

CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

HUMAN VALUES AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES

DANISH EU-PRESIDENCY CONFERENCE



INTRODUCTION

As part of Denmark's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Aalborg University hosted a conference on Human Values and Grand Challenges on December 1-2, 2025, in Copenhagen.

The goal of the conference was to offer concrete recommendations that can help strengthen SSAH's role in shaping challenge-oriented transdisciplinary research. Knowledge of society and human values is essential to address the grand challenges that Europe and the world faces and to further EU's agenda for a social, green and digital transition. These are our recommendations.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Implement two guiding principles for European Innovation and Research:

- A human-centric approach to innovation, resilience and societal development.
- Challenge-oriented research grounded in sound knowledge of society and citizens including behavioural, systemic and structural conditions shaping society.

STRUCTURAL PROPOSALS FOR FP10 & EU FUNDING INSTRUMENTS

Design elements funders can adopt when structuring calls, programmes and governance.

PROGRAMME ARCHITECTURE

1. Embed a Human-centric Approach across the Whole Programme (Art. 5)

- Make the Society policy window a robust and comparably well-funded investment for addressing critical social research questions (e.g. democracy, Culture, education, governance and future of Europe, and social cohesion, societal prosperity).
- Make a resilient society fit for human beings a central organizing principle across all policy windows to avoid the artificial divide between societal transformation and innovation & competitiveness.
- Ensure a human-centric approach in all the components of FP10, so that research addressing democracy, social cohesion, education skills, inclusion, culture and governance is properly funded across all four policy windows in FP10, including the European Partnerships, and social innovation in EIC
- Strengthen the challenge-based approach where SSAH leads/co-leads with STEM and policy actors, by continuously issuing calls for research and innovation solidly reflecting societal and human needs.
- Systematically embed SSAH in FP10 strategic planning, foresight, horizon scanning, and scenario development, to anticipate societal, geopolitical, technological, and value-based transitions.
- Encourage scholars' participation in the design of the programme including scholars from SSAH for the definition of appropriate research questions across different research areas.

2. Implement Diverse and Interdisciplinary Governance Structures to Ensure Human-centric, Mission-based R&I

- Establish multi-disciplinary boards connecting FP10 with the four policy windows of the ECF to ensure sound knowledge of human and societal needs.

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- Establish co-design panels with scholars, citizens, policy makers, SSAH, NGOs and industry in programme governance to ensure that FP10 delivers research and innovation that is legitimate, socially meaningful, and aligned with European values, at the earliest stages of programme development and throughout the life cycle of R&I actions.

3. Develop Innovative Initiatives to Advance Human-centric Approaches

- Make Europe a social data powerhouse. Invest in secure, FAIR, AI-ready data infrastructures ensuring Europe's leadership in social data for understanding implications of migration, inequality, health behaviours, cultural change, and democratic participation.
- Launch pilot 'Human Values Innovation Labs' across regions that combine policy labs, living labs and entrepreneurship support to advance SSAH-led innovation.

CALL DESIGN & EVALUATION

1. Embed SSAH in Call Design

- Ensure a broad disciplinary representation, by including sufficient SSAH expertise in the programme committees in pillar II of FP10 to ensure calls based on human and societal needs.
- Include relevant SSAH input in strategic research and innovation agendas (SRIA) of Horizon Partnerships to ensure SSAH considerations are fully integrated in calls and strategic orientations.

2. Move beyond SSAH Integration and Place SSAH Considerations as Key Defining Factors in Addressing Societal Challenges

- Continuously develop incentives to ensure SSAH elements in Pillar II proposals, by calling for SSAH perspectives in defining problem and solution.
- Expand the Societal Readiness Assessment across FP10 to ensure alignment with societal needs and challenges.
- Develop the TRL concept to include societal and social aspects of solution acceptance and adoption.

3. Develop Evaluation Criteria to Ensure SSAH considerations

- Align evaluator training to ensure that interdisciplinarity is recognized as essential and beneficial, helping to prevent mono-disciplinary biases in assessing relevance, feasibility, and novelty.
- Ensure that social, societal and interdisciplinary considerations are adopted as standard evaluation criteria (weighting example):
 1. Societal relevance & human values alignment (including societal readiness assessment, Responsible Research and Innovation and ethics) - 25%
 2. Interdisciplinarity & stakeholder engagement - 20%
 3. Scientific/technical quality - 20%
 4. Impact - 20%
 5. Implementation feasibility & scalability - 15%

4. Adopt a Portfolio Approach

- Combine complementary projects (short/long, disciplinary/ interdisciplinary) to address complex problems to strengthen the challenge-based approach.
- Introduce more two-step proposals in order to make it possible to screen for lack of or limited interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Ensure flexibility in challenge-driven research portfolios through portfolio-level reallocation and targeted rapid-response actions addressing emerging societal needs.

PROPOSED ACTIONS FOR THE WIDER EUROPEAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION COMMUNITY

Proposed initiatives for institutions and national agencies can adopt to promote a human-centric, challenge-based approach.

- 1. Establish and Strengthen Institutional structures that Actively Support Interdisciplinary Collaboration.**
Build environments in which interdisciplinary approaches are encouraged throughout education and career development, ensuring that researchers gain the skills, opportunities, and incentives to work effectively across disciplines.
- 2. Adopt the CoARA Agreement to Advance Research Assessment Reform.**
Promote diversified and inclusive assessment practices that actively encourage interdisciplinary collaboration. By implementing the CoARA principles, European research communities can strengthen incentives for researchers to engage in interdisciplinary work and contribute to a more innovative and integrated research landscape.
- 3. Provide Pilot Grants to Foster and Test Interdisciplinary Collaboration.**
Support early-stage interdisciplinary ideas through small-scale pilot funding, enabling teams to develop, refine, and demonstrate collaborative approaches before applying for larger European research programmes.

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