

European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Awards 2025 – Rules of the Competition

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1. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Commission has given a push for equality by adopting the EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025, the LGBTIQ equality strategy 2020-2025, the Gender equality strategy 2020-2025, the Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030, and the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020-2030.

The Commission committed in the Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025 and the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025 to launching an annual designation of European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity. **The European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Awards set out to recognise, give visibility to, and to highlight the best practices of a town, city or region¹ that can be a source of inspiration for other European cities in creating more diverse and inclusive environments for their citizens.** It seeks to recognise best practices that promote diversity (in terms of sex, age, disability, LGBTIQ identity, religion or belief and racial or ethnic origin) as a source of richness and innovation, contribute to inclusive policies and systems, and foster a feeling of belonging for all its citizens.

2. EUROPEAN CAPITALS OF INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

The European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Awards (also referred to below as *the Awards*) will recognise three cities in two distinct categories:

- local authorities with less than 50 000 inhabitants;
- local authorities with more than 50 000 inhabitants.

Each category will have a first (sole winner of the title of European Capital of Inclusion and Diversity for a given year), second and third place. Applicants may also receive a special mention, depending on the assessment of their continuous and positive efforts in contexts or circumstances that are exceptionally challenging, which can be perceived as a source of inspiration to other European cities. The special mention can be granted to a maximum of one shortlisted candidate, for each of the two distinct categories.

The Awards are open to all local authorities in the EU (e.g., towns, cities, regions etc.).

In 2025, a **Specific Award will also be given to local authorities that achieve ‘inclusive housing’**. There will be three winners in this category (first, second, and third place). The size of the local authority is not considered for the Specific Award, which has only one category.

The European Commission established and published the present competition rules. The Commission will launch and manage the competition with the support of the external European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Secretariat.

3. PROCEDURE AND CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATING WINNERS OF THE EUROPEAN CAPITALS OF INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY AWARDS 2025 AND THE SPECIFIC AWARD

The applications for the Awards will be subject to an eligibility check and to pre-assessment by independent

¹ Any local authorities led by an elected body.

experts. The final decision will be made by a European Jury, which will establish a final ranking in the two General categories (less than and more than 50 000 inhabitants), and by a European Jury for the Specific Award, which will establish a final ranking in the Specific Award category.

Local authorities can apply for both the General competition and the Specific Award.

3.1 Composition of the European Jury for the General Award

The European Commission will appoint the independent experts for the pre-assessment phase and the members of the European Jury for the final selection phase. The European Jury will consist of at least five members representing European non-governmental organisations.

The European Jury's members will review a ranking proposal established in the pre-assessment phase by the independent experts. Their assessment will include qualitative evaluations based on the independent experts' report and the application of the Award criteria in section 4.2 below. They will select three local authorities in each category of the general competition and rank them in first, second, and third place.

The members of the European Jury are individuals appointed in a personal capacity and act independently and in the public interest. They carry out their tasks *pro bono* and are supported by the Award Secretariat. Individuals appointed as members of the European Jury must disclose any circumstances that could give rise to a conflict of interest by signing a 'declaration of absence of conflict of interests' at the European Jury meeting.

3.2 Composition of the European Jury for the Specific Award

In 2025, the European Commission will award local authorities a Specific Award for **achieving 'inclusive housing.'** The same procedure as for the General competition will apply, which will consist of assessing eligibility and Award criteria.

The European Jury for the 'Inclusive housing'-Specific Award will consist of at least five people representing European non-governmental organisations and/or other relevant national and European stakeholders.

The European Commission will appoint the European Jury for the 'inclusive housing'-Specific Award and the independent experts in charge of the pre-assessment phase.

The members of the European Jury for the 'inclusive housing'-Specific Award will review a ranking proposal established in the pre-assessment phase by the independent experts. Their assessment will include qualitative evaluations based on the independent experts' report and the application of the Award criteria in section 4.2 below. They will select three local authorities and rank them in first, second, and third place.

The members of the European Jury for the 'Inclusive Housing'-Specific Award are individuals appointed in a personal capacity. They act independently and in the public interest. They carry out their tasks *pro bono* and are supported by the Award Secretariat. Individuals appointed as members of the European

Jury for the Specific Award must disclose any circumstances that could give rise to a conflict of interest by signing a 'declaration of absence of conflict of interests' at the EU Jury meeting.

3.3 Eligibility criteria

This call for applications for the competition is open to the following applicants:

- 3.3.1** The submitting body **must be a local authority** (town, city, region) in one of the EU Member States. It shall be an administrative unit governed by a city council or another democratically elected governmental body. **Previous winners of the Awards cannot apply in 2025.**
- 3.3.2** The applicants shall **complete all sections of the common application form** for the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Awards 2025 (Annex I) and should adhere to the character limits indicated for each section of the application form. The applicants for the 'inclusive housing' -Specific Award shall further complete the related section for the Specific Award (section H in the application form). Any characters above the specified limit will not be considered and may leave application responses incomplete.
- 3.3.3** The applications must be **completed and submitted via the online application form by 7 February 2025 (12.00 CET).**
- 3.3.4** The applicants must attach a **Declaration of Honour (Annex III) signed by the mayor** or the highest -ranking representative authorised by national law to represent the town/city/region legally.

3.4 Additional information

The Guidance Note for applicants (**Annex II**) should be read in conjunction with the application form for the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Awards 2025.

In addition, to support their application, candidates can also upload or provide a link to a 10-slide PowerPoint presentation to illustrate and highlight the strong points of their application. This presentation may be used to promote the shortlisted applicants during the Award ceremony.

The applications can be completed in any of the official languages of the EU; they will be translated using an automated translation system. Applicants are encouraged to submit the application in English, if possible, to facilitate the handling of the proposals and speed up the evaluation process.

The Award Secretariat may contact local entities in the case of clerical and/or administrative errors or in relation to missing documents.

3.5 Timeline

Tasks	Period
Opening of the applications process	18 November 2024
Closing of the applications process	7 February 2025 (12.00 CET)
Evaluation by the independent experts	February 2025
Evaluation by the European Juries (General competition and 'inclusive housing' -Specific Award)	March 2025
Information to applicants	March / April 2025
Ceremony of the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Awards 2025	29 April 2025

4. EVALUATION PROCESS

4.1 Selection and Evaluation Process

The selection of the local authorities to be awarded the title of European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity 2025 and the 'Inclusive Housing'-Specific Award, as well as the final ranking, is based on a standard set of evaluation criteria to ensure consistency, transparency, and fairness in the process.

The Award criteria used and their weight are specified in section 4.2. Applicants who do not obtain at least 60 points in relation to their responses to the questions related to the General Award will not be admitted to the European Jury level of the competition for the General Award or for the Specific Award.

The selection takes place in two phases: a **pre-assessment** by independent experts and a **final selection at the European level by the European Jury**. The European Commission reserves the right to exclude any applicants if they do not respect the European values set out in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union².

The Award Secretariat will check the applications received against the formal and legal requirements set out in section 3.3, Eligibility criteria. Applications that do not meet these requirements will not be examined further and will be excluded from the competition.

➤ *Pre-assessment*

The pre-assessment phase will be carried out by the independent experts appointed by the European Commission.

The independent experts of the local authorities will prepare a pre-assessment report that will be

² Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union states that the EU is "founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities". The Member States share a "society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail".

presented to the European Juries prior to the European Jury meetings. This report will serve as a background document for the European Jury's deliberations.

A shortlist of a maximum of 20 applications (10 in each category – local authorities < or > 50 000 inhabitants) will be produced by the independent experts and submitted to the members of the European Juries (general competition) in their report. A maximum of 10 applications will be submitted in their report to the European Jury for the 'Inclusive Housing'-Specific Award.

➤ *Final Selection / European Jury Deliberation*

The members of the European Jury will meet in Brussels (or online) in March 2025 in order to designate the winner, the second and the third place for each category. Their deliberation will be based on the Assessment Report received by the independent experts and their application of the Award criteria (section 4.2 below).

➤ *Award Ceremony*

The winners of the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Awards 2025 and the 'Inclusive Housing'-Specific Award will be announced at the Award Ceremony in Brussels (or online) on 29 April 2025 and on the Award website. Mayors/legal representatives of the winning applicants from all categories will be invited to Brussels (or online) to participate in the Award Ceremony and to receive their prize.

➤ *Feedback*

Any of the shortlisted cities may request feedback on the content of their application, and this will be provided on foot of such a request.

4.2 Award criteria

Both the independent experts and the European Jury will assess the applications of the candidate local authorities based on the following Award criteria:

Nature and scope of the initiatives

The applicants shall describe key initiatives responding to diversity and inclusion – whether already implemented or being implemented. Initiatives that comprehensively cover different grounds of discrimination (in particular, sex, age, disability, ethnic or racial origin, religion or belief, and LGBTIQ identity) and demonstrate an intersectional approach will be an asset.

The applications should demonstrate a coherent approach to diversity and inclusion across various policy fields and an ambitious vision in tackling discrimination on the local level.

Ownership/level of commitment

Applicants should outline the framework of the strategy and policy set up in the local administration to address diversity and inclusion, as well as a structure to drive their implementation. **The application shall demonstrate that the initiatives are part of a coherent strategy or policy framework rather than just *ad hoc* projects.** A policy statement and commitments to diversity and inclusion at a high level of responsibility must be evident. Diversity and inclusion should be mainstreamed in the local authority's policies,

programmes and/or regulations. Information about appropriate structures to drive and resources (staff, budget, etc.) allocated to implement these strategies and policies should be provided.

Impact

The local authority’s initiatives shall have a demonstrable positive impact on the situation and experience of people from groups exposed to discrimination, as well as on their overall quality of life. The gains for groups exposed to discrimination (on the grounds of sex, age, disability, ethnic or racial origin, religion or belief and LGBTIQ identity) shall be set out, further establishing how the initiatives benefit the wider population. The applicants shall include qualitative and quantitative data, such as concrete output numbers from KPIs in order to support claims of impact, specifying concrete initiatives in this regard.

Quality and sustainability of initiatives

The quality of diversity and inclusion results is defined in terms of improvements in the quality of life for groups exposed to discrimination (on the grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, and/or LGBTIQ identity), and gains for the wider population. Applicants shall set out what indicators and evaluation and monitoring mechanisms, such as commissioned independent evaluations or audits, have been put in place to ensure the quality of the initiatives, their compliance with national standards and legislation, and their alignment with national and/or European strategies.

Applicants shall set out the steps taken to ensure the sustainability of the initiatives taken and the results achieved. Delivering sustainable results involves continuity of effort, application of learning from the initiatives, and security in investing in and providing resources for maintaining and building on the results achieved.

Involvement of people exposed to discrimination

Active and clear involvement of people exposed to discrimination and their representative organisations, as well as diversity experts, shall be demonstrated in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the local authority’s initiatives responding to diversity and inclusion. The applicants shall further outline how they resource and support these representative organisations and underpin their effective involvement.

Criterion	Maximum no. of points
Nature and scope of the initiatives	25
Ownership / level of commitment	25
Impact	20
Quality and sustainability of initiatives	15
Involvement of people exposed to discrimination	15
TOTAL	100

Local authorities competing for the 'inclusive housing'-Specific Award shall answer both the General part and the Specific Award part of the application form. Their assessment for this Specific Award will be made based on the single Award criterion with 25 as the maximum no. of points.

5. ARRANGEMENTS AND FINAL DATES FOR SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS

The competition will be closed on 7 February 2025 (12.00 CET) (GMT+1). The application form must be fully completed and submitted using the **online tool only**.

To submit a complete online application, the following should be provided:

- A completed online application form (Annex I);
- The Declaration of Honour (Annex III), which should be signed by the mayor or the highest-ranking representative authorised by national law to legally represent the city/urban area, and uploaded in the application form.

6. PROCESSING OF PERSONAL DATA

The Commission is bound by Regulation 2018/1725 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions and bodies. Personal data contained as part of the submitted application form shall be processed in accordance with the regulations in place. Applicants may, on written request, gain access to their data and correct any information that is inaccurate or incomplete. The European Commission shall be authorised to publish or to refer to, in whatever form and on or by whatever medium, the following information:

- the name of the winners;
- the subject of the Award.

7. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The application process, the work of the independent experts, and the work of the two European Juries are facilitated by the Award Secretariat, which is run by the external contractor. The Secretariat also assists with PR activities related to the Award scheme through the Award website and through various communication channels such as brochures, social media, videos, etc. Contact the Secretariat via email: eudiversity_award@vo-europe.eu

8. ANNEXES

I Application form

II Guidance Note

III Declaration of honour