

# exchangeEU: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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Thank you for your interest in the exchangeEU programme. We have compiled answers to the most prominent questions below. Should your topic not be addressed here, feel free to reach out to us under [exchangeEU@coalregions.eu](mailto:exchangeEU@coalregions.eu) and we will be glad to assist you.

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## Eligibility

1. Is exchangeEU only applicable for those regions where **coal, lignite, peat or oil shale** is still being extracted?
  - Priority is given to “coal+”<sup>1</sup> regions which are actively facing challenges linked to the coal+ transition (e.g., phasing out mining operations, closing coal+ power plants, re-training of workers, re-purposing sites, environmental rehabilitation, switching to clean energy, etc.).
  - However, in justified cases also former coal+ regions or regions which have applicable frontrunner experience (e.g., clean tech innovation, renewables, green hydrogen, social inclusion, economic diversification, non-energetic mining transitions, etc.) can be selected for exchanges, likely more in a mentor role. In any case, all paired matches must include at least one active coal+ region.
2. Is this programme eligible only to coal+ regions in **EU27 Member States**?
  - Priority is given to applicants located within one of the EU27 Member States.
  - However, in exceptional and well justified cases, also non-EU27 might be allowed to participate on a case-by-case basis.
  - For coal regions in the Western Balkans and Ukraine (WBUA), please note that there is a separate exchange programme offered by the European Commission for exchanges between WBUA and EU27 coal regions. For more information, please refer to the WBUA Secretariat’s [website](#).
  - Currently, if regions from the UK consider applying to participate, they need to be aware that the programme cannot cover any of their costs related to the exchange.

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<sup>1</sup> “Coal+” refers to the extraction, or even intense use, of coal, lignite, peat and/or oil shale.

3. Are local or regional public authorities the only **valid type of applicants**?

- exchangeEU targets local or regional public authorities, but these are not the only valid applicants.
- Other active stakeholders driving regional coal+ transition are encouraged to apply.. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - energy or development agencies
  - trade unions
  - (business) associations
  - non-governmental organisations
  - relevant businesses or companies
  - vocational schools
  - universities or academic/research institutions
  - think tanks

They should demonstrate meaningful support and intended involvement from relevant public authorities through a Letter of Support (LoS, see Q8)

- If the envisaged exchange follows a group setting rather than a peer-to-peer learning purpose, applicants are strongly encouraged to form a group of stakeholders (“delegation”), which is diverse both from a sectoral and individual point of view (e.g., gender-balanced). The delegation should demonstrate ownership from the wider community affected by the transition.
- Generally, the exchangeEU programme is on the lookout for regions at all degrees of advancement of coal+ transitions, which:
  - are unsure of how to make their first steps, or
  - have made some headway, but want to learn more, or
  - are quite advanced and looking to further develop, or
  - are eager to share with others not only their successes, but also their “failures”/ ”challenges” and how they manage to approach them (or maybe better: “opportunities to improve”!)

4. What exactly is meant by **public authorities**?

- In this context, public authorities are meant to be those decision-making public administrations or bodies of elected political leaders which have a strong, legal mandate, as well as a budget to act, in shaping local and/or regional development and (energy) transition processes.
- At the local level, this includes municipal, city or metropolitan technical staff as well as city councils. At regional level, if applicable, this can vary widely, but generally speaking could conform to one of the [NUTS2-3](#) levels.
- The term would generally not include publicly owned companies, agencies, etc. nor other public institutions lacking decision-making authority. Such entities are still welcome to be part of a delegation or even apply as lead applicants, though they should provide a LoS from a public authority (see Q8).

## Application and selection process

### 5. Can I still apply?

- A **second call for applications will be launched on 15 September 2022**. Watch out for news on the launch of the call that will be published on our [website](#), and communicated via the [Twitter account of DG Energy](#) and the newsletter of the Coal Regions in Transition Initiative (for the newsletter archive and to subscribe see [here](#)).

### 6. How do I apply?

- The **deadline to apply** for the second call will be **7 November 2022**.
- Once the application forms for both individual and joint applications are made available, they will be provided via EU Survey, which can be accessed under the links below. Applicants need to complete the chosen application form by the above deadline:
  - [Individual application form](#)
  - [Joint application form](#)
- Please note that you do not need an account with EU Survey to access and fill in the application forms and that you can always save your draft (see screenshot below) and return later via a link that EU Survey provides you upon saving – be sure to save the link yourself in another location.

Save a backup on your local computer (disable if you are using a public/shared computer)

### Individual application form for the exchangeEU programme

Fields marked with \* are mandatory.

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- The application form templates of the first call for applications can currently be found as downloadable files on our [website](#) for your information. We will replace them with an updated version for the second call for applications as soon as they are available.
- We have provided an executive summary of the programme on our [website](#) that you can share with your public officials or other stakeholders to gauge their interest in the programme in the following languages: Bulgarian, Czech, English, Finnish, German, Greek, Polish, Romanian and Spanish.

### 7. Can I submit more than one application?

- Technically, applicants can submit more than one application, however we highly recommend that applicants focus on submitting one robust application rather than submitting two or more applications. A single, well thought-out and to-the-point application has much greater chances of being selected, and would therefore not create more competition for itself.
- In the application form, applicants can rank different thematic clusters. Therefore, multiple themes of interest can be indicated within one application.

8. What kind of information should be provided in a **Letter of Support (LoS)**?
- This should best be defined by the applicants and the supporting public authority/ authorities themselves. The LoS should follow normal protocols of the public authority for such documents (e.g., official letterhead, documentation numbers, etc.), though for our purposes it does not necessarily need to be signed by its highest level representatives, but any decision-maker deemed to be allowed to sign such documents.
  - Nonetheless, the LoS should ideally still make it clear that a mandate is given to apply specifically to the exchangeEU programme and that the public authority intends to be active in the exchanges, perhaps even leading them, and possibly even indicating specific resources/capacities they could really commit (though this is not a prerequisite).
  - You will be asked to upload the LoS in pdf format as part of the application form in EU Survey.
  - In case of a joint application, a LoS by a relevant local/regional public authority should ideally be submitted for each region involved in the application, though not needed for those cases where the main regional applicant is such a relevant local/regional public authority.
9. Do the regions themselves get to **define their own topics and activities**?
- Yes, exchangeEU is first and foremost a needs-based programme seeking to provide a service for those priorities felt by the regions themselves. We actually encourage you to provide your own ideas on the topics and format for the desired exchange.
  - Within the application form, applicants are asked to outline their own goals and priorities. The exchangeEU team will use these to try to find a suitable match among other selected applicants for mutually beneficial exchanges, so the more specific applicants can describe their interests, the better they can be matched. If applying jointly, then topics should be pre-aligned between those regions which are applying together.
  - Later on, once pairings have been accepted and launched, there will be many opportunities to further refine or even revise these topics in cooperation between the paired regions and their Exchange Facilitator at the start of the exchange.
10. If I have in mind a **particular region to exchange** with, what can I do to make it happen?
- The best option is to use the joint application form to apply together. We ask the applying regions in a joint application to make sure to have a mandate/ agreement from their respective decision-makers to apply jointly with a specific other region, ideally demonstrated with a LoS from each region. In any case, the intention is that the answers you provide in such a joint application form would have been coordinated and discussed together before its submission.
  - For those applicants who lack such a mandate/agreement with a specific other region, the individual application form has space for you to state and explain your own preferences. Even following this approach, it would be highly recommended that you still reach out to the desired region before submission in order to make clear your own wish to exchange with them, ideally with that other region specifically naming your region as a preference as well and stating similar topics, activities, etc.

- In case of individual applications, it cannot be guaranteed that your preferences for another region will be fulfilled as we cannot ensure that the preferred partner region applies and expresses the same interest in being matched. In case of a clear preference, we strongly encourage to reach out to that region during the application phase to align and ideally submit a joint application.
- We will offer a virtual “pre-matchmaking” session during the application phase on 29 September 2022, 10:00-12:30 CET in Zoom to facilitate that regions can find partnering regions of interest and apply jointly. This has proven to be useful to find mutual matches in the first call. Please watch out for news on the date and registration via the newsletter (subscribe [here](#)) and our [website](#).
- To get direct insights and inspiration from participating regions of the first round, we recommend to join our virtual session “Just transition through collaboration – highlights from the exchange programme for EU coal+ regions” at the European Week of Regions and Cities on 10 October 2022, in the time slot 14:30-16:30 CET.

11. Does the exchangeEU team provide applicants with matching regions to jointly apply with?

- Interested regions are strongly encouraged to choose and contact the regions they would like to jointly apply with directly.
- If you are still looking for a region to apply jointly with, please register to our “pre-matchmaking” session as described under the previous question.
- If still needed, the exchangeEU team can provide potential applicants with suggestions for regions that would be suitable for a joint application. To receive this support, please send an email to [exchangeeu@coalregions.eu](mailto:exchangeeu@coalregions.eu) well before the application deadline (November 7, 2022) and indicate your interests.

12. Is it possible for **more than two regions** to pair with one another in a single exchange?

- Yes, though at a maximum of four different regions. In practice four may not be so effective, and rather three might be seen as a functional maximum.
- Please use the joint application form in such cases, keeping in mind that all regions jointly applying should agree on the topics/ format of the exchange before submission of the joint application.

13. Do **regions get to host and visit**?

- At this point, only one visit per exchange is financed and facilitated by the exchangeEU programme.
- If applying via a joint application, ideally already include your intentions about which region will be hosting and which visiting.
- In case of a high number of individual applications, the willingness to host will be accounted for positively in the evaluation process.

14. What are the **next steps after submitting** the application?

- Once the 7 November 2022 deadline has passed, all submissions will be pre-assessed for eligibility and quality by the exchangeEU team. In relevant cases, applicants will be contacted to clarify items or do initial follow-up.
- Final evaluations will be conducted in close alignment with the European Commission/ DG Energy, including the identification of plausible pairings. The

exchangeEU team will then reach out to the selected applicants to confirm the acceptability of such pairings. Once agreed on all sides, formal exchanges will be announced by the exchangeEU team and the European Commission.

- This entire process will take a minimum of one month. In any case, please rest assured that the exchangeEU team will reach out to you when appropriate.
- The exchangeEU team will then launch preparatory activities for the selected exchanges as soon as they are established.
- We foresee to kick off the virtual aspects of the exchanges of the second round in January, but latest in February 2023. Please note that the second round of exchanges needs to be fully completed by May 2023, so applicants need to ensure available capacities between February and May 2023 to organise, implement and follow up of their exchange (see also section “Exchange activities” below).

15. If I do not apply in the second call for applications or my submission is not selected, are there **future opportunities** to apply (again) to exchangeEU?

- Currently, no further call is foreseen. If this changes, we will communicate that right away via the newsletter (subscribe [here](#)) and on our [website](#). For now, we strongly encourage interested regions to use the opportunity of the second call to apply.

## Exchange activities

16. How is an **exchange being implemented**?

- The exchange is very much shaped and driven by the participating regions. The exchangeEU team provides one Exchange Facilitator per exchange to support with organisational set up (see below), provide financial/logistical support, facilitation during the exchange, thematic moderation, and guidance towards follow-up actions.
- Therefore, participating regions should reserve sufficient time and capacities for the organisation and implementation of the exchange activities. This is particularly the case for in-person exchanges if you are the hosting region (e.g., in case of site visits or to find a suitable meeting venue), but also as the visiting region you need to prepare carefully to get a clear added value from the visit and need to have time to travel.
- Initial set-up activities involve virtual kick-off calls between the involved regions and the Exchange Facilitator. This would largely focus on introductions, explanations of respective contexts, refining joint topics/priorities, defining individual and mutual goals, etc.
- The second phase would revolve largely around the organisation and implementation of the chosen exchange activity (e.g., group workshop with or without site visit, mentoring, job shadowing). It is likely to require at most two months to prepare, with the actual implemented exchange itself likely being only within a single week.
- The final phase focuses on follow-up activities from the exchanges and outlining any future cooperation to be done between the two regions, but beyond the support of this exchangeEU programme.

17. Do exchanges need to be **in person** or can they be **virtual**?

- Depending on the needs and willingness of the applicants and matched regions, exchanges can be implemented face-to-face, online or in a combination of both. This is of course subject to current Covid19-related regulations (see also Q23).
- The kick-off meetings are in any case held virtually. The final format of the exchange itself will be defined in the kick-off.

18. Which **exchange format** can be applied?

- For the exchange visit (or virtual format) the applicant needs to define one format that is best suited to support its interests.
- Two overarching types of exchange formats (group workshop and peer-to-peer learning, see below) might be specifically relevant, but we nonetheless strongly encourage applicants to provide their own idea on a suitable format to address the needs and aim of your envisaged exchange. Generally, applicants should focus on one format.
- **Group workshop:** The aim is to collectively share lessons learned/ best practice examples and build upon them, generate new ideas or solve a common challenge. They last up to two full days and might be set up as high-level exchanges (to acquire basic-level insights and knowledge) or in-depth, tailored visits to provide specific insights into a particular topic. They include interactive elements and collaboration, and if desired by the applicant, innovative methods (e.g., creative thinking, hackathon/ innovation marathon). They may include site visits, if applicable. They can be in person, fully virtual or a hybrid of both.
- **Peer-to-peer learning:** The aim of one-on-one exchanges is to learn to provide/ receive on-the-job learning of replicable best practice examples. They last up to three full days and can be set up as needed, e.g., as job shadowing (a representative from visiting region follows one from the hosting region in their daily tasks) or as mentoring/ coaching (i.e., collegial advice from mentor to mentee region on current challenge/ project/ process). They can be in person, fully virtual or a hybrid of both.
- Under "**Other**" in the individual application form, we ask you to outline any other ideas on setting up the format you envisage as most beneficial for your intended exchange.
- Applicants are asked to choose one of three options (Group Workshops, Peer-to-peer learning or Other) in the application form and not to check multiple options. In the application, applicants should be as specific as possible when describing their preferred format.

19. How will **networking** be facilitated in the programme?

- Once regions are matched, all participants will receive the opportunity to connect, network and share experiences with other regions beyond their matched region(s) via dedicated networking of the exchangeEU programme.

20. Which **costs are covered**?

- The programme covers costs related to travel and accommodation of the visiting participant(s), and other expenses related to the activity as needed (e.g., venue, catering, local transportation, interpretation).
- It is important to note that the coverage is limited: For group formats, the travel and accommodation of up to altogether 4 persons from the visiting region(s)

may be financed. For peer-to-peer formats, the travel and accommodation of 1 person may be financed. These numbers may change once the second call for application is launched.

- Applicants are encouraged to indicate any willingness to cover selected costs (e.g., travel for additional participants, see also Q21) and/ or to provide services (e.g., venues, catering or interpretation, organise site visits) in the application already as a sign of commitment. However, this is not a prerequisite to participate in exchangeEU.

#### 21. Are **larger delegations** allowed?

- Generally, this is possible. However, as described in Q20, the coverage of travel and accommodation costs is limited. A larger delegation should be justified to and approved by the exchangeEU team.
- In some cases, larger delegations may have the possibility to participate in selected exchange activities, especially those done virtually (e.g., initial set-up), but it should be agreed beforehand and also ensured that it serves a useful purpose for the exchange activities.
- Upon prior agreement, it may even be possible that additional visiting delegates attend in person or that additional locals from the host region participate in certain exchangeEU activities in their own region. However, in case either is approved, the costs of such extra individuals will need to be covered by other sources than the exchangeEU programme.

#### 22. What is the intended **working language** of the exchanges?

- This is to be decided on a needs' basis, i.e. case by case. All members of the exchangeEU team are fluent in English, as well as a few selected other languages.
- In case simultaneous interpretation is needed, the costs can be covered by exchangeEU. However, any applicant wishing to offer interpretation are appreciated to do so, and ideally should highlight this information in the application form they submit.

#### 23. What happens if exchanges were planned as in-person meetings but cannot be implemented in-person due to **Covid19-related restrictions**?

- In the evaluation process, the exchangeEU team, jointly with the European Commission/ DG Energy, will assess the current Covid19 situation and potential implications on the selected exchanges and corresponding formats.
- In any case, accepted exchanges will be implemented – as needed, either by delaying them a few weeks or by shifting them to a virtual format – of course with the support by the exchangeEU team.
- It is in any case paramount that applicants fully commit to the exchange despite expressed preferences for in-person exchanges, even if they may ultimately participate in a virtual exchange format – this may be due to the other matched region's preference or due to ongoing pandemic restrictions. You will be asked to confirm your full commitment in the application form.