13.5.2024

Draft themes for SRC strategic research programmes 2025

Contents:

Theme proposal 1: Economy and welfare in an era of strategic competition
Theme proposal 2: Skills, labour supply and migration in future Finland
Draft cross-cutting priority: Artificial intelligence

Please note: At this stage, the themes and priority for the 2025 strategic research programmes are only drafts. The Strategic Research Council (SRC) will finalise the drafts after a public consultation, taking into account the discussions at the consultation. The SRC will submit the finalised theme proposal to the Finnish Government in June 2024.

Draft theme 1: **Economy and welfare in an era of strategic competition**

In an era of strategic competition, the emphasis increasingly falls on economic and social stability, resilient approaches, intellectual capital and the ability of societies to attract investment. This theme focuses on how and by what means the economy can develop favourably and lay the foundations for prosperity in changing circumstances. The Finnish economy suffers from structural problems, in terms of productivity, the scarcity of investment, and research and development. Solutions need to be found to improve competitiveness, help reverse the indebtedness trend and boost productivity with a view to supporting society's capacity, resilience and welfare. The preconditions for productivity growth are based on the competitive advantages made possible by technology and a high level of know-how. As the importance of intellectual capital grows and global competition for natural resources intensifies, both work and value creation face changes. The circular economy and natural capital will play a key role in future competitiveness. Solutions based on artificial intelligence are fundamentally creating both new opportunities and risks. How do we boost competitiveness, attract investment and build a sustainable economy that can generate added value? How do we simultaneously improve the economy in the long term and guarantee welfare services for future generations?

Research under this theme will generate new knowledge on productivity, develop methods to improve productivity and seek solutions to reform the economy and maintain prosperity. It is important that this research recognises the sustainability and welfare aspects of the economy and the rapid changes in the international operating environment. Issues related to investments, innovations, legislation, taxation and indebtedness and to the efficient use of tangible and intangible capital and their interlinkages are essential. In addition to GDP, research within this theme can analyse overall sustainability: welfare, economic profitability and the state of the environment. What will sustainable economic reform require within this context, and what are the obstacles to reform? How do we attract investments to maintain an adequate and stable tax base? What economic governance models, regulatory means and incentives work in an environment defined by interdependencies? Research under this theme can be linked, for example, to the dynamics of economy, productivity and welfare, as well as to structural and institutional issues. AI-based solutions have an important role to play in all these issues. International benchmarking can provide valuable perspectives for analysing the issues involved. An interdisciplinary and interactive approach and cooperation with different stakeholders are of key importance in tackling economic and productivity issues in a systemic way.

Draft theme 2: **Skills, labour supply and migration in future Finland**

This theme examines the means and conditions to ensure a sufficient supply of labour and skills for the future. The favourable development of Finnish society requires versatile, adaptable skills and enough employees in all key sectors. Many sectors in the Finnish economy face labour and skills shortages, which are expected to be exacerbated by changes in the age structure of the population. Better employment rates, education and training, and migration motivated by both study and work are key to addressing these challenges. In countries with considerable migration, questions have arisen about societal sustainability, democracy and security. Education, labour and immigration policies play a key role in ensuring a favourable development in all areas of society. The need for reform affects the labour market, the education system as well as business and industry. While the application of AI offers solutions, it also raises new questions and requires new skills. At the same time, international competition for skilled labour is also intensifying. How do we boost talent attraction and retention in Finland?

This theme involves multidisciplinary research to build a broad knowledge base and expertise to address and solve issues related to skills, labour supply and migration. For example, the research can focus on anticipating skills needs, developing new skills, balancing supply and demand, or ensuring the attractiveness of work. Key topics include the challenges faced by people who have migrated to Finland, the conditions for their integration into work and society in Finland, and solutions to ensure the functioning of democracy, the rule of law and societal security. The overall wellbeing of employees, language and cultural issues and the resolution of related challenges are important for the overall sustainability of society. It is also essential to explore how AI, digitalisation and technology can open up new opportunities for work and expertise and address issues linked to integration. International benchmarking can provide perspectives for analysing this theme. Research under this theme should strengthen the capacity to anticipate the sufficient supply of skills and talents in different sectors. An interdisciplinary, interactive and systemic approach and cooperation with different stakeholders are of key importance in research to be conducted under this theme.

Cross-cutting priority: artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence is the cross-cutting priority for the 2025 strategic research programmes. Artificial intelligence will play a major role in shaping future society; it will be embedded in our activities and can radically change the way we work. Advances in computing technology and AI-based solutions are changing both processes and societal structures. At its best, AI can improve not only decision-making and productivity, but also wellbeing. At the same time, the use of algorithmic decision-making systems involves risks and complex issues of fairness. The research to be conducted in the 2025 strategic research programmes shall address key issues related to artificial intelligence from the perspective of the chosen research topic.