

EUROPEAN
U R B A N
INITIATIVE

City-to-City Exchanges

Guidance for Applicants

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1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This guidance document is aimed at urban authorities who are interested in taking advantage of the opportunity to participate in a City-to-City Exchange supported by the European Urban Initiative (EUI). It presents the following content:

- In brief: What is an EUI City-to-City Exchange?
- What's in it for participating cities?
- Who is eligible to take part?
- What kind of topics can City-to-City Exchanges address?
- The EUI City-to-City Exchange process in detail
- What is expected of participating cities?
- How to apply?
- How are cities selected?
- Contractual and administrative elements

What other capacity building opportunities does EUI provide?

City-to-City Exchanges are just one of the capacity building activities organised by EUI. You might also be interested in opportunities to take part in Peer Reviews or training events.

Activity	Key features
Peer Reviews	Peer Reviews support European cities to improve the design and implementation of their Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) strategies, ¹ through a process of benchmarking and peer learning. Each Peer Review involves one 'city under review' (primary beneficiary), working with a group of up to six cities acting as 'peer reviewer cities' (secondary beneficiaries) to address a thematic challenge in developing, implementing or monitoring an effective SUD strategy.
Events	<p>EUI organises ad hoc capacity building events, mixing expert-led and peer-based learning in various formats. These include seminars, workshops and training events, which might be EU-wide events, country-specific or with a small group of countries.</p> <p>EUI capacity building events bring together urban authorities, ERDF Managing Authorities, the European Commission and relevant stakeholders to exchange information on key urban challenges and the implementation of Article 11 strategies.</p> <p>These events are also opportunities to seek synergies between and lessons across EUI, Urban Innovative Actions, URBACT and the Urban Agenda for the EU.</p> <p>Stay tuned for the next events. Sign up for the EUI newsletter and follow EUI on social media.</p>

¹ An SUD strategy is a strategy that adopts an integrated and place-based approach to urban development. This means strategies that engage multiple sectors, multiple levels and multiple stakeholders in approaches that balance economic, social and environmental goals in an urban area (including Functional Urban Areas). They can also involve approaches covering multiple territories and/or community-led strategies.

2. IN BRIEF: WHAT IS A CITY-TO-CITY EXCHANGE?

City-to-City Exchanges (C2C Exchanges) are one of the **capacity building activities offered by EUI** to support European cities to connect and exchange knowledge, expertise, and experience through **in-person study visits**.

A C2C Exchange focuses on how to address specific **local challenges in the design and implementation of sustainable urban development strategies, policies or projects** (See Section 5 *what types of challenge can a City-to-City Exchange address?*)

At the core of the activity is the possibility for cities to meet in person and have a first-hand experience of how other urban authorities in the EU tackle a particular thematic or operational challenge. (See Section 3. *“What’s in it for participating cities?”*)

Each European Urban Initiative C2C Exchange brings together an urban authority facing a specific design and/or implementation challenge related to sustainable urban development (**‘the requesting city’**) and an urban authority that has expertise which could help tackle this challenge (**‘the peer city’**). The peer city must come from a **different EU Member State to the requesting city**. (See Section 4 *“Who is eligible to take part”*)

Although, European Urban Initiative C2C Exchanges are typically bilateral in nature, **a second peer city may be included** if its participation can bring valuable insights into the peer learning process.

Each C2C Exchange is a quickly implemented and short-term capacity-building activity that takes place through a set of up-to-three in-person study visits **over no more than five months**. (See Section 6. *“The City-To-City Exchange process in detail”*)

It is a **bottom-up, on-demand activity**. The content, timing, and format of the exchange are **defined by the requesting city** (and their peers) according to their local needs.

- Study visits involve participants from the requesting city visiting a peer city to experience their local approaches and solutions – **‘outgoing visits’**.
- Study visits may also involve participants from each peer city visiting the requesting city to provide feedback and advice – **‘incoming visits’**.

The set of study visits may include **a mix of peer-learning activities**, workshops, trainings, site visits, etc. **Online exchanges** may also be organised as a follow-up to or to prepare the in-person visit(s).

The C2C Exchanges are paid for by EUI – including **travel, accommodation, and subsistence expenses** for up to four participants per visit from the requesting city, and up to two participants per visit from peer(s). Each C2C Exchange may also benefit on request from the **support of an expert moderator** who can be selected from an approved list in the EUI moderators’ catalogue. (See Section 3. *“What’s in it for participating cities?”*)

Participation in an EUI C2C Exchange is based on a **formal selection process** through an ongoing/rolling call with **no fixed deadline for applications** (See Section 8 *“How to apply”* and Section 9 *“How are participants selected?”*).

There is **no limit to the number of applications** that can be submitted or approved per urban authority. However, applications from urban authorities that have not yet benefited from an approved City-to-City Exchange may be prioritised.

3. WHAT IS IN IT FOR PARTICIPATING CITIES

Requesting cities

The requesting cities are the primary beneficiaries of the City-to-City Exchanges. They, receive **inspiration, guidance and advice** from peer cities in relation to the specific challenge(s) they face in the design or implementation of their strategies, projects, and policies.

They receive **financial support** to cover **travel and subsistence** costs involved in participating in study visits to the peer cities.

EUI covers the **travel, accommodation, and subsistence costs of up to four requesting-city participants** to take part in **up to three study visits**. This is paid in the form of a lump sum. For more precise details, see Section 11 “Contractual and administrative elements”.

Cities can also receive **support** in the form of an EUI expert who will guide and shape the exchanges to facilitate the learning process and ensure that they remain outcome-focused and inspiring. More specifically, experts can contribute to:

- defining the work plan and study visit agendas;
- facilitating exchanges and dialogue between partners;
- adapting and using creative methodologies for discussion; and
- supporting the interpretation and adaptation of ideas.

The involvement of an expert moderator is recommended as she/he can contribute to improving the learning potential of the exchange. More information regarding their role can be found in Annex II: EUI City-to-City Exchange Experts.

Peer cities

While the requesting city remains the primary beneficiary of the activities, a City-to-City Exchange is **definitively an opportunity for mutual learning**.

Peer cities have the opportunity to take **inspiration from the requesting city’s** approaches and solutions, as well as **reflecting critically on their own practices** through the process of preparing and presenting them to the requesting city.

Peer cities receive financial support to cover **travel and subsistence** costs involved in participating in study visits. Furthermore, peer cities can also claim **staff costs** associated with participation in study visits or online exchanges.

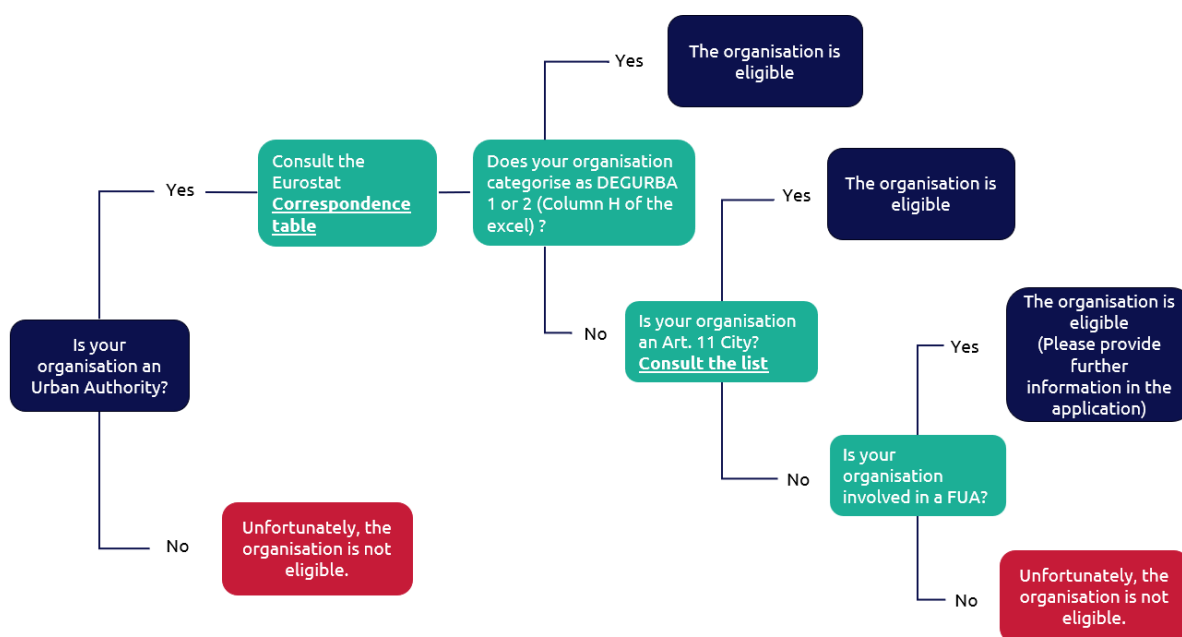
EUI covers the **staff costs** as well as the **travel, accommodation, and subsistence costs of up to two representatives from peer cities** to take part in up to three study visits. This is paid in the form of a lump sum. For more precise details, see Section 11 “Contractual and administrative elements”.

4. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO TAKE PART?

City-to-City Exchanges (C2C Exchanges) are targeting **urban authorities in the EU** who can participate as either the 'requesting city' or a 'peer city'.

There is no minimum population requirement for the city, town, or suburb. However, urban authorities must fit into **at least one of the following three categories**:

- **A Local Administrative Unit (LAU) defined according to the degree of urbanisation (DEGURBA) of Eurostat as either a city, town or suburb (DEGURBA codes 1 or 2).**
The official degree of urbanisation of each LAU can be consulted via the [Eurostat reference table of DEGURBA codes](#).
- **A Local Administrative Unit selected as an 'Art.11 City'² by the respective ERDF Managing Authority.**
The official designation of all Art. 11 cities can be found in this [EUI List of Art. 11 Cities](#).
- **A Functional Urban Area (FUA) – or 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 live in Local Administrative Units defined according to the degree of urbanisation (DEGURBA) of Eurostat as cities, towns or suburbs (corresponding to DEGURBA codes 1 or 2). If the FUA does not have a legal status, one of its main urban authorities may apply in the name of the FUA as a whole.'**



While only urban authorities may apply and be reimbursed directly by EUI, **relevant stakeholders may also participate in a C2C Exchange alongside the urban authorities of the involved cities**, if duly 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, municipal companies, waste management companies, housing associations, universities, Community Led Local Development Local Action Groups etc.).

² Article 11 of [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1058](#) on the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund defines the support provided to Sustainable Urban Development, requiring that "At least 8% of the ERDF resources at national level under the Investment for jobs and growth goal... shall be allocated to sustainable urban development." On this basis, 'Article 11 cities' and 'Article 11 strategies' are those that implement the 8% earmarking established.

All applicants are required to demonstrate their interest in improving their integrated, place-based approaches to sustainable urban development.

5. WHAT TYPES OF CHALLENGE CAN A CITY-TO-CITY EXCHANGE ADDRESS?

Requesting cities identify the challenge that they want to address through a City-to-City Exchange.

The identified challenge should be as focused as possible to allow for an effective learning process between peer cities. Challenges can be thematic, and have a focus on a specific policy area, or operational, and relate to how to design, implement and monitor strategies, policies and projects.

The below tables offer examples of categories of challenge that may be addressed:

Indicative topics of 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
	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 topics of 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

The above tables of indicative categories of thematic and operational challenges mirror the [Urban Themes of Portico](#), the EUI Knowledge Exchange and Sharing Platform.

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

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

Illustrative examples

A full and updated [list of approved City-to-City Exchanges](#) is available on the EUI Website. However, here below there are some illustrative examples of previous City-to-City Exchanges which demonstrate not only a diversity of thematic topics, but also a diversity in the specific approaches used to help guide applicants in the conceptualisation of their exchanges.

Urban Authorities	Challenge	Visits	Implementation period	Budget	Moderator
Lille (FR) with Turin (IT)	Urban transformation, riverbanks reconquest and park creation	2 in-person	25/08/2023 – 25/01/2024	EUR 11,062.00	Yes
Oulu (FI) with Fuenlabrada (ES)	Co-designing local integration strategies with migrants and local stakeholders	2 in-person	04/10/2024 – 04/03/2024	EUR 12,290.00	Yes
Borgomanero (IT) with Silla (ES)	SUD Borgo: unlocking the potential of a territory of 32 municipalities	1 in-person 1 online	29/01/2023 – 29/06/2024	EUR 6,964.00	No
Liepaja (LV) with Gava (ES) and Tampere (FI)	Striving for digitalisation and active citizens engagement – Liepaja learns from Gava and Tampere	3 in-person	21/12/2023 – 21/05/2024	EUR 24,728.00	No

6. THE CITY-TO-CITY EXCHANGE PROCESS IN DETAIL

Once an application for a City-to-City Exchange is approved (typically within 4 weeks of submitting the application), it follows a series of steps as set out below. *For more information on “How to apply” and “How cities are selected” see Sections 8 & 9 below.*

A **one-month initiation phase** is used to prepare the City-to-City Exchange activities (see Step 1). Following these preparations, beneficiaries have a **maximum of 5 months** to implement all activities (see Step 2)

At the end of the implementation period, the beneficiaries have **one additional month to complete the final report** and provide all requested documents to the EUI Secretariat (see Step 3).

The total time period from the submission of the application to the submission of the final report is therefore **not expected to exceed 8 months**:

- 1 month – Evaluation and eventual approval of application
- 1 month – Initiation phase
- 5 months – Implementation phase
- 1 month – Reporting phase

At the moment of approval, the EUI Secretariat will communicate the relevant deadlines the beneficiaries have to take into consideration.

The EUI Secretariat will complete its **evaluation of the final report and financial reimbursement request** within 8 weeks of receipt and – pending any necessary modifications – approve the payment.

Six months after the exchange, participating cities will be invited to feedback on the longer-term impacts of the Peer Learning activity. This will be done either through a survey or a follow-up meeting with members of the EUI Secretariat (see Step 4).

STEP 1. INITIATION PHASE

After receiving the notification of approval, beneficiaries will enter a one-month initiation phase to plan the City-to-City Exchange activities.

The key elements of the initiation phase are:

- A kick-off meeting with the EUI Secretariat to answer any questions, support the preparation of the activities and confirm the documents and templates that will need to be completed and submitted at the end of the implementation phase.
- Selecting the moderator – if one is wanted/needed.
- Defining the dates and formats for the visits.
- Refining and confirming the overall work plan and the agenda(s) of the in-person visits
- Discuss and communicate to the EUI PS any needed changes with respect to the application form, such as changes in the composition of the team.
- Initiating the signing of the Grant Agreement.
- Making travel arrangements.

For more information on the types of study visits planned during the initiation phase, see Step 2 below.

The selected expert moderators may also offer methodological support to contribute to the definition of the work plan of the City-to-City Exchange and the agendas of each study visit.

STEP 2. IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

The core activities of the implementation phase are the **in-person study visits** – potentially supported by either preparatory or follow-up online exchanges.

Study visits can last **between 2 and 5 days** - their proposed duration should be justified already in the application form together with a preliminary and indicative agenda of the expected learning outcomes and planned activities. These proposals can then be further discussed and refined during the initiation phase.

There are **two main formats for EUI City-to-City Exchange visits** with applicants able to select the most appropriate format for each exchange according to their needs:

1. OUTGOING VISITS: Up to four participants from the requesting city travel to a peer city.

Outgoing visits focus on in-person exchange on working methods, approaches, tools and solutions used in the peer city.

Participants from the requesting city experience first-hand the urban context of the peer city and may visit different locations related to the identified challenge. They may exchange with a range of staff from the partner urban authority and relevant stakeholder institutions. It usually consists of a bilateral exchange between the requesting city and the hosting peer city, but it may involve trilateral exchanges including participants from a second peer city.

2. INCOMING VISITS: Up to two participants from each peer city travel to the requesting city

Incoming visits focus on providing the staff from the requesting city with direct, in-person support on a specific topic or task.

Peer cities experience first-hand the urban context of the requesting city and may visit different locations related to the identified challenge. Peer(s) may support the requesting city in working meetings and technical activities alongside a wide range of staff from the requesting city authority and relevant stakeholder institutions.

ONLINE EXCHANGES

Online exchanges may also be organised involving any number of relevant participants from requesting and peer cities.

One online exchange may be included in the work plan and staff costs of up to two participants from the peer city/cities covered. This may allow the requesting city and peer(s) to further discuss specific aspects of the challenge addressed, providing additional or updated information compared to the in-person visit(s).

Additional ad hoc online meetings can also be organised to discuss logistical and organisational aspects – particularly focused on preparing the in-person visit(s). However, such online meetings are not considered a core activity of the C2C Exchange, do not need to be included in the work plan and are not eligible activities to request financing for any staff costs.

STEP 3. REPORTING PHASE

Beneficiaries are required to produce and submit a **short final report** in English together with their **financial reimbursement requests** to the EUI Secretariat **within one month of the conclusion of the implementation period**.

The submission of the report and reimbursement request will be carried out via the EUI Monitoring System if the system is operational or via another system indicated by the EUI Secretariat.

Content of the report

The final report should include information regarding:

- Initial situation and challenges
- Objectives of the exchange activities
- Impacts and key learnings
- Foreseen follow-up actions
- Participants list
- Agendas (including format and duration of study visits)

If an exchange consisted of several events, only one follow-up report should be provided documenting all events. The final report should be reviewed by the peers.

Receipt and validation of the final report by the EUI Secretariat will be required in order for EUI to approve the Reimbursement Form. EUI will conclude its evaluation of the final report and financial claim within 8 weeks of receipt.

If the reporting is deemed unsatisfactory and/or requires correction or completion, the EUI Secretariat 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 the EUI Secretariat, the urban authority at fault will not receive reimbursement, or benefit from promotional opportunities from the EUI Secretariat (e.g. invitation to participate in capitalisation studies, or invitations to speak in capacity building events etc).

The main elements of the Exchange may be published on the EUI website.

STEP 4. FOLLOW-UP PHASE

Six months after the exchange, participating cities will be invited to feedback on the longer-term impacts of the Peer Learning activity.

This feedback will include an assessment of whether the input received brought about any tangible benefits e.g. improvements in the design and implementation of the sustainable urban development policy instrument addressed or related projects, or improvements in day-to-day working practices within the requesting city authority and among stakeholders.

The follow-up activity will be organised by the EUI Secretariat either in the form of an online meeting or survey. In whatever form, it will focus on **capturing their opinion of the requesting city on:**

- the exchange overall;
- the quality of the support received from peers;
- the improvement of their capacities; and
- the longer-term impacts of the peer learning activity.

7. WHAT IS EXPECTED OF PARTICIPATING CITIES

7.1. CORE ACTIVITIES OF THE CITY-TO-CITY EXCHANGE

Requesting cities

The requesting cities are expected to **prepare and participate openly and actively** in the City-to-City Exchange in-person study visits, bringing a willingness to learn and ask questions.

They are also expected to **share their own practices and solutions** as part of a mutual learning process that should also benefit and inspire peer cities.

More specifically, and **with ongoing support for the EUI Secretariat**, requesting cities are expected to:

- i. Attend an online **kick-off meeting** with the EUI Secretariat
- ii. Select an EUI **expert moderator** if wanted
- iii. Refine their **work plan and draft agendas** for the in-person study visits
- iv. Organise any **preparatory online meetings** considered necessary with the peer cities to effectively plan in-person visits
- v. Take part in **1-3 in-person study visits** (either in the form of outgoing visits to a peer city or incoming visits to receive peer city representatives in their own city).
- vi. Produce and submit a **final report** together with a **financial reimbursement form**
- vii. Provide **feedback** to EUI six months after the exchange activity through a survey or meeting.

Peer cities

Peers are expected to share practical knowledge and know-how tailored to the identified challenge and the urban context of the requesting city, including:

- knowledge of suitable actions and approaches;
- technical skills and working methods;
- success and failures in tackling the challenge; and
- recommendations on possible actions to be taken by the requesting city.

They are also expected to bring a willingness to learn and take inspiration from the requesting city in a **mutual learning process**.

More specifically, peer cities are expected to:

- i. Cooperate with the requesting city in preparing the exchange activities, which may include
 - a. Attending an online **kick-off meeting** with the EUI Secretariat
 - b. Helping to select an EUI **expert moderator** if wanted
 - c. Helping to refine the **work plan and draft agendas** for the in-person study visits
 - d. Helping to organise any **preparatory online meetings**
- ii. Take part in **1-3 in-person study visits** (either hosting or visiting the requesting city, or visiting a fellow peer city).
- iii. Produce and submit a **financial reimbursement form**
- iv. Provide **feedback** to EUI six months after the exchange activity (through a meeting or survey).

7.2. COMMUNICATION, OUTREACH AND CAPITALISATION

Respect visibility requirements of EU Funds

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 Common Provisions Regulation covering the ERDF³ lays down beneficiaries' obligations regarding information and communication measures for the public. **Visibility requirements apply to all co-financed printed and digital products**, publications, and on-site activities and events.

In order to properly follow the visibility requirements:

- Beneficiaries must include the **EU emblem and reference to 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](#)

Act as external ambassadors for EUI City-to-City Exchange

All participants are encouraged to act as an ambassador of the City-to-City exchanges :

- **Disseminating the results and outcomes** of the City-to-City Exchanges within their institution and among stakeholders.
- **Participating in EUI capacity building training events** as a participants or speakers (when invited)
- **Participating in other activities organised by EUI** to promote City-to-City Exchanges and share testimonies from previous participants.
- **Sharing within their professional networks** and on social media the outcomes and benefits of the City-to-City Exchanges.

When relevant, the EUI Secretariat may provide the participants and ambassadors with ad-hoc templates for communication and dissemination of the activity.

Support the capitalisation of knowledge by EUI

Throughout the implementation of the City-to-City Exchanges, the participating cities will generate an important wealth of knowledge about Sustainable Urban Development, in terms of what works, what does not, and what could be done differently in different contexts. This **knowledge will be captured and shared with other policy makers and practitioners** across Europe in a process known as 'capitalisation'.

³ [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1060](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021

Different mechanisms will be set up by EUI to ensure this capitalisation and transfer of knowledge emerging from the City-to-City exchanges. Where relevant – and upon request from the Secretariat – **City-to-City Exchange participants will be expected to contribute to capitalisation activities.**

8. HOW TO APPLY?

The process of applying to the City-to-City Exchange has two distinct phases, in terms of i) preparing the application; and ii) completing and submitting the application form.

8.1. PREPARING THE APPLICATION

i. Self-eligibility check

Only Urban Authorities can apply for City-to-City Exchanges. Potential applicants need to check if they comply with the eligibility criteria set out in section 4 of this document. Stakeholders or urban authorities not complying with the requirements can still take part in City-to-City Exchanges if they participate as stakeholders in partnership with eligible urban authorities.

ii. Identifying the challenge

City-to-City Exchanges are bottom-up, demand-driven peer-learning activities. This means that **cities can apply to address the thematic and/or operational challenge(s) of their choosing** for the design, implementation and monitoring of sustainable urban development strategies, policies and projects. *(See Section 5 what types of challenge can a City-to-City Exchange address?).*

Nevertheless, applicants will need to be able to justify in the application form the selection of the challenge. This may include clearly defining the challenge, describing its importance to the local context, previous experiences in trying to address this challenge or setting out its relevance to sustainable urban development strategies, policies and action plans.

iii. Identifying the peer(s)

Requesting cities are **required to identify the peer city/cities before applying** for a City-to-City Exchange. Peers are urban authorities from a different EU Member State than the requesting city and must comply with the same eligibility rules set out in Section 4. The peer city/ies must have the expertise needed to solve the requesting cities challenge and must be willing to participate in the in-person study visits (as either or both of host city and visitor).

In order to facilitate the identification of peer/expert cities, a number of **support tools are available** . These include:

- The [Urban Matchmaker Tool on Portico](#) has, since May 2024, enabled the identification of peers – the initial post can come from a city who has a challenge they want to address or from a city that has a solution or method they want to share.
- EUI's [national Urban Contact Points](#) are available to help find appropriate peers in different countries across the EU – potentially working with the National URBACT Points.
- Existing **databases of best practices**, can also be a valuable source of information on potentially relevant peers including:
 - [Urban Innovative Actions](#) grouped by topic, or the [latest Innovative Actions](#)
 - [URBACT Good Practices](#) and/or cities participating in current or previous [URBACT networks](#) covering a diverse range of urban development themes.
 - [Interreg Europe Good Practices](#)
 - cases in the [JRC Handbook for Sustainable Urban Development Strategies](#)

- cases in the [JRC Policy Atlas of sustainable urban development for small urban areas](#)
 - the [JRC Strat-Board](#)
- Cities can use the online [Peer Introduction Request](#) form to request contact details for peer cities they have already identified but lack direct connections with. **By completing this form, cities will receive direct support from EUI Capacity Building Officers to find possible matches.**

8.2. COMPLETING THE APPLICATION FORM

Once a requesting city has selected their challenge(s) and found their peer city (or cities), they can proceed with completing the online application form which is accessible via the link available on the [EUI City-to-City Exchanges webpage](#). **The application form consists of five parts:**

A. General information

The applicant needs to insert general information regarding the exchange, such as the challenge they will focus on.

B. Participating cities

The applicant needs to provide details on the participating urban authorities (requesting and peer cities), contact details, and a [provisional](#) list of the people who will participate in the exchange. Applicants need to explain what role each person is expected to play in the exchange.

C. Challenge and motivation

The applicant needs to describe in more detail the challenge addressed by the exchange, the current situation faced, the connection to Sustainable Urban Development and Cohesion Policy objectives, and the expected outcome of the peer-learning activity. Applicants also need to justify the selection of the peer and explain why they are a good match.

D. Budget and work plan

A draft work plan and budget must be provided, including the planned: number, format, location and dates of visits, and the number of participants per city per visit – to enable calculation of the maximum budget for the exchange. A draft work plan should include an initial outline of the agendas for each visit setting out learning objectives and foreseen activities.

E. Endorsement

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. Additional endorsements are expected to be given by the authorised signatories of the peer urban authorities. The legal obligations linked to the endorsement of the application are detailed in the Application Form.

8.3. HOW TO GET SUPPORT

The [EUI webpage for the City-to-City Exchanges](#) provides the latest and most up-to-date information and support tools for interested urban authorities. This includes not only this guidance for applicants, but also:

- A **technical guidance** to complete the application.
- **Recordings** of previous online webinars and matchmaking events
- The **list of approved City-to-City Exchanges** which can provide inspiration to others
- **Resources to identify peers**
- Other relevant information provided on [the EUI City-to-City Exchange webpage](#).

The **EUI Secretariat** team is also ready to directly assist applicants with any questions they may have, concerning the City-to-City Exchanges, including the foreseen activities, eligibility criteria, identification of peers, or any other related topic:

- **Bilateral online consultation** are offered to applicants who can schedule a meeting with one of the EUI Secretariat Officers via this [link](#)
- Alternatively, contact the team **via email**: capacitybuilding@urban-initiative.eu.
- The Secretariat **may also organise further webinars and events** to support potential applicants. Updates on upcoming events will be published on EUI communication channels, including social media and website.

National [Urban Contact Points](#) can also provide support in local EU languages.

9. HOW ARE CITIES SELECTED?

Applications are evaluated on a rolling basis following submission. Each application is subject to a selection process organised through the following steps:

1. Prioritisation of applications
2. Eligibility check of applications
3. Quality assessment of applications

The prioritisation process will be carried out prior to the evaluation of the content of the application in order to determine the order in which applications are assessed in periods of high demand.

Applications will be **evaluated by a team of experts** under the supervision of the EUI Secretariat who take a final decision on the approval or rejection of each application.

The EUI Secretariat can also **provisionally approve an application under the condition of receiving complementary documents and/or information**. Applicants may be requested to submit this additional complementary information via email or an online form.

The **selection process may take approximately 4 weeks**, after which applicants will be notified of the decision about their application.

When rejecting an application, the EUI Secretariat may provide feedback and reasons for the results of the evaluation and advice for a **potential resubmission of the same proposal with certain improvements or clarifications**.

9.1. PRIORITISATION OF APPLICATIONS

Applications from specific categories of urban authorities will be evaluated with priority:

- 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 less developed regions
- Urban authorities with less than 500,000 inhabitants
- Urban authorities that have participated in an EUI Peer Review
- 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 processing and notification.

Applications received from urban authorities outside the priority group will be equally evaluated but may take longer to approve.

9.2. ELIGIBILITY CHECK

An eligibility check is undertaken to **verify the eligibility of the applicants and the compliance of the received Application Form with the formal eligibility criteria.**

This process is critical for ensuring equal treatment of all applications and avoiding further assessment of ineligible applications. .

The eligibility criteria for an application for a City-to-City Exchange are the following:

1. The applicants are urban authorities complying with the criteria explained in section 4 of the guidance. An application submitted by a stakeholder or an application where the peer city is not represented by an urban authority will be declared ineligible.
2. Mandatory fields of the Application Form are completely filled in.
3. The requesting and peer cities are located in an EU Member State.
4. The peer(s) is/are located within a different EU Member State to the requesting city.
5. The applicants and their institutions comply with the requirements on exclusion from access to funding (more details are provided below in the Section 10.3 “Exclusion criteria”).
6. The authorised signatory of the requesting city has confirmed their endorsement of the application and their support to its implementation, if the application is approved.
7. The authorised signatories of the peer cities 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.

Exclusion criteria

In accordance with EU Financial Regulations⁴, 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.

⁴ 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>

During the application process, the applicant cities must declare that they do not fall under one of the exclusion criteria above mentioned. This declaration is included in the Application Form.

During the selection procedure and prior to the final decision on the grant award, the EUI Secretariat 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 management⁵. If a requesting or peer city authority is detected in the EDES, the EUI Secretariat will notify the concerned city authority, who has then the opportunity to present a defence before a final decision is made by EUI, in compliance with the principle of proportionality.

9.3. QUALITY ASSESSMENT & SELECTION CRITERIA

Applications that are declared eligible will be subject to a quality assessment. This includes, but is not limited to, coherence and consistency of the application throughout the Application Form and the compliance with the Sustainable Urban Development framework of Cohesion Policy in the 2021-2027 programming period.

Selection criteria

The selection criteria for the call are the following:

i. Challenge addressed

- The application focuses on a challenge related to sustainable urban development strategies, projects.
- If multiple visits are planned, the application justifies why this is required in order to better address the challenge identified.

ii. Motivation for applying

- The applicant justifies how the exchange will contribute to the improved design, implementation and/or monitoring of policy instruments, strategies, and projects related to Sustainable urban Development
- The applicant justifies how the exchange will contribute to the improved capacities of participants to tackle the challenge(s).
- The type of outputs and outcomes expected to be produced is coherent with a City-to-City Exchange and the thematic focus of the exchange.

iii. Appropriateness of the proposed peers

- The expertise of the peer(s) is coherent with the challenge described by the requesting city.
- 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 proposed peer city either visits or hosts the requesting city at least once.

⁵ 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.

9.4. RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

Applicants should expect a written response on their application approximately four weeks after they submit the proposal. Nevertheless, in periods of high demand, and based on their prioritisation score, evaluation can take longer.

There are four possible outcomes from the evaluation. **Applications can be:**

- i. **Approved** – the EUI Secretariat sends all necessary information to start the implementation of the exchange and proposes a kick-off meeting.
- ii. **Approved under conditions** – The EUI Secretariat approves the application under the condition of receiving specific complementary information or documents.
- iii. **Advised for resubmission** – The EUI Secretariat does not approve the application but sends recommendations for a resubmission. Capacity Building Officers remain available for bilateral meetings and for providing further advice on the resubmission.
- iv. **Rejected** – Applications are rejected because they do not meet the necessary quality standards or eligibility criteria.

9.5. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Notification of applications that are not approved will include detailed information on the reasons why (eligibility criteria not fulfilled, detailed comments from the EUI Secretariat concerning the quality evaluation etc).

Only the applying urban authority can file a complaint in relation to the decision taken. The urban authority can address questions about or raise objections against the eligibility or evaluation decision to the EUI Secretariat.

These **queries/complaints must be made within 15 working days after the first official notification** of the non-selection of the application by the EUI Secretariat⁶. This deadline will not prejudice the start of the activity for any 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.

⁶ 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.

10. TIMELINE AND MILESTONES

The current Call for City-to-City Exchanges was launched on 4 April 2023. It operates as an **ongoing/continuous call with no currently fixed end date**.

The open call allows for a more bottom-up, **demand-driven approach**, providing greater flexibility and more opportunities for cities across Europe to benefit from peer learning when they need it most.

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and will continue to be so for the foreseeable during the current programming period of the European Urban Initiative (2021-2027). Applications are processed individually, and the evaluation and approval of any given application is expected to take no more than 4 weeks from the date of submission.

Cities **may apply and be approved as both the requesting city and a peer city** in different City-to-City Exchanges.

Cities **may also apply and be approved multiple times to address multiple challenges**. Nevertheless, priority will be given to cities that have not participated in a City-to-City Exchange before.

11. CONTRACTUAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ELEMENTS

11.1. CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS

The urban authorities involved in approved applications will be required to sign a Grant Agreement. A Grant Agreement binds the beneficiaries⁷ to the Entrusted Entity (Hauts-de-France Region, France).

Besides the maximum amount of ERDF granted to the exchange, the Grant Agreement provides all the conditions under which the exchange is approved and stipulates the legal basis for funding.

The Grant Agreement must be signed by all the beneficiaries (requesting and peer cities) and the Entrusted Entity. The draft agreement will be shared by the EUI Secretariat with beneficiaries following notification of approval, to be returned signed by the beneficiaries when submitting the reimbursement forms at the latest.

11.2. MODIFICATIONS TO THE APPLICATION

Specific details of the work plan and approach set out in the application can be amended – particularly during the initiation phase when it is foreseen that beneficiaries refine their work plans, including the exact timing and agendas for the study visits.

Notably, the list of participants provided in the application can be modified after the approval of the application. Changes can be requested by email to the EUI Capacity Building Officer monitoring the exchange.

However, the Grant Agreement cannot be amended and the maximum requested budget put in the application form cannot be changed. The beneficiaries can request reimbursement for less than the maximum amount (for example if the number of foreseen participants decreases); however, they cannot increase the total budget, even if more people participate. Additional costs exceeding the maximum budget would need to be covered by the participating cities.

⁷ Following approval of an application, the applicants are referred to as the beneficiaries.

11.3. ELIGIBLE COST CATEGORIES

Financial support is provided by EUI to cover the following categories of costs related to participation in the City-to-City Exchanges:

- a. **Travel costs** of each participant to attend the in-person study visits (where travel is required).
- b. A **per diem** to cover accommodation, subsistence, and local transport of each participant (where travel is required).
- c. **Staff costs of peer city representatives.** (Staff costs of requesting cities are NOT covered.)

Stakeholders can be involved and be eligible to have their costs covered for their participation in the exchange via the applicant city. However, for each visit to be eligible for financial support, a **minimum of one person from each urban authority must participate** (civil servants, elected representatives, employees of technical offices, etc). Within each cost category, **specific conditions apply** to determine exactly who is eligible and what for. See 11.4 “Terms of Reimbursement” and 11.5 “Calculation of eligible costs” below.

Additional participants, from the requesting or peer cities, beyond the maximum number indicated in this section may join the exchange at their own expense or at the expenses of the participating urban authorities.

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.

11.4. TERMS OF REIMBURSEMENT

Reimbursements are made in the form of **lump sum payments which are a form of ‘simplified cost option’** to cover the costs of each participant without the administrative burden of collecting and submitting receipts. The calculation of the lump sum to be paid is defined according to specific criteria for each cost category (such as distance travelled). (*See Section 11.5 “Calculation of eligible costs”.*)

Note that due to the lump sum nature of the reimbursements, **participants are responsible for booking their own travel and accommodation arrangements.**

The lump sum is **payable after completion of the tasks to the expected quality, submission of the final report and individual reimbursement forms** and their approval by the EUI Secretariat. (*See Section 6. The City-To-City Exchange process in detail – Step 3 Reporting Phase.*)

Approval of the reimbursement forms will involve **cross-checking the application form, the agenda(s), and the list(s) of participants.**

The reimbursement form template to be used will be provided to the beneficiaries by the EUI Secretariat. Besides information on the eligible costs of their participating representatives (employees of the urban authority or other relevant invited stakeholders), the requesting city and peer city(s) will provide the **bank account (IBAN) details** of each institution accompanied by Bank Account Identification Documents for each of the bank accounts listed in the reimbursement form proving the account belongs to the urban authority.

The reimbursement form must include information regarding the actual duration of visits and the number of participants. Information can change with respect to the initial budget submitted with the application. However, **the budget submitted with the application must be interpreted by beneficiaries as the maximum budget** allocated to their exchange. In the case of fewer participants or visits that take place over a shorter period (e.g. from 5 days to 3 days), the EUI Secretariat will reimburse participants according to the new revised information provided.

The EUI Secretariat will make **payments no later than 80 days from the date of the approval** of their reimbursement form.

11.5. CALCULATION OF ELIGIBLE COSTS

Travel costs

The travel costs **related to participation in the in-person study visits** can be claimed for all participants requiring travel. **Participants from the host city cannot claim travel costs.**

Eligible travel costs for a return journey are calculated based on a **fixed unit cost according to the distance** between the place of departure and host city – as defined by the European Commission.

- i. For **distances of 400km or more**, the eligible unit cost (for either rail or air travel) is calculated on the basis of the [EC travel cost calculator](#) – which first confirms the officially recognised distance between two locations and then provides the unit cost for different ‘distance bands’ (e.g. 400-600 km).
- ii. For **distances below 400km**, the unit cost is based on the addition of the unit costs for the [“intra Member State return journeys”](#) for both the Member State of the host city and the Member State of the visiting city.

Travel costs can be claimed for up to four representatives of the beneficiary city visiting a peer city or for up to two peer city representatives visiting the beneficiary city.

Accommodation and subsistence costs

The costs associated with hotels, food and local travel etc. are covered through a **per diem amount** as a simplified cost option to avoid the bureaucracy of having to keep and claim against multiple receipts. The amounts are calculated on the basis of the **European Commission’s [per diem rates](#)**.

The per diem **covers the duration of the study visit (2 to 5 days per event) plus 2 days per visit to cover necessary travel time (automatically added to the number of days dedicated to the actual visits)**. Participants from the **host city of each visit are not entitled to claim a per diem**.

The per diem rates may be updated in the future according to any revisions carried out by the European Commission on travel reimbursement conditions.

Staff costs

Peer cities are able to claim staff costs for their employees participating in the in-person visits according to a **fixed amount of EUR 350 per day** for the duration of the in-presence visits, or for one day in the case of an online exchange.

Beneficiary cities are not able to claim staff costs for their representatives.

Overview table of the financial support available for the beneficiary and peer(s):

Cost type	Requesting city	Peer cities
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 a peer city.	Up to 2 people may claim for each in-person visit to the requesting city (or to another peer city)
Per diem	Up to 4 people may claim for duration of each outgoing visit to a peer city (plus 2 travel days)	Up to 2 people may claim for duration of each eligible in-person visit to another city (plus 2 travel days)

Annex I. Legal basis for EUI City-to-City Exchanges

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) Regulation⁸, in conjunction with Article 28 (*Integrated territorial development*) and Article 29 (*Territorial strategies*) of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)⁹. 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 sustainable urban development strategies and ensure their implementation for the city as a whole, from its functional areas to its neighbourhoods¹⁰.

⁸ 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').".

⁹ Article 28 and Article 29 of [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1060](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021

¹⁰ [New Leipzig Charter- The transformative power of cities for the common good](#) (europa.eu)

Annex II. EUI City-to-City Exchange Experts

Upon request from applicants, EUI can mobilise an expert moderator to support the learning process between the requesting and peer cities.

Role of experts

Expert moderators can contribute to:

- facilitating exchanges – steering the discussion in a productive and objective-focused direction;
- supporting the interpretation and adaptation of ideas in multinational and multicultural contexts – reformulating questions and pinpointing important elements;
- defining the final agenda of a City-to-City Exchange;
- fostering dialogue between partners; and/or
- adapting and using creative methodologies for discussion.

Experts can also monitor participants' performance to discern potential learning or communication challenges.

Selecting an expert

Applicants can consult the catalogue of expert moderators on the EUI City-to-City Exchange webpage.

If already interested in working with a specific expert, applicants will be able to express this interest in the application form. Nevertheless, the final appointment will be subject to the agreement and availability of the selected expert.

Annex III. Full EUI 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 eligibility check, quality and operational evaluation,
- financial control procedures,
- the decisional process of the Entrusted Entity/ the EUI Secretariat 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 the EUI Secretariat. This is the first opportunity to try and get a complaint resolved. The EUI Secretariat in liaison with the Entrusted Entity, will examine the complaint and provide answers to the complainant.

Step 2: If the response provided by the EUI Secretariat 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 the EUI Secretariat 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.