



# POSITION STATEMENT Environmental Sustainability as an Integral Priority

for Horizon Europe 2028-34

22 July 2026

Building on its [previous policy positions](#), Science Europe calls for environmental sustainability to be embedded on a systemic level in Horizon Europe 2028-34, the 10th EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

This Framework Programme should create the conditions and incentives for the R&I sector to prioritise the effective mainstreaming of environmental sustainability into its strategies and operations, and to support both fundamental and applied research on the topic.

Environmental sustainability is key to the future competitiveness and resilience of the European R&I ecosystem and to the long-term competitiveness, resilience, and prosperity of European and global societies. By definition, [sustainability](#) is “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Against this backdrop, Science Europe recalls its November 2025 [position statement](#) on the relation between the Framework Programme and the European Competitiveness Fund, which advocates a broader understanding of competitiveness.

## Introduction and context

[Research](#) shows that Europe is the continent that is warming up fastest. [Unprecedented climate events](#) and [deterioration of natural environments](#) fundamentally threaten Europe’s economy and society. The current geopolitical and environmental crisis clearly illustrates the dangers of relying on fossil fuels and the vulnerabilities linked to dependency on scarce materials.

The consequences, such as price shocks, supply disruptions and natural disasters, also directly and indirectly affect research funding and performing

organisations. They pose significant risks to the resilience, competitiveness, and future-proofing of the R&I sector, affecting its infrastructure, the conduct of research, and ultimately its financial stability and strategic autonomy. It is a legal obligation for European states to address climate change and protect the environment, according to the [European Climate Law](#), and action must be based on the best available science, according to the 2025 [advisory opinion](#) of the International Court of Justice.

Science provides the evidence that calls for ambitious and immediate environmental action. It is also a sizeable sector with its own environmental impact and a strong interest in ensuring that action is efficient and adequate. It should be considered that the European R&I sector accounts for [2.2% of the EU’s GDP](#) and employs close to [3.4 million personnel](#) (fte). Research shows that environmental sustainability is a threat if not addressed, and an opportunity if done effectively.

## Environmental Sustainability in Horizon Europe 2028-34

Considering the above, the next Framework Programme should recognise environmental sustainability as a strategic priority and provide the incentives and investment that the R&I sector needs to support the transition to competitive and sustainable European societies. It should also support the R&I sector in leading by example on environmental sustainability, contributing to the broader societal transition and strengthening trust in science.

The threats and the opportunities posed by the need for environmental transition should be appropriately reflected in the governance and priorities of Horizon Europe 2028–34, as follows:

## 1. Reconcile research excellence and sustainability

**Environmental sustainability is one of the fundamental research values and should be treated as such in Horizon Europe 2028–2034. The programme must be driven by principles of excellence, in parallel with supporting efforts to decrease the environmental impact of research activities.**

Ultimately, environmental sustainability and research excellence can, and should, be mutually reinforcing, even if this is not (yet) always the case. On the one hand, excellence can reduce negative impacts of research on sustainability. Carefully planned, rigorous and reproducible research improves efficiency by minimising the resources used to produce its findings. On the other hand, sustainability can also be seen as a **contributing factor** to research excellence through securing the framework conditions necessary for it to thrive. Sustainability is one of the fundamental values of research culture, together with the broader concepts of ethics, integrity, care and collegiality.

**Most importantly, it is decisive for the long-term viability and competitiveness of the research system.** Environmental sustainability should be seen as a **fundamental value** in the organisation, management, and conduct of research and research-related activities. Where scientifically excellent research is not yet environmentally sustainable, Horizon Europe should support activities on decreasing the environmental impact of such research. Moreover, special consideration needs to be given to the rapid growth of digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence, including in scientific research, which also poses a challenge for environmental sustainability.

## 2. Fund research on environmental sustainability

**Robust funding for both fundamental and applied research on environmental sustainability across disciplines is of strategic importance for the future of Europe. This comprehensive approach to environmental sustainability should include, but not be limited to, industrial transition, expanding the current set of priorities listed in Pillar II.**

**As the next Framework Programme advances, the funding deficit in environmental resilience risks Europe's strategic autonomy.** Europe's future security, economic viability, and competitiveness strongly depend on a rapid and just environmental transition and on preserving the European and global environment, nature, and biodiversity. To underpin this transition, Europe needs research that harnesses the contributions of different scientific disciplines and stakeholders, and provides a comprehensive framework for building Europe's resilience.

Moreover, fundamental and applied research reinforce each other: applied research can offer

immediate scalable solutions, while fundamental research helps build a profound understanding of transitions and lays the foundations for future research breakthroughs.

Therefore, research funded by Horizon Europe 2028–34 should include, but not be limited to, applied research for the industrial transition. This would expand the current set of priorities listed in Pillar II (see also Science Europe's February 2026 **Proposal for Amendments** to the Council Decision & Regulation of the European Parliament and Council on establishing the 10th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, p. 31).

## 3. Embed environmental sustainability in research conduct

**Sustainability and resilience should be listed amongst operational objectives for Horizon Europe 2028–34. The Framework Programme should support environmentally sustainable research practices.**

In its **Proposal for Amendments**, Science Europe also indicated that sustainability should be included in the operational objectives of Horizon Europe 2028–34 (p. 38). It is important to make

research practices more sustainable and resilient, following general scientific advice on environmental sustainability.

For research funding and research performing organisations, **demonstrated co-benefits of environmental action include cost savings, reputational gains and attraction of new talent, improved competitiveness, stronger risk management and resilience, greater social inclusion, and regulatory compliance.** For example:

- i) Several research funding organisations have already incorporated environmental sustainability in their funding schemes.
- ii) Measures for sustainability, such as those oriented at energy saving and optimising the exploitation of research infrastructures, can generate significant cost savings that can be reinvested in research.

- iii) travel and commuting policies that enable online participation tend to be both cost-efficient and more inclusive.

To harness co-benefits and increase resilience, efficiency, and competitiveness across the European R&I sector, environmental sustainability should be mainstreamed in Horizon Europe 2028–34. The new Framework Programme should ensure the application of the ‘Do no significant harm’ principle in line with the specific context and needs of the research community (see also the [Proposal for Amendments](#), pp. 9, 11, 20, 34, 47).<sup>1</sup> It should promote co-ordinated action within the European R&I sector, and support appropriate mitigation and adaptation measures.

## Conclusion

Through effective mainstreaming of environmental sustainability in Horizon Europe 2028–34, the next Framework Programme can drive comprehensive research on the topic and support research funding and research performing organisations to integrate sustainable practices into their strategies and operations.

By prioritising environmental sustainability, the Framework Programme will strengthen the resilience, efficiency and competitiveness of European R&I systems and the societies they serve, enabling them to lead in addressing the legal, moral, economic and societal imperative of protecting the environment, for the benefit of current and future generations.

Science Europe is the association of national research funding and research performing organisations in Europe. We define long-term perspectives for European research and champion best-practice approaches that enable high-quality research for knowledge advancement and the needs of society.

Our vision for the next Horizon Europe is a Framework Programme that supports a robust research & innovation ecosystem providing the best conditions for excellent science and researchers.

More information is available at [www.scienceeurope.org](http://www.scienceeurope.org)

1. Science Europe intends to submit a response to the currently active targeted public consultation of the European Commission on draft guidance on the application of the ‘do no significant harm’ principle under the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF): <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/DNSH-Guidance-Next-MFF>.