EASSH Response to the European Commission Consultation on Horizon Europe February 2023

EASSH recommendations for FP10 on this consultation are:

➢ **A solid and strong focus on well-being and welfare** and therefore on fundamental research into social and cultural phenomena, social data, and cross borders social policies to strengthen provisions for a diverse Europe**.**

➢ The **focus on a human-centred approach** must be retained and strengthened in **all types of research questions across the programme**.

➢ A **redefinition of the concept of integration** through the call for experts contributions in the design of the programme (High-Level Group), also focussing on harvesting fundamental research results to accelerate responses to current and unforeseen crises. Devise a **mechanism to monitor interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity** across the whole programme **based on understanding researchers and their contribution.**

➢ We **recommend that a full participation of SSH scholars be achieved in the High-Level Group of experts**, strategic programming committees, in calls and topic-drafting teams to identify human-centric research questions, as well as in evaluation panels.

This paper prepared by the European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH) is the feedback collected from our 70 members. EASSH is the largest umbrella organisation for SSH research and the members are European-wide disciplinary associations, universities and private sector representatives with a specific interest in SSH. EASSH is also an active stakeholder in the ERA Forum, ESFRI, the EOSC and other major science policy roundtables. EASSH is a regular contributor to consultations and this is our response to the on-going consultation on European framework programmes.

The consultation collected the views of 100s of research institutions, businesses, consumer organisations, as well as non-governmental organisations, public authorities, and other stakeholders. While we applaud colleagues in the Commission for undertaking such an ambitious task, we wonder whether data or opinions collected in this way can provide the robust evidence or insights needed to assess the previous and possible future contributions of the Framework Programmes to the wider 'European project'.

As part of our campaigning, EASSH will continue to make the case for substantial assessment and evaluation of these programmes. For future exercises, we recommend that the EC use **expert guidance** to design the exercise not only a single 'opinion survey'. We would recommend collecting data that allows for a wide spectrum of evidence-based observations as well as differentiating between expert contributions and general opinion.

EASSH represents many organisations and individuals with this particular expertise. We also hope that in future exercises the European Commission will commit to making the data collected openly avalaible for secondary analysis. We consider this to be consistent with the Commission's own expectations for transparency in research across its programmes. It would also be relevant to better understand which methods were used to filter, respond and implement the feedback of different specific stakeholders.

Feedback on the four sections

1. The Horizon 2020 evaluation

Horizon 2020 was the very first programme in the history of European research funding to introduce two novelties: the challenges approach, and the integration of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) throughout the entire programme. Our initial contribution to this part of the discussion is that it is not yet clear how the new approach in these areas has led to a significant improvement in outcomes. It will be some time before the overall impact of the 'challenge' approach can be evaluated. If this approach were intended to encourage greater multi-disciplinarity in research-based problem solving, then there is still little evidence that this is happening.

By the Commission's own assessment in its annual monitoring reports, the same problem is apparent in relation to the integration of SSH throughout the programme, which was a declared a 'horizontal priority' of Horizon 2020. EASSH has published a number of position papers on this issue that highlight the changes in 'architecture' that will be needed for a better outcome. In fact, the operational design of the programme was not suited to ensure the successful integration of SSH contributions across all challenges. We refer readers to the EASSH position papers on *SSH Integration in H2020: Lessons learnt for Horizon Europe.* In those papers we identify a number of 'design' factors which prevented the selection of better integrated projects, namely the **work programme design, call texts, scarce use of relevant SSH experts, proposal evaluation panels and finally project/programme evaluation**. Appropriate expertise at all stages is absent – in particular SSH expertise – to ensure that outcomes reflect the original ambitions. Despite a growing number of SSH experts in the database, the engagement of such experts where it matters is still lacking or insufficient, particularly at the level of the topic flagging exercise and evaluation procedure.

Where the SSH integration or better collaboration has shown better results are those calls, topics and areas where the design was based on key social research questions, which clearly opened opportunities for SSH contents and methodological approaches and ultimately a robust scientific contribution.

A further area we believe deserves closer scrutiny relates to **the operations of Pillar 1 and Pillar 3, and the synergies between them**. While Pillar 1 focusses on the 'excellence' of research, the applications to current/immediate problem solving (the priority of Pillar 3) of this research are not always recognised. We think this reflects a problematic separation, in the wider science policy debate, between 'excellent' and 'applied' science; whereas there is a strong overlap between the two.

EASSH therefore advocates for **allowing more space for fundamental research** to run across the more policy driven part of the programme, encouraging at the same time a stronger positioning of the fundamental research components (eg. ERC, MSCA, etc.).

Maintainig the focus on fundamental research, particularly in assessment and evaluation, would enhance the contributions of both components to solving the challenges we face. For example, the success of vaccine production to fight the Covid-19 virus was built on sustained previous investment in fundamental research, which could be applied to tackle the immediate challenge of the emerging pandemic. Similarly, the social and economic mitigations put in place while vaccines were being developed could not have been possible without decades of prior investment in societal studies and SSH scholarship. This work was then called upon in rapid reaction studies to support the mitigation strategies. Without committment to long-term investment in fundamental research, Covid-19 would have had a longer and more disastrous effect on European citizens and society. In addition, maintaining a wider and open investment in fundamental research would also allow provide a foundation for fast response calls (emergency funds), which harvest long-term research endevours to new and emerging, unforessen needs, as occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that the mechanism for the evaluation of SSH integration would have benefitted from fundamental changes, including a larger pool of academic and scientific expertise in SSH disciplines in the evaluations panels.

2. The mid-term evaluation of Horizon Europe

In continuity with Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe was designed to make scientific, economic and societal impacts visible by taking account of both tangible and intangible impacts. Many of the horizontal issues discussed in preparation for the programme aimed at improving the inherent quality of research from all domains, making sure that results translate into societal impact. For example, more attention needed to be devoted to the analysis of the human and social nature of the underlying global challenges in the SDGs.

The focus of the programme as currently conceived attaches too much weight to short-term goals, whereas the EC document on Monitoring the Impact of EU Framework Programmes includes short, medium and long-term indicators. The Missions remain yet to prove their value as an approach to tackling challenges with more urgency. **SSH research inclusion is weak in the missions and across the challenges.** As discussed in the previous section, the creation of Pillars perpetuates a false divide between the long-run 'fundamental research' and the short/medium term work supported under the Clusters. We recommend that the mid-term evaluation looks at the possibility of a greater integration of of Pillar 1 and Pillar 3 (the Clusters) and makes specific recommendations for how investments running over a longer period can be made in the remainder of the HEU and future framework programmes, connecting the research of the two pillars.

According to the feedback of EASSH members, **the integration of SSH was improved in the programme design, thanks to calls that clearly state what type of SSH disciplinary contribution is required**. However, improvements in the call design are undermined by the evaluation process which remains inconsistent, according to our members. We continue to call for the inclusion of appropriate SSH expertise to evaluate proposals under calls where there is a social and human dimension to the call topic. **The flagging system is flawed** with flagged topics lacking SSH research questions and not flagged topics focussing on socio-economic issues.[1]

Feedback collected in this mid-term evaluation must be taken into consideration for the second phase of Horizon Europe. We recommend that Horizon Europe has **a higher degree of adaptiveness** during its implementation and can effectively intervene for example in revised flagged topics, especially when a SSH contribution is unclear or when it is vaguely defined. Furthermore, evaluation panels should comprise all the needed expertises demanded by the call. It is crucial to implement effective mechanisms to assess interdisciplinarity and SSH integration so that both researchers and their contributions are clearly highlighted.

3. The strategic plan of Horizon Europe for 2025-2027

Research in Horizon Europe must lead to EU policies that seek better integration of technological, industrial, economic and social policy-making. Currently, a tension exists between policies to improve Europe's competitiveness, the social disruption that such policies can cause, and the strategies for mitigating their effects on health and well-being (pre-distribution and redistribution).

Two significant policy domains underpinning much of the EU's long-term strategy are the 'green deal' and the 'digital transformation'. Both will bring about significant changes across the EU and with an increased risk of disruption to the status quo. In such conditions the need

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[1] Net4Society *Opporunities for reserchers for SSH in Horizon Europe* published on 8 February 2023.

to predict issues of 'fairness' and 'equal access' becomes more significant.[2] Furthermore, the focus on technology driven solutions has generated expensive and unaffordable products creating new inequalities (eg. health). **EASSH members call for a truly human-centric, user-centric approach in all research environments.** The health and well-being of citizens and communities deserve the highest priority in developing public policies. If Europe wants to become more competitive, these are areas that demand a strong focus at a European level. The challenges identified in Horizon Europe policy documents rightly draw attention to the importance of improving the knowledge base about the structure, culture, dynamics and demographics of Member States and the EU as a whole. In Horizon Europe, the significance of the 'social dimension' to policy-making and interventions is better highlighted than in Horizon 2020. Yet, it is not clear that Horizon Europe delivers according to the original intentions because of the replication of similar operational issues which did not encourage the integration of SSH research in Horizon 2020. This is disappointing since the problems were identified in Horizon 2020 and yet they have not been fixed in Horizon Europe.

For example, in the area of health and well-being, Horizon Europe has so far missed the opportunity to fund research into ways of achieving a healthy society for all. Research is needed to explore how to balance medical advancements with the development of affordable medicines, treatments, and the social care needed to support citizens and communities undergoing transformations across the EU. **How do we offer the best possible life to EU citizens suffering from conditions that are not yet medically treatable? How can we address challenges like ageing populations and mental health issues?** The impact of these issues on our societies in terms of assistance and care has an undeniable central role in our future.

In this framework programme and its successors, **Europe needs to contend with the 'datafication' of society andthe cultural difference in Europe regarding policy-making.** Member States and the EU as a whole have recognised the importance of coordinating the collection and use of research data, personal and digital data. 'Datafication' is affecting markets, business models, public administration, education and civil society actors, as well as having an impact on security measures and privacy. We know far too little about the consequences of this fast-paced process, but we can heavily rely on social sciences experts to guide the next generation of policymakers.

4. **Lessons learnt and messages for the future framework programme: Influential Europe**

The design of a new framework programme that could lead a united and influential Europe must be based on **European values embodied in a credible model** extending far beyond the usual discourses. We thrive if we recognise that Europe must stand for fundamental rights, the rule of law, accountable and transparent democracies, dignity, respect and non-alienation, fairness, openness (no hard borders), cultural and linguistic diversity and high social standards. However, the rhetoric has yet to become a reality in the everyday lives of all European citizens.

If European funding is to facilitate the design of policies to secure the well-being of EU citizens, Europe must invest in high-quality scientific research over a broad base, that develops knowledge and understanding, not simply consumer products. It must also be understood that achieving an open, democratic, and safe society can be affected by sudden changes of political and economic circumstances. Following recent events, we can observe how areas that only a year ago could report high access to education and health were disrupted by war and natural

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[2] Two studies EASSH provided to the EU show that Horizon 2020 funded mainly economic analysis and data, often isolated from the context and failed to fund the wealth of studies looking at historical and cultural dimensionsEASSH *R&I For A Fair Digital Transition: Project Review and Policy Analysis* and *R&I For A Fair Green Transition: Project Review and Policy* (submitted for publication December 2022)

disasters. We can never exhaust research questions about a secure and open society, in free and democratic countries as these are constantly under threat.

The new framework programme must also **encourage societal partnerships and cultural analysis** on several dimensions. Arguably, independent, high-quality research is required to find sustainable solutions to the societal challenges. Public research in Europe is highly competitive across disciplinary, sectoral, and national boundaries. Furthermore, Europe has a real competitive advantage in the quality of its SSH research.

The next framework programme must ensure that opportunities for contributions across all areas of the programme are not missed. FP10 should significantly **improve the mechanisms for cross-disciplinary collaborations with human-centric research questions**; this is how a real contribution from humanities and social sciences research can complement effectively technical advancements for a sustainable and responsible future. Data, distributed research infrastructures, and cultural differences in social provisions are the basis for an adaptable and thriving society.

Open Science provides an important instrument for promoting and disseminating European scientific knowledge, especially if it ensures easy access for all to quality publications, not confined to those who can afford to pay. However, we know that being open and accessible does not mean that research papers are read or that the results and insights are used. An investment in **translational research, alignment and interoperability of scientific methods** and working to align discoveries and ideas from all disciplines requires further efforts than just relying on open science.

Conclusions

EASSH has been actively engaged with the European Commission and other partners in learning from the implementation of Horizon 2020 with the aim of improving the design of Horizon Europe and any successor programme. The 2022 IPCC report is a code red for humanity. FP10 must pave the way to prioritise socio-cultural questions for **a responsible and sustainable future**, where economy and technology serve the people. A future that is just, affordable, and safe. **Research investments must secure well-being benefits.**

We continue to support the focus on a strong and well-resourced Pillar 1, especially concerning funding for ERC, Marie Skłodowska-Curie, and research infrastructures for all disciplines, including investment in large-scale longitudinal studies.

At the same time, the implementation of Horizon Europe has highlighted some of **the limitations of addressing societal challenges in isolation from fundamental research.** Investing in fundamental research remains key to addressing citizens' concerns over the long-term as well as providing the scientific base to respond to specific challenges. Fundamental research provides the theory, the methods, the rigour, and the assurance of reliable results from which to build the work with more specific or immediate applications.

We remain concerned that the current mechanisms for designing calls, selecting proposals and evaluating outcomes are not capable of ensuring that the right experts and expertise are systematically involved in delivering a human-centred programme.

EASSH recommendations for FP10 on this consultation are:

 ➢ **A solid and strong focus on well-being and welfare** and therefore on fundamental research into social and cultural phenomena, social data, and cross borders social policies to strengthen provisions for a diverse Europe**.**

 ➢ The **focus on a human-centred approach** must be retained and strengthened in **all types of research questions across the programme**. This requires having **a**

dedicated space to address issues related to an ever changing European society, using specific methods and approaches, qualitative and quantitative analysis, historical and contextual studies typical of social sciences and humanities disciplines**.**

➢ A **redefinition of the concept of integration** through the call for experts' contribution in the design of the programme (High-Level Group), also focussing on harvesting fundamental research results to accelerate responses to current and unforeseen crises. It is fundamental that a new programme invests in relevant socio-economic, historical, and legal frameworks. Also, it is important to devise a **mechanism to monitor interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity** across the whole programme **based on understanding researchers and their contribution**

➢ Looking at the new programme in the making, **we recommend that a full participation of SSH scholars be achieved in the High-Level Group of experts**, strategic programming committees, in calls and topic-drafting teams to identify human-centric research questions, as well as in evaluation panels. Crucial expertise is needed to achieve a full assessment of the research and innovation impact on societies and individuals.