

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT  
FOR INDUSTRIAL ECOLOGY

The logo for ECOIND features the word "ECOIND" in a large, bold, serif font. A small green leaf icon is positioned to the left of the letter "O".

EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

## **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN RESEARCH**

National Research and Development Institute for Industrial Ecology – ECOIND principles on  
social responsibility in research

**2026**

**Social responsibility in research** requires conducting studies ethically, ensuring public benefit, and minimizing harm to participants, society, and the environment. Key guidelines emphasize informed consent, integrity in data reporting, addressing societal impact, and fostering transparency and equity. Key principles include anticipating long-term consequences and engaging in dialogue with stakeholders.

### **Core components of Socially Responsible Research**

*Ethical Conduct and Participant Safety:* Researchers must protect the physical, social, and psychological well-being of participants, ensure informed consent, and maintain confidentiality.

*Public Benefit and Value:* Research should aim to produce reliable knowledge that benefits society, avoiding detrimental effects on nature and the environment.

*Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI):* This framework involves anticipating societal impacts, reflecting on motivations, and engaging with stakeholders early in the process.

*Integrity and Accuracy:* Data must be collected, analyzed, and reported honestly to avoid fraud and ensure transparency.

*Equality and Justice:* Research should be inclusive, empowering marginalized groups and ensuring fair distribution of benefits.

### **European framework**

Social responsibility in research within the European Commission (EC) is primarily operationalized through Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), which seeks to align research processes and outcomes with the values, needs, and expectations of European society. Under the Horizon Europe framework, these guidelines mandate that researchers and institutions engage society, ensure gender equality, increase access to scientific results, and adhere to strict ethical standards.

*Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI):* This approach encourages collaboration between researchers, citizens, policymakers, and businesses throughout the entire R&D process. It involves five key dimensions: engaging society, increasing access, promoting gender equality, integrating ethics, and promoting science education.

*The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity:* This is the cornerstone document for research integrity in Europe, emphasizing honesty, reliability, respect, and accountability. It was revised in 2023 to place greater emphasis on research culture, equity, diversity, and inclusion (<https://allea.org/code-of-conduct/>).

*Horizon Europe Ethics Appraisal Procedure:* Mandatory for EU-funded projects, this process ensures that research respects fundamental EU values (human rights, dignity, etc.) and involves, for example, checks on the use of personal data and potential misuse of research results (<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding->

[tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/guidance/programme-guide\\_horizon\\_en.pdf](#) Chapter 13)

*Guidelines on the Responsible Use of Generative AI:* These guidelines provide a framework for using AI in research, emphasizing transparency, privacy, and the avoidance of using AI in sensitive activities like peer reviews ([https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/guidelines-responsible-use-generative-ai-research-developed-european-research-area-forum-2024-03-20\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/guidelines-responsible-use-generative-ai-research-developed-european-research-area-forum-2024-03-20_en)).

*Open Science Policy:* The EC promotes open access to scientific data, publications, and processes, aligning with the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science to foster transparency and inclusivity (<https://www.unesco.org/en/open-science/about>).

*Action against "Ethics Dumping":* The EC supports the TRUST Code (The TRUST Code – A Global Code of Conduct for Equitable Research Partnerships), designed to ensure that international research collaborations with resource-poor settings are equitable and ethical (<https://prepared-project.eu/the-trust-code/>).

These policies aim to maintain public trust in science by ensuring that research is both high-quality (integrity) and socially relevant.

## **Romanian framework**

*Strategic Planning (PNCDI IV & SNCISI):* The 2022-2027 plan aims to modernize infrastructure, boost excellence, and promote ethical, sustainable research. The Strategy (SNCISI) aims to align R&I with regional strengths (smart specialisation) and create high-impact, sustainable outcomes.

*Ethical & Social Responsibility:* RRI in Romania emphasizes that innovation must serve society, requiring researchers to take on broader ethical responsibilities. This includes incorporating social responsibility into the innovation pipeline and protecting against security risks.

*Stakeholder Engagement & Collaboration:* Policies encourage partnerships between academia, the public sector, and private industries, ensuring that research addresses societal challenges.

*Research Security:* Initiatives like the development of a Research Security Advisory Hub are designed to balance openness with safety and ensure ethical practices (<https://uefiscdi.gov.ro/resource-865274-Research-Security-Concept-Note.pdf>).

*Danube Region Cooperation (D-STIR):* Romania participates in the Danube Framework for RRI, which uses the Socio-Technical Integration Research (STIR) method to bridge the gap between science and society across the region (<https://keep.eu/projects/18490/Danube-Framework-for-Respon-EN/>).

The framework is focused on transitioning toward a more collaborative and ethically responsible research system that can better compete at the European level.

## Actionable steps for researchers

*Conducting Risk Assessments:* Evaluate potential social, environmental, and ethical risks associated with the research.

*Ensuring Transparency:* Maintain open communication about research, including potential risks and uncertainties.

*Managing Conflicts of Interest:* Identify and address any conflicts that could affect research integrity.

*Continuous Reflection:* Regularly evaluate the societal impact and ethical implications of the research throughout its lifecycle.

## Social responsibility in environmental research

Involves aligning scientific, corporate, and individual actions with sustainability goals to minimize ecological impact, foster green innovation, and protect future generations. Key trends focus on ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) practices, reducing waste, and promoting environmentally friendly behaviors. It also emphasizes corporate accountability, with Environmental Corporate Social Responsibility (ECSR) driving eco-friendly innovations and sustainable resource management.

Key Aspects of Environmental Social Responsibility:

*Definition and Scope:* It is a moral principle for individuals and organizations to improve society and maintain a balance between the economy and the environment.

*Corporate Actions:* Companies are adopting voluntary, non-commercial, and proactive measures that go beyond legal requirements to protect the environment. These include developing greener products, reducing carbon footprints, improving waste management, and promoting biodiversity conservation.

*Research Trends:* Current research heavily focuses on ESG and sustainable behaviors. There is a strong, growing interest in how employee pro-environmental behaviors (PEBs) (e.g., recycling, saving water) contribute to organizational goals.

*Impact on Innovation and Performance:* Environmental CSR fosters innovation by driving companies to adopt cleaner technologies, which can lead to better financial performance and consumer loyalty.

*Frameworks:* Researchers often use the Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV) to explain how firms leverage internal and external resources for green, sustainable development. The framework outlines three key strategies that help companies achieve competitive advantage through sustainability:

- **Pollution Prevention:** Reducing waste and emissions rather than managing them after creation.
- **Product Stewardship:** Integrating environmental factors throughout a product's lifecycle, from design to disposal.
- **Sustainable Development:** Focusing on long-term ecological, social, and economic impact, aiming for sustainable growth.

Social responsibility in environmental research ensures studies are ethical, sustainable, and transparent, aiming to minimize ecological footprints while maximizing positive societal impacts. Key guidelines involve stakeholder inclusion, adhering to the "triple bottom line" (people, planet, profit), and aligning with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to foster long-term environmental protection.

#### Key Guidelines and Principles

*Active Stakeholder Participation:* Incorporate diverse perspectives and needs throughout all research phases.

*Ethical Standards & Integrity:* Ensure transparency, prevent conflicts of interest, and adhere to ethical guidelines regarding human and animal subjects.

*Sustainability & Minimizing Footprint:* Actively reduce the carbon emissions and environmental impact of the research activities themselves.

*Action-Oriented Research:* Focus on practical applications that contribute to solving environmental problems, such as climate change mitigation.

*Equity and Inclusivity:* Promote diversity and ensure research addresses the needs of affected communities, adhering to principles of environmental justice.

*Data Sharing:* Adhere to FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) to ensure data is responsible and transparent.