




# HORIZON EUROPE

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## THE EU RESEARCH & INNOVATION PROGRAMME

2021 – 2027

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# Intervention Area Democracy & Governance

“Europe’s future in a fractured world will depend on having a strong democracy and on defending the values that give us the freedoms and rights that we cherish” (*Political Guidelines 2024-2029*)

The research funded by this call will support the ongoing EU efforts (European Democracy Action Plan from 2020; European Democracy Shield from 2025 ...) to address threats to democratic systems, arising from both internal and external sources, and to rebuild citizens’ trust in democracy, including by responding to their social and economic needs.

## Expected impact (Horizon Europe Strategic Plan 2025-2027):

Democratic governance is reinvigorated by improving the **accountability**, **transparency**, **effectiveness** and **trustworthiness** of **rule-of-law** based institutions and policies and through the expansion of active and inclusive **citizenship** empowered by the safeguarding of **fundamental rights**.



### TO DO LIST

- Always take the **gender dimension** into account in the design of your proposal
- Clustering** and **cooperation** with other projects encouraged



# Destination Innovative Research on Democracy and Governance (2026)

## 10 topics

- 8 Research & Innovation Actions (RIA)
- 1 Innovation Actions (IA)
- 1 Coordination & Support Actions (CSA)



## HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-DEMOCRACY-01:

# Tackling gender-based violence against politically active women and LGBTIQ people (RIA)

€ 12 million / 3 projects

- Intersectional approach
- Multidisciplinary research combining quantitative and qualitative data
- Cooperation with previous or ongoing projects
- FAIR data principles

### Scope

- Rising intersection between **politically motivated violence** and **gender-based violence (GBV)** targeting women and LGBTIQ people in public life, including political aspirants,
- Violence occurring **online and offline** (e.g., harassment, hate speech, disinformation, deepfakes, sexualised attacks)
- Strong **chilling effect on democratic participation**, including withdrawal from political engagement
- Need to analyse **drivers, narratives and structural factors**, including crises and intersecting discrimination factors
- Exploration of **impacts on aspirations and participation trajectories** (including those not yet politically active)
- Examination of the **role of media, cultural representations, digital platforms and relevant EU legislation** (e.g. DSA)
- **Engagement of civil society, affected groups and men and boys** in prevention efforts

### Expected outcomes

- **Enhanced understanding** of drivers and impacts of violence against politically active women and LGBTIQ people
- **Enhanced prevention and early intervention**, based on evidence on impacts and participation trajectories
- Uptake of **evidence-based policy recommendations** to tackle GBV, counter harmful narratives and promote equal participation
- Better adherence to **ethical, gender-sensitive and intersectional media guidelines**
- Stronger **inclusive political environments**, supporting participation of underrepresented groups

## HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-DEMOCRACY-02:

### Understanding the forms of local democracy in low-income and low-middle income countries (RIA)

€ 12 million / 3 projects

#### Scope

- International cooperation particularly encouraged
- FAIR data principles

- **Increasing democratic backsliding** and human rights rollbacks globally, fueled by internal instability and **external interference** promoting non-democratic models
- These trends represent **security risks** for European citizens and businesses, and **destabilisation** in regions where the EU has diplomatic and economic interests
- Proposals should **gather evidence** on how actors in economic, political, and social ecosystems at the local level could foster democratic practices, increase citizens' trust, improve transparency of decision making, and promote respect for human rights.
- Proposals are encouraged to gather evidence on **different forms of democratic participation and governance at local level**.

#### Expected outcomes

- Provide **science-based toolkits** and training models to help EU leaders proactively reduce inequality, protect **human rights** and **democracy**
- Promote **democratic values, principles and practices** in low- and low-middle income countries
- Access and use of **evidence-based good practices** for working in **fragile contexts**
- Better understanding of the role and impact of **decentralisation processes in low-income and low-middle income countries**
- Better understanding of **link between efficient delivery of public services and prodemocratic sentiment** in the countries; and/or **better tools** for civil society organisations, and other relevant actors to promote democratic practices

# HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-DEMOCRACY-03: Government in transition – how governments change the way they work and prepare the civil service for the future (RIA)

Scope

€ 8 million / 2 projects

- Cooperation with previous or ongoing projects

- **Enhancing government capacities to define strategies and develop complex public policies** in a swiftly evolving context is imperative.
- **The call topic therefore aims at** furnishing a precise depiction of the condition of public service in EU Member States and Associated Countries (MS/AC); highlighting the current challenges for governments to manage, the general state of the civil service and the evolution of related public employment management, including HR policy; the organisational framework conditions conducive to innovation; and organisational development efforts.
- Proposals should cover the following three focus areas: **New governance paradigm; Innovative approaches to public service and policy development; and New public employment management and civil service empowerment.**

## Expected outcomes

- Country government innovation **info sheets, trends, good practices and innovative solutions** for next-generation governance and future-informed public decision making in EU Member States and Associated Countries (MS/AC).
- **Policy recommendations** for EU and MS/AC level actions on new governance paradigms, and strategies for internal government innovation efforts.
- **Publication of lessons learned** to enlighten government officials and the public about internal innovation strategies and impactful solutions in national governments.
- A comprehensive **Massive Online Open Course** for government officials with relevant examples and cases.
- **Closer collaboration among MS/AC** (and other actors) to leverage national capabilities in innovative governance and maintain peer learning.

## HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-DEMOCRACY-04: Sustainable paths to media viability (IA)

€ 12 million / 3 projects

- Cooperation with previous or ongoing projects
- FAIR data principles

### Scope

- Severe **economic pressure on journalistic newsrooms**, as social media and "infotainment" platforms force quality journalism to compete with unverified, low-quality, or malicious sources
- To compete in the digital age, **European media need to embrace innovation**
- An **early adoption and usage of new technologies** is key to adapt and open new markets
- Applicants are therefore invited to **work together with news media organisations** to enhance innovation across the news media sectors, including by **designing industrial and user-driven applications**
- Innovation projects should focus on **concrete ways to help journalistic content serve democracy**
- Proposals are encouraged to **investigate the behavioural dimensions of news consumption**, focusing on how reader habits, trust, and perceptions influence engagement with journalism; and to **explore the evolving trust dynamics between human-curated journalism and AI-driven news delivery**

### Expected outcomes

- **Reinforced digital transformation** of the news media industry by facilitating the development of new business models, contributing to more resilient and inclusive democracies
- **Empower systemically disadvantaged citizens** by providing tools to help them make informed decisions and enhancing media's role in a fair, reinvigorated democracy
- Stronger **engagement with emerging media creators** (such as influencers and other online content producers) to promote transparency and accountability in their role in sharing information, and to foster reliance on trustworthy media sources.

# HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-DEMOCRACY-05: Research and Innovation Network for a Union of Equality (CSA)

€ 4.5 million / 1 project

- Recommended duration: 4 years.
- Cooperation with previous/ongoing project(s)

## Scope

- The proposed network should bring together academics, public bodies & civil society to collaborate and promote the advancement of inclusive, equal, and resilient democratic societies
- **Key activities:** Develop an online platform for evidence-based tools; Host an annual forum for stakeholders, Foresight activities

## Expected outcomes

- Policymakers are made aware and are equipped with the knowledge and tools to integrate inclusive and intersectional perspectives into their policymaking, which strengthens their capacity to promote and protect democracy, fundamental rights, and EU values.
- Researchers gain insights on how to translate their findings on intersectional inequalities and democracy into actionable, evidence-based recommendations, enabling them to effectively inform policy and practice at local, regional, national, and EU levels.
- Innovative solutions developed under Horizon Europe and other EU-funding programmes empower equally all citizens, to participate in democratic processes and decision-making.

## HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-DEMOCRACY-06: Governing global commons sustainably (RIA)

€ 12 million / 3 projects

### Scope

- Engagement with international partners is encouraged
- Collaboration with other projects is encouraged

- **Global commons are threatened** by overuse and degradation, which are further put under pressure by current geopolitical tensions, weakened multilateral cooperation, technological advances, and rising commercial interests. This requires novel approaches for their collective management.
- The aim of the call is to **develop multi- and interdisciplinary concepts and solutions for governing global commons sustainably**. A review of the effectiveness of existing legal instruments and the implementation of new instruments is needed,
- Three projects will be funded looking at **a) climate governance, b) biodiversity governance, and c) governance of spaces beyond national jurisdiction** (the latter will be looking at such spaces in a horizontal manner, e.g. ocean, polar, space)
- They should perform a comprehensive **mapping of actors' motivations and values on societal, corporate and state level**. Research is also needed on how the current governance of global commons affects intergenerational justice and human rights, including gender equality and the impact on different social groups, and how civil society can be better involved.

### Expected outcomes

- **Enhanced understanding** of the systemic challenges and the underlying drivers and motivations.
- **Improved science-policy interface vis-à-vis foreign and security policy**, including better engaged citizens and a more participatory and inclusive approach.
- **Strengthened rules-based multilateralism** by the development of concepts, methods, processes, and information relevant for decision-making that foster the sustainable governance of global commons, also informing the EU's science diplomacy actions.

# HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-DEMOCRACY-07: Supporting post-conflict democracy and reconstruction (RIA)

€ 12 million / 3 projects

Scope

- International cooperation encouraged
- Multidisciplinary and actor-based approach
- Engage citizens and civil society organisations
- Clustering and collaboration with previous/ongoing projects

- The destruction of **infrastructure, institutions, and social fabric** in post-conflict areas risks prolonged instability, human suffering, and the total decline of **democratic governance**. Understanding the complex relationships between **democracy, inequality, and international cooperation** is essential for long-term **reconciliation and accountability**.
- Research needs to analyse the **causes and consequences of conflicts**, examining the role of historical narratives and cultural sensibilities, and gathering evidence on key factors such as ethnic violence, inequalities, and conflict legacies, to inform the development of **effective prevention, resolution, and reconciliation strategies**
- Proposals are encouraged to examine the **prevention of fractured transitions in post-conflict situations**, assessing past, present, and future divisions, and incorporating intergenerational and transgenerational perspectives
- Proposals should adopt a **collaborative and interdisciplinary approach**

## Expected outcomes

- Effective strategies for **sustainable peace and democratic reconstruction** in post-conflict zones, strengthening **integrity, stability** and **anticorruption** measures to ensure transparent, accountable, and ethical use of reconstruction aid
- Evidence-based **recommendations on international cooperation, EU democracy support, and civil society engagement** in post-conflict reconstruction
- **Local civil society organisations and community groups** provide guidance and support to educators, media professionals, public administrators, and other stakeholders on promoting reconciliation, accountability, and sustainable peace
- Specialised service providers, including NGOs and community organisations, offer **support services and programmes to veterans and the persons and groups in a vulnerable situation** affected by the conflict

# HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-DEMOCRACY-08: Electoral integrity in the digital context (RIA)

€ 12 million / 3 projects

## Scope

- Cooperation with previous or ongoing projects
- FAIR data principles.

- Digital transformation has created new avenues for engagement, but also poses significant risks to **democratic processes** through disinformation and foreign interference
- Concerns about **foreign information manipulation**, particularly from third countries like Russia, necessitate robust **cybersecurity and voter verification** measures
- Social media and **AI-powered tools** are increasingly used to artificially amplify falsehoods, manipulate public discourse, and influence **voter behaviour**
- To address these challenges, it is essential to **examine the effects of digital technologies on public opinion and governance**, and **investigate the development of ethical AI, transparent political advertising, and tools to counter misinformation, disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI)**.

## Expected outcomes

- Provide policymakers with the necessary knowledge to inform the development of **election regulations, standards and tools** that address the use of digital technologies in elections and political campaigns
- Enable organisations involved in electoral processes to develop and implement **guidelines for the responsible use of digital technologies in elections and political campaigns**, aligned with EU and national regulations
- Enhanced **transparency and accountability in AI-powered political campaigns**, achieved through requirements for AI system audits, data disclosure, transparency regarding algorithms and sources of Large Language Models (LLMs), and responsible AI development

## HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-DEMOCRACY-09: Citizenship education as part of lifelong learning (RIA)

€ 16 million / 4 projects

- Proposals should seek collaboration with the European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience

### Scope

- Look at how vocational education and training - including apprenticeships, or adult education programmes - can raise civic knowledge, political awareness, and attachment to democratic values.
- Investigate how involvement in these programmes is linked to increased civic participation.
- Test and pilot innovative methods and curricula.
- *Not mandatory*: research may also examine digital and media literacy, democratic participation among ageing populations for whom digital tools are a barrier, and/or non-digital, person-to-person approaches that support participation.

### Expected outcomes

- Tools and recommendations on lifelong civic and citizenship learning for educators, including opportunities offered by civic tech.
- Tools and recommendations to ensure the participation of citizens in democratic life, especially those who face barriers to participation in democratic processes, for policymakers at local, regional, national and EU level.

# HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-DEMOCRACY-10: Digital and media literacy as drivers for democratic and civic resilience (RIA)

€ 12 million / 3 projects

Clustering and cooperation with other selected projects under this topic and other relevant projects are strongly encouraged.

## Scope

- Research should explore patterns of user behaviours in the digital age, including an analysis of the emotional dynamics in the dissemination of disinformation and polarisation on digital platforms.
- Examine the factors that influence digital literacy, information-seeking habits, and online engagement, with a focus on improving citizen's' participation. Investigate how algorithms amplify emotive content.
- Plan a critical assessment of media and digital literacy initiatives to assess whether existing efforts are enhancing citizens' resilience, or whether new approaches are needed
- Explore the critical role digital and media literacy can play in fostering societal resilience and information integrity.
- Develop digital and media literacy strategies to counter emotionally manipulative narratives.

## Expected outcomes

- Equip societies to adapt and thrive in the face of evolving technological, political, and societal challenges.
- Empower citizens to navigate the digital landscape with discernment and critical thinking, engage actively with media and other source of information, ensuring informed democratic participation.



**DEADLINE TO APPLY**  
**!!! 23 September 2026 !!!**  
**17:00 Brussels time**



# Tips



Read the **call text**, the **general introduction** and the **general annexes** very carefully !



Start **early** & submit **before** the deadline



Do **not** draft online (use Word doc)



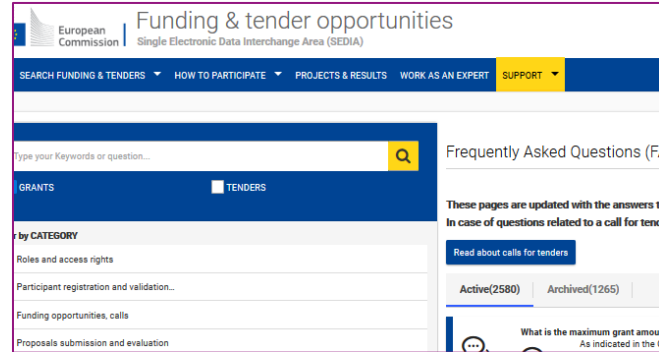
Connect to the **live webinar on 26 March** to ask questions & use the **Slido**

# Need help?



## Recorded webinars

« How to prepare a successful proposal » etc



## FAQ:

research enquiry service



National Contact Points



# Good luck!

## # HorizonEU

<http://ec.europa.eu/horizon-europe>



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