



SSH and Interdisciplinarity in Horizon Europe **Opportunities, barriers and useful support** **WORKSHOP REPORT**

This report is a summary of the workshop discussion among delegates and does not purport to set out policy positions of the IUA or EI.

This report has been compiled by IMSCO-IUA and Enterprise Ireland staff

Before publication, it has been reviewed by the workshop facilitator and shared with the working tables' chairs

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Introduction

The organisers

Enterprise Ireland, the governments agency responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprise, leads the national support network for Horizon Europe, working to increase participation by Ireland based companies and academic institutions in the EU's main instrument for funding research and innovation in Europe. This support network includes National Contact Points (NCPs), National Delegates (ND) and National Experts across the three pillars of Horizon Europe. Pillar 1 focuses on research excellence and includes Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions and the European Research Council. Pillar 2 focuses on missions and global challenges, including Cluster 2, Culture, Creativity and Inclusive society. The Irish Marie Skłodowska-Curie Office (IMSCO), jointly operated by the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and the Irish Research Council (IRC), hosts the MSCA National Delegate and NCPs and the Cluster 2 and ERC NCP (SSH), supporting Irish applicants engaging across these programmes.

Context and objectives

In line with their Horizon Europe remit, Enterprise Ireland (EI) and the IMSCO-IUA co-hosted an event "SSH and Interdisciplinarity in Horizon Europe" on May 25th, 2022, aimed at advancing the following:

- Demystify Horizon Europe: inform SSH researchers about collaboration and funding opportunities in Horizon Europe;
- Spotlight interdisciplinarity in European existing/past collaborative projects;
- Promote interdisciplinarity as an equal partnership between SSH and STEM researchers where the disciplines complement each other in the research;
- Provide next steps for the researchers/Research Office staff with respect to getting involved in interdisciplinary projects.

Given the above, presentations and workshop activities centered on the integration of social science and humanities (including arts) in European projects, with special focus on interdisciplinary cooperation.

It should be noted that this report is a summary of the workshop discussion among delegates and does not purport to set out policy positions of the IUA or EI.

Methodology

This report stems from the workshop discussion facilitated during the event. To ensure inclusion and representativity, sixty delegates (both academic staff and research officers) were invited to the event from all Irish HEIs. Their selection was run by the HEIs themselves through a process of internal nomination.

In the morning, attendees had the opportunity to hear about the integration of SSH in Horizon Europe from Dr Beatrice Lucaroni, Senior Policy Officer at the European Commission. They also learned about successfully implemented projects and real-life challenges and opportunities as three presentations were delivered by Prof Jane Ohlmeyer (TCD), Prof Noel Fitzpatrick (TU Dublin), and Prof Jane Walsh (NUIG).

In the afternoon session, on foot of that input, delegates were asked to work in pre-assigned groups which were created by the organisers on the basis of gender and institutional balance.

Following a short introduction from the facilitator, Dr Daithí Mac Síthigh (IADT), delegates were requested to discuss and respond to the following questions:

- What do you consider to be the main opportunities offered by Horizon Europe to SSH researchers?
- What are the main barriers faced by SSH researchers in interdisciplinary projects?
- Which supports would you find useful in this regard, at national and/or European level? Is there any good practice that should be promoted more widely?
- Is there anything else that you'd like to contribute or discuss?

Each table discussion was moderated by a chair, selected and briefed in advance (see Appendix 2). In addition to posing each question to all participants, chairs were responsible for ensuring that all comments were legibly recorded in the 'report summary form' provided (see Appendix 3).

As noted with all delegates at the time, the points included in the report summary form, complemented by the notes taken during the plenary session, would be used to inform this report (which is structured around the first three questions). This document, drafted by the organisers, was shared with the Chairs and the facilitator before publication so as to ensure that delegates' input and suggestions were accurately reflected.

Delegate's input

Opportunities

When discussing the opportunities related to the participation of SSH disciplines in Horizon Europe projects the following four clusters emerged: specific SSH opportunities; funding for excellent projects; networks and partnerships; and personal growth.

Specific SSH opportunities

As numerous Horizon Europe calls and topics ask for the inclusion of SSH expertise, there are funding opportunities for bottom-up, top-down and interdisciplinary initiatives. In addition to monetary benefits, that enables SSH researchers to influence projects that would have traditionally been perceived as STEM only, bringing their perspective as early as project-design stage. Visibility is another benefit, as these big-scale grants make it possible to showcase the value of SSH disciplines to colleagues and the wider public, for example creating tangible societal impact in a cost-effective way. In other words, as part of Horizon Europe projects, SSH researchers can contribute to social innovation and channel that effectively to policymakers and other academic stakeholders.

Funding for excellent projects

Delegates noticed how the funding size of Horizon Europe calls allows for the upscaling of ambitious projects, making possible the generation of transformative impact and the tackling of global challenges from a European perspective. Notably, EU projects often focus on issues such as poverty and climate change, which align with UN Sustainable Development Goals, and successful consortia are tasked with contributing innovative solutions. Given the multifaceted nature of these challenges, it was favourably noted by delegates that Horizon Europe was encouraging interdisciplinary

cooperation, engagement with non-academic stakeholders (e.g., industry, EU institutions and policy-makers, etc.). Also, delegates praised the presence of cross-cutting issues, such as gender, open access and societal engagement.

Networks and partnerships

Working groups highlighted the benefits related to building and extending international partnerships in the context of Horizon Europe projects, which offer precious opportunities to meet world-class colleagues from other institutions (even in the case of unsuccessful bids), learn from each other, gain exposure to different research cultures and expand networks well beyond western Europe. Also, as many of these projects have an interdisciplinary component, they constitute a platform for different subjects to meet, break silos and produce creative solutions. The inclusion of researchers at different career stages was also praised, with mention of the potential for mentoring, career development and peer-learning, both in terms of scientific knowledge and project-management skills. Finally, it was pointed out that a first successful partnership can become a networking critical mass, likely to result in more joint bids and connections over time.

Personal and professional growth

Given the consolidated reputation of EU Research Framework Programmes, delegates were vocal about the benefits of these grants on the career of researchers of all career stages. In addition to bringing local and international recognition to PIs, these awards are likely to lead to future promotions and professional advancements. In this regard, it was mentioned the value for protected research time for staff and opportunities for building up teams, inclusive of postdocs and research students. Also, as success ‘breeds success’, these grants often contribute to critical mass and core expertise within institutions. Furthermore, these projects often enhance career satisfaction, bringing about benefits such as international travelling, expansion of personal connections and deeper intercultural understanding.

Barriers

As a result of group discussion, delegates highlighted the following barriers: SSH and STEM communication; SSH specific challenges; networks (and lack thereof); time and resources and challenges related to approaching EU calls.

SSH and STEM

Delegates commented that, notwithstanding its huge potential, cooperating with STEM disciplines comes with some challenges. In some instances, interdisciplinary calls seem drafted with a preponderant STEM focus, which might result in a maximum of 1-2 SSH researchers being included in most projects. Similar to that, there is the feeling that SSH expertise is sometimes invited as an add-on, in a box-ticking fashion.

In terms of challenges related to working together, communication issues have been flagged. Some delegates pointed out how the role of SSH partners might not be fully understood by the rest of the consortium. Similarly, SSH PIs have highlighted the challenge of articulating convincingly their added value and proactively setting out their relevance to a given topic (rather than joining consortia at a later stage upon invitation). Finally, in terms of cultural barriers, it was noted that Horizon Europe requirements such as teamwork and data sharing are more embedded historically in STEM than SSH working culture, where ‘solo trading’ is more prevalent.

SSH specific challenges

Delegates pointed out that SSH is often conceptualised as a monolith, without fully acknowledging the specificities of disciplines and differences in funding opportunities. Instead, it would be useful to consider differently the various research areas, acknowledging that the current structure seems to better favour the interdisciplinary inclusion of social science than arts and humanities. In other words, while social scientists' expertise seems to fit a wide array of work packages, subjects like arts and study of the human past struggle more to find their space in interdisciplinary projects.

Other identified barriers were the fear to coordinate and resistance to interdisciplinary opportunities. Part of that seems explainable by limited benefits in terms of publication, interdisciplinary career paths, appreciation by departments and straightforward promotion mechanisms. A complementary explanation relates to the fear of failure, and perceived shame coming with that, which seem more pronounced in SSH departments than in other disciplinary areas. Finally, as coordinators are expected to have a substantial research track record and experience in funded projects, limited funding opportunities for SSH at system level make it challenging to build an internationally competitive CV.

Networks (and lack thereof)

Delegates widely commented on the incremental nature of networks, which keep expanding once a critical mass is there. In this regard, the challenge appears to be getting the foot in the door i.e., being included in successful networks as a first timer. In a paradoxical fashion, many researchers who are interested in joining interdisciplinary consortia do not have fully effective ways to find each other. That holds particularly true for early career researchers, especially considering that intra-institutional networking activities are limited, inclusion of junior researchers is rarely explicitly rewarded at evaluation stage and no widespread mentoring mechanisms are in place to support the construction of personal brands. Delegates also noted that, as a consequence of Brexit, there is a need to diversify international contacts, departing from the predominance of UK-Irish ties. While that might result in expanded networks, once that trust is built, issues such as language barriers need to be considered. In terms of intersectoral partnerships, delegates identified the challenge of building trust-based relationships with policy makers, particularly in the context of opening critical debates.

Time and resources

Delegates were vocal about how writing funding proposals requires considerable time, often in short supply for many academics, especially when employed on a short-term basis. While that applies across the board, it was pointed out that these issues are particularly relevant in small institutions, where arranging teaching buy-out comes with logistic complications (i.e., limited replacement options). Also, with reference to the Irish context, delegates noted additional challenges of the technological sector, which is often characterized by high teaching workload and limited rewards for research achievements, also in terms of promotion.

In terms of post-award challenges, delegates pointed out the advanced finance and project management skills needed to run projects of this kind, that PIs and in-house operation teams do not necessarily have, and the challenges related to under-performing partners.

Approaching the EU calls

Barriers were observed in regards to finding research funding opportunities and going through the relevant documents, also due to their length and specialistic language. For example, Coordination and Support Actions are extremely specific. It was also pointed out the technical expertise needed to draft Horizon Europe applications and the difficulty of finding consultants that specialize in SSH proposals. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary nature of some topics is sometimes perceived as excessively top-down and over prescriptive, in some cases complicating the design of effective projects.

Delegates also referred to the challenges of writing these types of proposals without adequate professional support, particularly considering the international nature of the evaluation process. Also, as there is no dedicated funding to ensure the sustainability of projects, risks concerning duplication of work and limited impact were identified.

Support

In terms of suggestions for better support, the following macro-themes emerged: inclusivity and capacity building; networks and partners; institutional support.

Inclusivity and capacity building

Delegates expressed their desire for playing a bigger role in the design of Horizon Europe calls and being included more in discussions about the selection of potential topics (including funding opportunities targeting SSH researchers). Furthermore, they recommended more consultation with researchers regarding the timelines and deadlines for calls.

In terms of building capacities and sharing best practice, delegates pointed out that knowledge is often confined within successful institutions. That leads to a continuous 'reinvention of the wheel', where efforts are unnecessarily duplicated and newcomers struggle to access the necessary 'know-how'. To bridge this gap, incentives should be provided for the publication of funded proposals, ideally in dedicated repositories. In addition to these tools, researchers signaled their interest in learning from successful peers, suggesting measures such as mentoring of new project leads, also through shadowing of experienced awardees, and showcasing of success stories. As not all SSH departments and institutions have the necessary knowledge and experience in-house, there would be merit in doing so across institutions.

Networks and partners

Delegates were vocal in calling for more support for networking activities. In particular, brokerage events (also interdisciplinary) and practical guidelines for effective networking were repeatedly mentioned. Similarly, small travel and conference-organisation grants (both with national and international focus) were defined as game-changers.

In terms of evaluating existing measures, delegates widely praised the financial support provided by the Irish governmental agency 'Enterprise Ireland' and suggested to extend its scope to the funding of national networking events.

It was pointed out that the EU matchmaking portal is not sufficiently user-friendly currently and effective online platforms for researchers to find each other would be particularly welcome.

Finally, it was noted the importance of provisions for the career development of postdoctoral researchers involved in Horizon Europe projects.

Institutional support

There was consensus on praising the crucial role played by research officers. As many pointed out, finding opportunities and fully understanding work programmes requires time and specific skills. In many instances, research officers act like navigators and interpreters, pointing applicants in the right direction and clearly explaining the requirements of calls. A special acknowledgement was given to personalised forms of support, tailored around the career stage and experience of the applicant.

As a suggestion for further improvement, delegates recommended dedicated training for research support staff specialized in SSH programmes. In terms of post-award support to PIs, it was suggested to offer training for newcomers, who do not necessarily have sufficient project management skills, and to provide *ad hoc* support for admin and reporting. Also, when thinking of building capacities, attention should be paid to the differences between big and small institutions, where reduced-size teams are responsible for a large number of programmes.

Another point that consistently emerged is institutional support. Numerous discussion groups talked about the crucial importance of teaching buy-out mechanisms, suggesting that they should not be available to coordinators only and that similar rules should apply across institutions. Also, it would be welcome to have more consistency at national level about issuing contracts with some balance between research and teaching duties.

Conclusions

On the day, delegates generously shared their experiences and opinion on the integration of SSH in Horizon Europe. In light of their discussion, the following emerged:

- There is agreement on the benefits that SSH researchers receive from engaging in Horizon Europe, in terms of funding, prestige, expansion of networks and opportunity for impact.
- While SSH is conceptualized as a single category for the purpose of Horizon Europe, there are substantial differences between social science and arts & humanities, with the opportunities in the latter not being fully realised
- Delegates widely mentioned networks while discussing both barriers and opportunities. While there is an understanding that reliable partners are a huge resource, being included in networks might be challenging for newcomers.
- Mentoring of early career-researchers is another cross-cutting theme. Notwithstanding undisputable benefits coming with participating in Horizon Europe projects, provisions for their inclusion and career-development are not explicitly required nor rewarded by the funder.
- Given the complexity of calls and projects, there is great appreciation for the role of research support staff both at pre- and post-award stage.
- There are considerable differences among institutions in terms of in-house, opportunities for peer-learning, expertise, capacities and contractual conditions.

Appendix 1: Event agenda

SSH and Interdisciplinarity in Horizon Europe

25 May 2022

Organised by Enterprise Ireland and the Irish Marie Skłodowska-Curie Office

Venue: Enterprise Ireland Head Office, East Point Business Park, The Plaza, Dublin 3, D03E5R6

Time	Agenda Item
09:45	Welcome coffee, registration and networking
10:15	Opening remarks <i><u>Peter Brown, IRC Director</u></i>
10:25	Keynote address (case study 1) and Q&A: <i>SSH and interdisciplinarity in collaborative European projects / Meaningful integration of SSH: key to addressing complex societal challenges for Europe / SHAPE-ID</i> <i><u>Prof Jane Ohlmeyer, TCD</u></i>
10:55	EU Commission (streamed in): SSH Opportunities in Horizon Europe and insights from “Integration of Social Sciences and Humanities in Horizon 2020” report. <i><u>Dr Beatrice Lucaroni, EU Commission</u></i>
11:55	Coffee
12:10	Case study 2 and Q&A: experience of participation in interdisciplinary EU projects and importance of SSH in addressing societal challenges <i><u>Prof Noel Fitzpatrick, TU Dublin</u></i>
12:40	Case study 3 and Q&A: experience of participation in interdisciplinary EU projects and importance of SSH in addressing societal challenges <i><u>Prof Jane Walsh, NUIG</u></i>
13.10	Lunch
13:55	Workshop <i><u>Facilitated by Dr Daithi MacSithigh, IADT</u></i>
14:55	NCP pitches from Horizon Europe NCPs, showcasing programmes, calls and opportunities for SSH researchers.
15:25	Closing remarks
15:35	Final Coffee and Networking
16:15	END

Appendix 2: Briefing note circulated in advance to all chairs

Workshop: Summary of activities and chairs' duties

All event participants will be asked to work in (pre-assigned) groups as per the table they are assigned to. Following a short introduction from the facilitator, Dr Daithí Mac Síthigh (IADT), delegates will be asked to have a discussion based on a set of questions provided by the organisers.

Chairs, selected and briefed in advance, will be responsible for moderating the discussion. That will entail posing each question to all participants, allowing a minute for each answer. To enforce that, the use of a timer is recommended.

Sample questions are:

- What do you consider to be the main opportunities offered by Horizon Europe to SSH researchers?
- What are the main barriers faced by SSH researchers in interdisciplinary projects?
- Which supports would you find useful in this regard, at national and/or European level? Is there any good practice that should be promoted more widely?
- Is there anything else that you'd like to contribute or discuss?

Group participants' answers could be inspired by what they have heard during the day or they are welcome to contribute completely new considerations.

The points suggested by the group should be noted down in the "report summary form" provided, preferably in a bullet-point style. The Chair can decide whether to take notes themselves or delegating the task to another participant. These forms will be collected and reviewed by the organisers.

At the end of the session, the facilitator will moderate the plenary section, asking Chairs to share the main points discussed for a given question (e.g., question 1, 2 or 3). 2 minutes will be given to each group, strictly enforced.

The points included in the "report summary forms", complemented by the notes taken during the plenary session, will inform a subsequent workshop report. To ensure accuracy, this document will be shared with all Chairs for review before its publication. The Chatham house rule will apply and we truly hope that delegates will feel comfortable to be honest and straightforward in their comments.

Workshop – All Steps

- Tables' composition (over the lunch break) → A tableau will be displayed by the organisers during the lunch break, indicating the tables' composition. Tables will be balanced in terms of gender, institution and seniority. Delegates will be expected to be seated at their table by the time the activity starts (h 13.55)
- Introduction (3 mins) → The facilitator will introduce the workshop-style activity (2-3 minutes) and invite people to work in small groups.
- Table discussion (30 mins) → to take place as per the guidelines above.
- Plenary session (25 mins) → The facilitator will ask each chair to summarise the main points expressed by their group (for a given question only), sharing them with all participants.
- Collection of forms → The organisers will collect the "report summary forms" from the Chairs.

Appendix III- Workshop Report Summary Form

[The size of comment boxes, originally 1 page each, has been reduced here in the interest of space]

Table number/name:

Chair:

Guidelines to complete this form:

The points included in this form, together with the final plenary session of the workshop, will inform a post-workshop report, to be published after the event (Chatham house rule will apply).

As each Chair will be allocated 2 minutes for the oral reporting stage (focusing on one question only), these written points will be crucial to compose the subsequent written report. To this purpose, the organisers might consult the Chairs during the drafting process.

Chairs might wish to take notes themselves or delegate the task to another group member. The most preferred style is bullet points.

Please note that, while it is fully understood that notes cannot be edited for style and grammar, we expect them to be legible.

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3

Question 4