![IURC - International Urban and Regional Cooperation logo]
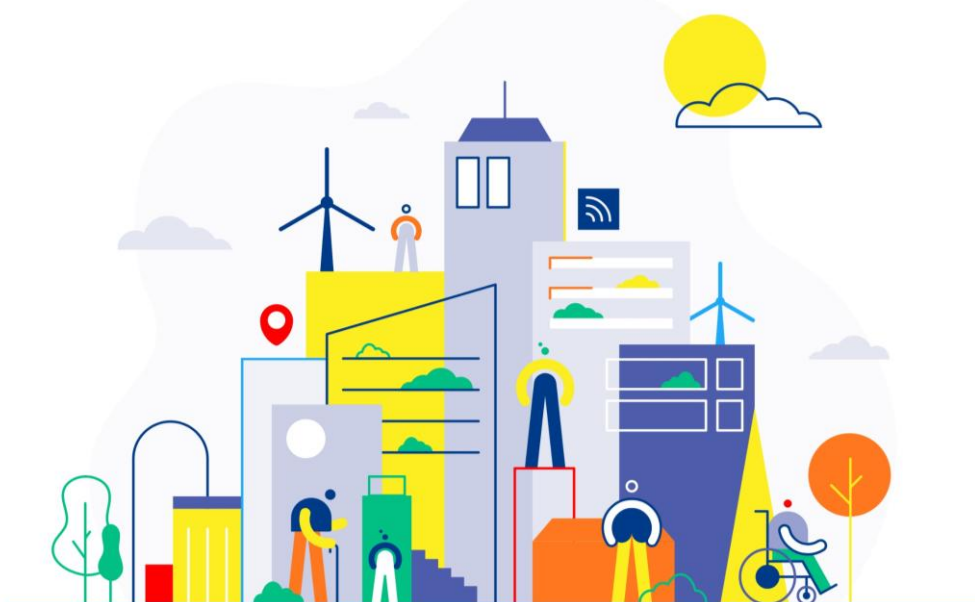

Funded by the European Union

International Urban and Regional Cooperation (IURC) Asia, Australasia and Latin America 2025-2027

IURC Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for EU Cities & Regions applying to cooperate with Asia, Australasia and Latin America in the period 2025-2027

"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?	The International Urban and Regional Cooperation (IURC) is a programme funded by the European Union (EU) to promote *city-to-city* and *region-to-region* cooperation on sustainable urban development and regional innovation, building partnerships between EU and non-EU sub-national entities at global scale.
	Thematic workshops, webinars, networking events and advanced cooperation visits enable local and regional governments to implement pilot projects engaging research, civil society and business partners (*quadruple helix*). IURC topics include *inter-alia* energy transition, mobility, smart city, circular economy, climate adaptation, start-up ecosystems, open innovation, digitalisation and agri-food (for details, please see Annex in the last page).
	Capitalising on results and lessons learned from the previous phases, the IURC emphasises the added value of *peer-to-peer* cooperation, strengthening its position as a global network of reference for urban and regional innovation.
	The IURC is financed by the European Union through the EU Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission (DG REGIO). It is jointly implemented by the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) and the DG REGIO through external contractors.
	The programme contributes to the delivery of EU international commitments under the Indo-Pacific and Global Gateway strategies, the Paris Climate Change Agreement, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is coordinated with EU Member States initiatives (*Team Europe*).

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 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	Which are the cooperation topics?	The **thematic clusters** of the IURC are linked to the relevant European frameworks, i.e. the *European Urban Initiative EUI* (see **PORTICO**[1]) for the urban cooperation and the *Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships* (see **S3 Thematic Platforms**) for the regional innovation cooperation. They are framed by **cross-cutting themes** (see Annex on last page). As entry points to the cooperation, candidate 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 onsite workshops/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 workshop 2025 will take place in Europe** within the Smart City Expo in Barcelona, 4-6 Nov 2025
		 • The thematic **networking workshop 2026 will take place in**
		   • Singapore for Asia (14-16 June 2026)
		   • In Latin America (Date/Location TBD)
		 • The thematic **networking workshop 2027 will take place in Europe**: within the EU Week of Regions and Cities, Brussels, Oct 2027 to present final results
		
		The IURC project will provide financial support for participation (see section 2 for details).
		
		b) Participation in monthly **thematic knowledge sharing online sessions**. (60 min), featuring:
		 • Coordinated by EU champion cities / regions
		 • Thematic input & management by IURC thematic cluster managers
		 • Consist of pitches by cities/regions from the 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) within each thematic cluster about a concrete pilot action, featuring:
		 • Definition of feasible, replicable pilot project for short-term

---

[1] The European urban knowledge platform PORTICO has been developed by the European Urban Initiative (EUI) as Portico is the gateway to the resources produced by a wide range of EU Cohesion Policy partners, and beyond.

		implementation
		• Mapping of interests, stakeholders, possible funding sources and expected outcomes • Monitoring progress and upscaling experiences
1.6	When do Geographical Partnerships 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 to facilitate sound applications. Date: **January-February 2026** • **Application** date: **March 2026** • **Implementation date of advanced cooperation 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 for the cooperation will be set out in Urban or Regional **Cooperation Action Plans** – a roadmap 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. During 2026, the IURC will launch a call for applications to receive financial support for the implementation of pilot projects (see 2.3. "Competitive fund")
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.

	Question	Answer
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 several online formats. Nevertheless, advanced cooperation visits will only be possible with one geographic area (see next question).
1.9	Can we join more than one geographical area?	Although the entry points to the programme are the *thematic clusters* and not the *geographical areas*, you will only be invited to on-site events in either Asia, Australasia or Latin America. Nevertheless, you are invited to join online 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 pilot cities & regions who are actively involved in the on-line activities of the programme. The number of **European delegates** to be funded will be: → Up to **1 delegate** for the two thematic events in Europe (Barcelona Nov 2025 and Brussels October 2027), and → Up to **2 delegates** for the thematic events in either Asia or Latin America. 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. **Advanced Cooperation Visits** (according to 1.6 requirements). The IURC Programme may finance: → up to **3 European delegates** for a **5-day** study visit in the non-EU city of region selected for the cooperation. → Hosting a **reciprocal visit** from your counterpart in Asia, Australasia or Latin America & The Caribbean → The advanced cooperation visit will aim to implement a concrete **pilot project** and 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 in case possible.
2.3	Is there any funding provided to implement pilot action or projects?	<u>As a rule, the IURC programme does not supply full funding for pilot projects.</u> However, in 2026, a **competitive fund** will be launched to co-finance the best pilot actions proposed by the European pilot cities or regions. The amount is not a cash contribution but a commitment to disburse project resources of up to 10.000 €. Further, the IURC teams will provide information on possible financing sources in Europe as well as in the non-EU geographic areas (GAs).

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)[1]** in EU member states are welcome to apply.
		For Region-to-Region Cooperation: Public authorities or agencies from EU Member States' regions are welcome to apply.
		[1] *According to the EU definition, a Functional Urban Area (FUA) corresponds to a city and its commuting zone. For the IURC we use the term « Functional Area (FA) » which includes also a contiguous grouping of municipalities that share some key functional services and belong to the same region/province.*
3.2	Are there population limitations for applications?	**For City-to-City Cooperation:** EU cities, Metropolitan Areas (MA) or Functional Areas (FA) with more than <u>100,000 inhabitants</u> are eligible to apply. In the case of MAs or FAs **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

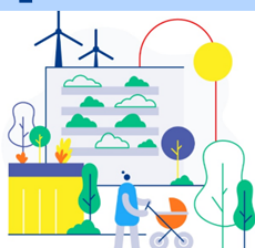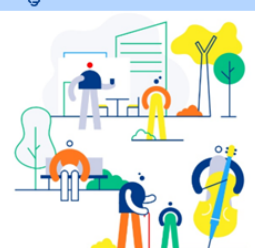| Question	
4.1 What are the steps for EU cities applying for the programme?	1. Make sure your city/region is eligible according to the information provided presented in this FAQs and in the application form. 2. Complete the ***application form** for cities or regions.* 3. Applicants are expected to 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. The first in-person workshop will take place in Europe at the Smart City Expo in Barcelona from **3-6 November 2025**.
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 updated 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