IURC
INTERNATIONAL URBAN AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

A European Union Programme

IURC 2025-2027
FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) EU Cities & Regions applying to IURC 25-27

"The information provided in this document is for informative purpose only and cannot be considered as binding"

1. General Questions: What is it? How does it work? …

Question	Answer
1.1 What is the IURC programme and who finances it?	Implemented since 2017, the European Union's International Urban Cooperation (IUC) evolved from 2021 to the International Urban & Regional Cooperation (IURC). The programme has become the world's largest city-to-city (C2C) cooperation initiative **involving 138 cities from the EU and non-EU countries from Asia and Australasia (AA), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and North America (NA).** **Complemented by 51 regions from Europe and non-EU in LAC, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia & New Zealand** cooperation on Smart Specialisation Strategies, the IURC is an example of the way local and regional authorities can more effectively achieve their goals in partnership with the key stakeholders including research, business and civil society (quadruple helix). The new phase of the programme launched in May 2025 aims to capitalise on the results and lessons learned from the previous phased with the aim to optimise the added-value of international cooperation, transforming the new programme into an international network of reference for urban & regional innovation and sustainable urban development. IURC will have two components or thematic strands of cooperation, notably **city-to-city cooperation** in the field of sustainable urban development and **region-to-region cooperation** in the field of innovation. The IURC is financed under the **EU Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)** and jointly implemented by the **Service for Foreign Policy Instruments** (FPI) **and the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission** (DG REGIO).

1.2	How does it work?	The programme facilitates knowledge exchange through a combination of online tools (webinars, digital learning) and onsite activities (study visits, networking events). The cooperation is developed as: • **Thematic clusters**: Are the entry point to the IURC. Groups of EU- and non-EU cities or regions cooperate in a specific theme in *online* webinars and relevant *onsite* events. They develop one thematic pilot project proposed by IURC experts or directly identified by them. Open for all IURC countries (*global network*). • **Geographical partnerships**: Evolve from the thematic clusters to deepen decentralized cooperation between two cities or regions or a small group (*open partnership*). They can apply for financial support to implement transferable and sustainable joint actions / pilot projects through the *IURC competitive fund*. Planned **activities** include: • **Cities** and **regions** from the EU, Asia, Australasia, North and Latin America to be involved in online/onsite **thematic clustering/networking** in project areas. • Targeted cooperation centred on **pilot projects** • Advanced **cooperation visits** for subnational entities from the EU and non-EU partners. • Publication of **thematic reports**. • Further development of the **IURC knowledge library** with resources from across the globe.
1.3	How long is the cooperation intended to last?	The cooperation will last for up to **24 months** The programme encourages cities and regions to continue their cooperation beyond this time, such that they themselves commit appropriate resources to continue a rewarding cooperation into the future.
1.4	When does it start?	In parallel to the application process (19 May - 30 June 2025) a series of Information and Promotion Webinars will be launched. After the evaluation, selection and communication of selected cities & regions (July & August) activities are expected to kick off in **September 2025.**
1.5	How broad or narrow are the cooperation topic(s) expected to be?	The areas for cooperation are pre-defined by the programme in Thematic Networks including **Thematic "groups" or Clusters and cross-cutting themes** (see table on p.8). As entry points to the cooperation, Cities/regions must select their preferred Thematic Clusters in the application.

1.6	What happens in a Thematic Cluster?	The networks and clusters are **open** for all IURC countries, emphasizing the **global approach** of the IURC network. Thematic clustering facilitates the creation of concrete, theme-oriented *synergies (cross-fertilisation)* among specialists from EU and non-EU cities/regions, adding **global value**. Thematic clusters are coordinated by experienced IURC team managers and will consist of: a) Participation in **annual networking** events for senior leaders (mayors, governors, chief executives or general managers) and/or technical experts to support high level conversations on governance and technical matters. • The thematic **networking event 2025 will take place in Europe**: IURC cluster workshops will take place within the [Smart City Expo in Barcelona, 4-6 Nov 2025](#) • The thematic **networking event 2026 will take place in the non-EU region** (TBC for each Geographical Area: AA-LAC) • The thematic **networking event 2027 will take place in Europe**: within the [EU Week of Regions and Cities, Brussels, Oct 2027](#) to present final results b) Participation in monthly **thematic knowledge sharing online sessions**. (60 min) • Coordinated by EU champion cities / regions (best "graduates") • Administrative management by IURC thematic cluster managers • Consist of pitches by cities/regions from EU and non-EU to present challenges and best practices • Pave the way for the joint delivery of demonstration projects around key themes c)Participation in **monthly coordination meetings** (60 min) aiming to identify / implement concrete pilot actions. • Mapping interests, stakeholders, pilot projects, expected outcomes • Monitoring progress and upscaling experiences
1.6	When do Geographiccal Pairings start?	Geographic partnerships **evolve from the thematic clusters** to deepen decentralised cooperation between cities or regions: • They can consist of two (**bilateral** partnership) or more (**multilateral** partnership) cities/regions – always at least one EU city/region coordinating the work. • Cooperation happens **online** and **onsite**, but there is <u>**no automatic EU financial support**</u> for the onsite activities. • **Advanced Cooperation Visits:** Cities/regions can **apply** for **financial support** to implement study visits if partners have agreed the joint development of at least one **concrete pilot action** and have undertaken the necessary steps for its implementation. The **roadmap** should include stakeholders mapping, methods, justification of study visits, deliverables and eventually co-funding. • **Targeted Coaching** to cities and regions will be offered by the project team in order to facilitate sound applications. Date: **January-February 2026** • **Application** date: **March 2026** • **Implementation date of study visits**: **2Q2026 – 2Q2027**

1.7	What are the expected results from our participation in the programme?	One of the main objectives of the programme is to show concrete progress and impact resulting directly from bilateral and multilateral cooperation on the pre-defined themes and sub-themes of the programme. The concrete focus and roadmap for the cooperation will be set out in Urban or Regional **Cooperation Action Plans** – a road map of the cooperation summarizing the objectives and identified actions including joint pilot projects and contributions to best practice. Participants are expected to define pilot actions and capture the knowledge exchange to make it sharable in the IURC Knowledge Library.
1.7	Can a city or region apply from more than one department or policy area?	Cites/regions are expected to coordinate internally and submit only one application.
1.8	Can we join more than one Thematic cluster?	Yes. You can participate in up to 3 thematic clusters through your sectorial technicians in online format. Nevertheless, your active advancement into in-person exchanges will only be covered through one Thematic Cluster. Even if you apply for the Competitive Fund under more than one Thematic Cluster only one project may be awarded.
1.9	Can we join more than one Geographical Area?	Although the entry point in the programme is a Thematic Cluster and not a Geographical Area, you will only be invited to on-site events in either Asia, Australia or Latin America. Nevertheless, you are invited to join on-line activities in the three Geographical Areas.

2. Costs & Funding

Question		Answer
2.1	Which costs are covered by the programme?	The programme covers **travel costs for up to three *Thematic Events*** (one per year) for selected cities & regions who are actively involved in the on-line activities of the programme involving up to 2 participants. These costs include round-trip economy class flights, visa application costs, arrival and departure transfers at destination (where needed), accommodation and meals. Also, a team of experts including cluster managers, knowledge transfer experts or communication experts from the programme, will be assigned to support and facilitate the cooperation process during the events. **Study Visits awarded (according to 1.6 requirements).** The IURC Programme may finance up to **3 delegates** for a **5-day** study visit in

		Europe and the corresponding follow-up visit in the non-EU counterpart aiming to launch a concrete **pilot project.** These Study Visits will be supported by an IURC expert.
2.2	Is my city expected to pay any direct costs?	**No.** However, your city/region must commit to providing human resources (e.g. time from staff members as required) to support the cooperation process. Also, host cities may offer to provide for some hospitality costs such as local transport, coffee breaks, or a welcome dinner for the study visits.
2.3	Is there any funding provided to implement pilot action or projects?	The IURC programme does not supply funding of these pilot projects. However, in some cases, seed funding to co-finance short term actions may be available through **the competitive fund**. The amount will be defined in the course of implementation ranging from 5.000-15.000€. Further, the IURC teams will provide information on possible financing sources in Europe as well as in the GA.

3. Eligibility Requirements & Call Procedures

Question		Answer
3.1	Who is eligible to apply?	**For City-to- City Cooperation:** public authorities from **cities, Metropolitan Areas (MA) or Functional Areas (FA)** in EU member states are welcome to apply. **For Region-to-Region Cooperation:** public authorities or agencies from EU Member States' regions can apply**.**
3.2	Are there population limitations for applications?	**For City-to- City Cooperation:** EU cities, Metropolitan Areas or Functional Areas with more than 100,000 inhabitants are eligible to apply. In the case of an MA or FA then **a lead entity or city must be designated.**
3.3	When will the call be open for EU cities to apply?	The call opens on 19ᵗʰ May 2025 and closes at **midnight CET on 30ᵗʰ June 2025.** Selected cities and regions are expected to be notified during August 2025

4. Application Process

Question	Answer
4.1 What are the steps for EU cities applying for the programme? *NB: Please note that a high score on the application does not automatically guarantee a participation to the programme. A balance in terms of geographical diversity among EU Member States and typology of applicant might be applied*	1. Make sure your city/region is eligible according the information provided presented in this FAQs and in the application form. 2. Complete the ***application form*** *for cities* or *regions.* 3. Applicants are expected to be notified if they have been selected or not during August 2025 4. Cities/regions in their Thematic Clusters will initiate work together in September-October through online meetings. 5. First in-person event will take place at the Smart City Expo in Barcelona from **3-6 November 2025** in Europe.
4.4 What profile and experience should the main contact /coordinator from the city or region have?	The main contact / coordinator should ideally have a solid track-record of experience in international cooperation and should be able to act as a delegate for decision-making on the activities of the project and be able to represent your city or region at international meetings and events. **The designated person needs to be fluent in English.**
4.5 For City Applicants only: Is it important to have a Sustainable Urban Development Strategy (e.g. Article 11 of the EDRF or similar) which is in alignment with challenges that we want to exchange on?	**Yes.** The IURC intends to support the implementation of integrated strategies to urban sustainability per the New Leipzig Charter. Your city must have an integrated city strategy for sustainable urban development.
4.6 For Region Applicants only: Is it important to have a Smart Specialisation Strategy which is in alignment with challenges that we want to exchange on?	**Yes.** Regional applications shall be in line with the regional institutional architecture of Smart Specialisation Strategies or at least mention how the IURC application connects to the regional S3 or S4 strategy.

This is living document that will be permanently being update with your questions. If you need further information, please do not hesitate to contact us at

helpdesk@iurc.eu

Annex: Thematic Networks, Clusters & Cross Cutting Themes

Thematic Networks, Clusters & Cross Cutting Challenges

Cross-Cutting

RESILIENT DIGITAL TRANSITION   **RESILIENT ENERGY TRANSITION**

Thematic Networks

Productive, Smart and Connected   **Green & Clean**   **Just and Inclusive**

Thematic Clusters

Cities

- **Mobility & Transport:** Active mobility, micro-mobility, walkable cities, logistics, traffic management, smart city (mobility)
- **Strategic Sectors:** Sustainable tourism, cultural heritage preservation, legacy of mega events
- **Urban Innovation:** Open innovation & ecosystems, innovation precincts, job creation & entrepreneurship

Regions

- **Regional Cluster Agri-food:** Regional value-chains, food policy, food packaging, high tech farming, smart data management, food innovation, traceability and big data
- **Regional Cluster Industrial Modernisation:** Digitalisation, AI-based automatization, innovation of SME, advanced materials, circular approaches.

- **Circular Economy:** Waste and recycling; water management; waste management; construction & built environment, GIS/BIM Smart City (buildings)
- **Climate Adaptation,** Nature based solutions (NBS), resilient environments, green infrastructure, biodiversity and nature protection
- **Clean Energy:** Energy transition, sustainable buildings, smart grids, bioenergy, mining, sustainable mobility.
- **Blue Economy:** Blue biotechnology, fisheries, aquaculture, ports and maritime transport

- **Urban Regeneration:** Revitalization of city centres, conversion of abandoned spaces (brownfield regeneration), shrinking cities, civic participation, tactical urbanism, urban prototyping, silver economy
- **Social Cohesion:** Affordable Housing, inclusive and participatory design, economic accessibility, habitability and comfort

Cities

Regions