
CULTURE, CREATIVITY and INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

CLUSTER 2 CONFIGURATION
OF THE HORIZON EUROPE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

WORKSHOP ON
DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

12 February 2025 14h-17h



1 Welcome and introduction



DEMOCRACY and GOVERNANCE

Policy context

European Democracy Shield...

- FIMI and disinformation
- Integrity and fairness of elections, checks and balances and media freedom and pluralism
- Societal preparedness and resilience
- Citizens at the heart of democracy and the centre of policymaking

...building on the European Democracy Action Plan...

- With initiatives in 4 work strands (free and fair elections and strong democratic participation; supporting free and independent media; countering disinformation; inclusive civic engagement and participation for European democratic resilience);
- and the Defence of Democracy package

...and other connected initiatives and positions

- DSA and its obligations on very large online platforms and very large online search engines
- EP resolution on foreign interference in democratic processes in the EU, incl. disinformation (2023)
- Council conclusions on the contribution of education and training to strengthening common European values and democratic citizenship (2023)
- Council conclusions on democratic resilience (2024)
- Preparedness Union Strategy, incl. regarding hybrid threats

... and the shockwaves coming across the Atlantic and from the East ...

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Portfolio under 2021-2024 calls...

- **Shaping the future of democracy** (Democracy in flux; future of liberal and representative democracy; education for democracy; new social contract; climate imperative; emotional politics and protest movements; culture & arts as political spaces; post-pandemic world; future scenarios and young visions for European democracy 2040)
- **Advancing democracy through diversity and inclusion** (Feminism; inequalities, intersectionality; social, cultural and political identities and democracies)
- **Digital transformation of democracy** (AI, big data; social networks; media; digital democracy; multilevel governance in times of digital and climate transitions; Computational Social Science approaches in research on democracy)
- **Protection of democracies and resilience to undue influences** (FIMI, corruption, role of multi-national companies, evolution of political extremism...)
- **Geopolitics and the role of the EU in the World** (global governance, neighbourhood and WB, impact of climate imperative on governance)

+ Nets4Dem (network for researchers, practitioners & policy-makers) + Scaledem (testing & implementation of results)

See: Booklets with the projects from the calls [2021](#), [2022](#) and [2023](#)

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... and what's coming under 2025



GLOBAL CHALLENGES

- Disinformation and freedom of speech
- FIMI
- Fostering consolidation of European science diplomacy
- EU enlargement
- Open strategic autonomy and economic security



RESILIENT DEMOCRACIES

- Radicalisation, extremism, hate speech and polarisation
- Antisemitism
- Civic and citizenship education
- Autocratic appeal



INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES & AGILE INSTITUTIONS

- Independence of the judiciary
- Economic inequalities
- OPSI (continuation)
- Network (continuation)

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Expected impact and outcomes

Strategic plan 2025-27 expected impact

Research and innovation will support the **reinvigoration of democratic governance**, the **enhancement of societal resilience** in front of internal and external threats to democratic processes, the facilitation of **active and inclusive citizenship** and the **protection of fundamental rights** and **the rule of law**.

Some expected outcomes

- Policymakers, civil society, practitioners and citizens at large are provided with evidence-base, knowledge, toolkits and recommendations to facilitate post-conflict trauma healing, post-war reconstruction of economies and societies, reconciliation, conflict prevention and resolution.
- Societal resilience in view of the digital transformation of democracy is enhanced via updated knowledge, data and scientifically robust recommendations for improved digital literacy and reinforced media freedom.
- Educators, practitioners, policymakers and citizens are provided with knowledge, data and strategies for action, on the human, social and political impacts of polarisation, populism, dogmatism and radicalisation, as well as their new forms and their causes, especially among children and youth.
- Political participation of disempowered groups is enhanced via intersectional democratic innovations, including in education.
- Enhanced understanding of the role of social and educational capital, as well as of access to culture, in strengthening democratic dialogue, civic participation and open and trusting societies, is available for policymakers and other key stakeholders.
- Policymakers and educators are provided with evidence base, toolkits, knowledge and recommendations on how to design citizenship education in a context of diverse and polarized societies.

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Framing the exchanges: areas not topics

3 types of research areas

- Insisting on angles already addressed but requiring further effort or justified by political priorities
- Covering missing angles not tackled in previous programming
- Strengthen long-term impact of actions (results uptake)

Characteristics

- Some could become standalone (broad and open) topics, others could be components of larger topics
- Incorporate already ideas/requests received from co-creating policy DGs and some of the suggestions from PC delegates

Keep in mind

- Overall need to formulate fewer, larger and more open topics than in previous work programmes

2 Research areas and possible foci



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MEDIA FREEDOM and MEDIA PLURALISM

RATIONALE

- Key tenets of our democracies and enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Free and plural media hold power to account and help citizens make informed decisions. By providing reliable information, independent media contribute to the fight against disinformation and the manipulation of democratic debate

POSSIBLE FOCI

- Media concentration and information integrity
- Media financing
- Investigative journalism and public interest news
- Threats to press freedom
- Journalist protection (SLAPPs, coverage of LGBTIQ issues)
- Interplay between electoral integrity and media freedom, ways in which a free and independent media can promote electoral integrity, transparency, and accountability

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SOCIETAL RESILIENCE and PREPAREDNESS

RATIONALE

- Education for democratic citizenship contributes to strengthening Europe's resilience in times of crises, as well as of rapid and profound changes
- Enhancing societal resilience via, among others, media and digital literacy for informed citizens to navigate and resist mis- and disinformation and propaganda

POSSIBLE FOCI

- Quality of deliberation and information provision, challenges to scientific knowledge
- Media literacy, digital literacy and informed and critical thinking; role of culture and education in fostering societal resilience
- Online and offline hatred (socio-economic, cultural, and psychological factors causing the development of hatred, including socioeconomic inequality, cultural and identity-based tensions, and the role of social media)
- Psycho-social aspects of resilience
- Polarisation, populism, dogmatism and radicalisation, including their new forms and causes, especially among children and youth (citizenship education in polarised and diverse societies)
- Education for crisis preparedness
- International conflicts and radicalised groups in Europe

AI and the DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION of DEMOCRACY

RATIONALE

- Putting people and their rights at the centre of the digital transformation are core principles in the EU approach to digitalisation and technological advancement, which should align with democratic values, promote transparency, and strengthen accountability, rather than undermining democratic institutions and processes

POSSIBLE FOCI

- AI's impact on the information environment (information production/consumption; opportunities / challenges for independent media; freedom of expression, artistic freedom and role of algorithms in shaping creative content and online discourse)
- Dual role of (gen)AI in generating and in fighting disinformation
- AI's impact on democratic participation and deliberation (potential to facilitate more inclusive, informed, and effective deliberation among citizens)
- AI, cyberviolence, and deepfakes impact (combatting disinformation and cyberviolence, promoting ethical governance, inclusiveness, protection of vulnerable groups)
- Procurement and public administration control of AI systems/algorithms
- Electoral integrity (cyberattacks and foreign interference on electoral processes, strategies to enhance voting system security, candidates' safety...)

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CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSIVE POLICY-MAKING

RATIONALE

- A healthy democracy relies on meaningful and inclusive citizen engagement exercises and an active civil society, not only at election time, but on an ongoing basis. Engaged, informed and empowered citizens and a vibrant civil society are vital to guarantee the resilience of our democracies
- Education, and in particular citizenship education, plays a vital role in this. Education institutions are places where students need to learn not only about but also through and for democracy

POSSIBLE FOCI

- Political engagement of immigrant communities in Europe (political integration and dynamics within immigrant and diaspora communities, and factors driving their political participation and societal integration)
- Inclusive and human-centred public service development: exploring ways to engage marginalized groups and putting the human centre-stage
- The evolving role of institutions in creating conditions for democracy (how institutions can foster democratic resilience, which new forms of collaboration between governments, citizens, and businesses to strengthen democratic governance and civic engagement)
- Student and parental engagement for a democratic school culture
- Citizen collectives and other forms of bottom-up citizen initiatives

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Area 5

PROMOTING EQUALITY AND INCLUSIVENESS

RATIONALE

- A truly inclusive democratic society empowers and uses everyone's potential, with equality at the heart of the policy agenda, so that all people can live free from discrimination

POSSIBLE FOCI

- Understanding and addressing gender-based violence against politically active women and LGBTIQ people
- Intersections of trust, gender equality, and access to rights for a more inclusive society (gendered impact of corruption, backlash against or limited access to sexual and reproductive health rights, unequal access to information and justice)
- Women's and LGBTIQ+ rights in autocracy and conflict (drivers and impacts of anti-gender rhetoric to better prevent and eliminate violence, hate speech, discrimination and ensuring inclusive access to humanitarian responses)
- Follow-up of the 2022 call "Strengthening racial, ethnic, and religious equality", with a focus on research into discrimination faced by various groups, notably Roma communities, and addressing the rise of Islamophobia in Europe

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Area 6

GOVERNANCE and PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS

RATIONALE

- The quality of a country's governance and public administration is a key factor not only in its economic performance and the wellbeing of its citizens, but also for enhancing trust in democracy. It is essential that public authorities are equipped to navigate today's changing circumstances

POSSIBLE FOCI

- Understanding and comparing public administration systems: evolution and functioning of various models in the EU and their performance in today's world
- Reimagining government and the most suited model to face the world's challenges and how to get there (agile organizations for multi-level governance; innovation in public policy- and decision making; new model for the public service)
- Government in transition – how governments change the way they work to cope with the challenges of the world today, the extensive reform/change agendas, and prepare the civil service for the future **[already co-created under 2025]**

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Area 7

RULE of LAW and CORRUPTION

RATIONALE

- The rule of law stands alongside democracy and fundamental rights as founding values of the Union. It is common a bedrock of the Union's identity and a core factor in Europe's political stability and economic prosperity

POSSIBLE FOCI

- Role of private companies in democracy (including sphere transgressions by multinational companies and big tech), examining the ways in which corporate interests influence and shape democratic processes, policies, and outcomes
- Promoting responsible corporate behavior and ensure that private companies serve the needs of democracy and the public good
- Democracy, plutocracy, kleptocracy
- Laws, legal systems and social justice (new approaches to crafting and enforcing laws; innovative approaches to law-making and enforcement; focus on increasing participation, exploring alternative forms of justice and redress, and building fairer societies)

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Area 8

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

RATIONALE

- Promoting a global system for human rights and democracy is at the core of the EU's commitment to strengthening multilateralism. The EU's strategic response to the changing international environment is to strengthen its coherence and unity in multilateral fora

POSSIBLE FOCI

- EU values and human rights in global context (including international criminal law e.g. accountability of violators, the role of national criminal courts...)
- Climate governance (including its international legal framework) and impact of climate change policies
- Development aid and democracy
- Understanding the forms of local democracy in low-income and low-middle income countries [already co-created under 2025]
- Post-conflict democracy and reconstruction (rebuilding institutions and promoting social dialogue, and developing effective strategies to support sustainable peace and democratic reconstruction)
- Inequality reduction in EU external action

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Piloting and experimenting with results

Thematically open area (relating to new Democracy Shield, EDAP and DoD package issues) to facilitate the experimentation and uptake of democratic innovations stemming from funded research, aiming to increase the impact of Horizon Europe funded research.

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Overview of research areas

1. **Media freedom and media pluralism:** financing of quality journalism; media concentration ; press freedom, protection of journalists ...
2. **Societal resilience and preparedness:** digital and media literacy; critical thinking, citizenship education; on-line hatred; polarisation, populism, radicalisation; education for crisis preparedness...
3. **AI and the digital transformation of democracy:** AI impact on information environment; AI and deliberation processes; public control of AI systems /algorithms; cyber-attacks on voting systems;...
4. **Citizen participation and inclusive policy-making:** immigrant communities; human-centred public services; evolving role of institutions; student and parental engagement for a democratic school; bottom-up citizen initiatives ...
5. **Promoting equality and inclusiveness:** intersections of trust, gender equality, access rights ; gender-based violence; inclusive access to humanitarian aid; women's and LGBTIQ+ rights in autocracy and conflict...
6. **Governance and public administrations:** functioning of various models, coping with change;...
7. **Rule of law and corruption:** sphere transgressions by multinational companies and big-tech; plutocracy; corporate responsibility; laws, legal systems and social justice; ...
8. **International dimension:** international climate policy; development aid and democracy; EU values and human rights; post-conflict democracy and reconstruction; inequality reduction in EU external action...

+ Piloting and experimenting with results