



Urban Innovative Actions (UIA)

Testing bold and innovative
urban solutions across Europe

@UIA_Initiative



| Introduction to UIA

UIA - Main objectives



Art.8 ERDF: “...To identify and test new solutions which address issues related to sustainable urban development and are of relevance at Union level.”

2 main objectives:

- To provide urban authorities with **resources** to **test how new and unproven solutions work in practice** and how they respond to the complexity of real life
- To **draw lessons** and **share knowledge** with other urban authorities across Europe

→ Thematic alignment to **EU Urban Agenda**

→ **NOT a transnational initiative:** supporting local urban projects

Key figures



- UIA total budget: **EUR 372 Mio ERDF**
- Co-financing per project: **max. EUR 5 Mio ERDF**
- Co-financing rate: **max. 80%**
- Project duration: **max. 3 years** implementation
+ 1 year knowledge transfer

→ **Covers the entire EU**

(no associated countries can participate)

Who can participate?

Eligible authorities:

- (Association of) **Local Administrative Units**
→ e.g. *Municipalities, Metropolitan areas* etc.
- Considered as **Urban**
→ “Degree of Urbanisation” Eurostat definition
- **> 50 000** inhabitants
- **No transnational partnership required** (not expected but possible if relevant for the proposed solution)

Where are we?

- ✓ 2 Calls for Proposals finalised (3rd Call ongoing: 184 appl.)
 - **584 projects submitted** from **26 Member States**
 - 6 topics of the EU Urban Agenda addressed



URBAN
POVERTY



URBAN
MOBILITY



JOB & SKILLS
IN THE LOCAL ECONOMY



INTEGRATION OF
MIGRANTS & REFUGEES



ENERGY
TRANSITION



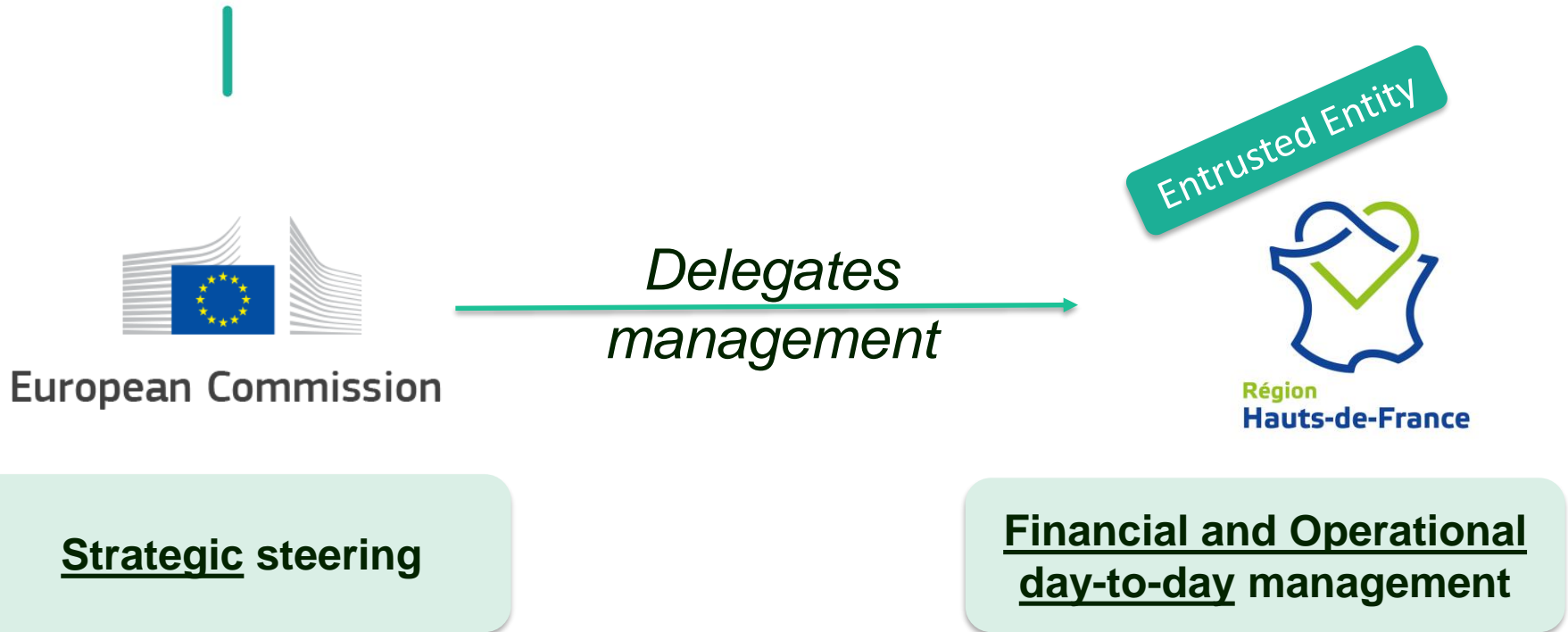
CIRCULAR
ECONOMY

- ✓ After 2 Calls for Proposals:
 - **130 EUR Mio** committed
 - **33 approved projects** from **13 Member States**

UIA Cities – After 2 Calls



Novelty: Indirect management



Two main documents to frame the relationship:

- **Delegated Act**
- **Delegation agreement**

→ Clear division of tasks between the two UIA authorities

Indirect management: decision-making

Steps	European Commission	Entrusted Entity
Call Topics selection	Decision and drafting of topics description	
Eligibility		Validation
Shortlist strategic assessment	Co-decision	Co-decision
Final decision	Co-decision + official sign off	Co-decision
Subsidy Contract		Signature

Main differences vs Interreg:



| ‘Governance & Content’

- ‘Simplified’ governance: No MC/SC with different Member States involved
- No Territorial facilitators / Contact Points: Permanent Secretariat as one-stop-shop for all applicants
- Much stronger reliance on External Experts
- Greater “tolerance to” and “appetite for” risky projects
- Closer links with other EU funds and initiatives

Main differences vs Interreg: ‘Technical’



- Overall financial risks lie in the Entrusted Entity (not shared with other MS as in Interreg programmes)
- Advance payment to projects (e.g. 50% of ERDF grant upfront upon SC signature)
- EU-wide centralised FLC (one single framework contract managed by Entrusted Entity)
- Partly exempted from State-Aid regulations (ERDF not concerned, only 20% local contribution is)
- Each project benefits from a dedicated Expert (50 days) to capture knowledge and support capitalisation

| Assessment process

3 steps assessment process: Timeline



Eligibility check



- Carried out by the PS
- 1 officer per application
- Main issues relate to Eurostat data (availability and accuracy)
- Final decision: Entrusted Entity
- Overall ineligibility rate (aft. 3 Calls): **< 5%**



Assessment criteria

Criteria	Weight	Checked during
Innovativeness	40%	Strategic assessment (External)
Partnership	15%	
Measurability	15%	
Upscaling / transferability	10%	
Quality of the work plan	20%	Operational assessment (Internal)

Scoring



- Standard scale from 1 to 5 (no half points)
 - **1: very poor**
 - **2: poor**
 - **3: adequate**
 - **4: good**
 - **5: very good**
- Similar challenges as in Interreg programmes (harmonisation, calibration etc.)



Strategic assessment (1)



- Mostly carried out by a **Panel of External Experts**
- For each topic:
 - 1 **Topic Coordinator** overseeing the process
 - **3 to 5 Assessors** (depending on nb of applications)
 - 1 PS project officer coordinating the process
- **4-eyes assessment approach**: 2 Experts per application:
 - 1) Individual remote assessments
 - 2) 'Liaison' time btw Experts to reach consensus (online)
 - 3) Lead Expert drafts consolidated assessment report
- Possibility to have a 3rd Expert reviewing in case of non agreement

Strategic assessment (2)



- In parallel, the EC organises internal review (consultation of other DGs)
- Shortlist of highest scored projects (ca 15% of eligible ones) move to next assessment phase
- Joint decision for shortlist by European Commission and Entrusted Entity

How to ensure harmonised | scoring & comments?

- Kick-off meeting: bring all Assessors together + joint practical exercise
- Development of a '**scoring rubric**' to be used to ensure coherence between scoring and comments + calibrate scoring among assessors
- Weekly collective discussions between assessors to compare and calibrate scoring
- Topic Coordinator (+ Permanent Secretariat) overseeing

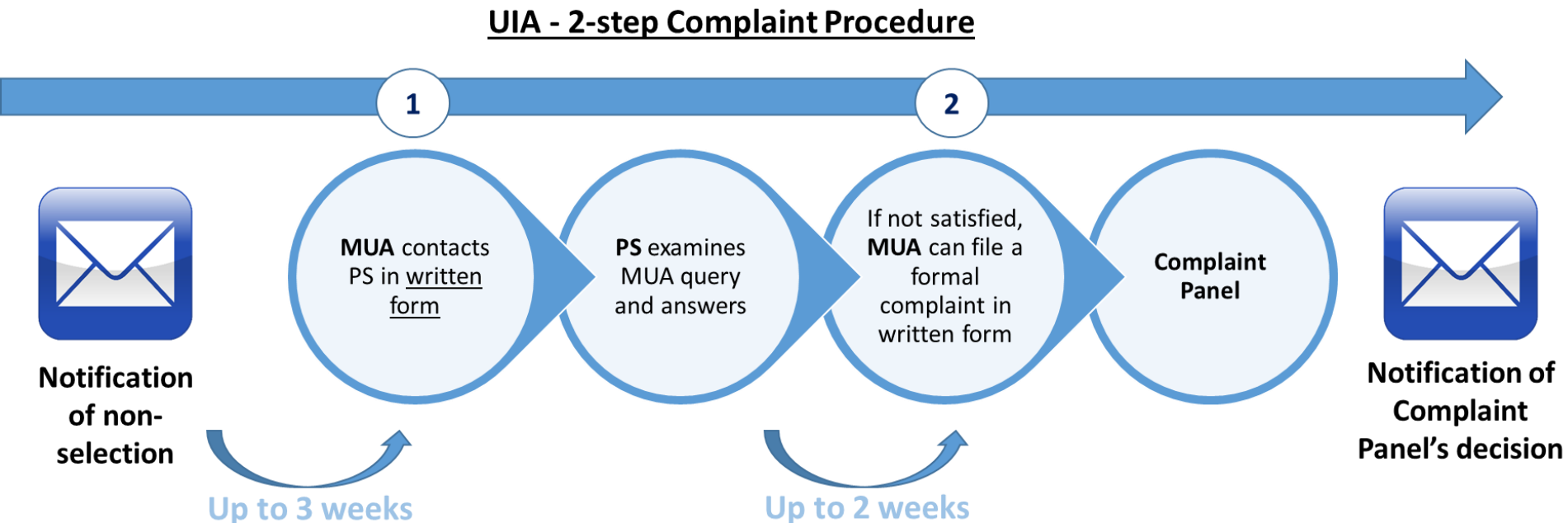
Operational assessment



- Carried out internally (PS)
- Sub-criteria used
 - **Quality of the intervention logic**
 - **Quality of the work plan**
 - **Management**
 - **Project's value for money**
 - **Quality of the budget**
 - **Communication Strategy**
- **4-eyes assessment approach**: 2 Officers per application:
 - 1) Individual assessments
 - 2) 'Liaison' time btw Experts to reach consensus
 - 3) Lead Officer drafts consolidated assessment report

Complaints: 2-steps procedure

- Possible to submit a 'complaint' after each step of the selection process



After 2 Calls: 4 formal complaints (0.7% of all applications)

Further questions / information:

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UIA initiative Changes procedure

Innovation process

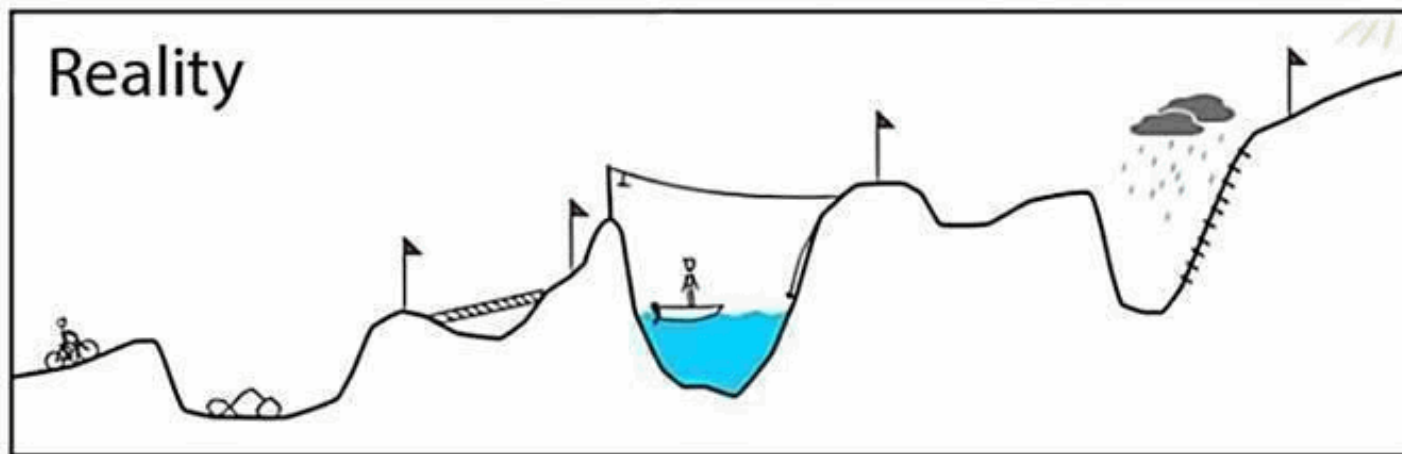


Project implementation

Your plan



Reality



Monitoring philosophy



Monitoring innovative projects requires flexibility

Flexible framework to enable projects to adjust their plans along the way (if needed)

Be ready for plan B (and possibly C)

→ Preventative monitoring needed to anticipate issues before they occur, or react as quickly as possible



Monitoring approach



- Initiation phase (6 months): ensuring a quick start of the project, adjust initial plans if needed and address SC recommendations
- Shift from Programme deadline-based to project milestones-centred monitoring
 - Only 1 formal Annual Progress Report per year (disconnected from Financial Claims)
 - Frequent **Milestone reviews** at key moments of project implementation (2 or 3 per year) + frequent updates in between
 - UIA Expert visits
 - PS Site visits
- Accessible Secretariat policy vs “Brussels Eurocrats”



Ex-ante audit



- Part of the initiation phase = positive outcome of the audit is a condition for the release of the 50% ERDF advance payment
- Objective: way to anticipate potential issues and factors of failure: check that all systems and processes (management and coordination, procurement etc.) are in place + 'take the pulse' of the situation.
- FLC goes and visits each approved project during the first months of implementation to check

Outcomes:

- Positive → Projects go on with recommendations for improvement
- Adverse opinion → Projects put on hold, action plan to be developed



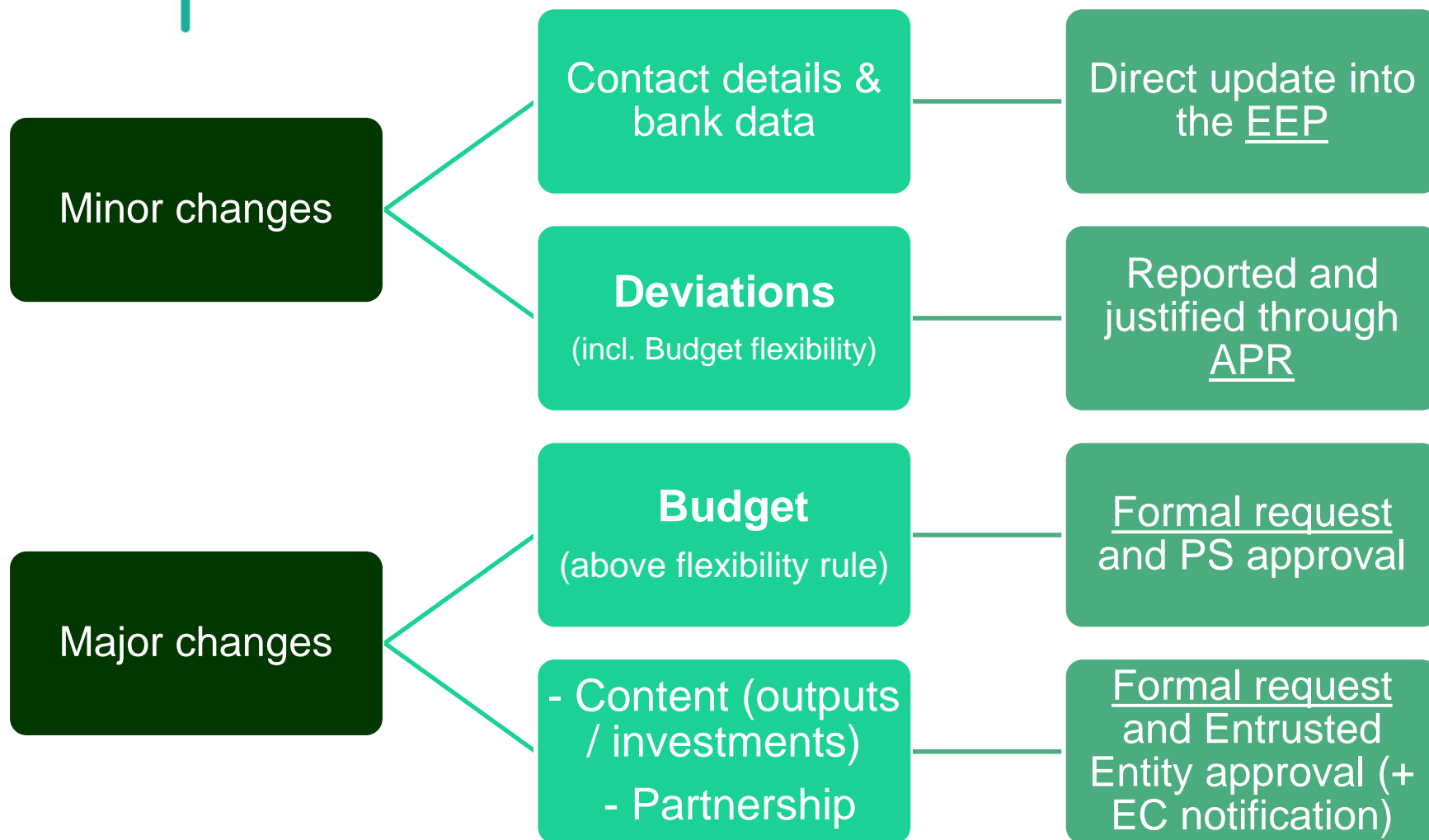
Changes processes



- Possibility for projects to request changes during initiation phase (content / partnership / budget etc.)
- After that, up to **2 major changes** (content and partnership). No limit for 'technical' changes
- **No Programme deadlines:** changes can be requested at the most relevant moment for the project
- **20% budget flexibility** at project level (btw BL, PPs and WPs)
- Simplified procedure = quick decision given to projects



Typology of changes



Feedback



- Chosen monitoring approach is time consuming and more complicated to manage at Initiative level
- Roles in decision-making are clear, and procedure somewhat simplified compared to Interreg Programmes (no MS involv.)
- **Strict EC regulations** (proved to be harder to change than Programme rules in my exp):
 - Ex: no extension possible for Calls 1 & 2: only option: postponement of start date (up to 9 months)
- So far, positive feedback from beneficiaries: flexibility and room to adjust plans

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