

## “Crisis – Perspectives from the Humanities”

The Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) Network in collaboration with CHANSE (Collaboration of Humanities and Social Sciences in Europe) have launched a new Joint Research Programme “Crisis – Perspectives from the Humanities” (*Crisis Call*). We wish to invite transnational consortia to submit proposals for humanities-led research under this theme. Proposed research may draw upon insights and methodologies from a wide spectrum of arts and humanities disciplines. Although humanities-driven, consortia are able to involve contributions from other research domains where appropriate.

By launching the *Crisis Call*, the national funding organisations involved want to create opportunities for humanities-led, collaborative, transnational research that will result in new academic insights relevant to major social, cultural, and political challenges facing Europe and the world.

The aim of the programme is fourfold. It will:

- 1) Provide, from a humanities perspective, new knowledge and understanding of the origins, sources and causes of the major philosophical, cultural, social, economic, religious, political and environmental crises that Europe and the world faced in the past and are facing today.
- 2) Highlight the complex role of cultural and social practices in shaping responses to crises but also, sometimes, in creating these, be it today or in the past, and will help us to understand whether and, if so, how cultural traditions problematize the notion of crisis as a fundamental and critical moment for society and for communities.
- 3) Explore the impact of culture in shaping resilience in the face of crises. Culture helps not only to react to present crises, but also to prepare societies for the threats and opportunities involved in future ones.
- 4) Emphasize how the humanities may contribute to the escalation or, equally, to the de-escalation and resolving of crises.

### Theme

In many respects, the history of humanity is frequently perceived and narrated as a history of crises. Crisis is a multivalent term that allows people to make sense of their world during difficult times of change or upheaval. It is about human responses to both ongoing and transitional change and transformation, which shift from the past to the present and into the future. Given that crisis is imbued with great significance, yet one which remains notoriously imprecise and vague, research addressing crises requires both structural clarity and contextual nuance.

Many crises are either human-made or human-led and human activity also often affects natural hazards. Whether they are political, social, economic, religious or environmental in origin or a combination of these factors, crises have marked the development of individuals and societies across the world and throughout history. Some of these crises have a local or regional character, strongly impacting particular groups or communities. Others are of such epic proportions that they profoundly transform and keep reshaping the existence and the self-perceptions of various collective identities and societies. Furthermore, crises can be sudden or develop over the long term; their duration can vary considerably, which, in turn, deeply affects their character and the responses that may entail.

From the earliest times, humanity has endeavoured to make sense of crises, trying to find an explanation for their outbreaks and to incorporate them (so as to address them) in their understanding and interpretation of the world. Thus, the meaning of ‘crisis’ has evolved over the centuries. In the medical tradition, either Greek or Latin, the word ‘crisis’ was used mainly to mean the ‘climax’ or ‘turning point of an illness’.

'Crisis' usually has a negative or even sinister meaning and is viewed as a disruptive event or succession of events that, sometimes irreversibly, affect the fabric, the equilibrium, the development of societies or the capacity these have to make sense of themselves. In some circumstances though, 'crisis' may take on a completely different meaning and be seen as an opportunity for change and a driver for renewal or healing. This call understands 'crisis' in the broadest possible terms. In order to reveal and address the complexity and inherent dynamics of the concept, the call hopes to attract proposals from across the humanities, adopting a wide range of perspectives.

Responses to crises – by individuals, households, communities, governments, religious bodies, organizations – have always attracted interest (not only from the political sphere) and been the object of studies and research. Today, this is accompanied by a fast-growing interest in the impact of such decisive moments in history upon individuals: on their values, practices, religion, traumatic experiences, memory, and their organized strategies of remembering and forgetting.

Equally important is the epistemological dimension of 'crisis': for example, it can be argued that crisis in science leads to 'scientific revolutions', or the creation of new theories and methods, or that the upheavals of the so deeply troubled 20th century have triggered major crises in humanity and humanism and, by repercussion, in some areas of the humanities, thus impacting our understanding of the world today. It could also be argued that what can be perceived as a crisis in the humanities enables us to critically reconsider universal humanism by taking into account people of all ethnicities, genders, sexualities, and (dis)abilities, and to question anthropocentrism by focusing on other species, the environment and the earth, thus leading to more inclusive methodologies.

The aim of the programme is fourfold. It will:

- 1) Provide, from a humanities perspective, new knowledge and understanding of the origins, sources and causes of the major philosophical, cultural, social, economic, religious, political and environmental crises that Europe and the world faced in the past and are facing today.
- 2) Highlight the complex role of cultural and social practices in shaping responses to crises but also, sometimes, in creating these, be it today or in the past, and will help us to understand whether and, if so, how cultural traditions problematize the notion of crisis as a fundamental and critical moment for society and for communities.
- 3) Explore the impact of culture in shaping resilience in the face of crises. Culture helps not only to react to present crises, but also to prepare societies for the threats and opportunities involved in future ones.
- 4) Emphasize how the humanities may contribute to the escalation or, equally, to the de-escalation and resolving of crises.

Proposals may explore any conception of crisis across time, any aspect of crisis throughout history, such as epidemics, pandemics, political upheavals, religious conflicts, wars, migrations (in some instances), etc., on both a macro and micro scale. The crises investigated do not have to be explicitly connected to Europe or European ways of conceptualizing crisis, and indigenous knowledge, non-European approaches and perspectives are highly encouraged. Similarly, research on minority/marginalised groups at a local, national or international level are also greatly encouraged. Proposals from all fields across the arts-based research and humanities are welcome.

## Scope of the transnational call

Proposals will address innovative outlooks on the phenomena of crises past and present. They will explore understandings of crisis, and how, by whom and why an event is defined as a crisis in the first place. They could interrogate human responsibilities and structural causes. They may also investigate the

temporalities, dynamics, complexities and entanglements of crises, along with their impacts on societies and communities. They could analyse individual or collective resilience, vulnerabilities, anticipations and responses to crises and the memories thus created or suppressed. Cross-cultural learning from crises is also a theme that they could explore. Proposals may involve investigating a variety of perspectives from one or several of the following sub-themes.

### **1. Different understandings of crises**

Proposals focusing on the conceptualization of crisis are welcome and may investigate how all crises have a discursive dimension, which could be explored from several points of view, amongst which:

- If a theory of crisis is possible and what advantages the concept has over other rival ones (e.g., revolution, decline, etc.).
- The significance of crisis within different cultural traditions, the transcultural exchanges and their impacts on understandings.
- How crisis is used in particular contexts (politics, civil society, business and the economy, art, religion and academia), the tensions generated and effects created.
- Narratives of crisis.
- Critical research theories or methodologies that, by challenging the status quo, have caused crises in the Humanities resulting in major conceptual transformations.
- To research the impact of human activities on climate and the environment from a humanities perspective.

Proposals could also explore the tensions between groups, to study their causes and effects, to identify the reasoning, the objectives of those who use the language of crisis: for example, the intention to hide a more serious reality, or, on the contrary, to provoke fears and anxieties, or to incite action.

### **2. Crises and the human response**

In both media and politics, the term 'crisis' is and was frequently used to dramatize a situation, to generate the perception of a looming threat or impending disaster, which creates a risk of escalation on the basis of polarised emotional reactions, thereby potentially generating even greater crisis.

There are several areas – temporal and spatial, structural and social, affective and communicative – where significant challenges remain for research on crises and the human response to them.

Thus, proposals could investigate the following questions:

- How do/did media, politics and other entities contribute to the escalation or/and de-escalation and resolving of crises?
- How do/did some assertions of belonging (whether, for example, connected to post-colonialism and de-colonial practices, to radical or extremist politics, to nostalgic or traditionalist ideas of culture/s, refugee communities) create, contribute to or respond to crises?
- Is the concept of crisis an effective – or equally effective – tool for analysis and explanation in the political, cultural, intellectual and economic domains?

### **3. The representation of crises**

Proposals might also investigate the evolving representations (or poetics) of crises, i.e., the changing representations of crisis resulting from transformations of heritage and cultural memory. Applicants are also encouraged to explore responses in the humanities and arts to representations of crises and the affects involved both in the production and reception of representation of disruptive and/or transformative events. Equally they are invited to address creativity engendered by crises – including as a positive reaction that helps to overcome the traumas caused by them –, discourses and imaginings of crises, as well as the potential for regeneration and hope.

Proposals could address:

- The immediate responses to and different representations of crises in literature, philosophy and the arts.
- The extended forms of commemoration, post-memory reinterpretations (e.g., fiction, poetry, films, paintings, music, memorials) which may – or may not – give voice to previously silenced groups (e.g., veterans, women, people of colour, immigrants, Roma, traveller communities and refugees), challenge aesthetic or ethical clichés and offer new modes of remembrance.
- Whose vision of crisis is represented in the media, literature and the creative and performative arts and why are they chosen.

## Knowledge exchange and impact

Knowledge exchange (KE) is a two-way process which brings together academic staff, users of research and wider groups and communities to exchange ideas, evidence and expertise. It is a process of working collaboratively, and is most effective when these relationships are established at the very start of the proposal.

Knowledge exchange activities are a crucial dimension to any proposed research project. In addition to the networking that takes place among academic partners and broader dissemination activities aimed at wider academic audiences, projects are also expected to develop links with stakeholders outside academy in order to maximise the societal benefit of the research. For example, collaborations may include the public sector, voluntary, community and charitable organisations, policy makers, the creative, cultural and heritage sectors, broadcasters, museums, galleries, business, industry, and practitioners (e.g. in the creative and performing arts). Collaborations should be meaningful for all partners involved and enable joint learning throughout the duration of the project and beyond. Public engagement activities may also be included to promote a wide understanding of the nature and impact of “crisis”. You should evidence how partnerships are equitable, ethical, responsible and meaningful.

It is recognised that you may not know the impact of your research at proposal stage. However, a knowledge exchange perspective should be included in the application, and we encourage applicants to explore, from the outset and throughout the life of your project and beyond, who could potentially benefit from your research and what you can do to help make this happen. Proposals should therefore include concrete plans for collaboration and knowledge exchange, demonstrating potential audiences, how these activities will add significant value to the research, and how your knowledge exchange activities will be monitored and evaluated throughout and beyond the project. Due consideration should be given that Knowledge Exchange will be part of the midterm and final monitoring requirements and that partnership nature and impact will need to be evidenced in detail.

Active inclusion of non-academic partners from the preparation phase of the project is encouraged and we recognise that it takes time to build these partnerships. Please refer to the national eligibility annex, for guidance about how Knowledge Exchange partners time can be costed as this depends on national funding rules.

A guide to Knowledge Exchange is available at: [Public Engagement, Knowledge Exchange and Impact: A Toolkit for HERA Projects \(heranet.info\)](https://www.heranet.info/public-engagement-knowledge-exchange-and-impact-a-toolkit-for-hera-projects)