

EUROPEAN
U R B A N
INITIATIVE

City-to-City Exchanges

Call for applications

4 April – 17 November 2023

Guidance for Applicants



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Région
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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR THE SUPPORT TO CAPACITY BUILDING UNDER THE EUROPEAN URBAN INITIATIVE

The Cohesion policy legislative package for 2021-2027 provides for the establishment of a European Urban Initiative (EUI). This initiative is conceived as an essential tool to support cities of all sizes, to build capacity and knowledge, to support innovation and develop transferable and scalable innovative solutions to urban challenges of EU relevance.

The legal basis of the EUI is included in the European Regional Development Fund/Cohesion Fund Regulation which provides for the main content and strategic framework of the initiative. The overall objectives of the EUI are (i) to strengthen integrated and participatory approaches to sustainable urban development, and (ii) to provide a stronger link to EU policies, and in particular to Cohesion policy. The initiative is aimed at offering coherent support to cities to overcome what may have been perceived in the past a fragmented landscape of manifold initiatives, programmes, and instruments in support of cities under Cohesion policy.

The capacity-building component of EUI seeks to improve the capacities of cities in the design of sustainable urban development (SUD) policies, strategies and practices in an integrated and participative way. It also contributes to the design and implementation of these policies and action plans on a local, regional and national level. This element encompasses the cooperation with URBACT IV networks of cities, as well as peer learning activities and capacity building events which are outlined in the sections to follow.

Sustainable Urban Development within Cohesion Policy should be primarily understood in the context of Article 11 of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)/Cohesion Fund (CF) Regulation¹, in conjunction with Article 28 (*Integrated territorial development*) and Article 29 (*Territorial strategies*) of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)². Article 11 provides the regulatory framework for urban authorities to design and implement SUD strategies, and to be involved as decision makers in project design and selection. Building the capacities of urban authorities on these challenges is key to ensuring that SUD strategies and the related ERDF investments (minimum 8% of ERDF resources in each EU Member State) deliver good results.

Sustainable Urban Development is also defined in the context of the New Leipzig Charter which highlights that, to achieve just, green, and productive cities, it is necessary to establish integrated and

¹ Article 11 of [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1058](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021: "To address economic, environmental, climate, demographic and social challenges, the ERDF shall support integrated territorial development based on territorial or community-led local development strategies (...) that are focused on urban areas, including functional urban areas ('sustainable urban development')".

² Article 28 and Article 29 of [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1060](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021

sustainable urban development strategies and ensure their implementation for the city as a whole, from its functional areas to its neighbourhoods³.

1.2 EUI CAPACITY BUILDING

Building on previous Urban Development Network (UDN) activities, the European Commission Joint Research Centre methodologies, the TAEIX REGIO Peer 2 Peer mechanism as well as UIA capitalisation work, EUI capacity building activities contribute to the following specific objectives:

- To improve the capacities of cities in the design of sustainable urban policies and practices in an integrated and participative way
- To improve the design and implementation of sustainable urban strategies and action plans in cities

The main activities proposed by EUI to contribute to these objectives are as follows:

Types	Activities	Methodological approach	Contribution to objectives
Peer learning activities	City-to-city exchanges	In-person visits (followed by an online exchange, when justified) carried out among groups of two or three cities. Peer cities share new working methods and innovative approaches on specific implementation challenges identified by the applicant city.	Applicant cities directly benefit by improving their capacities to tackle their specific implementation challenge(s) as identified in the application. Peer cities profit from the exchange in terms of networking and may also improve their capacities by increasing their understanding of how their working methods and innovative approaches may be applied in different contexts.
	Peer Reviews	Several article 11 SUD strategies are reviewed simultaneously by peers. Peer reviews may be organised as EU-wide events, events for a Cluster of EU Member States, or country-specific events.	Cities under review directly benefit by improving their capacities to design and implement SUD strategies and practices in an integrated and participative way. Participating peer cities not under review also benefit from the exchange in terms of networking and improve their capacities thanks

³ [New Leipzig Charter- The transformative power of cities for the common good](#) (europa.eu)

			to the experience of the other peers.
Capacity building events	Events	<p>Urban and managing authorities, and relevant stakeholders exchange information with each other and with the Commission on relevant urban challenges and on the implementation of Article 11 SUD strategies seeking for synergies and learnings from with UIA/EUI-IA, URBACT IV and the UAEU.</p> <p>Organised in various formats (seminars, workshops, trainings) and at different scales (EU-wide, multi-country, or country-specific), mixing expert-led and peer learning.</p>	Participants benefit from improved knowledge and knowhow on relevant SUD challenges and on the design and implementation of SUD strategies and action plans.

The information provided in this document hereafter refers only to EUI city-to-city exchanges.

2. CITY-TO-CITY EXCHANGES

2.1 MAIN FEATURES OF A CITY-TO-CITY EXCHANGE

2.1.1 Objectives

A city-to-city exchange brings together an urban authority facing a specific implementation challenge related to SUD ('the applicant') and another urban authority from a different EU Member State that has expertise which could help tackle this challenge ('the peer') for a short-term, quickly implemented visit.

A city-to-city exchange is a bottom-up, on-demand activity. The content, timing, and format of the exchange are defined by the applicant according to their specific needs related to the design and implementation of SUD strategies. Applications are submitted and approved for implementation on a rolling basis.

The objective of a city-to-city exchange is to improve the capacity of the applicant to tackle the identified SUD challenge through a process of peer learning and sharing of expertise.

To achieve the capacity building objective of an exchange, peers are expected to share practical knowledge and know-how which is tailored to the identified challenge and the urban context of the applicant. This may include:

- *Knowledge of suitable actions and approaches*
- *Technical skills and working methods*
- *More and less successful experiences of how the issue has been tackled in the peer city*
- *Recommendations on possible actions to be taken by the applicant city*

2.1.2 Thematic scope

A city-to-city exchange is required to focus on a specific policy challenge⁴ related to the implementation of Sustainable Urban Development within Cohesion Policy.

Applicants are required to define in the application form a specific policy challenge that consists of thematic and operational issues. The challenge should be as focused as possible to allow for an effective learning process between the applicant and the peers.

Exchanges may cover the range of challenges related to designing and implementing integrated, place-based strategies within Cohesion Policy. While the specific policy instrument to be influenced must be named in the application form, the challenge may refer to the design and implementation of specific types of projects to be funded through the policy instrument.

The below tables offer a non-exhaustive list⁵ of potential thematic and operational challenges that may be addressed, which cover the full range of policy objectives supported through Cohesion Policy.

Indicative thematic challenges

Productive, smart and connected	Research and Innovation
	Digital transition
	Localising production
	Decarbonised mobility
	Culture and sustainable tourism
	Support to Small and Medium Enterprises and entrepreneurs
Green	Sustainable soil and land use
	Resilient environments
	Climate adaptation

⁴ A challenge related to the implementation of a specific policy instrument. A policy instrument is a means for public intervention. It can be understood to mean any programme, policy, strategy, or law developed by public authorities and applied on the ground to improve a specific territorial situation.

⁵ The list of indicative challenges is adapted from the thematic taxonomy under development of the EUI Knowledge Exchange and Sharing Platform: Portico. Portico will be the online repository for the follow-up reports resulting from the city-to-city exchanges.

	Clean and healthy environments
	Biodiversity and nature protection
	Energy transition
	Circular Economy
Just and Inclusive	Inclusion
	Access to housing
	Education and employment
	Access to essential services
Place based	Safe and secure urban environment
	Balanced territorial development (including urban-rural linkages)
	Urban regeneration
	Sustainable urban planning

Indicative operational challenges:

Strategy	Diagnostics
	Sustainable Urban Development Strategies
	Localising Sustainable Development Goals
Governance	Multi-level governance
	Multi-stakeholder approach
	Public policy and legislation
Participation and Communication	Citizen engagement
	Communication with beneficiaries

Resource and funding	Access to funding (including selection criteria and procedures, and project pipeline preparation, implementation and monitoring)
	Public procurement and State Aid
Data management and evaluation	Data collection and analysis
	Monitoring and evaluation
	Territorial Impact Assessment
Scaling up and transfer	Capitalisation
	Scaling up
	Transfer/replication
Territorial tools	Integrated territorial investment
	Community-led local development
Territorial focus	Functional urban areas, neighbourhood, municipality

For additional examples of potential operational challenges related to Sustainable Urban Development, see the following resources:

- [Handbook for Sustainable Urban Development Strategies](#)
- [Urban Innovative Actions Operational challenges](#)
- [URBACT toolbox](#)

2.1.3 Participants

Cities participating in a city-to-city exchange belong to one of two categories: i) the applicant (primary beneficiary), ii) the peers (secondary beneficiaries).

In principle, city-to-city exchanges are bilateral in nature, bringing together one applicant city and one peer city. However, a second peer city may be included when the need is duly justified in the application form.

While both applicant and peers may improve their capacities thanks to the peer learning process, the applicant remains the primary beneficiary. The content and objectives of the exchange are defined by the applicant, not the peers. However, the peers are nevertheless secondary beneficiaries who receive financial support and who may also benefit from increased capacities on the issue addressed by the exchange.

2.2 ELIGIBLE AUTHORITIES

2.2.1 Main eligibility requirements

Applicants are urban authorities. There is no minimum population requirement for the city, town, or suburb. Urban authorities may be:

- A Local Administrative Unit defined according to the degree of urbanisation as city, town or suburb (corresponding to DEGURBA code 1 or DEGURBA code 2 of Eurostat).
- An association or grouping of urban authorities with legal status of organised agglomeration composed by Local Administrative Units, where the majority (at least 51%) of inhabitants lives in Local Administrative Units defined according to the degree of urbanisation (DEGURBA) of Eurostat as cities, towns or suburbs (corresponding to DEGURBA code 1 or DEGURBA code 2).

While only urban authorities may apply and be reimbursed directly by EUI, relevant stakeholders may also participate in the exchange alongside the applicant or peer urban authority if justified in the application. These stakeholders may be public bodies, bodies governed by public law or private bodies (e.g., rural authorities, regional development agencies, innovation agencies, waste management companies, housing associations, functional urban area associations, universities, Community Led Local Development Local Action Groups etc.).

All applicants are required to demonstrate their interest in integrated, place-based SUD approaches or their involvement in the implementation of SUD strategies.

Special attention will be given to applications focused on functional urban areas and those tackling urban-rural linkages.

2.2.2 Priority groups

Applications are invited from any eligible authorities on a rolling basis. However, applications from specific categories of urban authorities will be evaluated with priority:

- urban authorities in less developed regions (first priority) and transition regions (second priority)
- urban authorities with less than 500,000 inhabitants
- urban authorities that have participated in an EUI peer review
- urban authorities that have not yet benefited from an approved city-to-city exchange
- urban authorities resubmitting a previously rejected city-to-city exchange application

Further details on prioritisation of evaluation are described in Section 3.2 of the present document.

2.3 IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

2.3.1 Duration and timeline

City-to-city exchanges offer short-term opportunities for peer learning. City-to-city exchanges can be as simple as one visit between two cities. However, reciprocal visits are also possible. When duly justified, an applicant may define up to three visits per application if a series of events is most suited to tackling the identified challenge.

A visit may last between **two to five days**.

Applicants are expected to implement the visits as soon as possible following approval (i.e., as early as within the first month following notification of approval).

At the latest, all visits must be completed within 5 months of notification of approval (e.g., for an exchange approved on 10 May consisting of three visits, all must be completed by 10 October).

2.3.2 Number and format of events

There are two main formats for a city-to-city exchange – an outgoing visit or an incoming visit. The applicant selects the most appropriate format for each exchange according to their needs.

1. **OUTGOING VISIT:** Up to four participants from the applicant city travel to a peer city for an in-person exchange on working methods and approaches. Applicants experience first-hand the urban context of the peer and may visit different locations related to the identified challenge. They may exchange with a range of staff from the peer institution and relevant stakeholder institutions. It consists of a bilateral exchange between the applicant city and the hosting peer city, or trilateral exchanges involving a second peer city (if justified).
2. **INCOMING VISIT:** Up to two participants each from one or two peer cities travel to the applicant city to provide direct, in-person support on a specific topic or task. Peer(s) experience first-hand the urban context of the applicant and may visit different locations related to the identified challenge. Peer(s) may support the applicant in working meetings and technical activities alongside a wide range of staff from the applicant institution and relevant stakeholder institutions.

When duly justified in the application form, one **ONLINE EXCHANGE** per application may be organised as a follow-up to an in-person visit(s). This may allow the applicant and peer(s) to further discuss the challenge addressed, providing additional, updated information. It may be easier to mobilise specific staff from peer or applicant cities since no travel is required.

Note: Other forms of assistance and consultancy that go beyond peer learning among urban authorities (e.g., the development of studies, conferences, training courses etc) cannot be financed through a city-to-city exchange.

2.3.3 Examples of city-to-city exchanges

Example 1 – Bilateral exchange, one outgoing visit

The applicant is preparing an urban reforestation project to be financed by their SUD strategy. The applicant wants to learn from a peer how to manage the data collection and analysis, and how to engage with vulnerable groups to identify the most appropriate zones of intervention.

The applicant requests one visit to a peer city to discuss their green infrastructure project financed jointly by ERDF and ESF. In addition to a site visit, two workshops are organised. The first tackles the methodology used to gather and analyse temperature and rainfall data. The second tackled the identification of the territorial focus for the project, along with the methodology for selecting the locations for the green infrastructure interventions as part of a dedicated training programme for residents.

Example 2 – Bilateral exchange, one outgoing visit and one online exchange

The applicant is revising their SUD strategy and wants to improve the design of their monitoring system. The monitoring system is currently limited to the listing of indicators and the identifying of the body responsible for monitoring the implementation. The applicant requests one visit to a peer city and one online exchange:

Visit - May: The applicant visits the peer to see the key projects funded by the SUD strategy in the previous programming period and to meet the key stakeholders that contributed to the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy. The peer provides targeted recommendations on how the applicant can develop their first draft of a monitoring system.

Online meeting – September: The applicant and the peer meet online to review the final draft of the monitoring system prepared by the applicant. The peer provides in-depth recommendations on specific elements previously discussed and integrated by the applicant. The peer is also able to share new information about the design of their own monitoring system which has been finalised since the previous in-person visit.

Example 3 – Multi-lateral exchange, three visits (one incoming and two outgoing visits)

The applicant wants to improve the design of an ITI project focusing on the renovation of industrial buildings within the context of brownfield restoration. They wish to focus on multi-stakeholder engagement and monitoring and evaluation.

The applicant has identified a need to exchange with two peers to address this challenge:

- Peer 1 that developed a project focusing on the renovation of industrial heritage financed through the mainstream ERDF Regional Operational Programme.
- Peer 2 that is developing a brownfield restoration project financed through ITI.

The applicant requests three visits:

Visit 1 - June: Peers 1 and 2 visit the applicant to examine the brownfield site and to discuss the challenges and opportunities to renovate the existing industrial buildings. The timing of the visit coincides with a consultation meeting which allows the peer cities to present their successful experiences in mobilising the private sector to local stakeholders.

Visit 2 - September: The applicant (and, if justified), peer 2 visit peer 1 to tour their renovated industrial heritage complex and observe the cultural and economic activities that have been activated onsite. The draft terms of reference of the applicant's project are by now available, allowing both peers to review the specifications and propose improvements to the proposed indicators.

Visit 3 - October: The applicant (and, if justified, peer 1) visit peer 2 to see the first phase of completed works from their brownfield restoration project. The applicant and peers discuss the monitoring and evaluation strategy that has been put in place and identify recommendations that can be taken on board by the applicant.

With a multi-lateral and multi-visit exchange, an applicant can benefit by meeting two different peers several times in a short space of time, when justified by the challenge to be addressed. A peer visiting another peer alongside the applicant may only be justified if it contributes to meeting the needs of the applicant.

2.3.4 Implementation steps

For an application that will be approved by the EUI Permanent Secretariat (EUI PS), the implementation of a city-to-city exchange may follow the indicative steps and timeline below. However, the implementation can be faster, when possible, for the applicant.

The below timeline applies for the applications from the priority groups. In periods of peak demand, applications may take longer to approve, particularly for cities outside the priority groups.

Indicative timeline	Applicant	Peer(s)	EUI PS (+ experts)
Before submission	Identification and discussion with peers	Peer(s) is/are informed of the application by the applicant and agree to participate if approved	
Week 0	Application submission		
Week 0-3			Evaluation process
Week 2-4			Notification of decision to applicant
Week 4			If requested, allocate an expert moderator to support the exchange.
From week 5	Start of event implementation period		
Within 4 weeks of exchange(s)	Drafting of event follow-up report (after final event in the case of a series of events)	Review of follow-up report	Receipt of follow-up report for validation
Within 4 weeks of exchange(s)	Financial claim submitted (after final event in the case of a series of events)	Contribution to financial claim to be submitted	
Within 4 weeks of receipt of financial claim			Financial claim approved for reimbursement
6 months after exchange	Light evaluation completed		Light evaluation sent

2.3.5 Follow-up process

➤ *Short term*

Applicants are required to produce a follow-up report in English and share it with EUI PS **within one month** of the exchange. The content of the report should include the following information:

- Participants (including name, position, institution, city, financed by EUI or not)
- Objectives of exchange
- Agenda (including format and duration)
- Current situation and challenges
- Expected impact from the city-to-city exchange
- Key takeaways / recommendations for applicant to tackle the implementation challenge
- Any follow-up actions proposed (e.g., additional exchanges to be requested, introductions to be made by peers, additional resources to be shared by peers, suggestions for capacity building events)

If an exchange consisted of several events, only one follow-up report should be provided documenting all events. Receipt and validation of the follow-up report will be required in order for EUI to approve the Reimbursement Form.

The follow-up report will be uploaded on the space for exchange for capacity building on Portico. This will allow other community members to view it, comment on it, post their suggestions or contact the application or peers to discuss further. Reports from city-to-city exchanges will be grouped by theme according to the thematic taxonomy and included within any thematically relevant EUI knowledge and capitalization activities.

➤ *Long term*

Six months after the exchange, the applicant is invited to evaluate lightly whether the input received brought about any tangible benefits e.g., improvements in the design and implementation of the SUD policy addressed or related projects, improvements in day-to-day working practices within the applicant institution and among stakeholders. A survey will be shared with the beneficiary to capture their opinion on the exchange overall, the improvement of their capacities, and the quality of the support from peers.

2.4 IDENTIFYING PEERS

Applicants are required to identify peers before applying for a city-to-city exchange.

Peers are urban authorities from a different EU Member State than the applicant. Their expertise is coherent with the challenge described by the applicant. Each peer city is expected to visit the applicant city or host the applicant city at least once.

Peer cities will be allocated a daily rate corresponding to the expertise they will invest in the exchange to provide advice to the applicant cities.

Applicants are required to indicate the name of the peer institution(s) and staff members that will participate in the exchange in the application form. Stakeholders may participate in the delegation of the peer urban authority.

Applicants can identify peers, for example, by making use of databases of best practices, such as the [Handbook for Sustainable Urban Development Strategies](#), the [URBACT Good Practice Database](#) or the [Interreg Europe Good Practice Database](#). However, any peer that complies with the eligibility rules may be chosen.

In order to facilitate the process of identifying peers, EUI has created a [contact form](#) allowing an urban authority to be put in contact with another urban authority from an Urban Innovative Actions project or an Urban Agenda for the EU Partnership, in order to prepare a city-to-city exchange application. The request will be forwarded to the relevant contact person. Any subsequent follow-up or discussion is carried out bilaterally without EUI involvement, subject to the interest of the urban authority being contacted. The contact form can be found [on the EUI website](#).

Peers may also be identified from URBACT networks. Applicants are invited to browse the [list of networks](#) on the URBACT website. To obtain contact details from specific partners, the [National URBACT points](#) may be contacted and requested to provide the contact details of specific partners.

2.5 EXPERT SUPPORT

Upon request from applicants, EUI can mobilise an expert moderator to support the learning process among peers. Experts can contribute to:

- the facilitation of exchanges,
- foster dialogue,
- adapt and use creative methodologies for discussion.

Moderators are expected to facilitate the interpretation and adaptation of ideas in multinational and multicultural contexts and to steer the discussion in a productive and objective-focused direction. They can reformulate questions, pinpoint important elements, monitor participants' performance to discern potential learning or communication challenges.

Experts may offer also methodological support to contribute to the definition of the agenda of the city-to-city exchange. Applicants are also encouraged to take inspiration from methodologies available within the [URBACT toolbox](#) when planning their exchange.

EUI will identify a group of city-to-city exchange moderators and will allocate a moderator to the exchange based on thematic and language/geographical expertise.

2.6 FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Financial support is offered to city-to-city exchange participants. The financial support is provided under the form of lump sums⁶ and is paid directly to each participating city (applicant city and peers). The expenses covered are staff costs (only for the peers), travel costs and per diem (accommodation and subsistence).

The table below provides an overview of the financial support available for the applicant and peer(s).

City-to-city exchanges		
Cost	Applicant	Peer
Staff costs	No	Up to 2 people may claim for duration of each in-person visit (excluding travel days) and 1 day for an online exchange
Travel	Up to 4 people may claim for each outgoing visit to peers	Up to 2 people may claim for each in-person visit to applicant or to the other peer
Per diem	4 people may claim for duration of each outgoing visit to peers (plus one travel day)	2 people may claim for duration of each in-person visit to applicant or to the other peer (plus one travel day)

The financial support covers the following expenses:

- Staff costs: Up to two persons per peer city are entitled to receive a fixed amount of EUR 350 per day for the duration of the exchanges, or for one day in the case of an online exchange. No staff costs are foreseen for the applicant city.
- Travel costs: the travel costs of up to 2 persons per peer and up to 4 persons from the applicant city can be budgeted and reimbursed. The reimbursement consists of a lump sum based on the distance between the hosting city and the participating ones. For distances above 400km, the lump sum are calculated on the basis of the following [unit cost amounts per distance band](#). For distances below 400km, the lump sum is calculated by adding together the "[intra Member State return journeys](#)" of the Member states of the hosting city and the one of the participating city concerned.

⁶ A lump sum takes the form of a single payment of money. In the case of EUI capacity building activities, the lump sum is calculated based on simplified cost options and payable after the completion and proper reporting of the activity.

- Per diem: a per diem for up to 2 persons per peer city and up to 4 persons from the applicant city can be budgeted and reimbursed. The per diem is a daily rate that covers accommodation, subsistence and local transportation of the participating cities. The per diem covers the duration of the exchange (2 to 5 days per event) plus one day per event to cover the necessary travel time. Any hosting city is not entitled to budget or request any reimbursement for travel costs or per diem (subsistence and accommodation) costs. The [per diem amounts](#) are based on the European Commission Per diem rates - 25/07/2022.

The following rules must be followed:

- A budget must be submitted with the application form in order to be able to request reimbursement. The budget is calculated per event within the exchange and indicates the maximum financial support that the applicant city and peers will receive.
- The reimbursement is based on the actual number of participants that participated in the exchanges as confirmed by duly signed participant lists and IT attendance records (for online events).
- The financial support to participating stakeholders may be included within the budget and Reimbursement Form of the applicant city and peers. The urban authority concerned is responsible for setting the reimbursement arrangements with its stakeholders. EUI cannot intervene in these arrangements nor reimburse stakeholders directly.
- The lump sum is dependent on the duration and location of the exchanges, the distances between the hosting city and the other participating cities, and the number of staff involved.

Note:

- Participants are responsible for booking their own travel and accommodation arrangements.
- For peers, reimbursement is carried out only upon approval of Reimbursement Form, following cross-checking of the application form and the list of participants by EUI PS in the case of peers.
- For applicants, reimbursement is carried out only upon approval of the Reimbursement Form, following cross-checking of the application form and the list of participants by EUI PS and submission by the applicant and validation by EUI PS of the follow-up report.
- Reimbursement is paid into the bank account of the applicant and peer urban authorities. Complete bank account details are required in the Reimbursement Form, along with supporting documents proving the account belongs to the urban authority.
- The staff of both urban authorities and stakeholders may be among the funded persons for applicants and peer cities.
- For each event, a minimum of one person per urban authority must participate.
- Additional participants beyond the maximum number indicated in section 2.6 from the applicant or peer cities may join the exchange at their own expense.

3. APPLICATION PROSESSION AND SELECTION

3.1. APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT AND PROCESS

The call for applications for city-to-city exchanges will open on **4 April 2023 and will close on 17 November 2023 at 12:00 CET**. Applications will be processed on a rolling basis according to the prioritisation criteria and approved or rejected based on selection criteria, as shown below.

For this call, there is no limit to the number of applications that can be submitted or approved per applicant. However, applications from urban authorities that have not benefited from an approved city-to-city exchange may be prioritised.

The application form will be available on EU Survey and will consist of five parts:

A. General information

In this section, the applicant provides a title for the exchange and information that facilitates the prioritisation of applications.

B. Participating cities

In this section, the applicant provides details on the participating urban authorities (applicant and peers), the individuals participating in the exchange and the role that each person is expected to play in the exchange.

C. Challenge and motivation

In this section, the applicant describes the challenge addressed by the exchange, the current situation faced with regard to the challenge described, and the policy instrument related to Sustainable Urban Development that will be improved thanks to the exchange. The interest of the applicant in integrated, place-based approaches described along with the motivation of the applicant in requesting the exchange.

D. Budget and workplan

In order to complete section D, a Work Plan and Budget Excel file must be completed and uploaded. The following information must be filled in thereby calculating the maximum budget for the exchange: Number of visits, format(s), duration, date, participating cities per event, participating number of participants per city per event, location of visit(s).

E. Endorsement

In this section, the applicant is asked to confirm the endorsement of the application by their institution and to provide the name and contact details of the authorised signatory endorsing the application. The legal obligations linked to the endorsement of the application are detailed in the Application Form. Additional endorsements are expected to be given by the authorised signatories of the peer urban authority/ies.

3.2. SELECTION PROCESS

Following submission, each application is subject to a prioritisation, evaluation and selection process organised along the following steps:

1. Prioritisation
2. Eligibility check

3. Quality evaluation

The prioritisation process will be carried out prior to the evaluation process as the result determines the order in which applications are evaluated.

The evaluation and selection process will be carried out on a rolling basis for all applications submitted via EU survey before the deadline. Applications will be evaluated by a team of experts under the supervision of EUI PS who take a final decision on the selection process.

Applicants will be notified of the decision about their application (approved or rejected) at the end of the selection process.

3.2.1. Prioritisation of evaluation

Applications are invited from any eligible authorities on a rolling basis. However, applications from specific categories of urban authorities will be evaluated with priority:

- Urban authorities in less developed regions
- Urban authorities with less than 500,000 inhabitants
- Urban authorities that have participated in an EUI peer review
- Urban authorities that have not yet benefited from an approved city-to-city exchange
- Urban authorities resubmitting a previously rejected city-to-city exchange application
- Urban authorities in transition regions (second priority)

For each category that applies to an application, a prioritisation point will be allocated. The applications with the most priority points move towards the top of the list of applications that are pending evaluation resulting in faster notification of those applicants. Applications received from urban authorities outside the priority group will still be evaluated but may take longer to approve than the below indicated timeframe in periods of high demand.

3.2.2. Eligibility check

The purpose of the eligibility check is to verify the compliance of the received Application Forms with the formal eligibility criteria; avoid further assessment of ineligible applications; and ensure equal treatment of all applications to be selected for support. The eligibility check will verify the eligibility of the Application Form and the eligibility of the applicant, as well as the eligibility of the peer institutions.

The eligibility criteria for an application for a city-to-city exchange are the following:

1. The Application Form has been submitted electronically via EU survey before the deadline indicated in the Guidance of the Call for application.
2. Mandatory fields of the Application Form are completely filled in.
3. The applicant and peers are urban authorities of a Local Administrative Unit defined according to the degree of urbanisation as city, town or suburb (corresponding to DEGURBA code 1 or DEGURBA code 2 of Eurostat).

OR

The applicant and peers are an association or grouping of urban authorities with legal status of organised agglomeration composed by Local Administrative Units, where the majority (at least

51%) of inhabitants lives in Local Administrative Units defined according to the degree of urbanisation (DEGURBA) of Eurostat as cities, towns or suburbs (corresponding to DEGURBA code 1 or DEGURBA code 2).

Only eligible urban authorities may submit an application for a city-to-city exchanges or be listed as peer institutions. An application submitted by a stakeholder or an application where the peer institution listed is not an urban authority will be declared ineligible.

4. The applicant and peers are located in an EU Member State.
5. The peer(s) is/are located within a different EU Member State to the applicant.
6. The applicant and its institution comply with the requirements on exclusion from access to funding (more details are provided below in the Section 2.3 “Exclusion criteria for grant applicants”.)
7. The authorised signatory of the applicant has confirmed their endorsement of the application and their support to its implementation, if the application is approved.
8. The authorised signatories of the peers have confirmed their endorsement of the application and their support to its implementation, if the application is approved.

If all requirements set out above are not complied with, the application is deemed ineligible and no further evaluation is undertaken. Applicants will be notified at the end of the evaluation and selection process of the eligibility of their applications.

3.2.3. Quality evaluation

Applicants that are declared eligible will be subject to a quality evaluation. Quality evaluation includes, but is not limited to, coherence and consistency of the applicant throughout the Application Form.

The quality criteria for the call are the following:

Challenge addressed

- The application focuses on a challenge related to designing/implementing SUD strategies within Cohesion Policy.
- If a ‘Series of events’ is selected, the application justifies why this is required to address the challenge identified.
- If an online exchange is requested, the application justifies why and when this is required to address the challenge identified.

Motivation for applying

- The applicant demonstrates an involvement or interest in integrated, place-based approaches or the design and implementation of SUD strategies.
- The application justifies how the exchange will contribute to the improved implementation of a named policy instrument related to SUD.
- The application justifies how the exchange will contribute to the improved capacities of participants to tackle the implementation challenge specified.
- The type of outputs expected to be produced is coherent with a city-to-city exchange and the thematic focus of the exchange.

Peers

- The peer(s) expertise is coherent with the challenge described by the applicant.
- For applications with more than one peer, the participation of the second peer is justified according to the challenge addressed and the expertise of the peer.
- Each peer(s) visit(s) the applicant city or hosts the applicant city at least once.

3.3. EXCLUSION CRITERIA

In accordance with Financial Regulation⁷, applicants may be excluded from the grant award procedure if the Applicant City or persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control within the Applicant City, or persons who are essential for the implementation of the exchange are in one or more of the following exclusion situations:

- bankruptcy, insolvency or winding-up procedures,
- breach of obligations relating to the payment of taxes or social security contributions,
- grave professional misconduct, including misrepresentation,
- fraud,
- corruption,
- conduct related to a criminal organisation,
- money laundering or terrorist financing,
- terrorist offences or offences linked to terrorist activities,
- child labour and other trafficking in human beings,
- irregularity,
- creating or being a shell company.

During the application process, the Applicant City must declare that it does not fall under one of the exclusion criteria above mentioned. This declaration is included in the Application Form in the EU survey.

During the selection procedure and prior to the final decision of the Selection Committee on the grant award, EUI PS may check applicants in the Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES), the system established by the European Commission to reinforce the protection of the Union's financial interests and to ensure sound financial management⁸. If an Applicant City or a Peer is detected in the EDES, EUI PS notifies the concerned City, who has then the opportunity to present a defence before a final decision is made by EUI PS, in compliance with the principle of proportionality.

⁷ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2018/1046/oj>

⁸ Article 142, Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union.

3.4. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The EUI is committed to providing a high-quality service. A complaint is treated as any expression of dissatisfaction with our service which calls for a response. Complaints will be listened to, treated seriously, and learnt from so that we can continuously improve our service.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction whether justified or not. Complaints can cover:

- the standard of service we provide,
- the behaviour of staff or any action or lack of action by staff affecting an individual, group or organisation,
- the decisional process of supporting and financing European Urban Initiative activities,
- application evaluation related to the prioritisation, eligibility check, and quality evaluation,
- financial control procedures,
- the decisional process of the Entrusted Entity/ EUI PS during activity implementation.

Complaints do not cover: matters that have already been fully investigated through this complaints procedure, anonymous complaints, complaints about access to information where procedures and remedies are set out in legislation/regulation e.g. access to documents, general data protection.

All complaints received will be dealt with confidentially. However, we do not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour by complainants. Unacceptable behaviour includes behaviour which is abusive, offensive or threatening. We will take action to protect staff from such behaviour if a complainant behaves in a way that is unreasonably persistent or vexatious.

All complaints must be submitted in English, in writing (post or email) to the following addresses:

The European Urban Initiative – Permanent Secretariat

Les Arcuriales, 45D Rue de Tournai, 7e étage

59000 Lille, France

e-mail: complaints@urban-initiative.eu

The EUI has a two-stage complaints procedure. At each stage, as much clear detail as possible needs to be provided, including (if relevant) any documents and correspondence, and including the statement that a complaint is being made in line with the procedure. For complaints concerning project and financing decisions, a complaint can only be made if originating from the main accountable body.

Step 1: Complaints are made to EUI PS. This is the first opportunity to try and get a complaint resolved. EUI PS in liaison with the Entrusted Entity, will examine the complaint and provide answers to the complainant.

Step 2: If the response provided by EUI PS is considered unsatisfactory by the complainant and it is felt the procedures were not respected, then a formal complaint may be filed and a review by a Complaints Panel may be requested. In principle, and depending on the issue addressed, the Complaints Panel is made up of EUI PS and the Entrusted Entity. Impartiality of members of the Complaints Panel towards the case under review will be ensured. The decision if the complaint is justified or to be rejected is taken

by the Complaints Panel by consensus. The decision of the Complaints Panel is final, binding to all parties and not subject to any further complaint proceedings.

Complaints must be raised maximum 15 working days following the incident in question. The Permanent Secretariat will then have 20 working days to respond to the complaint. Following the answer to the complaint, the complainant has a maximum of 15 working days from the date of the response, to request that the complaint be progressed to the next step. The review will be undertaken and communicated to the complainant within 20 working days following the request. The aim is to complete all complaints within the timescales above; however, if a complaint is very complex and/or a Complaints Panel is needed to be convened, it may occasionally be necessary to extend the time limit. If this is the case, the complainant will be kept informed of progress with the investigation, the reasons for the delay, and the new deadline. The above complaints procedure and timeframes shall not prejudice the start-up or ongoing implementation of activities financed by the European Urban Initiative.

Complaints regarding application evaluation

Applicants of ineligible or rejected applications are informed in writing about the decision. The notification includes detailed information on the reasons why the application is rejected (eligibility criteria not fulfilled, detailed comments from EUI PS concerning the quality evaluation). Only the applying urban authority can file a complaint. The urban authority can address questions about or raise objections against the eligibility or evaluation decision to EUI PS. Please note that these queries must be made within 15 working days after the first official notification of the non-selection of the application by EUI PS⁹. This deadline will not prejudice the start of the activity for the selected applications.

In principle, complaints can only be logged against the following criteria:

- The evaluation does not correspond to the information provided by the applicant in the submitted Application Form and mandatory annexes.
- The application evaluation and selection process failed to comply with the specific procedures laid down in the Guidance for the Call for Applications for city-to-city exchanges that materially affected or could have affected the decision.

In case the complaint is justified, the case will be sent back to the Selection Committee to review the application and its evaluation.

⁹ The deadline for receiving queries starts counting from the day after the first notification was sent by the Permanent Secretariat. The notifications are dispatched only to the email addresses of the legal representative and contact person of the application. Therefore, it is responsibility of applicants to provide active email addresses and to check them regularly (including their SPAM folders). Please note that these addresses cannot be changed following submission of the application form. Therefore, the Permanent Secretariat cannot be held accountable in case the notification was not received by the applicant.

4. CONTRACTING

4.1 THE GRANT AGREEMENT

The urban authorities involved in approved applications will be required to sign a Grant Agreement. A Grant Agreement binds the Beneficiary¹⁰ and the Peers to the Entrusted Entity. Besides the maximum amount of ERDF granted to the exchange, it provides all the conditions under which the exchange is approved and stipulates the legal basis for funding. The Grant Agreement cannot be amended.

The Grant Agreement must be signed by the Beneficiary and the Peers. The contract with the Entrusted Entity will be shared with beneficiaries following notification of approval, to be returned signed by the beneficiary when submitting the Reimbursement Form at the latest.

4.2 EUROPEAN LAW REQUIREMENTS REGARDING EUROPEAN UNION FUNDS AND VISIBILITY

Capacity Building activities are co-financed by public funds. Beneficiaries must consequently acknowledge their funding source, the support from the European Union and communicate the role and achievements of the European Urban Initiative.

Article 50 of the Regulation 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 lays down beneficiaries' obligations regarding information and communication measures for the public. Visibility requirements apply to all co-financed printed and digital products, publications, online, offline, and on-site activities and events. In order to properly follow the visibility requirements:

Beneficiaries must include the EU emblem and reference to the ERDF support from the EU.

Urban authorities must include:

- a statement that highlights the support from the EU and EUI in all documents and communication materials for general public and for participants
- on its official website and social media sites, if such exist, a short description of the activity, proportionate to the level of support, including its aims and results, and highlighting the financial support from the European Union.

The following materials and templates are available on the EUI website:

- European Urban Initiative Visual Identity.
- European Urban Initiative Brand book.
- Templates: (i) PowerPoint and Word, (ii) letter paper, (iii) publication layout

¹⁰ Following approval of an application, the applicant is referred to as the beneficiary.

5. REPORTING AND TERMS OF PAYMENT

5.1. REPORTING PROCEDURE

The reporting of the activity will be carried out after the last city-to-city exchange event via the EUI Monitoring System if the system is operational or via another system indicated by EUI PS.

The submission of a completed, satisfactory follow-up report by the beneficiary accompanied by the Reimbursement Form which is approved by EUI PS is the basis for payment.

The follow-up report must be accompanied by the Reimbursement Form (template provided by EUI PS), which includes the IBAN of the bank account of each institution and is accompanied by Bank Account Identification Documents for each of the bank accounts listed.

The beneficiary and the peer(s) must submit the documents within 30 working days of the date of the last event.

If the reporting is deemed satisfactory by EUI PS, then it is approved by EUI PS, which will trigger payment. If the reporting requires correction or completion, EUI PS will request ad-hoc corrective or complete actions to the urban authority at fault. If the reporting is not completed, or still unsatisfactory after requests for correction/completion have been sent by EUI PS, the urban authority at fault will not receive reimbursement, or benefit from promotional opportunities from EUI PS (e.g. invitation to participate in capitalisation studies, or invitations to speak in capacity building events etc)

5.2. TERMS OF REIMBURSEMENT

The reimbursement of costs incurred during the city-to-city exchange by the beneficiary and peer(s) will be carried out by EUI PS following the completion of tasks as described in the previous section at the expected quality. The reporting procedure will lead to payment of the approved amounts to the beneficiary and peers based on the on-time submission and following approval of the Report and Reimbursement Form following approval.

The Reimbursement Form template to be used will be provided to the beneficiary and peers with the notification of approval of the application. Besides information on the eligible costs of their participating representatives (employees of the urban authority or other relevant invited stakeholders), the beneficiary and peer(s) will provide their bank account data on the Reimbursement Form. Payment to the city under review and peers shall be made by EUI PS no later than 80 days from the date of the approvals of their Reimbursement Form.

6. HOW TO GET ASSISTANCE

The EUI PS staff are ready to assist applicants with any questions they may have during the call:

- EUI PS will organise two Applicant Webinars: 5 April and 3 May 2023. The webinars will be broadcasted online, with a live Q&A session dedicated to the Call for Applications for city-to-city exchanges. Interested applicants may register for the Applicant Webinar on the EUI website.

- Bilateral online consultations will be offered. Interested applicants are required to first read the full call documentation, watch the webinar recording, and to prepare a list of questions before the consultations.

7. KEY DATES

- **03/04/2023** – launch of the pilot Call for Applications for city-to-city exchanges.
- **05/04/2023** – Applicant Webinar
- **17/04/2023 – 13/11/2023** – bilateral online consultations.
- **03/05/2023** – Applicant Webinar
- **17/11/2023** – closure of the call and deadline for submitting an application
- **15/12/2023** – indicative date for the latest application to be approved