

ÖAW Earth System Sciences (ESS) Call 2024

Changing Alps – Multiple conflicts between production, protection, and restoration

Call begins: 14 October 2024

Submission period ends: 15 February 2025

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1. Focus and objectives of the programme

The Earth System Sciences (ESS) research programme is carried out autonomously by the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW). The programme focuses on the study of changes in ecosystems which are impacted by social and climate factors.

The United Nations Agenda 2030 and its sustainable development goals are crucial to the focus of the programme. This requires an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach. For co-producing knowledge relevant to science and society, we expect cooperation of natural, technological and social sciences, cultural studies and the humanities with selected stakeholders as well as compliance with the rules for [Responsible Science of UNESCO](#).

The three national committees (Geo/Hydro-Sciences; Global Change; Man and the Biosphere) represented at ESS serve as the interface between Austrian and international research. They define research foci and fulfil Austria's duties towards the global scientific community; an international Advisory Board supports quality assurance.

This Call invites proposals for research projects on the topic of sustainable protection and restoration of natural structures and processes in the Alps.

2024 CALL

Changing Alps – Multiple conflicts between production, protection and restoration

The superordinate objective of the Call is to pool and strengthen capacities in research and civil society, economy and politics to contribute to comprehensive, systemic and sustainable protection of nature, and to reverse the deterioration of ecosystems in Austria. Research applications should pursue this transformation process from a socio-ecological perspective and under a systemic approach by using transdisciplinary methods. Human activities should not be considered a problem but, above all, a part of the solution. We are looking for solution approaches integrating use and protection based on scientific findings that can be applied in practice.

The complexity of the issues, which may only be processed in a societal context, requires participatory structures by making use of existing knowledge and the willingness to create new knowledge in society.

2. Eligibility and expectations

The focus of the Call is on dealing with intensifying use conflicts in relation to land, bodies of water as well as natural and human resources in the entire Alpine region. Eligible projects may include topics such as conflicts concerning economic priorities and conflicts of title between the heterogeneous interests of local interest groups. Approaches that contribute to a better understanding of processes, work on transformative solution approaches for conflict solution and improving the current situation, and embody a co-creative research design are welcome. The focus is on conflict solutions and nature-based solutions, with measures that achieve at least two goals at the same time, such as, e.g., protection and use (Win2), being given priority. Participatory methods (citizen science, living labs, etc.) may be applied.

This Call refers to the Alps, including the socio-ecologically connected Alpine Foreland and the regions of national parks in Austria. Its aim is to improve environmental protection and biological diversity in Austria by 2030. Regional studies and metastudies as well as a comparison with other Alpine regions in Europe are eligible projects.

The application must describe, on the basis of the methods used, the understanding of transdisciplinarity, the selection and involvement of stakeholders, and how that claim is intended to be fulfilled.

Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary project teams should include members of at least two different fields of social sciences, the humanities, natural sciences or technological sciences, and at least one stakeholder group or one institutional stakeholder should be involved. Ways towards a more effective implementation of current legislation, new obligations, measures, goals and governance mechanisms in a local, regional and national context should be shown. Project applications related to international research programmes and strategies (e.g. EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030), the strategic plans of UNESCO and implementation of the goals of the EU Missions, in particular in Austria, or contributing to the implementation of the Agenda 2030 at a national level are explicitly welcome. This also applies to cooperation with UNESCO protected areas (biosphere parks and geoparks), sites of ecological long-term monitoring (LTER sites and LTSE platforms) or national parks; letters of intent from the relevant institutions must be submitted together with the application.

Project management by young researchers from postdoc level upwards would be desirable. The funded projects must reflect the state of the art in the relevant research fields, their methods must comply with applicable scientific standards and use a problem-focused approach.

3. Application procedure

Project applications must follow international standards in research funding. The applications must be written in English and will be evaluated by international experts. The form used for evaluation can be downloaded [here](#). The project budget is between a minimum of EUR 300,000 and a maximum of EUR 500,000, and will be made available for a limited term of three years. Under the ESS programme no overheads can be accounted for.

The applicant will act as "Responsible PI" throughout the term of the project and will be responsible for project coordination and accounting by all parties involved. The Responsible PI must be affiliated with an Austrian research institution. All funds will flow through that institution. While collaboration with international partners is welcome, the project management must be situated in Austria. A maximum of 25% of the funds may go to foreign partners; awarding of funds to foreign project partners must be well-founded. Multidisciplinary project work should be recognisable from the application by stating an additional maximum of two co-project managers from different disciplines.

The [form](#) available on the ÖAW website must be used for submitting the application. The application including tables, illustrations, bibliographical references and short CVs (stating the expertise relevant to the project) must not exceed 20 pages. It must contain a precise description of the research question and methods, as well as a schedule and budget plan, including a Gantt chart and the planned work packages. Detailed CVs, a detailed [budget overview](#), and letters of intent from cooperation partners may be transmitted in the form of an Annex.

By submitting their documents, applicants acknowledge that the documents will be forwarded to members of the jury and external experts. Data and documents will exclusively be forwarded for the purpose of evaluation of the application and ensuring the best possible decision-making with regard to the award of funds. All persons involved in the programme are subject to an obligation to maintain secrecy (see also [Data Protection Information of ÖAW](#)).

Any queries should be directed to the following address.

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3.1 Selection process

ÖAW abides by the [Guidelines of Good Scientific Practice](#) of the Austrian Agency for Research Integrity (ÖAWI). All applications will be checked for plagiarism using Similarity (Turnitin). Violations of the rules of good scientific practice will result in immediate exclusion of the application. Applications which do not meet the formal requirements of the Call will be excluded from the procedure as well. All remaining applications eligible for selection will be presented to the ESS Advisory Board. They will be evaluated by international experts. At least two evaluation reports will be obtained for each application. In well-founded specific cases, applicants may exclude up to three persons. The names of those persons must be listed in a separate letter in the Annex.

Selection of the projects recommended for funding will take place at a meeting of the ESS Advisory Board. The final decision on awarding projects will be made by the Board of the Austrian Academy of Sciences jointly with the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research. Applicants will be notified of the decision in due time, and the decision will contain a brief factual justification. Anonymised excerpts from the evaluation reports will be made available.

3.2 Project support and evaluation

At the beginning of the term of the projects selected for funding, a workshop on transdisciplinary methods, and for June 2026 an "ESS Symposium" is planned. After half of the term the projects will be evaluated by the ESS Advisory Board during a compulsory workshop in which all funded projects will present their findings and results obtained by then. If the project does not progress, suspension of payment of the next project instalment may be recommended until the shortcomings have been remedied. If a project team does not attend the workshop for a justified reason, an interim report must be transmitted to the ESS Program Management. A final report must be submitted no later than three months after the end of the project. Project holders will be informed of the requirements for the final report if their project is awarded funding. The report will be reviewed by the ESS Advisory Board. Shortcomings, if any, must be remedied within a period of three months. The final project instalment (10% of the approved budget total) will be paid after final approbation of the final report by the ESS Advisory Board.

We expect the research results to be published in internationally recognised journals and to be made effective for societal action in a suitable form.

4. Schedule

The following schedule applies to the 2024 Call of the Earth System Sciences (ESS) programme of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW):

14 October 2024	Call for proposals
15 February 2025	Deadline for submission of applications (email date)
Summer 2025	Decision on awarding of projects