

## European Alliance for SSH contribution on SSH integration in Horizon 2020

### Stakeholders' Workshop, July 2016

Following the publication of the 2014 report on the integration of SSH in the first calls of H2020, EASSH made the following recommendations:

1. Improve the quality and the transparency of the **data collection** in order to increase the accuracy in tracing SSH participation
2. Work with the SSH community to develop a more **robust methodology for analysing the integration of SSH** research in projects. For example, measuring the number of “SSH Partners” is not a strong indicator of the depth of SSH integration in fundamental research.
3. Review the **composition of the Expert Advisory Groups and Evaluation panels** to end the significant under-representation of SSH researchers. The lack of SSH expertise in designing Work Programmes and framing topics (calling for a real SSH contribution within, across and beyond the societal challenges) as well as the lack of SSH experience in evaluation panels have contributed to the low integration of SSH in projects.

In order to address the second point and to **contribute to the Commission's methodological work on how to best assess the integration of SSH research in funded projects**, EASSH has carefully studied the selection results in three Societal Challenges and has come to the following suggestions.

The Commission currently assesses the degree of integration of SSH research by identifying “SSH Partners” in the consortia presented in submitted and successful projects. A partner in a consortium becomes an “SSH partner” if two-thirds or more of its personnel have an SSH background<sup>1</sup>.

EASSH considers that while this methodology might help obtain the number of projects which have an “SSH partner”, it does not capture at all the nature of the contribution to the project nor a true assessment of whether SSH research is ‘embedded’ in the research project.

EASSH proposes a different approach for assessing ‘embedding’ (or “integration” as EASSH prefers to refer to). This approach includes multiple dimensions and is **based on the project descriptions, including the details of the work-packages and the experience of the researchers leading and participating in the different projects**.

EASSH examined in detail the results of the first round of calls for three Societal Challenges: Societal Challenge 1 on Health, Demographic Change and Well-Being (SC1); Societal Challenge 2 on Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture (SC2) and Societal Challenge 5 on Climate Action, Environment and Resource Efficiency (SC5). These three challenges were reviewed in the Commission's report:

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<sup>1</sup> Without knowing whether appropriate SSH research potential (if any) is mobilised by the partner for the undertaking of the project. This is an important shortcoming of the current approach as it is key to be able to identify the real integration of research conducted by social researchers.

SC2 and SC5 were assessed as having 'good' integration of SSH and SC1 was assessed as showing 'moderate' integration of SSH research.<sup>2</sup>

EASSH has been developing an **alternative approach focusing on SSH research contents in the design and in the delivery of funded projects**. EASSH has thus created a simple scale with three levels to assess the degree of SSH integration:

0= Projects for which there is a barely discernible mention of SSH (a) in the research contributions as described in the Work Packages or (b) in the work experience of the members of the research teams, or (c) when SSH contributions are not core to research.

1= Projects for which there is some mention of SSH contributions in the research in the project in one of the areas mentioned above. For example, projects for which an 'impact' assessment is to be conducted using SSH approaches – social/economic/political impact or for which there is a substantive element of SSH research required to undertake the evaluation.

2 = Projects for which there is a substantial research contribution to the core of the project. For example when the detailed description of a work-package indicates that the research in the Work Package is predominantly SSH or when a WP leader has a SSH research background. In the latter case, we look at the discipline in which his/her PhD was awarded and/or at the fields in which the research has published most recently.

## Initial Findings

**EASSH approach significantly impacts the SSH integration assessment of the three Societal Challenges** (see Table 1). For SC1, the contribution of SSH was relatively straightforward to assess with either explicit reference to roles or no mention of SSH contribution whatsoever. For SC2 and SC5, the separation of activities and/or the contribution of SSH research are less clear.

SC1. Suitable information was found on 56 of the 60 projects funded. Only 12.5% of the projects under topics flagged for SSH integration could be described as achieving the objective. More than 60% of the projects funded under the flagged topics had no readily identifiable SSH research contribution.

SC2. This challenge appears to have been the most successful in terms of SSH integration. Only 25% of the funded projects had no readily identifiable SSH. 50% of the funded projects had some identifiable SSH contribution and 25% had a more significant SSH contribution

SC5. Only 16% of funded projects under the SSH flagged topics had a substantive SSH research component. Around 60% of the funded projects had no readily identifiable contribution from SSH researchers.

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<sup>2</sup> The method was to conduct a detailed 'interpretive' review of each of the projects based on the information available via a range of sources:

- CORDIS projects database
- Project database (where one has been created) looking at overall project descriptions, work-package descriptions, partner expertise, and expected project outputs
- Project information on the coordinator or partner's websites
- Other appearances and reports of the projects

Table 1

Societal Challenge	Score 0	Score 1	Score 2	Total
SC1	34	15	7	56*
SC2	5	10	5	20
SC5	15	6	4	25**
<b>% of Total</b>	<b>53.5%</b>	<b>30.7%</b>	<b>15.8%</b>	

\* 60 projects were analysed but 4 had too little information on their website or had no website to allow for meaningful assessment.

\*\*30 projects were analysed by of these 5 had too little information available publicly to undertake a meaningful assessment.

### Preliminary conclusions

The “qualitative” approach developed by EASSH suggests that there is substantial room for improving SSH integration in Societal Challenges. Given the very strong potential for SSH scientific contribution in SC1 and SC5, it is surprising how marginal the SSH contribution is to the research funded. The analysis that EASSH provided demonstrated that **a different methodology offers better insight into the understanding how SSH research is integrated in the challenges**. EASSH will continue monitor the results of the 2015 calls for applications to identify how the integration is changed. EASSH would welcome to work as partners with the Commission.

EASSH preliminary results also indicate that **many aspects of Horizon 2020 need to be improved in order to achieve a successful integration of SSH in Societal Challenges**: the scientific process leading to the framing of the challenges and the wording of the topics, the information process to better connect with SSH communities, the evaluation process that would need to give a fair share to SSH scholars and experts.

Undertaking reviews of SSH integration into Horizon 2020 is costly but needed. We are convinced it is time to **consider a better way to collect data on the research fields** from which participants are drawn. We hope the Commission will revisit earlier recommendations to collect “research field” data on participants through the online proposal submission process.

EASSH is currently producing a series of Position Papers to suggest possible amendments to current processes in order to foster SSH integration to Societal Challenges.

European Alliance for SSH ([www.eassh.eu](http://www.eassh.eu))

This paper has been endorsed by the following organisations: Academia Europaea (EA), European Association of Social Anthropologist (EASA), NORFACE, NWO, and HERA.