

Research Fund for Coal and Steel: research programme and multiannual technical and financial guidelines

2025/0398(NLE) - 03/03/2026 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to establish the Research Programme of the Research Fund for Coal and Steel and lays down multiannual technical guidelines for the implementation of the Research Programme as well as multiannual financial guidelines for managing the assets of the Research Fund for Coal and Steel.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Decision.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: Council may adopt the act only if Parliament has given its consent to the act.

BACKGROUND: for the purposes of Protocol No 37 on the financial consequences of the expiry of the ECSC Treaty and on the Research Fund for Coal and Steel, annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty for the Functioning of the European Union, the Commission is to manage the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in liquidation and, on completion of the liquidation, the assets of the Research Fund for Coal and Steel.

The Research Programme should contribute to increasing public and private investment in research and innovation in Member States, thereby helping to reach an overall investment target of at least 3% of the Union's gross domestic product in research and development.

CONTENT: this draft Council decision establishes the **Research Programme of the Research Fund for Coal and Steel** and lays down the objectives of the Programme and its budget, the multiannual **technical guidelines** for the implementation of the Research Programme and the multiannual **financial guidelines** for managing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in liquidation and, on completion of the liquidation, the assets of the Research Fund for Coal and Steel.

Programme objectives

The Programme supports the competitiveness of sectors related to the coal and steel industry by providing support for **collaborative research** in those sectors, including on dual-use civil and military applications.

The Programme also:

- provides support for **clean steel breakthrough technologies**, contributing to the objectives of climate neutrality in the Union, and reinforcing Union strategic autonomy across the steel value chain;
- provides support for research projects for managing the **just transition** of formerly operating coal mines or coal mines in the process of closure and related infrastructure and the regions in which they are located, particularly those facing significant social, economic or environmental challenges arising from the transition of the coal and steel sectors;
- promotes **valorisation** to enhance the market relevance of research outcomes and support their potential for scalable deployment;

- supports **synergies** aiming at accelerating technological development to deployment status.

Research objectives for coal

Research projects should aim to accelerate the transition towards a climate-neutral Union economy by 2050, with the objective of:

- supporting the phasing out of **fossil fuels**;
- developing **alternative activities** on former mine sites and avoiding or addressing the environmental damage from coal mines in the process of closure, formerly operating coal mines and the regions in which coal mines are located.

Research projects should envisage: (i) **new and improved technologies** to avoid environmental pollution, including methane leakage, associated greenhouse emissions and contamination of water tables, of coal mines in the process of closure, formerly operating mines and their surroundings (including the atmosphere, land, soils and water); (ii) solutions for managing and reusing mining wastes, improving circularity, restoring environment, and (iii) technologies to restore and protect sites from long-term effects.

Research objectives for steel

Research projects should aim to develop, demonstrate and improve sustainable and low carbon steelmaking and finishing processes with a view to raising product quality, increasing productivity and decreasing strategic dependencies. Research projects should:

- focus on developing **advanced, sustainable and low carbon steel** products;
- pay particular attention on the continuous development of **skills** adapted to the evolution of the sector towards new net-zero-carbon processes, as well as the improvement of working conditions, promotion of high health and safety standards and sustainable livelihoods;
- accelerate the use of **digital technologies**, including artificial intelligence and machine learning, in steel production and use.

Budget

The financial envelope of the Research Programme for the period **1 January 2027 to 31 December 2034** should consist of the following: (a) any amounts of the annual allocation which were made available to the Research Fund for Coal and Steel as a result of the cancellation of budgetary commitments; (b) any remaining assets and profits generated by remaining assets; (c) the amounts of previous annual allocations not yet entered in the budget.

Guidelines

The guidelines for the Research Programme are designed to enable a more flexible approach in its implementation and should thus further simplify access and maximise the effectiveness and impact of the funding under that programme.

The actions should primarily take the form of research projects covering the whole range from low to high Technology Readiness Levels, allowing for greater participation of industry, including small and medium-sized enterprises, and public and academic entities.