



EUROPEAN

# POLICY BRIEF



DECEMBER 2017

## INTRODUCTION

The importance of outcomes and impacts of SSH research has been highlighted in past and current editions of the European Framework Programme. Nonetheless, these impacts have been critically contested, and the lack of adequate tools for comprehensively assessing impact, as well as the unfunded perception of poor impact of SSH research have been an object of concern for the European Commission. Major research institutions and funders have been discussing impacts of research, but also citizens are asking about the return to their societies.

The FP7 project IMPACT-EV (January 2014 – December 2017) responds to this scientific and socio-political need. It has analysed the scientific, political and social impact, as well as the impact on strengthening the ERA, of research projects in SSH, and the latest quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools, in order to **develop a permanent system of selection, monitoring, evaluation and comparison of the impact and outcomes of European SSH research.**

In the lifetime of the IMPACT-EV project, awareness of the importance of social impact has clearly increased among researchers. Beyond exploring the difficulties and new methodologies for assessing these impacts, the project has promoted the public acknowledgement of many projects that do already have achieved social impact. A Social Impact Conference was held in Barcelona, 2016.

## DEFINITION

The IMPACT-EV analyses are based on the following definitions:

- **Scientific impact** refers to the publications, citation patterns, and dissemination among scientific networks, as well as further research development, derived from the project's results.
- **Political impact** means the transference of research outcomes and political recommendations into EU and national policies, and the use of those research outcomes by civil society or other entities in their political agendas.
- **Social impact** is different from dissemination and transference. It occurs when there is evidence of social improvements in relation to social goals (such as EU2020 goals) as a result of the research project.
- Finally, **impact on strengthening ERA** includes aspects such as mobility, training of young researchers, research careers improvement, interdisciplinarity, and international collaboration.

## EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

### EU funded research on SSH achieves relevant impacts.

The analysis of SSH projects funded under FP7 and FP6 (last call) allowed identifying plenty of particular examples of how the EC funded projects have achieved scientific, political and social impacts. For instance, the average of JCR publications per researcher is 3.71 (including in the calculation young researchers with no publications). Besides, significant political influence has been observed: there are projects whose findings have served as the basis to inform EU legislation and policy, as well as OECD, national, regional and local. There are also projects that have reached important social achievements, contributing to the established societal goals (i.e. Lisbon strategy, EU2020 targets, Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change). Furthermore, despite not having gathered evidence of their particular impacts, a number of projects recognize the importance of the social impact.

The interim evaluation of H2020 projects funded under Societal Challenge 6 analysed potential impacts (projects not yet finished) and revealed many are creating new knowledge to provide solutions for the future of Europe and its citizens. Some of them have also integrated new emerging challenges, which had not been foreseen when H2020 was launched, such as the refugee crisis or the effects of the Brexit. More than 60% are already working to influence the formulation of new policies. There is relevant involvement of stakeholders, including policy-makers and CSOs, in the development of most projects, thus increasing the interactions that make social and political impacts from research possible.

### **Social and political impact evaluation is at initial stages in most European countries.**

European national research evaluation institutes have developed different systems according to their experience and approach in research assessment. Apart from the Reference Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK and some developments in The Netherlands, Ireland and Spain, the evaluation of social and political impacts of research is still in its initial stages in most European countries analysed. Ex-post evaluations are less frequent and usually cover programmes or are applied to specific scientific disciplines. Assessment exercises are usually ex-ante. Peer review (individual or in expert panels) is the main technique used and, accordingly, criteria and measures to support these peer review processes and increase in rigour and quality are being developed worldwide. Some also include stake holders in these processes.

### **Awareness and difficulties in evaluating the social impact.**

Different difficulties exist when measuring social impact. First, many researchers share their concern about lack of appropriate measures and criteria to assess social and political impact, including measurable indicators. This is aligned with the growing debate about the role of metrics and quantitative measures, which is particularly relevant in the case of social impact. Actually today, different models currently at stake. Second, from a qualitative approach, the “bottom-up” model of collecting narratives and self-reported evidence has been acknowledged as an innovative system for social impact assessment; however, it is also perceived as too difficult and expensive to be extended beyond. Third, the time frame needed for achieving actual effects on the society is longer than for other tangible outcomes, which poses a barrier for ex-post evaluation to fully capture social impact of research. Finally, when social impact is observed, the problem of attribution (the difficulty to demonstrate that the improvements observed are the consequence of research) appears in many cases.

### **SIOR, the Social Impact Open Repository.**

One of the main outcomes of IMPACT-EV is the creation of the tool SIOR (<http://www.ub.edu/sior/>). SIOR is an open access repository to display, share, store and measure the social impact of research results. It is a non-profit initiative that aims to enhance the visibility of scientific research with social impact. This tool aims to respond to the growing social demand made to scientists of achieving and showing impact, and it does so by facilitating a systematic gathering and registration of the social impact. Within SIOR, researchers and research institutions describe the social impact of their scientific work and provide the evidence of this impact and its source in order to make it available to other scientists, funding agencies, policy makers, civil society organizations and citizens in general. SIOR is collaborating with ORCID in a way that registered social impact evidence is linked and can be tracked in the researchers' individual profile. Collaboration has also been established with WIKIPEDIA, which is accessible and used by citizens at large. In this way, the social impacts from research projects can be more easily found, cited and used beyond the scientific community. Finally, SIOR can support in this way funding agencies in their ex-ante evaluation exercises, because researchers will be able to describe their S&T excellent trajectories with publications, but also their experience in social impact with reliable evidence.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Social impact needs to be clearly differentiated from dissemination and transference of research findings, and include the improvements made in terms of contributions to the main goals of our societies (such as EU2020 or the UN Sustainable Development Goals, among other).
- Ex-ante evaluation for the selection of projects that can ensure having social impact needs to go beyond “expected social impact” and focus on experience of social impact (social impact already achieved in prior research).
- New mechanisms are needed to systematically gather evidence of social impact of funded projects throughout the project and beyond.
- Mechanisms of showcasing the social impact of research should use open frameworks so that make knowledge open to the society
- Beyond evidence-based policy, dialogic evidence-base involve dialogue with citizens and stakeholders to improve research and innovation processes and increase opportunities for impact.

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

IMPACT-EV has carried out an Ex-post evaluation of 473 SSH research projects funded under FP6 (last call) and FP7, as well as In-itinere evaluation of 56 SSH projects funded by H2020. These evaluations were made through documentation analysis, a questionnaire and interviews to main researchers and EC scientific officers. We identified projects that had achieved relevant impacts and analysed a selection of 15 case studies of Success, reaching out to both researchers and stakeholders involved. In addition, 8 projects that had not achieved the expected impacts were also studied.

The analysis of scientific impact involved a pilot study of a system of targeted indicators. To explore political impact, we conducted 40 interviews to policy makers (European, national and regional level) and a Delphi panel. Regarding social impact, we complemented the case studies and ex-post evaluations with 5 different national working groups with experts and stake holders, with whom we discussed potential social impact indicators, as well as strategies related to co-creation and open science. Finally, there has been an analysis of ERA policies and impacts on SSH research.

In the first stage of the project, we carried out an in-depth analysis of the systems and tools used for impact evaluation in 12 different countries with different traditions and experience in research assessment (Australia, Brazil, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, the UK and the USA). Following this work, we have established collaborations with agencies and evaluation bodies to implement procedures and indicators resulting from the IMPACT-EV project.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

**PROJECT NAME** IMPACT-EV. Evaluating the impact and outcomes of EU SSH research |

**COORDINATOR** **UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA**  
**CREA. Community of Researchers on Excellence for All**  
Barcelona, Spain  
Ramón Flecha, impact-ev@ub.edu

**CONSORTIUM** **HUNGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES**  
**Dep. of Science Policy and Scientometrics of the Library and Information Centre**  
Budapest, Hungary  
András Schubert

**ROYAL NETHERLANDS ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES (KNAW)**  
**DANS. Data Archiving and Networking Services**  
Den Haag, The Netherlands  
Andrea Scharnhorst

**UNIVERSITÀ DELLA SVIZZERA ITALIANA.**  
**Centre for Organisational Research (CORG)**  
Lugano, Switzerland  
Benedetto Lepori

**CONSIGLIO NAZIONALE DELLE RICERCHE.**  
**Institute for Economic Research on Firms and Growth (CERIS)**  
Roma, Italy  
Emanuela Reale

**TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN**  
**Trinity Long Room Hub**  
Dublin, Ireland  
Paul Holm

**POPULATION AND SOCIAL POLICY CONSULTANTS (PSPC)**  
Brussels, Belgium  
Dragana Avramov

**BRUNEL UNIVERSITY**  
**Health Economics Research Group (HERG)**  
Uxbridge, UK  
Claire Donovan

**CARDIFF UNIVERSITY**  
Cardiff, UK  
Charles Larkin

**FUNDING SCHEME** FP7 Collaborative Project

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**WEBSITE** [www.impact-ev.eu](http://www.impact-ev.eu)

**For more information** Ramon Flecha. Main researcher  
Marta Soler. Knowledge Management Committee  
[impact-ev@ub.edu](mailto:impact-ev@ub.edu)

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**Further reading** Flecha, R., Soler-Gallart, M. & Sordé. T. (2015). Social impact: Europe must fund social sciences. *Nature*, 528, 193. doi:10.1038/528193d

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