



**Connecting Data and
People in a Changing
Landscape**

CESSDA Strategy

Addendum for 2027-2029



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Preamble

The current CESSDA strategic period ends in 2027. As the research data landscape continues to evolve rapidly, particularly due to the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) and increasing attention to research security, a short extension of the current strategic period and an update of the goals are proposed.

This extension provides the opportunity for CESSDA to ensure continuity while making targeted updates to reflect developments in the data ecosystem. In particular, it allows CESSDA to better address emerging needs related to the shift from human-centred data discovery towards machine-actionable and AI-ready data. It also considers the growing importance of proportionate and risk-based approaches to data access and sharing.

By extending the current strategic period, it also ensures better alignment with related organisational processes with CESSDA, such as work plans, budget cycles, and long-term infrastructure development. Overall, this approach enables CESSDA to remain responsive to a fast-changing environment while maintaining strategic stability and coherence.



Introduction

Since the adoption of the current [CESSDA strategy \(2023–2027\)](#), the research data landscape has evolved. To continue ensuring long-term access to high-quality, well-documented, and curated social science data, CESSDA has identified a set of emerging needs across its strategic themes: Data, People, and Landscape.

Data

CESSDA's current interoperability efforts remain largely oriented towards human-driven data discovery and reuse, with limited emphasis on machine learning workflows and automated processing. The widespread use of artificial intelligence (AI) also increases the need for attention to research security and emerging data requirements. CESSDA's emphasis on openness is currently not yet balanced with the need for proportionate and risk-based safeguards – particularly in light of risks related to the undesirable transfer of critical knowledge (including potential dual-use). These challenges are further amplified across evolving regulatory and geopolitical contexts, which highlights a growing tension between openness, machine-readiness, and security.

People

The rapid uptake of AI reveals a gap between current capacity-building efforts and emerging skill requirements. CESSDA's existing training and professional development activities mainly focus on data management and FAIR implementation, with limited emphasis on AI literacy and skills needed to support AI-driven workflows and research. Growing research security concerns create new demands for expertise and training among both data providers and users. This includes skills related to risk assessment, secure data handling, and regulatory compliance. These new developments underscore the need for a community of skilled researchers and data managers equipped to support data that is not only FAIR, but also AI-ready and securely governed.

Landscape

While the existing approach emphasises policy alignment, it does not address CESSDA's role in the emerging AI ecosystems and its contribution to shaping policies related to AI-driven research and data use. With increasing attention to research security, CESSDA would need to play a bigger role in European and international discussions on data sovereignty, trusted research environments, and risk-based approaches to openness.



Overview of strategic adjustments

The table below summarises the proposed updates to the strategic goals in response to emerging developments. It is intended as a high-level overview. Please refer to the following sections for further explanation.

Themes	Current goals (2023–2027)	Updated goals (2027–2029)
Data	Goal 1: Enable data discovery Goal 2: Work on the interoperability of services	Goal 1: Enable data discovery for human and AI use Goal 2: Work on the Enhance interoperability of services across open and secure environments
People	Goal 3: Facilitate mutual exchange among CESSDA Service Providers and support them in their national landscapes Goal 4: Reach out to SSH researchers at the national, European, and global level	Goal 3: Facilitate mutual exchange knowledge sharing and capacity building across among CESSDA Service Providers and support them in their national landscapes Goal 4: Reach out to SSH Engage and support researchers at the national, European, and global level in the evolving data landscape
Landscape	Goal 5: Establish strategic partnerships with actors of the European Research Areas (ERA) Goal 6: Establish strategic partnerships for the benefit of society	Goal 5: Establish Strengthen strategic partnerships with actors of the European Research Area (ERA) Goal 6: Establish Strengthen strategic partnerships for the benefit of society societal impact



Strategic adjustment: Data

Current strategic priority

The strategic theme, "Data", focuses on advancing the interoperability of metadata and data across CESSDA to enable seamless discovery, access, and reuse of social science research data. The current goals are:

Goal 1 – Enable data discovery

Goal 2 – Work on the interoperability of services

To reach these goals, CESSDA promotes the adoption of common metadata standards and controlled vocabularies. CESSDA develops tools and services, in line with the FAIR principles, to facilitate data use in cross-border and interdisciplinary research. Overall, CESSDA positions itself as a key contributor to an interoperable European and global research data ecosystem.

Required updates

To address the impact of AI and research security, Goals 1 and 2 will be extended to ensure that data and services are AI-ready and securely accessible.

The bullet points below include examples of how they could be operationalised:

Updated Goal 1 – Enable data discovery for human and AI use

- Strengthen metadata standards and practices to support automated data processing and AI workflows for the benefit of data discovery and reuse
- Encourage the adoption of clear, standardised licensing and reuse conditions, including for AI use, and make access conditions transparent and machine-readable

Updated Goal 2 – Enhance interoperability across open and secure environments

- Integrate risk-based approaches into data management to support different access conditions and apply proportionate safeguards
- Improve traceability and accountability of data use (including AI applications) in line with European and international policies and standards
- Adopt cross-domain interoperability frameworks (e.g., DDI-CDI, CDIF) to enable integration and reuse of social science data across domains

These updates will position CESSDA to support data that is not only interoperable and reusable, but also fit for AI-driven research within an increasingly complex security landscape.



Strategic adjustment: People

Current strategic focus

The strategic theme, “People”, emphasises strengthening the capacity of CESSDA community members by developing skills and expertise to support high-quality data management and reuse. The current goals are:

Goal 3 – Facilitate mutual exchange among CESSDA Service Providers and support them in their national landscapes

Goal 4 – Reach out to SSH researchers at the national, European, and global level

To achieve these goals, CESSDA provides FAIR data training to social science researchers. CESSDA promotes knowledge sharing through its Core and Key Topic Working Groups, European Union-funded projects, and leadership in several community-based Competence Centres. Its current focus is to ensure social science data users across Europe have the competencies needed to manage and use data effectively.

Required updates

In light of the widespread use of AI and increasing concerns about research security, Goals 3 and 4 will be extended to ensure that the community has the skills, awareness, and capacity to support AI-ready and securely governed data.

The bullet points below include examples of how they could be operationalised:

Updated Goal 3 – Facilitate knowledge sharing and capacity building across CESSDA Service Providers

- Expand knowledge exchange and training to include AI-related competencies, such as machine learning and AI workflows in repository operations
- Integrate research security awareness into training by including components such as risk assessment, secure data handling, and regulatory compliance
- Develop the CESSDA Knowledge Hub as a unified entry point to CESSDA's resources for researchers, data stewards, and Service Provider staff

Updated Goal 4 – Engage and support researchers in the evolving data landscape

- Strengthen outreach to ensure researchers from and outside the SSH community are using AI responsibly and ethically across the data lifecycle
- Promote awareness of research security considerations, including data and responsible data use, access conditions, and the balance between openness and protection

These updates will position CESSDA to support a skilled and informed community to manage and use data that is FAIR, AI-ready, and securely governed.



Strategic adjustment: Landscape

Current strategic focus

The strategic theme, “Landscape”, prioritises leveraging CESSDA's expertise in the European and international research data ecosystem through partnerships. The current goals are:

Goal 5 – Establish strategic partnerships with actors of the European Research Areas (ERA)

Goal 6 – Establish strategic partnerships for the benefit of society

To achieve these goals, CESSDA collaborates with national, European, and international organisations, including other ERICs, to shape open science policies. It promotes alignment of CoreTrustSeal requirements and Data Documentation Initiative (DDI) standards, and supports cross-domain and cross-border research. Its current focus is on leveraging open data for societal benefit and a sustainable research data landscape.

Required updates

To address AI and research security, Goals 5 and 6 will be extended to strengthen CESSDA's role in an evolving European and global research and policy landscape.

The bullet points below include examples of how they could be operationalised:

Updated Goal 5 – Strengthen strategic partnerships with actors of the European Research Area (ERA)

- Deepen engagement with European initiatives and research infrastructures to support AI-ready data ecosystems and interoperable services
- Position CESSDA in policy discussions on AI, data governance, and research security, to align with initiatives such as the European Open Science Cloud
- Advance European digital sovereignty by prioritising European providers, open standards, and alignment with evolving EU data policies (e.g., GDPR, Data Act, Data Governance Act)

Updated Goal 6 – Strengthen strategic partnerships for societal impact

- Foster collaborations that promote the responsible and ethical use of social science data in AI-driven research
- Engage with policymakers, industry, and other stakeholders on data sovereignty, trusted research environments, and balancing openness with protection
- Embed environmental responsibility in infrastructure and service decisions, in line with ESFRI Roadmap 2026 and ERA Action 8 on sustainability and resilience

These updates will position CESSDA to support a more proactive and strategic role for CESSDA in shaping an interoperable and secure research ecosystem.



Implementation and next steps

Rather than a full revision, the proposed updates will be integrated into the existing strategic framework through targeted refinements. These adjustments will focus on strengthening support for AI-ready data, improving interoperability across open and secure environments, and reinforcing capacity to address emerging research security considerations.

In practical terms, the updates will be reflected in ongoing work programmes, service development activities, and coordination across CESSDA Working Groups and Service Providers. No disruption to the current implementation is expected, as the changes build on existing priorities and structures.

Further consultation and detailed planning will take place through established governance channels to ensure alignment across the consortium. The updated strategic framework will continue to guide activities through the extended strategic period.



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