

POLICY BRIEF #7

NOVEMBER 2025

FOREGROUNDING POLICY SCIENCES FOR ENHANCED SOCIETAL RESILIENCE

Key points

Societal resilience is essential for sustaining democratic societies amid rising uncertainties and complex, systemic threats. While scientific research underpins effective resilience policies, current approaches often underutilise policy sciences—undermining the coherence, relevance, and impact of funded initiatives. This policy brief calls for a stronger integration of **policy sciences** as a core discipline in European Union (EU) funding instruments. Policy sciences, because they provide a scientific way to understand and navigate politics and align scientific advancement with the promotion of public good, are poised to help the praxis of European policymaking respond more robustly to emergent risks, sociotechnical complexity, and the requirements of democratic governance.

In line with the goals of Futuresilience, this policy brief takes a meta-approach towards making policy recommendations on how to increase the uptake of evidence-based policy solutions for societal resilience. Core recommendations include:

- Encourage policy scientists to take part in research consortia so policy measures reflect societal and policy needs.
- Ensure policy solutions are written in clear, accessible formats for policymakers through collaboration with communication experts.
- Promote the use of a standards for policy solutions that clearly presents their benefits, costs, and potential externalities.



Introduction

Societal resilience-promoting policies require the sophisticated use of **scientific evidence** from multiple disciplines, including engineering, environmental sciences, and social and behavioural sciences, among others. As governments develop resilience policies, they must navigate the challenge of integrating diverse forms of knowledge while ensuring that policies remain responsive to local contexts and emerging threats. Although this process is complex, science, in all its pluralism, remains the most effective paradigm society has to address and solve current societal challenges and their attendant policy problems.

However, in practice, scientific knowledge and evidence are often contested and, given that policymaking involves numerous actors, scientific evidence is just one of many sources considered by policymakers during their deliberations. Other sources include previous experiences of policymakers or path dependent practices reflecting erstwhile responses that may or may not be effective but are nevertheless easily accessible and applied with minimal effort. Additionally, scientific knowledge is typically presented in technical terms and communicated in inaccessible formats, such as lengthy reports and academic texts.

In this policy brief, we argue for an **increased role for policy sciences in European Union (EU) funding schemes that are designed to produce scientific knowledge and evidence for societal resilience**. Policy sciences, uniquely placed among social sciences and humanities (SSH), is a discipline that not only understands politics but also knows how to fulfil the public good and promote human dignity through science in public policy.

Policy sciences for societal resilience

- Societal resilience challenges involve a vast array of **stakeholders and experts** from diverse fields. Understanding opinions, technical expertise, and timescales related to these challenges requires a **deep knowledge of politico-administrative processes** and contextual details.
- Policy sciences can **provide methods and tools** for science-informed, cost-effective, and utility-oriented policy solutions to strengthen societal resilience. It can also provide a scientific understanding of politics, which determines the prioritisation of conflicting

The Challenges of using scientific evidence in public policy

Although simplistic and popularised notions of science attempt to describe it as a process that produces universal truths that remain eternally true, there is no universal understanding of science. This does not mean that policymakers should embrace relativism and the perversion of "alternative facts"; rather, it means

- we must recognise that scientific evidence is often contested;
- different academic disciplines view the world through different lenses and speak different languages;
- and there is an overwhelming amount of information at our fingertips, which is not always easy to organise meaningfully.

Moreover, the **reality of politics and the policymaking process** involves policymakers who are generalists and who often know little about the policy problems they are asked to solve; balances a multitude of interests and ensures that as many constituents as possible benefit from a given policy; and involves a short horizon for elected officials that extends only until the next election cycle, thus discouraging them from taking on long-term, hard-to-solve problems of which long-term societal resilience is one.



The current landscape in knowledge production

Technical understandings of resilience are often front-of-mind in the context of crisis mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Evidence from social sciences, which can require a complex line of argumentation, may be deemed secondary to the perceived certainty and relative brevity of conclusions based on statistical foundations visualised in elegant graphs. For example, the European Union (EU) funding schemes have attempted to foster interdisciplinarity and to integrate SSH in their calls. SSH integration has been a cross-cutting principle in both Horizon 2020 (2014–2020) and Horizon Europe (2021–2027), spanning all pillars and clusters, including “Civil Security for Society” (Cluster 3). SSH expertise is vital for understanding threats, vulnerabilities, and societal responses to ensure that security policies and innovations are ethically grounded and culturally sensitive (European Commission, 2024).

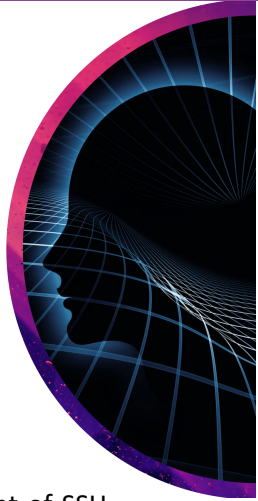
In practice, SSH integration has three main foci:

- **Mandatory inclusion in calls:** Many Horizon Europe calls explicitly require the involvement of SSH disciplines. Topics addressing civil security, migration, disaster resilience, radicalisation, and terrorism increasingly demand collaborative consortia, including both STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) and SSH researchers (European Commission, 2025).
- **Focus on society and ethics:** Projects must address the societal impact of technologies, engage end users, consider privacy issues, and ensure that the fundamental rights of people are respected. SSH participation ensures that issues such as trust, acceptance, and the protection of vulnerable populations are addressed in the design of security solutions (APRE, 2023).
- **Interdisciplinary consortia:** SSH researchers such as sociologists, legal experts, psychologists, and ethicists work alongside engineers and technical practitioners, leading to more holistic research approaches and policy recommendations (Horizon Europe NCP Portal, 2025)

However, challenges remain. The degree of integration varies by topic and cluster, and ensuring that the SSH is not simply a plug-in but a core component remains an ongoing problem. The very fact that social sciences and humanities are grouped together signals a lack of understanding of the very different traditions that social sciences and humanities have. Moreover, there is a pressing need for improved collaboration between SSH and STEM disciplines to maximise societal impact (HERANET, 2019).

Finally, on the basis of findings from FutuResilience (both in the simulation exercise and labs experiences navigating scientific evidence), the results generated by both STEM and SSH disciplines are often not in a form that can be used by policymakers. Rather, they constitute long, complex reports or highly technical and specialised results. As a result, the knowledge generated, although valuable, is difficult for policymakers to interpret, translate into action, or integrate into policy processes without substantial additional work.

Strengthening policy engagement throughout the research cycle – and vice versa, researchers in the policy cycle – can help address this gap. Co-creation approaches—where policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders jointly define problems, methods, and outputs—can further enhance relevance and usability, as evidenced by some FutuResilience labs.





The FutuResilience simulation exercise

The FutuResilience project conducted a high-tech **simulation exercise** aiming to examine how decision-makers engage with evidence-based policy tools before and after significant societal disruptions. The simulation built on a scenario about a fictional city designed to represent a city on a European river featuring a working port, an industrial area, waterfront redevelopment, more- and less-affluent areas, and associated power and socioeconomic differentials. Following the simulation, participants took part in a policy workshop to co-create innovative public policy responses towards societal resilience.

The simulation involved participants from multiple disciplines, as happened in each FutuResilience Lab participatory workshop—a unique feature to obtain multiple competences working together towards common goals.

Two key takeaways from the exercise include the following:

- **Translating research into policy:** while participants could have used evidence in the form of policy cards, the complexity of evidence makes the use challenging under time constraints.
- **Targeted focus works:** Narrowing the scope to specific city areas or issues allows for



Figure 1. Simulation of flooding in Southbank, poorest neighbourhood of fictional Veilburgh city.

There is a balance between complexity and reductionism, but in summary, there are three areas in which an **increased role of policy scientists** in EU funding schemes can be beneficial. First, policy scientists can ensure that the policy recommendations produced by public projects, especially technical solutions, are actually fit to be considered by policymakers, given the vagaries of politics and the short horizon of policymakers. Second, policy scientists, together with dedicated communication specialists, can ensure that the policy solutions are translated into a form that is accessible to policymakers. Finally, policy scientists can contribute to guiding a scale-up (vertically to higher levels of governance and laterally to other jurisdictions) of a locally validated policy solution.



Policy recommendations

The integration of SSH in Horizon Europe notwithstanding, we propose the following recommendations for research policy:

- Encourage the participation of policy scientists in Horizon Europe consortia. This will ensure that any policy solutions (e.g., to enhance societal resilience) take into account policy and society.
- Encourage the 'translation' of policy solutions in text forms that are relevant to, and accessible by, policymakers. This can be achieved through collaboration between policy scientists and communication experts in Horizon Europe-funded projects.
- Establish a standard format of policy solutions, ensuring that utility, costs, and externalities are transparent.

Project Identity

Project Name	Creating FUTure societal RESILIENCE through innovative, science-based co-creation labs [FUTURESILIENCE]
Consortium	[Coordinator] European Future Innovation Systems (EFIS) Centre – Belgium; NTNU Social Research – Norway; Fraunhofer ISI – Germany; University of Ferrara – Italy; University of Urbino – Italy; Maastricht University – Netherlands; Regional Development Institute – Greece; Polytechnic University of Cartagena – Spain; Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies – Denmark; Foresight Centre at the Riigikogu – Estonia; Mid-Sweden University – Sweden; Bulgarian Association of Personalised Medicine – Bulgaria; Municipality of Murcia – Spain; Municipality of Chios – Greece
Funding Scheme	Horizon Europe / HORIZON-WIDERA-2022-ERA-01: An experimentation space for the uptake and use of R&I results for EU resilience and future preparedness
Website	www.futuresilience.eu
Duration	36 months (January 2023 – December 2025)
Budget	€2,889,406.25

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