

EUROPEAN
U R B A N
INITIATIVE

Peer Reviews

**Call for Peers for the Thessaloniki Peer
Review, 28-29 June 2023**

Call opening 2 May – call closing 30 May 2023

Guidance for Applicants



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

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

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

1.2. EUI CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES

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 to the experience of the other peers.
Capacity building events	Events	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 UIA/EUI-IA, URBACT IV and the UAEU. Organised in various formats (seminars, workshops, trainings)	Participants benefit from improved knowledge and knowhow on relevant SUD challenges and on the design and implementation of SUD strategies and action plans.

		and at different scales (EU-wide, multi-country, or country-specific), mixing expert-led and peer learning.	
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The information provided in this document hereafter refers only to EUI Peer Reviews.

2. PEER REVIEWS

2.1 MAIN FEATURES OF A PEER REVIEW

2.1.1. Objectives

The overarching objective of a peer review is to improve the design and implementation of the applicants' SUD strategies through a process of benchmarking and peer learning.

Cities under review will benefit from first-hand evaluation experience and use of the peer review outcomes to further improve their own strategies. All participating cities will discuss common issues and challenges related to their current work on integrated sustainable development strategies.

To achieve the capacity building objective of a peer review, peers are expected to share practical knowledge and know-how helping to improve the design and implementation of SUD strategies of the cities under review. While the cities under review are the primary beneficiaries, both cities under review and peers may improve their capacities thanks to the peer learning process.

2.1.2. Thematic scope

A peer review is required to focus on specific challenges related to the design and implementation of SUD Strategies within Cohesion Policy as defined in article 11 of the ERDF Regulation⁴.

Under the current ERDF Regulation (2021-2027), Sustainable Urban Development is defined in article 11. It is understood as integrated, place-based and community-led development, addressing economic, environmental, climate, demographic and social challenges and focused on urban areas (including functional urban areas). **A SUD strategy should hence be understood as a strategy in covering an urban area that adopts an integrated and place-based approach to urban development, where integration means a multi-sectoral policy, multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance, and possibly a multi-territorial and community-led strategy.**

⁴ Applicants should also take note of Article 29 of the CPR which outlines that integrated territorial development strategies should be built on:

- The territorial focus or geographical area covered by the strategy;
- An analysis of development needs and the potential of the area;
- A description of the integrated approach addressing the identified development needs and potential; and
- A description of the involvement of the partners in the preparation and implementation of the strategy

Challenges addressed in the peer review will be built on the Handbook for Sustainable Urban Development Strategies⁵ which outlines the six building blocks of the EU approach to sustainable and integrated urban development and the expected contents of a strategy.

The main building blocks which characterise the EU approach to sustainable and integrated urban development can be characterised as follows:

- An approach which promotes a strategic vision for the development of urban areas.
- An approach which targets cities of all sizes and promotes integration across scales, from neighbourhoods to wider territories.
- A multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder approach, which coordinates different actors according to their respective roles, skills and scales of intervention, ensuring that citizens are actively engaged.
- An approach which is integrated across sectors and pushes cities to work across policy-areas.
- An approach based on the integration of multiple sources of funding.
- An approach which promotes result-oriented logic and establishes frameworks for monitoring and evaluation.

From an operational point of view, a strategy should contain the following elements:

- a diagnosis of the urban area and a selection of the target area(s) (see Territorial Focus chapter);
- a description of the governance model (see Governance chapter);
- a definition of the general strategic framework, which should include a long-term vision, strategic goals, specific goals, and lines of action, and should specify the intervention logic and plan for periodic review. This requires deep reflection on how goals and lines of action are integrated (see Cross-Sectoral chapter);
- prioritisation of actions to be supported by European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF);
- a monitoring system which links OP indicators with strategy-specific indicators (see Monitoring chapter);
- an action plan that translates the long-term strategy and goals into investments with a budget and a schedule referring to the programming period of the ESIF (see Funding and Finance chapter).

The guiding questions defined by cities under review are based on operational challenges related to these building blocks or the expected elements of a strategy. Applicants are required to refer directly to [the Handbook for Sustainable Urban Development Strategies](#) for more information.

2.1.3. Participants

Cities participating in a peer review belong to one of two categories: i) the cities under review (primary beneficiary), ii) the peers (secondary beneficiaries)⁶.

⁵ The [Handbook for Sustainable Urban Development Strategies](#) was developed by the JRC. The Handbook is based on a **mixed-methods analysis of SUD strategies which were implemented during the 2014-2020 programming period**. Quantitative data were collected using [STRAT-Board](#), which is both a database and an online mapping tool providing an overview of 964 SUD strategies implemented in 2014-2020 across 28 EU countries.

⁶ Eligible peers are urban authorities with experience in the design and implementation of integrated, place-based strategies. Article 11 cities and Article 7 cities from the 2014-2020 period are particularly encouraged to apply, as they have demonstrated experience in working on a SUD strategy.

Once the cities under review are selected and their guiding questions reframed, a call for peers⁷ is launched shortly after, identifying the cities under review that have been selected and the three challenges related to each SUD strategy that are to be addressed.

All participants approved within these two linked calls (call for cities under review and call for peers) will constitute a cohort. Cities within a cohort are divided into groups of cities that will follow the process together and participate in an individual peer review event. The present call will select peers that will participate in the Thessaloniki peer review on 28-29 June 2023.

For both cities under review and peers, the participating staff members are required to be those individuals with responsibility and/or experience in the design and implementation of an integrated, place-based strategy.

2.2. PEERS – ELIGIBLE AUTHORITIES

Peers are **staff members from urban authorities with experience in the design and implementation of integrated, place-based strategies.**

Applicants to the Call for Peers are staff members from urban authorities that:

- Are currently involved in designing, updating or implementing a SUD strategy in line with Article 11 of the ERDF Regulation⁸ (i.e. “Article 11 cities”)
- Were involved in designing, updating or implementing a SUD strategy in line with Article 7 of the past ERDF Regulation⁹ (i.e. “Article 7 cities”).

Applicants are asked to provide information about their selection or their eligibility to be selected as an article 11 city within their Member State, if known. In any case, the EUI PS will verify this information during the eligibility check.

All applicants shall be from urban authorities that are either:

- Local Administrative Units defined according to the degree of urbanisation as city, town or suburb (corresponding to DEGURBA code 1 or DEGURBA code 2 of Eurostat), or
- Associations or groupings 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).

In addition, all applicants shall be from urban authorities located in an EU Member State.

Peers apply as individuals (i.e., the staff member applying commits to participate personally if selected), but the urban authority that they represent remains the beneficiary of the financial support allocated under peer reviews. More than one staff member from the same urban authority may apply and be selected. However, in order to ensure a variety of the expertise is mobilised, **no more than two peers from the same urban authority will be selected for the same peer review event.**

⁷ The call for peers for the autumn/winter 2023 cohort is indicatively expected to launch early June 2023.

⁸ These cities, which have reinforced responsibilities in managing Cohesion Policy funds, are commonly known as article 11 cities. In the previous programming period, they were known as article 7 cities.

⁹ The 2014-2020 ERDF Regulation is available [here](#).

Applicants from cities that benefited from previous peer reviews organised by the Urban Development Network, or the European Urban Initiative are particularly encouraged to apply to the call for peers since they are familiar with the peer review methodology.

Applicants that are not from article 7 or article 11 cities may be considered for the role of peers. They will have to demonstrate experience with the design and implementation of integrated, place-based strategies. However, applicants from article 7 or article 11 cities will be prioritised over applicants from urban authorities experienced in integrated, and place-based strategies.

2.3 INTERVENTION LOGIC

2.3.1. Overall logic of the Peer Review

A peer review is **a set of pre-defined activities carried out by a cohort of cities to benchmark their Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) strategies**. The aim is to improve the design and implementation of SUD strategies through a process of peer review and provision of recommendations.

A peer review follows a specific fixed methodology and implementation process. The cities under review define the challenges to be addressed according to their specific needs, but the format and the timing of each implementation step within the activity is pre-defined by EUI.

The peer review methodology was adapted from the methodology developed by the JRC (Joint Research Centre of the European Commission).

2.3.2. Defining the scale of the peer review

Peer reviews may be organised at three geographical scales: EU-wide, among a cluster of Member States, or country-specific. The scale of each peer review event will be determined by EUI PS based on the number and characteristics of the cities under review that are approved.

For **country-specific peer reviews**, the cities under review are from the same Member State, but their peers may be from different Member States.

Cities reviewed in a **cluster of Member States peer review** are grouped based on common thematic interests, on geographical contexts (e.g., as part of a cross-border functional area, or within the same macro-region), or on similarities in territorial delivery mechanism for SUD (e.g., use of SUD programme, SUD priority axis, ITI, CLLD or other).

Cities reviewed in an **EU-wide peer review** may be composed of cities that share a common thematic interest or similar territorial delivery mechanism for SUD and that are not suitable to participate in a country-specific or cluster of Member States peer review.

2.3.3. Matching cities under review with peers

EUI PS will match eligible peers to cities under review with the help of a team of peer review experts. The quality of the peers is important to ensure the success of the peer review. Matches will be based on the interest and relevance of peers (e.g., similarities in challenges addressed or in urban context). Each city under review will be allocated up to four peers. In addition, EUI PS will take into account the motivation of peers in the selection of peers, in addition to their capacity to address the three guiding

questions of the cities under review. Peers, if interested, may apply to review several cities under review within multiple peer review events.

2.3.4. Implementation steps and work plan

The peer review methodology follows a four-step process and timeline, once cities under review are selected.

1) Call for peers

A **call for peers will be launched** including information about the guiding questions to be tackled for the cities under review along with the proposed date and location for the peer review event. The call for peers will be open for at least four weeks. Applying peers will complete a number of fields to demonstrate their eligibility and should select up to four cities for which they want to take on the role of peer based on their guiding questions. The call for peers will be published on the EUI website and widely disseminated to existing EUI-related networks to maximise the number of relevant applicants.

Applications will be evaluated according to the eligibility, quality and exclusion criteria defined in Sections 3.2 and 3.3 of the present document. The content of the Application Form is described in Section 3.1 of the present document.

Selected applicants requesting to be a peer will be informed that they are accepted into the cohort. Following their notification, EUI PS, will confirm advise on the next steps by email.

Any applicants that are not eligible or unsuccessful will be informed, by the end of June, depending on the number of applications received. They may reapply for subsequent call for peers.

2) Content preparation

Cities under review will develop a background paper which is the basis of discussion of the peer review. The paper includes information of the strategy, results from the Self-Assessment Tool for Sustainable Urban Development strategies (hereafter: SAT4SUD) and details on the guiding questions of the city under review... EUI will then disseminate it to peers. The peers are expected to carefully read the background paper before the preparatory webinar and prepare any questions to share with the cities under review.

For each peer review session, a **preparatory webinar** will be held at least two weeks before the peer review to clarify the expectations for each type of participant during the peer review event and have a first discussion on the guiding questions of cities under review and the background papers. **Cities under review and peers are expected to attend the webinar** along with the EUI peer review experts who act as facilitators. In this webinar, the cities under review will present their local context, their guiding questions and their expectations for the peer review event. Peers will be able to ask first questions to their city under review and provide a first overview of their relevant experience which led to their selection as peers. Participants will start the exercise of reframing the guiding questions which will be continued in the peer review event. Cities under review may provide initial feedback to the peers about which particular insights or uses cases would be most interesting to elaborate further on during the peer review event.

After the webinar, peers are expected to reflect on what was shared by the cities under review and look for use cases, best practices or insights to share during the peer review event. EUI peer review experts may provide some support to the peers upon request and if needed.

3) Peer review session

Peer review events will follow a fixed methodology (see below visual). They will be organised through three discussion rounds dedicated to the three questions of cities under review. Each city under review will be reviewed in parallel in a separate breakout session. There will be opening and closing plenaries to orient all participants and share conclusions. An informal networking session and study visits may also be organised.

Each discussion round will focus on one guiding question. The city under review will detail their question. Peers will be then asked to rethink the question (What is the problem behind the problem?), building on the discussion in the preparatory webinar. The new question will then be discussed at the table, with peers providing policy advice based on their experiences, sharing lessons learnt and best practices with the city under review.

Each breakout session at the event will be composed of i) up to four representatives from the city under review, ii) up to four peers iii) two experts, trained in the Peer Review methodology and in charge of drafting the report.



Indicative agenda for a peer review event

The active involvement of peers during the break-out discussion is key to ensure the success of the peer review activity. **Peers are hence expected to prepare insights and actively participate to the discussions.**

4) Follow-up activities

Two weeks after the event, cities under review will receive an **expert report** (drafted by the EUI experts) detailing the discussions, recommendations and insights provided to them during the peer review. Peers and cities under review are expected to reply to the **follow-up survey** sent after the peer review event for EUI PS to assess the impact of the peer review and overall satisfaction with the event and process.

At least six months after the peer review event, EUI will organise a **post-event webinar for participating cities** to discuss their progress in integrating recommendations in their SUD strategies and identifying remaining hindrances or new challenges. Cities under review will share whether the input received brought about any tangible benefits e.g., improvements in the design and implementation of the SUD strategy addressed or related projects, improvements in day-to-day working practices within their institution and among stakeholders. Peers will be invited to attend this webinar.

Cities under review and interested peers will be encouraged to submit a **'fast-track' application for city-to-city exchanges** to explore specific recommendations from one or two peers in more detail, if needed. The application can be fast-tracked because all participants eligible to participate in a peer review are confirmed to be eligible also for city-to-city exchanges.

Interested and eligible peers are also encouraged to submit an application to be a city under review in a subsequent call for application for cities under review.

As part of the post-event webinar and follow-up email, participants will be reminded to act as **ambassadors** to recommend EUI capacity building activities to other urban authorities in their national or EU network that may be interested to apply.

2.4. EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION OF PEERS

Up to four peers will support each city under review in addressing their three guiding questions. Peers are required to contribute in the following way:

- Review of the background paper of their city under review before the preparatory webinar.
- Participation to the preparatory webinar, during which they will be invited to ask the city under review for specifications on the background paper, and feedback on which insights and use cases to collect. A first discussion on how to reframe the guiding questions will be initiated.
- Preparation of the peer review event by collecting experiences and use cases on the three guiding questions and sharing this information with EUI PS and the experts allocated to their group.
- Active participation in the peer review event, and active involvement during the three discussion rounds addressing the guiding questions of their city under review. Peers will be asked to rethink the question (What is the problem behind the problem?). The new question will then be discussed at the table, with peers providing policy advice based on their experiences, sharing lessons learnt and best practices with the city under review.
- If desired, participation in a follow-up city-to-city exchange with the city under review to discuss more in-depth one or more specific recommendation(s) provided during the peer review.

2.5. EXPERT SUPPORT

The peer review activity is supported by a team of peer review experts throughout the preparation, delivery and follow-up of the event. Peer review experts carry out the following tasks:

- Identifying peers via call for peers and via direct contacts as needed,
- Accompanying cities under review with review with the preparation of SAT4SUD analysis, background paper, and guiding questions as needed,

- Overseeing preparation of recommendations by peers,
- Organising webinar one month before peer review to prepare event,
- Moderating 2-day Peer Review event,
- Drafting of follow-up report within ten working days after event including review of EUI PS,
- Participating in follow-up webinars 6 months after peer review event.

The peer review experts are selected due to their specific skills and experience:

- Experience working with cities on challenges related to the design and implementation of SUD strategies and/or supporting urban authorities and stakeholders with finding possible solutions to urban policy challenges.
- Experience moderating events aimed at facilitating learning among cities.
- Experience with the use of the Joint Research Centre / Urban Development Network Peer Review methodology or similar peer review methodologies.

EUI directly covers all costs related to the activities of EUI Experts (including costs for travel and accommodation).

2.6. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Financial support is offered to peer review participants. The financial support is provided in the form of lump sums¹⁰ that are paid directly to each participating urban authority (city under review and peers). The expenses covered are staff costs (only for peers), travel costs and a per diem (covering accommodation and subsistence).

The table below provides an overview of the financial support available for cities under review and peers.

Peer Reviews		
Cost	City under review	Peer ¹¹
Staff costs	No	Up to 5 days (2 days for participating in the peer review event, and 3 days for preparatory activities)
Travel costs	Up to 4 people, unless hosting the Peer Review event	Yes

¹⁰ A lump sum takes the form of a single payment of money. In the case of EUI capacity building activities, the lump sum is a form of simplified cost option and is payable after the submission and approval of the Reimbursement Form by the EUI PS.

¹¹ For peer reviews, peers apply individually while representing the urban authority. Two peers from the same urban authority may be involved in the same peer review event, if justified.

Per diem	2 days (plus 1 travel day) for up to 4 people, unless hosting the Peer Review event	2 days (plus 1 travel day)
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Only urban authorities can request reimbursement from EUI.

The lump sum is payable to the participating urban authorities after the approval of the Reimbursement Form by EUI PS. The lump sum is dependent on the location of the event, the distance between the hosting city and the other participating cities, and the number of staff involved from the Urban Authority that are listed in the Reimbursement Form.

The financial support covers the following expenses:

- Staff costs: Peers are entitled to receive a fixed amount of EUR 350 per working day. Peers may claim up to five working days per peer review covering the 2 days of the peer review plus 3 days for preparatory activities.
- Travel costs: The travel costs of each peer can be reimbursed. The reimbursement consists of a lump sum including unit for distance band between the hosting city and the peer city concerned. For distances above 400km, the lump sums are calculated on the basis of the following EC provided list of [unit cost amounts per distance band](#). For distances below 400km, the lump sum is calculated by adding together the “[intra Member State return journeys](#)” amounts for the Member states of the hosting city and the one of the participating city concerned. If the travel is within one Member state, only the amounts for “intra Member state return journey” can be reimbursed.
- Per diem: A per diem for each traveling peer can be reimbursed. The per diem is a daily rate that covers accommodation, subsistence and local transportation of the participating cities. The per diem covers the two-day duration of the peer review event plus one day to cover the necessary travel time to the hosting city. The [per diem amounts](#) are based on the European Commission Per diem rates - 25/07/2022.

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 list of participants attending the Peer Review event by the EUI PS.
- Payments are made into the bank account of the peer urban authority. Complete bank account details are required in the Reimbursement Form, along with supporting documents proving the account is the one of the Urban Authority.

4. APPLICATION PROCESS AND SELECTION

4.1 APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT AND PROCESS

The Call for Peers for the Thessaloniki peer review will open on **2 May April 2023 and close on 30 May 2023 at 12:00 noon (CEST)**.

Applicants are required to fill in the application form on EU Survey. A courtesy Application Form in MS word format is available on the EUI website. Applications submitted by email will be deemed ineligible. The Application Form is composed of three sections:

➤ **A. Applicant information.**

In this section, the applicant is asked to provide information on their urban authority. In addition to standard information and contact details, the applicant should provide information of the involvement of the urban authority in SUD strategies and SUD-related EU cooperation.

➤ **B. Challenges and motivation**

In this section, the applicant is invited to provide information on their capacity and their motivation for participation as a peer. The applicant is asked to state their preferences in discussing group of guiding questions and justify why they are best positioned to discuss their preferred groups of questions. Best positioned refers to being most interested in the challenge and having relevant experiences to share.

The applicant is also asked to clarify why they would be suitable to act as a peer and what they expect to gain in the peer review activity.

➤ **C. Endorsement from the institution.**

In this section, the applicant is asked to confirm the endorsement of the application by an authorised signatory (i.e., with delegation and power to engage the legal person of the urban authority) from the applying urban authority and to provide their contact details. The legal obligations linked to the endorsement of the application are detailed in the Application Form.

4.2 SELECTION PROCESS

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

1. Eligibility check,
2. Quality evaluation, including prioritisation score.

The evaluation and selection process will be carried out upon the closure of the Call for Peers for the Thessaloniki peer review, on all applications submitted via EU survey before the deadline. Applications will be evaluated by a team of experts, specialised in the peer review methodology under the supervision of EUI PS who take a final decision on the selection process.

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

4.2.1 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's institution to be a peer (as defined in Section 2.2. of the present document).

The eligibility criteria for an application from a potential peer are the following:

1. The Application Form has been submitted electronically via EU survey before the deadline indicated in the Guidance for Applicants for the Call for Peers for the Thessaloniki peer review.

2. Mandatory fields of the Application Form are completely filled in.
3. The applicant is from an urban authority 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 is from 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 applicants from eligible urban authorities as defined in Section 2.2 may submit an Application Form in the framework of the Call for Peers. An Application Form submitted by a stakeholder involved in the design and/or implementation of an urban authority's SUD strategy will be declared ineligible.

4. The applicant is from an urban authority located in an EU Member State.
5. The applicant is from an urban authority involved in the Article 11 of ERDF Regulation, referred to in the Application Form and Guidance for Applicants as an Article 11 city. **(Priority 1)**

OR

The applicant is from an urban authority involved in the Article 7 of past ERDF Regulation, referred to in the Application Form and Guidance for Applicants as an Article 7 city. **(Priority 1)**

OR

The applicant otherwise demonstrates experience with the design and implementation of integrated, place-based strategies. **(Priority 2)**

6. The applying individual is/was involved or in charge of designing and/or implementing the SUD strategy of their urban authority.
7. The applicant institution complies with the requirements on exclusion from access to funding (more details are provided below in the Section 3.3 "Exclusion criteria for grant applicants").
8. The authorised signatory has confirmed their endorsement of the application and their support to its implementation, if the application is approved.

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

4.2.2 Quality evaluation

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

The quality criteria for the call are the following:

- **Expertise and interest.** The applicant has clearly justified why they would be suitable to act as a peer for the preferred guiding questions. Justifications may include past and current experiences, best or promising practices and similarities in context or faced challenges.
- **Motivation & building of capacities.** The applicant clearly described their motivation and what they expect to gain from the activity. The overarching goal of capacity building and peer learning is well understood.

As a result of the evaluation and selection process (including the eligibility check and quality evaluation), EUI PS elaborates an evaluation of the applications. They rank all eligible applications based on the scoring of their quality evaluation. The maximum score for the quality evaluation is 4 points.

A Selection Committee composed of the experts and EUI PS make the final selection of approved applications. Applicants are then notified of the decision.

4.2.3 Scoring system

A scoring system is used for the evaluation to help the decision-making process. A score of 0 to 2 is attributed to each criterion, which results in an average score per project. The following scoring scale is used:

2 – good

1 – adequate

0 – poor

Please note that if an application scores 0 under any assessment criterion, it is automatically rejected and will not be further processed.

The scoring system is applied considering not only the specific merits of each application but also in the spirit of a competitive process considering comparatively the other applications submitted in the framework of the same Call for Peers.

3.3 EXCLUSION CRITERIA

In accordance with Financial Regulation¹², applicants may be excluded from the reimbursement procedure if their urban authority or persons having powers of representation, decision-making or control within the urban authority, or persons who are essential for the implementation of the project 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,

¹² 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/req/2018/1046/oj>

- 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, all applicants must confirm with the Application Form a declaration confirming that the urban authority does not fall under one of the exclusion criteria above mentioned. This declaration is included in the Application Form in the EU survey. Please note that the Application must be duly endorsed by an authorised signatory who has delegation and power to engage the legal person of the urban authority for the application to be considered eligible during the eligibility check.

During the selection procedure and prior to the final decision of the Selection Committee on the grant award, EUI PS checks 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 management¹³. If an Urban Authority is detected in the EDES, the EUI PS notifies the applicant, who has then the opportunity to present a defence before the final decision of the Selection Committee, in compliance with the principle of proportionality.

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 eligibility check, quality and operational 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,

¹³ 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.

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. The 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 PS¹⁴. 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 assessment 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 Peers 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.

4. CONTRACTING

4.1. CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS

By applying to the Call for Peers, the applicant confirms that the application has been endorsed by an authorised signatory with delegation and power to engage the legal person of the urban authority (hereafter: authorised signatory). The urban authority commits to support the implementation of the activities if selected. All conditions for support from EUI are listed in the Application Form (Part C “Endorsement by the urban authority”). No contract is expected to be signed.

Only applications that include the endorsement from an authorised signatory from the Urban Authority deemed eligible. In case of any doubt, EUI PS may contact the authorised signatory listed in the Application Form to verify the information provided.

4.2. CONFIRMATION OF PARTICIPATION

Once the evaluation of all applications is completed, EUI PS will notify approved and rejected applicants to the call for peers with a notification letter. The notification letter will be sent to the contact persons defined in the Application Form and to the authorised signatory from the urban authority.

Approved applicants will be contacted by EUI PS for confirmation of participation and for information of the next steps of the peer review process.

Upon confirmation of participation, peers commit to participate in the peer review event on the agreed date and location. In case of unforeseen and exceptional circumstances to be pre-approved by EUI PS, the peer may ask another staff member to replace them if they are eligible to be a peer.

¹⁴ 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 authorised signatory and contact person of the applicant. 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.

5. REPORTING AND TERMS OF PAYMENT

5.1. REPORTING PROCEDURE

The peer review activities will be implemented by EUI PS in close collaboration with cities under review (as they are the main focus of the activity) and peers (as they are the key component for a successful peer review).

The peers are expected to communicate with EUI PS and the peer review experts on a regular basis. By participating in the activity, they commit to carry out all steps described in Section 2.3 of the present document.

The reporting of the activity will be carried out after the peer review event.

For peers, payment is triggered following a cross-check by EUI PS of the participants listed in the Reimbursement Form against the list of participants that attended the peer review, and the proper submission of the Reimbursement Form after the date of the event. If the reporting requires correction or completion, EUI PS will request ad-hoc corrective or complete actions to the peer. If the reporting is not completed, or still unsatisfactory after requests for correction/completion have been sent by EUI PS, the peer 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) or benefit from a fast-track application for city-to-city exchanges. If the request for reimbursement is not completed 80 days after the end of the event, or if the peer has not participated in the event (e.g., not on the list of participants whose presence were confirmed), then the peer will not receive reimbursement.

5.2. TERMS OF REIMBURSEMENT

The reimbursement of costs incurred during a peer review by peers will be carried out by EUI PS, provided that all tasks described in Section 5.1 are completed at the expected quality. The reporting procedure will lead to payment of the approved amounts to the peers based on the on-time submission and following the approval by EUI PS of the Reimbursement Form.

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

6. EXPECTATIONS FOR PEERS AFTER THE EVENT

6.1. ACTING AS AN AMBASSADOR

All participants are expected to act as **an ambassador of the peer review activity**. Acting as an ambassador may include:

- Disseminating the results and outcomes of the peer review within their institution and among stakeholders.
- Participating in EUI capacity building events as a participants or speakers (when invited)

- Participating in activities organised by EUI PS to promote peer reviews and share testimonies from previous participants.
- Sharing within their professional networks and on social media the outcomes and benefits of the Peer Review activity.

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

6.2. EXPECTATION FOR CAPITALISATION ACTIVITIES

Throughout the implementation of the peer review, by discussing challenges related to SUD strategies, the cities under review and peers will generate an important wealth of knowledge about the strategy process (i.e. what worked, what did not work and what could be done differently). This knowledge will be captured (mainly through the involvement of peer review experts) and shared with other policy makers and practitioners across Europe.

Different mechanisms will be set up to ensure the capitalisation and transfer of knowledge. The results of peer review activities will be transferred to capitalisation activities carried out by EUI PS and may feed into the work of the European Commission Joint Research Centre, to help build knowledge on challenges and possible solutions for the design and implementation of SUD strategies.

When relevant and upon request from EUI PS, peer review participants are expected to participate in capitalisation activities, which may include studies on elements discussed during their peer review.

6.3. EXPECTATIONS ON COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY 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 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

7. HOW TO GET ASSISTANCE

EUI PS staff are ready to assist applicants to the call for peers with any questions they may have related to the call. Applicants are invited to contact the EUI-PS at the following email address: capacitybuilding@urban-initiative.eu.

8. KEY DATES

- **02/05/2023** – launch of the Call for Peers for the Thessaloniki Peer Review
- **30/05/2023** – closure of call and deadline for submitting an application
- **07/06/2023 (tbc)** – indicative and earliest date for the final decision for selection of peers
- **20/06/2023 (tbc)** – indicative date for the preparatory webinar
- **28-29/06/2023** – date for the Thessaloniki peer review