

Integration of Social Sciences and Humanities in Horizon 2020
2nd Report published by the European Commission
A response from the European Alliance for SSH

The paper has been endorsed by Academia Europaea, the Coimbra Group and the European Association of Social Anthropologists.

The European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH) thanks the European Commission for its commitment to evaluate annually the integration of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) in Horizon 2020. We welcome this effort and recommend that it should be continued. Transparency is a powerful tool for improving the implementation of H2020 and **EASSH encourages transparency through the release of annual evaluation reports and the larger availability of data on the implementation of the H2020 programme.**

There are many issues and questions raised by the report. We offer some evidence-based observations and recommendations to help shape a competitive and dynamic framework for European funding.

I. Integration results after two years of implementing H2020 (2014-2015)

EASSH has reviewed the results of the two reports on SSH integration in 2014 and 2015. Unfortunately, we find that little evidence of progress and even some backwards developments.

The number of topics ‘flagged’ as requiring an SSH contribution is a little under 40% of all topics. This does represent a proportional increase on the previous period but represents a small drop in the absolute number of flagged topics.

Although SSH partners received a similar proportion of the budget for the flagged topics (22,1% in 2014 and 21,5% in 2015), the number of projects supported has fallen by 20% and the actual committed funding for SSH decreased by €39m on the figure reported in 2014.

Importantly, we find a divergence between calls as defined by the DGs and calls as managed and implemented by the agencies. The result is that 25% of the projects funded in SSH-flagged topics have no SSH research component. This seems to indicate that the evaluation process allows projects to be funded even if they do not meet all the success criteria – *i.e.* an explicit request for SSH contribution in the call.

Only 5% of the 2015 budget available for the two major pillars of H2020 (the Societal Challenges and LEIT) go to SSH partners. This is lower than the already disappointing 6% recorded in 2014. If we consider that on average across the SCs (excluding SC6), SSH partners coordinate about 20% of the projects under the SSH-flagged projects, this

indicates that in spite of SSH researchers doing their best efforts to take part in the programme, the funding allocation remains extremely low overall.

The report shows that when SSH research is included in a project, the spread of disciplines tends to be concentrated in just a few areas. The fields represented suggest that H2020 primarily draws on the SSH for 'impact' assessment or to support business plans. A stronger diversity of contributions, which would come from a wider set of fields and disciplines, has not been realised in the implementation of the Commission's integration policy.

The report identifies activities (again such as impact assessment and financial sustainability) that are not components of the core research and thus should not be categorised as research but are nonetheless counted as SSH research contribution.

The methodology adopted in the report cannot detect whether SSH research perspectives are involved in core activities. EASSH analysis of many project work package descriptions suggests that many projects funded under the SSH-flagged topics place SSH research at the periphery.

In brief, SSH integration in H2020 Pillars II and III seems to have fared worse in 2015 compared to the already disappointing outcomes of the first calls in 2014.

Key concerns

After two years of implementation, there has been little increase in the integration of SSH research across the Societal Challenges.

A high proportion of calls flagged as relevant for inclusion of SSH research ended up with marginal or without any funding of SSH. The decoupling of call definition and call implementation may be the cause. We need to ask why those projects were awarded? What measures will be put in place to secure that SSH-flagged topics in future include topical SSH research?

H2020 is failing to attract the diversity and depth of the social sciences and humanities. Where SSH research fields are represented, they overwhelmingly belong to the social sciences; the integration policy has so far failed to better include the humanities.

II. The architecture of H2020 and limits to interdisciplinarity

The report highlights the continued lack of SSH research input in those topics that had been identified as requiring SSH perspectives. While the report provides some data, it is largely descriptive and provides little or no analysis. EASSH study of different parts of Horizon 2020 clearly documents that the problem is systemic. We would like to stress that procedural and technical issues have a disproportionate and negative impact on the implementation of the integration policy.

1. The balance of contributions in **Experts Advisory Groups (EAGs)** has a strong influence on the development of work programme. Contributions from the members of EAGs are not currently drawn from a sufficiently wide range of research fields. It is vital that SSH advice and expertise help identify key questions of the Work Programmes and help frame the topics published in calls. The EAGs should also be called upon to validate the final drafts of Work Programmes at the end of the process.
2. **Evaluators** of proposals need to be drawn from across diverse research fields. A review of registered evaluators on the participant portal demonstrates the strong imbalance between different research backgrounds. Fewer than 12% of the reviewers under Societal Challenge 5 (Climate) and only 4.5% of evaluators for Societal Challenge 1 (Health) have an SSH background. This is much lower than the share of SSH-flagged topics under these two challenges; respectively 41% of topics under Societal Challenge 5 and 25% under Societal Challenge 1.
3. The **Guidelines for Evaluators** provide little guidance for experts on how to assess the contributions from SSH research fields. In particular the guidance does not highlight when a SSH-flagged topic should evaluate SSH as a core contribution to the aims of the project and not as a peripheral component providing 'impact assessment' or 'communications' advice. The report presents a set of indicators to monitor the integration of SSH-flagged topics. The Guidelines for evaluators should integrate this and establish minimum standards for SSH integration in the flagged topics (*e.g.* projects to be funded should reach the threshold in at least two dimensions).
4. **Multi-disciplinary evaluations** are difficult. However, we ask the Commission to consider designing interdisciplinary panels for each challenge, or per set of calls, or panels with interchangeable expertise. Over time these panels could learn how to work together to evaluate inter-disciplinary proposals.

Recommendations

1. Ensure balanced and varied representation of SSH expertise at all stages of the development work programmes and drafting of specific text for calls. The pool of expert evaluators must have key expertise and ensure that proposals for projects under flagged topics are reviewed by at least two SSH experts.
2. The evaluation of SSH-flagged topics should be monitored by a dedicated and resourced unit within the DG Research and Innovation with the task to report on the actual implementation of SSH integration by evaluation panels. For these topics, SSH research contribution needs to be an evaluation criterion.
3. The SSH integration reports of 2014 and 2015 should be used as case studies for improving the multidisciplinary approaches and themes such as the sustainable development goals. Such annual reports necessitate the collection of relevant data. **More detailed and accurate data is required to understand how Horizon 2020 draws on the wide base of European research resources to address the questions of the Work Programme.**

The above issues are relevant not just for the review of Horizon 2020 but also for the design for the 9th Framework Programme. The difficulty experienced in integrating SSH research is an example of the broader difficulty of integrating different research fields into projects tackling the most significant societal challenges. We hope lessons can be learned in time to be implemented in the 9th Framework Programme through closer examination of the SSH integration policy.

EASSH wants to highlight that the range of Societal Challenges identified in H2020 is very limited in addressing the Juncker's agenda priorities: issues such as democracy, growth, attitudes to sustainable development, the ageing society, diversity and cultural exchanges, migration, deserve specialised and interdisciplinary scientific efforts with a view to help EU citizens and states to better understand and navigate the future.

EASSH is fully committed to supporting the European Commission's efforts to ensure that Horizon 2020 and the 9th Framework Programme bring about the transformations needed in Europe. We will continue to encourage our community to participate in advisory groups, to act as evaluators and serve as experts.

The 'European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities' (EASSH) brings together more than 25 European disciplinary associations and scholarly networks. The main purpose of EASSH is to promote research on social sciences and humanities as a resource for Europe and the world and to give a voice to SSH disciplines in the design of science policy at and international levels.

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