



HORIZON EUROPE

THE EU RESEARCH & INNOVATION PROGRAMME

2021 – 2027



Research and
Innovation

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Info Day 2026

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
- **Stronger 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

- International cooperation particularly encouraged
- FAIR data principles

Scope

- **Increasing democratic backsliding** and human rights rollbacks globally, fueled by internal instability and **external interference** from non-democratic models
- **Heightened security risks** and destabilisation in regions where the EU has diplomatic and economic interests, affecting both citizens and businesses
- **Governance gaps** in fragile states where central authorities lack control, necessitating direct cooperation with **sub-national administrations**.
- **Diverse political ecosystems** involving a wide range of stakeholders, from faith leaders and trade unions to **marginalised groups** and indigenous people.

Expected outcomes

- Provide **science-based toolkits** and training models to help EU leaders proactively reduce inequality and protect **human rights**
- Establish **evidence-based good practices** for operating in **fragile contexts** where institutions are weak or failing
- Prove how **decentralisation** and efficient **public service delivery** directly increase citizens' trust in democratic systems
- Equip decision-makers to better support **local actors** by identifying their specific capacities and needs

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)

€ 8 million / 2 projects

- Cooperation with previous or ongoing projects

Scope

- **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
- Technological lag in the **European media sector**, necessitating the early adoption of AI, user-driven applications, and innovative revenue models to open new markets and remain competitive
- Fragmentation of the **news media ecosystem**, requiring pan-European interoperable standards, joint innovation agendas, and new ways to federate media industries across borders
- **Transparency and accountability gaps** among emerging media creators, such as influencers, who play an increasingly large role in information sharing without traditional **journalistic oversight**

Expected outcomes

- **Reinforce digital transformation** by facilitating new business models that make the news media industry more resilient, inclusive, and economically viable
- **Empower systemically disadvantaged citizens** by providing tools to help them make informed decisions and enhancing media's role in a fair, reinvigorated democracy
- **Foster reliance on trustworthy sources** by establishing stronger engagement with influencers and online creators, promoting transparency in their information-sharing roles
- **Establish evidence-based "trust indicators"** and browser plugins that help citizens easily recognise and categorise content produced with high journalistic integrity.

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

- Network of academics, public bodies & civil society to:
 - Promote inclusive, equal, resilient democracies.
 - Address equality & intersectionality across Europe
 - Counter disinformation & reduce polarisation.
 - Protect academic freedom in research.
- **Key activities:** Develop an online platform for evidence-based tools; Host an annual forum for stakeholders, Foresight activities

Expected outcomes

- **Policymakers** equipped with tools and knowledge to integrate **inclusive & intersectional perspectives into policymaking.**
- **Researchers** translate findings into **actionable recommendations.**
- **Innovative solutions** empower citizens in **democratic participation**

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

€ 12 million / 3 projects

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

Scope

- **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

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

Scope

- 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 must analyse the role of **historical narratives and cultural sensibilities**, specifically addressing **ethnic violence and conflict legacies** to prevent fractured transitions.
- **Intergenerational and transgenerational perspectives** are needed to promote a more sustainable societal transition
- Reconstruction efforts must prioritise **anticorruption measures** to ensure the transparent, accountable, and **ethical use of aid** within fragile institutional environments.

Expected outcomes

- Effective strategies for **sustainable peace and democratic reconstruction**, strengthening **integrity and stability** in post-conflict zones
- **Evidence-based recommendations** to policymakers regarding **international cooperation** and effective methods for **EU democracy support**
- Empowered **local civil society and community groups**, ensuring **vulnerable populations** are provided with the necessary guidance for reconciliation and accountability
- Facilitated **specialised support services** for veterans and affected groups to address **socio-economic and psychological needs**, ensuring successful reintegration into civilian life
- Enhanced **social dialogue and inclusivity** by involving a diverse range of stakeholders

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**
- The proliferation of **AI-generated content** across media can distort social narratives, reinforce **gender stereotypes**, and undermine public trust in elections

Expected outcomes

- Provide policymakers with knowledge to develop **election regulations and standards**, ensuring the integrity and **transparency of digital** campaigns
- Enable electoral organisations to implement guidelines for the **responsible use of technology** aligned with both national and **EU-level regulations**
- Enhance **accountability in AI-powered campaigns** through mandatory audits, data disclosure, and transparency
- Strengthen the **resilience of democratic systems** by fostering dialogue between online platforms, political parties, and **media providers**
- Protect the **safety of political candidates**, particularly women, LGBTIQ people, and minorities, from digital **harassment and intimidation**

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)



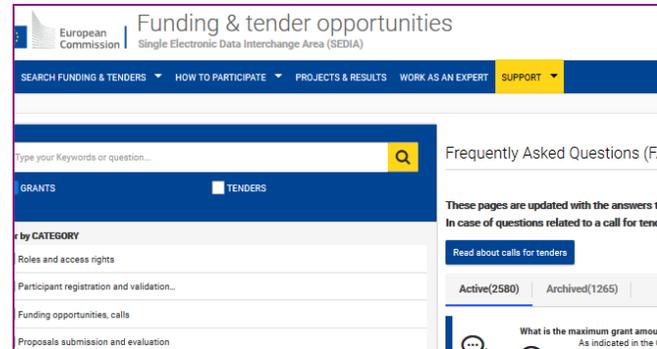
Connect to the **live webinar on 26 March** to ask questions & use the **Slido**

Need help?



Recorded webinars

« How to prepare a successful proposal » etc



FAQ:

research enquiry service



National Contact Points



Good luck!

HorizonEU

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