

Review and assessment framework for collaboration with the fossil fuel sector

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Committee of Experts on ties to the fossil fuel industry

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Introduction

It is the mission of Erasmus University Rotterdam (hereinafter: EUR) to have a positive social impact. Driven by its commitment to social responsibility, EUR aims to contribute meaningfully to the understanding and resolution of key societal transition challenges. In addition to fundamental, curiosity-driven research, EUR therefore also conducts impact-driven research. In education, students learn to use their knowledge and skills to help understand and address complex challenges.

Issues of (environmental) sustainability play a major role in this. Following student protests, a series of internal dialogues on sustainability were held, during which a widely shared concern was expressed that collaborations with fossil fuel companies and organisations could conflict with EUR's mission. The EUR community has therefore called for the development of a framework to assess such collaborations. This framework aims to transparently evaluate choices made to help secure our values in teaching, research and engagement, where academic freedom and independence remain primary principles. Providing a review and assessment framework is part of our social responsibility and protects EUR's independent position as a public knowledge institution.

To arrive at such a review and assessment framework, EUR's Executive Board (hereinafter: EB) has set up a Committee of Experts. The Committee of Experts comprises subject matter experts from various disciplines, as well as a representative from the University Council and the services departments, and an external expert on ethics and sustainability. The Committee of Experts is led by Prof. Arwin van Buuren (Strategic Dean Impact and Engagement) and Dr Bas Karreman (Associate Professor of Strategy Economics, ESE).

Various internal and external EUR stakeholders were consulted in the development of this framework. In addition, (procedural) coordination took place with the Advisory Committee on Sensitive Collaborations (ACSC). The final version of the review and assessment framework was presented to the EB on 6 May 2025.

This review and assessment framework provides concrete criteria that staff and students in faculties, departments and affiliated private entities can use to assess the extent to which existing and new collaborations align with the university's mission and remit.

The Committee of Experts recommends that the EB adopts the proposed review and assessment framework and develops an implementation plan for it. This plan should then be shared with EUR staff, students, the broader scientific community and the public.

Background

Global warming is creating major and irreversible consequences for society. In 2015, the Paris Climate Agreement was signed by the Netherlands.¹ This agreement sets a target of limiting global warming to a maximum increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius. To achieve this objective, a fundamental transition in many areas is unavoidable.

The climate and ecological state of emergency was recognised by EUR in 2023.² By recognising the state of emergency, the university endorses the need for urgent and coordinated action to counter the effects of climate change and the destruction of ecosystems. EUR aims to have a net positive impact on the climate and ecosystems. EUR policy aims to align with the goals of the Paris Agreement.

The fossil fuel industry is by far the largest contributor to global carbon emissions. It is for this reason that working with partners from this sector requires particular care. In order to increase EUR's contribution to the global transition to a sustainable society, in spring 2024, the EB decided to tighten the principles for entering into or maintaining collaborative partnerships with the fossil fuel sector.

The Committee of Experts was tasked by the EB to formulate guidelines for collaboration with the fossil fuel industry, which includes formulating a moral minimum regarding divestment from fossil fuels. In doing so, attention should be paid to the efforts and ambitions these companies display in their commitment to contribute to a sustainable future beyond the lower limit. A demonstrable and feasible “divesting from fossil fuel” policy is a prerequisite for this.

In drafting the present review and assessment framework, the Committee of Experts took the proposal of the internal sustainability dialogues as a starting point (as well as the EB's response to it), supplemented by an analysis of existing frameworks at other Dutch knowledge institutions and insights from discussions with various sections within EUR. The proposed framework includes advice for a moral minimum in relation to the Paris Agreement targets, which fossil fuel companies we collaborate with must meet. It also contains criteria that the relevant collaboration projects must meet. This review and assessment framework is a first step towards working together to have a positive social impact, where there is no longer a role for companies that have a negative impact on the climate.

¹Netherlands Emissions Authority. (16 February 2017.) *Paris Climate Agreement*. Accessed from: <https://www.emissieautoriteit.nl/onderwerpen/klimaatakkoord-van-parijs>; United Nations (2015). *Paris Agreement*. Accessed from: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf.

² EUR (2023). *Erasmus University Rotterdam formally recognises the climate and ecological state of emergency*. Erasmus University Rotterdam. Accessed from: <https://my.eur.nl/nl/eur/nieuws/erasmus-universiteit-rotterdam-erkent-klimaat-en-ecologische-noodtoestand>.

Scope

The review and assessment framework applies to collaborations entered into by EUR, EUR faculties and EUR-affiliated persons or entities with the fossil fuel sector in the field of teaching, research and/or engagement.

Definition of fossil fuel sector collaboration: a fossil fuel sector collaboration exists if an EUR-affiliated person enters into an arrangement or agreement with an external party belonging to or affiliated with the fossil fuel sector.

Definition of external party belonging to the fossil fuel sector: a private or public company, organisation or institution that exploits (petroleum) oil, (natural) gas, coal and other consumable fuels, or engages in related activities of extraction, drilling, exploration, refining and production.

Definition of external party affiliated with the fossil fuel sector: a private or public company, organisation or institution that is a subsidiary of an external party that is part of the fossil fuel sector or is directly or indirectly controlled by an external party that is part of the fossil fuel sector.³

Definition of EUR-affiliated persons: employees of EUR, including the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, EUR Holding, Erasmus Enterprise, Erasmus Trustfonds Foundation and RSM BV. This includes persons with a hospitality contract with EUR and students (including study associations) who enter into a collaboration on behalf of or related to the university.

Definition of arrangement or agreement: an agreement relating to research, teaching or engagement entered into by or on behalf of EUR-affiliated persons with an external party making a contribution in cash or in kind to the proposed project. Examples include formalised or other agreements on services, such as (not exhaustive):

- direct or indirect financial support (including sponsorship and funds);
- the hiring of third parties;
- guest lectures, business presentations and other activities (including recruitment activities) on campus;
- co-branding or using partners' branding identity;
- (shared) licences;
- the collecting and using of data;
- the valorisation of the outcomes of scientific research.

The following are not within the scope of the above collaborations:

- Non-formalised individual collaborations that take the shape of informal knowledge exchanges between experts, for example, within a particular field. The framework does not apply to these collaborations. The Committee of Experts *does* advise the staff concerned to consult the guidelines to avoid entering into collaborations that do not align with EUR policy.

³ For the feasibility of this review and assessment framework, the Orbis database is used to determine whether an external party is affiliated with the fossil fuel sector. The Orbis database is available through the university library. See Annex 2 for a visual roadmap of how to use Orbis.

- Collaborations in the context of EUR's operational management, such as with procurement partners. These types of collaborations have different characteristics and processes. They therefore require separate policies.

Source justification and moral minimum

As outlined in the review and assessment framework below, an important condition for collaboration with fossil fuel industry partners is that the partner in question effectively and credibly works towards achieving the targets of the Paris Agreement. There are several sources available online that provide information on this. These sources are often complex, incomplete and/or influenced by the compilers' intentions.

The Committee of Experts therefore suggests using two simple, accessible, independent and data-driven sources:

1. To determine the extent to which the Paris Agreement targets are effectively worked towards, it recommends the Transition Pathway Initiative (TPI) of the Grantham Institute at the London School of Economics, which monitors carbon emissions and targets for various sectors.⁴ For major gas and oil companies, it indicates whether they meet the Paris Agreement targets.⁵

The monitor is transparent about its sources and method of analysis. The Committee of Experts thus considers TPI an authoritative and reliable source.

2. To determine the degree of credibility regarding the Paris Agreement targets, it recommends LobbyMap by InfluenceMap,⁶ a UK-based non-profit community interest company. LobbyMap provides an independent, data-driven assessment of how companies and their industry associations influence the policies and regulations needed to transform the global economy into a zero-emissions economy.⁷

The database is transparent about its sources and method of analysis.⁸ The Committee of Experts thus considers LobbyMap an authoritative and reliable source.

The **moral minimum** is that our partners have committed to reducing their carbon emissions to such an extent that they stay within the 2-degree temperature rise by 2035 and the 1.5-degree rise by 2050, as shown by data from TPI. In addition, our partners have no obstructionist involvement in climate policy, as indicated by a score of C or higher from LobbyMap. This moral minimum is reflected in the partner-level test we will present in the next section.

⁴ The London School of Economics and Political Science & Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment (n.d.). *Transition Pathway Initiative*. Accessed from: <https://www.transitionpathwayinitiative.org/>.

⁵ There is a one-year delay between the time of data entry and the time when the data are available in the database.

⁶ InfluenceMap (n.d.). *LobbyMap*. Accessed from: <https://lobbymax.org/index.html>.

⁷ *Policy engagement* is defined as a range of business activities, such as: advertising, social media, public relations, research sponsorship, direct contact with regulators and elected officials, campaign financing and participation in policy advisory committees. United Nations Global Compact (2013). *The Guide for Responsible Corporate Engagement in Climate Policy*. Accessed from: <https://unglobalcompact.org/library/501>.

⁸ There is a two-year delay between the time of data entry and the time when the data become available in the database.

Review and assessment framework

Concerning a potential collaborative relationship with an external party belonging to or affiliated with the fossil fuel sector, the following review and assessment framework should be followed.

Step 1: Partner-level test⁹

- A) Is the intended collaboration partner part of or affiliated with the fossil fuel sector?
 - Yes: go to question B.
 - No: this policy does not apply to the potential collaboration. Check within the organisation whether other policies apply.
- B) Is the intended collaboration partner a company listed in TPI or affiliated to such a company?¹⁰
 - Yes: go to question C.
 - No: go to step 2 (project-level assessment).
- C) According to TPI, does the company's or parent company's carbon performance policy meet the cumulative requirements of "below 2 degrees" in 2035 and "below 1.5 degrees" in 2050?¹¹
 - Yes: go to question D.
 - No: the company is not suitable as a collaboration partner (outcome).
- D) Is the intended collaboration partner a company listed in LobbyMap or affiliated to such a company?¹²
 - Yes: go to question E.
 - No: go to step 2 (project-level assessment).
- E) According to LobbyMap, does the company or parent company have an overall rating score of C, B or A in terms of policy advocacy and links with industry associations?¹³
 - Yes: go to step 2 (project-level assessment).
 - No: the company is not suitable as a collaboration partner (outcome).

Step 2: Project-level assessment

If the intended collaboration partner meets the partner-level test (i.e. the moral minimum), a project-level assessment is required to determine whether collaboration can occur responsibly. Preferably, a project or collaboration should aim to help accelerate the energy transition.¹⁴ As a minimum requirement, the project or collaboration should not have negative effects on the climate and living environment. In this context, information on the following elements of the project or individual collaboration should be sought and assessed:

- Do the project objectives/goals for collaboration and the activities to be carried out within the project/collaboration have no negative impact on the climate and cause no ecological harm?

⁹ Consortia consisting for less than half of fossil fuel sector partners or consortia where fossil fuel sector partners do not have a predominant influence on the consortium should go through the project-level assessment (step 2).

¹⁰ See Annex 2 for a visual roadmap for using Orbis.

¹¹ See Annex 3 for a visual roadmap for using TPI. In this instance, the 2050 standard takes precedence over the 2035 standard: the company is required to adhere to the "below 1.5 degrees" standard for 2050 and (with a margin of error of both 2.5% above and below the line) meet the "below 2 degrees" standard by 2035.

¹² See Annex 2 for a visual roadmap for using Orbis.

¹³ The lower limit for meeting the requirements of this assessment framework is a C-, according to LobbyMap.

¹⁴ We consider the energy transition in a broad sense, and thus consider it part of the required socio-economic transition.

- Are contractual agreements in place with the collaboration partner regarding the use of and communication about the project or partnership (and the results thereof), in such a way that dual use and greenwashing can be prevented?¹⁵
- Is it possible to ensure a balanced collaboration relationship with the intended collaboration partner in order to avoid one-sided opinion-forming by the intended collaboration partner? (This is especially important in teaching and engagement activities, such as company days and guest lectures.) In addition, can we ensure academic freedom?

If all the questions of step 2 can be answered positively, it is possible to enter into the relevant project or collaboration with the intended collaboration partner.

Transitional provisions regarding ongoing collaborations

For short-term collaborations with fossil fuel industry partners (one year or less) entered into before this review and assessment framework came into force, the advice is to finalise them. For long-term collaborations, we recommend reviewing them within one year of this review and assessment framework coming into force to ensure adherence. Should the review indicate that the collaboration does not meet the conditions set out in this review and assessment framework, the collaboration should in principle be terminated.

¹⁵ Greenwashing is a term used to describe behaviour or activities that make one believe a company is doing more to protect the environment than it really is. Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.). *Greenwashing*. Accessed from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/greenwashing>; United Nations. (s.d.). *Greenwashing – the deceptive tactics behind environmental claims* | United Nations. Accessed from: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/greenwashing>. In this context, dual use refers to research and gathered information that has a positive social impact as its goal, but which may be used incorrectly or with bad intentions to promote the economic position of companies or organisations in the fossil fuel sector. European Commission (n.d.). *Exporting dual-use items*. Accessed from: https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/help-exporters-and-importers/exporting-dual-use-items_en.

Underlying considerations

This section outlines the main considerations we took into account in formulating this advice.

Creating the greatest possible **positive societal impact** and ensuring that our teaching and research **do not damage the climate and ecosystems** is the underlying objective of the assignment to define a moral minimum as a condition for collaboration, and, above that lower limit, to formulate the expectation that both the partner and the (intended) collaboration contribute to a sustainable future. Based on these principles, a review framework for collaboration partners is proposed (see p. 8), which independently determines whether the partner is implementing a transition policy in line with the targets of the 2015 Paris Agreement. Partners' efforts to contribute to a sustainable future above this lower limit are taken into account in the assessment of lobbying activities within the partner-level test. In addition, the project-level assessment ensures that the collaboration project contributes to the energy transition without having a negative impact.

Academic integrity, independence of scholarship, and academic freedom and responsibility weigh heavily in this advice. According to the KNAW-DJA, a broad definition of academic freedom is used, which gives scholars not only the right but also the responsibility to conduct independent research and teaching.¹⁶ Herein, a responsibility lies with the institution to enable staff to be able to do so by avoiding conflicts of interest or the appearance thereof and protecting individual scholars, as well as avoiding dependence on the non-scientific interests of partners. This institutional framework promotes the freedom that scholars and employees need to perform their work responsibly by setting conditions for collaboration that prevent conflicts of interest.

Another important consideration is the potential **impact** of collaborations on the **university's reputation and trust in science**. As the report by the alliance of All European Academies (ALLEA) shows,¹⁷ collaboration with partners from the fossil fuel sector mainly undermines trust in scientific institutions through greenwashing. This review and assessment framework counteracts this by: (i) establishing a partner-level test to independently assess the reliability and credibility of a partner's climate policy; (ii) promoting project-level contractual agreements to ensure EUR's consent to the use of results from the collaboration for marketing or other secondary purposes; and (iii) ensuring the transparency of (the terms of) EUR collaborations.

¹⁶ The Young Academy (2023). *Thinking space. An analysis of structural threats to academic freedom and integrity*. Amsterdam, KNAW. <https://www.dejongeakademie.nl/publicaties/2495595.aspx>.

¹⁷ ALLEA, "Ethical Problems for Research Institutions Collaborating with Commercial Entities" (2025). ALLEA, DOI: 10.26356/ALLEA-ETHICAL-PROBLEMS-RESEARCH-INSTITUTIONS: <https://allea.org/portfolio-item/allea-statement-on-ethical-problems-in-research-collaborations-with-commercial-entities/>; Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2018): <https://www.know.nl/publicaties/nederlandse-gedragcode-wetenschappelijke-integriteit>.

Annexes

1. Committee of Experts member list
2. Roadmap for using Orbis
3. Roadmap for using TPI
4. Literature

Annex 1 – Committee of Experts member list

Chairs

- Prof. Arwin van Buuren (EUR Strategic Dean Impact & Engagement);
- Dr Bas Karreman (Director of Engagement at the Erasmus School of Economics).

Members

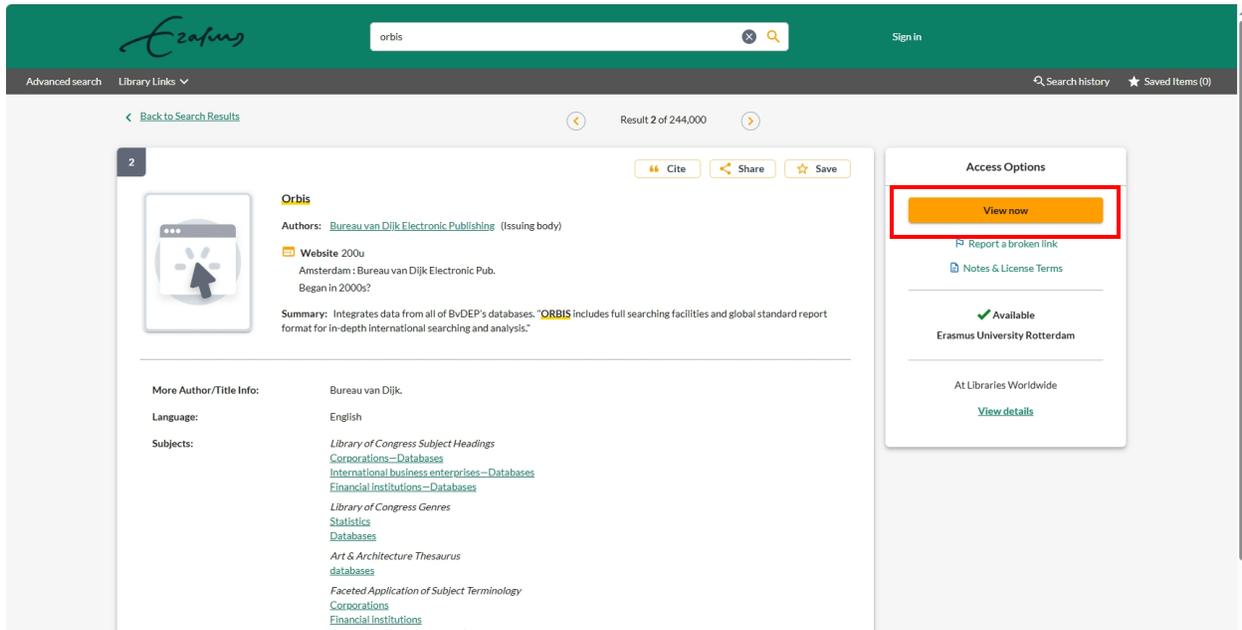
- Dr Margo Strijbosch (Engagement & Research Services) (until 24 Sept. 2024);
- Dr Michiel Besters (Engagement & Research Services) (from 14 Jan. 2025);
- Prof. Liesbeth Enneking (Erasmus School of Law);
- Prof. Constanze Binder (Erasmus School of Philosophy);
- Prof. Dirk Schoenmaker (Rotterdam School of Management);
- Max Wagenaar, BSc (University Council member);
- Prof. Behnam Taebi (Delft University of Technology).

Official Secretaries:

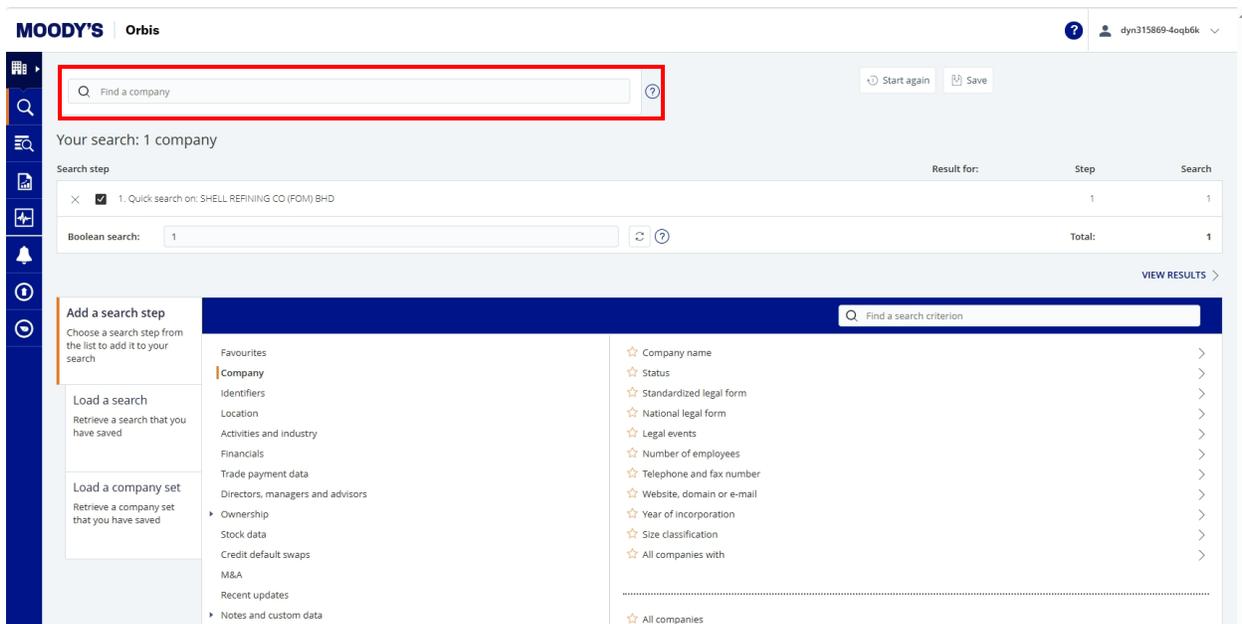
- Fiona Verkerk (Academic Affairs);
- Laura Rolsma (Academic Affairs);
- Linda de Vreede (Academic Affairs).

Annex 2 – Roadmap for using Orbis

Step 1: access Orbis via the EUR university library website (VPN connection required).



Step 2: find the relevant company by entering the company name in the **Find a company** search screen.



Step 3: check the affiliates by clicking the **Corporate group** under the **Corporate ownership** heading. This screen gives information about the parent company, affiliates and the total ownership percentage.

Report ⋮ < Back to Current subsidiaries Actions Explore Excel PDF th USD

SHELL PLC
LONDON, United Kingdom

Active
BvD ID: GB04366849 Orbis ID: 011212252

Publicly quoted
This company is the Global Ultimate Owner of the corporate group

< > Corporate group

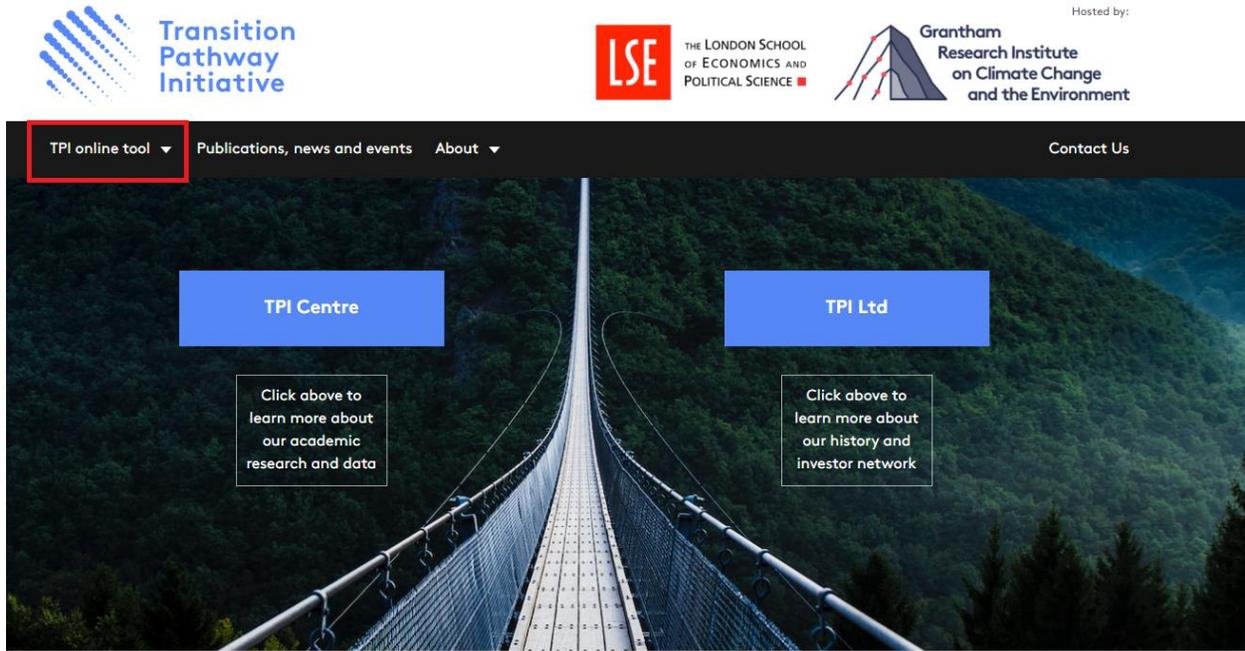
Filter by + Add/remove columns A-Z

There are 1,912 companies in the corporate group

Name	Country	Ownership		level of own.	Info	
		Direct %	Total %		Source	Date
Global Ultimate Owner						
SHELL PLC	GB					
Ultimately owned subsidiaries						
AMBER BALTIC WIND 10 SP. Z O.O. W LIKWIDACJI	PL	100.00	100.00	1	RM	12/2023
AMBER BALTIC WIND 11 SP. Z O.O. W LIKWIDACJI	PL	100.00	100.00	1	RM	12/2023
AMBER BALTIC WIND 7 SP. Z O.O. W LIKWIDACJI	PL	100.00	100.00	1	RM	12/2023
AMBER BALTIC WIND 8 SP. Z O.O. W LIKWIDACJI	PL	100.00	100.00	1	RM	12/2023
▶ CRI/CRITERION INC.	US	100.00	100.00	1	WW	12/2019
▶ DAYSTAR POWER ENERGY SOLUTIONS LTD	NG	100.00	100.00	1	WO	12/2023
GREEN TIE SL'S 2000MW 10 PHOTOVOLTAIC PROJECTS PORTFOLIO IN SPAIN	ES	100.00	100.00	1	Z	12/2022
▶ PECTEN BRAZIL EXPLORATION INC	US	100.00	100.00	1	RM	12/2023

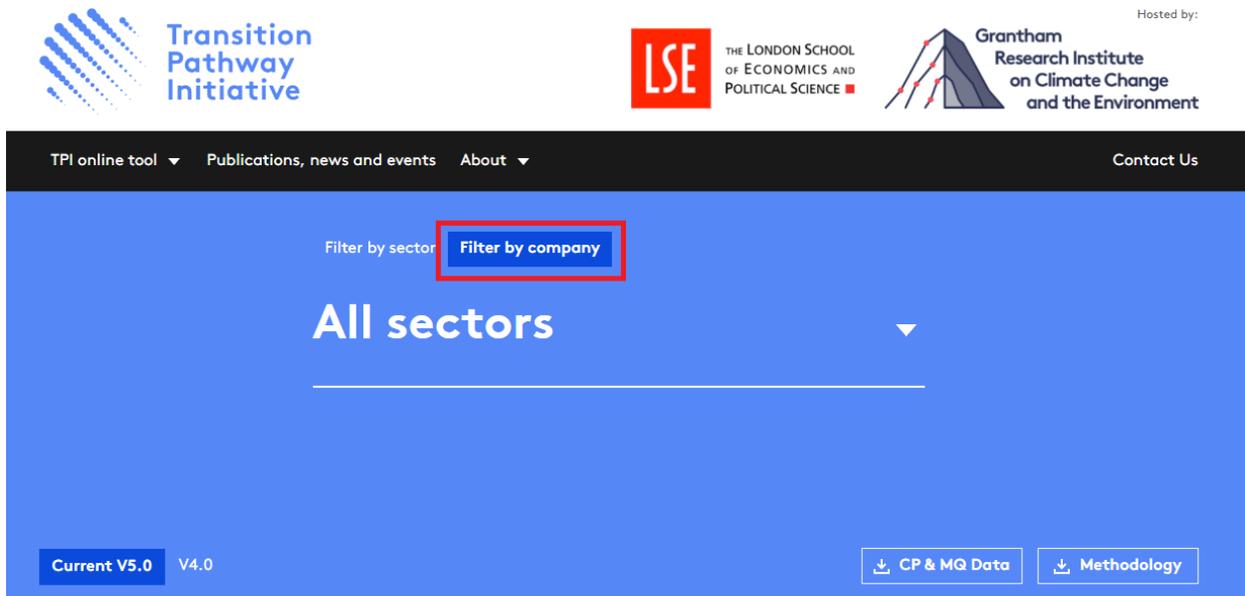
Annex 3 – Roadmap for using TPI

Step 1: go to the Transition Pathway Initiative(<https://www.transitionpathwayinitiative.org/>) and go to **Corporates (CP & MQ)** via TPI online tool.

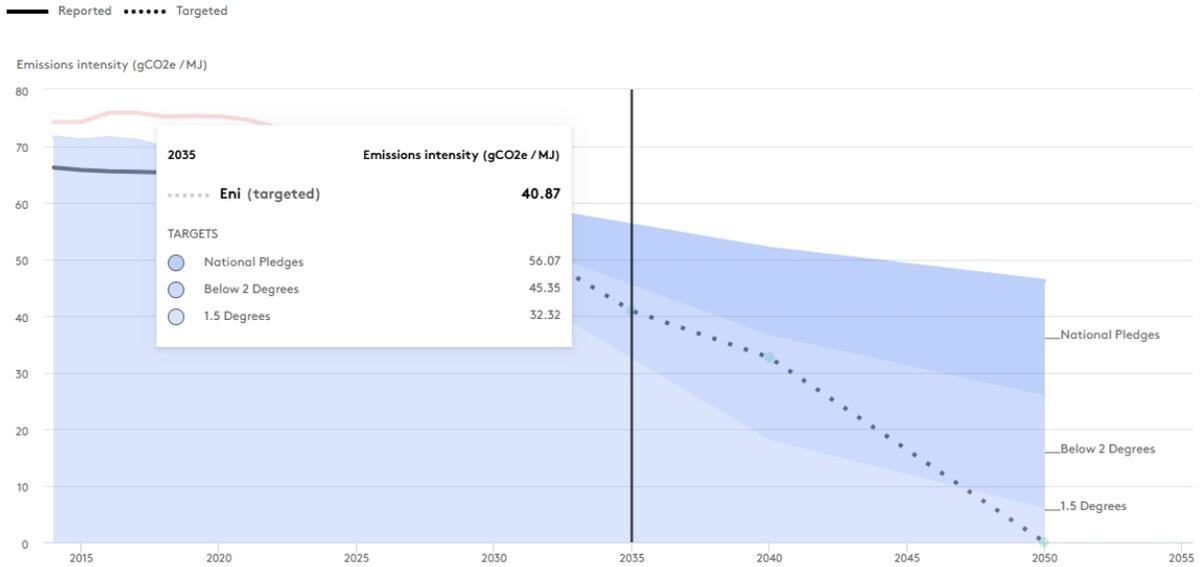


Check out TPI Centre's assessment tools

Step 2: find the relevant company using **Filter by company**.



Step 3: check the carbon performance figures for 2035. The numbers appear when you move the cursor to the year 2035. The example below shows that, to meet the “below 2 degrees” criterion, the emissions intensity target needs to be 45,350,143 or lower. Since, in this particular example, ENI has a targeted carbon intensity of 40.87 for 2035, it meets the criterion.



Step 4: repeat step 3 for 2050. (Note that, in 2050, the “below 1.5” degrees criterion applies.)

Annex 4 – Literature

ALLEA (2025). *Ethical Problems for Research Institutions Collaborating with Commercial Entities*. Accessed from: <https://allea.org/portfolio-item/allea-statement-on-ethical-problems-in-research-collaborations-with-commercial-entities/>.

Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.). *Greenwashing*. Accessed from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/greenwashing>.

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KNAW (2018). *Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity*. Accessed from: <https://www.knaw.nl/publicaties/nederlandse-gedragscode-wetenschappelijke-integriteit>.

Netherlands Emissions Authority (2017). *Paris Climate Agreement*. Accessed from: <https://www.emissieautoriteit.nl/onderwerpen/klimaatakkoord-van-parijs>.

The London School of Economics and Political Science & Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment (n.d.). *Transition Pathway Initiative*. Accessed from: <https://www.transitionpathwayinitiative.org/>.

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United Nations (2015). *Paris Agreement*. Accessed from: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf.

United Nations Global Compact (2013). *The Guide for Responsible Corporate Engagement in Climate Policy*. Accessed from: <https://unglobalcompact.org/library/501>.

World Health Organization (2020). *What is dual-use research of concern?* Accessed from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/what-is-dual-use-research-of-concern>.