

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Social Sciences and Humanities researchers rate EU funding as the key to internationalisation**

“Social sciences and humanities researchers are not active in EU research!” This is a common misconception recently proven wrong. The “Socio-Economic and Humanities Programme (SSH)” of the European Union Seventh Framework Research Programme (FP7) is considered a gateway for researchers into international research cooperation.

This positive response is one of the key results of a recent survey of SSH researchers and scholars around Europe and beyond, carried out by the EU-funded NET4SOCIETY project. NET4SOCIETY is a network of National Contact Points assisting SSH researchers’ engagement in FP7. The survey focused exclusively on the experience and assessment of SSH researchers within FP7. The goal was to investigate the main barriers and incentives identified by SSH researchers with regard to their involvement in FP7 and to gain insights into their experience within the specific SSH programme and across the other themes of FP7. More than 450 researchers from 39 countries contributed to the survey via an online questionnaire, and an additional 100 researchers in 29 countries were interviewed this summer.

Two out of three SSH researchers said their primary motivation to participate in this challenging and bureaucratically intense programme is the international research environment and the interdisciplinary opportunities it offers. This assessment was endorsed by a UK project coordinator who stated *“the most important incentive for working on an FP7 project is the wealth of international contacts you develop as you’re going along. It allows you to broaden your approach and look at how other countries solve social problems”*. An indicator for the scope of international cooperation in SSH are the 67 countries currently participating in the SSH projects.

Typically, European SSH research teams include six to nine international partner institutions. This working environment – often misconceived as too large and diverse to be attractive – is considered a very important approach, and can only be complemented, but not replaced by other schemes which fund individual researchers, such as the ERC.

Women find the SSH programme attractive, with a participation rate of over 32%. While gender balance remains a problem in FP7, the SSH programme currently

comes closest to achieving the European Commission's goal of increasing the overall participation of female researchers to 40%.

While putting to rest some typical misconceptions often voiced about FP7, numerous issues were criticized. Over-subscription to calls and low success rates are considered a massive barrier for SSH researchers. In total more than 1.700 proposals have been submitted, whereas 134 project have been funded so far. With a success rate of under 10%, the SSH programme has the lowest success rate in the FP7 Cooperation programme, while at the same time attracting proposals of the highest quality. While being the world's largest SSH research programme, with a total budget of 623 million Euro for 7 years, this programme by far commands the smallest budget within the Cooperation Programme. Inadequate budgets have repeatedly led to a substantial number of excellent proposals, scoring 14.5 out 15 possible points, being denied funding.

Researchers were divided in their opinions of the new approach based on "societal challenges" introduced in 2009. While the general idea was welcomed, the implementation and especially the larger size of the projects are seen as problematic in terms of project management and consortium building.

Other recommendations for improvements include the concentration of funding on small and medium scale collaborative projects. Another point stressed was the need for a greater emphasis on humanities-oriented research. Three out of four SSH researchers would also welcome the inclusion of bottom-up funding possibilities within the context of the SSH programme.

Overall, the answers and comments of the research community indicate a high approval of the current programme and there are high expectations that FP8 will include a more appropriate budget, recognising the great potential that the European SSH research community has to offer.

The report "SSH experiences with FP7 – a midterm commentary", resulting from the NET4SOCIETY survey, will be published at the beginning of 2011. More information on first results can be found here: <http://www.net4society.eu/public/survey> .

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