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# New societal challenges for the European Union New challenges for social sciences and the humanities

Thinking across boundaries  
Modernising European research

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European Commission

## **New societal challenges for the European Union New challenges for social sciences and the humanities**

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## RESPONDING TO MAJOR SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

Who can give convincing answers to questions such as:

- What will the world look like in 2025?
- How can creativity be fostered in economy and society?
- What compromises are necessary to preserve the environment?
- Why does intolerance still thrive?
- Which policies can better help feed the world?
- Are high rates of unemployment among young people unavoidable?
- How will climate change affect the regions of Europe?
- Are security policies threatening freedoms and rights?
- How to combine national, European and other cultural and political identities?

Researchers in social sciences and the humanities can. They can help understand the world around us and act upon it if we have a clearer grasp of these situations. They can help Europe tackle these issues and succeed in its socio-economic and political development.

However, these societal challenges are complex. They require not one answer but rather a combination of answers from economics, sociology, history, anthropology, geography, political science and other relevant disciplines, based on different data, tools, concepts and interpretations.

In addition, research results in social sciences and the humanities are often overlooked when it comes to using knowledge for policies and taking decisions which affect European citizens.

This is why the European Commission wants to promote a new approach to research in social sciences and the humanities, a new approach that enhances interdisciplinarity and promotes social sciences and the humanities knowledge in the public debate.



## ENHANCING COOPERATION AND MANAGEMENT IN RESEARCH

Up to the end of the 7th Framework Programme in 2013, the Commission will invite researchers in social sciences and the humanities to address societal challenges in its annual call for proposals. A societal challenge is defined as a major social, economic, political and cultural issue for Europe. Each societal challenge project will require a consortium that can lead excellent interdisciplinary research and manage efficiently and effectively an European Commission contribution of several million euros (at least EUR 6 500 000 for 2010).

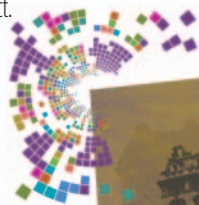
To be viable, such a project must be built on a number of activities, such as:

### RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

- Several research teams address various aspects of the societal challenge and make progress under the supervision and guidance of a strategic steering team. This research must foster reliable quantitative and qualitative comparative analyses across Europe (and, where applicable, with other world regions) and enhance interdisciplinarity and innovative approaches.

### CENTRAL MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- A strong strategic steering team to enhance the coherence of the project.
- A strong central management team with a solid network throughout the consortium.



## SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES

- A thorough stock-taking of research in the relevant disciplinary fields.
- Forward looking activities on future developments and possible scenarios.
- Dissemination of research results to scientific communities, citizens and policymakers.

Each of these activities can be conceived of as different work packages closely combined in a single large project.

**Two major sources of EU funding are available for researchers in social sciences and the humanities:**

- **The cooperation programme with its new approach to societal challenges.**
- **The European Research Council which supports bottom-up research.**



## UNDERSTANDING SOCIETAL CHALLENGES: THE MEANS BEHIND THE ENDS

Too many research institutions and universities working in the fields of social sciences and the humanities in Europe still lack the necessary capacity to run a project with an European Union contribution of at least EUR 6 500 000 (in 2010). In order to make such research on societal challenges a success, active institutions in social sciences and the humanities need:

- **Dedicated project leaders.** A societal challenge project cannot be managed centrally by a single senior researcher on a part-time basis, as is still too often seen in European research. Societal challenges projects will require central strategic steering teams made up of senior and junior researchers who can steer the project coherently and continuously and make sure that interdisciplinarity yields scientific results and policy-oriented documents and debates.
- **Professional managers.** A societal challenge project cannot be managed in financial and administrative terms by the existing, sometimes limited, staff of European universities on top of their normal duties. It requires additional staff who will have sufficient time and the adequate training to manage the project and report in due time to the European Commission. The European Commission

does not advocate a specific management model but believes that managing such a project is an opportunity for European universities and research centres to grow internally and develop new professional skills and competencies.

- **Open-minded researchers.** A societal challenge project cannot be the exclusive domain of one discipline or one school of thought. It has to combine different theoretical approaches and disciplinary views. This combination will require a well-balanced strategy by the central steering team and first and foremost a readiness by all junior and senior researchers to engage and reflect actively about their practices, methodologies and results.
- **Specialised staff in communication and dissemination.** Communication and dissemination to policymakers and the wider public is often seen as the final effort after the project. They must now become central to the project right from the outset, in order to inform European citizens, policymakers, businesses, trade unions and other civil society organisations on today's and tomorrow's realities.





- Funded up to 75% of total eligible costs
- Funded up to 100% of total eligible costs
- Funded up to 100% of total eligible costs

## ADDRESSING SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

According to article II.16 of the Grant Agreement for Collaborative Projects:

- research activities can be funded up to 50 to 75% of total eligible costs (depending on the legal status of the beneficiary);
- management activities, including strategic steering, can be funded up to 100% of total eligible costs;
- other activities (such as stock-taking studies, forward-looking studies and dissemination) can be funded up to 100% of total eligible costs.



## MEETING THE SOCIETAL CHALLENGES: SIMPLIFYING REQUIREMENTS

In order to help researchers address societal challenges, the European Commission will support simplification in the following ways:

- The funding scheme to be used for societal challenge projects is the collaborative project. It is well-known by the research communities and helps combine flexibly research (funded up to 75% of total eligible costs) and non-research activities (funded up to 100% of total eligible costs).
- Each societal challenge project will last 4 to 5 years in order to enable adequate quantitative and qualitative research, communication and valorisation.
- It will be difficult for a societal challenge project to meet its objectives if too many partners are involved. At the same time, the breadth of the challenge and the need for interdisciplinarity call for a sufficient number of different competencies. It is thus expected that the total number of partners will be between 7 and 15, covering a sufficient number of Member States and/or Associated Countries (the additional participation of international cooperation partner countries is welcome).

- Each societal challenge project will produce a limited number of deliverables. Quality rather than quantity of scientific output is the objective that researchers must pursue.
- The European Commission will actively support the dissemination of research results at the European level through its website and official contacts within the European institutions and the Member States and Associated States. It will thus maintain close contact with the coordinators of societal challenge projects.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

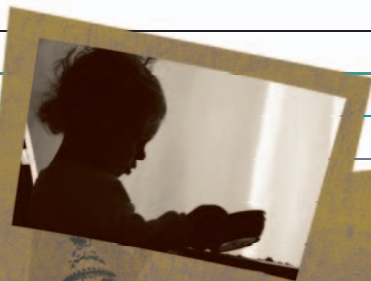
- Consult the Socio-economic Sciences and the Humanities Research Programme web site at:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/index_en.html)
- Go to the EU *National Contact Point* (NCP) in your country, whose job is to provide advice to potential applicants for EU research funding. NCPs, each knowledgeable about the various aspects of FP7, are established in every Member State and in countries associated with FP7. See the list of NCP addresses at:  
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This site contains a great deal of information about FP7, including the latest information updates, the calendar of Calls for proposals, the text of the Calls, frequently-asked questions (FAQs), and more.
- For the ERC (bottom-up research):  
<http://erc.europa.eu/>

- Contact the dedicated *Research Enquiry Service*, which will assist those new to participation in EU Framework Programmes, at:  
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## NOTES



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Our modern world cannot live on fragmented knowledge and policies, and “business as usual” in research in social sciences and the humanities won’t help. The European Commission is going a step further in addressing today’s and tomorrow’s major societal challenges that affect our citizens, the countries we cooperate with, and of course future generations of European citizens. The European Commission is launching large research cooperative projects of several million euros in social sciences and the humanities (at least EUR 6 500 000 for 2010) to address these societal challenges. This booklet explains how major changes will be required in the way researchers manage their projects, steer their interdisciplinary research and valorise their results in society at large.



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