

Themes for SRC strategic research programmes 2026

Theme 1: The changing Arctic region

Research under this theme will examine the ongoing, multi-layered changes in the Arctic region that result 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 transition 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 changes in the Arctic region will have a profound impact on the region's population and living conditions. The Sámi people have a special status as an indigenous people of the region. Depending on the research design, therefore, how the Sámi people view the changes is an important element when studying the changing Arctic region in an ethical and responsible manner.

Theme 2: Public mental health



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, communities and society at large. It also has significant economic importance.

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 and growth 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 promotive, 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.

Cross-cutting priority:

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.