EUROPEAN
URBAN
INITIATIVE

Peer Reviews

Call for applications

8 October – 18 November 2025

Guidance for Applicants

Co-funded by
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1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This guidance document is aimed at urban authorities who are interested to participate in a Peer Review activity supported by the European Urban Initiative (EUI). It presents the following content:

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What other capacity building opportunities does EUI provide?

Peer Reviews are one of the three capacity building activities organised by EUI. You might also be interested to take part in a City-to-City Exchange or a Capacity Building event.

Activity	Key features
City-to-City Exchanges	EUI has a continuously open call and a range of support tools for any urban authority in the EU to benefit from short-term peer support from one (or two) cities in addressing a particular challenge for the successful development or implementation of their SUD strategies, policy or projects. A City-to-City Exchange takes place through **up to three in-person visits over a maximum of five months** – or it can be as simple as one study visit. Additional online exchanges can also be organised. In their application, cities identify the topic they would like to address, the one or two cities that they want to work with and the preferred number and format of study visits. City-to-City Exchanges provide opportunities to **learn about new working methods and innovative approaches**, focusing on one specific aspect of SUD and learning from only one (or two) other cities.
Events	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. EUI capacity building events bring together urban authorities, ERDF Managing Authorities, the European Commission and relevant stakeholders to **exchange information and experiences** on key urban challenges and the implementation of SUD strategies, policy or projects.

	These events are also opportunities to seek synergies among EUI, Urban Innovative Actions, URBACT, the Urban Agenda for the EU and other partners Stay tuned for the next events. Sign up for the EUI newsletter and follow EUI on social media.

2. IN BRIEF: WHAT IS AN EUI PEER REVIEW?

A Peer Review is a **capacity building activity offered by EUI.** The aim is to 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. For the purposes of an EUI Peer Review, a SUD strategy is one financed through Article 11[2] of the ERDF Regulation (EU) 2021/1058. Other SUD strategies cannot be the subject of an EUI Peer Review. Potential applicants are requested to confirm with their Urban Contact Point which is the relevant Article 11 SUD strategy to be addressed prior to applying. Email addresses for the Urban Contact Points are available on the EUI website.

Each Peer Review involves **one 'city under review' (primary beneficiary), supported by individuals from up to six other EU cities acting as 'peer reviewers' (secondary beneficiaries)** to address concrete challenges in developing, implementing or monitoring an effective SUD strategy. The challenges are defined by the city under review.

Only urban authorities receiving ERDF support for their SUD strategy under Article 11 of the ERDF Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 (known as '**Article 11 cities**') are eligible to be '**cities under review'. However,** representatives of **any EU urban authority can take part as a 'peer reviewer'**. (See Section 4 "Who is eligible to take part").

'Cities under review' identify the **challenges that they wish to address** according to their specific needs related to their SUD strategy. They are then matched with 'peer reviewers' who share their practices, experiences, approaches and ideas in addressing those challenges (See Section 5 "What kind of topics can a Peer Review address?"). Each peer reviewer tackles three guiding questions defined by the city under review.

While the city under review is the main beneficiary, all participants discuss common issues and current challenges related to their integrated SUD strategies and **everyone learns from each other**. (See Section 3 "What's in it for participating cities?")

Participation in an EUI Peer Review is based on a **formal selection process** (See Section 9 "How to apply" and Section 10 "How are participants selected?"). **'Cities under review' apply as an urban authority** with up to four named representatives, or up to six named representatives if the applicant is representing a Functional Urban Area (FUA), whilst **'peer reviewers' apply as individuals** with the formal support of the urban authority they work for and are representing.

[1] A SUD strategy is a strategy that adopts an integrated and place-based approach to urban development. This means a strategy that tackles economic, social and environmental goals, engages multiple levels of governance and multiple stakeholders in in an urban area (including Functional Urban Areas). For more information we recommend consulting the handbook for sustainable urban development strategies.

[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.

Cities under review and peer reviewers are invited to apply twice per year during the open calls organised in March and October.

Each EUI Peer Review follows a **fixed implementation process**, adapted from a methodology developed by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission. It involves a **preparatory phase, a 2-3 day Peer Review event and targeted follow-up activities**. (For more precise details see Section 6: "The EUI Peer Review process in detail").

The 2-3 day Peer Review events are fully paid for by EUI, working with a **host urban authority**. In each Peer Review event, there are several Cities under Review invited. Each City under Review has their own group of Peer Reviewers. The Cities under Reviewers and their Peer Reviewers work through the guiding questions in dedicated breakout sessions. There are also opportunities for cross-fertilisation between the different groups and topics, through a joint session, **study visits**, **and informal networking moments.**

Peer Review events may be organised as country-specific events, as EU-wide events or for a cluster of EU Member States. The geographical scale, thematic focus, and duration of each event will be determined by the EUI Secretariat in agreement with DG REGIO based on the number, identified needs and characteristics of the selected cities under review. Depending on the demand, Peer Reviews at other geographical scales may be envisaged. Similarly, a Peer Review event focused on a specific theme may be organised (e.g. Peer Review 10 July 2025 in Perugia, Italy, was a first thematic peer review organised in collaboration with the Joint Research Centre and which focused on urban-rural linkages).

The activities are delivered with the help of the **EUI 'Peer Review expert' team** who accompany the cities through their journey.

Each Peer Review event lasts between two and three full days, depending on the number of participating cities under review and the overall structure of sessions. When four or more cities under review are involved in the same event, a three-day duration may be proposed to ensure sufficient time for in-depth exchanges and reflections, interactive hands-on sessions, and matchmaking and networking opportunities." The duration of each Peer Review event will be agreed with DG REGIO and confirmed by the EUI PS when inviting the selected participants to take part in a specific Peer Review.

The beneficiaries of the present call are expected to participate to EU-level Peer Reviews. Participants in an EU-level Peer Review are expected to contribute in English. Interpretation cannot be provided in the break-out sessions of EU-level Peer Reviews due to the small scale and fast paced working character of these sessions. Interpretation may be provided in the opening plenary, if needed, to facilitate the welcoming address of local, regional or national speakers representing the hosting territory.

In the case of a Peer Review event that is country-specific or based on a regional clustering of Member States, **some or all sessions may be held in national languages to facilitate exchanges.**

3. WHAT'S IN IT FOR PARTICIPATING CITIES?

Cities under review

Cities under review are at the heart of the EUI Peer Review activity, since **their SUD strategy is the main focus of attention**. Cities under review benefit from:

i. A **structured self-assessment process**[3] built around the SAT4SUD tool developed by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission. The tool is used to help identify specific needs in developing, implementing or monitoring their SUD strategy which are then addressed through the guiding questions. The tool allows cities to detect the gaps and needs across the different elements of the EU integrated approach to territorial development, facilitating self-reflection and pinpointing improvement areas critical to strategy enhancement.

ii. Specific, tailored **feedback, reflections, and inspiration from their peers** to directly address the three challenges they are facing related to their SUD strategy. The dedicated sessions focus on direct, relevant discussions on real-world urban challenges, providing actionable insights and fostering a practical learning environment. The tangibility of the recommendations, along with the readily implementable feedback are especially appreciated by participants.

iii. Constant **expert support, guidance and advice** from the team of approved EUI experts and the EUI PS before, during and after the event. The high quality of the expert support, guidance and advice ensures that Peer Review inputs are not only actionable but closely aligned with each city's strategic goals.

Peer Reviews can be beneficial at any point along the policy lifecycle of SUD strategies, including: **at design stage**, for example to review a draft strategy; **during implementation**, for example to prepare project selection, to ensure continuous stakeholder engagement, or to develop cross-sectoral approaches or risk management; and **at the monitoring and evaluation stage**, for example to set up evaluation mechanisms, to define indicators, or to ensure the continuity, replication or scaling-up of projects.

Past beneficiaries already reported **numerous tangible improvements** either in their SUD strategy or a related policy or action plan following their participation in a Peer Review (e.g. new projects supported, new measures introduced, and indicators revised for their SUD strategies inspired by the advice received from peers).

"I'd definitely participate again. The structured exchange of experiences and the concrete, actionable feedback we received helped shape our urban strategies. These well-defined dialogues and written recommendations have real value that we're using to make tangible improvements" (Former participant from a city under review).

EUI covers the **travel costs of up to four city under review representatives** (or six if the city under review is a Functional Urban Area) to take part in the 2-3 day Peer Review event, as well as a **per diem (or real cost reimbursement)** to cover accommodation, food and other expenses. The precise amounts and conditions are set out in Section 11.5 "Calculation of Eligible Costs".

[3] The tool is the Self-Assessment Tool for Sustainable Urban Development strategies (SAT4SUD), designed by the Joint Research Center for **Local Authorities** and national and regional **Managing Authorities** of EU Cohesion Policy, in charge of building or updating sustainable urban development strategies.

Peer Reviewers

While the primary focus of each Peer Review activity is the city under review, **peer reviewers** – and the authorities they represent – are expected to provide experience and feedback but also benefit in multiple ways:

i. Peer Reviewers **learn from, as well as inspire, the city under review** – the learning always goes two ways.

ii. There are also opportunities to **learn from the other peer reviewers** taking part, hearing about a range of inspiring practices and approaches from cities and authorities across Europe.

iii. Through the process of sharing their own approaches and practices, peer reviewers are encouraged to **critically reflect on their own successes and remaining challenges**.

iv. Finally, to recognise their valuable contribution, involvement and availability, **certificates** are awarded by EUI to each individual peer reviewer after the event, acknowledging the specific challenges they helped tackle in the framework of each Peer Review.

"For us, as a small town, participating in the EUI Peer Review has been transformative. It's opened up so many doors for EU projects, enabling us to start building a portfolio of European partnerships. Thanks to this experience, we've even hired a technical officer dedicated solely to EU projects, which is remarkable for a small municipality" (peer reviewer from a small Spanish city).

"I would absolutely participate again because I love analysing different urban contexts and seeing how solutions from my work [in [my city] might be applied elsewhere. Experiencing diverse challenges like those we have been discussing adds to my perspective. This exchange with other cities, hearing how they tackle challenges, is a continuous enrichment of my skills" (peer reviewer that participated multiple times).

EUI covers the **travel costs** of peer reviewers to participate in the Peer Review event, as well as a **per diem (or real cost reimbursement)** to cover accommodation, food and other expenses. Their urban authority **can also claim staff costs** for the days involved in their team member participating in the Peer Review activities. The precise amounts and conditions are set out in Section 11.5 "Calculation of Eligible Costs".

Host urban authority

All participating cities can apply to be the host city of a Peer Review event. EUI may also approach a selected city asking if they would like to host a Peer Review or might propose an alternative location in another EU city if duly motivated. Hosting provides opportunities to **showcase a city to peers from across Europe** – including through site visits – as well as **engaging local elected representatives and local media** in discussions around their SUD strategy.

EUI covers all the financial costs of hosting the event. Host urban authorities can also send **up to six representatives (or up to 8 representatives in case of a FUA beneficiary)** to the Peer Review event. FUA representatives are invited to take advantage of this opportunity.

4. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO TAKE PART?

A more detailed presentation of all the eligibility criteria used for assessing applications to take part in an EUI Peer Review is set out below in Section 10.1 "Eligibility Criteria". However, it is useful here to already set out the key criteria in terms of who is eligible to apply.

Role	Eligible cities	Eligible participants
City under review	Article 11 cities only (*see definition below*), as defined by national or regional ERDF Managing Authorities. Applicants are required to check with their national Urban Contact Point (UCP) in advance that the strategy they are applying with is the correct Article 11 SUD strategy.	**Up to four representatives** of the urban authority or **up to six representatives of a FUA applicant** – who work directly on the Article 11 SUD strategy.
Peer reviewer	Peer reviewers can represent **any EU urban authority** with experience in the design and implementation of integrated, place-based strategies. The experience and involvement of article 11 cities and article 7[4] cities from the 2014-2020 period is highly encouraged.	Peer reviewers must be formally authorised by their urban authority to take part in the process and represent them. **Up to two individuals from any one city** may be invited to the same Peer Review event.
Host urban authority	Any urban authority (whether under review, peer reviewer, or other invited city) may host an event.	**Up to six representatives (or up to 8 representatives in case of a FUA beneficiary).** The participation of host urban authority representatives is not financed by the EUI.

Cities under review

The **primary beneficiary of a Peer Review must be a city entitled to receive ERDF support** for the development and/or implementation of its sustainable urban development (SUD) strategy under Article 11 of the ERDF Regulation – known as an **'Article 11 city'**.

This is because – as an instrument of EU Cohesion Policy – **EUI prioritises the achievement of EU Cohesion Policy objectives** and maximising the impact of EU funding support. (See Annex I – Legal basis for EUI Peer Review).

Note: *It is the relevant ERDF Managing Authority – at national or regional level – in each country that defines its Article 11 cities.* ***Check out the current*** *list of Article 11 cities for the period 2021-2027 which is being continuously updated.*

[4] [4] Article 7 the ERDF Regulation (EU) N° 1301/2013 defined the support provided to Sustainable Urban Development, requiring that "At least 5% 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 7 cities' and 'Article 7 strategies' are those that implemented the 5% earmarking established in the past 2014-2020 programming period.

Cities under review apply as an urban authority, which can be **represented at the Peer Review event by up to four people (up to six in case of a Functional Urban Area beneficiary)**. The nominated **staff members** must be individuals with responsibility and/or experience in the design and implementation of the article 11 SUD strategy. **Relevant stakeholders** may also be invited by the city under review to join the delegation participating in the Peer Review event. The participation of Managing Authorities in the delegation is encouraged when relevant and can be supported with a dedicated letter of invitation from EUI PS when needed. Their involvement helps strengthen the link with national/regional policy frameworks and supports implementation of recommendations and further actions. For applications submitted on behalf of a Functional Urban Area (FUA), the Article 11 cities included within the FUA must be clearly named in the application form and representatives from these cities included in the delegation.

Peer Reviewers

Peer reviewers **apply as individuals** to take part in a Peer Review process. However, it is the urban authority that they represent which is the formal beneficiary of the financial support available. Therefore, applicants must be **authorised by their urban authority** to represent them and **no more than two individual peer reviewers from the same city** will be selected for the same Peer Review event.

Peer reviewers can represent **any EU urban authority** but must have relevant **experience in the design and implementation of integrated, place-based strategies**. Due to their relevant knowledge and experience, Peer reviewers from Article 11 cities – and the equivalent Article 7 cities[5] from the 2014-2020 period – are particularly encouraged and prioritised (see Section 10.3 on Selection Criteria).

Other participants

Speakers with relevant **expertise in the design and implementation of integrated, place-based approaches to Sustainable Urban Development** may be invited to contribute to specific plenary or breakout sessions on a limited basis and when duly justified by the needs of the cities under review (e.g. national or regional/managing authorities involved in article 11, rural authorities experienced in urban-rural linkages, EU networks or partners, academics or independent experts, etc.) Speakers are not recruited through this call for applications but may be identified and invited to join the Peer Review throughout the preparatory phase depending on the needs of the cities under review to be addressed through the event.

5. WHAT KIND OF TOPICS CAN A PEER REVIEW ADDRESS?

An EUI Peer Review is required to **focus on specific challenges related to the design and implementation of SUD strategies**. Each city under review is tasked with identifying the challenges they want to tackle and formulating them into **three 'guiding questions'** to be addressed in turn.

[5] Article 7 the ERDF Regulation (EU) N° 1301/2013 defined the support provided to Sustainable Urban Development, requiring that "At least 5% 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 7 cities' and 'Article 7 strategies' are those that implemented the 5% earmarking established in the past 2014-2020 programming period.

The challenges tackled should **align with the key elements of integrated approaches to sustainable urban development identified under EU Cohesion Policy** – as outlined briefly in the ERDF Common Provisions Regulation[6].

The **JRC's** Handbook for Sustainable Urban Development Strategies[7] **is a key reference material** for cities to identify relevant topics that may be addressed. It presents the required elements of a SUD strategy in more detail. The Handbook sets out the following '**six building blocks of the EU approach to sustainable and integrated urban development**:

i. A **diagnosis of the urban area** and **strategic vision** for its development (Strategic dimension).

ii. A **selection of the target area**(s), including integration across scales, from neighbourhoods to wider territories. (Territorial Focus)

iii. A **multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder** approach, ensuring citizen engagement (Governance model)

iv. **Integration across sectors** and policy areas. (Cross-Sectoral integration)

v. Integration of **multiple sources of funding**, including prioritisation of actions to be supported by EU Funds. (Funding and Finance)

vi. A **result-oriented logic** and framework for monitoring and evaluation, linking Operational-Programme and strategy-specific indicators. (Monitoring System)

Example topics (guiding questions) covered by previous EU Peer Reviews

- How to **engage relevant stakeholders** to boost the implementation of SUD strategies?
- How to build understanding of a SUD strategy as a tool for urban transformation and **boost internal cooperation** and engagement among all municipal departments?
- How to be more effective in the **long-term planning and continuity** of SUD measures?
- How can the **private sector and other sources of financing** (apart from EU) be involved in the funding of the actions and services of the SUD strategy?
- How to ensure the **metropolitan fringes** equally benefit from EU/National Investments?
- How to ensure the **sustainability of services** in a shrinking population context?
- How to build a **strategic vision at multi-level scale** (Functional Urban Area, metropolitan cooperation)?
- How to implement **a project selection process that prioritises integration**?
- How to **identify and combine multiple funding sources** effectively and connect them to concrete projects?
- How to **boost an efficient governance integration and collaboration** between the various local governments to achieve a unitary effective impact?

Before completing their application form, applicants are encouraged to review the questions already addressed through EUI Peer Reviews organised in June 2023 in Thessaloniki (Greece), in November

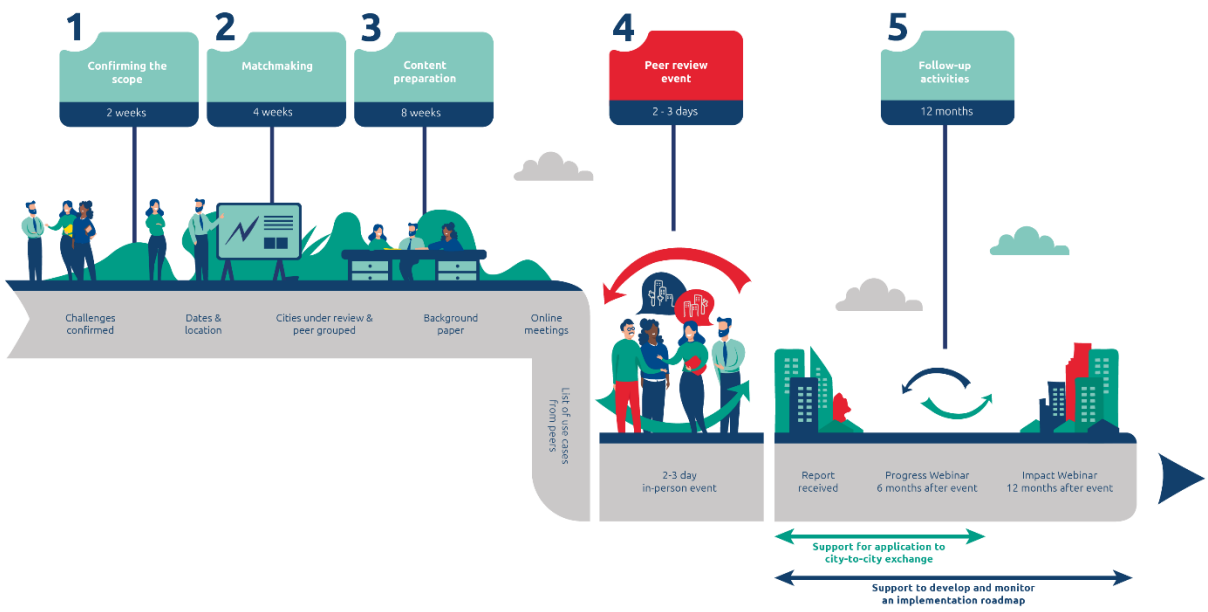
[6] Article 29 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 laying down common provisions for the ERDF [and other ESIF funds], outlines the elements that must be covered by any territorial strategy supported with EU Funds.
[7] The Handbook for Sustainable Urban Development Strategies produced by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission was based on a mixed-methods analysis of 964 SUD strategies implemented across 28 EU countries during the 2014-2020 programming period. Quantitative data was collected using STRAT-Board, which is both a database and an online mapping tool.

2023 in Coimbra (Portugal), in January 2024 in Kalisz (Poland), in September 2024 in Jiu Valley (Romania), in October 2024 in Athienou (Cyprus), in December 2024 in Basso Piave Urbano (Italy), in February 2025 in Torrelavega (Spain), in April 2025 in Alba Iulia (Romania), in May 2025 in Sormland (Sweden) and in July 2025 in Perugia (Italy).

6. THE EUI PEER REVIEW PROCESS IN DETAIL

An EUI Peer Review follows a **five-step process** adapted from a methodology developed for sustainable urban development strategies by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission. All resources developed by the JRC on sustainable urban development strategies are accessible online.

The EUI PS oversees the whole process, defining and confirming the format and timing of each implementation step. From the beginning of the process after notification of selection until the end, **each selected 'city under review' will be allocated two EUI Peer Review experts** to provide support and guidance.



STEP 1. CONFIRMING THE SCOPE

The Peer Review process starts once the application and selection phase have been completed and both the 'cities under review' and the 'peer reviewers' have been informed of their selection. (*For more information on the application and selection procedures, See Sections 9 and 10 below).*

The **first step of each Peer Review process is to confirm its thematic and geographical scope**.

Thematic scope

The selected 'cities under review' will conduct a **self-assessment analysis** of their current situation, challenges and needs using the Self-Assessment Tool for Sustainable Urban Development strategies (SAT4SUD) developed by the JRC – or a comparable tool relevant to their SUD strategy if justified.

Based on the **specific operational challenges identified for the design and implementation of their SUD strategy**, they will refine the definition of three main issues they wish to address – known as the **three "guiding questions" of the Peer Review** (For more details, see Section 5 above, "What kind of topics can a Peer Review address?").

The Peer Review experts and EUI PS will support cities under review with this process.

Geographical scope

Under Step 4 of the process, **3-5 Peer Review groups will come together in one Peer Review event (a group consists of one city under review and their peer reviewers)**. This aims to enable exchanges across and between the groups participating in the Peer Review groups (as well as within them).

To prepare this – during Step 1 of the process – the EUI Secretariat and Peer Review Experts will cluster all selected 'cities under review' into groups based on thematic or geographical characteristics.

Cities may be clustered together according to a **common interest in a particular theme (e.g. climate adaptation or digital transition) or territorial delivery mechanism for SUD** (e.g. use of a SUD programme, SUD priority axes, Integrated Territorial Investments - ITIs, Community-Led Local Development – CLLD or Functional Urban Areas – FUAs), characteristics and geographical context (e.g., as part of a cross-border Functional Urban Area).

STEP 2. MATCHMAKING

Step 2 of the Peer Review is **matching the selected 'cities under review' with the most appropriate 'peer reviewers'** from the pool of peers. Each city under review will be allocated between four to six peer reviewers. This task will be undertaken by the EUI Secretariat working with the team of Peer Review Experts in a process lasting around three weeks.

'Peer reviewers' will be matched with 'cities under review' **based on their interest, motivation and capacity to address the guiding questions** put forward by each city under review. Cities may be chosen due to similarities in challenges addressed or in urban context.

Matching of Peer reviewers will be **mostly according to the answers provided in their application form**. Nevertheless, this may be supported by additional information gathering, such as through a survey, to further establish relevant experiences, motivation and interest.

Once each 'city under review' has been matched with its selection of up to six 'peer reviewers', the allocated **Peer Review Experts will liaise with participating cities on the next steps**.

In limited and exceptional cases, other **speakers** may be invited to join the Peer Review event to provide specific content input in a particular session. See section 4 ('Who is eligible to take part?')

STEP 3. CONTENT PREPARATION

Kick-off meeting for cities under review

A first kick-off meeting is organised between cities under review of a same Peer Review event. The meeting aims at:

1. Briefing the cities under review on their role, the timeline and ways of working of the activity.
2. If relevant, defining a common guiding question to be addressed during the event by all cities under review and all peer reviewers. The common guiding question is based on a common challenge shared by all cities under review involved in one event.

During this meeting, cities under review will deliver a short presentation outlining their urban context and the challenges they identified. The discussion will be moderated by the Peer Review Experts, who will support the cities under review throughout the activity. Information is provided on the regulatory, legislative and urban context of the cities under review.

Background paper

In order to prepare the content of their Peer Review event, each 'city under review' is required to draft a **background paper** detailing the specific characteristics of their city, their SUD strategy and the challenges they face. They should actively **consult with their local stakeholders to contribute to this task**.

To facilitate the task, cities under review will receive a **template background paper** from the EUI Secretariat as well as **personalised guidance and support from their Peer Review experts** to complete it. The template may be adapted lightly by the city under review if justified, but the required content sections and maximum and minimum lengths indicated in the template must be respected.

Cities under review should share their background paper with the EUI PS **not later than one month before the Peer Review event according to the deadlines put in place by the accompanying experts**. The background paper will be then disseminated to the peer reviewers to allow them to prepare their contributions.

Peers' kick-off meeting

Following the matchmaking exercise and background paper, a first kick-off meeting **bringing together the city under review with their peer reviewers** will be organised by the EUI PS and experts.

The key aims of the meeting are to **clarify understanding of the needs and guiding questions of the city under review** as set out in the background paper, which peer reviewers must read in advance and ask any additional information they may need to understand the context of the city under review.

To support the preparation process, peer reviewers will receive a factsheet outlining the configuration of Sustainable Urban Development in the Member State of the city under review they are supporting. This complements the information on the regulatory, legislative and institutional context of each city under review provided within the background paper. This aims to help peer reviewers better understand the strategic and operational framework behind the guiding questions. Peer reviewers are also expected to prepare a short outline of practices and recommendations they will present during the event.

Pre-event online briefing

No later than two weeks before the Peer Review event, an online briefing will be organised by the EUI PS and experts, bringing together all expected participants. The key aims are to **clarify expectations and details of what will happen at the event**. Peer reviewers can ask for further specifications on the challenges faced by the city under review. The peer reviewer is required to prepare relevant practices and recommendations to address the challenges which they can outline shortly in the briefing. The city under review provides feedback on **examples and experiences shared by peer reviewers to highlight the areas they would like to focus on during the upcoming event**.

The briefing may also suggest **updates to the background paper** that the city under review should make in advance of the event. All participants should leave this briefing clear on **what they should be presenting at the event and any materials they need to prepare**.

STEP 4. PEER REVIEW EVENT

Host urban authority

In the application form, applicants are invited to indicate whether they would like to be considered as the host for a Peer Review event. Host urban authorities are usually – but not always – cities under review. Peer reviewers or other EU urban authorities may also host if duly motivated. EUI aims to vary the selected hosting country as much as possible between individual Peer Review events. However, other factors may contribute to the selection of a host including (but not limited to) accessibility for international participants, availability of suitable venues or accommodations, or possibility to organise relevant study visits linked to the common theme. Hosts of past peer reviews report that hosting offers an opportunity to develop an enhanced international profile, to showcase local initiatives and successful projects, to engage in meaningful exchanges with peers, and to align sessions with local challenges and priorities. Host cities also can engage Managing Authorities and other stakeholders from the public sector (regional authorities, ministries), private sector and academia.

Hosts also help design the opening plenary and study visits, which can be focused on their context and engage their elected representatives in discussions on their SUD strategy. Host cities are also encouraged to invite representatives from the relevant Managing Authorities to contribute to the opening plenary or breakout discussions where appropriate, especially to provide context on Article 11 implementation. Hosting a Peer Review event also provides opportunities to engage local media and generally raise awareness of local efforts and sustainable urban development.

While the host city may be asked to suggest possible venues and local service providers, EUI will organise and finance the entire Peer Review, including contracting service providers and defining the agenda. **No financial contribution is expected from host urban authorities.** Host urban authorities can also send **up to six representatives (or up to 8 in case of a FUA beneficiary)** to the Peer Review event.

Peer Review Event Agenda

Each Peer Review event follows the same structure and key elements based on the methodology defined by the EUI PS and Peer Review experts:

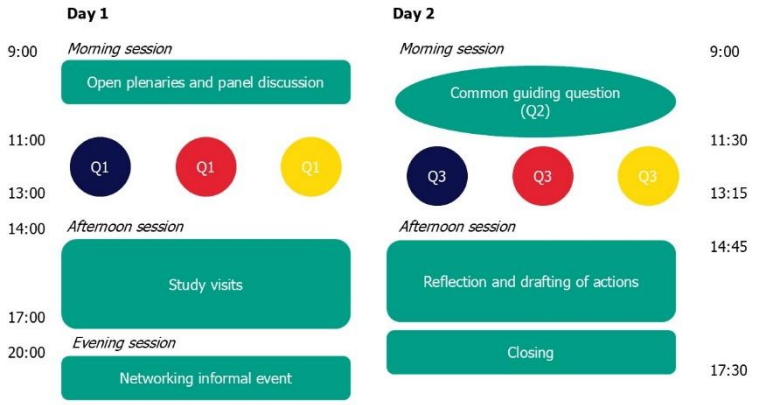
- Each Peer Review event lasts **2-3 days depending on the number of cities under review involved.**
- **Opening and closing plenaries** bring together all participants across Peer Review groups
- **Each of the** three guiding questions is addressed in turn through **three discussion rounds.**
    - A **common guiding question** may be addressed during a **joint session** with a highly interactive and hands-on character.
    - The other guiding questions will be addressed in **parallel sessions.**
- The event will include **informal networking** opportunities.
- The event may include **study visits** to relevant sites in the host city. These visits have a strong capacity building character in their design and either enhance the participants understanding of the challenges or demonstrate relevant solutions.

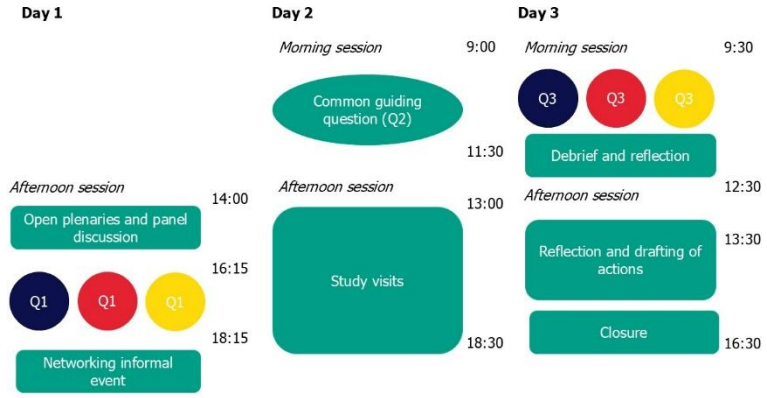
There is some flexibility in the order of sessions (such as the timing of the study visits and informal networking). The agenda of the event evolves according to the needs of the participating cities. Past agendas from Peer Review events already organised can be accessed online:

Past Peer Reviews:

- 1-2 July 2025: Peer Review 10 co-organised with JRC (Perugia, Italy)
- 26-28 May: Peer Review 9 (Sörmland, Sweden)
- 24-25 April: Peer Review 8 (Alba Iulia, Romania)
- 26-27 February: Peer Review 7 (Torrelavega, Spain)
- 4-5 December 2024: Peer Review 6 (Jesolo and San Donà di Piave, Italy)
- 30-31 October 2024: Peer Review 5 (Athienou, Cyprus)
- 25-26 September 2024: Peer Review 4 (Petrila, Romania)
- 31 January - 01 February 2024: Peer Review 3 (Kalisz, Poland)
- 28-29 November 2023: Peer Review 2 (Coimbra, Portugal)
- 28-29 June 2023: Pilot Peer Review (Thessaloniki, Greece)

An indicative agenda for a typical 2-day and 3-day Peer Review event is illustrated below.





STEP 5. FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Feedback report

The EUI Peer Review Experts are responsible for drafting a Feedback Report on each city under review, which they will share with the city under review **no later than three weeks after the Peer Review event**. This report will detail the discussions that took place, the examples presented, the recommendations and insights provided, and the concrete actions that the city under review is willing to explore as a result of the Peer Review.

The report is shared for comment with the city under review and peer reviewers who may add information and resources or clarify details about the advice provided. This **update is expected within three weeks.** The cities under review are invited to analyse the feedback report with their stakeholders

and **identify which recommendations and further actions they would like to prioritise** for the further development of their SUD strategy.

The report is validated with the Peer Review experts, shared with the EUI and uploaded on an online platform (e.g. SharePoint) so that all participants, including peer reviewers, are able to access the full report, with both the recommendations and planned follow up.

The process usually takes 4-6 weeks.

An adapted version of the report will be prepared by the experts, validated by the city under review for sharing publicly, and made available online by EUI.

Peer reviewers will be invited to document the practices shared in the Peer Review in the urban practice template provided by the EUI secretariat for uploading on Portico. EUI experts will assist with this task as needed.

Implementation roadmap

Following submission of the feedback report, cities under review will be **offered the opportunity to develop an optional "implementation roadmap"**, tailored to one or more priority actions received during the Peer Review.

This roadmap is developed in close cooperation with the EUI experts after cities have had time to reflect on the feedback report with local stakeholders. Itis particularly useful for cities under review who wish for additional expert support to structure next steps and maximise the impact of the recommendations and further actions. The process is expected to develop over the course of 1 year and will include several milestones identified over a clear timeline, a list of responsible parties and stakeholders, tools and formats, as well as expert support. It will focus on 'how' to implement the agreed actions with the overall goal of improving the SUD strategy. The final result will be an implementation report, drafted by the Peer Review experts in collaboration with the cities under review

Follow-up City-to-City Exchange

To better facilitate that the recommendations given by peer reviewers to the cities under review are taken up for implementation, a support action allowing cities under review to easily apply for a City-to-City Exchange is initiated as soon as the feedback report is sent. The application can be fast-tracked because the cities are already confirmed to be eligible and the topics relevant for city-to-city exchanges.

This action allows the city under review to select 1 or 2 recommendations from their follow-up report for which they need additional advice from peers and experts to put into practice. If justified and clearly linked to a process of improving their SUD strategy, the beneficiary may also focus on other learnings gained through the Peer Review process (e.g. through a common session). An EUI expert will help identify and contact 1 or 2 peer cities, either from the participants of the Peer Review the city under review attended, or other external cities. Once peer cities are confirmed to support the exchange, the expert can support the applicant with suggestions and feedback as they prepare the application. The city under review will be offered one expert to support with the City-to-City Exchange follow-up activity – either a Peer Review expert or a City-to-City exchange Moderator.

The applicant agrees on the dates and locations for the visits with the peer city or cities, they obtain the endorsement from their institution, and they submit the completed city-to-city exchange application in accordance with the guidance for City-to-City Exchanges.

Cities under review are still welcome to apply for a City-to-City Exchange through the standard procedure if they wish to focus on themes or questions unrelated to the Peer Review learnings.

Furthermore, if several 'cities under review' share a common interest in a follow-up topic, this request may be considered by the EUI Secretariat for a **future EUI capacity building event**.

The **peer reviewers are also encouraged to apply** for a city-to-city exchange following on from any of the topics they discussed or learned about during the Peer Review.

Progress webinar

At least six months after the Peer Review event, the EUI Secretariat will organise a **progress webinar for participating cities** to discuss the progress of cities under review in implementing their plans and priorities, integrating the provided recommendations into their SUD strategies.

Cities under review will **share any tangible benefits** brought by the inputs received as well as **identifying remaining hindrances or new challenges** in the design and implementation of their SUD strategy or related projects. This should retain a focus on the six building blocks of the EU approach to sustainable and integrated urban development (See Section 5: "What kind of topics can a Peer Review address?").

If the city opted to develop an implementation roadmap, they can already present the progress achieved by the date of the webinar and receive feedback from the participants, therefore allowing the city and experts to **adapt their roadmap for implementation** accordingly.

Final follow-up

The EUI Secretariat will ensure a final **follow up on the progress of cities under review twelve months after the Peer Review event by contacting the cities under review individually with a questionnaire and inviting them to a final impact webinar**. This is vital for EUI to be able to identify and celebrate successes, track the impact of the Peer Review, make improvements to the process and identify further capacity building needs to address.

Cities who have opted for an implementation roadmap will be able to present their final progress and conclusions, as this date will correspond to the end of this process.

> To prepare the follow-up activities six and twelve months after the Peer Review event, cities under review are invited to complete a short survey which contributes to the EUI reporting on **Key Performance Indicators.**

7. WHAT IS EXPECTED OF PARTICIPATING CITIES?

Here, we summarise the main commitments made by cities participating in an EUI Peer Review (in return for the benefits outlined in Section 3 "What's in it for participating cities?").

7.1. CORE PEER REVIEW ACTIVITIES

Cities under review

Throughout the Peer Review process, 'cities under review' will be invited to **review and assess their ways of working, their strategy and policies**, as well as to listen to inputs from the peers and experts. **Active involvement and an open mind** are thus critical to get the most out of the activity.

More specifically – and **with ongoing support from the EUI Secretariat and Peer Review Experts – cities under review are expected to:**

i. Participate in an **online kick-off meeting** with other cities under review.
ii. Complete a **self-assessment** tool to analyse current strengths and weaknesses.
iii. Draft a **background paper** setting out local characteristics and the guiding questions (priority topics) of the Peer Review.
iv. Participate in a '**peers kick-off meeting'** with their allocated peer reviewers to discuss first assumptions related to the guiding questions of the city under review.
v. Help prepare and participate in a **pre-event online briefing** to understand the tools used during the event.
vi. Finalise the background paper and **prepare a presentation** for the Peer Review event.
vii. Participate actively in the **2-3-day Peer Review event**.
viii. **Circulate and review the draft feedback report** with relevant stakeholders.
ix. Confirm their **plans and priorities** for following up on the recommendations provided.
x. Prepare and participate in a **Progress webinar** six months later and in an **impact webinar** (final online follow-up activity) 12 months later.
xi. Optional: Develop and carry out a **follow-up City-to-City Exchange** if relevant to support the implementation of the recommendations obtained from the peers.
xii. Optional: Develop, with the help of Peer Review experts, an **implementation roadmap**, tailored to one or more priority recommendations received during the Peer Review

Around **8 – 10 working days** are estimated for a city under review (plus travel time to and from the event)

Peer Reviewer cities

To support the cities under review, peer reviewers are expected to **provide strategic, technical and practical advice, insights and know-how** for designing and implementing SUD strategies based on their experiences. Active involvement and a **willingness to share lessons learnt and best practices** are thus critical to get the most out of the activity.

More specifically, they are expected to:

i. **Review the background paper** of the city under review in detail.
ii. Participate in the **peers' kick-off meeting** with their allocated city under review.
iii. Help prepare and participate in a **pre-event online briefing**.
iv. Prepare identified **content and presentations** for the Peer Review event.
v. Prepare at least one urban practice description for submission to Portico.
vi. Participate actively in the **Peer Review event** across all sessions.
vii. Review the feedback report and participate in the **Progress webinar** six months later and in an **impact webinar** (final online follow-up activity) 12 months later.

Peer reviewers are expected to commit **5-6 working days** (plus travel time to and from the event).

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 (EUI).

Article 50 of the Common Provisions Regulation covering the ERDF[8] 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.
- Templates: (i) PowerPoint and Word, (ii) letter paper, (iii) publication layout.

Act as external ambassadors for EUI Peer Review

All participants are encouraged to act as an ambassador for EUI Peer Reviews, which means:

- **Disseminating the activities, results and outcomes** of the Peer Review within their institution and among stakeholders, including subsequent calls for applications.
- **Participating in EUI capacity building events** as a participants (when invited).
- **Participating in other activities organised by EUI** to promote Peer Reviews and share testimonies from previous participants.
- **Sharing within their professional networks** and on social media the activities, outcomes and benefits of the Peer Review activity, including subsequent calls for applications.

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

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

the activity are not covered by the EUI Secretariat, unless the participants are invited as speakers to an EUI in-person promotional event.

Participants will also benefit from increased visibility: testimonials from past cities under review and peer reviewers may be shared on the EUI website, through articles, videos, and social media.

Support the capitalisation of knowledge by EUI

Throughout the implementation of the Peer Review process, participating cities will generate a wealth of knowledge about the SUD strategy process, in terms of what works, what does not, and what could be done differently in different contexts. EUI will endeavour to **capture and share this knowledge with other policymakers and practitioners** across Europe in a process known as 'capitalisation'.

Different mechanisms will be set up by EUI to ensure this capitalisation and transfer of knowledge emerging from the Peer Review activities. The Peer Review experts will have a crucial role to play here, typically feeding into activities carried out by the EUI PS. Where relevant – and upon request from the Secretariat – **Peer Review participants are encouraged to contribute to capitalisation activities**. In addition to developing at least one urban practice template for upload to Portico, this may also include sharing their experiences at an EUI event or for a publication, or feeding into follow-up activities, such as studies, on elements discussed during their Peer Review.

This may include also contributing to future work to build knowledge on challenges and possible solutions for the design and implementation of SUD strategies as well as on the identification of additional good practices.

7.3. BEYOND THE PEER REVIEW

EUI Pool of Peers

All participants in EUI peer-exchange activities – whether from cities under review, peer reviewers or those involved in City-to-City Exchanges – are **invited to be part of the EUI pool of peers**.

This pool consists of a database of all past participants, with the name of their institution, experience and contact details. Members of this pool may be contacted to participate in a future EUI Peer Review or may be invited to act as a peer in a City-to-City Exchange. **Participants that are not interested in the pool can opt out as part of the Peer Review follow-up**.

In addition, **representatives of cities under review from one Peer Review are invited to act as peer reviewers in another, provided that they meet the eligibility requirements to be a peer reviewer (i.e. be employed as staff of an urban authority)**. Reviewing another city is a valuable part of the capacity building process that brings additional insights to any city looking to continually improve its SUD strategy and actions. Participating as a peer reviewer can bring new outlooks on challenges previously addressed by a Peer Review. It is also a networking opportunity and helps to foster the development of an EUI capacity building community.

8. TIMELINE AND MILESTONES OF THE CURRENT CALL

The present call will select participants for Peer Reviews that will take place in the first semester of 2026. The below is an **indicative timeline** of the Peer Review process under this call:

- **25 September, 13:30-15:30 CEST** – Applicant Webinar **for Peer Reviews and City to City Exchanges.** The webinar provided information and guidance on the calls and how to apply, delivered jointly by the Secretariat and Urban Contact Points.

- **8 October 2025** – **launch of the Call for Applications**

  - While the call is open, potential applicants can book **bilateral online consultations** with the EUI Secretariat to get more information and advice about the call, or contact their Urban Contact Point for information tailored to the national context.

- **18 November 2025, 12:00 CET** – deadline for applications– **closure of the joint call. No applications beyond this time will be accepted**

- **19 December 2025** – indicative **date for results of the Call**. All applicants (whether approved or rejected) will be notified of the results around three-four weeks after the call closes, depending on the number of applications received.

- **January 2026** – confirmation of **date and location (hosts) for Peer Review events** and start of content preparation for cities under review.

- **February 2026** – confirmation of the **composition of all Peer Review groups** (city under review and their allocated peer reviewers) based on completion of the matchmaking exercise and the agreement of participants.

- **March 2026 onwards –** completion of background paper, kick-off meeting for cities under review, peers kick-off meeting and pre-event briefing (**preparatory activities**).

- **March to July 2026 -** it is expected that **two to four Peer Review events** (supporting between 6-16 cities under review) will be held in the first semester of 2026, depending on the call results. The following tentative event dates are set, with events usually taking place between Tuesday and Thursday to facilitate international travel:

  - **Week of 9 March 2026**
  - **Week of 20 April 2026**
  - **Week of 25 May 2026**
  - **Week of 29 June 2026**

- **September to December 2026** – Progress webinar aimed at tracking progress will be organised six months after each Peer Review and completion of follow-up survey.

- **March to July 2027 –** an impact webinar (final online follow-up activity) aimed at capturing impacts is organised one year after each event.

9. HOW TO APPLY?

The Call for Applications for both cities under review and peer reviewers opens on 8 October 2025 and **closes on 18 November 2025 at 12:00 (CET).** Applicants to this call are required to fill in the application form accessible via the call page, specifying their preference in terms of acting as 'city under review' and/or 'peer reviewer'. A courtesy Application Form in MS Word format is available on the EUI website to facilitate offline preparation of the application. However, **only applications submitted through the official application form will be accepted** - applications submitted by email will be deemed ineligible.

Application Form

The Application Form is composed of three sections:

- **A. Applicant information.**

The applicant is asked to provide standard information and contact details, as well as information on their urban authority and involvement with SUD strategies and SUD-related EU cooperation.

- **B. Challenges and motivation**

The applicant is asked to identify challenges they are facing and set out their **motivation and interest** in the role of city under review or peer reviewer. Depending on their answer, the subsequent questions are different.

If selecting city under review
The applicant will provide **information on their article 11 SUD strategy**, including its status and timeline, a description of the potential guiding questions to be addressed and participating individuals. The applicant is also invited to express their willingness to act as a host city for a Peer Review event.

If selecting peer reviewer
The applicant is invited to provide information on their **capacity, fields of expertise and their motivation** for participation as a peer reviewer, including what they expect to gain from the process.

- **C. Endorsement by the urban authority**

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

How to receive assistance

The EUI Secretariat is ready to assist applicants with any questions related to the call.

- Applicants may contact the Secretariat with **specific queries via email** to capacitybuilding@urban-initiative.eu. A FAQ on Peer Reviews in available here.
- The Secretariat organised an Applicant Webinar **co-delivered with Urban Contact Points** on 25 September 2025 from 13:30-15:30 CEST. The webinar was recorded and will be made available on the EUI website.
- Potential applicants can benefit from online **bilateral consultations with the EUI Secretariat** to receive information and advice about the call throughout the period the

call is open. They are required to first read the call documentation, watch the webinar recording and prepare their questions. Sessions can be booked here.

10. HOW ARE CITIES SELECTED?

Each application is **evaluated by a team of independent EUI Peer Review experts**, working under the supervision of the EUI PS who retain responsibility for the final selection decision. The evaluation and selection process is organised in **two main steps**:

1. **Eligibility check**, using defined **eligibility criteria** and **exclusion criteria** to ensure equal treatment of applications and avoid further assessment of ineligible applications.
2. **Quality evaluation**, using the defined **selection criteria** and including a **prioritisation score** to inform choices between applications meeting the overall criteria.

10.1. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

If not all requirements set out below 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.

Eligibility criteria for all applications

1. The **Application Form has been submitted electronically before the deadline** indicated in Section 8 "Timeline and milestones of the current call".
2. **Mandatory fields** in the Application Form **are duly completed**.
3. The applicant is either:
    a. An **urban authority** – or its representative – **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).
    b. A **Functional Urban Area** (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 code 1 or DEGURBA code 2.

    In case the Functional Urban Area, does not have a legal status, one of the main urban authorities of the Functional Urban Area may apply in the name of the Functional Urban Area. In this case, other article 11 urban authorities involved in the Functional Urban Area are expected to be included in the delegation participating in the Peer Review Event.
4. The application form is submitted by a representative of the urban authority that is involved in the design and/or implementation of the SUD strategy and directly works for that urban authority. An Application Form submitted by a stakeholder involved in the design and/or implementation of an urban authority's SUD strategy – but not working for the authority itself - will be declared ineligible[9].

[9] As defined in Article 29 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, "territorial strategies shall be under the responsibility of the relevant territorial authorities or bodies." Stakeholders hence do not bear the responsibility of the territorial strategies, although they greatly contribute to them.

5. The applicant is **located in an EU Member State**.
6. The applicant institution **complies with the requirements on exclusion** from access to funding (See sub-Section on "Exclusion criteria" below)".
7. The application must be duly **endorsed by an authorised signatory** who has delegation and power to engage the legal person of the urban authority.

Additional eligibility criteria for cities under review

1. The applicant is an **Article 11 city** i.e. an urban authority selected by its national/regional ERDF Managing Authority to implement an SUD strategy under article 11 of the ERDF Regulation, and this article 11 strategy is named in the application form.
2. The **relevant person from the urban authority** in charge of designing and/or implementing the SUD strategy of the applicant city is involved in the Peer Review process.

Additional eligibility criteria for peer reviewers

The peer reviewer demonstrates relevant experience with the design and implementation of integrated, placed-based SUD strategies.

Priority will be given to peer reviewers involved or in charge of designing and/or implementing the SUD strategy of an urban authority, which means:

- Applicants from an Article 11 city i.e. an urban authority involved in Article 11 of the current ERDF Regulation (2021-2027),
- Applicants from an Article 7 city i.e. an urban authority involved in Article 7 of the previous ERDF Regulation (2014-2020).

These are staff members employed by the urban authority. Applicants will be requested to reconfirm their employment status before accepting to participate in each specific peer review event, providing evidence if required (e.g. a copy of the employment contract signed by the urban authority).

In case EUI requires additional country-specific information to determine the eligibility of an applicant or the correctness of the identified Article 11 SUD strategy, EUI may consult with the relevant Urban Contact Point and/or DG REGIO Geographical Unit.

10.2. EXCLUSION CRITERIA

All applicants must provide a **declaration confirming that the urban authority does not fall under one of the exclusion criteria** set out below - this declaration is included in the Application Form.

In accordance with EU Financial Regulations,[10] applicants may be excluded if the applying 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,

[10] Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending previous EU Regulations: 1296/2013; 1301/2013; 1303/2013; 1304/2013; 1309/2013; 1316/2013; 223/2014; 283/2014; and Decision 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012.

- grave professional misconduct, including misrepresentation,
- fraud,
- corruption,
- conduct related to a criminal organisation,
- money laundering or terrorist financing,
- terrorist offences or offences linked to terrorist activities,
- child labour and other trafficking in human beings,
- irregularity,
- creating or being a shell company.

During the selection procedure and prior to the final decision of the Selection Committee, the EUI Secretariat checks applicants in the **Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES)**, established by the European Commission to reinforce the protection of the Union's financial interests and to ensure sound financial management.[11]

If an urban authority is detected in the EDES, the EUI Secretariat will notify 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.

10.3. SELECTION CRITERIA

Applicants that are declared eligible will be subject to a quality evaluation, looking at aspects of the experience and motivation of the applicant, and coherence and consistency of the application.

The independent EUI Peer Review Experts will conduct the quality assessment of each application based on the selection criteria below. Each application is assessed by at least two experts. A Selection Committee comprised of the Experts and members of the Secretariat then check and confirm the ranking of all eligible applications, also taking into account the prioritisation score outlined below.

Quality requirement for all applications

- **Motivation & expectations**. The applicant clearly describes their motivation and what they expect to gain from the activity. The overarching goal of capacity building and peer learning is well understood.

Additional quality requirements for cities under review

- **Challenge definition & coherence**. This includes the description of challenges and definition of guiding questions.
- **Consistency with Article 11**. The application is consistent with the context and challenges of SUD as understood within Article 11 of the ERDF Regulation. The article 11 SUD strategy to be reviewed is clearly and correctly identified, its status and timeline are coherent.
- **Maturity of the SUD strategy.** The status and timeline of the applicant's SUD strategy will be assessed to ensure all strategies from approved applications will be reviewed at an impactful and decisive moment of the policy life cycle.

Additional quality requirements for peer reviewers

[11] Article 142 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046.

- **Expertise and experience**. The applicant clearly describes the relevance of their knowledge and experience with regards to the development and implementation of SUD strategies.

Prioritisation system

To help the decision-making process, a scoring system considers not only the specific merits of each application, but also **a prioritisation of applications** based on clear criteria.

Based on **individual scorings for the priority criteria** described in the table below, the prioritisation score is added to the quality evaluation score to give each application a final overall evaluation.

Priority criteria	Scoring scale
Level of regional development	Urban authority is from a less developed region = 1 Urban authority is from a region in transition = 0.5
Size of city	Urban authority with up to 500,000 = 1
Additional prioritisation criteria for peer reviewer	
ERDF experience	Experience with ERDF funds including article 7 cities = 1
Article 11 city	Yes = 1

10.4. CONFIRMATION OF PARTICIPATION

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

- Applicants of **ineligible or rejected applications** are informed in writing about the decision, including detailed information on the reasons why the application is rejected (whether because the eligibility criteria were not fulfilled, or following the quality evaluation).

- **Approved cities under review** will be contacted by the EUI PS for confirmation of participation and to confirm dates and location for the Peer Review event. After selection, EUI will advise each city under review in case there are any specific requirements on how to ensure the proper implementation of their Peer Review (e.g. sufficient focus on the correct article 11 SUD strategy, or expected composition of the delegation with regard to the correct article 11 SUD strategy).

- **Approved peer reviewers** will be contacted by the EUI Secretariat for confirmation of employment status, confirmation of participation and to provide information on the next steps of the Peer Review process.

Upon confirmation of participation, cities under review and peer reviewers commit to participate in a Peer Review event on the date/ period and location proposed by EUI Secretariat. **Unsuccessful applicants may reapply** for the next call for Peer Reviews (calls organised twice yearly, usually in March and October) or apply for a City-to-City Exchange.

10.5. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Applicants are entitled to make a complaint if they feel their application has not been treated fairly and all complaints will be treated seriously. The full EUI complaints procedure can be found in Annex III, however, the key elements of the procedure defined for this Peer Review Call for Applications are:

- **Only the applying urban authority can file a complaint**.
- The urban authority can raise questions or objections about the decision of EUI regarding the eligibility or evaluation of the application. 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 Applications that materially affected or could have affected the decision.
- Queries or complaints must be sent to the EUI Secretariat – by post or email – **within 15 working days after the first official notification** of the non-selection of the application by the EUI Secretariat[12]. This deadline will not prejudice the start of the activity for the selected applications.
- The EUI Secretariat will then have 20 working days to respond to the complaint. **If the complaint is considered justified**, the application will be sent back to the Selection Committee to review the application and its evaluation.

11. CONTRACTUAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ELEMENTS

11.1. CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS

By applying for a Peer Review, the urban authority commits to support the implementation of the activities if selected. **No contract is signed between EUI and the participating urban authorities.**

It is essential that the application form confirms that the **application is endorsed by an authorised signatory with delegation and power to engage the legal person of the urban authority** (hereafter: authorised signatory) – see Section 10.1 "Eligibility criteria" above and Part C of the Application Form "Endorsement by the urban authority".

In case of doubt, the **EUI Secretariat may contact the authorised signatory** listed in the Application Form to verify the information provided.

[12] The deadline for receiving a complaint starts counting from the day after the first notification was sent. The notifications are dispatched only to the email addresses of the authorised signatory and contact person of the application. The EUI Secretariat cannot be held accountable in case the notification was not received by the applicants, therefore it is the responsibility of applicants to provide active email addresses and to check them regularly (including SPAM folders). Addresses cannot be changed following submission of the application form.

11.2. MODIFICATIONS TO THE APPLICATION

In case of unforeseen and exceptional circumstances, a request can be made to the EUI Secretariat to approve **changes to the nominated people to take part in the Peer Review event**, as follows:

- The city under review may involve **fewer or other staff members** in the Peer Review compared to those listed in the application form within the limits of the maximum delegation size.
- In exceptional and duly justified cases, the peer reviewer may propose **another staff member from their urban authority** to replace them, provided that they are also involved in the design, implementation or evaluation of the SUD strategy and that they provide the same level of expertise and experience[13].

11.3. ELIGIBLE COST CATEGORIES

Financial support is provided by EUI to cover the following categories of costs related to participation in the Peer Review activity:

a. **Staff costs of peer reviewers**. (Staff costs of cities under review are NOT covered.)
b. **Travel costs** of each participant to attend the Peer Review event (where travel is required).
c. A **per diem** to cover accommodation, subsistence, and local transport of each participant (where travel is required).

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.

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 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**. No advance payments are possible.

The lump sum is **payable after the submission of the Reimbursement Form** – together with proof of bank account details – and its approval by the EUI Secretariat. (See 11.6 "Reporting requirements").

The **default option is that reimbursements are paid to the bank account of the relevant urban authority**.

[13] If the proposed replacement staff member is not accepted by EUI, a replacement peer reviewer from a different urban authority will be invited to replace them in supporting the City under Review.

11.5. CALCULATION OF ELIGIBLE COSTS

Staff costs

The urban authority employing a selected peer reviewer[14] may receive a **fixed amount of EUR 350 per working day** to cover the related staff costs. The authority can claim up to **six working days per peer reviewer** covering the two to three days of the peer review event plus three days for preparatory activities.

Cities under review are not eligible to claim staff costs – they are considered to be the primary beneficiary of the Peer Review.

Travel costs

The travel costs **related to participation in the peer review event** can be claimed for all participants requiring travel – whether representing a city under review or a peer reviewer. **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 Commission Decision (translated into the EC travel distance 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).

   Example 1: travel between Coimbra (Portugal) and Zagreb (Croatia)
   The distance of a one-way trip between Coimbra and Zagreb is 2586 km by rail according to the EC distance calculator. Eligible travel costs for the roundtrip (going and return) is hence 541€ per staff member.

ii. For **distances below 400km within one Member State**, the eligible unit cost is defined on the basis of a fixed rate for any journey of between 50 and 400 km for each Member State – as set out in the EC table of 'intra-Member State return journeys'[15].

   Example 2: travel between Lille (France) and Paris (France)
   The distance of a one-way trip between Lille and Paris is 221 km according to the EC distance calculator. Eligible travel costs for the roundtrip (going and return) is hence 72€ per staff member.

iii. For **distances below 400km between two Member States**, the unit cost is based on the addition of the unit cost for an intra-Member State return journey in both countries.

   Example 3: travel between Brno (Czechia) and Budapest (Hungary)
   The distance of a one-way trip between Brno and Budapest is 326 km according to the EC distance calculator. Eligible travel costs for the roundtrip (going and return) is hence 57€ per staff member (29€ for intra-Member State journey in Hungary, 28€ for intra-Member State in Czechia).

iv. For travel distances between 401 km and 600 km within relevant Member States and between Member states (in the case of connections involving DE, ES, FI, FR, IT, PL and SE)

[14] Peer reviewers are direct employees of the urban authority, as defined in Section 4 "Who is eligible to take part?".
[15] Commission Decision C(2023) 4928 amending Commission Decision C(2021)35 authorising the use of unit costs for travel, accommodation and subsistence costs. (p.10)

relevant unit costs will be applied as described above under ii. and iii. (Unit amounts can be found in Table 5.2. of the COMMISSION DECISION of 31.7.2024 amending Commission Decision C(2021)35).

Costs can be covered for **up to four staff members from each city under review** (except the host city) and **up to two peer reviewers from the same city** in each peer review.

Per diems

The per diem is a **flat daily rate** that covers accommodation, subsistence, and local transportation (including journeys up to 50km distance) of participants at the peer review event.

A per diem can be claimed for **each participant coming from outside the host city** for the two to three days of the peer review event plus up to two days to cover the necessary travel time to the host city (**up to a maximum of five days in total**).

Per diem amounts are fixed for each Member State according to a Decision of the European Commission.[16]

Summary of eligible costs per form of reimbursement (with the exception of host cities)

Eligible costs (transfer of lump sum)		
Cost	**City under review**	**Peer reviewer**
Staff costs	No	Up to 6 days (2-3 days of the peer review event, plus 3 for preparatory activities)
Travel costs	Yes	Yes
Per diem	Up to 5 days (2-3 days of the event plus 2 travel days)	Up to 5 days (2-3 days of the event plus 2 travel days)

Note: An exception to the above tables is that **any city hosting a peer review is not entitled to request any reimbursement for travel costs or per diem amounts.**

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.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Both cities under review and peer reviewers are expected to **communicate with the EUI Secretariat and the Peer Review Experts on a regular basis** to achieve a successful Peer Review.

Reimbursement will only be made once the EUI has validated that the participant has completed all their associated tasks (see Section 7.1) to the expected level of quality. There are also **formal reporting requirements** which need to be respected, namely signature of the Participant's list on-site, completion

[16] Commission Decision C(2023) 4928 of 26.7.2023 amending Commission Decision C(2021)35 authorising the use of unit costs for travel, accommodation and subsistence cost.

of a final feedback report (only for cities under review) and submission of a correctly completed reimbursement form after the event.

Final version of the feedback report

Cities under review are required to have submitted a completed a final feedback report of sufficient quality within two months of the Peer Review event. This should include their plans and priorities in response to the draft report and recommendations provided by the Peer Review Experts.

If the report is not completed, or still unsatisfactory after requests for correction/completion have been sent, the city will not receive reimbursement, or benefit from promotional opportunities from EUI (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.

Peer reviewers do not have to submit a final feedback report, but the PS still validates that they have completed their tasks to the expected quality, notably at the Peer Review event. Quality refers to active and relevant contributions during the preparation activities and during all sessions of the Peer Review event.

Reimbursement form

Participants are required to complete an electronic reimbursement form, which will be sent to them by the EUI Secretariat after the peer review event. Respondents will be asked to provide:

- **Confirmation of the eligible costs of their participating representatives for calculation of the lump sum payment amount**:
  - Names of staff participating in the peer review event (from the urban authority).
  - Days worked (up to 6) – paid at a flat rate of EUR 350 per day for peer reviewers.
  - Distance travelled (one-way) – The form will automatically calculate the lump sum for travel on the basis of the distance that participants are required to calculate using the official calculator.
  - Per diems requested based on 2-3 days at the event and up to 2 days of travel.
- **Bank account details for receipt of the lump sum:**
  - Including IBAN of the bank account.
  - along with supporting documents (Bank Account Identification Document) proving the bank account is owned by the urban authority.

Payment is made by the EUI Secretariat no later than 80 calendar days from the date of the approval of the above reporting requirements.

Force majeure

Force majeure is a legal term referring to unforeseeable events beyond a person's control that prevent them from fulfilling a Peer Review obligation (participation of approved representatives). If a force majeure event makes travel impossible or dangerous, a person may be forced to cancel their trip. Peer Review participants are suggested to take reasonable steps to minimize their losses (e.g., attempt to rebook, seek refunds, insure their travel and accommodation from such cases). To justify a claim for travel cost reimbursement due to force majeure to the EUI PS participants are required to submit a clear and compelling statement to clearly state the specific event and provide related supporting documentation.

ANNEX I. LEGAL BASIS FOR EUI PEER REVIEW

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 as 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) Regulation[17], in conjunction with Article 28 (*Integrated territorial development*) and Article 29 (*Territorial strategies*) of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)[18]. 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 neighbourhoods[19].

ANNEX II. ANNEX II. EUI PEER REVIEW EXPERTS

[17] 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')".

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

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

EUI Peer Review Experts

Each city under review will benefit from the support of two EUI Peer Review Experts that will follow them throughout the preparation, delivery and follow-up of the event.

The Peer Review experts are selected due to their specific skills and experience in the following areas:

- 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.

Peer Review experts will provide the participating cities with support throughout the entire Peer Review process, including on the following tasks:

- Accompanying cities under review with review and 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 to 3-day Peer Review event.
- Drafting of follow-up report within ten working days after event including review by the EUI Secretariat.
- Participating in follow-up activities after Peer Review event.

For any country-specific Peer Reviews to be organised in languages other than English, a dedicated separate team of Peer Review experts with the necessary language skills may be composed via a separate call for experts.

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

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/ EUI PS during activity implementation.

Complaints do not cover: matters that have already been fully investigated through this complaint's 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 by the urban authority that submitted the application:

The European Urban Initiative – Permanent Secretariat
15 Rue du Palais Rihour, 5e étage
59800 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.