In 2006 CESSDA was identified as a social science research infrastructures (RIs) of excellence by the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI). Consequently, CESSDA was awarded FP7 funding to undertake a Preparatory Phase Project (PPP) lasting two years. The PPP will facilitate CESSDA’s transition to a fully integrated and formally constituted European Research Infrastructure (ERI). This will benefit three main stakeholder groups: Data Producers, The Social Science and Humanities Research and Learning Community and Data Archivists.

The upgraded infrastructure will ensure:
1. Access to a distributed (and increasingly diverse) set of data collections.
2. A role in developing and implementing standards and common tools.
3. The ability to ensure adherence to ‘good practice’ through the provision of strategic guidance.
4. The new centralised CESSDA ERI will not create a big new European Data Archive. It will offer a portal service for data discovery and access – providing a gateway (with common authentication) to a distributed (and increasingly diverse) set of data collections.

The new social science ERI, expects to have a multi-tier governance structure – the central ERI functions (the umbrella international infrastructural activities) will be integrated with distributed operational functions (the national operational requirements and activities). The organisational and governance structure of the new social science ERI could be represented as follows:

Which countries are involved in the PPP?

Seventeen of the twenty members of CESSDA are full partners to the PPP:

- Slovenia
- Italy
- The Netherlands
- Denmark
- Germany
- Greece
- Czech Republic
- Sweden
- Austria
- Spain
- Switzerland
- Norway
- Hungary
- France
- Finland
- Romania
- UK
- Poland
- Russia
- Luxembourg
- Estonia
- Portugal
- USA
- Canada
- Croatia
- Ireland
- Ukraine
- Latvia
- Bulgaria
- Slovakia
- Serbia
- Macedonia
- Belarus
- Lithuania

The project also includes associates from the following countries:

- Austria
- Czech Republic
- Sweden
- Hungary
- UK
- Norway
- Romania
- France
- Finland
- Germany
- Greece
- Denmark
- Italy
- Spain
- Switzerland
- Portugal
- USA
- Canada
- Croatia
- Ireland
- Ukraine
- Latvia
- Bulgaria
- Slovakia
- Serbia
- Macedonia
- Belarus
- Lithuania

A year of expansion

- European experts met in Paris to discuss data harmonisation.
- Recommendations drafted concerning the future management of the multilingual thesaurus.
- PPP undertook a series of meetings in the Balkans with data archives, researchers and national funding bodies. A similar meeting is planned to Russia and the Baltic. Both aim to raise awareness of ESFRI and the new ERI and facilitate discussion on long-term funding.
- Joint meeting with Eurostat and ONS: Microdata Access – New Developments and a Way Forward. The results of the CESSDA PPP survey of National Statistical Institutes were presented.
- Exploring synergies and cross-working - discussions are ongoing with other ESFRI RIs (e.g. CLARIN, DARIAH and ESS), associated project teams and organisations, including e-IRG, Clinical Research infrastructures and DNAES.
- The CESSDA-PPP was highly visible at the 34th IASSIST Conference 2008.
- Technical meetings with organisations outside of the PPP have focused on cross-infrastructure issues, such as Persistent Identifiers, Single Sign On and Multi-lingual thesauri.

The benefits of an enhanced CESSDA Research Infrastructure

The new centralised CESSDA ERI will not create a big new European Data Archive. It will offer a portal service for data discovery and access – providing a gateway (with common authentication) to a distributed (and increasingly diverse) set of data collections.

It will be a co-ordinator, a facilitator and a broker. It will play a role in developing and implementing standards and common tools, and aims to ensure adherence to ‘good practice’ through the provision of strategic guidance.

The new social science ERI, expects to have a multi-tier governance structure to manage the expansion of the current CESSDA federation and the distributed nature of its operational structure – the central ERI functions (the umbrella international infrastructural activities) will be integrated with distributed operational functions (the national operational requirements and activities). The organisational and governance structure of the new social science ERI could be represented as follows: