



Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend
Nederland



The Societal Readiness pilot in Horizon Europe

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Succesfactoren voor internationale
samenwerking
aan hogescholen



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General context



CL5 main goal: fight climate change, make energy and transport sectors more efficient, resilient, and environmentally friendly.

The pilot is an **initiative from** the Cluster 5 Programme Committee.

Its development was **steered by** the Commission and **co-created with** national delegations and relevant stakeholders over an 18-month participatory process.

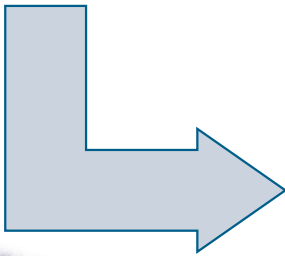


Rationale

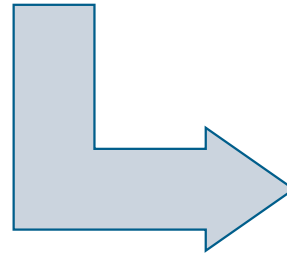
Possible misalignment between:

Innovation trajectories

Societies needs & concerns



Creates bottlenecks in tech development and deployment
Erodes trust
Generates negative externalities



Failure to meet people needs
Waste of public resources
Lack of mobilisation for societal challenges

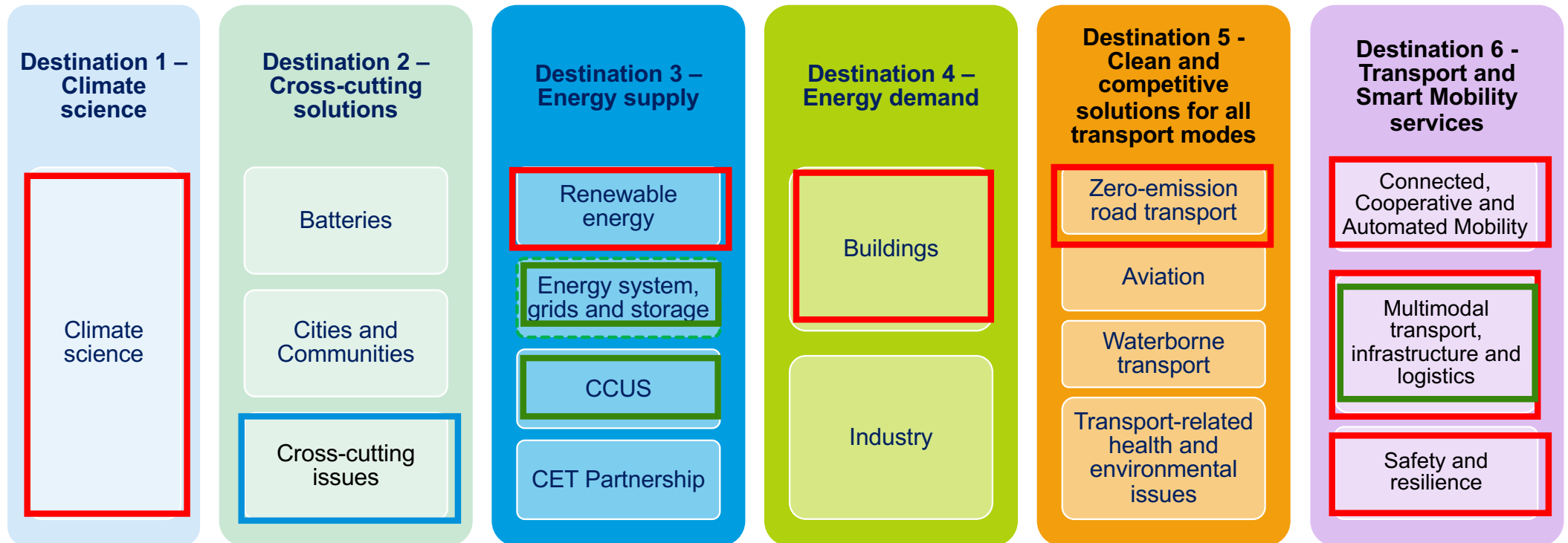




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SR pilot in Horizon Europe



8 SR pilot topics > 18 projects (WP 2025)
+ 1 meta topic/project (CSA, D2, WP 2025)
3 SR Pilot topics > 8 projects (Draft WP 2026-2027)

Only in Cluster 5

SR pilot topics - already closed in September 2025 (1)



topic ID	topic title	# projects
HORIZON-CL5-2025-06- D1 -06	Fostering equity and justice in climate policies – Societal Readiness Pilot	3
HORIZON-CL5-2025-02- D3 -04	Development of hydropower technologies and water management schemes allowing for win-win situation of flexible hydropower and biodiversity improvement – Societal Readiness Pilot	3
HORIZON-CL5-2025-04- D5 -01	Efficient wireless stationary bidirectional charging solutions for road Light Duty Vehicles (2ZERO Partnership) – Societal Readiness Pilot	2



SR pilot topics – already closed in September 2025 (2)

topic ID	topic title	# projects
HORIZON-CL5-2025-04-D6-01	Advancing remote operations to enable the sustainable and smart mobility of people and goods based on operational and societal needs (CCAM Partnership) – Societal Readiness Pilot	2
HORIZON-CL5-2025-04-D6-02	Preparing for large-scale CCAM demonstrations (CCAM Partnership) – Societal Readiness Pilot	1
HORIZON-CL5-2025-04-D6-11	Innovative air mobility and services for sustainable and smart urban, peri-urban transport – Societal Readiness Pilot	2
HORIZON-CL5-2025-04-D6-12	Safe Human-Technology Interaction (HTI) in the vehicle systems of the coming decade – Societal Readiness Pilot	2

SR pilot topics – upcoming in 2026 & 2027



topic ID	topic title	# projects	deadline
HORIZON-CL5-2026-01-D2-09	Monitoring and Evaluation of the Societal Readiness Pilot	1	20 January 2026
HORIZON-CL5-2026-02-D4-05	Optimal combination of low embodied carbon construction products, technical building systems and circularity principles for climate neutral buildings – Societal Readiness Pilot	3	17 February 2026
HORIZON-CL5-2026-03-D3-23 (draft)	AI driven forecasting algorithms for Grid and Consumer friendly Energy Sharing – Societal Readiness pilot	2	31 March 2026
HORIZON-CL5-2027-05-D6-08 (draft)	Enhancing Mobility for All: affordable, reliable, and accessible multimodal transport for inclusive rural and urban connectivity – Societal Readiness pilot	3	14 April 2027
HORIZON-CL5-2027-07-D3-33 (draft)	Delivery of industrial CCUS clusters – Societal Readiness pilot	3	9 September 2027



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Cluster 5 WP 2025 & draft WP 2026-2027



2 parallel approaches to address societal concerns:



1) SSH-flagged topics:

- SSH activities streamlined in thematic topics
- Include the standard SSH sentence*

2) Societal Readiness (SR) pilot topics:

- Integrated in thematic topics
- Include the SSH flag (standard sentence)

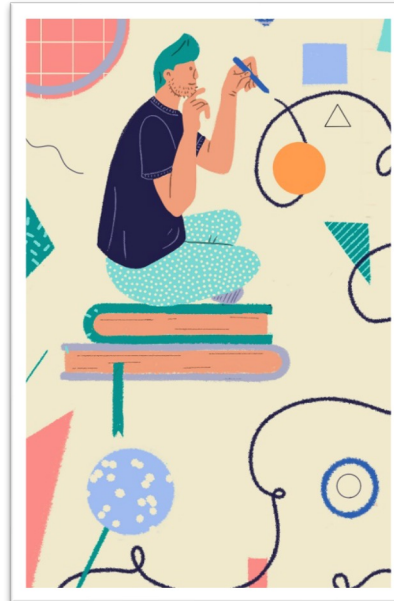
**This topic requires the effective contribution of SSH disciplines and the involvement of SSH experts, institutions as well as the inclusion of relevant SSH expertise (including social innovation), in order to produce meaningful and significant effects enhancing the societal impact of the related research activities.*



What is Societal Readiness (SR)?

> SR **IS** about:

- the readiness **of R&I practices**
- forcing R&I processes that facilitate an **inclusive and society-focused approach**
- **supporting all R&I actors** to do societally relevant and engaging R&I
- focusing on **mindsets, processes, practices and outcomes** so that project results are most relevant to societal challenges



SR **IS NOT** about:

- the acceptance from societies to accept projects' outcomes
- rating technological solutions

SR is connected to the design and implementation of R&I, to generate better understandings so that the research would be ready to be acted upon by society

See definition in CL5 WP introduction



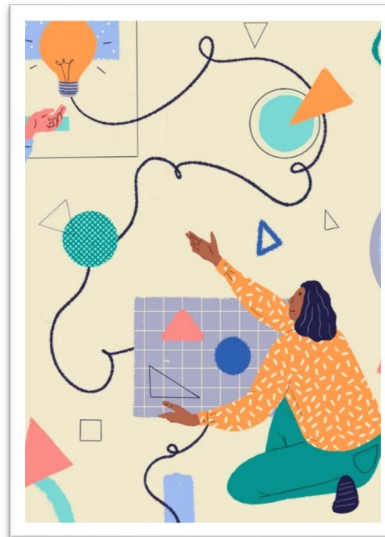


Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), definition

Social Sciences

(e.g. disciplines like Psychology, Sociology, Political Science)

study the **social organisation of human action**, (attitudes, values, perceptions, norms, conventions, expectations etc.) with an increasing interest in how these understandings could **directly inform policy interventions**.



Humanities

(e.g. disciplines like History, Law, Theology)

are concerned with the fundamental [...] cultural principles that underpin **how societies are governed** (responsibilities, engagement, participation, (in)equality, equity, ethics, faith etc.) with lessons for **what societies should regard as 'desirable'** (even if indirectly) when managing the energy system.

- *Integrating theories, methods, and principles across the full range of SSH is highly relevant for effective interdisciplinary R&I pursuing Societal Readiness.*

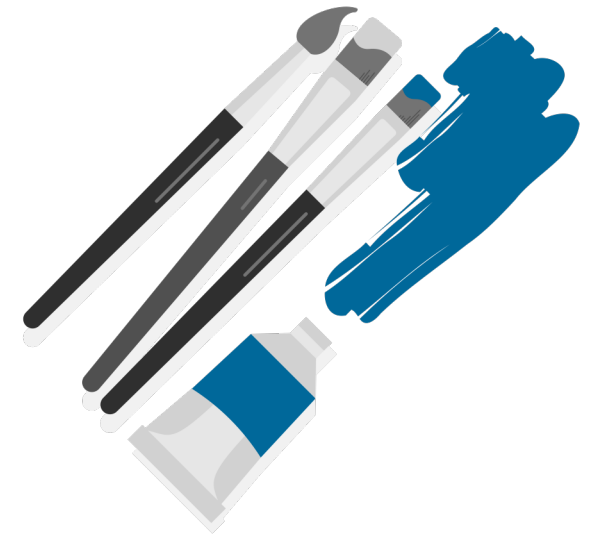


Societal Readiness and SSH

To achieve a **well-developed Societal Readiness of R&I results**, **social and cultural perspectives** need to be covered

→ SSH disciplines are key to achieve that!

- ❑ This may be done by researchers from SSH disciplines (or related), as those disciplines have developed a wide range of theories and methods to better understand human behavior and social organisation.
- ❑ In SR pilots, **SSH disciplines** are needed to deliver R&I results with well-developed Societal Readiness in a holistic approach to:
 - **facilitate the socio-technological interface**
 - **enable the design of project objectives** compatible with Societal Readiness related activities



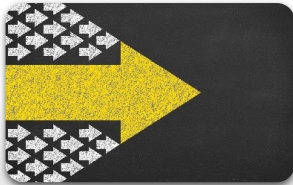
*No duplication between the 2 concepts:
SSH disciplines and expertise focus on Societal Readiness goals*

Specificity of Societal Readiness



Innovative interdisciplinary approach

- **Societal needs and concerns are intrinsically embedded in R&I activities** through i) the proposal structure; ii) the project activities' implementation; iii) partners' interactions



Integrated societal dimension at each steps of a project's life

- Gives **directionality, purpose, and holistic vision** to each of the consortium partners



SSH experts steering SR work have their voices heard

- They are considered at a **same footing as technical partners**, their activities take a more prominent place in the proposal



Partners are owners of their (SR) research

- They reflect internally on and **define themselves the most relevant issues to be looked at**

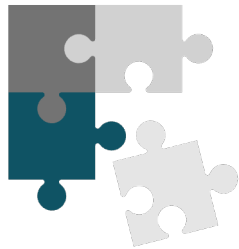




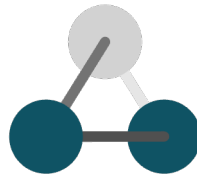
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Key aspects of the pilot



Interdisciplinarity



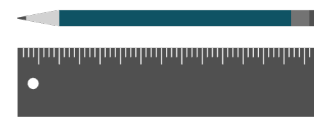
Project partners



Flexibility



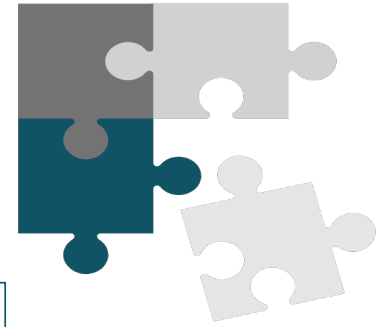
RRI* methodology



Monitoring and evaluation

¹⁸
*Responsible Research and Innovation

1- Interdisciplinarity



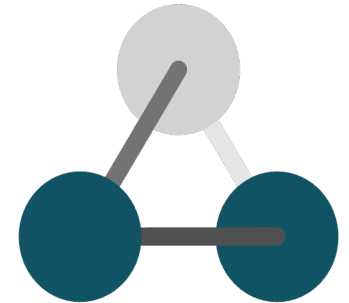
*Definition**

Interdisciplinarity focuses on specific **‘real world’ system problems** and, as a result, the research process forces participants (from a variety of unrelated disciplines) to **cross boundaries to create new knowledge**, based on a common language.

Interdisciplinary work

- ☐ **brings together capabilities from diverse perspectives** fostering creativity, and a common understanding of the challenges at stake.
- ☐ allows for more **comprehensive problem-solving** by combining expertise from different fields.
- ☐ **encourages collaboration** and often leads to new ideas and solutions that wouldn't arise from a single discipline alone.
- ☐ **enhances adaptability** making it especially valuable in tackling multifaceted real-world problems from various angles.

2- Projects' partners



Types of SR profiles

- ☐ experience in addressing **social and cultural perspectives** to e.g., design and lead **co-creation**, facilitate **inclusion**, support the consideration of and **responsiveness to societal needs and concerns**.

Involvement in proposal preparation

- ☐ from the **very beginning!** To enable the **appropriate design** of project objectives, methodology and tasks compatible with societal readiness.

Other partners

- ☐ should **meaningfully and actively collaborate** to SR activities **across all stages** of a project life cycle.



Contributions might be of different nature but have **equal value**.
All partners share responsibility for RRI*/SR activities !!

3- Methodology



RRI dimensions:

- Reflexion
- Inclusion
- Anticipation
- Responsiveness

RRI categories:

- R&I goals
- Societal actors
- Benefits and burdens
- Objections and concerns

- ☐ Based on **Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI)** processes.
- ☐ The instructions include a set of **guiding questions** that are meant to bring project partners to **reflect, include, anticipate** and **respond** to the societal needs and concerns identified.
- ☐ Those four dimensions support **co-creation with societal actors** in different ways and offer a set of procedural interventions in policy makers and researchers' activities.
- ☐ They support the outreach of a **well-developed Societal Readiness**.



The guiding questions are a starting point for reflexion and it is possible to address other questions relating to RRI dimensions and categories.

Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) guiding questions

R&I Goals: How do the objectives and expected results of the proposal reflect and integrate the diverse societal needs or goals of different social groups potentially involved or affected? (*RRI dimensions: reflection, inclusion, responsiveness*)

Societal actors: How does the proposal identify and include key stakeholder groups in activities? If appropriate, how does the proposal identify and include groups often marginalised or excluded from previous or similar initiatives? (*RRI dimensions: reflection, inclusion*)

Benefits and burdens: Who stands to benefit from envisioned activities of the project and their expected impacts? Who stands to bear the burdens (social, environmental, economic or other)? How are the groups bearing these burdens included in and given a voice in the project? How are possible conflicts of interest and uncertainties managed? (*RRI dimensions: anticipation, reflection, responsiveness*)

Objections and concerns: How does the project, through its activities, plan to identify and respond to the objections or concerns of different groups of societal actors? How could potential undesired consequences of activities, results, outcomes, or impacts be anticipated? How could such consequences be avoided? (*RRI dimensions: reflection, inclusion, anticipation, responsiveness*)

4- Flexibility



RRI guiding questions are the starting point for a comprehensive consideration of all societally-related side aspects in the development of a given solution

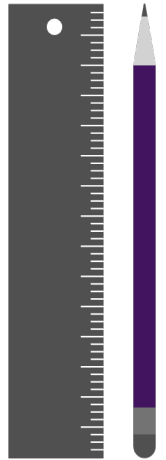
- ☐ Partners are **free to choose in which way SR is integrated** in the proposal and in the project, and which societal actors to engage with.
- ☐ **No prescription of specific pathways**, the expertise lies within the consortium.
- ☐ **Creative options are encouraged**, no one-size-fits-all.



However, the horizontal instructions are common to all SR pilot projects and need to be entirely fulfilled.



5- Monitoring and evaluation of the SR pilot



- ❑ **Coordinating and Support Action (CSA)** – 42 Months – 1,5 M€
- ❑ Aims at **learning from the pilots' implementation** to improve future SR topics by:
 - analysing the way Societal Readiness is addressed and integrated in piloted projects;
 - supporting the designing of an efficient, clear, and impactful way of applying the SR approach in future EU funded R&I projects.
- ❑ In addition, the CSA includes the following milestones:
 - **annual workshops** gathering SR pilot project partners;
 - a **web platform** with tips and tricks supporting future EU projects;
 - a **publication** to support effective **interdisciplinary** practices.



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Integration of the SR pilot in topic text

Consideration of SR
is compulsory for
all applicants

[IN EXPECTED OUTCOME]

Responsiveness to a deeper understanding of the needs and concerns of diverse social group involved in or potentially affected by the R&I development, thereby increasing the potential for beneficial societal uptake, and building trust in results and outcomes.

[IN SCOPE]

This topic is a Societal-Readiness pilot:

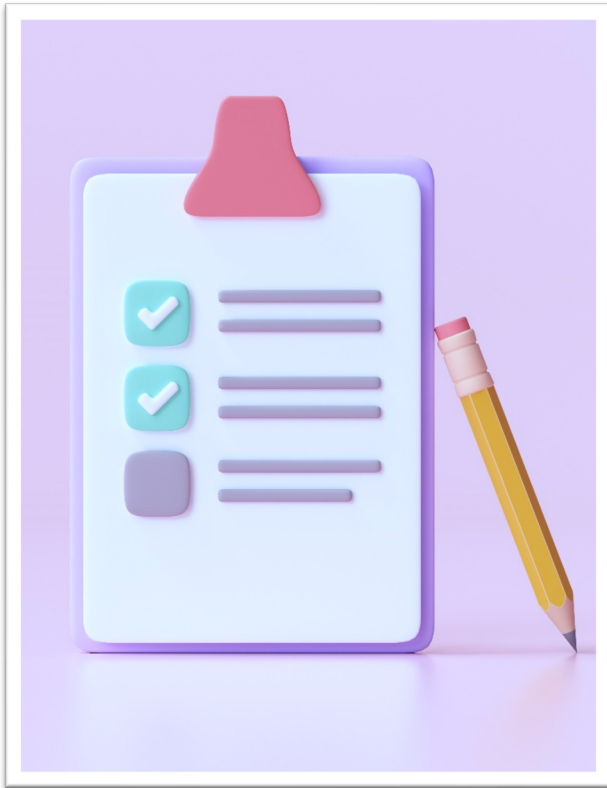
*Proposals **should follow the instructions** applying to the Societal readiness pilot, as described in the introduction of the Horizon Europe Main Work Programme 2025 for Climate, Energy and Mobility. They entail the use of an **interdisciplinary approach** to deepening consideration and responsiveness of research and innovation activities to societal needs and concerns.*

*This topic requires effective **contribution of the relevant SSH expertise**, including the involvement of SSH experts in the consortium, to **meaningfully support Societal Readiness**. Specifically, SSH expertise is expected to **facilitate the socio-technological interface** and **enable the design of project objectives** with Societal Readiness related activities.”*



All SR pilot topics have an ‘SSH-flag’

Instructions for the SR pilot



❑ 6-page instructions in CL5 WP 2025 main introduction including:

- ✓ Implementation requirements
- ✓ A list of 'guiding questions' following RRI processes (addressing 'reflection', 'inclusion', 'anticipation', 'responsiveness' dimensions)
- ✓ Information on the evaluation aspect
- ✓ Definitions of SR, SSH, RRI

Horizontal requirements – 1

1- « **Resources should be explicitly allocated** to cover project activities associated with advancing Societal Readiness. Societal Readiness considerations should be **integrated transversally** in the proposal, either as a set of tasks across work packages associated with the R&I work, or in the form of a transversal work package.»

What does it mean?

- "Allocation of resources" refers to the process of distributing available assets – e.g., financial resources, human resources, materials, equipment – across the different tasks and at the right time to achieve Societal Readiness goals efficiently.
- A "transversal integration" of Societal Readiness means that related activities should be incorporated across the various work packages of the project (or as a transversal work package connected to the others). Rather than being confined to a isolated task, SR is integrated throughout project's activities and processes, impacting the various sectors involved.
- The various roles, responsibilities, tasks, as well as what everyone involved contributes to are co-defined and clearly described.

Horizontal requirements – 2

2- « Consortia should bring **sufficient expertise** to support Societal Readiness activities via the inclusion of partners with **appropriate expertise** in SSH disciplines*. These partners will facilitate the socio-technical interface and enable the design of project objectives, work packages and tasks compatible with Societal Readiness related activities.»

**For example, profiles with experience in addressing social and cultural perspectives, methodological knowledge to e.g., conduct and analyse interviews, design, and lead co-creation, facilitate inclusion, or otherwise meaningfully support the consideration of and responsiveness to societal needs and concerns.*

What does it mean?

- The SSH community is not single and homogeneous. SSH in this context should be understood as a broad term that can go beyond the limited list of 'official' SSH disciplines', as soon as they foster collaboration across sectors, co-creation with societal actors and participatory processes.
- All partners, including non-SSH profiles, can bring valuable experience and knowledge, thanks to partners' respective backgrounds.
- Different communities within SSH may play different roles contributing to SR goals' achievements.

→ Sufficient / appropriate expertise is to be determined by the project team.

Horizontal requirements – 3

3- « **All partners** in the consortia **should be associated** to the Societal Readiness tasks, where relevant, building on interdisciplinarity efforts to facilitate knowledge integration.»

What does it mean?

- SR is a concept that helps R&I actors – in particular those not from an SSH background – to do R&I that is societally relevant, engaging and transformative.
- Therefore, all partners should meaningfully and actively collaborate across all stages of a project life cycle.

Horizontal requirements – 4

4- « *Proposals should clearly **address, under section 1.2 Methodology, how the project will integrate Societal Readiness throughout the proposed work**, by demonstrating how they take up the Societal Readiness guiding questions relevant to the subject.*»

What does it mean?

- The text under 'Methodology' part is expected to:
 - outline how the project will be developed to enhance Societal Readiness all along its duration
 - demonstrate the uptake of the RRI guiding questions for each category*
- SR should be included across the whole project narrative under this section and not in isolation from the technological part
- Due to the limited length of the proposal template, it is not expected at this stage, to provide concrete pathways to address those questions (this will be done in the first report deliverable)

²¹
*R&I goals; societal actors; benefits and burdens; objections and concerns

Horizontal requirements – 5

5- « Proposals should **allocate reasonable resources** as part of a dedicated task to engage with the Coordinating and Support Action funded under HORIZON-CL5-2026-01-D2-09 (e.g., participation in physical format to annual workshops, availability to reply to interviews, punctual exchanges with other Societal Readiness pilot projects, provide access to Societal Readiness related information). Travel costs to attend physical workshops will be covered by topic HORIZON-CL5-2026-01-D2-09.»

What does it mean?

- SR pilot projects require to be monitored by the CSA HORIZON-CL5-2026-01-D2-09, in order to improve the approach in future WP
- It is not possible for the Commission to provide a quantitative figure as regards what could be 'reasonable resources': this is up to each project to assess
- Cooperation with the CSA will benefit pilot projects by fostering cross-project exchanges, by analysing what works, what works less

Horizontal requirements – 6

6- « A public report called **First report on Societal Readiness** should be delivered within the first six months of the project.

- The report will build on the Societal Readiness approach for the project as set out in the proposal.
- It should primarily focus on:
 - the project's vision for and approach to Societal Readiness;
 - reflections on initial impressions of societal needs and concerns as connected to the project;
 - preliminary responses to the guiding questions;
 - more detailed plans on how Societal Readiness will be addressed (e.g., time plans, roles and responsibilities, relation to tasks/work packages, anticipated results and how these will be integrated into the project activities).»

Horizontal requirements – 7

7- « A public report called **Final report on Societal Readiness** should be delivered within the last three months of the project.

- The report will reflect upon:
 - the project's experience with implementing Societal Readiness approaches;
 - any differences in experience between expected and actual outcomes;
 - challenges and lessons learned from successful or unsuccessful efforts;
 - ways in which different societal actors were identified and engaged in interdisciplinary or intersectoral activities, as well as these actors needs and concerns considered, identified, and responded to;
 - recommendations for future projects on similar thematic areas.
- The Final report on Societal Readiness is expected to directly address the questions identified in the First report on Societal Readiness. »



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Application form

The standard template of the Application Form remains unchanged, and its **page limit is increased by two additional pages**. The proposed work is expected to **reflect an integration of Societal Readiness consideration into the overall project design**.

What does it mean?

- The two additional pages are intended to accommodate the integration of SR in the proposal.
- They do not constitute a separate section, as SR is expected to be integrated across the whole project narrative.

References to SSH activities requested under section 1.2 Methodology of the standard Application Form remain valid → they should aim at achieving Societal Readiness goals



Proposal evaluation

Societal Readiness will be **assessed in the same way as other aspects** that **belong to 'Methodology' within the Excellence section** of the Application form. During the evaluation, **all comments** under the "Excellence" criterion **will be consolidated** so that a mark out of five points is issued, which reflects the **overall score** of the proposal for the "Excellence" evaluation criterion.

What does it mean?

- There is no separate evaluation criterion for SR: it is jointly assessed with the other aspects of the methodology part. Evaluators will comment under this section when necessary.
- Although SR is incorporated throughout the other proposal parts as well, its evaluation should be concentrated into one specific place, with the Methodology serving as the foundation of the SR approach.
- Each panel will include 1 additional expert with an SSH profile compatible with the assessment of Societal Readiness.



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-
- A dense, circular arrangement of green icons on a white background. The icons represent various aspects of environmental science and sustainability. Key elements include: a bee, olive branches, a wind turbine, a house with a leaf, CO2 gas, palm trees, a person on a bicycle, a sun with a lightning bolt, a plug with a leaf, a deer head, a recycling bin, a fish, a heart with a leaf, a butterfly, a globe showing the Americas, a computer monitor with a plant growing from it, a carrot, an apple, a hedgehog, a flower, an umbrella, evergreen trees, footprints, a hand holding leaves, puzzle pieces, paw prints, a gear, a heart, stars, and small circles. Some icons are solid green, while others have orange outlines or accents.



Contact and resources

- E-mail your NCP:
 - **For Dutch HBOs:** fatma.saccli@rvo.nl + NCP of the relevant destination
 - **For Belgian HBOs:** Belgian NCPs for Horizon Europe can be found [here](#)
- E-mail EC directly:
 - EC-HE-SOCIETAL-READINESS@ec.europa.eu
- Useful resources to support SR activities in piloted projects:
 - [Societal Readiness Thinking Tool](#) – online tool
 - [Engaged Research report \(IE\)](#) – report
 - [Transdisciplinary collaboration](#) (NL)





Dutch National Contact Points Horizon Europe for Cluster 5

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