MEDIABACKGROUNDER

2026 European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award

The European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award is a competition run by the European Commission that recognises and rewards local authorities across the EU that actively promote inclusion and diversity. As part of the European Diversity Month initiative, the 2026 Award Ceremony will take place on 21 April 2026 in Brussels, followed by the 2026 EU Diversity Month opening event on 22 April 2026 in Brussels.

Now in its fifth edition, the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award recognises local efforts to build more inclusive societies and contribute towards a Union of Equality. The Award is part of the European ongoing work to promote equality and combat discrimination, which are core values and fundamental rights in the EU, enshrined in its Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

The 2026 edition features a Specific Award for local authorities with initiatives and actions that focus on inclusive labour market for all. An inclusive labour market is one where everyone is equally valued, included and given a chance to thrive, regardless of their sex, age, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, whether they belong to an LGBTIQ+ community or have a disability or not. This ensures that diversity is not just embraced, but celebrated, paving the way for equal opportunities and equitable growth for all.

Media Coverage

The media is invited to attend the Award Ceremony in Brussels on 21 April 2026 by expressing their interest to JUST-CITY-AWARDS@ec.europa.eu.

Award Categories

There are two main categories:

- Local authorities with less than 50,000 inhabitants
- Local authorities with more than 50,000 inhabitants .

Additionally, Specific Award will be given to local authorities for their work on "Inclusive labour market for all". A **Public Vote Winner** will also be awarded during the Award Ceremony.

Recognition of Diversity Initiatives

The Award recognises diversity and inclusion initiatives that comprehensively address different grounds of discrimination (in particular those based on sex, age, disability, ethnic or racial origin, religion or belief and LGBTIQ+ identity). Demonstrating an intersectional approach is an asset.

The initiatives may have already been implemented or be currently in the process and must originate from local authorities (towns, cities and regions) within the EU-27 that are governed by a city council or a democratically elected governmental body.

Selection Process

Applications for the Awards will undergo an eligibility check and pre-assessment by independent experts. A European Jury will make the final selection in the two general categories and the Specific Award.

- The European Jury for the General Award will comprise at least five members representing European non-governmental organisations.
- The European Jury for the Specific Award will include at least five people representing European non-governmental organisations and/or other relevant national and European stakeholders.

A shortlist of up to 30 finalists will be selected, followed by the Jury's decision on the Gold, Silver and Bronze winners for each category. In total, there will be 10 winners across all categories.

Previous Winners

In the 2025 edition, several local authorities across the European Union won the Gold, Silver and Bronze Awards. You can find the full list of winners here.

- **Utrecht** (the Netherlands) won the Gold Award in the category of local authorities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. It was recognised for its impressive city-wide commitment to diversity, equality and inclusion, embedded across all departments and backed by robust structures, leadership and funding.

- **Mariehamn** (Finland) won the Gold Award in the category of local authorities with less than 50,000 inhabitants. The experts and jury highlighted its inclusive approach across municipal workplaces, education, and newcomer integration, guided by a clear intersectional vision.
- **Braga** (Portugal) won the Gold Award in the Specific Award category for inclusive housing for its strategy supporting older persons, people with disabilities, lone parents, Roma, migrants, and victims of domestic violence.

Further Context

Despite significant advances, Eurobarometer data and recent surveys demonstrate that many EU citizens still experience discrimination.

- 60% of Europeans believe that discrimination based on one's ethnic origin is widespread.
- Skin colour, followed by ethnic or immigrant background, are the most common grounds for discrimination mentioned by respondents of African descent in 2023 survey[1].
- 37% of LGBTIQ+ respondents felt discriminated because of being LGBTIQ+ in the previous12 months, with significant variation across countries in the EU[2]
- Women in the EU earned on average 13% less per hour than men in 2021, and this has only changed minimally over the last decade.
- People with disabilities face obstacles when accessing essential services, healthcare, education, employment and political life.
- 25% of Roma feel they have been discriminated against in their daily life, including employment and education opportunities.
- When asked which criteria may put candidates at a disadvantage when a company is recruiting, respondents are most likely to mention the candidate's age (52%) and their manner of dress or presentation (50%).

More information on the current European Commission strategies on equality is found here:

- EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2026-2030
- LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026-2030

[1] *Being black in the EU. Experiences of People of African Descent. EU Survey on immigrants and descendants of immigrants*, FRA, 2023.

[2] *LGBTIQ+ Equality a t a crossroads. Progress and Challenges* , FRA, 2024

- Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030
- Strategy for the Rights of persons with Disabilities 2021-2030
- EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020-2030
- EU Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life (2021-2030)

More Information

For more information on the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award, visit the official website at EU Diversity 2026 Initiatives. You can receive further updates and insights by signing up for the newsletter here or contacting the Award secretariat at JUST-CITY-AWARDS@ec.europa.eu.