

# URBAN AGENDA FOR THE EU



## Greening Cities Partnership

### Draft Action Plan

April 2024





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**Disclaimer:**

*\*\*\* The Pact of Amsterdam states that the Action Plan 'can be regarded as non-binding'. Therefore, the actions presented in this Action Plan are not compulsory. \*\*\** (chapter 4 clause 19.)

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## Table of Acronyms

AH	Affordable housing
CABERNET	Concerted Action on Brownfield and Economic Regeneration Network
CALM	Coordinators and Action Leaders Meeting
CCI	Cross-cutting issues
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CEF	Connecting Europe Facility
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CF	Cohesion Fund
CHP	Combined Heat and Power
CLLD	Community-led local development
CO2	Carbon Dioxide
CoR	Committee of the Regions
COM	European Commission
COSME	EU's programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
COTER	Commission de la politique de cohésion territoriale et du budget de l'UE
CPR	Common Provision Regulation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DE	District Energy
DG	European Commission's Directorate General
DG CLIMA	European Commission's Directorate General for Climate
DG COMP	Directorate-General for Competition
DG ECFIN	Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs
DG EMPL	Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion
DG ENER	European Commission's Directorate General for Energy
DG ENVI	European Commission's Directorate General for Environment
DG EPL	European Commission's Directorate General for Employment
DG HOME	Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs.
DG REGIO	European Commission's Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy
DGUM	Directors-General Meeting on Urban Matters
DSJC	Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition
DSO	Distribution Network Operations
EC	European Commission
EDP	Entrepreneurial Discovery Process
EAA	Ex-ante Assessment
EEA	European Environment Agency

EEB	The European Environmental Bureau
EEFIG	Energy Efficiency Financial Institutions Group
EFSI	European Fund for Strategic Investments
EIB	European Investment Bank
EIF	European Investment Fund
ELA	European Labour Authority
ELENA	European Local Energy Assistance
ELTI	Education and Life Long Learning
EPBD	Energy Performance of Buildings Directive
EPSR	European Pillar of Social Rights
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ERHIN	European Responsible Housing Initiative
ESCO	Energy Services Company
ESF	European Social Fund
ESF+	European Social Fund plus
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ESPON	European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion
ETS	Emission Trading System
EU	European Union
EUI	European Urban Initiative
EUKN	European Urban Knowledge Network
EU-SILC	European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
FUA	Functional Urban Area
GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GI	Green Infrastructure
HE	Housing Europe
HP	The Housing Partnership
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IEC	International Electro-technical Commission
INTERREG	European Regional Development Fund
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investments
IUT	International Union of Tenants
JPI	Joint Programming Initiative
JRC	European Commission's Joint Research Centre
LLCG	Lifelong Career Guidance
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MS	Member State
NBS	Nature Based Solutions
NEET	A person who is 'Not in Education, Employment, or Training'



NESTA	National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (UK)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NRL	Nature Restoration Law
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OP	Operational Programme
OP	Operational Programme
OSH	Occupational Safety and Health
PES	Public Employment Service
PoA	Pact of Amsterdam
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
R&D	Research and Development
RFSC	Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities
RIS	Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation
ROI	Return of Investment
ROP	Regional Operational Programme
SDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGEI	Services of General Economic Interest
SMEs	Small and Medium sized Enterprises
SMSTs	Small and Medium Sized Towns
SUD	Sustainable Urban Development
TG	Task Group
UA	Urban Agenda
UAEU	Urban Agenda for the EU
UAETP	Urban Agenda Energy Transition Partnership
UDG	Urban Development Group
UDN	EU Urban Development Network
UIA	Urban Innovative Actions
UN	United Nations
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
URBIS	European Investment Advisory Hub
USEPA	United States Environmental Protection Agency
VAT	Value added tax
WG	Working Group
YEI	Youth Employment Initiative

# Definitions

**An Action Plan is a document that (1) lists the specific actions that need to be taken, as well as (2) the relationships between these actions in order to achieve predefined goals in an integrated way. How the actions complement and support each other to create synergy is an important part of the Action Plan.**

## General Definitions

**Actions** should address a real need, have real and visible impact and concern a larger number of Member States and cities. Actions should be new: no reiterated elements which have already been done or which would be done anyway. Actions should be ready to be implemented: clear, detailed and feasible; a study or a working group or a network is not considered an action.

**Deadline** refers to the moment where the action should take place in order to be meaningful. A deadline refers to a specific day and time.

**Recommendations** are meant to suggest good policies, good governance or good practices examples which could be used for inspiration. For instance, these can be projects that have already been implemented and that are considered successful. The aim of such recommendations is to encourage their mainstreaming (implementation at a wider scale) and transfer (implementation across more Member States and cities).

**Targeted stakeholders/governance level** is meant as the type of stakeholders or the level of governance (EU/ national/ local) to whom the action is addressed, and where the results and outcomes of an action should be implemented and used. To describe why a stakeholder/governance level should be involved means that the partnership evaluated the action and reached the conclusion that an action fits the purpose.

**Action Leader** is member of the UAEU Thematic Partnership who accepted to take the leading role in a certain group of members (of the Thematic Partnership) and guide them in the process of defining, drafting, developing and in the end implementing a specific action of this Action Plan.

**Timeline** means a graphical representation of a period of time, on which important events are marked.

## Definitions specific for the topic of the partnership

**Green infrastructure** means „a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features, designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services, while also enhancing biodiversity“. ([https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/green-infrastructure\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/green-infrastructure_en))

**Nature-based solutions** are actions to protect, sustainably manage, or restore natural ecosystems, that address societal challenges such as climate change, human health, food and water

security, and disaster risk reduction effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits. (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2022/05/19/what-you-need-to-know-about-nature-based-solutions-to-climate-change>)

**Urban green space** is a component of “green infrastructure” and can be defined as all urban land covered by vegetation of any kind. This covers vegetation on private and public grounds, irrespective of size and function, and can also include small water bodies such as ponds, lakes or streams (“blue spaces”). <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/344116/9789289052498-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

**Urban nature plan** is a strategic and operational document elaborated by local level in order to reverse environmental degradation in cities and drive nature-positive actions. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 mandates all cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants to develop ambitious Urban Nature Plans.



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Objectives of the Partnership

Europe is one of the most urbanised parts of the world, with an estimated 80+% of its population to live in urban areas by the middle of the 21st century. This brings about several unprecedented challenges to be dealt with in the years to come, including unsustainable consumption and production patterns, loss of biodiversity, pressure on ecosystems, pollution, natural and man-made disasters, climate change and its related risks, undermining the efforts to reduce poverty and move towards more sustainable development.

In this context, the Thematic Partnership on Greening Cities with a focus on green infrastructure in the urban areas was launched. The Partnership would be of high relevance to the problems and needs of cities of all sizes with regards to biodiversity preservation and adaptation to climate change. The Partnership would be aligned with the objectives of cities to provide higher well-being to citizens through cleaner air, better inclusiveness and more aesthetic environment.

The Greening Cities Partnership is coherent with numerous global and EU policy agendas such as the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Green Infrastructure Strategy, the Adaptation Strategy, the New European Bauhaus, as well as other initiatives with a potential for cross-fertilisation and exchange at policy level. The Action Plan of the Partnership builds on and complements the results of the previous Partnerships on Sustainable Use of Land and Nature-based Solutions, Air Quality and Climate Adaptation, as well as on the knowledge generated on green and blue infrastructure.

In this regard, the objective of the Partnership is to contribute to the development of an implementation framework for green infrastructure at local, regional/national and EU levels, including the provisions of Article no 8 from the proposal for a Nature Restoration Law, through:

- **ensuring knowledge** (methodologies, guidelines, indicators) for the deployment of concrete green infrastructure (GI) solutions at city level and national level;
- **strengthening the integration of green infrastructure** (GI) in the urban dimension of upcoming EU policies and in other sectoral policies;
- **increasing absorption of funding** for green infrastructure (GI) in an integrated manner.

### 1.1.1 Coordinator(-s) of the Partnership

Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration (RO)  
Nuovo Circondario Imolese (IT)

### 1.1.2 Members of the Partnership

Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets (HR) - **Action Leader**  
Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy (PL)  
Roma Capitale (IT)  
City of 's-Hertogenbosch (NL)  
City of Utrecht (NL) - **Action Leader**  
City of Tampere (FI)  
City of Ostrava (CZ)  
City of Roeselare (BE)  
City Council of Pontevedra (ES) - **Action Leader**

Lisbon Metropolitan Area (PT) - **Action Leader**  
Eurocities (BE) - **Action Leader**  
European Investment Bank (LU)  
Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (SI)  
EUKN – European Urban Knowledge Network EGTC (NL) - **Action Leader**  
Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO)  
Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV)  
Directorate-General for Employment, social affairs and inclusion (DG EMPL)  
Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW)  
Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA)  
Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (MARE)  
Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (EAC)  
Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI)  
Joint Research Centre (JRC)  
Brussels Environment (BE)  
Marshal's Office of the Masovian Voivodeship (PL)  
INCASÒL – Catalan Land Institute (ES)  
JPI Urban Europe/DUT Partnership (EU)

### **1.1.3 Working method, process and timeline of the Partnership in defining the Action Plan**

The Partnership was substantiated by an initial ex-ante assessment and report, which recommended a thematic focus on green and blue infrastructure as an effective and efficient approach to address climate and biodiversity challenges in cities, while also linking it to the concept of nature-based solutions. The partnership would also continue the work of the Sustainable Use of Land and Nature-based Solutions partnership without overlapping actions.

So far there have been nine partnership meetings – five in person linked with major European events and the rest online – that guided the work of the members.

The first physical meeting took place in Turin (IT) in Q1 2023. The purpose of the meeting was to initiate the elaboration of the Orientation Paper (the mandate of the partnership) and to get to know everyone, brainstorm a working method, discuss past UAEU experience, and agree on a general framework for partnership activities. Discussions continued beyond the actual event with an online workshop that helped identify members' thematic interests and possible working groups. For this purpose, an internal survey was elaborated.

The second physical meeting in Malmö (SE) in Q2 2023 continued with the stocktaking phase, namely identifying potential actions and discussing around those selected as relevant. The partnership was structured in four working groups for the following themes – indicators for GI, defining the demand/need for GI, guidelines for national and local level for the GI implementation of GI in relation with needs for nature restoration defined by NRL proposal, and funding GI. In the end of Malmö meeting a timeline for finalising the Scoping Fiches was proposed.

By the time of the third physical meeting in Brussels (BE) in Q4 2023, working groups had been already working on the Scoping Fiches for some time and the outcomes were presented. A timeline was set up for the Action Plan and the proposed survey addressed to all administrative levels (local and national/regional) as an initial consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

The fourth physical meeting took place in Zagreb (HR) in Q4 2023 in hybrid format. Its main goals were to finalise the questions for the proposed survey and to transition from Scoping Fiches to Action Plan. Each working group leader presented their final Scoping Fiche.

The fifth meeting took place in Pontevedra (ES) in Q2 2024. During the meeting the partners decided the form of the first Draft Action Plan of the Partnership.

These in-person meetings were interspersed with multiple online meetings dealing with more specific day-to-day activities.

In the end of March, an online preparatory CALM was organised in order to learn from the experience of other UAEU Partnerships.

### **1.1.4 Consultations carried out during the development of the Action Plan**

As per due process, the Action Plan draft will undergo public consultations in the period June-July 2024. Results will be reflected in the final version of the Action Plan.

Several intermediate consultation phases of varying scale were carried out during the writing of the Orientation Paper and Scoping Fiches which eventually fed into the Action Plan as well. Firstly, an internal Partnership survey was carried out in March 2023 with support from EUKN and JPI Urban Europe and Eurocities, which collected views, expectations and priorities from the Partners as a starting point for setting up the working groups.

Secondly, a broader survey was carried out in January 2024, addressed at European municipalities, regional authorities and Member States in preparation for drafting the Action Plan. The purpose of the survey was to gather information, including challenges and good practices, from national ministries and local authorities as to the status of legislation, policies, financing, and methodologies related to green infrastructure, to shape a set of actions that would be useful and relevant for the intended beneficiaries. The 193 answers received from all administrative levels highlighted a strong thematic interest and reconfirmed the relevance of the proposed actions.

## **1.2 Background information**

### **1.2.1 Background information used in the development of the Action Plan**

The ex-ante assessment identified a strong relevance and links with the following policies: UN Sustainable Development Goals; UN New Urban Agenda; European Green Deal; New Leipzig Charter; EU Biodiversity Strategy; EU Forest Strategy; EU Green Infrastructure Strategy; EU Climate Adaptation Strategy; EU Climate Law; European Climate Risk assessment (EEA), EU Zero Pollution Action Plan; EU Digital Strategy; New Bauhaus Initiative; and Territorial Agenda 2030.

Results of surveys were used by the action leaders to adapt the proposals in line with expectations and the needs of local and national/regional authorities, to use existing information and to avoid any possible overlapping with existing initiatives. Inputs from 193 local, regional and national authorities were collected in January and February 2024.

In the demand/need for green infrastructure working group - GRETA – Green infrastructure: Enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem services for territorial development (ESPON EGTC project) was analysed to identify the synergies. Also, different other initiatives from local and regional level were analysed and discussed (Flemish Climate Portal & climate adaptation tools).

In the study of indicator systems for the evaluation of urban nature plans: the European Commission's handbook 'Evaluating the impact of Nature-based Solutions' and in the Spanish document associated to a call for proposals for the renaturalisation of cities and "*Guía para la medición y seguimiento de indicadores para proyectos de renaturalización y resiliencia en ciudades españolas*" of Fundación Biodiversidad Ministry for Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge Ministry for Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge

Originally, the Greening Cities Partnership aimed at working with the COM, Member States, local and regional authorities to implement the NRL and to define "satisfactory levels" for green spaces and canopy cover after 2030. On 22 March 2024, however, the NRL, having passed through the trilogue phase of the inter-institutional legislative approval process, and having been approved by the European Parliament, has not been able to pass the final hurdle, with no qualified majority yet in favour at MS ministerial level. The now uncertain future of the NRL does not mean that many aspects of the NRL that are highly relevant for urban areas do not need to be addressed. The loss of green space in cities, towns, suburbs and peri-urban areas in Europe require urgent and effective action. Urban areas, and cities in particular, are at ever increasing risk from the impacts of climate change, including from excessive heat, and from flooding. At the same time, urban green space, which is being steadily lost, is essential for supporting biodiversity, helping to regulate air and water quality, and for the physical and mental well-being of citizens.

There is also an interrelation of GI and other UAEU priority topics, particularly of air quality, urban mobility, sustainable use of land and NBS and climate adaptation.

## Specific References

### Funding

Information about guidelines for PPP constructions was found in:

- Investing in nature-based solutions State-of-play and way forward for public and private financial measures in Europe © European Investment Bank, 2023.
- Circular Economy Action Plan (2015), Green Infrastructure Strategy (2013), Urban Agenda for the EU (i.e. Pact of Amsterdam, 2016), Europe 2020 Strategy (2010), Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (2008)
- World Economic Forum – Insight report – January 2022 - BiodiverCities by 2030: Transforming Cities' Relationship with Nature  
[https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_BiodiverCities\\_by\\_2030\\_2022.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_BiodiverCities_by_2030_2022.pdf)
- Network Nature – Factsheet - Financing NbS in municipalities: Exploring opportunities from municipal funding. Factsheet drafted by IUCN for NetworkNature (H2020 project No. 887396).
- For the survey questions about the use of funds for urban greening project the list of financing mechanism compiled in the Grow Green project was used [Working-Document Financing-NBS-in-cities.pdf \(growgreenproject.eu\)](#)
- The research project concerning funding of climate adaptation/green infrastructure investments – 'ClimateFit' gave us a scoping review of alternative financing models for NBS and maintenance costs for GI.

## 2 ACTIONS

### Overview table of actions

N°	Title	Short Description
1	<b>Need for green - Methodology for quantifying the demand for green infrastructure at local level</b>	This Action will provide a methodology to serve as a tool for municipalities in defining their demand/need for urban green infrastructure, which would serve a dual purpose: (1) fulfilling climate adaptation needs, while enhancing biodiversity needs (2) ensuring an evidence-based substantiation for green infrastructure.
2	<b>Indicator system for evaluating Urban Nature Plans</b>	This Action will be a tool that promotes the comparability across EU MS and local authorities to measure and monitor progress towards urban greening. It will include several thematic areas of assessment as well as a set of common mandatory and voluntary indicators and will set out the methodology for their measurement.

3	<b>Reaching meaningful urban greening targets</b>	This Action will focus on supporting the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 and helping us meet the obligations of Action 12 of the Global Biodiversity Framework - for steadily increasing the amount and quality of green space in towns and cities, and for increasing the overall use of green infrastructure at the local level. In two parts, this action will start by providing <b>guidelines</b> for national, regional and local authorities on how they can meet any urban greening targets they set - overcoming key challenges, learning from the good practices of others, providing tips and tricks on how to develop and implement their urban nature plans. The action will then make recommendations for, and promote, the establishing of an <b>EU wide legislative framework</b> on urban green space - to help stop the loss of green space and trees, and to promote their steady increase in the future.
4	<b>Strengthening structural funding for urban green infrastructure</b>	This Action consists of two parts. First it aims to recommend to the European Commission via a position paper the design of a formal provision in the future regulation of funds on national level by earmarking resources for investment in and maintenance of green infrastructures. The recommendation will be focused on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund of the next financial period of the EU (2028-2034). The second part of this Action aims for a more easily overview of available funding for green investments and maintenance via a one stop shop.
5	<b>Enhancing the use of innovative funding to enhance urban authorities to green cities</b>	This Action identifies and shares knowledge on good practices regarding innovative funding to enhance urban authorities' green infrastructure. It focusses on three main issues. Firstly, we identify good and worst practices that cities and private investors have had in public and private partnerships on green infrastructure projects. Secondly, we identify good



		and worst practices on the use of debt bases instruments such as green bonds and loans from the Natural Capital Financing Facility (NCF). Thirdly, we focus on long term financial constructions to finance green infrastructure projects and maintenance costs of green infrastructure.
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## Integration

All Actions deal with green infrastructure or nature-based solutions from different perspectives, either with regard to knowledge, funding or regulation, or a combination of the three. Together, those Actions will develop an ecosystem for green infrastructure implementation. If we look at the proposed Actions as a timeline for deployment of green infrastructure from pre-implementation to post-implementation, the proposed Actions behave as a streamlined process. In this regard, a strong correlation will be established in the development and in the implementation of the actions:

### **Action 1 – Need for green - Methodology for quantifying the demand for Green Infrastructure at local level:**

- Will be used as a base for implementation of the Action 3;
- Will substantiate the Action 4.

### **Action 2 - Indicator system for evaluating Urban Nature Plans**

- Is the base for Action 1;
- Will be used in the development and implementation of Action 3;
- Will substantiate the proposals of the Action 4 and Action 5.

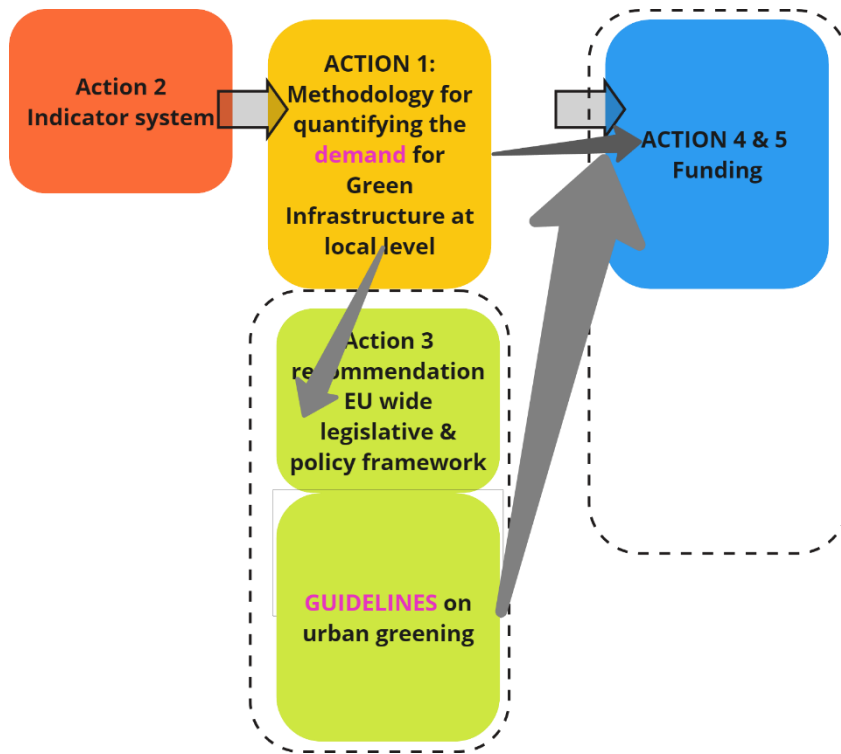
### **Action 3 - Reaching meaningful urban greening targets**

- Will contribute as a framework for Actions 4 and 5.

### **Action 4 - Strengthening structural funding for urban green infrastructure**

- Will contribute at the implementation of Action 3 and Action 5.

In conclusion, the Draft Action Plan is proposing 5 interconnected innovative Actions that will offer proposals for measuring, defining the need, implementing and maintenance, and funding possibilities.





## 2.1 Action N° 01 – Need for Green: Methodology for quantifying the demand for green infrastructure at local level

The methodology is meant to serve as an evidence-based substantiation tool in deploying green infrastructure, in an integrated manner, to be used in the urban planning process in existing urban areas/neighbourhoods or new urban developments.

Targeted stakeholders/governance level: Local Authorities

Deadline: 31/12/2025

Intermediary Deadline 1: Q2 2025 - First version

Intermediary Deadline 2: Q4 2025 - Final version

### 2.1.1 Which of the three pillars is this action contributing to?



**Better knowledge**

The Action contributes to the Better Knowledge pillar, but in more practical rather than theoretical terms. It was conceived not simply as a historic collection of existing knowledge or good practices, but as a forward-looking evidence-based assessment instrument for the implementation of green infrastructure at local level.

### 2.1.2 What is the specific problem?

Green infrastructure can be defined in two ways: (1) in a broader sense, as low-carbon infrastructure, which would include for instance renewable energy infrastructure and public transportation systems; or (2) in a narrower sense, as harnessing nature as an infrastructural system to solve urban and climatic challenges, which would include for example urban forestry and bio-retention. For the purpose of this action, by green infrastructure we refer to the second meaning of the term, which is also more in line with the traditional functions of urban green spaces, according to Climate adaptation strategy.

Before even attempting to respond to practical challenges related to improving urban green infrastructure for its multiple environmental, social and economic benefits, there is a need to accurately understand and describe its demand/need in quantitative terms so that any attempt to fill existing gaps is well-informed. Both new and restored urban green infrastructure should meet certain objective criteria to ensure broad coverage, quality and resilience, and which would also allow for cross-border comparisons for statistical purposes.

The methodology could be a useful tool for European municipalities in defining their demand/need for urban green infrastructure, which would serve a twofold purpose: (1) fulfilling climate adaptation needs, while enhancing biodiversity needs (2) effectively satisfying demand at municipal level on an evidence basis.

**Action 1**

### 2.1.3 How do existing EU policies/legislations/instruments contribute?

Since green infrastructure is such a broad topic, there are multiple interlinking policy documents at EU level relating to the proposed action, such as the EU Biodiversity strategy for 2030, the EU Green Infrastructure Strategy, the EU Climate Adaptation Strategy, and the New European Bauhaus.

The proposed methodology is also coherent with and complements a number of previous Urban Agenda for the EU partnerships, namely Sustainable Use of Land and Nature-based Solution, Air Quality and Climate Adaptation. The methodology would pick up specifically where the Sustainable Use of Land and Nature-based Solutions partnership left off, with (1) redefining the basis of city infrastructures and design in the context of climate change and (2) implementation of GI and NBS to address climate-related challenges.

The Action is meant to fill a knowledge gap by providing a methodology that would act as a tool for municipalities in defining their demand/need for urban green spaces.

EU Mission 100 climate neutral cities until 2030 – which will involve local authorities, citizens, businesses, investors as well as regional and national authorities to:

- Deliver 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030;
- Ensure that these cities act as experimentation and innovation hubs to enable all European cities to follow suit by 2050.

### 2.1.4 Which action is needed?

While a solid knowledge base already exists, access to it is unequal and dispersed, and significant improvements are possible for the deployment of concrete green and blue infrastructure solutions at city level, following tested methodologies.

The purpose of the Action is to establish a methodology for quantifying the demand for green infrastructure at local level. Using an integrated approach, the methodology could be applied in the urban planning process, for existing neighbourhoods, for entire city/urban areas, for urban regeneration projects or for new urban developments. It should be in line with the requirements deriving from EU laws and policies to further support the subsequent deployment of investments and projects in European cities.

More specifically, the action can contribute as follows to:

- Monitoring the link between green infrastructure, climate adaptation, biodiversity and ecosystem services;
- Contributing indirectly to enhancing community wellbeing and resilience;
- Implementing the European legislation and policies with regard to urban matters at local level;
- Elaborating urban nature plans as in the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy;
- Investigating failure of implementation of green infrastructure;
- Facilitating the assessment of the full scope of benefits provided by green infrastructure;

- Substantiating decisions and raising the planning capacity of local authorities.

## 2.1.5 How will the action be implemented?

Implementation will be done using ESPON targeted analysis in two phases, as follows:

- A. A **first phase** for stocktaking of methodologies and indicators already used at EU and international level within the Partnership. This consists of an inventory and analysis of existing relevant methodologies that could be adapted to fulfil the desired outcomes:
  - Taking into account existing resources and build on them, such as the JRC Publications Repository – Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services: An EU ecosystem assessment;
  - Capitalising on the results of the Sustainable Use of Land and Nature-based Solutions Partnership;
  - Using the UNECE Guidelines for developing national biodiversity monitoring systems;
  - Finding other examples of good practices.
  - Making use of provisions from the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy and Nature Restoration Law proposal.
- B. The **second phase** – elaboration of a methodology for quantifying the demand for green infrastructure at local level.

The Partners involved in the Action develop the project proposal and send it to ESPON EGCT by filling in a digital form. In their proposal they outline the issues through a focused ESPON analysis and must ensure that:

1. It takes into account their specific territorial context and policy needs;
2. Refers to one of the Thematic Action Plans (TAP) of the ESPON 2030 programme and reflects a wider European perspective.

If the proposal is selected, within one year, ESPON will provide:

1. Administrative and technical assistance for the elaboration of the Terms of Reference starting from the request of the stakeholders in accordance with the provisions of the ESPON Cooperation Program;
2. Permanent technical support from the ESPON team of experts to ensure the progress of the activity and the quality of the results;
3. A dedicated budget for financing a study developed by selected European experts (through public procurement procedures);
4. Participation in relevant ESPON events.

As of 29 March 2024, the stocktaking phase was completed and the ESPON application was sent, with contributions from all members of the Working Group.

## 2.1.6 What resources are needed?

The ESPON application was written by the Action Leader with the help of the Working Group members. The implementation of the Action will make use of external expertise, so no day-to-day activities are expected. If the application is accepted, several ad-hoc activities will be expected of the Working Group members, among which: securing

signatures for the cooperation agreement, drafting of the Terms of Reference and evaluation of tender offers. Funding is ensured through ESPON funds.

## **2.1.7 Are there any risks foreseen?**

Risks need to be split into two categories:

1. Development of the Action;
2. Implementation of the methodology.

As far as the former goes, there are no foreseen risks in terms of application, analysis and deliverables. Given the subject matter, profile of the applicants and Urban Agenda for the EU umbrella in conjunction with the thematic areas proposed by ESPON, there is high confidence that the application will be successful. ESPON is a well-established institution with a proven track record so there is also no risk on its behalf to not deliver the expected results.

As far as the latter goes, actual uptake of the methodology by local authorities is to a large extent beyond the control of the Partnership. The Action Leader and members will continue to promote the methodology beyond the scope of the Urban Agenda for the EU to the best of their ability and strive to maximum involvement of all actors, but actual implementation is left to local authorities.

## **2.1.8 Which members of the UAEU Partnership are involved in implementation of the action?**

### **Action Leaders**

1. Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, RO

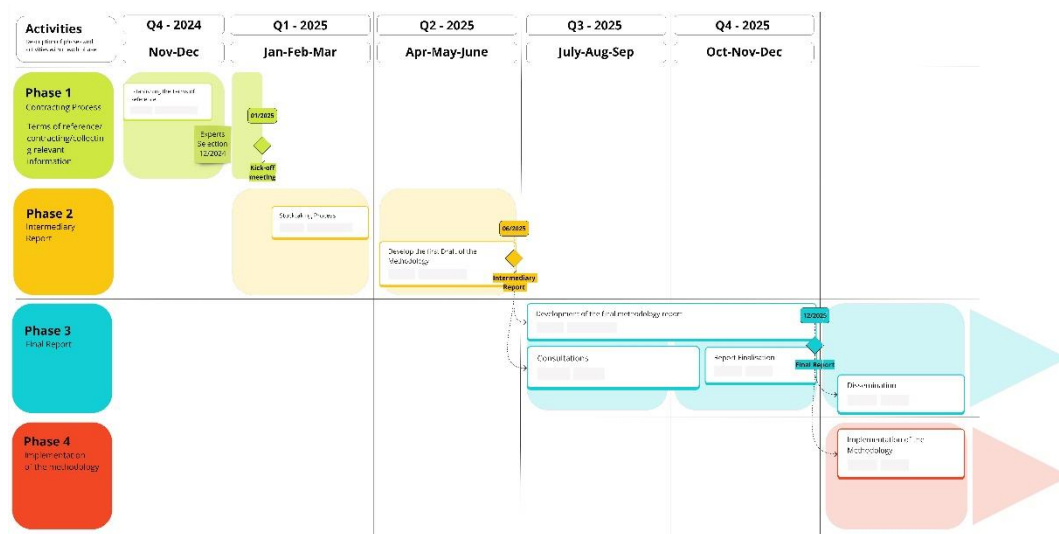
### **Contributors**

1. Nuovo Circondario Imolese, IT
2. Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, PL
3. Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets, HR
4. City of Tampere, FI
5. City of Roeselare, BE

### **Advisors**

1. Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO)
2. Joint Research Centre (JRC)

## 2.1.9 What is the timeline of the implementation?



## 2.1.10 Which outputs will be produced?

The expected output is a guide or handbook that would help quantify the demand/need for green infrastructure at local level, to be used as a substantiation tool/decision support tool in the urban planning process.

This approach might broaden and change as discussions with ESPON progress, and the proposed targeted analysis gets underway and new evidence or opportunities are revealed.

## 2.1.11 Identify potential EU activities/legislative proposals that may result in considerable spatial imbalances, related to this specific action?

As ideas in the Working Groups started to develop and branch out, the initial proposal on the methodology expanded as well both conceptually and spatially with newfound purpose and opportunities for its implementation. One such opportunity came with the proposal for a Nature Restoration Law, which went through its adoption process as the Partnership was working on its internal documents.

As such, while the proposed methodology can stand on its own as a substantiation tool for the deployment of green infrastructure by urban authorities, linking it to the provisions and requirements set by the Nature Restoration Law proposal seemed like a natural evolution. In this sense, the methodology can help bridge certain spatial gaps by substantiating where, why and how green infrastructure could be supplemented to improve living conditions. This would ensure not only the fulfilment of some abstract quantitative requirements at national level for monitoring purposes, but a real-world evidence-based implementation from which local communities would benefit directly, while also meeting national targets. Basis on the methodology, can be established the satisfactory level of green infrastructure as it is mentioned in the proposal for a NRL.

## 2.2 Action N° 02 – Indicator system for Urban Nature Plans

This Action aims to codevelop an **indicator system** that promotes comparability across EU Member States and local authorities to measure and monitor progress towards urban greening. It will encompass several thematic areas of assessment as well as a set of common mandatory and voluntary indicators, setting out a methodology for their measurement.

Targeted stakeholders/governance level: Local Authorities

Deadline: 31/12/2025

Intermediary Deadline 1: 31/03/2025 - First version

Intermediary Deadline 2: 30/10/2025 - Final version

### 2.2.1 Which of the three pillars is this action contributing to?



**Better knowledge Better regulation**

This Action contributes to the pillar of "Better Knowledge" in a 70%. In terms of "Better Knowledge", the Action provides a tool with which local authorities will be able to better understand the results and impact of their policies in favour of urban greening, across different dimensions of sustainable urban development, leveraging practices and successes of different European cities. The Action also contributes in terms of "Better Regulation" in a 30%, it will establish a common system of themes and indicators that support integrated assessment and harmonisation, thus contributing to having comparative information at European level.

### 2.2.2 What is the specific problem?

The EU is encouraging local authorities to play a more active role in favour of renaturation and biodiversity from an urban perspective as a tool to better adapt urban environments to climate change and its consequences.

Among the measures developed, the Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV) has developed a 'Guidance for cities to help prepare an Urban Greening Plan' (NB.: to avoid confusion with terminology used by the Green City Accord and the European Green Capital Award, the term Urban Greening Plan has been changed to "Urban Nature Plan", better reflecting the intended focus on urban biodiversity enhancement). This initiative is carried out within the framework of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which

mandates all cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants to develop ambitious Urban Nature Plans to reverse environmental degradation in cities and drive nature-positive actions.

Given the political competences at different levels on environment (EU level) and urban affairs (Member State level) and the fundamental role of cities in relation to urban planning and implementation and, thus, in the restoration of urban ecosystems, concrete multi-level governance actions are profoundly needed. Such actions can help urban authorities measure and monitor their progress in favour of biodiversity and urban nature restoration.

Despite the postponement on the final vote of the Nature Restoration Law in March 2024, the development of integrated Urban Nature Plans to protect, restore, and enhance urban ecosystems and biodiversity is a key ambition of the EU Green Deal, and an imperative aspect of Europe's transition towards a climate resilient future. This calls for evidence-based measuring and monitoring systems that can inform the implementation of such plans and advance comparability across EU Member States and cities.

### **2.2.3 How do existing EU policies/legislations/instruments contribute?**

This Action aims to strategically inform and support the implementation of Urban Nature Plans as called for by the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which defines them as “measures to create biodiverse and accessible urban forests, parks and gardens; urban farms; green roofs and walls; treelined streets; urban meadows; and urban hedges.” DG ENV, in partnership with Eurocities and ICLEI, has developed an interactive and iterative [Urban Nature Plans Guidance and Toolkit](#), identifying *Monitoring and Reporting Systems* as a key milestone towards successful implementation.

At present, there is no common set of indicators at the European level to monitor and report on the implementation of Urban Nature Plans, and, thus, to be able to accredit and compare the progress made by local authorities. This action endeavours to bridge this gap with an evidence-informed proposal for indicators and data on urban greening and ecosystem restoration actions, with a view to promoting standardisation and comparability across cities of different sizes and capacities in the European territory. With defragmented evidence and systematic mapping of the multiple benefits of Urban Nature Plans for different policy and societal sectors, political support for the Nature Restoration Law proposal might be increased.

It will be important to ensure coherence and coordination with the definitions and targets set by complementary regulations and policies such as the Green Infrastructure Strategy, the Climate Adaptation Strategy, the New European Bauhaus, and the proposal for the EU Soil Monitoring and Resilience Directive.

### **2.2.4 Which action is needed?**

The proposed Action consists of the development of an "Indicator system for evaluating Urban Nature Plans". A first approximation of the scope of this indicator system would include:

- Establishing a set of relevant thematic areas (inspired by the European Commission's handbook 'Evaluating the impact of Nature-based Solutions');
- Proposing a small number of common indicators under each of thematic area to measure and monitor the progress of local authorities in the implementation of



Urban Nature Plans, which reflect the targets proposed for "urban ecosystems" by the proposal for a Nature Restoration Law. In this regard, the technical and financial capacities of local entities, especially smaller municipalities, should be considered;

- Proposing a set of **voluntary indicators**, to be adapted to local contexts and needs;
- Where relevant and possible, indicators will be matched to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (sub-)targets and indicators, building on the work of the Horizon 2020 CONEXUS project and of the European Commission's NBS Task Forces as part of Network Nature. This linking exercise can support standardisation and comparability among cities, while also contributing to reporting against the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- Defining a **methodology** to carry out each indicator, highlighting potential challenges as well as capacity, data, and expertise needed.

Following the elaboration of the indicator system, a series of **complementary activities** are proposed in order to disseminate it and make it known to local authorities.

The elaboration of such a common indicator system at the European level can contribute to the successful **implementation of Urban Nature Plans** by local authorities under a common scheme favouring the harmonisation and comparability of results from data collection at local level. Comparability between different cities (of different sizes) and between EU regions can significantly inform the implementation of current and future policies related to the restoration and protection of urban ecosystems not only at local level, but also at Member State and EU level.

Lastly, this action contributes to demonstrating, with objective data, the benefits of urban nature for European citizens and societies, across multiple policy sectors and governance scales.

## 2.2.5 How will the action be implemented?

The Action will be implemented in three phases:

### Phase 1. Initial version of the indicators system

The following activities will be carried out during this phase:

- Review of the indicator systems;
- Analysis of survey results;
- Consultation with experts.

These activities will be implemented using an iterative methodology, including a literature review and grey literature, as well as by analysing survey results (based on responses from 43 cities). This will allow the development of the first proposal for a system of indicators for monitoring the Urban Nature Plan, taking into account proposals for thematic areas and mandatory and voluntary common indicators.

### Phase 2. Co-creation and consultation

The following activities will be carried out during this phase:

- Conducting 2 workshops with relevant stakeholders;
- Conducting semi-structured interviews with cities of different sizes and experts.



The activities carried out will allow for the enrichment and validation of the proposals for the system of indicators developed in Phase 1. The final product of this phase will be the second proposal for the system of indicators for monitoring the Urban Nature Plan and a methodological annex regarding the determination of indicators.

### **Phase 3. Communication and dissemination**

The following activities will be carried out during this phase:

- Organization of dissemination event aimed at building the capacity of cities to implement the indicators system and elevate the impact of the Action;
- Promotion of multimedia material aimed at dissemination of the indicator system.

Next step will be creating a common application to Eurostat and national statistical offices, with list of indicators as an amendment, for making our indicators with given by us methodology a common European standard of greening statistics on EU, national and local stage.

## **2.2.6 What resources are needed?**

For the implementation of the Action the following resources are needed:

For literature review, survey results analysis, interviews, workshop and developing the indicator system an important human resources contribution is needed. The work will be carried out with the partial contribution of the different members of the Partnership involved in the implementation of the Action. The contribution of external expertise is also considered in this estimation of human resources. The external expertise will contribute mainly to the definition of the methodologies for the measurement of the indicators. In addition, external expertise will be necessary in order to have technical contributions in the workshops planned for the development of the Action, as well as technical and physical logistical support for its development.

Funding would be necessary for the development of the Action to ensure its effective coordination and dynamization, as well as for the development of the different tasks foreseen:

- For the analysis and methodological descriptions/recommendations of the proposed indicators and type of data some technical expertise is needed;
- Two workshops will be organised, online or in physical meeting. In the case of physical workshops, it will be necessary to provide premises with the necessary equipment;
- The indicator system can be delivered as a simple document, but it is recommended to develop it on an online portal. In that case the indicator system must be digitalised and transformed into a user-friendly interactive platform/application;
- Hiring professional translators who will verify the texts in the Indicator System and the online course.

## **2.2.7 Are there any risks foreseen?**

Foreseen implementation risks at this stage:

- More limited capacity of small cities to be involved in the activities and thus of being represented (we can think of possible mitigation strategies, e.g. to target outreach to small cities as well). The implementation of the Action will depend

on the willingness and interest of cities to participate in the WG's activities, sharing their experiences and knowledge on UGP indicators. A risk could be having a low number of cities participating, outside the cities of the Greening Cities Partnership;

- Lack of involvement of national and regional authorities in supporting local and regional authorities;
- Issues related to language accessibility - both the documents being developed, and the planned meetings/workshops should take into account the issue of language barriers. The availability of planned activities will have an impact on the involvement of cities;
- Not enough willingness of active participation of Partners in preparing "indicator system for evaluating Urban Nature Plans", what should be an impulse for changes in project management (more compulsion for participant chosen by the Coordinator than looking for volunteers);
- Lack of involvement of representatives of Member States', in issues related to monitoring restoration targets – long implementation period of the Directive in individual Member States, lack of coordination at national level in the field of uniform monitoring of progress, and thus a problem with providing the necessary information to the Commission;
- Lack of support from UAEU.

Insufficient promotion of the activities carried out (dissemination event, multimedia materials, proposals for a system of indicators monitoring the municipal Nature Plan and a methodological annex on the determination of indicators), which will result in the fact that we will not reach all stakeholders.

## 2.2.8 Which members of the UAEU Partnership are involved in implementation of the action?

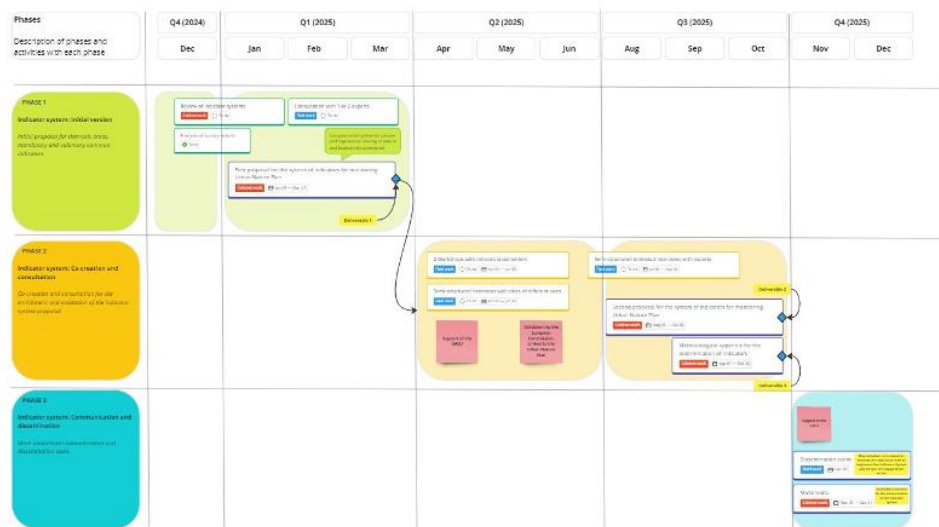
### Action Leaders

1. City Council of Pontevedra, ES,
2. European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN), NL

### Contributors

1. City of Tampere, FI
2. Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV), EU
3. Eurocities, BE
4. Joint Research Centre (JRC), EU
5. JPI Urban Europe/DUT Partnership, EU
6. Marshal's Office of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship, PL
7. Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, RO
8. City of 's-Hertogenbosch, NL, Partner, Contributor
9. INCASÒL - Catalan Land Institute, Contributor.
10. City of Roeselare, BE

## 2.2.9 What is the timeline of the implementation?



## 2.2.10 Which outputs will be produced?

The following outputs are foreseen during the implementation of the action:

### Intermediate outputs:

- **Handbook:** First proposal for the system of indicators for monitoring Urban Nature Plans | Deadline: 31/03/2025;
- **Workshops:** 2Xworkshops with relevant stakeholders | Deadline: 30/06/2024.

### Final outputs:

- **Handbook: Final version** for the system of indicators for monitoring Urban Nature Plans | Deadline: 30/10/2025;
- **Handbook: Methodological appendix** for the determination of indicators | Deadline: 30/10/2025;
- **Event: Dissemination action** to promote the indicator system among European cities (Event) | Deadline: 15/12/2025;
- **Video: Multimedia material** for the dissemination of the indicator system | Deadline: 15/12/2025.

## 2.2.11 Identify potential EU activities/legislative proposals that may result in considerable spatial imbalances, related to this specific action?

EU legislative initiatives and activities that relate to and may affect this action include:

- The **European Commission's initiative in relation to the [Urban Nature Platform](#)** and, in particular, the future Urban Nature Plan toolkit. The proposed Action generates synergies with this EU activity, as it provides a practical tool for monitoring and follow-up of Urban Nature Plans.
- The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the proposal for a **Nature Restoration Law** should be considered. The Action should include indicators to assess the quality of "urban ecosystems" related to urban green space, tree canopy cover and protected natural areas on public land.
- The proposal for an **EU Soil Monitoring and Resilience Law**: While it is still in discussion, it will have an impact on cities due to the following: Member States will have to designate soil districts and competent authority to monitor soil health and land take. The proposal lays down the soil descriptors and criteria for monitoring and assessing soil health, that could be considered by this Action.

## 2.3 Action N° 03 – Reaching meaningful urban greening targets

This Action is about supporting the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 and about helping us meet the obligations of Action 12 of the Global Biodiversity Framework for steadily increasing the amount and quality of green space in towns and cities, and for increasing the overall use of green infrastructure at the local level. In two parts, this Action will start by providing **guidelines** for national, regional and local authorities on how they can meet any urban greening targets they set – overcoming key challenges, learning from the good practices of others, providing tips and tricks on how to develop and implement their Urban Nature Plans. The Action will then make recommendations for, and promote, the establishing of an **EU wide legislative framework** on urban green space to help stop the loss of green space and trees, and to promote their steady increase in the future.

Targeted stakeholders/governance level: EU, National, Regional and Local Authorities

Deadline: 31/01/2026

### 2.3.1 Which of the three pillars is this action contributing to?

This Action contributes to both Better Knowledge – providing guidelines, exchanging knowledge on good practices (50%) – and for Better Regulation – recommending and promoting the establishment of an EU wide legislative framework for stopping the loss of urban green space and for steadily increasing it over time. (50%).



Better regulation



Better knowledge

### 2.3.2 What is the specific problem?

In May 2020, the EU published the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems. The Strategy called for an increase in urban green space and green infrastructure, and for all towns and cities to develop ambitious urban greening plans to support this. A proposal for a Nature Restoration Law (NRL) has been made, aimed at establishing binding targets to restore specific habitats and species, including urban ecosystems. Originally, the Greening Cities Partnership aimed at working with the COM, Member States, local and regional authorities to implement the NRL and to define “satisfactory levels” for green spaces and canopy cover after 2030. On 22 March 2024, however, having passed through the trilogue phase of the inter-institutional legislative approval process, and having been approved by the European Parliament, the NRL has thus far not been able to pass the final hurdle, with no qualified majority yet in favour at MS ministerial level. **The now uncertain future of the NRL, of course, does not mean that many aspects of the proposed law that are highly relevant for urban areas do not need to be addressed.** The loss of green space in cities, towns, suburbs and peri-urban areas in Europe requires urgent and effective action. Urban areas,

Action 3

and cities in particular, are at ever increasing risk from the impacts of climate change, including from excessive heat, and from flooding. At the same time, urban green space, which is being steadily lost, is essential for supporting biodiversity, helping to regulate air and water quality, and for the physical and mental well-being of citizens.

Therefore, the Partnership proposes, even with the potential rejection of the proposed Nature Restoration Law, to **support the implementation of the important urban objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy**, showing how local authorities can establish and move towards targets for urban green space, and to explore the possibilities that exist for a legislative framework for the promotion of increasing green infrastructure at city level.

This work will build on existing and approved strategies and European commitments, specifically the EU Biodiversity Strategy (2020) and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), adopted during the 15th meeting of the [Conference of the Parties \(COP 15\)](#). Target 12 of the GBF is particularly relevant, since its focus is to “Enhance Green Spaces and Urban Planning for Human Well-Being and Biodiversity”. The target states:

***“Significantly increase the area and quality, and connectivity of, access to, and benefits from green and blue spaces in urban and densely populated areas sustainably...by mainstreaming the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity...and ensure biodiversity-inclusive urban planning, enhancing native biodiversity, ecological connectivity and integrity, and improving human health and well-being and connection to nature, and contributing to inclusive and sustainable urbanization and to the provision of ecosystem functions and services.”***

#### **All EU MS have signed up to achieving this target.**

Once the needs of an urban area have been understood – in terms of green space (so how much is needed and where, and what types of green space) – an effective monitoring and evaluation system should be put in place, and crucially a local strategy and an implementation plan will be needed to achieve these needs.

*(Note: Action 1 and 2 of this partnership will deal with understanding and quantifying the needs from green space in a city, and what indicators can be established to track the development of green infrastructure. This work should enable a local authority to better understand what a good level of green space they should aim for to meet their needs in the future (akin to the proposal to set ‘satisfactory levels’ proposed in the NRL)*

One main barrier, in terms of achieving any urban green targets that have been set, is the lack of cohesive and integrated approaches to the implementation of greening plans and measures due to challenges of engaging wide range of stakeholders and aligning different needs, including co-creation practices, with wider local community, as well as ensuring cooperation between departments at different government levels. Disjointed actions, lack of knowledge, poor communication and coordination between different departments further obstruct the implementation of efficient solutions – in fact collaboration between stakeholders on a horizontal and vertical level is crucial. The engagement and support from diverse stakeholders, including local businesses and citizens, are often inadequate, highlighting a gap in innovative and effective strategies for their involvement. Existing regulatory policies and support on the use of local and national instruments for increasing greenspace at local level, both on municipal as well as privately owned land, are proving ineffective. Firstly, many local authorities are focused on other priorities, and the increasing of green space, with land as such a precious resource, is seen as a low priority. There remains a belief that you can’t grow green, only grey (i.e. you cannot decouple urban

development from loss of urban green – which is not true). The management of green spaces by private landowners is particularly challenging, where current regulations are struggling to oversee and enforce sustainable practices, such as limiting the ability to cut trees, sealing land for parking or other construction or a struggling to translate greening into value for private landowners. Many other challenges face local authorities keen to scale up the use of green infrastructure, even when targets have been established and funding has been secured – including finding experts such as ecologists and landscape architects, builders willing to undertake major green infrastructure developments even finding nurseries to be provided locally appropriate trees can be very challenging.

### **2.3.3 How do existing EU policies/legislations/ instruments contribute?**

Several existing EU policies and global agendas include the increase of urban green infrastructures as a component of their broader environmental and sustainability efforts. The proposed Action aligns with the EU Biodiversity strategy for 2030 and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, adopted by the UN. Both frameworks strongly align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely: SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land).

Other EU strategies also emphasise the strategic deployment of green and blue infrastructure for ecosystem services, climate adaptation, NBS for urban resilience and sustainability and biodiversity enhancement, such as the EU Green Infrastructure Strategy the Climate Adaptation Strategy and, more generally, the European Green Deal.

These global and EU frameworks are supported by the New Leipzig Charter, adopted under the German EU Council Presidency of 2020, which emphasises the role of the greening of cities through its "Green City" concept, as one of its central pillars (alongside the "Just City" and the "Productive City").

The Action is furthermore aligned with values promoted by New European Bauhaus, striving for sustainable design of urban areas, with high levels of social cohesion and quality of life. Opportunities for funding and knowledge exchange, such as the European Urban Initiative and Horizon Europe missions could support cities in reaching the objectives of this Action.

While existing EU policies and initiatives provide a solid framework for Action, their efficiency can vary based on the level of integration, coordination, and the actual deployment of resources at the local level. Concretely, the practical application of these mechanisms and their impact could be improved, particularly among small and medium-sized cities, which often have insufficient technical capacities and need improved access to funding and technical support; better communication on funding possibilities to stakeholders and coordination among the myriad of initiatives could enhance the absorption of funds. Engaging a broader range of stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society, and local communities, could also help improve the implementation of greening projects and sustainability of efforts. Furthermore, there is, in many Member States, no obligation to meet any form of greening targets – and with pressure for land at such a high level, for residential and commercial developments, green space invariably loses out and the policies supporting green infrastructure deployment count for very little. More support is needed to encourage and help local authorities to push for more green space, not less. On the one hand inspiring practices and guidance and one the other – some form of legislative / binding framework as a baseline from which to move forward.



Without this, targets are almost certain to continue not to be met and green space, providing cities with so much, will continue to be lost.

Several existing instruments and programmes support the Action; e.g. European Environment Agency (EEA) could contribute by providing impartial, high-quality information and analysis on the state of the environment and the effectiveness of environmental policies and measures. Copernicus Programme, specifically Copernicus Land Monitoring Service, provides data and tools for monitoring land use and land cover, including urban green spaces, which could be used as a tool for quantitative evaluation of existing and future levels of urban green space and tree canopy cover, and how they could benefit a given town or city.

The LIFE Programme is the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action, and among other projects, it supports those related to monitoring and evaluating ecosystems and green spaces. While not a policy or initiative directly, EUGIC (European Urban Green Infrastructure Conference) is a platform that brings together urban green infrastructure professionals, policymakers, and researchers to exchange knowledge and best practices; discussions held at events like EUGIC often include monitoring and evaluation methods for urban green spaces. Besides, optional there is an option for local communities to develop their own methodologies for monitoring progress and improvement of greening.

### **2.3.4 Which action is needed?**

The proposed course of Action is the development of a guiding framework that would aid in achieving any targets set in relation to urban green space in cities, towns and suburbs, and in a creation of a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the impact of greening measures prescribed by the objectives of NRL on the national and the level of the EU. To approach this task, a variety of stakeholders perspectives and experiences should be considered, examples of best practices and relevant case studies should be thoroughly researched, and conclusions and potentially applicable solutions should be proposed and discussed.

The Action will create the set of guidelines aimed at supporting the successful implementation of local relevant greening targets (established through Actions 1 and 2 of this Partnership) and help better coordination and involvement of governance bodies and stakeholders. A chosen format of guidelines presentation and dissemination is a Guidebook. The Guidebook will present a general overview of how to establish targets related to urban areas and cities and the implications they could have on urban planning, as well as provide information on expected timelines and linkages to other EU legislation, aiming to build knowledge and understanding among relevant stakeholders.

Addressing the local level of implementation, the attention will be put on enhancing horizontal coordination and integration of targets into local plans, collaboration among local departments to foster their synergistic co-action and avoid conflicting regulations, presentation of methods for getting local political entities onboard, and for getting support from the community, businesses, and the private sector. To better illustrate these approaches and share best practices, case study examples will be provided.

Further, the Guidebook will help with embedding of targets at the national level, by providing tools and mechanisms for collaboration between vertical levels of governance, incorporating local inputs and feedback, and ensuring synergy and applicability of regulations and measures within national context.



Regarding greening municipal-owned land, regulatory policies and non-legislative measures to increase urban green space and tree canopy cover on municipal-owned land will be presented through case study examples (e.g. regulations, policies and measures for new developments and existing developments, brownfield sites, empty buildings, street regeneration, etc.). Equally, the greening of urban privately owned land would be covered in the same level of detail (e.g. through national and local regulatory policies, non-legislative instruments, and measures to increase urban green space and tree canopy cover on privately owned land). Both instances would be supported and illustrated through case study examples, along with guidance through e.g. possible fiscal policies that could motivate the greening of privately owned land as well those to support the greening of municipal land. Guidelines for greening urban cultural heritage sites and buildings will be included in the Guidebook through examples of best practices and case studies utilizing the approach that successfully balances heritage conservation with the and greening objectives in question.

### **2.3.5 How will the action be implemented?**

Action 3 will build on two other Actions of the Partnership: Action 2, which will develop an indicator system for evaluating Urban Nature Plans, and Action 1, which will develop a methodology for quantifying the need and demand for green infrastructure. The first part of this Action will start from the point where a local authority had assessed and understood its need, and has, to some extent, set or understood its targets (akin to the idea of setting a satisfactory level as part of the proposal for a nature restoration law). Having provided guidelines on how to implement targets at the local level in practical terms, this Action will then explore the idea of establishing a legal basis at the national and EU level for setting and establishing targets at a later date – building on the idea of the Nature Restoration Law proposal, it will make recommendations and promote discussions on what and how best to move forwards and what options are available for promoting the use of targets at the local level.

In the first step this Action will research case studies, best practices, and potentially applicable solutions drawn from these the experience of the group and a wider research base. Supplementary surveys aimed at local and national/regional levels will be conducted to explore the existing knowledge and experiences, and special attention will be paid to stakeholders (states/regions/cities and institutions) who have expressed interest in participating in this Action and help understand how targets have successfully be implemented and what the driving factors were in their success (this research will help inform both the guidelines and the recommendations). Case studies of already implemented quantitative measures and targets which several cities included in their regulations will be considered and discussed, to draw conclusions and narrow down the focus on potentially relevant solutions for implementing targets and appropriate monitoring methodology. Following the gathering of inputs, the summary of results will be processed and workshopped with EC, along with expert involvement of other relevant stakeholders (e.g. JRC, EEA, etc.) where examples, visions, and relevant suggestions of survey participants/stakeholders will be presented

This step will also include analysis of and research of existing legislative local and national frameworks of urban greening targets, and of how implementation has been undertaken. Additional surveys and interviews with interested stakeholders will be conducted, along with supplementary research of relevant case studies and examples of best practices. Participants from the already conducted survey, especially those who presented compelling arguments and case studies or expressed particular interest in further collaboration, will be contacted for additional in-depth surveys and/or interviews. After gathering sufficient input, the first draft of the Guidebook will be prepared. The draft would then be shared with

selected experts for evaluation and feedback, after which it would undergo correction and refinement. Upon finalizing the Guidebook, dissemination and promotion to relevant stakeholders on different governance levels will be conducted through presentations, workshops and events with various stakeholders. Event(s) will be held to ensure knowledge transfer to local, regional and national level stakeholders, while continuous dissemination activities will take place to make the Action results accessible and usable.

For the next step, on developing ideas and discussion for an EU wide legal framework for moving towards urban greening targets, further research will be done (some will be undertaken simultaneously with the previous sub-Action), looking at examples where, at national level, no-net land take, or legal greening compensation for new developments exist - and looking at their implementation success. The research will be put together with ideas from all relevant stakeholders as to what options can work and what their obstacles are, to develop an in-depth discussion paper to be presented at a dedicated workshop. The outcomes of this will form the basis of a recommendation from the group for wider dissemination.

Members of the Partnership will actively participate in relevant events to promote the work of the Partnership. The following events have been identified as most relevant:

- World Habitat Day, 7 October 2024
- EWRC, Brussels, October 2024
- WUF12, Cairo, 4-8 November 2024
- Political meeting with EP, COM and MS, beginning 2025
- Ministerial PL2025, Warsaw, May 2025
- Cities Forum, June 2025
- Covenant of Mayors Annual Event.

### **2.3.6 What resources are needed?**

Throughout the implementation phase, members of the Partnership, along with stakeholders outside the Partnership, will be reached out to for their insights and contributions necessary for building the knowledge base and creating the framework. To effectively implement the Action, the involvement of external experts will be essential, necessitating financial support for some phases of the Action (e.g. workshops, expert meetings and consultations, etc.) Depending on the final form in which the results of the Action will be disseminated and communicated to stakeholders on EU and national/regional and local levels, resources for the organization of the different workshops, online platforms, publications, software, etc. may be needed.

### **2.3.7 Are there any risks foreseen?**

For its successful and well-timed realization, initial drafting and creation of guidelines requires timely and prompt input and collaboration of many involved parties, which is where issues with coordination of large number of stakeholders may occur. In feedback and refinement phase of the Action (final Guidebook development), similar issues could occur.

To reach meaningful urban greening targets, more stakeholders and involved parties will need to collaborate and provide timely inputs, suggestions and feedback. Creating targets for urban greening and establishing an EU wide legislative framework on urban green space

is a complex political process, as has been shown by the complexities around the NRL. For the Guidebook to be simultaneously uniformed and standardized enough to be used across the EU member states, they should be sufficiently flexible to encompass the specific national and local contexts. Therefore, it can be expected that obstacles and delays might occur, especially in earlier stages of the process, before the potential indicators (Action 2) and evaluation methodology (Action 1) are narrowed down to a point where they can be applied to all conditions and locations of concern.

### **2.3.8 Which members of the UAEU Partnership are involved in implementation of the action?**

#### **Action Leaders**

1. Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets, HR
2. Eurocities, EU
3. European Urban Knowledge Network European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EUKN EGTC), NL

#### **Contributors**

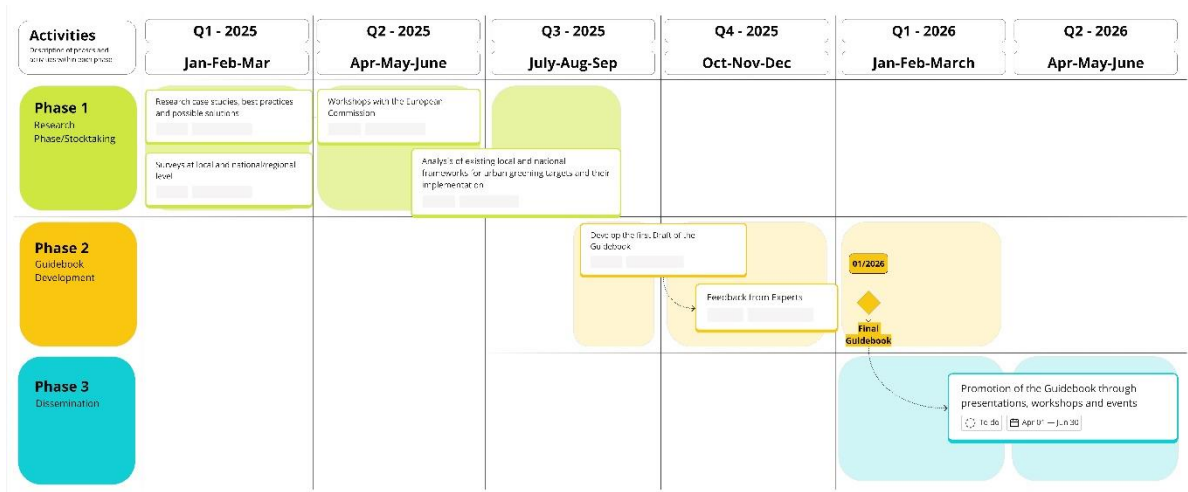
1. INCASÒL – Catalan Land Institute, ES
2. Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia, SI
3. Directorate-General for Environment, DG ENV
4. Marshal's Office of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship, PL

### **2.3.9 What is the timeline of the implementation?**

The work on this Action will start as soon as possible after the Action Plan of the Partnership is approved.

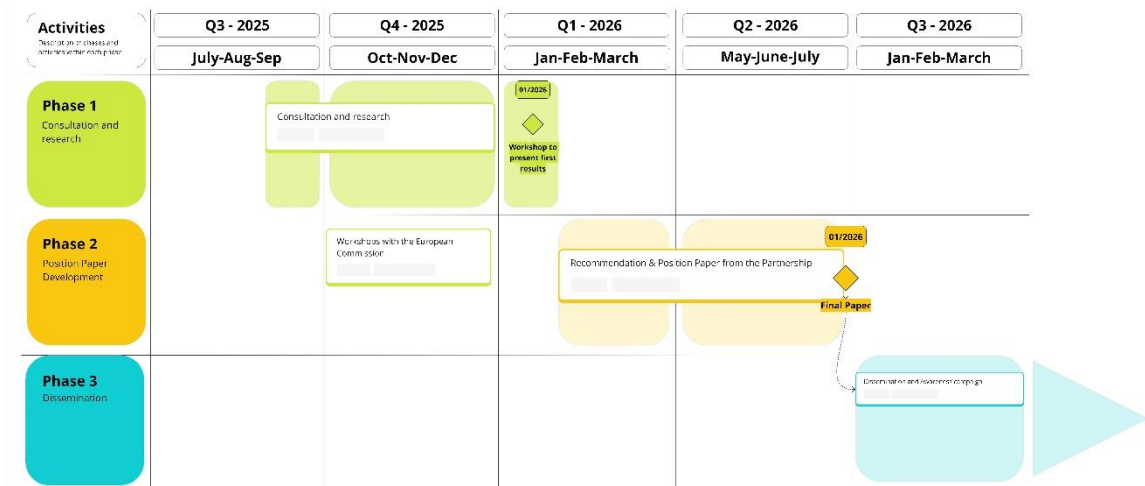
#### **Guidebook**

- Research case studies, best practices and possible solutions | Month 1-3;
- Surveys at local and national/regional level | Month 1-3;
- Workshops with EC | Month 4-6;
- Analysis of existing local and national frameworks for urban greening targets and their implementation | Month 6-8;
- Guidebook first draft | Month 8-11;
- Feedback from experts | Month 12;
- Final version Guidebook | Month 13;
- Promotion of the Guidebook through presentations, workshops and events | Month 14-18.



## Legislative framework

1. Consultation and research – Month 9-12;
2. Workshop to present first results – Month 13;
3. Recommendation & Position Paper from the Partnership – Month 14-18;
4. Dissemination and Awareness campaign – Month 18 until the end of the Partnership.



## 2.3.10 Which outputs will be produced?

The Action will be realized through series of interconnected outputs. First, further research of case studies and in-depth surveys with interested stakeholders will be held, which will then be collected and formed into a summary, outlining the guiding framework for defining the satisfactory levels and potential indicators. These inputs will be further processed through consultations and workshops involving EC and other expert stakeholders, eventually creating a set of indicators which could ultimately be applied in satisfactory levels evaluation methodology.

A workshop series will be held aimed for collecting input on innovative practices from participants from the already conducted survey. A final output of this Action will be a Guidebook with recommendations for meeting the needs for Greening Cities Partnership

(development of GI) at the national, regional, and local levels, focusing specifically on greening publicly owned land, privately owned land and cultural heritage sites and assets with relevant case studies overview. Final stakeholder event in form of webinar(s) will be organized in order to promote the Guidebook to relevant stakeholders, build capacities among national and local level actors and enable dissemination of results.

### **2.3.11 Territorial Impact Assessment**

The setting of satisfactory levels of green spaces and canopy coverage in cities will likely exhibit asymmetric territorial effects. The intensity of the problem, as well as the proposed measures can be expected to vary across the European territory. The needs and potentials for the development of urban green areas differ among cities and Member States, and so does the effectiveness of governance of urban ecosystems, which is why the required policy responses will require different levels of effort in different cities and national contexts. Furthermore, the nature of the Action is such that it will act unevenly across territories, as it specifically addresses places which will be designated as urban ecosystem areas. Urban areas with higher shares of urban green space, which are permitted an exemption from the obligation to achieve no net loss by 2030, will likely be affected differently, possibly leading to an unfair advantage in economic competitiveness. If the satisfactory levels are to be set at the Member State level or regional or mostly expected at local level to adequately address regional specificities, particular attention should be paid to possible advantages or disadvantages in terms of economic competitiveness of cities and regions which relatively stricter or more relaxed urban green space targets could influence. In light of these considerations and according to ESPON's TIA Necessity Check methodology, a need for Territorial Impact Assessment might arise during the Action implementation, as both the problem which it addresses, and the design of the Action are expected to have spatially uneven effects across EU territory.

### **2.3.12 Are you aware of any (Territorial) Impact Assessment already existing in relation to certain EU legislative activities, which is relevant for this specific action?**

No. Territorial Impact Assessment of the implementation of NRL in urban areas presently exists, but as a starting point, the TIA potentially conducted for this Action could be informed by the general Impact Assessment accompanying the proposal of the Nature Restoration Law.

### **2.3.13 Identify potential EU activities/legislative proposals that may result in considerable spatial imbalances, related to this specific action?**

Setting targets for greening infrastructures might result in spatial imbalances as cities with different geospatial characteristics, historic development patterns, planning systems and development directions have different opportunities to develop urban green spaces. Therefore, special attention should be put upon definition of indicators for monitoring progress at EU level.



## 2.4 Action N° 04 – Strengthening structural funding for urban green infrastructure

This Action consists of preparing a position paper with two recommendations. The first will be on the earmarking of funds for GI under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund of the next financial period of the EU (2028-2034). The second will be on the facilitation of access to information on funding opportunities for GI by developing a one-stop shop tool gathering information on possible funding sources.

Targeted stakeholders/governance level: European Commission (DG REGIO, DG ENV), Local, Regional and National Level of Governments, European Parliament Research Service

Deadline: 31/12/2024

Draft Position Paper: 09/2024

### 2.4.1 Which of the three pillars is this action contributing to?

**Better Funding (90%)** and **Better Knowledge (10%)**

The first objective of this action is to increase the availability of structural funds for green infrastructure by earmarking EU funds under Article 11 (on sustainable urban development) and the second objective is to facilitate access to information on EU funding opportunities.



**Better funding**



**Better knowledge**

### 2.4.2 What is the specific problem?

The climate emergency situation and loss of biodiversity means that we need to act in a general way at the urban level to increase the resilience of cities to climate change, to better adapt them to the negative effects of climate change, and to improve the quality of the urban natural environment and thus the quality of life of their inhabitants. These objectives can be achieved through the widespread use of GI in urban spaces. However, creation, developing and maintenance of the GI requires the provision of funding to increase the capacity of cities and functional urban areas (FUA) to implement such projects. This approach is based, inter alia, on the suggestion of the EEA to focus on green and blue infrastructure in an urban context and between cities and to integrate the perspective of cities of various sizes, as well as their natural surroundings.

GI includes planned green and blue spaces and other nature-based spatial solutions, implemented in cities and FUAs, that contribute to the conservation, enhancement and regeneration of nature, ecosystem services and processes in order to achieve the environmental, economic and social benefits of sustainable development (it is important to have a broad definition to allow Member States to fine-tune the needs for GI).

# Action 4



Despite the benefits of GI, financing such projects remains problematic. The survey regarding funding of GI filled in by nearly 150 cities shows that experienced barriers in finding financial support are insufficient funding, technical know-how, bureaucracy and capacity building. Also lack of structural funding for maintenance seems to be a problem. 45% of the cities experience “red tape in EU region funds” as a bottleneck in funding for GI. Only 15% of the cities have experience with PPP constructions, and three quarters of the cities is in need of a guidance on PPP constructions.

For European cities, the main sources of funding for GI are still EU-level funds, primarily the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and programmes managed directly by the EC (LIFE or Horizon Europe). In the 2021-2027 programming period, GI can be financed primarily from funds to promote sustainable urban development (SUD) that amount to EUR 28 billion in total. These resources come from 4 EU funds, but the majority, i.e. EUR 24.4 billion, is allocated through the ERDF. In relation to the Cohesion Policy objectives, elements related to SUD can be found in all policy objectives (PO), but the most relevant is PO5: Europe closer to citizens which fosters economic, social, and environmental sustainability and resilience in all types of territories. The second biggest contributor to SUD is PO2: Greener Europe. However, investments in GI are not explicitly mentioned in any of the PO, and this, together with the very broad range of SUD challenges, means that GI is not always a priority. Local authorities themselves often struggle with competing priorities and limited resources. This can result in economic development activities being prioritised over investment in GI.

Another problem is the fragmentation of information on funding opportunities. The information available is scattered across many websites, platforms and funding guides. This makes it very difficult for funding officers from local authorities to plan and adapt their strategies and needs in relation to the funding available. As a result, the funding process is very complex, bureaucratic and inefficient. Moreover, many cities in the EU, especially small and medium-sized ones, do not have sufficient administrative and technical know-how to prepare applications for project-based funding. There is also the language barrier (some calls for proposals are only available in English) and some funds require very specific technical information (such as risk assessments, environmental reports and analyses), which is very difficult for many cities to deliver.

### **2.4.3 How do existing EU policies/legislations/instruments contribute?**

The EAA and the Orientation Paper identified the EU Green Infrastructure Strategy and the Nature Restoration Law as EU frameworks regarding GI. The importance of GI is also acknowledged in the Forging a climate-resilient Europe - the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change and EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. These documents provide a strategic framework that should be better reflected in the structure of EU funding priorities. In this policy context, this Action seeks to strengthen structural funding for GI by earmarking EU funds under the article 11 provision (SUD, article 11 of Regulation (EC) No 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2010 on the ERDF and the CF). The Article 11 provision should directly address the thematic priorities identified in the EU Green Infrastructure Strategy and in the other strategic documents mentioned above. The explicit earmarking of the ERDF and CF should be accompanied by a solution to facilitate access to knowledge on EU funding opportunities for GI.



The Orientation Paper stated that in terms of Better Funding, the Partnership could develop new knowledge and strategies for increasing absorption of funding for GI in an integrated manner. Cities could also be supported in greening their budgets. This could be beneficial for the cities across Europe, while it could also feed into the COM's process of tailoring different financial instruments through place-based approaches, sensible to the needs of cities of different sizes. The same document stated that the NRL can serve as a guiding framework. However, even without the implementation of the NRL Regulation, the NRL's principles and measures on urban ecosystems and monitoring their recovery should be implemented as optimal solutions to ensure ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change and to improve the quality of the urban natural environment and thus the quality of life of city residents. In order to operationalise these principles and measures there is a strong need to create a friendly framework for the local level to implement them and for the national level to support municipalities and monitor their progress. As the ERDF continues to be the main source of funding for urban greening activities, this WG identified the need to enhance structural funding to GI with a formal recommendation to ensure that it appears explicitly in the future regulation on the ERDF and the CF of the next financial period of the EU (2028-2034) in connection with SUD (right now, the article 11 of Regulation 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the ERDF and the CF specifies that at least 8% of the ERDF resources at national level should be allocated to SUD).

We also wish to recommend the creation of a one-stop shop tool, e.g. within Portico, containing updated information on opportunities to obtain EU financial support for GI projects and its maintenance.

The Action consists of preparing a position paper which will contain two formal recommendations. The first one focuses on securing adequate funding exclusively for urban greening, i.e. the creation, development and maintenance of GI. Therefore, we will prepare the recommendation to the COM to ensure the design of a formal provision in the future regulation on the ERDF and the CF (or equivalent future funds) on national level by earmarking resources for investment in and maintenance of green infrastructures. The recommendation will be focused on the ERDF and the CF of the next financial period of the EU (2028-2034). It will be recommended that, at national level, 25% of the funds allocated to SUD under article 11 of the Regulation 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the ERDF and the CF, should be specifically earmarked for the creation, development and maintenance of GI.

The second recommendation, also to the COM, will focus on facilitating the access to information on EU funding opportunities for GI. Given the complexity of the EU financial support system, the number of programmes and instruments, it should be made easier for cities, especially small and medium-sized ones, to access knowledge about funding opportunities for both investment in GI and its maintenance. In this respect, the formal recommendation will include a well-reasoned proposition to prepare a one-stop shop tool or search engine for available EU funding opportunities for GI, e.g. as part of Portico.

Putting the position paper with these two recommendations on the political agenda will require building an alliance of partners with a strong position both within the EU structures and among European cities and their networks and expert communities. The proposed Action would help all levels of government, but particularly city authorities, to align their priorities on GI with the EU framework and thus improve their financing strategies for the investment and long-term maintenance needed to provide EU citizens with high quality GI.

Implementation of the recommendation set out in the Partnership's position paper and consequently the introduction of a clear earmarking of the ERDF for creating, developing

GI measures and its maintenance will be of great importance in boosting the greening of urban spaces, because, as already mentioned, EU funds are so far the main source of funding for urban greening projects. As for the second recommendation mapping all EU funding opportunities for GI will provide every urban authority with a clear view of funding universe and thus help to strategize their funding approaches. We expect that the implementation of both recommendations will generally increase the amount of green space in cities and its accessibility to residents. This will have a positive impact on the overall quality of life through climate change mitigation, reduced pollution and health benefits.

This Action would need the support of the COM and the Research Service of the European Parliament. The WG would have to organise a participation and engagement process with DG Regio (1 meeting per governance level) in order to draft a position paper with a clear recommendation to the COM to design a formal provision in the future regulation on ERDF and CF for the next financial period of the EU (2028-2034) in relation to SUD.

Putting the position paper on the political agenda will require building a broad coalition of partners both within the EU structures and among European cities or city associations. This means contacting potential partners and then meeting with them to explain the purpose of this action and the draft position paper, to gain their support and to involve them in the process of refining the document.

The refinement of the position paper will be a step-by-step process, and subsequent versions will be subject to consultation with key partners, so that their feedback will be a gradual and ongoing process. This will also increase their involvement, as they will be part of the process of refinement of the paper, rather than their role being limited to the promotion of the final version, over which they would have little influence.

In preparing the position paper, the members of the Working Group will need expert support: it will be necessary to have the assistance of a person with experience in drafting this type of paper; a person with a good knowledge of strategic documents and the NRL, who will help the group to propose the operationalisation of principles and indicators with the possible use of earmarked resources from the ERDF.

## 2.4.4 Which action is needed?

The Action consists of preparing a position paper which will contain two formal recommendations. The first one focuses on securing adequate funding exclusively for urban greening, i.e. the creation, development and maintenance of GI. Therefore, we will prepare the recommendation to the COM to ensure the design of a formal provision in the future regulation on the ERDF and the CF (or equivalent future funds) on national level by earmarking resources for investment in and maintenance of green infrastructures. The recommendation will be focused on the ERDF and the CF of the next financial period of the EU (2028-2034). It will be recommended that, at national level, **25% of the funds allocated to SUD** under article 11 of the Regulation 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the ERDF and the CF, should be specifically earmarked for the creation, development and maintenance of GI.

The second recommendation, also to the COM, will focus on facilitating the access to information on EU funding opportunities for GI. Given the complexity of the EU financial support system, the number of programmes and instruments, it should be made easier for cities, especially small and medium-sized ones, to access knowledge about funding opportunities for both investment in GI and its maintenance. In this respect, the formal

recommendation will include a well-reasoned proposition to prepare a one-stop shop tool or search engine for available EU funding opportunities for GI, e.g. as part of Portico.

Putting the position paper with these two recommendations on the political agenda will require building an alliance of partners with a strong position both within the EU structures and among European cities and their networks and expert communities.

The proposed Action would help all levels of government, but particularly city authorities, to align their priorities on GI with the EU framework and thus improve their financing strategies for the investment and long-term maintenance needed to provide EU citizens with high quality GI.

Implementation of the recommendation set out in the Partnership's position paper and consequently the introduction of a clear earmarking of the ERDF for creating, developing GI measures and its maintenance will be of great importance in boosting the greening of urban spaces, because, as already mentioned, EU funds are so far the main source of funding for urban greening projects. As for the second recommendation mapping all EU funding opportunities for GI will provide every urban authority with a clear view of funding universe and thus help to strategize their funding approaches. We expect that the implementation of both recommendations will generally increase the amount of green space in cities and its accessibility to residents. This will have a positive impact on the overall quality of life through climate change mitigation, reduced pollution and health benefits.

## **2.4.5 How will the action be implemented?**

This Action would need the support of the COM and the Research Service of the European Parliament. The WG would have to organise a participation and engagement process with DG Regio (1 meeting per governance level) in order to draft a position paper with a clear recommendation to the COM to design a formal provision in the future regulation on ERDF and CF for the next financial period of the EU (2028-2034) in relation to SUD.

Putting the position paper on the political agenda will require building a broad coalition of partners both within the EU structures and among European cities or city associations. This means contacting potential partners and then meeting with them to explain the purpose of this Action and the draft position paper, to gain their support and to involve them in the process of refining the document.

The refinement of the position paper will be a step-by-step process, and subsequent versions will be subject to consultation with key partners, so that their feedback will be a gradual and ongoing process. This will also increase their involvement, as they will be part of the process of refinement of the paper, rather than their role being limited to the promotion of the final version, over which they would have little influence.

In preparing the position paper, the members of the group will need expert support: it will be necessary to have the assistance of a person with experience in drafting this type of paper; a person with a good knowledge of strategic documents and the NRL, who will help the group to propose the operationalisation of principles and indicators with the possible use of earmarked resources from the ERDF.

## **2.4.6 What resources are needed?**

Partners within the EC, especially DG Regio, DG ENV.  
EUROCITIES

EUKN

Other associations and networks of European cities

External experts: One with experience in the area of drafting and promoting position papers. One having a specialist knowledge of strategic documents underlying the importance of green infrastructure and with a particular focus on operationalising the principles and indicators identified for greening of the cities.

## 2.4.7 Are there any risks foreseen?

1. Any earmarking in EU structural funding is a limitation to other policy areas and other policy objectives and priorities. To achieve the earmarking desired it is necessary a broad base of political support to interact and implement it in a very complex and diverse policy and political environment. The risk is to enlist the broad support of significant partners.
2. The recommendation must also take into account the current discussion on the future of cohesion policy, its priorities and possible changes to the earmarking mechanism.
3. Long term maintenance of green urban areas is mostly financed by municipalities itself (survey on funding). EU funding tends to focus on green infrastructure projects rather than maintenance. As a result, obtaining ERDF funding for maintenance of green urban areas will be more difficult. The risk will be that investments especially in the quality of green infrastructure in cities will slowly be undone again after several years.
4. With regard to the recommendation of a one-stop shop tool, it is crucial to ensure the institutional ownership for the tool (its implementation, maintenance and updating), e.g. by DG REGIO if the tool becomes part of Portico.

## 2.4.8 Which members of the UAEU Partnership are involved in implementation of the action?

Poland's Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy and the Action Leaders (City of Utrecht and Lisbon Metropolitan Area): drafting the position paper with two recommendations: the first one on EU structural funds and the second on one-stop shop for greening cities.

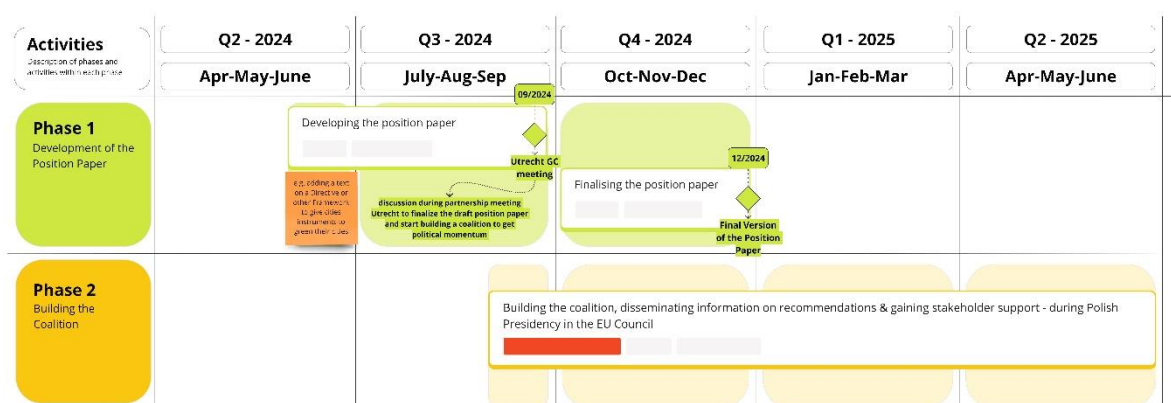
Working group members - Guidelines.

Eurocities and Action Leaders: optional adding a text on a Directive or other framework to give Cities instruments to green their cities (together with DG ENV, EUKN, ICLEI and Eurocities) starting in June 2024 (if the NRL is definitely 'off the table').

Action Leaders, Eurocities, EUKN: building a coalition (for funding green infrastructure) to get political momentum in the context of the Ministerial meeting on 20 and 21 May 2025 and further and any other r bringing Mayors 'on board". Also connecting with the Urban Envoy to bring this relevant stakeholder.

## 2.4.9 What is the timeline of the implementation?

- Developing the position paper, e.g. by adding a text on a Directive or other Framework to give cities instruments to green their cities (together with DG ENVI) | June – September 2024;
- Discussion during Partnership Meeting in Utrecht to finalize the draft position paper and start building a coalition to get political momentum | September 2024
- Final version of the position paper | December 2024;
- Building the coalition, disseminating information on recommendations during Polish Presidency in the EU Council, gaining stakeholder support | September 2024 - June 2025.



## 2.4.10 Which outputs will be produced?

Position paper with two recommendations to the COM:

1. To design of a formal provision for investment and maintenance of GI in the future regulation on the ERDF and the CEF for the next financial period of the EU (2028-2034) in connexion with SUD, i.e. the article 11 of Regulation 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the ERDF and the CF for the earmarking of at least 25% of the article 11 ERDF resources at national level to be allocated to GI (creation, developing, maintenance).
2. To create a one-stop-shop tool to facilitate the search for possible funding opportunities for green infrastructure; such a tool could be part of Portico.

**Final output** – Position paper with recommendations to the COM and coalition built to put the position paper on the political agenda.

**Intermediate outputs** – Draft policy brief with the inputs from stakeholder recommendations after participatory process (1 meeting per governance level).

## 2.4.11 Territorial Impact Assessment

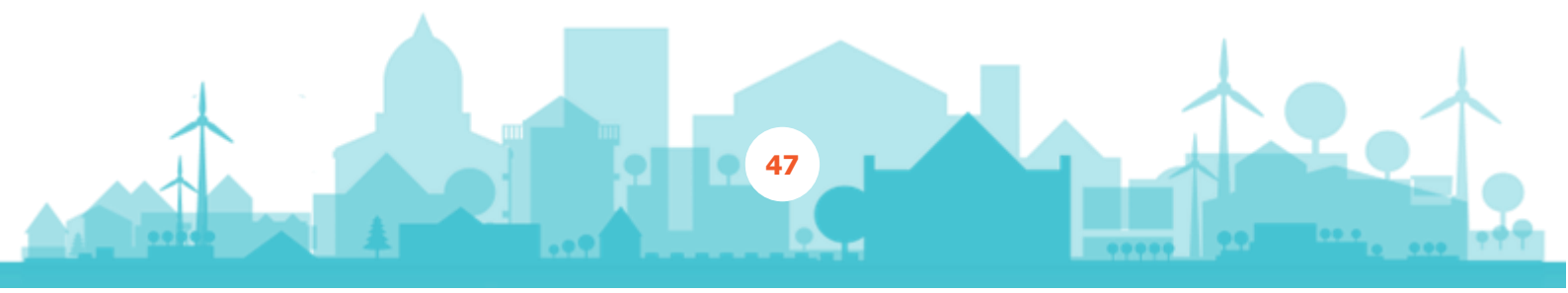
In the context of the first recommendation to the COM for future earmarking of at least 25% of the article 11 ERDF resources at national level to be allocated to GI the impacts should undergo Territorial Impact Assessment. If this action is successful and contributes

to future regulation on the ERDF and the CEF for the next financial period of the EU (2028-2034) impact on territories will be recognisable.

As for the second recommendation, i.e. the proposal for a one-stop-shop tool to facilitate the search for possible funding opportunities for GI, such assessment is not required.

### **2.4.12 Identify potential EU activities/legislative proposals that may result in considerable spatial imbalances, related to this specific action?**

The provision of dedicated ERDF funding for the creation and development of GI should lead to an increase of the green spaces in the cities. However, it is key to ensure not only an increase in green area calculated as a percentage of the city's surface area, but it is also important to ensure the accessibility of green spaces for residents, their quality in terms of preserving and enhancing biodiversity and the application of solutions mitigating the negative effects of climate change.





## 2.5 Action N° 05 – Enhancing the use of innovative funding by urban authorities to green cities

This Action identifies and shares knowledge on good practice in innovative financing of GI by urban authorities. It focuses on three main issues:

1. Identifying good and bad practices of cities and private investors in public-private partnerships for GI projects;
2. Identifying good and bad practices in the use of debt instruments such as green bonds and loans from the Natural Capital Financing Facility (NCFF);
3. Focusing on long-term financial engineering to finance GI projects and maintenance costs of GI.

Targeted stakeholders/governance level: European Commission DG Regio, EIB (EU Level), WG4 Funding/Multilevel (Local, Regional, National, EU) private investors.

Deadline: Draft version ready in September 2024

Final version ready in December 2024

### 2.5.1 Which of the three pillars is this action contributing to?

**Better Funding 50%** and **Better Knowledge 50%**

This Action aims to raise awareness on alternative ways of financing GI by giving examples of best and worst practices of urban authorities regarding innovative funding. With easily accessible information the partnership members can inspire 'smaller cities' to find alternative ways of funding the GI fitting to their needs.



**Better funding**



**Better knowledge**

### 2.5.2 What is the specific problem?

Although investments in GI (or NBS) are increasing, it remains crucial as “the UNEP State of Finance for Nature report (2021) estimates that current investment in NBS globally is approximately \$133 billion annually, but to properly tackle the climate change, the UNEP calls for a tripling of investment by 2030 and a quadrupling of investment in NBS by 2050”. Having said that, it is clear how private finance plays a crucial role as the public sector cannot, economically speaking, bear alone this achievement. On top of that, if we consider the limited city spending autonomy, we understand why investment of the private sector is essential to green our cities.



Public Private Partnership (hereafter PPP) can be a good way to help finance GI in Cities. However, our survey shows that establishing a PPP on GI projects has only been done by 15% of the almost 150 Cities who have taken the survey. The difficulty can come from the private sector, the public sector, or is common to both. Some critical issues are unique to a specific PPP construction, or local or national conditions and perceptions, others arise from the specific characteristics of NBS in the project or the type of GI project.

From a private perspective, entering a PPP on a green infrastructure project can be tricky because of an undefined value of the assets as well as calculating the expected profits. More generally, there is an objective problem in transforming the environmental and social value implemented by GI into monetary units. Moreover, it is harder to quantify the impact of GI with respect to the grey infrastructure considering that the former one tends to deploy its positive effects on several different levels (the so-called information failure in market terms) as well as to identify information on the performance of GI.

Another point to keep in mind with for instance more debt-based finance is the time it takes to achieve the return from the investment. In fact, investors on GI usually must wait five to ten years or even more before being able to see the benefits on their investment. Forestry investments usually require 30 years before producing returns and this feature makes these investments less attractive for the private sector who are looking for a shorter exit horizon.

Also, the private sector is often hesitant to investing in GI due to an uncertain regulatory environment or change in political direction of the city, which could hamper the business plan previously made.

Add to this the fact that investments in green infrastructure tend to be riskier and more unpredictable precisely because they are based on natural cycles, especially when compared with grey infrastructure, it is not difficult to see why GI projects could not be attractive to private investors.

From a public point of view, allowing the private sector to enter in the urban development poses a series of considerations as well.

The procedure through which a greening project is usually designed and realized is by a public tender procedure. This is a difficult way to establish a financial partnership, or any other long lasting financial construction and it mainly looks at economic efficiency rather than environmental and social benefits which are pivotal when it comes to NBS. Problems common to both sectors.

As already pointed out, involving private finance to realize green infrastructure projects require a very wide range of skills as well as the involvement of numerous stakeholders which makes these types of projects particularly difficult to implement due to sectorial silos and expertise. Also having on board several stakeholders and citizens entails numerous drawbacks such as dealing with different interests, understanding the functioning of the administration, and even going beyond the lack of political will. Moreover, the fact that so many stakeholders are involved increases the transaction costs of these projects.

Regarding long term costs of green infrastructures, like maintenance costs, it is important to state that:

- NBS and linked co-benefits (so called ecosystem service) are difficult to monetize in comparison to other sector (like the energy sector) even if some tools already exist;
- Return on investment is then difficult to argue only based on co-benefits generated by NBS especially for the private sector. The public sector is much more open to the arguments;
- Central question is on how to mainstream NBS through the private sector (private owner and investors) and how to find the enabling conditions/tools to do that and to convince them to invest with Urban Authorities in a win-win framework.

### **2.5.3 How do existing EU policies/legislations/ instruments contribute?**

The EAA and the Orientation Paper identified the EU Green Infrastructure Strategy and the Nature Restoration Law as EU frameworks regarding GI. These two strategic frameworks must be aligned with the EU funding priorities and to identify an integrated approach regarding funding implementation. In terms of Better Funding, the Partnership aims to enhance the knowledge and strategies for increasing absorption of private funding for GI in an integrated manner and showcase to cities how to be supported in greening their budgets.

Focusing on the contribution of EU policy framework it is necessary to identify and draft a twofold answer, namely, how the European Union copes with private finance for green infrastructure and how it deals with it<sup>1</sup>.

The Orientation Paper stated that in terms of Better Funding, the Partnership could develop new knowledge and strategies for increasing absorption of funding for GI in an integrated manner. Cities could also be supported in greening their budgets. On one hand, this could be beneficial for the members and other cities across Europe, while it could also feed into the European Commission's process of tailoring different financial instruments through place-based approaches, sensible to the needs of cities of different sizes. The proposed Action would help tackle a bottleneck identified in the Orientation Paper regarding difficulties of public authorities in the interaction with the private sector and with more complex financing mechanisms. The Orientation Paper stated also that this Partnership must be able to find financing solutions in support of greening cities and this Action proposed is one of the solutions that can help cities/urban authorities coping with the desired need to expend quality green infrastructures, involving the private sector and coping with a long-term approach to green infrastructures costs sustainability.

### **2.5.4 Which action is needed?**

Best and worst practices on alternative ways of funding the green infrastructure can guide urban authorities towards more use of innovative finances for GI projects and maintenance. To showcase examples, start discussions on common challenges perceived by several cities

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<sup>1</sup> As to the latter, even though the EU policy frameworks covers sufficiently well NBS, it must be noted that their implementation greatly depends on Member States as there is a lack of mandatory measures as well as of quantitative and measurable standards. And although in both the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) for the 2014-2020 period and the CEF (Connecting Europe Facility) regulation, PPPs are viewed as a potentially effective means of delivering infrastructure projects it is also highlighted how it is necessary to foresee that the public tender procedure is linked to value-for-money considerations rather than budgetary constraints. Any guidance should provide tools designed specifically for the formation of an institutionalized PPP for the creation of NBS projects with its own characteristics that it must have in light of the peculiarities highlighted above.

will help develop these alternative financial instruments and lower barriers for other Cities to test the waters. There is already some knowledge on this topic, but to enhance experiences with these instruments and to actively bring it to other Cities is key. Especially smaller Cities look up to bigger Cities and will follow their lead. We see a need to deepen the knowledge of Cities on three topics: public and private partnerships, alternative financial instruments like debt-based instruments from the banking sector and financial solutions for long term projects and maintenance. Action is needed in addressing the review of the experiences that Cities may have had in public and private partnerships on green infrastructures projects.

A recommendation before starting with the three topics above is to establish an interdepartmental group within your municipality called to work in all those projects dealing with green infrastructure. This will enhance urban finances and will effectively deal with the multi-sectoral approach required by GI to avoid the fragmentation that hinders their implementation. Such action would also streamline and simplify relations not only within the municipality but also and especially in relation to the private partner. The positive side of this solution is that it would have basically no direct cost.

Public Private Partnership: From a private perspective (but also for the public sector, albeit to a lesser extent), it is crucial to start producing more data and indicators about the positive economic effects stemming from embarking on NBS projects. Some steps have already been taken in this direction for instance, "by using value transfer function using willingness-to-pay measurements from the original valuation studies", but it is important to increase their dissemination. A guide containing best and worst practices and common lessons learned such as clear indicators regarding the output will make PPP more attractive and will help in encouraging more general use of this instrument.

All Cities struggle with the structural costs of maintenance and are seeking ways to lower costs and increase the quality of the green infrastructure. We see a need to showcase examples of best and worst practices which innovate on cost-efficiency of green infrastructure, and thus reduce the cost of maintenance. For doing that, we need to centralize data (as a reference framework) but also to innovate on business models for the maintenance of our green infrastructure. A business plan as a digital tool could also be used as an 'evaluation and decision tool'. Projects from Cities with demonstrative pilot sites could be used to convince other cities of the GI business plan.

The proposed Action would help tackle a bottleneck identified in the Orientation Paper regarding difficulties of public authorities in the interaction with the private sector and with more complex financing mechanisms.

We also need to target the private sector in this Action. Priority is to convince the private sector to work with urban authorities using arguments of low cost of investment and maintenance and to show the way on how to do it.

Opening a discussion and active dissemination of the output between big and small Cities, and in all EU languages will lower barriers to knowledge on these alternative ways of funding.

## **2.5.5 How will the action be implemented?**

We will first create a survey with the questions we want to ask divided by three topics: PPPs, forms of financial cooperation other than PPPs, and structural private finance to support the GI maintenance or long-term projects. The survey questions will be based on the aspects that emerged as critical from our research in relation to the themes.

We will identify Cities which have had experience with these issues and will create an excel file containing a list of organizations to contact both public and private. We will contact those Cities, sending out the survey and preferring, when possible, an online meeting as well.

At the end of this activity, we will have our intermediate output, which is a compilation of the different private finance mechanism used to realize GI projects and maintenance, and various experiences Cities have had in relation to the 3 themes.

Once collected we will proceed by analysing them and create a document based on the experiences that we have collected divided per thematic being able to distinguish between drivers and barriers.

Then, to disseminate the outcome of the Action we would need the support of the European Commission (DG Regio), the EIB/JASPERS and some external consultancy regarding innovative funding framework for urban authorities and regarding long term finance sustainability (including maintenance).

## 2.5.6 What resources are needed?

For scouting potential interesting Cities, for contacting and for taking the survey and filling in the template each WG will take part in contributing. It is estimated that the **external experts** would be needed from April until September 2024 divided over all WG Members.

Expertise from the EIB is needed on the debt-based instruments and ways to make this way of funding more easily accessible to Cities.

Expertise from a University or an Institution with a lot of experience on Alternative Finance for Greening Cities to help us analyse the bottlenecks perceived by Cities and suggest solutions to overcome them. The assistance will be needed in organizing an online meeting to talk to all stakeholders (cities, private financing partners and EIB) and analysing the outcome of the meeting. Defining bottlenecks and recommendations to make private finance more easily accessible to cities.

All WG partners and ICLEI, EUKN and UAI will be necessary to disseminate the outcome of this action.

External assistance will need to:

- Identify other market-based instruments that can be mobilised by urban authorities regarding green infrastructure financing if benchmark of Cities remains insufficient;
- Identify and characterise the business models used in the instruments identified
- Identify and characterise the business models and governance/collaborative; frameworks in a long-term approach to green infrastructures costs sustainability;
- Website expertise will be required to disseminate final outputs and results using a tailored strategy to reach Member States and Cities. ICLEI and other networks will also be used (like the Nature Network or the Urban Knowledge Network).

Final results will be disseminated through planned event by the EUKN.

EIB will have an active role in analysing private fundings instrument with and for the private sector.

## 2.5.7 Are there any risks foreseen?

There are three main risks which we can recognize in this action:

1. Risk is that this work **relies on the willingness of external parties** (private and public subjects that we will contact) to collaborate with our Working Group. Apart from voluntary cooperation, we have no other "levers" that can force them to cooperate. Their participation and sharing are therefore uncertain. This risk can be avoided mainly by personal contact with representatives of Cities and the private sector, explaining to them the situation and the need to share their experience and involvement.
2. **Low quality of the information** gathered from the Cities and private sector. The involvement of Cities and the private sector does not in itself have a positive impact on the final results. The important thing is to get the best possible result from the cooperation and to get all the necessary experience and information on partial failures from which lessons need to be learned. In particular, the appropriate selection of Cities to be approached for sharing and cooperation should avoid poor quality of the information provided. Pre-selecting suitable candidates and then interviewing them directly with specific questions relevant to the event.
3. **Weak cooperation with the private sector, especially with the EIB.** EIB is one of the key stakeholder and partner in this action, especially their knowledge, contacts and sources. If they are not actively involved in the Action, the Action may fail. It is therefore necessary to enter into direct contact, to trigger joint action and to become more cooperative with EIB.

## 2.5.8 Which members of the UAEU Partnership are involved in implementation of the action?

### Action Leaders

City of Utrecht, NL

Lisbon Metropolitan Area, PT

### Contributors

Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia, SI

City of Ostrava, CZ

Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO)

JPI Urban Europe/DUT Partnership, EU

Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy of the Republic of Poland, PL

Roma Capitale, IT

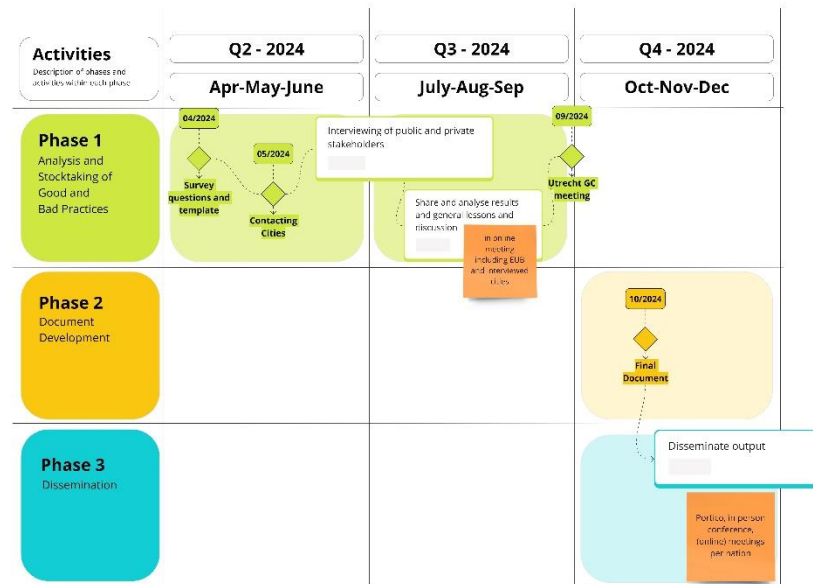
European Investment Bank, LV

Brussels Environment, BE

## 2.5.9 What is the timeline of the implementation?

- Survey questions and template (including analyses) | April 2024;
- Contacting cities | May 2024;
- Interviewing of public and private stakeholders and filling the template | June-August 2024;

- Share and analyse results and general lessons and discussion in online meeting including EUB and interviewed cities, | first half of September 2024;
- In person meeting of Partnership in Utrecht | 26 September 2024;
- Finalizing and translation of the document | October 2024;
- Disseminate output (Portico, in person conference, (online) meetings per nation) | November-December 2024.



## 2.5.10 Which outputs will be produced?

The output is an inspiration booklet on innovative funding for green infrastructure. The intermediary output: will be a compilation of all positive and negative experiences collected from Cities and private partners, and an evaluation of the process ongoing and the amount of quality answers as well as the ratio of representation of small and large Cities in responses gained. Later in the process, the focus will be on underrepresented size of Cities or areas of private finance with little examples.

The Working Group together with financial GI experts (EIB and University or other institution) will then analyse the responses and create the best, and the worst practices list of urban authorities' practices regarding private finance instruments used for green infrastructure projects & maintenance, and a document on innovative funding for green infrastructures as the final output. The inspiration booklet will deal with three topics:

- A first one addressing the review of the experiences that Cities may have had in public and private partnerships on NBS projects,
- a second one regarding other private finance instruments and
- a third one addressing green infrastructures projects with a long-term financial need including maintenance costs.

The exact output can be either a PDF file which will be published on Portico, for example, or a web page, which is more demanding in terms of financial and human resources. We will then hold an online conference to promote the result of the survey. The first one will be with the subjects we had contact with. The next conference to disseminate the result will be decided later within the partnership.

Finally, any member of the Working Group will disseminate the results within their country in order to reach as many Cities as possible, especially medium and small ones.



# 3 CONTRIBUTION OF THE ACTION PLAN TO EU COMMITMENTS AND GLOBAL FRAMEWORKS

## 3.1 European dimension

### 3.1.1 Cross-cutting issues

The complexity of urban challenges requires integrating different policy aspects to avoid contradictory consequences and make interventions in Urban Areas more effective (Pact of Amsterdam clause 12).

Cross-cutting Issues represent key aspects to be considered in the overall work of the Urban Agenda for the EU and its Partnerships. Each Partnership shall therefore consider the relevance of the Cross-cutting Issues (Gijon Agreement clause 5).

The Cross-cutting issues are:

- a) Promoting urban policy for the common good, inclusiveness, accessibility, security and equality.
- b) Enhancing integrated and innovative approaches, notably through financing and in correlation to the green, digital and just transitions.
- c) Supporting effective urban governance, participation, and co-creation.
- d) Promoting multi-level governance and cooperation across administrative boundaries.
- e) Harmonising measures at different spatial levels and implementing place-based policies and strategies.
- f) Supporting sound and strategic sustainable urban planning, and balanced territorial development.
- g) Contributing to the acceleration of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda SDGs, the New Urban Agenda and Habitat III principles.

	Action1	Action2	Action 3	Action 4	Action 5
a. Promoting urban policy for the common good, inclusiveness, accessibility, security and equality.	X	X	x	x	
b. Enhancing integrated and innovative approaches, notably through financing and in			x	x	x



correlation to the green, digital and just transitions.					
c. Supporting effective urban governance, participation, and co-creation.	X	X	x	x	x
d. Promoting multi-level governance and cooperation across administrative boundaries.	X	X	x	x	x
e. Harmonising measures at different spatial levels and implementing place-based policies and strategies.	X	X	x		x
f. Supporting sound and strategic sustainable urban planning, and balanced territorial development.	X	X	x		
g. Contributing to the acceleration of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda SDGs, the New Urban Agenda and Habitat III principles.	X	X	x	x	x

### 3.1.2 Link to the New Leipzig Charter

The New Leipzig Charter (adopted on 30 November 2020 under German Presidency of the Council of the European Union) provides a key policy framework document for sustainable urban development in Europe. The Charter highlights that cities need to establish integrated and sustainable urban development strategies and ensure their implementation for the city as a whole, from its functional areas to its neighbourhoods.

The document is strongly aligned with the Cohesion Policy and its framework for sustainable urban development. Member States agreed to implement the Charter in their national or regional urban policies. The New Leipzig Charter is also accompanied by an Implementing document about the Urban Agenda for the EU.

Source: New Leipzig Charter- The transformative power of cities for the common good (2020). [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/whats-new/newsroom/12-08-2020-new-leipzig-charter-the-transformative-power-of-cities-for-the-common-good\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/whats-new/newsroom/12-08-2020-new-leipzig-charter-the-transformative-power-of-cities-for-the-common-good_en) (Accessed: February 16, 2024).

[https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/sites/default/files/2022-10/new\\_leipzig\\_charter\\_en.pdf](https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/sites/default/files/2022-10/new_leipzig_charter_en.pdf)

The Action Plan of the Greening Cities Partnership meticulously aligns with the principles and aspirations of the New Leipzig Charter, marking a significant step toward realizing sustainable urban development in Europe. By advocating for the integration of green infrastructure within urban landscapes, the Action Plan not only adheres to but also champions the Charter's vision of a "green city." It emphasizes the creation of urban environments where nature and humanity thrive in harmony, thereby directly contributing to the Charter's goal of sustainable urban development strategies that benefit the entire city and its diverse neighbourhoods.

Moreover, the Action Plan resonates with the "just city" dimension of the New Leipzig Charter. It seeks to ensure equitable access to green spaces, fostering social cohesion and enhancing the well-being of all citizens, irrespective of their socio-economic status. By prioritizing methodologies for quantifying the demand for green infrastructure and enhancing funding mechanisms, the Action Plan aims to address environmental justice and ensure that the benefits of urban greening are universally accessible.

In terms of fostering a "productive city," the Action Plan introduces a legislative framework and innovative funding strategies that encourage the integration of nature-based solutions into urban economies. These measures not only enhance the city's aesthetic and environmental standards but also stimulate economic growth by creating green jobs and attracting investment in sustainable projects.

Digitalization, although not explicitly mentioned, is inherently supported through the Action Plan's emphasis on indicator systems for evaluating urban nature plans. These systems rely on data collection and analysis, showcasing how digital tools and technologies can play a pivotal role in monitoring and managing urban green spaces efficiently.

The Action Plan's alignment with the New Leipzig Charter underscores its commitment to a holistic approach to urban development. By addressing the charter's dimensions of the just, green, and productive city, the Action Plan fortifies the EU's urban agenda, providing a concrete framework for Member States to incorporate these principles into their national and regional policies.

## 3.2 Global (International) dimension

### 3.2.1 New Urban Agenda (Habitat III)

The New Urban Agenda was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador, on 20 October 2016. It was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly at its sixty-eighth plenary meeting of the seventy-first session on 23 December 2016.

The New Urban Agenda represents a shared vision for a better and more sustainable future. If well-planned and well-managed, urbanization can be a powerful tool for sustainable development for both developing and developed countries.

Source: *The New Urban Agenda* (2016). <https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/> (Accessed: February 16, 2024).

The New Urban Agenda (Habitat III) and the UAEU are interlinked instruments at global and macroregional levels which foster a shared approach to sustainable urban development.

The core of the NUA is its Implementation Plan, which is divided into two sections:

- A. Transformative Commitments (*NUA paragraphs 23 to 80*); and
- B. Effective Implementation (*NUA paragraphs 81 to 160*).

#### A. Transformative Commitments

The UAEU contributes to the NUA Transformative Commitments for Sustainable Urban Development. The Transformative Commitments are grouped under the following three categories:

- Sustainable urban development for social inclusion and ending poverty (NUA paragraphs 25-42); and
- Sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all (NUA paragraphs 43-62); and
- Environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development (NUA paragraphs 63-80).

#### B. Effective Implementation

The NUA outlines five main pillars: (1) national urban policies, (2) urban legislation and regulations, (3) urban planning and design, (4) local economy and municipal finance, and (5) local implementation. These pillars are laid out across the following three sub-sections:

- Building the Urban Governance Structure: Establishing a Supportive Framework (NUA paragraphs 85-92)
- Planning and Managing Urban Spatial Development (NUA paragraphs 93-125)
- Means of Implementation (NUA paragraphs 126-160)

Source: *Review of the contributions of the Urban Agenda for the EU to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda* (2021). <https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/sites/default/files/2022-12/Review%20of%20the%20UAEU%20contributions%20to%20the%20NUA%20-%20Final%20report.pdf> (Accessed: February 16, 2024).

<https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/>

The Greening Cities Partnership Action Plan contributes to the New Urban Agenda (NUA) adopted at Habitat III. Through its focused approach on greening cities, the Plan embodies a global vision for sustainable urban development, aligning with and actively supporting the NUA's transformative commitments and pillars of effective implementation.

## A. Transformative Commitments

- **Sustainable Urban Development for Social Inclusion and Ending Poverty:** The Action Plan directly addresses social inclusion by promoting equitable access to green spaces, thereby contributing to the eradication of urban poverty. By enhancing urban ecosystems, the Plan aims to improve public health and well-being for all city dwellers, reducing inequalities.
- **Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Prosperity and Opportunities for All:** The initiatives within the Plan, particularly around innovative funding and legislative frameworks for green infrastructure, are designed to spur urban prosperity. They foster an environment ripe for economic opportunities, driving forward the goal of inclusive growth within urban settings.
- **Environmentally Sustainable and Resilient Urban Development:** Central to the Action Plan is its focus on implementing nature-based solutions and green infrastructure, which are critical for achieving environmental sustainability and resilience in urban areas. This aligns with the NUA's vision for cities that can withstand and adapt to environmental challenges.

## B. Effective Implementation

The Action Plan contributes to the NUA's pillars of effective implementation through:

- **National Urban Policies:** By recommending a legislative framework for green infrastructure, the Plan supports the creation of national urban policies that prioritize sustainability.
- **Urban Legislation and Regulations:** The proposed Actions for developing guidelines for green infrastructure policies at all levels of government contribute to strengthening urban legislation and regulations.
- **Urban Planning and Design:** The methodology for quantifying the demand for green infrastructure, central to the Action Plan, facilitates informed and sustainable urban planning and design, ensuring developments are responsive to the needs of urban populations. Furthermore, Action 3's commitment to providing comprehensive guidelines for national, regional, and local authorities on implementing green infrastructure policies underpins the principle of integrated urban planning. These guidelines aim to ensure that green infrastructure is seamlessly incorporated into urban landscapes, fostering more resilient and sustainable cities in alignment with the NUA's vision.
- **Local Economy and Municipal Finance:** Through advocating for enhanced structural funding and innovative financing models, the Action Plan addresses the pillar of local economy and municipal finance, underlining the importance of financial sustainability in urban greening efforts.
- **Local Implementation:** Enhancing local implementation capacities is crucial for the realization of the NUA's objectives. The Action Plan, through its focus on identifying best practices and promoting innovative funding models, directly supports this goal. Additionally, Action 3 plays a pivotal role by offering clear guidelines for the implementation of green infrastructure policies across different government levels. This ensures that urban greening efforts are not just visionary but actionable at the ground level. Moreover, the inclusion of Action 2, which

develops a set of indicators for evaluating urban nature plans, is instrumental in this regard. These indicators provide Cities with the tools to measure and monitor their progress towards urban nature restoration, ensuring that efforts are not only implemented but are also effective and aligned with the NUA's transformative commitments and implementation pillars.

### **3.2.2 The Sustainable Developments Goals of the UN**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. Central in the document are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Source: THE 17 GOALS. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (Accessed: February 16, 2024).

The Greening Cities Partnership Action Plan, strategically aligns with several of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), offering a robust framework for advancing sustainable urban development and contributing to global objectives for a sustainable future.

#### **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities**

At the heart of the Action Plan is its direct contribution to SDG 11, which aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Through promoting the development and integration of green infrastructure, the Action Plan enhances urban biodiversity, reduces pollution, and improves the quality of life for city dwellers.

#### **SDG 13: Climate Action**

The Action Plan also contributes significantly to SDG 13 by advocating for the implementation of green infrastructure as a means to combat climate change. Nature-based solutions inherent in the Plan help to increase urban greenery, which in turn enhances carbon sequestration, reduces heat island effects, and supports adaptation and mitigation strategies against climate change impacts.

#### **SDG 15: Life on Land**

By focusing on the restoration and preservation of urban biodiversity through green infrastructure, the Action Plan aligns with SDG 15. Actions aimed at developing urban green spaces not only help to protect and promote urban biodiversity but also connect habitats, support species, and maintain ecosystem services, contributing to the conservation of terrestrial ecosystems.

#### **SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals**

The collaborative nature of the Action Plan, involving multiple stakeholders at various governance levels, embodies the spirit of SDG 17. By fostering partnerships between the EU, national, regional, and local authorities, as well as private stakeholders, the Plan exemplifies how collaborative efforts are essential for achieving sustainable development goals.

Additionally, the Action Plan indirectly supports other SDGs through its holistic approach to urban greening:

- **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being** by improving air quality and providing green spaces for recreation and mental health.
- **SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation** through nature-based solutions that contribute to water management and purification.
- **SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy** by potentially integrating green infrastructure with renewable energy sources.
- **SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure** by encouraging innovative approaches to green infrastructure and sustainable urban development.

In summary, the Action Plan represents a comprehensive approach to addressing critical global challenges identified in the SDGs. Through its focus on sustainable urban greening, the Plan not only advances specific goals related to sustainability, climate, and biodiversity but also fosters health, well-being, and partnerships, showcasing a model for integrated, sustainable urban development that can inspire actions globally.



### 3.2.3 The Paris Agreement adopted at COP21

The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France, on 12 December 2015. Its overarching goal is to hold 'the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels' and pursue efforts 'to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.'

Since 2020, countries have been submitting their national climate action plans, known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs). Each successive NDC is meant to reflect an increasingly higher degree of ambition compared to the previous version.

Source: The Paris Agreement (2015). What is the Paris agreement? <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement> (Accessed: February 16, 2024).

The Action Plan is intrinsically aligned with the goals of the Paris Agreement adopted at COP21. By focusing on the integration of green infrastructure and nature-based solutions within urban settings, the Action Plan contributes significantly to the global efforts to combat climate change and limit global warming.



## **Mitigating Climate Change**

The Action Plan's initiatives directly support the mitigation of climate change by promoting urban greening and the development of green infrastructure. Trees and green spaces play a crucial role in absorbing CO<sub>2</sub>, thereby reducing the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. This natural form of carbon sequestration is vital for keeping global temperature rise well below 2°C, as targeted by the Paris Agreement.

## **Adapting to Climate Impacts**

Urban green infrastructure enhances cities' resilience to climate change impacts, such as heatwaves, flooding, and increased urban heat island effects. By increasing urban biodiversity and implementing nature-based solutions, the Action Plan helps cities adapt to the adverse effects of climate change, making urban areas more liveable and resilient. This aligns with the Paris Agreement's emphasis on enhancing adaptive capacities and reducing vulnerability to climate change.

## **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)**

The Action Plan supports the implementation of NDCs by providing a framework for local and regional authorities to incorporate urban greening into their climate action plans. Through the development of methodologies for quantifying the demand for green infrastructure, the development of specific indicators and enhancing funding mechanisms, the Action Plan ensures that Cities can contribute effectively to their national climate targets. This iterative improvement of urban strategies for green infrastructure contributes to the ambition of progressively increasing NDCs over time.

## **Promoting Sustainable Development**

While addressing climate change, the Action Plan also promotes sustainable urban development. By integrating economic, social, and environmental considerations, the initiatives within the Plan support the transition to low-carbon, sustainable cities. This multifaceted approach not only addresses the immediate goals of the Paris Agreement but also ensures long-term sustainability and improved quality of life for urban populations.

## **Fostering International Collaboration**

The Action Plan embodies the Paris Agreement's call for global cooperation in the fight against climate change. By sharing knowledge, best practices, and innovative solutions for urban greening across EU member states and beyond, the Plan facilitates international collaboration and mutual learning. This exchange of expertise is crucial for enhancing global climate action and achieving the ambitious goals set forth in the Paris Agreement.

In essence, the Action Plan by the Urban Agenda for the EU, Greening Cities Partnership, serves as a concrete mechanism for Cities and urban areas to contribute to the achievement of the Paris Agreement's objectives. Through its comprehensive approach to urban greening, the Plan not only helps limit global temperature rise but also enhances urban resilience, promotes sustainable development, and fosters international collaboration in climate action.

### 3.2.4 UN Global Biodiversity Framework

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was adopted in December 2022 during the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) following a four year consultation and negotiation process. This historic Framework, which supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, sets out an ambitious pathway to reach the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050. Among the Framework's key elements are 4 goals for 2050 and 23 targets for 2030. Signed by all EU Member States, the key obligation for this action plan is Target 12 on urban green space:

#### **TARGET 12: Enhance Green Spaces and Urban Planning for Human Well-Being and Biodiversity**

*Significantly increase the area and quality, and connectivity of, access to, and benefits from green and blue spaces in urban and densely populated areas sustainably, by mainstreaming the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and ensure biodiversity-inclusive urban planning, enhancing native biodiversity, ecological connectivity and integrity, and improving human health and well-being and connection to nature, and contributing to inclusive and sustainable urbanization and to the provision of ecosystem functions and services.*



## 4 MONITORING

Action	Action Leader	Targeted stakeholder/governance level	Deadline	State of Play
Action n°1	Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, RO	Local Authorities	31/12/2025	
Action n°2	City Council of Pontevedra, ES European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN), NL	Local Authorities	31/12/2025	
Action n°3	Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets (HR) Eurocities (EU) European Urban Knowledge Network European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EUKN EGTC) (NL)	EU, National, Regional and Local Authorities	31/01/2026	
Action n°4	City of Utrecht Lisbon Metropolitan Area	European Commission (DG REGIO, DG ENV), Local, Regional and National Level of Governments, European Parliament Research Service	31/12/2024	
Action n°5	City of Utrecht Lisbon Metropolitan Area	European Commission DG REGIO, EIB (EU Level), WG4 Funding/Multilevel (Local, Regional, National, EU) private investors.	31/12/2024	



