Supporting the Social Sciences & Humanities across Southern and Central & Eastern Europe:

A Position Statement for international climate, energy and mobility research

June 2023

SSH CENTRE

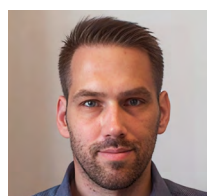Social Sciences & Humanities for Climate, Energy aNd Transport Research Excellence

Supporting the Social Sciences & Humanities across Southern and Central & Eastern Europe:
A Position Statement for international climate, energy and mobility research

June 2023

LEAD AUTHORS

Viktor Varjú*
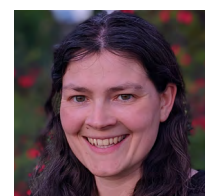Centre for Economic and Regional Studies
Hungary

Gergely Tagai
Centre for Economic and Regional Studies
Hungary

Violeta Cabello
Basque Centre for Climate Change
Spain

Alevgul H. Sorman
Basque Centre for Climate Change
Spain

Rosie Robison
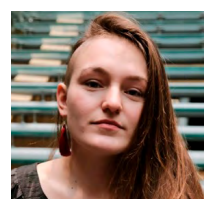Anglia Ruskin University
UK

Chris Foulds
Anglia Ruskin University
UK

Dóra Bálint
Centre for Economic and Regional Studies
Hungary

Ester Galende Sánchez
Basque Centre for Climate Change
Spain

Kristina Zindulková
Basque Centre for Climate Change
Spain

Ilona Pálné Kovács
Centre for Economic and Regional Studies
Hungary

*varju.viktor@krtk.hu

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

Jone Aliri

University of the Basque Country
Spain

Isabelle Anguelovski

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
Spain

Maria Attard

University of Malta
Malta

Liliia Bilous

Anglia Ruskin University
UK

Guido Caniglia

Konrad Lorenz Institute for Evolution and Cognition Research
Germany

Jana Chovancová

University of Presov
Slovakia

Luciano d'Andrea

Knowledge and Innovation
Italy

Jampel Dell'Angelo

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Netherlands

Elena Dimitrova

University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy
Bulgaria

Magdalena Drăgan

Romanian Academy in Cluj-Napoca
Romania

Antonio Ferreira

University of Porto
Portugal

Fabio Feudo

Knowledge and Innovation
Italy

Inma Garrido

Acento Comunicación
Spain

Emília Huttmanová

University of Presov
Slovakia

Vineta Kleinberga

Rīga Stradiņš University
Latvia

Maria Kola-Bezka

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń
Poland

Bernadett Horváthné Kovács

University of Agriculture and Life Science
Hungary

Orsolya Küttel

National Research Development and Innovation Office
Hungary

Julia Leventon

Global Change Research Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences
Czechia

József Pál Lieszkovszky

KTI Hungarian Institute for Transport Sciences and Logistics Non Profit Ltd
Hungary

Cristina Lincaru

National Scientific Research Institute for Labor and Social Protection
Romania

Balša Lubarda

DAMAR Institute
Montenegro

Naja Marot

University of Ljubljana
Slovenia

Yago Martín

Pablo de Olavide University
Spain

Carmen Valor Martínez

Comillas University
Spain

Hana Müllerová

Czech Academy of Sciences
Czechia

Imre Nagy

University of Novi Sad
Serbia

Efi Nakopoulou

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
Greece

Ourania Papasozomenou

Arden University Berlin
Germany

Michaela Pixová

Charles University
Czechia

Catarina Sales

University of Beira Interior
Portugal

Laura Vozmediano Sanz

University of the Basque Country
Spain

Mauro Sarrica

University of Rome La Sapienza
Italy

Iva Tajnšek

Consensus
Slovenia

Ethemcan Turhan

University of Groningen
Netherlands

Gábor László Vasárus

Centre for Economic and Regional Studies
Hungary

Giorgos Velegrakis

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
Greece

Aleksandra Wagner

Jagiellonian University
Poland

Additional countries the authors have experience working in include: Cyprus, France, Republic of Moldova, Turkey, Ukraine, USA.

SUPPORTING THE SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES ACROSS SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE:
A POSITION STATEMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE, ENERGY AND MOBILITY RESEARCH

SSH
CENTRE

For the purposes of this Position Statement, the countries below were deemed to be included in Southern Europe (green) and Central & Eastern Europe (orange); this was linked to their current or planned association to the Horizon Europe funding programme.

ESTONIA
LATVIA
LITHUANIA
POLAND
CZECHIA
SLOVAKIA
UKRAINE
HUNGARY
REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA
SLOVENIA
CROATIA
ROMANIA
ITALY
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
SERBIA
BULGARIA
MONTENEGRO
KOSOVO
NORTH MACEDONIA
ALBANIA
PORTUGAL
SPAIN
GREECE
TURKEY
MALTA
CYPRUS
ISRAEL

Social Sciences & Humanities for Climate, Energy aNd Transport Research Excellence

SUPPORTING THE SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES ACROSS SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE:
A POSITION STATEMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE, ENERGY AND MOBILITY RESEARCH

SSH
CENTRE

Introduction

What is the aim of this Position Statement?

This Position Statement aims to foreground the voices of Social Sciences & Humanities (SSH) researchers from Southern Europe (SE) and Central & Eastern Europe (CEE) (See Figure 1), working on sustainability-related challenges. Despite efforts, disparities remain in terms of the participation of SSH researchers in many countries from SE and CEE in research collaborations, as compared to Northern and Western scholars[1]. This is accompanied by burdens such as precarious conditions and temporary contracts in SE, and very low salaries in CEE. Given SSH is already marginalised in favour of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) disciplines when it comes to funding[2], this means SSH research and researchers from SE and CEE are disadvantaged several times over. This Position Statement intends to help overcome fragmentation across **geographies** (North/ South/ East/ West Europe), **disciplines** (e.g. social vs. technical sciences) and **sustainability themes** (e.g. climate, energy and mobility). It is part of the work of the Horizon Europe initiative SSH CENTRE, which aims to generate best practices for how SSH can be better integrated into EU research and innovation policy.

How was it developed?

An online **call for evidence** survey gathered responses from 137 SE and CEE researchers, with the results feeding into **two hybrid workshops** bringing together 59 researchers[3] - in Bilbao (co-hosted by the Basque Centre for Climate Change and Wikitoki) and Pécs (co-hosted by the Centre for Economic and Regional Studies and the Central European Initiative). The resulting Position Statement explores several of the main challenges identified by SE/CEE SSH researchers through the survey and workshops. It also suggests how different institutional actors can better support their staff moving forwards. It is intended to be of interest to policy officers at the European Commission working on EU Framework Programmes (particularly Cluster 5 of Horizon Europe), funders and research institutions in SE and CEE countries, as well as individual researchers interested in better supporting SSH insights from across the whole of Europe.

This Position Statement was submitted to the European Commission (Directorate-General for Research & Innovation) in June 2023 and its main messages will be translated into several European languages. For further details on the data behind the Position Statement, see the accompanying Data Note[4].

1   Tagai, G. (2023) Az európai kutatási együttműködések egyenlőtlen terei [Unequal spaces of the European research collaborations]. *Területi Statisztika,* 63(2): 179-206.

2   For example, in 2018, only around 8% of the total calls budget for Horizon 2020 went to SSH partners, see: Kania, K. and Bucksch, R. (2020). *Integration of Social Sciences and Humanities in Horizon 2020: Participants, Budgets and Disciplines – 5th monitoring report on projects funded in 2018 under the Horizon 2020 programme.* European Commission; Genus, A., Iskandarova, M., Goggins, G., Fahy, F. and Laakso, S., 2021. Alternative energy imaginaries: Implications for energy research, policy integration and the transformation of energy systems. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 73, p.101898..

3   The authors of this Position Statement all attended one or both workshops.

4   Foulds, C., Crowther, A., Sorman, A.H., Cabello, V., Bálint, D., Tagai, G., Varjú, V., Robison, R., Galende Sánchez, E., and Zindulková, K. (2023). Addressing disparities in European Social Sciences & Humanities research on climate, energy and mobility: Insights from a Call for Evidence survey and analysis workshops on the challenges and opportunities of working in Southern and Central & Eastern Europe [version 1; peer review: awaiting peer review]. *Open Research Europe*. https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.16237.1

SUPPORTING THE SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES ACROSS SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE:
A POSITION STATEMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE, ENERGY AND MOBILITY RESEARCH

SSH
CENTRE

Part I: How can funders and institutions better acknowledge the challenges for SSH in Southern and Central & Eastern Europe?

1. Recognise the crucial value SSH offers for improved policy and decision-making in SE and CEE contexts

Contemporary societal challenges are not only technical, but also deeply political and socio-cultural. The value of SSH insights in addressing the Cluster 5 challenges of Horizon Europe (climate, energy, and mobility) is clear. For instance, how people think, act, work and play - and thereby consume energy- and carbon-intensive resources - are inherently social issues. However, in SE and CEE contexts in particular, SSH research (with the exception of Economics, as repeatedly stated in our survey) continues to be judged as having less policy and innovation value than STEM. In order for the unique offerings of SSH research to be recognised - such as its conceptual and methodological pluralism, its critical approach, and its ability to highlight assumptions underlying numerical results - they need to be promoted and mainstreamed in policy and decision-making at EU, national and local levels.

2. Acknowledge the wide variety of research and institutional cultures across Europe: "one size does not fit all"

When Northern Europe (NE) and Western Europe (WE) ways of conducting science and social science are promoted as the 'right ways', this reproduces and perpetuates existing inequalities. Research carried out in SE and CEE has specificities tied to national, regional and local geographies (e.g. heat waves, wildfires, displacement, migration), as well as cultural and socioeconomic contexts (e.g. unemployment, levels of inequality, poverty) that may need to be justified for a wider audience who are less unfamiliar with them. The greater value placed on NE/WE research experiences is also reproduced within national SE/CEE institutions. For example, research visits to NE/WE institutions may be seen as a prerequisite to career progression in SE. Conversely, lack of mobility to SE/CEE also means fewer possibilities for other scholars to learn about research cultures there.

3. Identify and work to overcome precarious working conditions in SE/CEE research institutions

Precarious working conditions, which researchers in SE/CEE are particularly vulnerable to, are currently one of the foremost systemic challenges in the European research sector. This is reflected in institutional setups through the prevalence of temporary contracts in SE, and very low academic salaries in CEE (comparatively). In SE, a lack of permanent staff can lead to individuals being overloaded with educational and organisational duties reinforcing job insecurity and decreasing capacity for applying to funding calls. Moreover, this situation is coupled with the occasional presence of clientelism, nepotism (or even corruption) which hinders access to public research funds, meaning researchers may not be competing on a level playing field. This leads to researchers having limited time to compete for a small pool of national/international research funding leading to low rates of success, especially in undervalued SSH disciplines and underfunded SSH project calls.

SUPPORTING THE SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES ACROSS SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE:
A POSITION STATEMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE, ENERGY AND MOBILITY RESEARCH

SSH
CENTRE

Part II: How can research funders (in particular the European Commission) better support SSH in Southern and Central & Eastern Europe?

4. Bring theory-driven, critical, reflexive and transformative research to the forefront of knowledge production with greater inclusion of SE/CEE know-how

While theory-driven research may not always provide immediate solutions to pressing social, economic or environmental problems, it can help address them more effectively in the medium- to long-term. Theory-driven research should be encouraged with a recognition that the speed and nature of outputs differ between SSH and STEM. Increasing the number of funding opportunities for critical, reflexive and transformative research, allowing experimentation outside the institutional agendas of the 'Western/Nordic mainstream', and bringing together different ways of knowing (e.g. local or traditional knowledge from SE/CEE) will help develop solutions to current and future socio-ecological challenges, which are better tailored to different contexts and more likely to succeed.

5. Design and implement new grant schemes targeting the promotion of long-term, inclusive SSH research in SE/CEE countries

There is a need to overcome the short-term logic of project-based funding and seek a more profound and longer-term vision, in order for SSH to deliver its unique offerings. Targeted grant distribution schemes - focused for instance on improving working conditions and supporting permanent, well-paid positions - can help provide stability to SE/CEE researchers and institutions, aiding participation in collaborative international research. Additionally, novel mechanisms of grant distribution schemes that seek to maximise equality and diversity, rather than solely productivity, should be explored for both individual and collective grants. Examples of such schemes include (i) allocation of funding by random selection instead of competition (which often uses metrics that reproduce inequalities), and (ii) more schemes for SSH-STEM collaborations.

6. Launch situated, thematic calls and include reviewers from different geographies and disciplines

As outlined above, SE/CEE countries have specific challenges and particular historic conditions when it comes to climate, energy and mobility that are often neglected in funding calls. Sub-programmes aimed at widening participation via situated calls on relevant local challenges can support SE and CEE researchers to collaboratively advance solutions to local problems. Simultaneously, more reviewers from SE/CEE regions and across a greater number and wider variety of SSH disciplines should be involved - through processes similar to gender quotas - to help build inclusive research and innovation capacities for SE and CEE countries that are currently at the 'periphery'.

SUPPORTING THE SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES ACROSS SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE:
A POSITION STATEMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE, ENERGY AND MOBILITY RESEARCH

SSH
CENTRE

7. Promote Open Science responsibly, with mechanisms to reduce barriers for SE/CEE authors and journals

Paying to publish Open Access (which is now often a funder requirement) can be a serious financial burden in most SE/CEE contexts. We wholeheartedly support the aim for knowledge production to be steered toward Open Science, but propose that this needs to be accompanied by the democratisation of knowledge production, which involves challenging the power of (usually non-SE/CEE) publishing companies and supporting the greater inclusion of authors from SE/CEE. Given that the publishing market is dominated by companies who may have less familiarity with CEE and SE contexts and research interests, this calls for acknowledging and legitimising SE/CEE authors' contributions and for supporting their publishing (e.g. organising thematic issues in journals). We also call for a wider variety of open access knowledge exchange outputs to be evaluated and valued by reviewers, especially those aimed directly at policy makers, planners, civic groups, NGOs, and community members.

Part III: How can research institutions better support SSH in Southern and Central & Eastern Europe?

8. Encourage collaborative SSH-STEM teams and networking across SE/CEE countries

Instead of only focussing on individual competition, it is vital that collaborative and interdisciplinary working schemes are promoted (including collaboration both across SSH, and across the SSH-STEM divide) in SE/CEE countries to address historical imbalances and division between SSH and STEM. These collaborations should be fostered through networking opportunities, including virtual participation where possible which can slightly reduce the financial disadvantages SE/CEE researchers' experience. An SSH research network association focussed on the SE/CEE region could give greater voice to these researchers at the European level.

9. Train the next generation of SSH and interdisciplinary researchers

In SE/CEE, we must create, foster, and recognise interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary degrees, including Masters and PhD programmes that seek to transcend the currently fragmented SSH vs. STEM mindset. Much like the rise of sustainability in recent decades, SSH topics could be cross-cutting requirements for all students in higher education. In the case of SSH and interdisciplinary researchers with PhD degrees, research institutions should increase their provision of free online trainings focusing on the know-how of writing research proposals or leading interdisciplinary partnerships (and paying SE/CEE researchers who have had success in these areas to provide their insights), in order to develop greater capacity.

SUPPORTING THE SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES ACROSS SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE:
A POSITION STATEMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE, ENERGY AND MOBILITY RESEARCH

SSH
CENTRE

10. Value local talent and ensure visible profiles for SSH researchers to avoid forced mobility
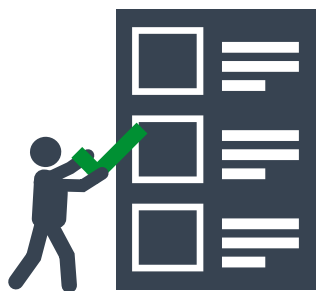
Expectations around the movement of researchers to NE/WE institutions in pursuit of a more 'successful' career can create strong personal and institutional burdens. It also hinders researchers from developing the long-term engagement with local communities needed in SSH research. Research institutions should value their local talent and direct efforts to retain it by providing long-term stability and flexible conditions, whereby mobility is an option rather than a necessity. They should also ensure that the scientific activity and online profiles of their researchers are visible at the European level, for instance highlighting individual researcher experience in project coordination, Work Package or task leadership, media interventions, advisory roles, and/or decision making implications of their research.

11. Strengthen administrative capacity for SSH funding application and grant management processes

One of the gaps in many SE/CEE research institutions is a lack of administrative capacity (e.g. personnel number, knowledge, experience, language) to support competitive EU research applications as well as successful grant management; this further increases the already heavy burden on researchers. The administrative load for research proposals should shift in favour of scientific innovation, rigour and quality. In this area, National Contact Points have a role to play in supporting and advocating for SSH researchers. Particularly in CEE countries, a strategic priority for research institutions wanting to increase their grant success rate should be to establish teams with international experience in the administrative process of research projects.

12. Support research evaluation procedures by universities and research centres that value critical and interdisciplinarity SSH research in SE and CEE

Many SE/CEE research institutions remain bound by disciplinary silos and evaluation criteria that do not necessarily value the research strategies and practices of SSH researchers. Universities and research centres often remain focused on quantitative criteria (e.g. journal quartile, impact factor, fundraising outputs, number of PhD students) when it comes to assessing their researchers. In contrast, we call for qualitative criteria to be utilised (e.g. mentoring and community-building capacities, administrative/community service, interdisciplinarity, knowledge exchange, civic engagement) to better appreciate actual research practices of many SSH researchers.

Closing remarks

Whilst we see the challenges outlined above as being structural and therefore requiring institutional solutions, individual researchers can also be supportive of this endeavour by building wider research partnerships and looking beyond the norms and cultural contexts they are already familiar with. We call for both institutions and researchers to acknowledge the multiple ways in which situated knowledge and solutions are generated by diverse research cultures from across SE/CEE contexts, and give greater recognition to the existing contributions made by SE/CEE SSH researchers.

SUPPORTING THE SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES ACROSS SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE:
A POSITION STATEMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE, ENERGY AND MOBILITY RESEARCH

SSH
CENTRE

Acknowledgements

SSH CENTRE

Social Sciences & Humanities for Climate, Energy aNd Transport Research Excellence