



European Lighthouse of AI for Sustainability

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ELIAS Research Areas Attract Nearly Half of the New ELLIS PhD Cohort

New recruitment data highlights growing interest in trustworthy, sustainable, and interdisciplinary AI research.

The ELLIS PhD Programme has officially concluded its 2025/2026 recruitment cycle, marking unprecedented growth and an intensifying shift towards interdisciplinary, sustainability-oriented, and ethical AI research. Driven by an expanding European network, the programme drew close to 4,500 registered applicants and 2,111 completed applications—representing a 41% and 43% surge respectively over the previous cycle.

The recruitment data also highlights the growing influence of ELIAS research areas across the applicant pipeline. As a core network partner, ELIAS has expanded its footprint to 62 active advisors across 19 partner institutions, actively shaping the next generation of researchers tackling some of the field's most critical open problems.

A Pipeline Focused on Trustworthy and Sustainable Innovation

Reviewing the data from initial application to final selection reveals a clear alignment with ELIAS-specific fields, which span interpretability, fairness, robustness, climate change, and law.

- Robust & Trustworthy ML emerged as an established cornerstone, capturing interest from 24% of applicants and remaining one of the most represented research areas among admitted students (22%).
- Interpretability & Fairness similarly held strong, representing 18% of the final admitted cohort.
- Machine Learning in Chemistry & Material Sciences saw a notable increase, with representation among admitted students rising to 14%

Ultimately, 49% of the 121 newly admitted students expressed specific interests in research areas closely aligned with ELIAS priorities, demonstrating that the demand for sustainable and trustworthy AI runs deeply through the entire competitive pipeline.

"The strong interest in trustworthy and sustainable AI demonstrates that young researchers increasingly want to work on challenges that combine scientific excellence with societal impact," said **Florence d'Alché-Buc**, ELLIS PhD & Postdoc Program Coordinator at [Institut Polytechnique de Paris](https://www.ipolytechnique.fr). *"These results reinforce the importance of*



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building interdisciplinary research environments where AI can contribute to sustainability, science, and public benefit."

An Interdisciplinary, Cross-Border Model

The 121 admitted students—representing 38 nationalities and 27 countries—were selected through a rigorous process involving 415 evaluators.

ELIAS plays an integral role in this international framework through its focus on interdisciplinary tracks. Every ELLIS PhD student benefits from a co-supervision model pairing two advisors from different European countries, alongside a mandatory six-month research exchange. This structure seamlessly supports ELIAS's goal of bridging foundational machine learning with vital external domains like earth sciences, law, humanities, and chemistry.

Looking Ahead

With this latest cohort, the ELLIS PhD Programme now counts approximately 500 students across its Academic (83%), Industry (13%), and Interdisciplinary (4%) tracks. The growing pipeline positions Europe at the forefront of AI innovation built around economic and environmental stability. The next global call for applications for the ELLIS PhD Programme is expected to open in October 2026.

ELIAS will also support the upcoming edition of the European Doctoral Symposium (EDS 2026), dedicated to Trustworthy AI, further strengthening opportunities for doctoral researchers to engage with Europe's AI research community. More information can be found here: [EDS 2026 - Trustworthy AI](#), [EDS 2026](#).

About the ELLIS PhD Program

The ELLIS PhD Programme is a premier European AI training initiative attracting top-tier global talent. Spanning over 200 European research institutions and 21 countries, the programme fosters cross-border collaboration and interdisciplinary breakthroughs through its specialised academic, industry, and interdisciplinary doctoral tracks.

More details regarding the ELLIS PhD Program and upcoming calls for entry are available via the official portal at ellis.eu/phd-postdoc.

About ELIAS

Coordinated by the [University of Trento](#), ELIAS aims to position Europe as a global leader in AI research, driving sustainable innovation and economic growth. Rooted in the European Laboratory for Learning and Intelligent Systems (ELLIS), ELIAS supports AI researchers at all career stages through a broad network that fosters collaboration, training, mobility, and policy development.



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ELIAS champions a vision of AI that not only accelerates technological advancement but also upholds ethical values, promotes societal well-being, and contributes to environmental sustainability.

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