

Call	<p>CERV Network of Towns Deadline: April 15, 2026 https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/cerv/wp-call/2026/call-fiche_cerv-2026-citizens-town-nt_en.pdf</p>
Project title	<p>EPIC – European Programme for Inclusive Active Citizenship <i>Experiencing Europe through participation, dialogue and civic engagement</i></p>
Context and relevance of the CERV Programme	<p>The European Union, through the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme, aims to strengthen democratic participation, promote equality and fundamental rights, and foster a shared sense of European belonging among citizens. Within this framework, the <i>Networks of Towns</i> call represents a key instrument to support long-term cooperation between municipalities and local communities, encouraging citizens’ engagement in democratic life and policymaking processes. The call explicitly promotes transnational exchanges, inclusive participation, and the development of sustainable networks that translate European values into concrete local actions. It reflects a broader evolution of EU policies, which increasingly emphasise the need to reinforce democratic resilience, counter polarisation and disinformation, and actively involve citizens—especially young people—in shaping the future of Europe.</p> <p>Recent initiatives such as the European Democracy Shield, the Defence of Democracy Package, and the EU Citizenship Package underline the urgency of strengthening democracy through active civic engagement. In parallel, EU strategies on gender equality, anti-discrimination, inclusion and disability rights stress that participation must be accessible, representative and inclusive.</p> <p>In this context, projects funded under CERV are expected to move beyond awareness-raising and deliver concrete, operational forms of participation that combine local action, transnational cooperation, and digital innovation.</p>
Challenges addressed by EPIC	<p>Across Europe, and particularly in medium-sized cities and territorial systems similar to those involved in EPIC, several structural challenges are increasingly evident. There is a growing distance between citizens and institutions, often accompanied by a perception of the European Union as abstract and disconnected from everyday life. This is particularly evident among younger generations, who frequently lack meaningful opportunities to engage in democratic processes.</p> <p>At the same time, many communities experience declining civic participation, fragmentation of social ties and a lack of structured spaces for dialogue. Participation often remains occasional and consultative, rather than continuous and impactful. European societies are also facing broader risks, including polarisation, hate speech and disinformation, alongside the underrepresentation of vulnerable groups in decision-making processes. These dynamics weaken trust and reduce the inclusiveness of democratic systems.</p> <p>Finally, a significant implementation gap persists between European policy ambitions and local practices. While EU strategies promote co-creation and participation, many local authorities lack tools and methodologies to translate these principles into everyday governance.</p> <p>EPIC is designed to address this gap by transforming participation into a structured, inclusive and replicable experience of inclusive active citizenship.</p>
Vision and overall approach	<p>EPIC is grounded in a clear vision: European citizenship must be experienced in practice, not only understood in theory.</p> <p>The project aims to transform citizenship into a lived experience, in which individuals actively participate in shaping their communities and engage with Europe through concrete actions, dialogue, and collaboration.</p> <p>At its core, EPIC builds a transnational civic ecosystem, connecting municipalities, citizens, young people, civil society organisations and local stakeholders in a shared process of democratic engagement.</p>

	<p>This approach combines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • experiential learning, • participatory governance, • intercultural exchange, • and digital tools for engagement. <p>In doing so, EPIC translates EU priorities into concrete local practices, making inclusive active citizenship tangible and accessible.</p>
<p>Project objectives</p>	<p>The overall objective of EPIC is to strengthen democratic participation and promote inclusive, active citizenship across Europe through structured, transnational civic engagement.</p> <p>More specifically, the project aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhance citizens’ participation in democratic life by establishing permanent and inclusive participatory spaces; • engage young people and schools through innovative, experiential and gamified approaches; • promote equality, inclusion and non-discrimination, addressing hate speech and polarisation; • strengthen intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding across European communities; • build a sustainable network of municipalities committed to long-term cooperation; • increase awareness and practical exercise of EU citizenship rights through participatory experiences.
<p>The EPIC methodology: from participation to inclusive active citizenship</p>	<p>EPIC introduces an innovative methodology that shifts participation from a passive process to active civic co-creation.</p> <p>The project is structured around four interconnected pillars.</p> <p>The European Experiential Passport represents the individual dimension of participation. Each participant receives a physical and digital passport that records their journey through activities, creating a tangible and motivating pathway of engagement. This tool transforms participation into a personal experience of inclusive active citizenship.</p> <p>The European Citizenship Challenge provides a structured and gamified framework for engagement. Through thematic missions—focused on democracy, inclusion, sustainability, rights and culture—participants actively contribute to their communities while developing civic awareness and skills.</p> <p>The EU Future Labs constitute the core democratic infrastructure of the project. These permanent local spaces enable citizens, institutions and stakeholders to collaborate, deliberate and co-design solutions. Inspired by European approaches to co-creation and citizen assemblies, they function as practical arenas of inclusive active citizenship.</p> <p>Finally, the European Civic Spaces ensure long-term sustainability by anchoring participation in physical places—cultural centres, regenerated spaces or community hubs—where civic engagement continues beyond the project lifecycle.</p> <p>Together, these pillars create a coherent ecosystem that embeds participation into everyday local governance.</p>
<p>Main activities</p>	<p>The project is implemented through a combination of transnational and local activities over a 24-month period.</p> <p>A series of transnational events—including a kick-off meeting, thematic events in partner countries, a youth exchange and a final European festival—will enable direct interaction among participants and foster a shared European experience.</p> <p>At the local level, civic assemblies will be organised in each partner territory. These assemblies will serve as structured platforms for dialogue, allowing citizens to express needs, discuss priorities and contribute ideas.</p>

	<p>The EU Future Labs will operate continuously, transforming these inputs into concrete proposals, policy recommendations and civic initiatives. They will also support capacity building, equipping participants with skills for participation and democratic engagement.</p> <p>The European Citizenship Challenge will guide participation across all activities, ensuring coherence and continuity while maintaining high levels of motivation and engagement.</p> <p>Specific actions will focus on young people, including school-based activities, simulations of democratic processes and a transnational youth exchange.</p> <p>The project will also include dedicated activities on inclusion and anti-discrimination, addressing gender equality, hate speech, social inclusion and digital safety, in line with EU strategies.</p> <p>Digital tools will play a key role, with a fully accessible digital platform supporting participation, feedback collection and engagement tracking.</p>
<p>Expected results and impact</p>	<p>EPIC is designed to generate both measurable outputs and long-term systemic impact.</p> <p>The project will involve more than 1,000 citizens, with a significant number actively participating in continuous activities such as the Future Labs. Over 120 civic proposals are expected to be developed, with at least 30% integrated into local policies and planning processes</p> <p>Beyond quantitative results, EPIC will contribute to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strengthening trust between citizens and public institutions; • improving inclusiveness and quality of local policymaking; • increasing awareness and exercise of EU citizenship rights; • fostering social cohesion and intercultural dialogue; • promoting a culture of inclusive active citizenship. <p>A key outcome will be the European Charter of Inclusive Active Citizenship, a co-created document that translates citizens’ contributions into operational policy orientations. The Charter will be formally adopted by partner municipalities, ensuring concrete impact and continuity.</p>
<p>Indicative budget</p>	<p>The project is designed with an indicative total budget of approximately €800,000, consistent with the lump sum funding approach of the CERV programme.</p> <p>Resources will be allocated primarily to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transnational events and mobility; • local participatory activities and Future Labs; • development of the digital platform and Passport; • youth engagement actions and final event; • communication, dissemination and evaluation. <p>This allocation reflects the project’s strong focus on participation, experimentation and impact.</p>
<p>European added value</p>	<p>EPIC generates European added value by connecting local communities to EU priorities in a concrete, operational way.</p> <p>It establishes a transnational network of municipalities working collaboratively on shared democratic challenges. It strengthens local governance by introducing structured participation mechanisms. It offers a replicable and scalable model of inclusive active citizenship that can be adopted across Europe.</p> <p>Most importantly, it helps redefine European citizenship as an active, participatory, and shared experience.</p>
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