

All FP9 Global Challenges must be more equally resourced

EASSH calls for equity in investment in research and innovation across all the challenges of the 9th Framework Programme and for the 'cluster' on human-social dimensions to be recognised as of equal importance to the investments in technological solutions.

EASSH has previously argued in favour of addressing the social challenges Europe faces in our position paper - [People's Union](#) – which called for a cluster in the 9th Framework programme (Horizon Europe) to address major human and social issues. Europe's future progress will not only depend on new technologies and new products, but in securing a new 'social contract' that prioritises citizen's wellbeing alongside economic development. **Understanding society**, what is driving change and how this dynamic will function into the future of humanity **ought to be of equal significance for research investment** as other technical, environmental and health challenges to achieve Europe's long-term goals. **All clusters of Horizon Europe deserve comparable resources and within each cluster, budget distribution should respond to demand and awarded on quality assessment to ensure a fair distribution of EU funding.**

We want to challenge the assumption that some research costs more than others, which is often the argument used to justify the imbalance in investment across challenges. In this paper, we suggest that the real driver of research costs is scientific methods, which are no longer specific to a given set of disciplines and scientific enquiries. **If the methodological approaches are the real drivers of the costs of research then can we sustain the current perception of the relative costs of research in different fields?**

- 1. In Horizon 2020, cross-challenge evidence suggests that funding is supporting the costs of researchers, who are performing largely similar research tasks across the different challenges.**

In Horizon 2020, Challenge 1 - Health represented 20% and Challenge 6 - Inclusive, reflective and Innovative societies represented 1.2% of the total EU budget. In a preliminary analysis, EASSH examined the funding provided at the level of the call and the topic descriptions together with individual projects to see whether the large 'macro' level difference highlighted above could be based on evidence of the funding required at the 'micro' project level.

The **median EC contribution** to projects across the different calls in **Challenge 1 - Health** is just **under €6m**, in **Challenge 2 - Food** is just **under €5m** and in **Challenge 6 - Societies** around **€3m**. These are clear differences in funding per project across the challenges, but they reflect the maximum sums for projects pre-determined in the each Work Programme. By looking more closely at the call descriptions, a large proportion of projects in the Challenge 1 - Health, for example, often require secondary analysis of clinical data, or to examine clinical and health care practices. Challenge 1 studies will thus not necessarily deploy research methodology requiring large and expensive equipment. In order to validate that, we also reviewed the EC contribution **per partner** in successful project consortia. Results show that under **Challenge 1 - Health the median funding per partner** is just over **€350k**, just under **€250k in Challenge 6 - Societies**, and about **€220k in Challenge 2 - Food**. The differences in costs per partner are much less significant than the figures we might expect if guided by the median of EC contribution in the Work Programme.

On the basis of our preliminary analysis, we do not see clear evidence to support the view that research under medical, technological and environmental challenges are inherently more expensive and therefore require greater investment than those addressing human and social challenges. We believe that the research that requires the kind of technology and infrastructure, which would justify the large differences in funding levels, are the exception and not the norm.

2. The funding rules for EU programmes allow only a proportion of the cost of equipment to be funded from the projects.

A typical argument about the cost of research in different disciplines is that some kinds of research have much higher costs than others. ‘The study of society does not need to build a CERN’, is often said in research policy debates; or “social sciences and humanities studies are cheap”. On the surface this seems to be a self-evident argument. Some science requires large laboratories and expensive equipment to examine the fundamental nature of the physical and biological worlds, but we believe that this does not apply to most research and certainly **doesn’t recognise the way EU framework programmes support research.**

According to the framework programme rules, applicants apply for a given set of costs that can be recovered from the EU: personnel costs, subcontracting costs, other direct costs- usually a category divided into purchase of services, goods and travel, equipment, consumables, etc; and indirect costs (a fixed 25% of the direct costs per partner). Under the ‘other direct costs’ category, the rule of best value for money is applied, and **the costs recovered for equipment are based on the depreciation costs and time that the equipment is utilised for the project.** Therefore, where large infrastructure and expensive equipment is required for research, the majority of costs are borne by the host universities and research institutes, and not by EU research programmes.

Typically pre-existing institutional infrastructure has been an indicator for predictability of awards allocation, which helps to show that large-scale and expensive equipment is already in place and not significantly funded by the EU programmes. This is reflected in the low participation of institutions in member states without the required infrastructure: only around 4% of the funding is secured by EU 13 new member states.

Research investment in Horizon 2020 is not being allocated to expensive technology. EASSH preliminary analysis suggests that funding is supporting the costs of researchers, who are often performing similar research tasks and using similar methods across the different research fields, which contribute to the challenges.

3. Technology, new scientific methods, big data and open science policies have impacted scientific investigations in all disciplinary areas, including Social sciences and Humanities.

Technology has a profound and deep impact on our research practices. New technology is changing the way research is done across all scientific fields, but perhaps the greatest change is being seen in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH). Big data analysis, the use of MRI for behavioural studies, satellites used to map and measure economic growth, laser scanner data from archaeology, and in general digitalisations have changed not just the scale of the results, but profoundly transformed the methodologies and the training of all scholars today. Just as any fields, SSH is finding innovative tools to conduct research, and many of these are new and expensive. If funding ‘caps’ are applied to the SSH research based on historic norms, then Europe will not be able to access the research at the cutting edge, which could have a profound impact of the way we describe, understand and address social and human processes.

Since large differences in the investment made in research across challenges in Horizon 2020 are not justified by the cost of research, **EASSH calls on Horizon Europe: (a) to reduce the imbalance of funding between clusters, and (b) to guarantee within each cluster a fair distribution, as in the ERC example, the budget is assigned per call based on the number of submitted applications and awarded only to those project that have successfully passed selective evaluation criteria.**