

Proposals are encouraged to involve entities in low- and middle-income countries, so as to rely on their first-hand competences to steer the methodological approach and perform the data collection and analysis.

Proposals under this call are encouraged to make use of participative methodologies and experimental methods.

There are several projects funded under EU programmes whose aim has been to promote democratic governance and the defence and promotion of human rights in developing countries. Proposals should seek cooperation with relevant ongoing research projects and should indicate which additional projects they would collaborate with.

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

Applicants to this topic are encouraged to consider the data offered by European Research Infrastructures in the social sciences and humanities domain¹⁸.

Where applicable, proposals should leverage the data and services available through European Research Infrastructures federated under the European Open Science Cloud, as well as data from relevant Data Spaces. Particular efforts should be made to ensure that the data produced in the context of this topic is FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Re-usable).

HORIZON-CL2-2025-01-DEMOCRACY-04: Preparing the EU for future enlargement: challenges and opportunities

Call: Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society' - 2025	
Specific conditions	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR 3.00 and 3.50 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 10.50 million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Research and Innovation Actions
<i>Eligibility conditions</i>	<p>The conditions are described in General Annex B. The following exceptions apply:</p> <p>The following additional eligibility criteria apply:</p> <p>The consortium must include at least one entity from Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Ukraine, or Türkiye. Legal entities from these</p>

¹⁸ For example, CESSDA, the European Social Survey or SHARE.

	countries must take part in the project as beneficiaries.
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Expected Outcome: Projects should contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

- Provide policymakers and public administrations in each Member State, candidate country, and at EU institutional level, with thematic insights on lessons learned from previous enlargement processes for the development of future policies with particular attention to democracy, rule of law and governance related topics.
- Exploring the political, social and economic consequences of enlargement versus non-enlargement of the EU to raise awareness in the society, both in the Union and in the candidate country, of this process.
- EU authorities and public authorities in Member States benefit from better use of existing interactive tools to better inform and promote educational opportunities on enlargement process for citizens in the Union and in the enlargement countries.
- Enhance public involvement on enlargement through transparent and participatory processes, leveraging digital tools for broader engagement.

Scope: Following the Commission's Communications on "pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews"¹⁹ and on "Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans"²⁰, as well as "New growth plan for the Western Balkans"²¹, there is a need to invest more in understanding enlargement priorities, opportunities, and challenges based on the perspective of a EU counting more than 30 Member States. This also means that EU Member States need to be better prepared, while citizens and civil society must gain a better understanding of what enlargement entails.

The proposed research should improve on the one hand, the EU Member States' understanding of the history, political and economic situation of the candidate countries through socio-historical research, combined with a legal and economic approach. And, on the other hand, it should support EU citizens and civil society to gain a better understanding on challenges and opportunities related to potential future enlargements of the EU.

Reflecting on previous enlargements, the proposals should provide thematic insights on lessons learned and identify potential similarities with the candidate countries, focusing particularly on democracy, rule of law and governance-related topics.

Adopting a flexible and adaptive approach to enlargement, responsive to geopolitical dynamics and regional challenges, might be necessary. Utilizing foresight and scenario planning can help the EU and the Member States to anticipate future changes and strategically manage the enlargement process. This approach can also consider differentiation within EU governance to build resilient, inclusive, and participatory societies.

¹⁹ COM(2024) 146 final <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2024:146:FIN>

²⁰ COM(2020) 57 final <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0057>

²¹ COM(2023) 691 final <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2023:691:FIN>

A comparative analysis of the terms and conditions issued by Member States upon joining the Union, such as freedom of movement, could serve as interesting case studies.

Public support and engagement for EU enlargement are crucial but fluctuates largely between Member States. To address this, it is essential for the proposals to involve citizens early in the enlargement discussions, ensuring transparency and addressing economic and social concerns. This can be achieved through public consultations and enhanced discourse to improve the credibility and acceptance of the enlargement process.

The proposals should also address the EU's readiness to enlarge, considering the "enlargement fatigue" and the rise of euroscepticism within the Union and in the candidate countries.

Building concrete knowledge through comparative analysis on the motives of candidate countries to join the EU would be beneficial to observe any similarities and whether these motivations are still present, strengthened or declining in the Member States. Efforts should also be directed towards effective and inclusive communication on the EU integration process and the benefits of enlargement, as a way to on this process from foreign and domestic actors.

Additionally, the proposals should collect evidence on the role of societal dialogues and education in proposing learning approaches to EU integration and enlargement prospect within the Union that combine mutual, social and intercultural learning to support the development of local and regional initiatives by the civil society. These learning approaches could be based on evidence from formal learning in education institutions or informal learning through civil society initiatives. Proposals should consider citizens engagement and dialogue, for seeking wider input. Youth participation should be encouraged in the proposals.

To support this goal, the proposals should identify the most effective tools for public administration and policymakers to improve citizen's understanding of the enlargement process, seizing educational opportunities and societal awareness. Utilizing emerging digital technologies such as artificial intelligence and social media could be beneficial in meeting the evolving challenges of digital communication.

Pilot projects should be carried out in at least five EU Member States to assess the effectiveness of these tools, which may also have synergies with people-to-people programs like Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, Interreg, or the Civil Society Facility, fostering a common European spirit between EU Member States and candidate countries.

Based on the research, policy recommendations should be developed to promote inclusive strategic communication and citizen engagement on EU integration and values within the Union and in the Member States. These policy recommendations should also explore how to support the reform process of candidate countries and/or learn from their existing reforms regarding Chapters of the Acquis, such as of Chapter 10: Information Society and Media, Chapter 23: Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, Chapter 23: Justice Freedom and Security, and Chapter 34: Institutions.

Proposals are encouraged to network with and build on previously funded projects under Horizon Europe calls²², Horizon 2020 or other EU programmes, e.g. Global Europe²³ or the Instrument for Pre-accession²⁴ [Exact scope to be confirmed], as appropriate. Clustering and cooperation with other selected projects under this topic and other relevant projects are strongly encouraged.

Applicants to this topic are also encouraged to consider the data offered by European Research Infrastructures in the social sciences and humanities domain²⁵.

Where applicable, proposals should leverage the data and services available through European Research Infrastructures federated under the European Open Science Cloud, as well as data from relevant Data Spaces. Particular efforts should be made to ensure that the data produced in the context of this topic is FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Re-usable).

HORIZON-CL2-2025-01-DEMOCRACY-05: The EU's foreign policy, open strategic autonomy and economic security

Call: Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society' - 2025	
Specific conditions	
<i>Expected EU contribution per project</i>	The Commission estimates that an EU contribution of between EUR 3.00 and 3.50 million would allow these outcomes to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude submission and selection of a proposal requesting different amounts.
<i>Indicative budget</i>	The total indicative budget for the topic is EUR 7.00 million.
<i>Type of Action</i>	Research and Innovation Actions

Expected Outcome: Projects should contribute to all of the following expected outcomes:

- EU institutions, national decision-makers, and practitioners in various relevant fields dispose of a consolidated and workable definition and a robust evidence base for policymaking regarding open strategic autonomy and economic security, including research security.
- EU institutions and national decision-makers have a better understanding of how the open strategic autonomy and economic security can benefit the EU and its Member

²² In particular HORIZON-CL2-2023-DEMOCRACY-01-08: Political perspectives for the Eastern Neighbourhood and the Western Balkans, HORIZON-CL2-2021-DEMOCRACY-01-04: Democratic politics in the EU's neighbourhood, as well as other relevant projects funded under other clusters and pillars of Horizon Europe.

²³ https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/global-europe-programming_en

²⁴ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/overview-instrument-pre-accession-assistance_en

²⁵ For example CESSDA, the European Social Survey or SHARE.