



ELIAS Virtual Centre

European Lighthouse of AI for Sustainability Expansion – Guidelines



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Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Membership.....	4
3. Benefits.....	5
What are the benefits of membership in the ELIAS Virtual Centre?.....	5
Examples of engagement in ELIAS activities include – but are not limited to the following:.....	5
What benefit will ELIAS gain from expanding its network?.....	6
4. Budget.....	6
5. FAQ.....	6
If one institution from a unit joins the network, does this mean that other institutions from the same unit cannot join?.....	6
What are the next steps after filling-in the application form?.....	7

1. Introduction

ELIAS contributes to Europe's AI Lighthouse by **expanding the Virtual Centre of Excellence in Sustainable and Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence, fully embedded within the ELLIS Network**. The Virtual Centre **strengthens coordination among leading European AI institutions** while extending the reach and impact of ELLIS across the continent. Through ELIAS, the network grows in a transparent and excellence-driven manner, supporting the establishment of new ELLIS Units and ensuring compliance with rigorous scientific standards alongside strong diversity criteria, including gender balance, interdisciplinarity, and geographical inclusion.

The creation of the Virtual Centre **responds to the need for a more connected, inclusive, and sustainability-oriented European AI ecosystem**. It provides a **shared framework for collaboration** among partner institutions of the AI Lighthouse, supported by concrete **networking** and capacity-building actions such as the **PhD mobility programme** and **joint scientific workshops**. These activities foster **knowledge exchange, talent development, and long-term cooperation** across borders and disciplines.

On the research side, ELIAS **focuses on advancing machine learning methods**, with particular emphasis on sustainability. The research strategy is articulated through a **Strategic Research Agenda (SRA)**, that defines five interconnected pillars across three core dimensions of Sustainable AI: the planet, society, and the individual. These pillars are supported by two cross-cutting enablers, Fostering Scientific Excellence and Entrepreneurship & Tech Transfer, ensuring ELIAS research delivers practical, scalable, and socially responsible AI innovations. The pillars are:



- **AI for a Sustainable Planet** – creating hybrid AI models that integrate scientific knowledge to accelerate clean energy, sustainable materials, and climate resilience, while reducing AI's own carbon footprint.
- **AI for a Sustainable Society** – developing systems to safeguard democracy, counter disinformation, support inclusive prosperity, and foster fair coordination of shared resources.
- **Trustworthy AI for Individuals** – ensuring AI systems are fair, transparent, privacy-preserving, and attentive to human cognition and diversity of needs.

- **Fostering Scientific Excellence** – expanding PhD programs, fellowships, and cross-border collaborations to strengthen Europe's AI research community and train the next generation of talent.
- **Entrepreneurship & Tech Transfer** (Sciencepreneurship) – bridging the gap between research and real-world application through open calls, accelerators, internships, and sciencepreneurship initiatives.

By broadening the network's interdisciplinary scope, **reinforcing diversity**, and **placing Sustainable and Trustworthy AI at its core**, the Virtual Centre addresses AI challenges from environmental, societal, and individual perspectives. Its growth is driven by collaborative instruments such as **mobility schemes** and joint events, underpinned by transparent governance, excellence-based selection, and clear inclusivity requirements. Particular attention is given to **underrepresented regions**, including Eastern and Southern Europe, and to improving **gender balance** across the community.

Building on established ELLIS evaluation frameworks and lessons learned from major European initiatives such as ELISE, [ELSA](#), AI4Media, and HumanE-AI-NET, ELIAS strengthens Europe's position as a global leader in high-impact, trustworthy AI research.

We count on your participation to ensure the success of the ELIAS network expansion and to showcase the strength of ELLIS research in Sustainable and Trustworthy AI across Europe. We very much look forward to welcoming you to the ELIAS community.

2. Membership

Institutions interested in joining the ELIAS Virtual Centre complete an application form and send a Letter of Support.

1. **Application form** – the form is available [here](#).

Please provide the following information:

- a. *Contact person* – each organisation is expected to appoint one contact person.
- b. ELLIS Unit, Name of Organisation, Department name, Website of the ELLIS UNIT and the Organisation
- c. *PR representative* – if the organisation has a communication department, a representative from this department should be listed so she/he can attend the meetings focused on the communication and dissemination activities. The contact person could also be listed as the PR representative.
- d. *Webpage summary* – a brief summary of the institution to be provided for the ELIAS webpage.
- e. *Research approach* – describe your approach, contribution, and understanding of sustainable AI and how it can fit the ELIAS project.

- f. *Expectations* – Outline what you expect to gain from your membership in the ELIAS Virtual Center.
 - g. *List of researchers* – researchers who wish to be involved in ELIAS activities, including a short biography for each one.
2. **A Letter of Support** is expected to be signed by the legal representative (e.g., director/dean/rector) of the participating organisation and submitted to the central ELIAS email: elias-coordination@unitn.it. The template is available [here](#).

The deadline for submitting the application form and the letter of support is Friday, **February 25th, 2026**.

3. Benefits

What are the benefits of membership in the ELIAS Virtual Centre?

Members joining ELIAS Virtual Centre primarily benefit from **access to its cutting-edge research**, which combines expertise in different domains such as AI for a Sustainable Planet, AI for a Sustainable Society and Trustworthy AI for Individuals. By participating in ELIAS's research activities, members ensure that they **remain at the forefront of excellence in sustainable AI**.

Members not only gain access to and participate in cutting-edge research but also benefit from the **network's connections** and **collaborative initiatives**. This could be done via participating in work package meetings, being in direct contact with Work Package Leaders, initiating **joint papers**, etc. In addition, members have opportunities for knowledge exchange through **workshops, joint projects**, and access to **mobility funds for PhDs and Postdocs**. Members also have access to ELIAS activities and programmes such as the **PhD/PostDoc Programme** and the **ELIAS Alliance** (European Leadership in Innovation with AI and Science).

In addition, ELIAS' emblem of excellence boosts their **reputation and visibility**.

Examples of engagement in ELIAS activities include – but are not limited to the following:

- **Networking, joint scientific workshops** – bring together researchers, industry leaders, and other stakeholders to explore industrial trends, identify needs, and align them with AI capabilities across Europe – learn more here <https://elias-ai.eu/tdw/>.
- **Talent development** – PhDs and postdocs benefit from joint supervision by leading scientists, the interdisciplinary track aims to foster successful collaborations between Machine learning/AI and other research fields such as law, biology, social sciences & humanities – learn more here <https://elias-ai.eu/phd-postdoc/>.

- **Mobility programs** – offer PhD students and postdoctoral researchers across Europe the opportunity to expand their networks, gain new perspectives, and collaborate with leading institutions in the ELIAS network – learn more here <https://elias-ai.eu/mobility-program/>.
- **Joint projects, joint scientific publications** – support long-term cooperation.
- **ELIAS Alliance** – ELIAS nodes are strategically designed to recognise and amplify locally developed AI and science-based innovations, while acting as integral parts of the ELIAS Alliance –a pan-European network fostering AI entrepreneurship. Learn more here <https://elias-ai.eu/elias-alliance/>.

What benefit will ELIAS gain from expanding its network?

Network expansion is one of the core objectives designed to exploit research outcomes and foster a robust network committed to the three core dimensions of sustainable AI: the planet, society, and the individual. The participation of members aims to sustain research efforts over the long term, **ensuring continued progress** and **impact in the field**. Including new members also promotes ongoing growth and collaboration, enriching the network's expertise, resources, and collaborative potential.

Strengthening research efforts enhances the research agenda, addressing challenges through **interdisciplinary collaboration** and diverse perspectives. The network remains open to research input, fostering an inclusive environment.

The collective impact of new and existing consortium members will significantly advance research in the field of sustainable AI. This, in turn, will foster innovation and promote AI practices that **align with EU values**.

4. Budget

New consortium members must **ensure their own funding** to participate in the project and its work packages. No ELIAS funding is available.

No fees are required to join the network.

5. FAQ

If one institution from a unit joins the network, does this mean that other institutions from the same unit cannot join?

Applications are submitted individually, each institution separately. Every institution/organisation from the same unit is welcome to join the network and contribute to different work packages.



What are the next steps after filling in the application form?

Each application will first be checked for eligibility. Applications that pass the eligibility check will be reviewed by the ELIAS committee. The committee consolidates the reviews and makes a recommendation to the principal investigator who makes the final decision. Upon agreement, the applicant will receive the invitation letter to join the ELIAS Virtual Centre. The expansion of the network will be officially announced through the ELIAS channels.