



Research Council of Finland



strategicRESEARCH

Draft themes for 2026 strategic research programmes

26 May at 13.00–14.15, SRC chairs:
Chair Mikael Fogelholm, Vice Chair Laura Solanko, Vice Chair Jussi Ronkainen
+ Secretary General Pilvi Toppinen

Programme

- **Themes at the core of strategic research**

Pilvi Toppinen, Secretary General, Strategic Research Council

- **SRC's draft themes and priority for 2026**

Strategic Research Council

Chair Mikael Fogelholm

- **Questions and comments from participants**

Chair Mikael Fogelholm, Vice Chair Laura Solanko, Vice Chair Jussi Ronkainen

Questions and comments can be posted in the event's chat.

- **Summary**

Themes at the core of strategic research:

Theme preparation for
SRC programmes 2026

Pilvi Toppinen,
SRC Secretary General,
Research Council of Finland



Strategic research: solutions to societal challenges

- Strategic research aims at finding solutions to major societal challenges, advancing the regeneration and development of Finnish society and supporting evidence-based policy in line with the changing information needs in society
- The objective is for long-term, high-quality research to serve as a strategic resource for societal development and decision-making – contributing to the future welfare of our society.
- SRC programmes are based on changing themes are usually run for six years.
- Typical budget: circa €25m per programme

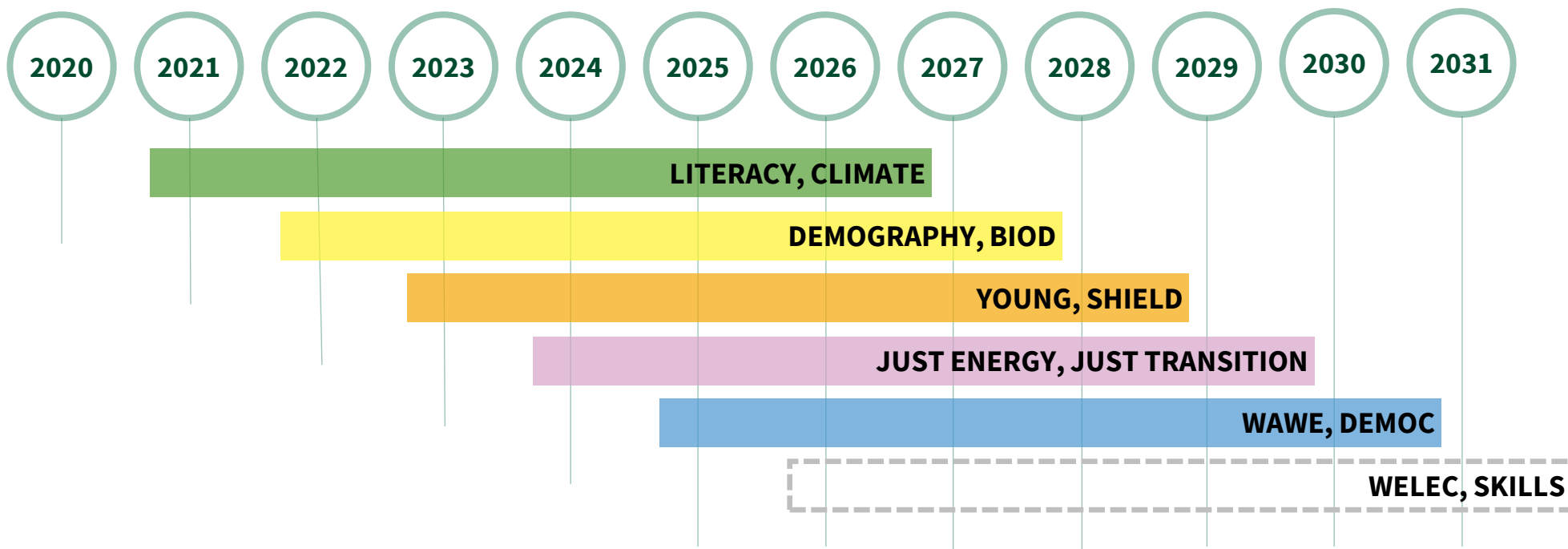
Themes form the core of SRC programmes

- SRC programmes focus on a specific societal challenge – *a theme*.
- The theme preparation starts from the question: What information is needed to support the future welfare of Finnish society?
- The themes must be sufficiently focused to address major challenges (top-down programming).
- They should also leave enough room for manoeuvre in programming to allow researchers in multidisciplinary consortia to decide how to tackle the societal challenge in question (bottom-up dimension).

Foresight and broad scope

- The volume of the SRC programmes and the six-year programme period require foresight.
- Seeking an ability to look beyond a single discipline, to see things in the context of the bigger picture
- Shifting the focus from individual solutions to major challenges and long-term, large-scale transformation
- Anticipating challenges that are important for Finland's future and that require new, cross-disciplinary research knowledge
- Encouraging deliberation on possible, desirable futures, and what kind of research could make them a reality

New themes complement SRC programme portfolio



- Information Literacy and Evidence Informed Decision-Making (LITERACY)
- Climate Change and Humans (CLIMATE)

- Demographic Changes – Causes, Consequences and Solutions (DEMOGRAPHY)
- Environmental and Social Links to Biodiversity Loss (BIOD)

- Children and Young People – Healthy, Thriving and Capable Makers of the Future (YOUNG)
- Security and Trust in the Age of Algorithms (SHIELD)

- Energy Solutions as Part of a Just Green Transition (JUST ENERGY)
- Societal Solutions in a Just Green Transition (JUST TRANSITION)

- Water for Welfare, Security and Peace (WAVE)
- Democracy for the Future (DEMOC)

- + At application stage:
- Economy and Welfare in an Era of Strategic Competition (WELEC)
- Skills, Labour Supply and Migration in Future Finland (SKILLS)

Division of work between SRC and Finnish Government

Government

- Appoints SRC members based on proposal from Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
- Decides the themes and cross-cutting priority for the research
- Government proposal 25/2014:
The Government or its ministries shall not participate in the allocation of funding to individual research programmes or projects.

Strategic Research Council

- Submits annual proposal to the Government on themes and priorities for strategic research
- When preparing the theme proposal, consults representatives of universities, research institutes and the scientific community, as well as experts on research utilisation.
- Determines the programme structure and the scope of the programmes, selects the research projects and decides on the funding

Scientific community and knowledge users play key role

- Stakeholders play a key role in supporting the SRC throughout the preparation – both in identifying themes and in developing them further.
- The scientific community and knowledge users bring a wide range of scientific and societal understanding and perspectives to the preparation.
- What are the current challenges facing Finnish society that should be addressed in SRC programmes? (theme survey in autumn)
- How to structure the challenges to formulate a multidisciplinary and long-term thematic package? How to refine the draft themes? (feedback from stakeholders at February workshop and comments on the draft themes)
- The SRC also makes use of the latest foresight reports.

Preparation of theme proposal



Strategic Research Council 2025-2027

Chair: Professor **Mikael Fogelholm**, University of Helsinki

Vice Chairs: Senior Advisor **Laura Solanko**, Bank of Finland &
Lead Researcher **Jussi Ronkainen**, South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (2nd term)

Members:

Research Professor **Tuomo Alasoini**, Finnish Institute of Occupational Health

Research Professor **Anu Castaneda**, Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare

Project Director **Kari Herlevi**, Sitra (2nd term)

Professor **Pigga Keskitalo**, University of Lapland

Director **Sammeli Liikkanen**, Orion Pharma

Professor **Eva Pongrácz**, University of Oulu

The Strategic Research Council (SRC) is an independent body established within the Research Council of Finland. Secretary General: Pilvi Toppinen

SRC's draft themes and priority for 2026

Strategic Research Council
Chair, Professor Mikael Fogelholm

The SRC seeks to identify themes that

- 1 Are key challenges for the future of Finland
- 2 Require multi- and cross-disciplinary research in producing new knowledge
- 3 Are horizontal and extensively affect different sectors of society
- 4 Are sufficiently distinct (also in relation to [existing SRC programmes](#)).



What does the SRC expect from the consultation?

- Comments and questions on the draft themes and the cross-cutting priority
- Suggestions on how to refine the descriptions to facilitate:
 - interesting themes that can be meaningfully explored and that allow scientific freedom to approach a topical societal challenge from different perspectives
 - high-quality applications from multi-/cross-disciplinary consortia combining different disciplines in a research-oriented and open-minded way
 - research that supports societal reforms, the competitiveness of business and industry and the development of work and the public sector.
- You can post comments and questions in the chat.
- All questions and comments will be saved to support further work by the SRC.

The Arctic region in transformation

Draft theme I



Research Council of Finland



The Arctic region in transformation

– draft theme

Research under this theme will examine the ongoing, multi-layered transformation in the Arctic region that results from climate change, geopolitical tensions and economic interests. From Finland's perspective, it is essential to understand how these fundamental changes will affect the people, livelihoods, nature and security of the region.

The Arctic region is warming faster than the rest of the planet, making it particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. At the same time, military, security policy and economic interest in the region is growing.

These developments raise a number of important questions regarding the natural equilibrium and socio-cultural and economic sustainability.

How can we promote the sustainable use of the Arctic environment and its natural resources? How can we support different perspectives in decision-making concerning the Arctic region? How can Finland make an impact as an Arctic expert and a global leader on Arctic issues?

The objective of the present theme is to develop Finnish Arctic expertise through multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research and to bolster Finland's capacity to prepare for and influence changes in the Arctic region. The geographical focus of the research may be either the northern regions of Finland or the entire country as an Arctic region.

For example, research under this theme can focus on how to reconcile the different perspectives of nature, business and the population in a sustainable and fair manner. Individual projects can examine how technology, services or innovations would best support the protection of biodiversity, the adaptation to changes or the construction of a working infrastructure. Key questions include how the Arctic transformation will affect security of supply and overall security, for example logistics, energy security or the role of the major powers and military alliances in the Arctic region. Finland's international status and role are also important viewpoints in examining changes in the Arctic region.

A cross-disciplinary and interactive approach and stakeholder cooperation are of key importance in promoting the development of the Arctic region while strengthening justice and inclusion. The Arctic transformation will have a profound impact on the region's population and living conditions. Depending on the research design, for instance, how the Sámi people view the changes is an important element when studying the transformation of the Arctic region in an ethical and responsible manner.

Public mental health

Draft theme II



Public mental health

– draft theme

Research under this theme will focus on building and promoting good mental health in Finnish society. The aim is to improve mental health and prevent mental health problems in the population.

Mental health is a life-long process; it is with us everywhere, and it affects each and every one of us. Good mental health is important for individuals, society, public health and the economy alike. The individualistic nature of society, times of uncertainty, the strain caused by technological change, and growing demands in different areas of life create significant challenges for mental wellbeing. On the other hand, digitalisation can also offer new solutions and new forms of support.

The present theme seeks innovative solutions in which Finland can take a pioneering role in promoting good mental health. How can we allocate society's resources wisely? How do we choose which actions to take to best facilitate impactful and long-ranging support for mental wellbeing?

Research under this theme will develop a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary understanding of the cause-and-effect relationships in mental health, particularly from the perspective of improved wellbeing. From a public health perspective, it is essential to understand the biological, psychological, social and societal root causes of mental health.

Individual research projects can examine, for example, differences between population groups, generations, cultures and social norms, or intergenerational effects. Possible research topics include the effects of work, living environment and digitalisation on mental health, as well as maintaining mental health in crisis situations. In addition, the research can focus on the importance of community, inclusion and lifestyles in building good mental health. To support strategic choices in society, information is needed on the costs and effects of mental health in the social and healthcare service system and on the availability of care and services in both the public and private sectors.

Research under this theme should focus on preventive, cost-effective and people-centred solutions. Co-creating services with users and producers can help create more effective societal structures and operating methods as well as new business opportunities. In their research designs, projects under this theme should also take into account the perspectives of groups that are difficult to reach. International benchmarking can provide valuable perspectives for analysing the issues involved.

Priority draft:
**Finland as a
global pioneer**



Cross-cutting priority

- The cross-cutting priority applies to all programme calls in a given year.
- The priority provides a common framework for the themes and their programmes, and it is defined based on:
 - the current state/situation in society
 - the development objective of society
 - a phenomenon that is shaping or will shape society considerably
 - a relevant approach guiding research and interaction work.

Draft cross-cutting priority: **Finland as a global pioneer**

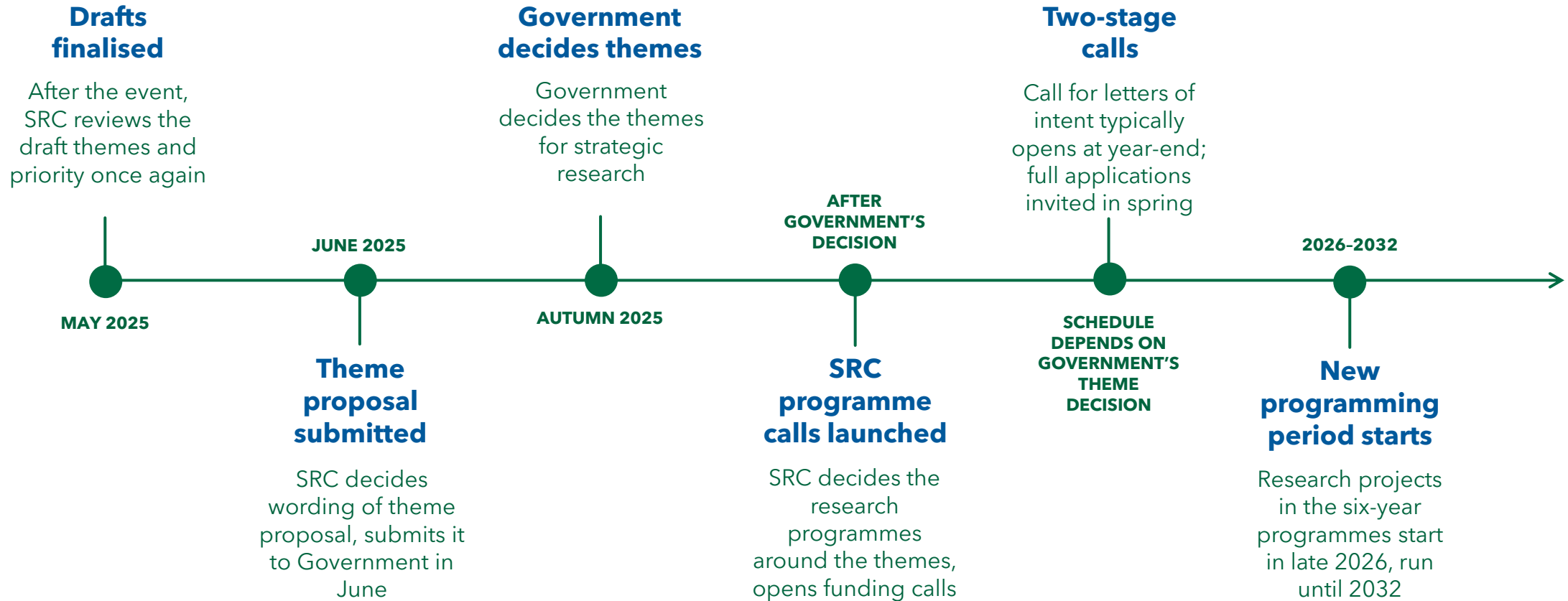
- The cross-cutting priority for the 2026 strategic research programmes is **Finland as a global pioneer**. It is essential that the research aims to find new, scalable solutions and practices that contribute to building internationally influential expertise, skills and competence. Individual projects should approach the pioneering solutions from the perspective of the chosen topic.

Questions and comments about the themes and the priority

Questions and comments can be written in the chat.
(in Finnish / Swedish / English)

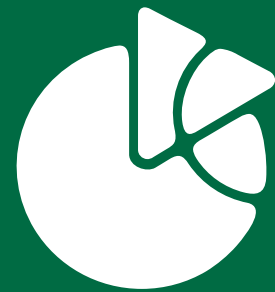
Posted questions and comments will be saved to support the SRC's theme preparation, but there may not be time to discuss all issues during the event.

What's next





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Contact us: aka.fi/feedback

