

Access City Award 2024 – Rules of contest

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1. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Persons with disabilities have the right to full participation in all areas of life, as does everyone else. Yet, despite progress, millions of persons with disabilities continue to experience barriers to use transport, to access buildings or to receive information. This issue is not merely a concern for persons with disabilities but for society as a whole. The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 aims to make progress in this area, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Since 2010, the European Commission organises the Access City Award. This Award recognises and celebrates a city's willingness, ability and efforts to become more accessible for persons with disabilities, in order to:

- guarantee equal access to fundamental rights;
- improve the quality of life of its population and ensure that everybody – regardless of age, mobility or ability – has equal access to all the resources and pleasures cities have to offer.

Around 87 million people have some form of disability in the EU and its population is also becoming older. Additionally, Europe is now essentially an urban society, with about 70% of the EU population living in towns and cities. As a society, we have the duty to ensure that persons with disabilities can participate in society in the same way as everyone else. By doing good work on accessibility, municipalities ultimately improve the safety and quality of life for everyone. A city is accessible when persons with disabilities can, for instance:

- get information;
- use buses, trams and metro;
- enjoy parks and playgrounds;
- get in and around buildings like the library, sports hall and city hall.

Participating in the Award is an opportunity for cities to gain European recognition and a unique chance to review their current situation. It also allows to share experiences with other European cities, which helps to become an even better city to live and visit. The winning city and the two runners-up also receive a financial prize. Applicants may also receive a special mention award if they have done exceptional work in a particular area.

The overarching message that the award scheme aims to communicate to the local level is that Europeans have a right to live in urban areas where services and leisure activities should be accessible to all. Cities should therefore strive to improve the quality of life for their citizens by enhancing accessibility.

More information about the Access City Award is available on the European Commission's official website:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/accesscityaward>.

2. ACCESS CITY AWARD (ACA)

The European Commission intends to select the winner of the Access City Award (ACA 2024) title following an EU-wide competition.

The award is open to cities of over 50,000 inhabitants in one of the EU Member States. In Member States with less than two such cities, urban areas composed of two or more towns may also participate if their combined population exceeds 50,000 inhabitants.

The outcome of the selection process of the European Access City Award is to award the Access City Award 2024 title to the winning city and to award the second and third place winners.

Applicants may also receive a special mention award if they have done exceptional work in a particular area (e.g. built environment and public space; mobility, transport, and related infrastructure; ICT; or public facilities and services). The European Commission also intends to award a 'New European Bauhaus' special mention to a city that demonstrates how they feature accessibility in their initiatives while reconciling sustainability, aesthetics, and inclusiveness – the three complementary values of the New European Bauhaus¹.

Since the 10th anniversary of the Award (ACA 2020), the European Commission awards a financial incentive of €350,000. This amount shall be shared among the three winning cities (1st prize: €150 000, 2nd prize: €120 000, 3rd prize: €80 000). Special mention awards do not include a financial incentive.

To that end, the call for submission of entries for the Access City Award 2024 is also to be seen as the rules of competition for awarding the financial incentive².

The title of winner of the Access City Award for the year 2024 ('title year') and the financial incentive is to be awarded in year 2023 ('award year') following the procedure and based on the criteria set out in section 3. The payment of the financial incentive occurs in one instalment and is conditioned and ruled by the requirements laid down in section 6 of this document.

The present rules of competition are established and published by the European Commission, which will launch and manage the competition with the support of the external ACA Secretariat. The financial incentive will be managed solely by the European Commission's Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

¹ More information on the New European Bauhaus can be found on: https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/index_en

² The proposed financial incentive will follow the rules on prizes as set out in [Financial Regulation 2018/1046](#) applicable to the general budget of the Union (Title IX, Articles 206 and 207).

3. PROCEDURE AND CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATING A CITY FOR THE ACA 2024

The title of winner of the Access City Award 2024 will be awarded following a competition between applicant cities. The eligibility criteria for entering the competition are explained below.

3.1 Eligibility criteria

The Access City Award 2024 will reward **three** cities. The first place winner is the sole winner of the Access City Award 2024 title. The second and third place winners will also be awarded. This call for entries to the competition for the Access City Award 2024 is open to the following applicants:

- The submitting body must be a governmental authority of a city of over 50,000 inhabitants in one of the EU Member States. A 'city' is understood to be an urban area, excluding metropolitan areas, larger urban zones and conurbations, and is understood as an administrative unit governed by a city council or another form of democratically elected governmental body.
- In Member States with less than two such cities/Administrative entities, urban areas composed of two or more towns/Administrative entities may also participate if their combined population exceeds 50,000 inhabitants.
- **Past winners of the first place may not apply** for a period of five years after they held the Access City Award title for a given year³.
- The signatory should be the Mayor or highest-ranking city representative authorised, by national law, to legally represent the city.

All candidates shall complete all sections of the common application form for the Access City Award 2024 (see **Annex I**). Candidate cities are invited to comply with the following formal requirements when drafting their application. Applications that do not follow these requirements at preselection stage shall not be examined further:

- **Applicants are encouraged to submit their project proposal in English**, in order to facilitate the treatment of the proposals and speed up the evaluation process. It should be noted, however, that proposals submitted in any of the official languages of the EU will be accepted.
- Applications must be made by completing and submitting the online application form by the **deadline of 18 September 2023, 12:00 CEST**.
- Candidate cities shall answer all the questions, complete all sections of the application form and adhere to the word limits indicated per section of the application form. Any words above the specified limits will not be taken into account and may leave application responses incomplete.
- Cities/entities may be contacted by the Secretariat in case of clerical and/or administrative errors or for missing documents.

Each candidate shall complete all sections of the **application form**⁴. In addition to the information provided in the application form, candidates must upload the Mayoral declaration, the Declaration on honour, the Legal Entity Form (LEF) and the Financial Identification Form (FIF) (see annexes in section 9).

Candidates are also invited to upload – or provide a link to – a ten-slide PowerPoint presentation in order to illustrate and highlight the strong points of their application.

³ This provision took effect as of November 2019 in occasion of the ACA 2020 and applies only to cities that won the first place in the ACA competition.

⁴ The online tool can be accessed via the Access City Award website : www.ec.europa.eu/social/accesscityaward2024

Up to five files⁵ (maximum size of one file is 10 MB) or links can be uploaded. The uploaded files can be in the national language(s) of the EU member state taking part to the competition.

Each uploaded document must be appropriately named. The file name should clearly state what the file represents or contains.

The ACA Guidance Note for applicants (**Annex II**) should be read in conjunction with the Application form for the European Access City Award 2024.

3.2 Exclusion

The Commission, in its role as contracting authority, may exclude participants which are in one of the situations referred to from Article 136 and 141 of the Financial Regulation. Please refer to Annex IV (Declaration on honour).

3.2.1 Applicability of penalties

Administrative sanctions may be imposed on applicants, who are guilty of misrepresentation, if any of the declarations or information provided as a condition for participating in this procedure prove to be false, in accordance with the conditions laid down in Article 138 of the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Union and in proportion to the value of the financial incentive.

3.3 Composition of the National Jury and European Jury

A National Jury will be set up in the member states where cities apply. The National Juries are composed of a minimum of three and a maximum of five members with different areas of experience. In principle, the composition of the National Jury will have the following structure:

- One representative of the National Disability Council,
- One representative of a national administration responsible for disability policy,
- One accessibility expert,
- One chairperson (if not member of one of the three above-mentioned categories),
- One expert for aging population.

Members of juries have equal status and decisions are taken by consensus. The role of the chairperson is to coordinate the work of the National Jury.

The Jury members have the task to assess the applications submitted by the cities (see section 4.2 below). The assessment will include qualitative evaluations, and a peer review of each application. The National Juries will establish a shortlist of maximum three cities per Member States based on the rating, per criteria, as set out in section 4.1

The national candidates that are admitted to the second phase of the competition will be assessed by the European Jury. At least three persons will compose the European Jury. They will be representing the European Commission and at least two of the following organisations and/or field of expertise:

- European Disability Forum,
- Age Platform Europe,
- Expert on built environment and public spaces,
- Expert on transport and related infrastructure,

⁵ Accepted file formats are: doc, docx, rtf, pps, ppsx, ppt, pptx, xls, xlsx, pdf, zip, gif, jpeg, jpg, png.

- Expert on ICT,
- Expert on public facilities and services.

The European Jury (see section 4.3), will further assess the shortlisted cities by applying the same criteria and maximum rates used by the National Juries and described in sections 4.1. and 4.2. below.

3.4 The National Jury

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion sets up the Juries along with the European Disability Forum. The members of the National Jury carry out their tasks pro bono and are supported by the Access City Award Secretariat. The aim of the National Jury is to select up to three cities (called national candidates), among the national applicants, according to the evaluation criteria described in section 4.1. They also have to communicate the shortlisted cities to the Award Secretariat. The National Jury's tasks are set out in section 4.1. Members of the National Jury are individuals appointed in personal capacity and act independently and in the public interest. Individuals appointed as members of the National Jury in a personal capacity must disclose any circumstances that could give rise to a conflict of interest by submitting a 'declaration of absence of conflict of interests' through the online platform devoted to the ACA selection process. Each member of the National Jury will perform their task remotely, via the online platform, exchange of e-mails, virtual meetings and/or phone calls.

3.5 The European Jury

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion will appoint the European Jury members. The European Jury will be composed as set out in section 3.3. The Jury's tasks are set out in section 4.1. Members of the European Jury are individuals appointed in personal capacity and act independently and in the public interest. Individuals appointed as members of the European Jury in a personal capacity 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. The European jury members must also have a proficiency level in English. Each member of the European Jury will perform his/her task remotely, via the online platform; exchange of e-mails and/or by phone calls.

3.6 Indicative timeline

Tasks	Indicative period
Opening of the applications	End June/Early July 2023
Closing of the applications	18 September 2023, 12:00 CEST
Evaluation by the national juries	End of September 2023
Evaluation by the European Jury	End of October 2023
Information to Applicants	Beginning of November 2023
Access City Award Ceremony	30 November 2023

4. EVALUATION PROCESS

4.1 Selection and Evaluation process

The selection of the cities to be awarded with the title of Access City Award 2024 is assessed on the basis of a standard set of evaluation criteria to ensure consistency, transparency and equity in the process.

The criteria used and their weight are specified in section 4.2. Applicant cities at the national level that do not obtain at least 60 points cannot be admitted to the European level of the competition.

The selection takes place in two phases: a **pre-selection** at the national level and a **final selection at the European level**. The ACA Secretariat shall check the received applications on the formal and legal requirements as set out in section 3.1 and 3.2. Applications that do not meet these requirements shall not be examined further and will be excluded from the competition

- **Pre-selection**

The pre-selection phase will be carried out by National Juries. These Juries will be established in each Member State where cities have applied to the ACA competition. A shortlist of maximum three cities per Member State (defined as national candidates) will be designated by the National Juries and submitted to the European Jury members. Non-shortlisted cities will be informed about the outcome of the evaluation of their application.

- **Final Selection**

Out of the pre-selected national candidates, the European Jury selects the Access City Award winner and the second and third prize winners.

In addition, the EU Jury may decide to award one or several further “Special Mention(s)” depending on the current context and projects/policies or specific highlights of the submissions (e.g. access to cultural heritage, access to work, smart cities, etc.).

The National Juries’ assessment of the shortlisted cities is presented to the European Jury in the form of an assessment report, prior to the jury meeting and serves as a background document for the deliberation of the Jury.

Non-selected cities will receive a communication detailing how the city could improve its application for future editions of the competition. However, the latter communication is not made publically available and is for the use of the relevant city only.

- **Jury Deliberation**

The members of the European Jury will meet in Brussels or online at the latest one month prior to the Award Ceremony⁶. The Jury will designate, by consensus, the winner, the second and the third place as well as the cities winning a special mention, if any. Their deliberation will be based on the assessment report received by the National Juries.

- **Award stage**

The winner of the European Access City Award 2024 will officially be announced at the Award Ceremony in Brussels on 30 November 2023.

⁶ Please see the indicative timeline in section 3.6.

4.2 Award criteria

Both National and EU Jury members will assess the candidates cities based on the following evaluation criteria:

1) *Relevance to the objectives*

The applicant shall provide a description of actions, policies and initiatives – whether already implemented or at the planning stage – in all four key areas of accessibility:

- a. the built environment and public spaces;
- b. transportation and related infrastructures;
- c. information and communication, including information and communication technologies (ICT);
- d. public facilities and services.

The successful applicant has to demonstrate a coherent approach to accessibility across all four areas and an ambitious vision in tackling accessibility in the city.

2) *Ownership, level of commitment*

Applicants should outline the structures or framework set up in the city's administration to implement accessibility actions. **The application has to demonstrate that the actions implemented or planned are part of a coherent strategy or policy framework, rather than just *ad hoc* projects.** The accessibility strategy must be mainstreamed in the city's policies and its regulations. A policy statement/commitment on accessibility at high level of responsibility must be visible. Information about appropriate resources (staff, budget, etc.) allocated to implement these policies should be provided. Considerations of cost of accessibility must be combined with an assessment of the expected benefits.

3) *Impact*

The city's policies/initiatives shall have a demonstrable positive impact on the everyday life of persons with disabilities, and on the overall quality of life in the city. Examples of initiatives initially targeting persons with disabilities shall be provided, explaining how they benefit wider parts of the population, when relevant. The applicants shall include qualitative and quantitative data to support claims of success and provide concrete examples. It is important to mention project(s) – if any – involving people with intellectual disabilities. Planned initiatives and policies will be assessed on the basis of their coherence and potential impact.

4) *Quality and sustainability of results*

Applicants shall explain what structures, mechanisms and processes have been put in place to ensure the quality and sustainability of the results achieved. **The quality of results is defined in terms of improvements made to the level of accessibility and advancing compliance with standards and legislation.** Delivering sustainable results requires continuous efforts, secure resources and the establishment of a sound structure; evaluation and monitoring mechanisms (for regular checking, the notification and repairing of problems, the handling of complaints, etc.) are essential to evaluate success.

5) *Involvement of persons with disabilities and relevant partners*

Active and clear involvement of persons with disabilities, their representative organisations, and accessibility experts must be demonstrated in the planning, implementation and maintenance of city's policies and initiatives aimed at increased accessibility. The applicants shall also outline how they raise awareness around accessibility; whether and how they disseminate, exchange and share experience and good practices with other cities at local, regional, national and/or European level.

Criterion	Maximum no. of points
1. Relevance to the objectives	20
2. Ownership, level of commitment	20
3. Impact	20
4. Quality and sustainability of results	20
5. Involvement of persons with disabilities and relevant partners	20
TOTAL	100

5. ARRANGEMENTS AND FINAL DATES FOR SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS

The competition will run from 17 July 2023 to 18 September 2023.

All applications must be submitted directly online via the [online application platform, which can be accessed via the Access City Award 2024 website](#). Paper format applications are **not** accepted.

The full application must be written in one of the official languages of the European Union. However, submission of the application in English is encouraged for the smooth and timely running of the assessment of the applications. Applications must be complete. Applicants must answer to all questions and must complete all sections of the application form. If a question cannot be answered, reasons should be given. For further information on how to submit an online application, please see the Guidance Note (Annex II).

Applications shall adhere to the word limits indicated in each section of the application form. Any words above the specified limit will not be taken into account and may leave application answers incomplete.

Applicant cities may be contacted in case of clerical and/or administrative errors or for missing documents.

In order to submit a complete online application, the following should be provided:

- A completed online application form (Annex I);
- The relevant Mayoral Declaration (Annex III), signed by the Mayor or the highest ranking City Representative, authorised by national law to legally represent the city/urban area)
- The declaration on honour (Annex IV)
- The Legal Entity Form (Annex V)

Applications must be fully completed and submitted. In addition to the information provided in the application form, candidates are invited to upload – or provide a link to – a ten-slide PowerPoint presentation in order to illustrate and highlight the strong points of their application.

Up to five files⁷ (maximum size of one file is 10 MB) or links can be uploaded. The uploaded files can be in the national language(s) of the EU member state taking part to the competition.

Each uploaded document must be appropriately named. The file name should clearly state what the file represents or contains.

⁷ Accepted file formats are: doc, docx, rtf, pps, ppsx, ppt, pptx, xls, xlsx, pdf, zip, gif, jpeg, jpg, png

All queries should be directed to the Secretariat: secretariat@accesscityaward.eu

The deadline for submission of applications is 18 September 2023 at 12:00 CEST (GMT +2). Once the application is submitted, a confirmation page appears. Applications will subsequently undergo validation and applicants will be informed no later than two months following the deadline of submission set out above if their application has been accepted into the competition or not.

For formal requirements, please refer to the criteria set out in section 3 above.

6. THE FINANCIAL INCENTIVE

The total amount of the financial incentive is €350.000 (three hundred and fifty thousand euro). It shall be awarded to winning city of the Access City Award and the two runners-up.

The funds shall be allocated as follows:

- 1) €150 000 to the winner of the Access City Award 2023 (first place)
- 2) €120 000 to the winner of the second place
- 3) €80 000 to the winner of the third place

6.1 Payment arrangements

The winners of the competition will be announced at the Award Ceremony (see section 4.1). The financial incentive will be awarded through bank transfer after the announcement and designation of the winning cities at the official Award Ceremony. The payment of the amount will be settled in one instalment executed within 60 days from the official announcement of the winners. Finalist cities may be asked to provide the necessary financial information (financial identification form, legal entity form) ahead of the award ceremony.

6.2 Sole liability of contestants

The European Commission and the ACA Secretariat may not be held responsible for any claim relating to the activities carried out in the framework of the European Access City Award competition by the contestant. The Commission shall not be held liable for any damage caused or sustained by any of the contestants, including any damage caused to third parties as a consequence of or during the implementation of the activities related to the competition.

6.3 Checks and audits

Once the authorising officer of the European Commission has established the award decision for the financial incentive, the contestants accept that the Commission, OLAF and the Court of Auditors may carry out checks and audits in relation to the competition and the received financial incentive.

6.4 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. The financial information that is needed comprise the duly signed Legal Entity Form of the City and the Financial Identification Form. Personal data contained as part of the submitted application form shall be processed in accordance with the regulations in place. Contestants may, on written request, gain access to their personal data and correct any information that is inaccurate or incomplete (see section 8 for

contact details). 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 winning city
- The amount of the financial incentive awarded
- The subject of the award

6.5 Applicable law and competent jurisdiction

Regarding the award and payment of the financial incentive, the Law of the Union applies. The competent court or arbitration tribunal to hear disputes in the General Court of the Court of Justice of the European Union: General Court Rue du Fort Niedergrünwald L-2925 Luxembourg Tel: (352) 4303-1, Fax: (352) 4303 2100.

E-mail: GeneralCourt.Registry@curia.europa.eu

7. CONDITIONS FOR CANCELLATION OF THE COMPETITION

The Commission has the right to terminate the competition before its closing date without any obligation to award and to indemnify the competition applicants. The Commission has the right to decide not to award any financial incentive if no applications are received, if no applications meet the eligibility criteria or if the Jury decides not to propose an award of the financial incentive to any of the eligible applications.

8. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The application process, the work of the National and European Juries are facilitated by the ACA Secretariat, which is run by Ecorys Europe EEIG. The Secretariat also assists with PR activities related to the award scheme through the ACA website and through various communication channels such as brochures, social media, film clips etc.

Contact the Secretariat via E-mail:

secretariat@accesscityaward.eu

or the European Commission at:

EMPL-EDPD-ACA@ec.europa.eu

9. ANNEXES

- I. Application form
 - II. Guidance Note
 - III. Mayoral declaration
 - IV. Declaration on honour
 - V. Legal Entity Form (LEF)
 - VI. Financial Identification Form
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