

Society in FP10 proposal is for research on society



EASSH Position Paper

25 September 2025

The paper in a nutshell

On 2 September 2025, Commissioner Ekatherina Zarahieva clarified that the European Commission (EC) proposal (published on 16 July 2025) aims at strengthening research on Society within Pillar 2. EASSH welcomes the move and invites legislators to confirm the commitment.

EASSH calls for the European Parliament and the EU member states to support the following key issues in the EC proposal for a new framework programme (FP10):

1. **Society.** The policy window called Society in Pillar 2 is dedicated to research on society and available funding must focus on research on societal challenges. In the paper we propose five priorities: Democracy, Education & Skills, Europe in 2040, Culture & Knowledge, and Productive and Inclusive Societies.
2. **SSH integration.** The principle of multidisciplinary and integration of SSH across the whole programme (when relevant) must be supported, including the commitment to a regular monitoring of the scientific contribution of SSH disciplines
3. **Excellent Science.** It is crucial to secure support for the European research community and strengthen the investment in ERC, MSCA, and research infrastructures.

1. Strengthening investment in research on society

The European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH) welcomes the European Commission's proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034, and the allocation of €175 billion to Horizon Europe. This is the right step to show how R&I are at the core of European commitment to a shared and prosperous future.

In particular, we welcome that under Pillar 2, the proposal recognises the importance of an investment in a separate policy window called Society that will address bottom-up research and the societal framing of the global challenges with a proposed budget of €7.6 billion.¹ We also applaud the renewed expectation regarding the central role that the SSH research community will play in addressing those challenges.

EASSH and other organisations, as well as several member states and associated countries, have long advocated for an investment in research on society. It is reassuring that this is reflected in the Commission's proposal.

On the basis of feedback from the research community that EASSH represents, and in line with priorities set out by several member states and associated countries,² EASSH would like to propose a number of key multidisciplinary societal challenges that a future Society programme must address. Through these challenges, we respond to the call to fight for our values and our democracies made by President von der Leyen, supporting the narrative of “Choose Europe”.³ We draw priorities given the geopolitical context and the pressure on Europe today and the need to have a strong European-wide overview. For these reasons, it is important to note that the proposed budget of €7.6bn remains fundamentally limited in scope, based perhaps on the arbitrary assumption that ‘social’ research requires fewer resources, which we have already demonstrated is not the case.⁴

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- 1 [Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing Horizon Europe](#), p.9 says: “In addition, a policy window specific to the new Horizon Europe will address bottom-up research, in particular in the areas of global societal challenges such as migration, disinformation, and the safeguarding, strengthening and promotion of democracy, as well as social and economic transformations, inclusive societies and social cohesion.”
 - 2 Priorities are based on a bibliometric data analysis and member states' and associated countries' proposals for FP10. We can mention a few: [Austria](#) p.6; [Belgium](#); [Czechia](#); [Germany](#); [Sweden](#). See also [EASSH plus 14 organisations](#); [Coimbra Group](#).
 - 3 [State of the Union speech](#), 10 September 2025.
 - 4 See EASSH position paper [All FP9 Global Challenges must be more equally resourced](#).

The societal challenges we propose are:

- **Democracy.** In support of development of the European Democracy Shield initiative, the Commission's proposal for FP10 already indicates that research is needed for safeguarding, strengthening and promoting democracy.⁵
- **Education and Skills.** As member states address the need to adapt to social, demographic and economic changes, education systems face not only rising skills demands but also a paradigm shift in goals, infrastructures, and pedagogy. A coordinated, Europe-wide, research-led approach is essential to understand and guide these changes across all stages of education, and critical for the European Social Pillar to achieve inclusive, future-oriented societies.
- **Europe in 2040.** This challenge is central to our most pressing concerns and more urgent than ever due to the latest geopolitical and environmental circumstances. Social and economic transformations and demographic changes reshaping society are mentioned in the Commission's proposal as key research questions.
- **Culture and Knowledge.** The current geopolitical tensions can be rooted in our understanding of Europe as a continent where different cultures, religions, and beliefs co-exist. Member states identify a need for research questions on societal self-perception and representation.
- **Productive and Inclusive Societies.** The service sector, which already has an economic output nearly three times that of the manufacturing sector,⁶ employs around 73.1% of the EU's workforce, and is built on the contribution of SSH scholars.⁷ This research can inform policymakers designing future industrial strategies and research on citizens' behaviour will lead Europe towards higher productivity.

An extended version of these key priorities can be found in the annex at the end of this paper.

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5 See [Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing Horizon Europe](#), p.9

6 The services sector encompasses a wide range of activities, including transportation, telecommunications, professional services, financial services, retail, and tourism.

7 See "[World Economic Outlook database](#): April 2025". International Monetary Fund. 22 April 2025. Retrieved 26 July 2025.

There is a thread running through the previous observations in this paper. Policymakers need help to identify, understand and fix the corrosive challenges facing society. In this paper we are arguing for recognition of the importance of tackling societal challenges, and that research in SSH will make critical contributions. Now is the time to help the SSH to harness the power of technological changes brought about by unimaginable increases in computational power and AI. SSH researchers need access to data, to well structured ‘research ready’ data.

We are calling for Europe to make a robust investment (e.g. €100M euro) over the next decade to make Europe a social data powerhouse, just at a time when other democracies are leaving this space. With new data capability in Europe, we can support the strengthening of international organisations that have played a critical role in maintaining peace in our continent and beyond.

Academic freedom and security are challenged in many countries. Furthermore, our capacity to ethically harvest global data on societies is at risk, especially data that can support aid programmes or legal and policy interventions for specific social groups (vulnerable people, individuals and communities experiencing poverty, etc.). Europe has been declared a safe environment where academic freedom can thrive and where researchers at risk are welcome. Such financial resources in fundamental research programmes will strengthen Europe’s capacity to make these aspirations a reality.

Other elements in the Society policy window

Missions

The proposal suggests including the EU Missions in the Society policy window. EASSH strongly believes that this is confusing. By definition, EU Missions aim at the delivery of products and services,⁸ whereas the

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8 As set up in the Regulation 2021/695 should enable a transformative and systemic impact for society, by fostering cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral, cross-policy and cross-border collaboration. They should rely on research and innovation to develop the breakthrough technologies, services, products, and social innovations needed to achieve their ambitious objectives. In turn, EU Missions should accelerate the development, scaling, and deployment of innovative solutions and help create lead markets for new products and services.

policy window aims at bottom-up research on social challenges. In a recent joint paper with LERU, the Guild, ISE and UNICA, EASSH clearly stated how the EU missions have been used to fund non-R&I activities.⁹

The proposal seems to imply that funding is needed to complete the investment on the Missions that so far has absorbed over €3bn. Yet such investment was spread among all the current clusters as there is a strong connection between missions and clusters. It seems appropriate therefore to suggest that the missions remain financed across all the different policy windows, rather than just by Society.

New European Bauhaus

The New European Bauhaus¹⁰ has invested critical resources for a policy that makes green transition in built environments, for living spaces that improve communities' well-being and sense of belonging. Funded projects under this programme promote solutions that are not only sustainable, but also inclusive and respectful of the diversity of places, traditions, and cultures in Europe and beyond.

From 2025 onwards, the New European Bauhaus is set to have its first ever multiannual funding tool, the NEB Facility, and such a tool is also part of the Society policy window. EASSH recognises the alignment with research on society, and we propose that funding can be more significant in FP10 to address research questions that benefit citizens' well-being.

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9 [Recommendations for closely connecting the European Competitiveness Fund to an ambitious and self-standing FP10.](#)

10 [New European Bauhaus](#) is a programme that has been funded across different EU programmes: Horizon Europe, Cohesion policies and Life.

2. SSH integration

The principle of multidisciplinary and integration of SSH across the whole programme must be supported, including the commitment to a regular monitoring of the scientific contribution of SSH disciplines. In fact, beyond Society, social research questions are also critical in the policy windows within the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) such as “Clean transition and industrial decarbonisation, Health, Biotechnology and Bioeconomy”, “Digital Leadership, and “Resilience and Security, Defence Industry and Space”. While research on Society is rightly kept separate from the European Competitiveness Fund, SSH research can contribute to innovation and competitiveness. Limiting research strategy solely to economic output and tech-driven competitiveness is not just outdated, it is counterproductive.

It is not possible to understand the comparative advantage of European economies unless we also take into account shared values, a human-centric approach to technology, and a capacity-building strategy to mould the future of our societies.

Therefore, we feel confident that SSH researchers can also contribute and assess where related research questions from the humanities and social sciences are relevant to the whole programme’s design. Each of these policy windows will have an investment which is bigger and up to more than three times that which is proposed for Society, even before receiving additional funds from the ECF, from which Society remains excluded.

Consequently, EASSH urges the European Parliament and the Council of the EU to maintain and strengthen a key enabling feature of the Horizon Europe proposal and to prioritise as a principle of Horizon Europe 2, the commitment to multidisciplinary including the integration of Social Science and Humanities and in particular when fostering stronger links between research, innovation, and the development of evidence-informed public policies. EASSH encourages a timely and robust monitoring of the implementation of this principle to verify if a legal provision will still be necessary in the next framework programme.

3. Securing support for the European Research Community

EU funding is critical to complement national investment. Through the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), the European Research Council and the European Research Infrastructures, resources have been made available to support researchers at all stages of their career, from doctoral training to senior professors. Such funding has allowed a new generation of European scholars to move across borders and share their ideas for our community.

Both programmes have proven their value, yet they are often in a precarious state. It is not clear why ERC governance should change. The MSCA is also under threat from the imposition of a stronger directionality mandate undermining the bottom-up approach that the programme has long benefitted from.¹¹

EASSH strongly encourages the European Parliament and the Council of the EU to enforce the following:

- strengthen ERC governance, autonomy, and permanence in future funding programmes rather than require recurrent approval at every Multiannual Financial Framework cycle;
- remove any form of directionality from the MSCA and increase the number of the panels to meet the demand of young researchers in SSH (currently only 2 out of 10 of the panels respond to the demands of SSH researchers).

These measures will secure just and appropriate support for a strong generation of European scholars, including in SSH.

EASSH remains open and available to collaborating with colleagues in ministries, the European Parliament and the European Commission for the implementation of a strong and clear programme that invests in our societies.

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¹¹ See joint statement [No directionality in MSCA. The research community urges the EU to preserve MSCA's bottom up approach.](#)

Annex I: A programme for Society

On the basis of feedback from the research community that EASSH represents, and in line with priorities set out by several member states and associated countries,¹² EASSH would like to propose a number of key multidisciplinary societal challenges that a future Society programme must address.

Through these challenges, we respond to the call to fight for our values and our democracies made by President von der Leyen, supporting the narrative of “Choose Europe”.¹³ We draw priorities given the geopolitical context and the pressure on Europe today and the need to have a strong European-wide overview. For these reasons, it is important to note that the proposed budget of €7.6bn remains fundamentally limited in scope, based perhaps on the arbitrary assumption that social research requires fewer resources, which we have already demonstrated is not the case.¹⁴

The societal challenges we propose are:

Democracy

In support of development of the European Democracy Shield initiative, the Commission’s proposal already indicates that research is needed for safeguarding, strengthening and promoting democracy.¹⁵

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- 12 Priorities are based on a bibliometric data analysis and member states’ and associated countries’ proposals for FP10. We can mention a few:
[Austrian Reflection Paper on the future of EU R&I](#), p.6; [Belgian Reflection Paper on the 10th European Framework](#); [Czech Position Paper on the Future EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation \(FP10\)](#); German position paper [European societies of the future: Research for a democratic, culturally diverse and socially just Europe](#) and the [Swedish Research Council Recommendations for FP10](#). See also some position papers from large organisations, for example a joint position paper by 14 organisations [A Prosperous and Competitive Europe – Joint position paper on SSH in FP10](#), and Coimbra Group’s [For bold, value-driven investments in Education, Research and Innovation](#).
- 13 [State of the Union speech](#), 10 September 2025.
- 14 In the context of the funding model adopted by all FPs, the cost differences are irrelevant to the type of research developed on a project by project basis. Additionally, innovations in social research have introduced the use of more and expensive tools and methods that were often scarce in SSH organisations. See the EASSH position paper [All FP9 Global Challenges must be more equally resourced](#).
- 15 See [Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing Horizon Europe](#), p.9.

The topic is also central to a position paper published by the German ministry.¹⁶ Urgency is given to topics addressing the root causes of democratic erosion, polarisation, and disinformation.¹⁷ An emerging collaboration of member states is also working on voting systems and the design of political representation that is not driven by financial imperatives.

Research is also needed to assess the impact of regulations for safeguarding citizens' rights. European countries are today flying the flag for liberal democracies and civil liberties in a world that is slowly eroding even in those countries and polities thought to be the strongholds of such values.

Education and skills

Education and skills are central to the Social Pillar and vital for an inclusive, future-oriented society. As Vice-President Mînzatu has noted, by 2040, most jobs will require advanced competences. As member states adapt, education systems face not only rising skills demands but also a paradigm shift in goals, infrastructures, and pedagogy.¹⁸ A coordinated, Europe-wide, research-led approach is essential to understand and guide these changes across all stages of education.

European educational research must be recognised not only for its role in skills development but also as a strategic vehicle for fostering shared values and citizenship. It contributes to defining a European identity grounded in mutual understanding, cultural diversity, and democratic principles. Rigorous inquiry at the European level can help promote a civic culture that values both unity and difference.

A pan-European research infrastructure is also critical in responding to the rapid digital transformation affecting all spheres of life. With AI, datafication, and emerging technologies reshaping work and learning, research can provide the necessary tools and ethical frameworks to guide this shift in line with values of equity, inclusion, and human dignity.

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- 16 German position paper [European societies of the future: Research for a democratic, culturally diverse and socially just Europe](#).
- 17 [European Democracy Shield](#), Bergen University position paper in response to EC consultation on 26 June 2025.
- 18 European Commission, [Union of Skills](#).

Finally, building a genuinely European approach to education requires leveraging national strengths and fostering collaborative knowledge production. This includes generating and integrating datasets to support robust comparative research. In doing so, Europe can cultivate an inclusive, innovative, and resilient education ecosystem that prepares all citizens for the challenges ahead, while upholding shared values and objectives.

Europe in a 2040 world

This challenge is central to our most pressing concerns and more urgent than ever as a result of the latest geopolitical and environmental circumstances. Social and economic transformations, EU governance, and demographic changes reshaping society are mentioned in the Commission's proposal as key research questions. We also need to ensure that this includes research on migration trends driven by environmental and political crises. Increasing pressure at the borders of Europe must be critically analysed from an EU perspective to support future policies of the Union.

Rapid global changes require understanding the new global context with area studies. These have never been funded before within the framework programmes. There are challenges related to technology sovereignty, energy autonomy, and hard and soft borders. Research questions about development and EU Aid, and the soft power of the EU across the world appear for the first time in European funding.

Finally, new technological developments such as artificial intelligence pose an increasingly important challenge for Europe's societies and human rights. These include the consequences of the rapid continuing development of AI, digitalisation, strategic foresight and research into the future. All of these research questions will have ethical, philosophical, legal, economic, and social impacts.

Culture and society

The current geopolitical tensions can be rooted in our understanding of Europe as a continent where different cultures, religions, and beliefs co-exist. Member states identify a need for research questions on societal self-perception and representation. In times when beliefs in ethical

standards, gender, and race equality have been challenged, Europe remains a stronghold of diversity and integration. We need research not only on our history and art, but also on the economic and social power of art, that creates social cohesion and generates wealth. European funding has a long history of encouraging the study of cultural heritage across the continent (also with partnerships and KIC¹⁹ instruments). It has done so from a very multidisciplinary perspective, where all disciplines share interests and knowledge, and this research has supported the tourism industry, especially when combined with archaeological discoveries.

Humanities research supports the development of philology and new language models at the core of the fast-developing generative AI, and our relation with an increasingly automated world from an ethical, philosophical, and legal perspective.

Productive and inclusive societies

In previous position papers, EASSH has highlighted how much of the EU economy is transitioning towards the service sector, which already has an economic output nearly three times that of the manufacturing sector,²⁰ and employs around 73.1% of the EU's workforce. The creative industries generate an annual market value of around €500bn and employ about 6 million people across the EU.²¹ These industries, that rely on research from the humanities and social sciences, are key players in European competitiveness.

Furthermore, large EU programmes for a *Creative Europe*, *Citizens, equality rights and value*, and others looking at cross-border education, training, and solidarity have been neglected in European research investment. This is also the case for programmes about international cooperation, sustainable development, and the global south.

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19 Knowledge and Innovation Communities.

20 The service sector encompasses a wide range of activities, including transportation, telecommunications, professional services, financial services, retail, and tourism. See "[World Economic Outlook database: April 2025](#)". International Monetary Fund. 22 April 2025. Retrieved 26 July 2025.

21 See EASSH position paper [Cross borders collaboration, EU comparative advantage. Focus on Society](#) and Marianna Mazzucato's [The Public Value of Arts and Culture. Investing in Arts and Culture to Reimagine Economic Growth in the 21st Century](#) Discussion Paper September 2025.

Research on innovation in management is critical to understand how to transform an industry in Europe. So far it has mainly been of relatively small scale, family run and manufacture based. Strategies to scale up and understand the financial market and the aim for a European banking system are major challenges for which research is critically needed. This research can inform policymakers designing future industrial strategies and research on citizens' behaviour will lead Europe towards higher productivity.

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EASSH is the largest umbrella organisation for SSH in Europe with over 70 members including universities, disciplinary associations, and corporate associate partners. Our mission is to promote learning and research in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) as a resource for Europe and the world, and to engage with policymakers and research funders in support of the social sciences and humanities.

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