



**Interdisciplinary perspectives for Horizon Europe:
Lessons from the 4th SSH Integration Monitor Report
— April 2019 —**

EASSH welcomes the continued commitment of the European Commission to integrate SSH expertise and to continue evaluating the quality of such integration. However, in the four years of monitoring Horizon 2020 (2012-2017), the integration of SSH across the societal challenges has remained very weak.

In this contribution, EASSH aims to highlight some of the on-going issues raised by the 4th Monitoring Report so that our recommendations will improve the architecture of Horizon Europe by integrating SSH research and expertise more effectively.

The European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH) thanks the European Commission for its continued commitment to evaluate the [Integration of Social Sciences and Humanities \(SSH\) in Horizon 2020](#). We welcome this effort and ask that this annual exercise can be continued in Horizon Europe.

Main findings of the Report

Overall the findings show **the continuing difficulty of integrating SSH research across the societal challenges of Horizon 2020**. While we acknowledge the genuine challenge of interdisciplinary integration, it is disappointing to see how little the results have changed over the four reporting years. Across the challenges and over the past years, the situation has been rather stable: between a quarter and a third of projects funded under SSH flagged topics have no SSH contribution.

In addition, flagging more topics does not help in addressing the lack of SSH integration. 2017 represents a high point for the number of SSH-flagged topics (37.5% of all topics were flagged), but the budget allocated to SSH partners remained stable at 15.8% of the overall budget for flagged topics (when calls for the 6th societal challenge are excluded).

The Report acknowledges that over the past four years (2014-2017) very few changes have been introduced in the architecture and implementation of Horizon 2020's societal challenges. It is therefore not surprising how similar many of the 2017 report's findings are compared to those of the previous years. EASSH recalls its detailed analyses of the past reports in [2014](#), [2015](#) and [2016](#) (links incorporated).

The Report also highlights that, on average, 20% of SSH participants in selected projects are performing project management and project communications roles; in challenge 3 these figures are higher than 40%. When project management shares are separated from the figures, SSH representation falls further.

As stated in the report's conclusions: "the current approach has reached its limits in the quantity and quality of SSH integration". It goes on to states that "the way in



which SSH should be integrated will have to be redefined for the Horizon Europe Programme”.

Towards Horizon Europe

In this paper, we would like to **focus on the key recommendations for transforming the implementation of SSH integration in Horizon Europe**. We believe that it is important to ensure that lessons learned in Horizon 2020 are integrated into the design of Horizon Europe. We hope the recommendations of this paper will be given **serious consideration in the final design of Horizon Europe**.

Changes are needed to the architecture for Horizon Europe to ensure that the design of the work-programme and calls and the evaluation processes give due consideration to the social and human dimensions. One of the lessons of Horizon 2020 is how little appetite there is to make changes to the architecture during implementation. It is therefore most important that Horizon Europe's first implementation design addresses SSH integration and includes dynamic review mechanisms. EASSH's first observation is that the integration of SSH research should not have the sole function of enhancing social impact, but should instead contribute substantially through its research and findings to addressing the societal challenges. The starting point is the full acknowledgement of the scientific contribution of SSH fundamental research to the most applied areas of investigations and future emerging technologies. All aspects of knowledge require holistic and pluralistic approaches from different point of views, not least human and societal.

As the report shows, the ERC – an entirely bottom-up programme – recognises that about 25% of the excellent research projects in Europe are in SSH areas. Also, SSH scholars successfully participate in the MCSA and show that SSH is the second largest scientific field per number of applications (about 20%) and receives about 16% of the total budget of the programme (the only field that shows a smaller proportion of the budget than of projects, p.86).

These numbers indicate that SSH researchers do participate successfully in EU programmes. As other data show, SSH research also remains at forefront of European research excellence worldwide. For example, 51% of the Humanities Centres for Excellence worldwide and 56% of the top publications in social innovation are delivered by European researchers. Insufficient integration of SSH is therefore a missed opportunity for harnessing the world class talents of European SSH researchers.

Key insights for Horizon Europe

EASSH wants to focus on three specific dimensions of the architecture of the funding programme:

- The design of the work programme, including calls and topics;
- The implementation of the programme and evaluation processes;
- A new methodology for monitoring scientific contributions and interdisciplinary approaches and adaptive mechanisms.



Design of the work programme

It is of paramount importance that the design of the programmes, calls and topics bear in mind the important contributions of all disciplines, including those which have previously been left behind, as the Horizon 2020 monitoring reports demonstrated. In Horizon Europe, researchers need to provide long-term perspectives and to assess the impact of individual and social transformations, with a view to developing European policies to deal with changing European identities and the integration of different cultures. Horizon Europe should be designed to encourage contributions from legal and humanities scholars, since they are often crucial in resolving institutional bottlenecks in the implementation of new technologies. **If future policy discussion about emerging innovation or industry is not conceived within the legal and ethical frameworks that are necessary to protect individuals, innovation will be doomed to fail.**

In many cases, it is important to ascertain whether the low level of SSH integration has been generated by technical call descriptions that leave little room and incentives for SSH researchers to contribute and lead projects. For Horizon Europe, a useful first step would be to ensure that the calls and topics are effectively co-designed by a team of scientific experts and policy officials with a wide range of expertise and disciplinary backgrounds.

Implementation of the programme and evaluation processes

Both the monitoring report and the data analysis that EASSH developed indicate that good intentions driving the overall programme can be undermined by poor implementation, particularly at the level of the evaluation of proposals. Outsourcing of the call implementation and project evaluation to executive agencies has created a gap between where the call is designed – and therefore with the details of what the funder is aiming to achieve –, and how the call is implemented.

Preliminary analysis conducted by EASSH has concluded that further evidence is required to establish whether the current evaluation process for the selection of projects to be funded in Horizon 2020 is fit for purpose. Our evidence suggests that **the proportion of evaluators with SSH backgrounds is very low in societal challenges other than SC6 – in some cases less than 3% of evaluators – making it difficult to evaluate SSH-flagged topics** (see annex 1). EASSH has also observed that, in challenges where a reasonable proportion of SSH experts are included in the lists of reviewers, the integration of SSH research has shown better results.

Self-nominated experts and the selection of reviewers on the basis of keywords does not seem to be effective as we suggested in a previous paper on [Evaluation in Horizon 2020 Societal Challenges](#). We recommend that **high-level expert groups responsible for designing the aims and purposes of the calls within the various challenges should serve on evaluation panels**, thereby deploying the wide range of specific expertise required to evaluate multi-discipline topics. Several members of evaluation panels should serve throughout the duration of the programme to facilitate the task of individual experts in selecting and implementing interdisciplinary projects that fulfil the aims of the calls.



Better monitoring of scientific contributions and interdisciplinary approaches

As stressed in previous EASSH papers, the methodology adopted in the Monitoring Reports is not capable of accurately assessing whether SSH research was involved in the core activities of funded projects. Changes are required in the data collection about proposals and selected projects to enable not only more accurate monitoring of SSH-integration but also the integration of multiple research fields. Information about the disciplinary background of the investigators participating in a project should be used as primary data to identify the interdisciplinary dimension of the project. A short section covering the key expertise of the members of the consortium could help evaluators to assess the mix of knowledge engaged in the proposal and to compare it to the requirements for each topic set out in the call text.

In addition, the framework programme needs to display a degree of flexibility in order to integrate possible changes if annual monitoring or mid-term evaluation identify flaws or insufficient results. It was unhelpful and costly to have to wait for the end of Horizon 2020 to have the opportunity to review technicalities that could have improved the integration after the first couple of years of implementation. Opportunities are needed to review and act on review findings at regular intervals during the lifetime of Horizon Europe.

Recommendations for Horizon Europe

With a focus on the development of the future framework programme, EASSH would like to make the following recommendations:

- A solid and **strong focus in Horizon Europe on research in societies, democracy, culture and social transformation** as a self-standing cluster, which has comparable resources to those in other clusters.
- A **redefinition of the concept of integration** through the co-design of the clusters to ensure a relevant socio-economic, historical and legal framework, and the inclusion of SSH-led intervention areas in all clusters in Horizon Europe.
- **Appropriate participation of SSH-researchers** in strategic programming committees, in calls and topic-drafting teams and evaluation panels to ensure that proposals are assessed in line with all call requirements and to embed crucial expertise to allow full assessment of research and innovation impact on societies and individuals.
- **A revised methodology for monitoring interdisciplinary integration combined with a higher degree of adaptiveness of the programme during its implementation based on mid-term evaluation.**

EASSH stands ready to make available our expertise to colleagues in the Commission to carry out a more extensive analysis of data on the implementation of the H2020 programme in the hope that we can learn lessons for Horizon Europe.



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ANNEX 1: Degree of SSH expertise of the evaluators in the 7 challenges (Source: EASSH own data: Deer, Lombardo, Nguyen)

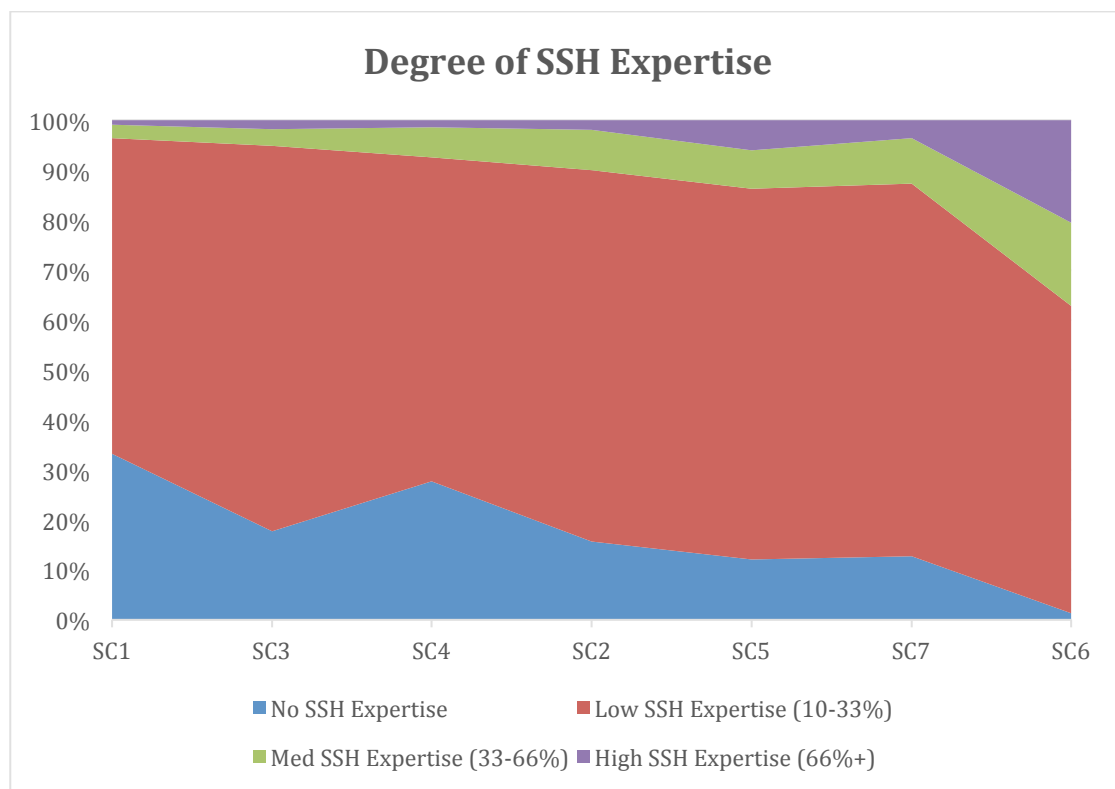
The chart below shows the degree of SSH expertise of the evaluators in each of the 7 societal challenges; from those evaluators with no SSH expertise, to those with a high degree of expertise. An EASSH team analysed the degree of expertise of each evaluator by examining the expertise information provided by each evaluator. Experts provide information on their expertise in between 1-10 fields. Each of expertise field for each evaluator was then assessed as denoting SSH expertise or not.

Using this data we calculate the degree of expertise for each evaluator. For example if an evaluator has completed 5 expertise fields, 2 of which are categorised as 'SSH' then the expert's degree of SSH expertise is 40%.

The evaluators are then categorised in one of 4 bands:

- No SSH expertise, where none of the expertise fields are SSH
- Low SSH Expertise, between 1% and 33% of the expertise fields are SSH
- Medium SSH Expertise, between 34% and 66% of the expertise fields are SSH
- High SSH Expertise, 67% or more of the expertise fields are SSH

For each societal challenge a distribution of the degree of SSH expertise for the evaluators is calculated and shown in the chart above. The order of societal challenges across the x-axis is by ranking of No/Low SSH expertise. Societal Challenge 1 has the highest proportion of evaluators with No/Low SSH expertise, around 97% have No or Low SSH expertise. Societal Challenge 6 has the lowest proportion of No/Low expertise.



(Source: EASSH own data: Deer, Lombardo, Nguyen)

