

URBACT IV

Programme evaluation (2021–2027)

Evaluation plan

as approved
by the URBACT IV Monitoring Committee
at the meeting in Ghent, Belgium,
on 27th June 2024

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INTRODUCTION

This document is the **Evaluation plan of the URBACT IV programme**.

URBACT is the European Territorial Cooperation Programme that facilitates the sharing of knowledge and good practice between cities to promote integrated and sustainable urban development, improve city's policies and the effectiveness of cohesion policy in cities.

Just like the other programmes co-financed by the European Cohesion Funds, URBACT is obliged to **carry out evaluations** throughout the programme period on the basis of an **Evaluation plan**.

In the **programme period 2021-2027**, there is a high degree of continuity with the concepts of performance, evaluation, and monitoring in the previous programme period (2014-2020). Certain **evaluation requirements** have been simplified and certain requirements can be handled more flexibly.

The **key changes linked to performance, monitoring and evaluation** are described and listed in the Commission Staff Working Document COM SWD(2021) 198 final as follows:

- *Streamlining and reducing the number of policy objectives, specific objectives and the contents of the programmes involving a simplification of the intervention logic;*
- *A change in programming and monitoring from a focus on result indicators reflecting impacts to a focus on result indicators measuring outcomes (the change for direct beneficiaries);*
- *A more complete list of common output indicators and a new list of common result indicators with the intention to improve the investment coverage of common indicators for transparency, accountability, monitoring, evaluation and communication purposes at regional, national and EU level;*
- *A reformed performance framework will encompass all output and result indicators. It will be one of several factors taken into account in the mid-term review in deciding on the allocation of the flexibility amounts;*
- *The use of specific objectives for the definition of the intervention logic, combined with aligned structured data on result indicators, output indicators and financial inputs (categorisation data) and more frequent data transmission;*
- *A simplification of certain evaluation requirements.*

In addition, the following changes in the **programme period 2021-2027** should be noted:

- There is no more obligation to perform an ex-ante evaluation. However, draft programmes had to set out **lessons learnt**, i.e. from 2014-20 monitoring and evaluation.
- The obligation to develop, agree and implement an **Evaluation plan** is unchanged. It is due one year after the adoption of the programme.

- Programmes are obliged to **carry out evaluations** throughout the programme period. Timing and sequencing of evaluations are up to the programmes, except for the **impact evaluation** which is **due in June 2029**.
- There is no longer an obligation for annual implementation reports (AIR), thus no more regular updates on evaluation activities for the Commission.
- The Commission mid-term evaluation by 12/2024 in advance of the mid-term review stays an evaluation element.
- The choice of the **evaluation criteria** in individual evaluations is also up to the programme, but it is strongly recommended that at least one evaluation covers the five criteria as mentioned in the [Better Regulation Guidelines](#), i.e. **effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence** and **EU added value**.
- The role of the **Monitoring Committee** (MC) did not change: It must approve the Evaluation plan and any amendments, and it has to examine the progress made in carrying out evaluations, syntheses of evaluations, and any follow-up activities given to findings.

The **Evaluation plan** is a strategic document and an essential element to ensure good programme results. It is intended to set out how evaluations will be organised. Main elements are objectives, coverage and coordination mechanisms for the programme evaluation, a summary of the details related to the evaluation framework, the planned evaluations, a description of the evaluation process, the reporting and the communication of the evaluations. Its main purpose is to support planning evaluation, which plays a crucial role in guaranteeing the implementation of high-quality evaluations and their efficient use.

The 1st version of the Evaluation plan for the URBACT IV programme of February 2024 marked the formal starting point for URBACT's evaluation activities and was submitted to the Monitoring Committee for information and possible comments.

The 2nd version of the Evaluation plan of May 2024 was a revised version, which took into account the comments of Monitoring Committee members. It was submitted to the **Monitoring Committee for discussion and approval** during the Monitoring Committee meeting in Ghent on 27 June 2024 in order to **mandate the Evaluation Steering Group** to start its work and to advise the Monitoring Committee on the **strategy and rationale** for the overall evaluation of the URBACT IV programme, the **detailed planning and budget** of the individual evaluations, as well as on the **Terms of Reference** to commission the external evaluators.

This 3rd version of the **Evaluation plan for the URBACT IV programme** of August 2024 takes the comments of the Monitoring Committee members into account and is the revised, approved and final version. It will be submitted to the **Evaluation Steering Group** for implementation and to the **European Commission** for information. It will also be **published on the URBACT website**.

The **Evaluation Steering Group** will steer the implementation, follow-up and **regular review** of the Evaluation plan. In line with the Commission's recommendations in chapter 4 of the [Guidance document](#), the **Monitoring Committee** should review the implementation of the Evaluation plan at least once a year. It is therefore intended making such a review a regular part of the Evaluation plan and therewith a routine for

the whole programme period. The idea is to increase the knowledge on what works, and what doesn't, in order to support well-informed decision-making on the further steps to take. By doing so, programme evaluation will be an ongoing process and a **collective learning exercise** that improves the results of the programme.

PART I – Objectives, coverage and coordination

This chapter sets out the objectives of the Evaluation plan as well as the objectives of the evaluation of the URBACT IV programme, the legal requirements for the evaluation, the coverage and the rationale.

It also provides an overview of the coordination and exchange mechanisms on evaluations planned, evaluation findings, and methodologies, as well as an initial reflection on the intended focus of the evaluation, based on an analysis of the relevant evidence of previous evaluations.

1. Objectives of the Evaluation plan

The Evaluation plan of the URBACT IV programme is a strategic document and includes information on the planned evaluations including the timing and type of evaluations, the methodological approach, data needs and availability as well as resources needed. It also outlines the roles and responsibilities of the programme bodies in planning and implementing evaluations and following up on evaluation outcomes.

In operational terms, the Evaluation plan should support the programme implementation by ensuring:

- a smooth evaluation process and providing an evaluation framework during implementation
- good quality of evaluations through proper planning, including the identification and collection of necessary data
- provide a framework to plan impact evaluations
- appropriate financial and personnel resources for evaluation activities
- follow-up and communication of the evaluation findings/results
- facilitate the synthesis of findings from different evaluation elements, and the exchange of available evidence
- an informed programme management and policy decisions on the basis of evaluation findings
- timely and relevant evaluations regarding the programme's implementation phase and reporting requirements towards the European Commission.

2. Objectives of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is an independent contribution to:

- assessing and – if required – adjusting the delivery system of the URBACT programme with a view to **efficiency** and **effectiveness**; in order to provide a high quality of services and safeguard customer-orientation throughout all stages of the project life cycle
- revisiting the **intervention logic**, starting to **conceptualise the impact** with a view to relevance and coherence of the programme; in order to ensure a high quality of project results and check if there is a need for tailored calls analysing the **project results** and deriving the aggregate **programme**

impact with a view to **relevance, coherence, sustainability, and Union Added Value** (with a particular interest in its contribution to lasting improvement of governance structures), and other relevant criteria, such as inclusiveness, non-discrimination and visibility; in order to ensure and document that the programme delivers visible, sustainable outcomes with high policy relevance, thereby,

- when analysing **coherence**, it should be differentiated between the **inner coherence** (within the programme itself, between different elements of the programme, in relation to the programming documents, etc.) and the **external coherence** (coherence in relation to other ETC programmes, EU policies, EU strategic goals, EUI, etc.)
- when deriving the **added value created (at all levels)**, it should be analysed and highlighted as a **result of implementation** of the URBACT programme
- having a specific look at newly designed and implemented activities and instruments (such as **pilots and pioneers**), assessing their specific risks and benefits as well as their overall impact, in order to identify **lessons learnt** for other and/or future programme activities
- identifying the programme's **effects on cities of different characteristics**, including size differentiation, old versus new EU Member States and other countries, Article 11 cities, etc.
- identifying **lessons learnt and new priorities** for the 2028-2034 programming period
- using the **findings** of the evaluation to develop and propose **recommendations** and **follow-up activities** (for immediate implementation and to be considered in the future).

3. Legal requirements

This Evaluation plan of the URBACT IV programme has been prepared in compliance with **Article 35** of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 (**INTERREG Regulation**).

Article 35

Evaluation during the programming period

1. The Member State or the managing authority shall carry out evaluations of the programmes related to one or more of the following criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and Union added value, with the aim to improve the quality of the design and implementation of programmes. Evaluations may also cover other relevant criteria, such as inclusiveness, non-discrimination and visibility, and may cover more than one programme.
2. In addition to the evaluations referred to in paragraph 1, an evaluation for each programme to assess its impact shall be carried out by 30 June 2029.
3. Evaluations shall be entrusted to internal or external experts who are functionally independent.
4. The managing authority shall ensure the necessary procedures to produce and collect the data necessary for evaluations.
5. The managing authority shall draw up an evaluation plan that may cover more than one INTERREG programme.

6. The managing authority shall submit the evaluation plan to the monitoring committee not later than one year after the approval of the INTERREG programme.
7. The managing authority shall publish all evaluations on the website referred to in Article 36(2).

In addition, the Evaluation plan builds on the following relevant European Commission guidance document:

- [COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT, Performance, monitoring and evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund in 2021-2027, Brussels, 8.7.2021, SWD \(2021\) 198 final \(europa.eu\).](#)

4. Coverage and rationale

This Evaluation plan covers the European Interregional Cooperation Programme URBACT IV. The programme is funded from ERDF, IPA III and NDICI as well as match-funding from the participating countries.

The URBACT IV programme area (OP, p. 36; PM, p. 20-21) covers:

- EU 27 Member States
- Partner States: Norway, Switzerland
- IPA countries: Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina
- NDICI countries: Ukraine, Republic of Moldova (note: as regards the eligible area within Ukraine: Following the unprovoked and unjustified, unprecedented Russian aggression against Ukraine and its impact, only the territories under the control of the sovereign Government of Ukraine are eligible under the programme. Regions currently under Russia's military control will not be eligible.)
- other countries (anywhere in the world) – at own costs.

The programme area of URBACT IV overlaps with other interregional, transnational as well as with some cross-border programmes. However, a joint Evaluation plan or joint evaluations with other programmes are not considered feasible as geographical and thematic overlaps with other programmes are only partial and as intervention logic differs between programmes.

In terms of timing, the Evaluation plan covers the entire programme period (2021-2027), taking into account that the impact evaluation has to be completed by June 2029 at the latest.

5. Analysis of relevant evidence

The URBACT III programme during the 2014-2020 programming period undertook several studies and evaluations which provided relevant information for the development and focus of the URBACT IV Operational Programme (e.g. [URBACT III implementation report](#), [URBACT III impact evaluation report](#)).

The main results of these evaluations are summarised in the URBACT IV Operational Programme as **“Lessons learnt from past experience”** (OP, p. 47ff.):

Since 2002, URBACT has financed 161 networks which have tackled major challenges faced by cities such as social inclusion, physical planning and urban renewal, competitiveness of SMEs, employment and labour mobility, etc. In addition to burning issues of today, like housing, migration, new economy and digitalisation, environmental protection and climate change, recent URBACT networks and knowledge activities cover newly emerging topics.

It has taken such time for URBACT to develop strong links with cities, develop effective cooperation mechanisms and build up national points that can inspire next developments in complementarity with the European Urban Initiative. This experience and URBACT’s extensive evaluations have permitted the programme to become a trusted brand for cities and make some bigger and many incremental improvements over the course of the programming periods.

The URBACT III implementation evaluation, along with other sources of evaluating programme activities provides a strong basis on which URBACT IV can be built; what should be continued and what can be improved.

To this end, the URBACT IV Operational Programme refers to the following findings from previous works (OP, p. 47ff.):

- *Networking is an efficient tool for capacity building & knowledge sharing*
- *The capacity of cities to act does increase, especially for smaller cities*
- *Integrated Action Plans support the smarter use of EU funds*
- *URBACT evolves as a knowledge hub and partner for the Urban Agenda of the EU*
- *National URBACT points play an important role in linking local, national and EU urban policy.*

These findings are underpinned with more detailed and concrete observations as well as recommendations for further improvements. In addition, the Operational Programme sets out how URBACT IV will respond to these tasks (OP, p. 49ff.). This is a good starting point for the planning of future evaluations.

Other relevant sources of information could be related to

- other previous evaluations (incl. EU ex-post evaluations for INTERREG)
- communication and knowledge-sharing initiatives (e.g. results from the communication campaign, events and online survey of the URBACT stakeholder consultation 2024)
- thematic research and capitalisation activities (relevant studies) and subsequent discussions
- territorial analysis
- evaluation literature and preparatory studies for this programming period
- the basic rationale for the establishment of baselines for indicators if it provides useful insights for the evaluation approach.

On this basis, a **brief overview and analysis** should be provided of the relevant evidence and of **core takeaways from previous works** ([SWD, p.17](#)).

In a second step, and on the basis of this stock-taking exercise, the **key focus of planned evaluation activities** should be derived. The analysis of the essence of previous efforts should give an answer to the question, where future evaluation efforts should be concentrated.

This strategic part of the Evaluation plan should be further developed with the **Evaluation Steering Group** (see below).

6. External coordination and exchange

To ensure high-quality results of the programme evaluation and the user orientation of the evaluation results, evaluation processes should be streamlined, and coordination and exchange with other relevant programme authorities and partners is necessary. Everyone can benefit from such a joint learning exercise to increase mutual knowledge about the programme performance, good practices and needs for adjustments throughout the programme lifecycle ([SWD, p.17](#)).

To this end, URBACT will seek the exchange with programme external partners, especially with **other ERDF programme authorities**, where relevant:

- Exchange with other interregional and transnational cooperation programmes, also through the Group of Pan-European Programmes (PEP)
- Exchange with other INTERREG programmes through the INTERREG community “Results and evaluation” offered by INTERACT and through national working groups (if relevant, e.g. in France)
- Exchange with other Managing Authorities of ERDF funded programmes and other regional and national Cohesion Policy programmes.

The exchange with other programme authorities could address topics such as:

- planned and conducted evaluations
- approaches and quality of findings
- quality of service providers
- how to coordinate drafting and issuing Terms of References
- how to use the findings of the evaluation to develop and propose recommendations and follow-up activities (for immediate implementation and to be considered in the future)
- how to improve the visibility and sharing of evaluation findings/results
- how the contribution to cohesion policy materialises through the programmes' work and deliverables
- new features and good practices of the programmes (e.g. small-scale projects, aim to attract new applicants and beneficiaries, support mechanisms and funding opportunities, good practices for application and selection processes, involvement of Monitoring Committees and national levels)

- changes in the political or economic framework for the programmes (e.g. new European policy priorities or themes, European elections, inflation and external shocks such as Russia's aggression), which might require more short-term reactions
- Following the partnership principle, the URBACT programme will also seek exchange and coordination with **other relevant programme partners**, such as the European Urban Initiative (EUI), the Urban Agenda of the European Union (UAEU), cities networks (e.g. Eurocities, CEMR) or other urban initiatives, funds and actors, if and where relevant (e.g. ESF+, CEF, LIFE+, Horizon Europe, rural or coastal development policies such as LEADER or EMFAF local groups, together with Policy Objectives 5).

PART II – Evaluation framework

This chapter sets out the evaluation framework, i.e. the general conditions and circumstances which are defining for the planning and carrying out of the programme evaluation. It comprises

- a description of the evaluation process led by the Managing Authority (MA), such as responsibilities of involved bodies, Evaluation Steering Group, technical working groups, scientific or other expert academic input, Monitoring Committee (MC), etc.
- the involvement of other stakeholders within the framework of the MC or in specific working groups established by the MC
- the source of evaluation expertise (internal and external) and provisions ensuring the functional independence of evaluators from the authorities responsible for programme implementation
- the need for training programmes for MA and Joint Secretariat (JS) staff and eventually a wider audience (Evaluation Steering Group, MC) dealing with evaluation (for example, seminars, workshops, self-study, and working with other evaluators)
- a strategy to ensure use and communication of evaluations (how their findings will be followed up, how the evaluations will be made public and published, how they will be transmitted to the European Commission)
- the overall budget for implementation of the plan subdivided between evaluations (covering the cost of evaluations, data collection, training etc.).

1. Evaluation function

The responsibilities and functions for evaluation are set out in Article 35 of the INTERREG Regulation. The MA/JS and the MC have the main functions in the evaluation process. The regulation mentions the MA as the main responsible actor and the MC in a supervising function.

Responsibilities of the Managing Authority (MA) and the Joint Secretariat (JS)

According to Article 35 of the INTERREG Regulation

- the Managing Authority (MA) has the responsibility to draw up the Evaluation plan and submit it to the MC no later than one year after the adoption of the programme.
- the MA has to submit the Evaluation plan, and any of its amendments approved by the MC, to the EC for information.
- the MA shall ensure the necessary procedures to produce and collect the data necessary for evaluations.
- the MA shall carry out evaluations of the programmes related to one or more of the following criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and Union added value, with the aim to improve the quality of the design and implementation of programmes. Evaluations may also cover

other relevant criteria, such as inclusiveness, non-discrimination, and visibility, and may cover more than one programme.

- the MA shall publish all evaluations on the website referred to in Article 36 of the INTERREG Regulation.

In accordance with the structure for the programme management of URBACT IV, the Managing Authority relies on the Joint Secretariat for the operational work related to evaluation. **Under the overall responsibility of the Managing Authority**, the Joint Secretariat will design and coordinate the implementation of the Evaluation plan. It will monitor the quality of evaluation activities throughout the whole evaluation cycle and report regularly to the Monitoring Committee ([SWD, p.17](#)).

The **Joint Secretariat (JS)** shall be responsible for the overall coordination of evaluation activities for the URBACT IV programme. The main tasks involved are:

- drafting and updating the Evaluation plan in coordination with the Evaluation Steering Group
- managing procurements and contracts for evaluation activities, selection of external evaluators
- coordinating the evaluation activities and promoting their quality, especially with view to
 - the **findings** of the evaluation,
 - the **recommendations** developed and
 - the **follow-up activities** proposed (for immediate implementation or to be considered in the future)
- supporting evaluation teams for programme evaluations carried out at the initiative of the Commission
- participating in training and evaluation capacity building activities organised at national or EU level
- being the key liaison point for evaluation purposes
- being in charge of the reports **summarising the findings** of evaluations carried out during the programming period and the main outputs and results of the operational programme
- disseminating evaluation reports to key stakeholders.

Responsibilities of the Monitoring Committee (MC)

According to Article 30 of the INTERREG Regulation

- the Monitoring Committee (MC) shall approve the Evaluation plan and any amendment thereto.
- the MC shall examine the progress made in carrying out evaluations, syntheses of evaluations, and any follow-up given to findings.

For the quality and effect of the evaluation process, the commitment of the MC is crucial. The MC is the multi-lateral supervisory board of the programme. It decides on the programme strategy and on the projects and hence has a core responsibility for the programme outcomes.

The MC should therefore closely accompany and supervise the evaluation process. It is recommended that the MC reviews the implementation of the plan annually.

2. Evaluation process (internal coordination and exchange)

To ensure a smooth evaluation process and high-quality results of the evaluation, a strong cooperation between the main programme bodies and a continuous exchange with the URBACT stakeholders is necessary. Everyone can benefit from such a **joint learning exercise** to increase knowledge and good practices throughout the programme lifecycle.

The design of the evaluation process needs to fit the purpose to offer an appropriate framework for (programme internal) coordination and exchange between the different **URBACT programme bodies** and **main URBACT stakeholder groups** throughout evaluation process.

The main elements of the evaluation process shall be:

a) Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat (MA/JS)

MA/JS are the main responsible actor for planning, organising, supporting and coordinating the evaluation process as set out above (part II, point 1).

b) Evaluation Steering Group (ESG)

To **steer the evaluation process** and, and in accordance with the URBACT IV Operational Programme, an **Evaluation Steering Group** shall be set up for the evaluation of the programme. The Evaluation Steering Group will ensure the appropriate implementation of the Evaluation plan and might propose changes to the Evaluation plan if necessary (the responsibility for drawing up the Evaluation plan is on the MA, art. 35 of the INTERREG Regulation).

Composition of the Evaluation Steering Group

The Evaluation Steering Group should be a group of **nominated MC members** that uses its expertise to steer the evaluation process in the best possible way and to ensure that all the processes are implemented correctly and objectively. The ESG should be operational, so the number of members should be limited.

The members are nominated on a personal basis for their experience and capacity, not as a representative of the institution or stakeholder group that they come from, i.e. they do not (necessarily) speak on behalf of their country/administration, but in their **personal capacity**.

To the extent possible, the Evaluation Steering Group should blend practical evaluation and administrative **experience**, as well as diverse opinions and viewpoints, in order to steer the process as an extended MC. It should **act objectively**.

The members of the Evaluation Steering Group shall be **nominated by the Managing Authority** upon declaration of interest or invitation. The members of the ESG need to be **approved by the MC**, in line with para. 4.1. of the COM's Staff Working Document (SWD 2021 198). This also ensures a level of transparency between the ESG, MA/JS and the MC and builds trust.

As the Evaluation Steering Group will be operational over the whole programming period, membership may **rotate** and change over time.

The Evaluation Steering Group shall be managed by the MA/JS.

Overall, the **Evaluation Steering Group** shall be composed of **10-11 members**:

- Managing Authority (1 representative)
- Member States and Partner States (3-4 representatives)
- European Commission (1 representative)
- Partner initiatives and organisations (2 representatives)
- For organisation and support: JS (2-3 representatives).

Other interested Member States and Partner States (especially new MC members) may participate as **guests** upon invitation. The **external evaluator** shall participate in the Evaluation Steering Group meetings as a guest upon invitation where suitable. **Cities/beneficiaries** may also be consulted by the Evaluation Steering Group as guests in order to consider the users' perspective.

Meetings of the Evaluation Steering Group

The Evaluation Steering Group should meet at all the key steps of the planning, implementation and monitoring of the evaluation.

At least **once per year**, the Evaluation Steering Group should **meet in person**, ideally back to back with an MC meeting. In addition, **1-2 online meetings** per year should be foreseen.

In addition to face-to-face meetings, the members of the group will provide feedback on reports, terms of reference etc (OP, p. 73).

Tasks of the Evaluation Steering Group

The Evaluation Steering Group will – with the organisational and technical support of the JS – be responsible for all further **activities related to evaluation**, including, but not limited to:

- steering the evaluation process
- ensuring an appropriate design of the Evaluation plan and advising on the strategic parts of the Evaluation plan
- subsequent monitoring of the implementation of the Evaluation plan
- elaboration of Terms of References (ToR) for services of external evaluators, in consultation with the Monitoring Committee
- managing external evaluations, ensuring a close dialogue with external evaluators
- elaboration and fine-tuning of evaluation questions, methods and tools
- discussion and approval of draft evaluation reports (including **findings**, conclusions and **recommendations**)
- based on evaluation findings, recommending **follow-up activities** to the MC for implementation
- reporting to the MC

- advising on communication of evaluation outcomes to third parties.

The Evaluation Steering Group will ensure that the interests of **all major stakeholders/partners** are taken into consideration when carrying out the activities and that the institutions which might have to act on the recommendations are involved.

c) Monitoring Committee (MC)

The Monitoring Committee shall analyse, discuss and approve the Evaluation plan and any other subsequent amendments.

The progress report on the Evaluation plan shall be presented by the Joint Secretariat to the MC for discussion when relevant, **once a year**. It shall include:

- an introduction outlining the rationale, background, coverage and main approach to the Evaluation Progress Report
- a detailed review of evaluation activities undertaken during the preceding year and methods used to capture data (e.g. surveys, questionnaires, number of respondents etc.) taken together with those of earlier years
- the results of the evaluation activities vis-à-vis the baseline and the cumulative progress towards achieving the targets set
- the presentation of the progress of impact evaluation
- a commentary on the results of the evaluation process and progress towards achieving targets together with recommendations for follow-up-activities (including changes to programme management), and for future evaluation and programming activities.

d) Joint responsibilities of Evaluation Steering Group, MA/JS and MC

The **Evaluation Steering Group** is the **advisory body** to the MC and MA/JS to steer the evaluation process, providing input, feedback and advice.

The **MA/JS** remains the responsible actor for **planning, organising and coordinating** the evaluation process. It is also responsible for the **implementation of follow-up activities** based on the findings and recommendations from evaluations approved by the MC.

Decision-making on evaluation-related matters, such as **approval** of updates to the Evaluation plan, final evaluation reports and follow-up activities, resides with the **MC**.

3. Involvement of stakeholders and partners

To ensure high-quality results of the evaluation, all URBACT stakeholder groups and also programme partners should be involved in the evaluation at appropriate times. Their experience and perception of the programme can be a **valuable source of evidence** as well as a **good sounding board** for discussion of

evaluation findings and subsequent ideas and recommendations for adaptations in the programme management.

Due to the large area covered by the URBACT IV programme, a broader range of relevant stakeholders including programme beneficiaries and experts will be addressed via **surveys and interviews** in order to collect data serving as an input for the operational and impact evaluation. Evaluation results will also be shared with relevant partners through various **communication** channels.

In addition, exchange with relevant stakeholder groups and programme partners (Member States, Partner States, European Commission, Managing Authorities, experts, beneficiaries and other cities/cities networks, local stakeholders like decision-makers, elected representatives, practitioners, URBACT Local Group members) should be envisaged to **discuss intermediary results and outcomes of the evaluations** (e.g. in focused seminars/group works at the occasion of other events). See also OP, p. 71 and 73.

In accordance with the required multi-level governance approach, national events and discussions organised with the support of the National URBACT Points should also be foreseen in order to allow relevant national partners to voice their positions on strategic matters concerning the implementation of the programme.

4. Source of evaluation expertise

According to the regulation, evaluations are to be carried out by experts (internal or external) that are functionally **independent** from the authorities responsible for programme implementation.

The structure of the URBACT IV MA and JS does not foresee separate departments/units dealing with evaluation matters and therefore such functional independency is not ensured simply by the organisational structure. Therefore, wherever and to the extent possible, **external experts** should be appointed to carry out the evaluation work itself.

As a **general rule**, evaluations shall be carried out by **external experts** especially when strategic issues such as implementation and impact evaluations are concerned and when complex methodologies or data collection have to be applied and carried out. The JS will provide the external experts with information, data and input from the monitoring of the approved projects, programme developments and ongoing discussions. Data collection will be completed by the experts whenever necessary (e.g. through surveys). For the evaluation of effectiveness, efficiency and the communication strategy, MA/JS will provide the main data and reference analysis and then external experts will review them.

The programme intends to guarantee an efficient use of the human and financial resources allocated to evaluation activities.

External expertise

The **evaluation work itself** shall be carried out by **external experts**, who should also complement the internal sources of evidence and assist the programme in all its evaluation activities. The role of the external evaluator is an **independent** one, acting as a **critical friend**, who draws unbiased conclusions and develops evaluation findings and recommendations for follow-up activities.

External experts shall be recruited through **public procurement procedure**.

The **Terms of References (ToR)** for the evaluator should be prepared and discussed with the **Evaluation Steering Group** and consulted with the **Monitoring Committee**, in order to collaboratively define the scope, methods and tasks for the evaluator, so that there is a clear and shared picture of what the external evaluator should deliver. The tender documents will also specify the competences and skills required for the specific evaluation work foreseen.

The **URBACT pool of experts** includes experts that have experience in working with EU projects and policies and a number of them have many years of experience in evaluating programmes. This specific expertise amongst URBACT experts is an **asset** that should be used for evaluation purposes. To this end, programme short-term purchase orders should also be considered if possible and where appropriate.

In order to achieve a **good outreach and impact** of the evaluation reports, the ToR should address the need for a close cooperation between evaluation, capitalisation and communication, also for the evaluation report (**EVAL-CAP-COM**).

Internal expertise

Internal studies, surveys and assessments (evaluations) of specific programme activities (networking, capacity building, capitalisation and communication) to gather relevant data and evidence shall be carried out in a **collaborative manner**. The JS communication officer will contribute to the evaluation of the communication strategy and will also ensure the communication of the outcomes of programme evaluations.

One staff member of the JS will be engaged in the preparation and implementation of the Evaluation plan, supporting the MA and the Programme Director in **coordinating** the different evaluation activities. Additional staff members of MA and JS will be involved in the evaluations on demand.

In addition, the efficient and effective functioning of the programme bodies (MA/JS) are subject to independent checks by the **internal audit department** (Internal Audit) of the MA.

Data and evidence

The necessary **data and evidence as source of evaluation** will be derived from networking, capacity building, capitalisation or communication activities, as well as from the **programme monitoring tool** which is being developed specifically with the programme result indicators in mind. It will be possible to monitor project outputs and access information from progress reports on the results and impact at each project level. Such qualitative information will also be gathered directly from projects through specific questionnaires and reports at the mid-term and end of their projects.

The **dashboard of key performance indicators (KPI)** will allow to monitor the implementation of the communication strategy along the different channels used (examples include: number of applicants per geography, size, experience); no of website sessions; percentage of satisfaction rate for events).

Data for defining baseline and monitoring evaluation will also come from website and social media analytics, **internal statistics, feedback forms and surveys** (e.g. from the URBACT stakeholder consultation 2024).

Should **gaps or data deficiencies** be noted during programme implementation, specific targeted questionnaires will be launched, as was the case in the previous programming period, using online tools which are easily accessible and not costly.

5. Trainings

To ensure good knowledge of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methodologies and sound planning and managing of evaluations, JS staff will regularly take part in trainings offered, especially by INTERACT, but also at national level, carry out self-studies and exchange with other INTERREG programmes. There is usually no cost associated with such trainings.

6. Use and communication of evaluations

All **evaluation reports** shall be submitted to the Evaluation Steering Group for discussion and to the **Monitoring Committee for approval**.

Approved evaluation reports will be **transmitted to the European Commission** through the official channels.

Approved evaluation reports shall also be **made available** to the public through the **URBACT website**.

The **results** of the evaluations will be communicated to all **relevant stakeholders and the general public** using a variety of communication tools such as social media, events and publications.

The way the evaluation reports are written should reflect these **different user needs**. Therefore, the cornerstones and characteristics of the evaluation reports should be discussed in the **Evaluation Steering Group** and reflected in the ToR for the external evaluator, as it is a strategic matter how to use and communicate evaluation findings in the downstream, once the evaluation reports are available. The ToR need to ensure that the evaluation reports meet these expectations on the outreach and impact.

Therefore, the ToR should also comprise recommendations on suitable deliverables for communication and capitalisation on the evaluation findings. Again, a close cooperation between evaluation, capitalisation and communication (EVAL-CAP-COM) is necessary to ensure concise and readable reports, using illustrative

examples, thus providing suitable materials for storytelling and addressing policy-makers or the general public. Their use should be reflected in accompanying communication plans and capitalisation strategies.

7. Quality management

The following steps are envisaged to be taken in order to ensure qualitative evaluation results:

- adequate planning of evaluations, including as regards data availability and drafting of detailed ToRs
- setting out clear award criteria and quality requirements
- wide advertising of tender
- in the evaluation contract, including a procedure for the early termination of the contract conditional on the quality of the work provided
- organising a kick-off meeting with the contractor to clarify all aspects of the Terms of Reference and Technical Offer
- requesting an inception report and quarterly progress reports
- using a thorough quality assessment grid for assessing the quality of final deliverables
- organising evaluations in a way that ensures that evaluators are sufficiently familiar with the interventions they will assess
- provisions ensuring the functional independence of evaluators from the authorities responsible for programme implementation (framework conditions need to be such that constructive judgements and unbiased expert opinions are possible, that the work can be carried out impartially and not subordinated to an agreement of the services responsible for the design of the programme)
- involving the Evaluation Steering Group endorsing key steps, such as draft reports and approving final reports
- involving the Evaluation Steering Group in regular zoom-ins to take a comprehensive view on the quality of the evaluation processes and the deliverables
- organising evaluations in a way that facilitates the immediate consideration of findings by the authorities responsible for programming and implementation.

The idea of the quality management is to check regularly whether things are done in the best possible way, and to feel responsible to make adjustment if need be. It means integrating regular feedback in the evaluation process and requires being open-minded, accepting criticism, and investigating and proposing options for adjustment of processes and products.

8. Budget for evaluations

The overall budget foreseen for evaluation actions in **Technical Assistance (TA)** amounts to **100.000 EUR**.

For the **planning of the budget**, it needs to be noted that all major cost elements in TA have seen steep increases of cost (staff, travel, office, equipment) and just as in all parts of the economy, the prices for services – including evaluator's fees – have increased.

Beyond this background, it is important to be realistic in the services and budget planning for the evaluation activities and especially for the ToR for the external evaluator. Given the rich experience from previous evaluations, it is justified to restrict the evaluation exercise to two evaluations (implementation and impact) with a clear focus. Furthermore, the use of internal capacities for gathering data and evidence should be maximised. However, the choices to be made in this respect are strategic ones. Therefore, and in order to ensure the impartiality of the evaluation process, the **Evaluation Steering Group** should be involved in the discussion of the budget allocations for the programme evaluations.

For the budget planning, the following **guiding lines** should be respected:

The TA budget should be primarily used for the most important task of the **implementation evaluation** as well as for the most complex and obligatory task of the **impact evaluation**.

For the **use and communication of evaluation results**, external services should be mobilised and financed from outside of the Technical Assistance budget (esp. communication budget).

Programme-internal resources of the programme bodies (MA/JS) are required for the **planning and coordination of the evaluations**, internal expertise, collection of necessary data, decision making and follow up measures as well as communication. Those necessary (mainly staff) resources are covered by the other budget lines of the TA budget and are linked to programme implementation tasks.

The budget planning is to be discussed with the **Evaluation Steering Group** in the framework of the overall planning of evaluations (see also part III.).

PART III – Planning of evaluations

This part of the Evaluation plan shall contain an indicative list and timetable of the evaluations to be carried out throughout the period (until 30 June 2029), including an explanation for the selection of the themes covered. The planning will define the practical arrangements for the organisation of evaluations (esp. number of contracts, timing and scope).

For the planning of evaluations, the following **guiding lines** should be respected:

- The planning should be based on a **strategic approach**, which provides a clear and detailed **reasoning** for the overall evaluation (vision, purpose) of the URBACT programme as well as for the choice and importance/weight of the individual evaluations (e.g. management, implementation, PO5, impact). Each **individual evaluation** should have a purpose and a rationale in its own right.
- The planning should provide a clear **presentation of the overall mechanism** which is proposed for the purpose of the evaluation based on efficacy, efficiency, coherence and relevance and with a clear view of the purpose of the evaluation.
- The **allocated budget** should reflect this reasoning and the **importance** of the individual evaluations.
- The **most important evaluation** should be the **implementation evaluation**, as implementation is the core part of the programme and thus should be the **focus of the overall evaluation**. It should take into account **all criteria** including the added value of the programme and its contribution to Cohesion Policy as well as the relevance in the EU policy/strategy landscape.
- The **impact evaluation** can build on previous evaluations and should also cover **all criteria**.
- The **programme context** (programme objectives, investment strategy and intervention logic) should be taken into account. The timing of evaluations needs to reflect the projects' lifecycles (different calls and projects durations, availability of project closure reports), which define the data availability from projects (a **timetable** should be added showing the evaluation timeline in connection with the programme lifecycle, esp. calls and events). Given this timeframe, evaluations – especially evaluations with a thematic focus or impact evaluations – are not appropriate before 2025.
- The planning of the individual evaluations should **reflect the reasoning** for the overall evaluation mechanism in the **methodology, actors, activities, responsibilities, timeframe and resources** for the individual evaluations and set them out clearly in the planning.

The **planning of evaluations** should be developed on the basis of these guidelines **by the Evaluation Steering Group**, in order to reflect the strategic decisions to be made on the type of evaluations, the subject and rationale (key criteria and questions) as well as on the timing and budget allocation. An indicative planning of evaluations is included in Annex 2 and shall be further discussed and detailed by the Evaluation Steering Group. The updated planning of evaluations shall be submitted to the **Monitoring Committee** for approval.

ANNEX 1: List of references

- [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund](#)
- [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal \(INTERREG\) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments](#)
- [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy](#)
- [COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT, Better Regulation Guidelines, Brussels, 3.11.2021, SWD \(2021\) 305 final \(europa.eu\)](#)
- [COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT, Performance, monitoring and evaluation of the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund in 2021-2027, Brussels, 8.7.2021, SWD \(2021\) 198 final \(europa.eu\)](#)
- [URBACT III Implementation Evaluation Final report November 2019 \(urbact.eu\)](#)
- [URBACT III Impact evaluation Final report October 2022 \(urbact.eu\)](#)
- [URBACT IV Operational Programme December 2023 \(urbact.eu\)](#)
- [URBACT IV Programme Manual November 2023 \(urbact.eu\)](#)
- [Interact | Monitoring Evaluation Reporting \(interact-eu.net\)](#)

ANNEX 2: Indicative planning of evaluations

Title of evaluation	Subject & rationale	Methods, actors & responsibilities, data requirements (outputs)	Data availability, actors & responsibilities	Timeframe (start, duration)	Budget (EUR, net/gross)
Implementation evaluation	<p>Evaluation of main activities, e.g. of knowledge or capacity building activities.</p> <p>Key criteria: All 5 criteria mentioned in the Better Regulation Guidelines should be covered (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value).</p> <p>Key questions: Suitability of the design (activities, tools, methods, communication strategy) and progress of implementation. The programme's contribution to Cohesion policy objectives, principles and implementation framework (including PO5).</p>	External expertise (evaluation report).	<p>Data on applications and projects ensured by the monitoring system and documentation of MC meetings.</p> <p>Data related to key performance indicators (KPI) available in-house.</p> <p>Data on projects and participating cities gathered from project partners (surveys among beneficiaries, targeted desk research and interviews).</p> <p>Data on client satisfaction: Surveys among beneficiaries and stakeholder consultation 2024.</p>	Starting in July 2025 (9-12 months)	Estimated 70.000 EUR
Use it!	Immediate consideration of findings and recommendations by MA/JS and MC for follow-up activities	External evaluator to prepare a summary of major findings from evaluation report (a factsheet or short note) with illustrations, storylines, testimonials and main recommendations for implementation and dissemination	Evaluation report by external expert to be discussed by ESG and approved by MC, to be submitted to EC and to be published.	Starting in Q2 in 2026	[eventually Communication budget for dissemination of evaluation report and major findings]

Programme evaluation (2021-2027) – Evaluation plan

Title of evaluation	Subject & rationale	Methods, actors & responsibilities, data requirements (outputs)	Data availability, actors & responsibilities	Timeframe (start, duration)	Budget (EUR, net/gross)
		<p>purposes (follow-up activities) for discussion in ESG and MC.</p> <p>MC to approve findings, recommendations, and follow-up activities (for immediate implementation and preparation of future programme period).</p>			
Impact evaluation	<p>Impact evaluation to show-case major achievements and provide evidence-based lessons learnt for the forthcoming period (mandatory element).</p> <p>Key criteria: All 5 criteria mentioned in the Better Regulation Guidelines should be covered (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value).</p> <p>Key questions: Major impacts and achievements, focusing on relevance and EU added value.</p>	External expertise (comprehensive analysis of programme outcomes)	Mix of different sources of data: desk research, monitoring system, focus groups, surveys/interviews, case studies, etc., including report from implementation evaluation, stakeholder consultation 2024	Starting in 2027 (12 months) – due in June 2029	Estimated 30.000 EUR
Use it!	Immediate consideration of findings and recommendations by MA/JS and MC for follow-up activities	External evaluator to prepare a summary of major findings from evaluation report (a factsheet or short note) with illustrations, storylines, testimonials and main recommendations for implementation and	Evaluation report by external expert to be discussed by ESG and approved by MC, to be submitted to EC and to be published.	Starting in 2028	[eventually Communication budget for dissemination of evaluation report and major findings]

Title of evaluation	Subject & rationale	Methods, actors & responsibilities, data requirements (outputs)	Data availability, actors & responsibilities	Timeframe (start, duration)	Budget (EUR, net/gross)
		<p>dissemination purposes (follow-up activities) for discussion in ESG and MC.</p> <p>MC to approve findings, recommendations, and follow-up activities (for immediate implementation and preparation of future programme period).</p>			
Total budget					Estimated 100.000 EUR