Horizon Europe – Cluster 2: Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society

What is Horizon Europe?

Horizon Europe is the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation (R&I) with a budget of €95.5 billion for the period 2021-2027. It tackles climate change, helps to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and boosts Europe's competitiveness and growth.

The programme facilitates collaboration and strengthens the impact of R&I in developing, supporting and implementing EU policies while tackling global challenges. It supports the creation and better sharing of knowledge and technologies.

It also creates jobs, fully engages Europe's talent pool, boosts economic growth, promotes industrial competitiveness and optimises investment impact within a strengthened European Research Area.

For information on UK participation in the programme see UKRO's **dedicated factsheet**.

What are Clusters in Horizon Europe?

The 'Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness' pillar of Horizon Europe takes forward the current societal challenges and industrial technologies in a more 'top-down' approach, addressing EU and global policy challenges. These challenges and opportunities are integrated into six Clusters, each with several specific intervention areas and designed to incentivise cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral, cross-policy and international collaboration. In terms of addressing global political priorities, each Cluster will contribute towards several Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and many SDGs will be supported by more than one Cluster.

The Clusters and their intervention areas are expected to achieve greater impact when compared to the societal challenges of Horizon 2020 since they will cut across classical boundaries between disciplines and address different types of challenges. The integrated Clusters of activities derive from the **First Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe 2021-24** and **Second Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe 2025-27** and form the basis for support to collaborative R&I projects under the 'Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness' pillar.

What is funded under Cluster 2?

Cluster 2 has an overall budget of €2.28 billion. With this funding, this Cluster will back up the following impact areas of the Horizon Europe Strategic Plan:

- Reinvigorating democratic governance
- Realising the full potential of cultural heritage, arts, and cultural and creative sectors
- Strengthening social and economic resilience and sustainability
- Boosting inclusive growth and reducing vulnerabilities effectively

Funding will help the EU meet its goals and priorities on enhancing democratic governance and citizens participation, on the safeguarding and promotion of cultural heritage, and to respond to and shape multifaceted social, economic, technological, and cultural transformations.

Cluster 2 mobilises multidisciplinary expertise of European social sciences and humanities for understanding fundamental contemporary transformations of society, economy, politics, and culture. It aims to provide evidence-based policy options for a socially just and inclusive European green and digital transition and recovery.

More specifically, Cluster 2 contributes to the expected impacts as set out by the strategic plan for 2025-2027, which are the **three destinations** described below:

Destination 1 - Innovative Research on Democracy and Governance

- Focuses on knowledge, data and scientifically robust recommendations to reinvigorate and defend democratic governance and improve trust in democratic institutions.
- Contributes to helping safeguard fundamental rights to empower active and inclusive citizenship.
- Strengthens accountability, transparency, effectiveness and trustworthiness of rule of law-based institutions and policies.
- Addresses an increasing number of threats from both internal and external actors, notably those who use harming methods enabled by digital technologies and social media. Focus on tackling increased hatred, disinformation, information manipulation, and foreign interference, as well as the polarisation of political debate.
- Key priority is the fight against radicalisation and extremism will be a priority, alongside efforts to combat social isolation caused by online group dynamics and addressing algorithmic bias.

Destination 2 - Innovative Research on the European Cultural Heritage and the Cultural and Creative Industries

- Focuses on boosting sustainable growth and job creation through the cultural and creative industries.
- Promotes artificial intelligence for creativity and innovation, better access and engagement with cultural heritage and improve its protection, enhancement and restoration.
- A new European partnership for Resilient Cultural Heritage will be launched and support the European Collaborative Cloud for Cultural Heritage will be continued.

Destination 3 - Innovative Research on Social and Economic Transformations

- Funded activities will help tackle social, economic and political inequalities, support human capital development and contribute to a comprehensive European strategy for inclusive growth.
- Focuses on improving the understanding of how technological, climate, economic and demographic changes impact society. This will inform the design of policies addressing existing and emerging challenges, harnessing new opportunities (particularly in the areas of employment, education, mental health and wellbeing).
- Focuses on boosting sustainability and inclusion, by supporting vulnerable groups and protecting individuals from discrimination.

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Call timings and requirements

The 2025 single-stage and partnership calls open on 15 May and close on 16 September 2025.

The two-stage calls open on 15 May 2025. The first stage deadline is 16 September 2025 and second stage deadline is 17 March 2026.

Please note that some topics have specific eligibility criteria, listed under eligibility and admissibility conditions, such as the obligation to include legal entities established in the target country/region. Applicants are advised to check the work programme for details relating to their topics of interest.

For 31 2025 calls, the Commission will use the lump sum funding model.

The **UK National Contact Points (NCPs)** can provide further advice and guidance to potential applicants.

European Partnerships

The UK is a part of the **Social Transformations and Resilience**, and **Resilient Cultural Heritage** Cluster 2 Co-funded European Partnerships.

International cooperation

International cooperation is strongly sought across Horizon Europe.

Cluster 2 topic areas are also included in many high-level agreements for R&I cooperation like the **EU-AU Innovation Agenda**. Out of the 24 calls that will receive an additional €500.5 million under the **Africa III Initiative**, 3 are part of the Cluster 2 Work Programme:

- HORIZON-CL2-2025-01-DEMOCRACY-04: **Open strategic autonomy, economic and research security in EU foreign policy**

- HORIZON-CL2-2025-01-HERITAGE-08: **Bridging historical past and future potential through conservation, preservation, and adaptive use of Europe's contentious and dissonant heritage**

- HORIZON-CL2-2025-01-TRANSFO-11: **Migration and climate change: building resilience and enhancing sustainability**

Relevant EU policy areas and developments

The call topics under each destination are closely connected to the current political and R&I agendas.

Protecting democracy and upholding European values is among the seven main priorities of the European Commission for 2024-2029. Building on what has been achieved already, its aim is to do more to protect European democracy and citizens from rising threats posed by internal and foreign actors, while strengthening the rule of law.

In 2024, the EU renewed its commitment to human rights and democracy by extending its **Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 until 2027**. Promoting and protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law is at the heart of EU activities, both internally and in the Union's external relations, and the trends, challenges and necessary response are outlined in the **EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027**.

Cluster 2 is equally linked to the Commission's agenda on **Promoting our European way of life** and multiple initiatives around justice, rule of law and inclusion through which the Commission supports collaboration among Member States in the area of **Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion** policies.

The **Pact on Migration and Asylum** was adopted by the European Parliament and Council, and entered into force on 11 June 2024 and will enter into application after two years. The Pact will ensure

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that the EU has strong and secure external borders, that people's rights are guaranteed, and that no EU country is left alone under pressure.

The European Commission adopted the **Roadmap for Women's Rights** on 7 March 2025, which outlines a long-term vision for achieving gender equality based on core principles and policy objectives set out in a Declaration of principles for a gender-equal society.

The specific intervention area in Cluster 2 dedicated to the EU's commitment to safeguarding and enhancing Europe's cultural heritage, derives from the **European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage**. By focusing on the competitiveness of cultural heritage, arts and cultural and creative sectors, the Work programme contributes to the **European Agenda for Culture's** goal of supporting culture-based creativity in education and innovation, for jobs and growth.

Several topics address the objectives of the EU flagship **European Green Deal**, namely by providing sustainable solutions for cultural heritage conservation and restoration; looking at a translation of the green transition objectives into tangible applications, and inclusive and accessible experiences for citizens, as well as by contributing to the **New European Bauhaus initiative**.

The Work Programme relates to the **Digital Europe Programme (DIGITAL)**, which supports the wide uptake and deployment of innovative digital solutions in areas of public interest by setting up and making accessible Europe-wide data spaces and platforms and providing SMEs and public administrations access to the latest digital technologies. Priority actions for DIGITAL include the EU digital platform for cultural heritage and Europeana, which supports the digital transformation of cultural heritage institutions. This is in line with the EU's goals defined in the **Communication – 2030 Digital Compass: The European way for the Digital Decade** and in the **Policy Programme – Path to the Digital Decade**. The Cluster 2 budget will support the **European Collaborative Cloud for Cultural Heritage (ECCCH)**, as well as on exploring challenges and opportunities of digital technologies such as artificial intelligence for culture, creativity and cultural heritage, and the ways cultural and creative industries can successfully engage with such technologies.

Cluster 2 also aims at promoting various types of synergies with other EU programmes, including **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme**, **Global Europe: the EU's Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument** and **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**, and contribute to the **Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights**. In line with the global approach to R&I, as presented in **Europe's Strategy for International Cooperation in R&I**, the Work Programme 2025 supports the EU's ambition to have a positive influence in the world and confirms its commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and collaborations with international frameworks (UNESCO, OECD, etc).

Furthermore, the effective **integration of Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) in all Clusters**, including all missions and partnerships, is a principle through the Horizon Europe programme cycle. This means that SSH can make their contribution where they are most needed. Integrating the socio-economic dimension into the design, development and implementation of research itself, and of new technologies can help find solutions to societal issues.

This cross-cutting priority is reflected by flagging specific topics and/or requesting an assessment of their societal impact. For these topics, SSH should be integrated from the drafting of the topic to the selection and evaluation of projects by evaluators with demonstrable SSH expertise. In addition, the expected societal impact must be explicitly set out in the topics, projects, deliverables and outputs.

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More information

- **Horizon Europe website** and **Cluster 2 website**
- **Work Programme 2025 for Cluster 2**
- **Find your UK National Contact Point**
- **UK National Contact Point Newsletter**

Horizon Europe's legal basis:

- **Regulation establishing Horizon Europe**
- **Decision establishing the Specific Programme of Horizon Europe**
- **First Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe (2021-2024)**
- **Second Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe (2025-2027)**

UKRO Portal

- **UKRO Portal**

Other websites and resources

- **REA Cluster 2 website**
- **EU website on Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities research**
- **European Democracy Action Plan** and **European Agenda on Migration**
- **EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027**
- **Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion policies**
- **Justice and fundamental rights policies**
- **The EU Gender Equality Strategy**
- **Europe's Strategy for International Cooperation in R&I**
- **European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage**
- **EU Policy for Culture and Creativity**
- **Green Paper 'Unlocking the Potential of Cultural and Creative Industries'**
- **Report on a European collaborative cloud for cultural heritage** and **EC factsheet**
- **European Industrial Strategy** and **new European Innovation Agenda factsheet**
- **The EU's Cybersecurity Strategy**
- **Excellence and trust in artificial intelligence – EU and AI**
- **European Green Deal website**
- **New European Bauhaus initiative**
- **EU's Digital Strategy** and **Shaping Europe's digital heritage future page**
- **Fostering a European approach to Artificial Intelligence website**
- **Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) on Cultural Heritage**
- **HERA - Humanities in the European Research Area Network**
- **NORFACE - New Opportunities for SSH Research Funding in Europe**