European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Awards 2027 – Rules of the Competition

Table of Contents

Contents

1. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES 2
2. EUROPEAN CAPITALS OF INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY 2
3. PROCEDURE AND CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATING WINNERS OF THE EUROPEAN CAPITALS OF INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY AWARDS 2027 AND THE SPECIFIC AWARD 3
   - 3.1 Composition of the European Jury for the General Award 3
   - 3.2 Composition of the European Jury for the Specific Award 3
   - 3.3 Eligibility criteria 4
   - 3.4 Additional information 4
   - 3.5 Timeline 5
4. EVALUATION PROCESS 5
   - 4.1 Selection and Evaluation process 5
   - 4.2 Award criteria 6
5. ARRANGEMENTS AND FINAL DATES FOR SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS 8
6. PROCESSING OF PERSONAL DATA 8
7. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION 8
8. ANNEXES 9

1. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Commission has given a push for equality by adopting the Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030, the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020-2030, renewing the LGBTIQ+ equality strategy 2026-2030 and the Gender equality strategy 2026-2030 and adopting for the very first time the Anti-racism strategy 2026-2030.

The Commission committed in the Anti-racism strategy 2026-2030, the LGBTIQ+ equality strategy 2026-2030 and the Gender equality strategy 2026-2030 to continuing a designation of European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity. **The European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Awards set out to recognise, give visibility to and highlight the best practices of a town, city or region[1] 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 2027, a Specific Award for local authorities **combating racism[2]**, will also be handed out. There will be three winners in this category (first, second and third place). The size of the local authority is not taken into account for the Specific Award for which there is only one category.

The present Rules of the Competition have been established and published by the European Commission, which will launch and manage the competition with the support of the external European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Secretariat.

[1] Any local authorities led by an elected body.

[2] The Anti-racism strategy 2026-2030 is driven by the objective of combating racism in all its forms, including anti-Black racism, antigypsyism, antisemitism, anti-Asian racism and anti-Muslim hatred.

3. PROCEDURE AND CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATING WINNERS OF THE EUROPEAN CAPITALS OF INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY AWARDS 2027 AND THE SPECIFIC AWARD

The applications for the Awards will be subject to an eligibility check and to pre-assessment by independent experts. The final decision will be made by a European Jury who 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 who 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 European Jury members for the final selection phase. The European Jury will be composed 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 report of the independent experts and 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 these 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 2027, the European Commission will give a Specific Award to **local authorities combating racism**. The same procedure as for the General competition will apply, which will consist of the assessment of eligibility and Award criteria.

The European Jury for the **'combating racism'**-Specific Award will be composed of at least five persons representing European non-governmental organisations and/or other relevant national and European stakeholders.

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

The members of the European Jury for the **'combating racism'**-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 report of the independent experts and application of the

Award criteria in section 4.2 below. They will select three local authorities and rank these in first, second and third place.

The members of the European Jury for the **'combating racism'**-Specific Award 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 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 or region etc.) in one of the EU Member States. The submitting body shall be an administrative unit governed by a city council or another form of democratically elected governmental body. **The previous winners of the Awards cannot apply in year 2027.**

3.3.2 The applicants shall **complete all sections of the common application form** for the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Awards 2027 (Annex I) and should adhere to the character limits indicated for each section of the application form. The applicants for the **'combating racism'**-Specific Award shall further complete the related section which is for the Specific Award (section H in the application form). Any characters above the specified limit will not be taken into account and may leave application responses incomplete.

3.3.3 The applications must be **completed and submitted via the online application form by 26 February 2027 (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 legally represent the town/city/region.

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 2027.

In addition, to support their application, candidates can also upload or provide a link to a 10-slide PowerPoint presentation in order to illustrate and highlight the strong points of their application. This presentation may be used to promote the shortlisted applicants during the Awards 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, in order to facilitate the handling of the proposals and speed up the evaluation process.

Local entities may be contacted by the Awards Secretariat 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	October - November 2026
Closing of the applications process	26 February 2027 (12.00 CET)
Evaluation by the independent experts	February / March 2027
Evaluation by the European Juries (General competition and **'combating racism'**-Specific Award)	March / April 2027
Information to applicants	March / April 2027
Ceremony of the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Awards 2027	3 June 2027

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 2027 and the **'combating racism'**-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 that 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 in the case of not respecting the European values set out in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union[3].

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

[3] 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".

- *Pre-assessment*

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

The pre-assessment by the independent experts of the local authorities will be presented to the European Juries in the form of an Assessment Report, prior to the European Jury meetings, and will serve as a background document for the deliberation of the European Jury.

A shortlist of a maximum 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 **'combating racism'**-Specific Award.

- *Final Selection / European Jury Deliberation*

The members of the European Jury will meet in Brussels (or online) in March 2027/April 2027 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 2027 and the **'combating racism'-** Specific Award will be announced at the Awards Ceremony in Brussels (or online) on 3 June 2027 and on the Awards website. Mayors/legal representatives of the winning applicants from all categories will be invited to Brussels (or online) to participate in the Awards 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 provide a description of 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, and 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, and 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 and 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 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 **'combating racism'** -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 26 February 2027 (12.00 CET) (GMT+1). The application form must be fully completed and submitted through the **online tool only.**

In order 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 personal 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: just-city-awards@ec.europa.eu

8. ANNEXES

I Application form

II Guidance Note

III Declaration of honour