

Urban Agenda for the EU

# Sustainable Tourism Partnership

Action  
Plan

October  
2024





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Authors: Sustainable Tourism Partnership

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**Contact:** [urbanagenda@urban-initiative.eu](mailto:urbanagenda@urban-initiative.eu)

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<sup>1</sup> Pact of Amsterdam, ch.4 clause 19

## 1.1 Table of Acronyms

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Full Name in English</b>
CALM	Coordinators and Action Leaders Meeting
CCI	Cross-cutting issues
CF	Cohesion Fund
CLLD	Community-led local development
CoR	Committee of the Regions
COSME	EU's programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
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 ENV	European Commission's Directorate General for Environment
DG EPL	European Commission's Directorate General for Employment
DG GROW	European Commission's Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship, and SMEs
DG HOME	European Commission's 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
DMO	Destination Management/Marketing Organisation
DSJC	Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition
EAA	Ex-Ante Assessment
EEA	European Economic Area
EC	European Commission
ECTN	European Cultural Tourism Network
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund

EUCRA	European Commission Unit for Climate Resilience in Agriculture
EUI	European Urban Initiative
FUA	Functional Urban Area
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSTC	Global Sustainable Tourism Council
INTERREG	European Regional Development Fund – European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) strand
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investments
JRC	European Commission’s Joint Research Centre
PoA	Pact of Amsterdam
RFSC	Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities
RIS	Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMEs	Small and Medium sized Enterprises
UA	Urban Agenda
UDG	Urban Development Group
UDN	EU Urban Development Network
UN	United Nations
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
WG	Working Group
WTTC	World Travel & Tourism Council

# 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.

**The Ex-Ante Assessment** serves as an exploratory document aimed at guiding the Thematic Partnership's orientation within the existing policy and practices framework. Specifically, the EAA examines key thematic areas, evaluates contributions towards better regulation, knowledge, and funding, and identifies opportunities for synergy with other initiatives. Additionally, it outlines optimal organizational structures, timing, and activities for the Partnership.

**The Orientation paper** is a guiding document for the Thematic Partnership that defines its specific objectives and thematic focus, drawing on the findings of the Ex-Ante Assessment (EAA). Building upon the EAA, it refines the Partnership's scope by identifying priority topics, relevant policy areas, and EU policy connections, as well as links to other Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU) partnerships. The Orientation Paper also establishes the Partnership's working methods and organizational arrangements, aligning with the mandate, knowledge, and resources of its members to ensure effective coordination and impactful outcomes.

**The Scoping fiches** are documents that provide an in-depth analysis of the primary challenges, knowledge gaps, and specific issues that the Thematic Partnership aims to address within its selected areas of intervention. Based on themes outlined in the Orientation Paper and Ex-Ante Assessment, the Scoping Fiches delve into identified problems, map existing solutions and initiatives, and examine the current policy environment. This document serves as a foundation for refining or reassessing the Partnership's actions and supports decisions on targeted, actionable measures that align with pressing needs.

## Definitions specific for the topic of the partnership

**Sustainable Tourism** is, following the UNWTO definition, “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”. <https://www.unwto.org/EU-guidebook-on-sustainable-tourism-for-development>

**Tourism destination** is a physical space with or without administrative and/or analytical boundaries in which a visitor can spend an overnight. It is the cluster (co-location) of products and services, and of activities and experiences along the tourism value chain and a basic unit of analysis of tourism. A destination incorporates various stakeholders and can network to form larger destinations. It is also intangible with its image and identity which may influence its market competitiveness. <https://www.unwto.org/glossary-tourism-terms>

**Tourism sector**, as contemplated in the TSA, is the cluster of production units in different industries that provide consumption goods and services demanded by visitors. Such industries are called tourism industries because visitor acquisition represents such a significant share of their supply that, in the absence of visitors, their production of these would cease to exist in meaningful quantity. <https://www.unwto.org/glossary-tourism-terms>

**Destination Management/Marketing Organisation (DMO)** is the leading organizational entity which may encompass the various authorities, stakeholders and professionals and facilitates tourism sector partnerships towards a collective destination vision. The governance structures of DMOs vary from a single public authority to a public/ private partnership model with the key role of initiating, coordinating and managing certain activities such as implementation of tourism policies, strategic planning, product development, promotion and marketing and convention bureau activities. The functions of the DMOs may vary from national to regional and local levels depending on the current and potential needs as well as on the decentralization level of public administration. Not every tourism destination has a DMO. <https://www.unwto.org/glossary-tourism-terms>

**Certification** is the provision by an independent body of written assurance (a certificate) that the product, service, or system in question meets specific requirements. <https://www.iso.org/certification.html>

**Certification for a Tourism Enterprise** is voluntary, third-party assessment, through an audit, of a tourism enterprise for conformity to a standard. <https://www.gstcouncil.org/gstc-criteria/glossary/>

**Accreditation** is the formal recognition by an independent body, generally known as an accreditation body, that a certification body operates according to international standards. <https://www.iso.org/certification.html>

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Objectives of the Partnership

The Sustainable Tourism Partnership seeks to advocate for sustainable tourism by raising awareness and educating stakeholders, citizens, and policymakers about its benefits and challenges. The overarching goal is **to leverage the economic, social, and environmental opportunities of sustainable tourism to foster a balanced and resilient recovery, promote inclusivity, and drive innovation**. A key focus is addressing the unique challenges of urban tourism, recognizing its critical role in fostering sustainable socioeconomic development within urban environments.

To achieve these objectives, the partnership promotes collaboration among Member States, cities, the European Commission, and other stakeholders. This collaborative framework aims to develop effective policies to address the specific needs of urban areas, as highlighted in the Pact of Amsterdam (2016). The partnership emphasizes a co-creation and co-implementation process, as outlined in the Transition Pathway for Tourism, with a commitment to fully implement strategies that are co-developed.

Recognizing tourism's pivotal role in urban policy, the partnership advocates for tailored strategies for sustainable urban tourism that consider local characteristics and needs. Due to the complexity of urban tourism, the partnership calls for a multi-level governance approach involving stakeholders at different scales. On a broader level, the partnership seeks to strengthen the joint vision of the EU's multilevel, multi-stakeholder cooperation framework on sustainable tourism, as outlined in the Transition Pathway for Tourism and the European Tourism Agenda 2030.

In line with the European Commission's principles of Better Regulation and the Pact of Amsterdam, the partnership has developed an Action Plan aimed at helping cities implement existing EU initiatives. The Action Plan focuses on streamlining access to EU funding (Better Funding), promoting combined financing from EU funds, enhancing the knowledge base on urban tourism issues, and facilitating the exchange of best practices (Better Knowledge). Through these efforts, the partnership aims to support cities in adopting sustainable tourism practices and driving positive change at both local and EU levels.



## 1.2 Governance of the Partnership



Figure 1 : Part of the Members of the Partnership during the in-person meeting held in Tallinn (EE) on 17-18 Sep.2024

### 1.2.1 Coordinators of the Partnership

Municipality of Genova (IT)  
Municipality of Galati (RO)

### 1.2.2 Members of the Partnership

The Sustainable Tourism Partnership comprises 29 Members:

Cities (Urban Authorities) :

- Municipality of Genoa (IT) - **Co-Coordinator**
- Municipality of Galati (RO) - **Co-Coordinator**
- City of Zadar (HR) - **Action Leader**
- Municipality of Heraklion (EL) - **Action Leader**
- City of Šibenik (HR)
- City of Venice (IT)
- City of Porvoo (FI)

- Municipality of Larissa (EL)
- Narva City Government, Department for City Development and Economy (EE)

Regions :

- Rhine-Neckar Region Association (DE) - **Action Leader**
- Ministry of Tourism and Andalucía Exterior (ES)
- Comunidade Intermunicipal da Região de Coimbra - CIMRC (PT)

National Authorities :

- Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications of Estonia (EE)

European/National City Umbrella-Organisations :

- Eurocities (BE) - **Action Leader**
- ICLEI European Secrétariat (DE)

European Institutions :

- European Commission Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO)
- European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, social affairs and inclusion (DG EMPL)
- European Commission Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW)
- European Commission Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA)
- European Commission Secretariat-General, European Commission Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (MARE)
- European Commission DG Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (EAC)
- European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC)

Other Stakeholders :

- Association for the Promotion of Tourism in Oradea and the Region (Visit Oradea)-APTOR (RO)
- Diputació de Barcelona (Barcelona Provincial Council) (ES) - **Action Leader**
- Fundació Visit València (ES)
- Ljubljana Tourism (SI)
- Mirabilia Network (IT)
- Visit.Brussels (BE)

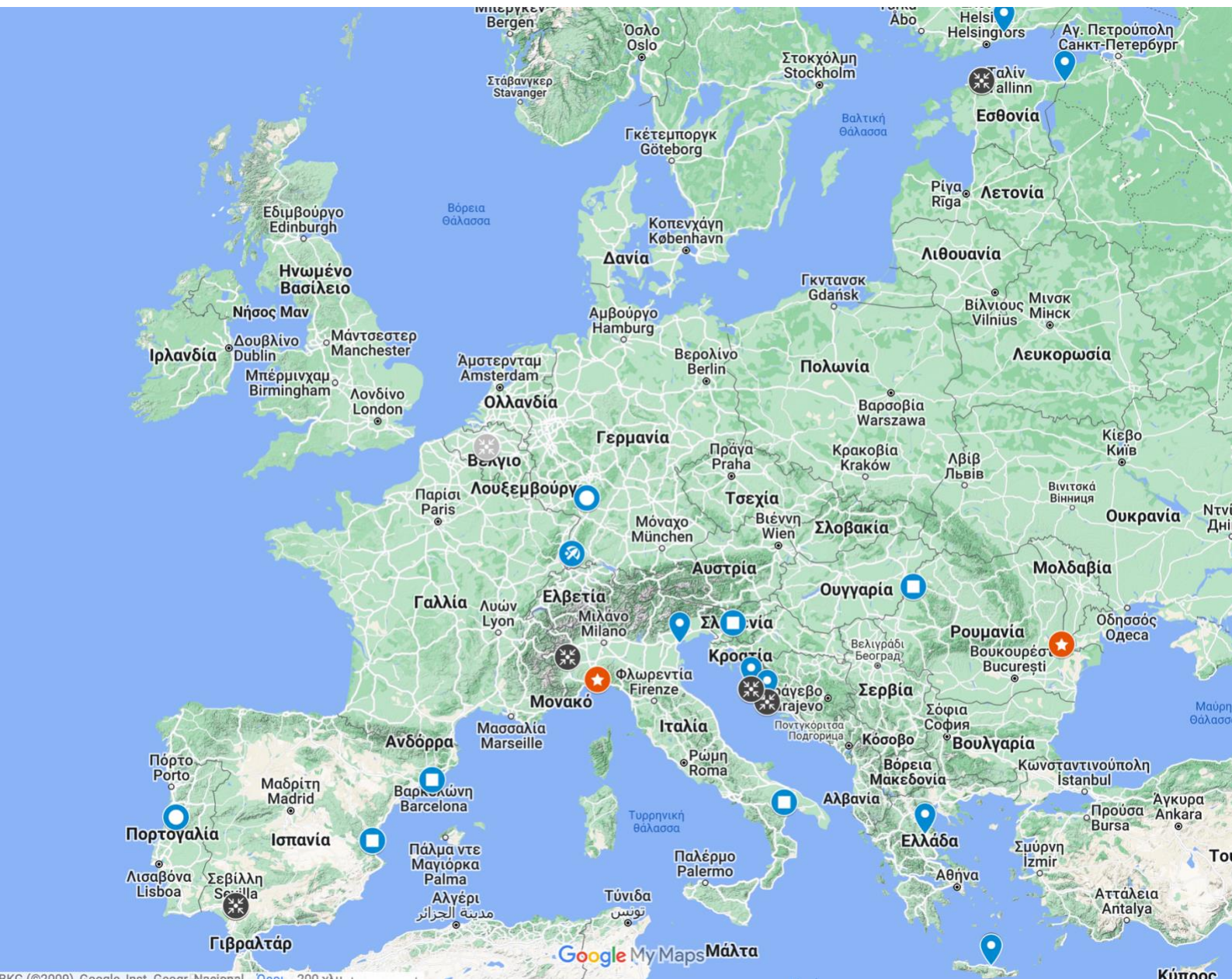


Figure 2 : Map of the Sustainable Tourism Partnership Members

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

To improve the efficiency of the partnership's efforts, especially given the large number of partners involved, coordinators proposed the formation of specialized working groups focused on different aspects of Sustainable Tourism. These working groups delved into the comprehensive concept of sustainable tourism, exploring it through the lenses of three primary themes: **Environment, Development, and Unbalanced Growth**. Each theme addressed a range of relevant issues reflecting the current policy landscape, as identified by the **Ex-Ante Assessment Report**.

The selection of topics for these working groups was a collaborative process involving the partnership members. Through an online survey and subsequent discussions during meetings, topics were chosen

to cover a broad spectrum of sustainable tourism issues relevant to urban policies. During the inaugural face-to-face meeting held in Turin on March 15th, 2023, the outcomes of the survey were thoroughly deliberated and validated by all members.

By the moment of publishing this document (November 2024) there have been **fifteen Partnership meetings** that guided the work of the members. Four of them were in-person and the rest were online.

**The first in-person meeting took place in Turin (IT) in Q1 2023**, within the Cities Forum, and its main focus was to agree on the Partnership main topics to be addressed in the **Orientation Paper**. Discussions continued beyond the actual event with online discussions that helped identify members' thematic interests and Working Groups. For this purpose, an internal survey was developed.

**The second in-person meeting took place in Seville (ES) in Q4 2023**, within the Tourism Innovation Summit, where initial Actions were proposed, clustered, and prioritized towards the draft Sustainable Tourism Action Plan. At the end of this meeting a timeline for drafting the Actions was agreed. An invited external expert, Mrs. Daniella Patti attended the meeting providing with a **comprehensive Report** on the Partnership's state of the art.

The **third in-person meeting took place in Šibenik and Zadar (HR) in Q1 2024**, and marked the finalization of the **Draft Action Plan** with all Action Leaders and Partners refining the Action's descriptions and proposing indicative task allocation and timeline for implementation.

During **the fourth in-person meeting in Tallinn (EE)**, the Sustainable Tourism Partnership finalized the Action Plan incorporating the feedback received by the consultation processes.

These in-person meetings were interspersed with multiple online meetings dealing with more specific administrative activities and content issues.

**On March 26 2024, an online preparatory Coordinators and Action Leaders Meeting** was organised by EUI in order to learn from the experience of other UAEU Partnerships followed by an **in-person Coordinators and Action Leaders Meeting in Brussels, in April 23 2024**, that brought together seven Thematic Partnerships of the Urban Agenda for the EU, the European Commission, the Committee of the Regions, and the European Urban Initiative.

## 1.2.4 Consultations carried out during the development of the Action Plan

An **internal Partnership survey** was carried out in March 2023 by the Partnership Coordinators, which collected views, expectations, and priorities from the Partners as a starting point for setting up the Working Groups.

**During the CALM Meetings** (as presented in 1.1.3), the Coordinators presented the most developed Actions, **and representatives from other UAEU Partnerships provided feedback** and answered to key questions regarding the development of the Action Plan, including the relevance of the actions, possible indicators to be considered to ensure the consistency of the Action Plan, complementarities or overlapping with the Actions developed by other Partnerships, the methodology employed in defining complementarities between the Actions, and recommendations for successful development and implementation of the Action Plan.

The feedback focused on increasing the visibility of the actions, fostering the engagement of all members of the Partnership, ensuring the impact on specific target groups, as well as on political level, and careful and feasible planning of the implementation phase.

Additionally, **a public consultation process** on the draft Action Plan took place from the beginning of June 2024 to the end of July 2024, during which 49 contributions were received from the Member

States of the UDG, as well as national and regional authorities, and other stakeholders. These comments were integrated into the draft Action Plan to ensure its relevance and alignment with the needs of the stakeholders targeted. Additionally, comments from the European Commission Interservice Consultation were received and incorporated into the document to further refine and strengthen the Action Plan.

## 1.3 Background information

### 1.3.1 Background information used in the development of the Action Plan

The Sustainable Tourism Partnership contributes to the implementation of the **EU Transition Pathway for Tourism** and coordinates with other partnerships to ensure synergy and avoid redundancy. Aligned with EU strategic priorities in the field of sustainable tourism, particularly in post-pandemic recovery and the updated **EU Industrial Strategy** the Partnership emphasizes green and digital transitions and collaborates with stakeholders at all governance levels and Member States to contribute to the implementation of the transition pathway for the tourism ecosystem.

Urban tourism's contribution to **European Green Deal** strategies and climate targets highlights the need for a competitive and holistic sustainability approach, supported by EU funding programs, policy guidelines, and legislation such as the **New European Urban Mobility Framework, EU Cohesion Policy and "Short-term Rentals" Regulation**.

Concerning the congestion of tourism flows in cities, a variety of specific features and tools have been discussed globally (UNWTO 2019). In Europe, the study "Unbalanced tourism growth at destination level. Root causes, impacts, existing solutions and good practices: final report" has been published in 2022. Many of these issues are strongly aligned with the Action n.07 of **the UA Partnership on Culture and Cultural Heritage**.

The Report on the Transition Pathway for Tourism also emphasizes the link between sustainable urban tourism and the renovation of the physical assets, including tourism-related buildings. The **New European Bauhaus** initiative is particularly relevant in this context.

Significant tools are already available or on the way, in terms the appropriate use of data: **the EU Tourism Dashboard**, developed by the JRC, is the most relevant to provide visualisations of tourism-relevant indicators relating to policy objectives.

The European Commission has also supported several initiatives aimed at showcasing and supporting local practices in sustainable tourism, including:

- **European Green Capital and Green Leaf award**
- The DG REFORM Flagship Technical Support Project "**Support to the tourism ecosystem: towards a more sustainable, resilient and digital tourism**" in 7 member states (Croatia, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain) [https://reform-support.ec.europa.eu/our-projects/support-tourism-ecosystem-towards-more-sustainable-resilient-and-digital-tourism\\_en](https://reform-support.ec.europa.eu/our-projects/support-tourism-ecosystem-towards-more-sustainable-resilient-and-digital-tourism_en)
- **EDEN – "European Destinations of Excellence"**
- the **European Capital of Smart Tourism**
- the **ECTN Cultural Tourism award**

Under the **European Urban Initiative**, sustainable tourism was one of the three topics of the second call for proposals for **innovative actions** (<https://www.urban-initiative.eu/calls-proposals/second-call-proposals-innovative-actions>), with an overall indicative budget for the call of EUR 120 million from the ERDF. The selected projects focused on the topic will provide valuable knowledge and experience to support the implementation of this Action Plan.

# 2 ACTIONS

## Overview table of actions

N°	Title	Short Description
<b>1</b>	<b>Guidelines for enabling climate-friendly and resilient urban destinations</b>	The action aims to generate guidelines focused on how urban destinations can develop climate action plans, communicate them, promote climate-friendly offer, attract climate-friendly demand, and promote better tourists' behavior within destinations.
<b>2</b>	<b>Support for destinations to enable the use of sustainability certifications for the SMEs tourism transition</b>	This action seeks to generate good practices and case studies for destinations in order to promote the use of Certifications for SMEs on tourism transition in line with the Green Claim legislation. This action primarily contributes to better knowledge, also supporting regulation and funding.
<b>3</b>	<b>Developing competences for tourism professionals and local &amp; regional authorities in the field of digital touristic services &amp; products</b>	This action has the objective to enhance key competences for tourism professionals, maximizing the impact and added value of digital tools. In alignment with the Urban Agenda for the EU, the action strives for a robust and cohesive European standard for competences in the field of sustainable tourism through digital innovations.
<b>4</b>	<b>More resilient and sustainable destinations through diversification of tourism offer</b>	This action contributes to existing efforts to gather knowledge on challenges, opportunities, measurement, and lessons learned, particularly through the collection and analysis of good practices. The action explores available funding opportunities and recommend optimal ways to utilize these funds and propose how funding structures can be amended to better support diversification. The recommendations regarding financial incentives for diversifying the tourism offer can also provide opportunities for improving relevant regulations at many governance levels.

<b>5</b>	<b>Destinations accessible for all</b>	The action explores opportunities to contribute to the Better Knowledge pillar, aiming to gather information on accessibility challenges and practices in urban destinations. However, considering recent relevant legislative developments, the outcomes of this action can also contribute to better implementation of EU-level accessibility-related legislation.
<b>6</b>	<b>Strategies on Protection of Local Retail as an Asset for Tourism</b>	The action addresses the growing concern of cities towards the 'monoculturalization' of city centres. The phenomenon is caused by an increasing number of visitors and impacts local economies and retail infrastructures which then reflect limited diversity. The action seeks to identify and promote good practices in the field, in order to support the authenticity, attractiveness and vibrancy of historical centres as well as a diversified and inclusive local economy.

# Integration (of the actions)

Each action in the Sustainable Tourism UAEU Partnership Action Plan plays a crucial role in feeding multiple other actions, creating a holistic, integrated approach to sustainable urban tourism. Below, some of the linkages are depicted:

## **Action 1 – Guidelines for Enabling Climate-Friendly and Resilient Urban Destinations:**

- Will provide a foundational framework for Action 2, offering criteria for sustainability certifications based on climate resilience, which SMEs can use to prepare for certification.
- Will inform Action 3 by establishing the necessary climate action competences required for tourism professionals, ensuring they can implement effective climate strategies.
- Will support Action 4 by detailing climate adaptation strategies that can diversify tourism offerings, leading to more resilient and sustainable destinations.
- Will enhance Action 5 by integrating accessibility considerations into climate resilience plans, promoting infrastructure that accommodates all visitors.

## **Action 2 – Support for Destinations to Enable the Use of Sustainability Certifications for the SMEs Tourism Transition:**

- Will complement Action 1 by providing the specific metrics and indicators necessary to measure compliance with the climate action guidelines established therein.
- Will contribute to Action 3 by identifying the skills and competencies required for professionals to successfully navigate the certification process and implement digital tools for monitoring.
- Will reinforce Action 6 by ensuring that certified businesses can be highlighted in strategies for protecting local retail, offering proof of how sustainability leads to economic resilience.

## **Action 3 – Developing Competences for Tourism Professionals and Local & Regional Authorities in Digital Touristic Services & Products:**

- Will establish a framework that supports Actions 1 and 2 by ensuring that the necessary digital competencies align with sustainability and climate action goals.
- Will directly inform Action 4 by providing the skills needed to effectively promote and manage a diversified tourism product through digital platforms, enhancing outreach and customer engagement.
- Will support Action 5 by enabling tourism professionals to create accessible digital services that enhance the experience for all visitors, especially those with disabilities.

## **Action 4 – More Resilient and Sustainable Destinations through Diversification of Tourism Offer:**

- Will build on Action 1 by implementing climate resilience guidelines to develop new tourism products that are environmentally sustainable and attractive to diverse visitors.
- Will draw from Action 2 by integrating best practices from certified SMEs that have successfully diversified their offerings, thus demonstrating the benefits of sustainability certifications.



- Will feed into Action 5 by ensuring that diversified offerings include accessible options, promoting inclusivity within tourism destinations.

#### **Action 5 – Destinations Accessible for All:**

- Will leverage insights from Action 1 to incorporate climate-resilient infrastructure into accessibility planning, ensuring that all visitors can enjoy sustainable tourism experiences.
- Will contribute to Action 2 by promoting certification standards that include accessibility criteria, allowing SMEs to better serve diverse tourist populations.
- Will support Action 6 by providing recommendations on how to protect and enhance local retail through accessibility-focused tourism initiatives, thereby ensuring a vibrant, inclusive local economy.

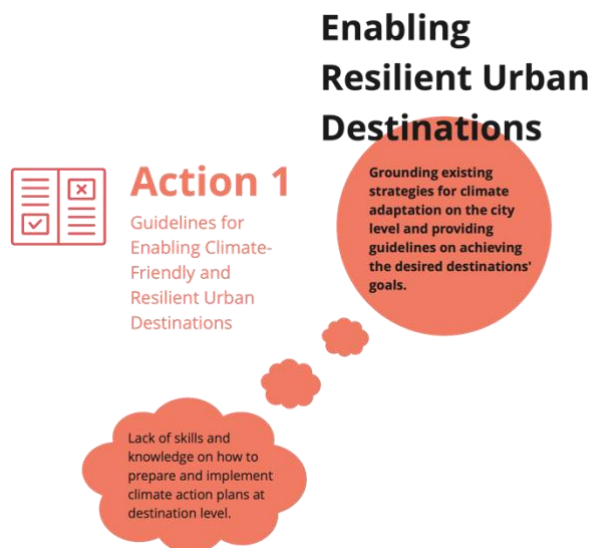
#### **Action 6 – Strategies on Protection of Local Retail as an Asset for Tourism:**

- Will integrate frameworks from Action 1 to demonstrate how local retail can be part of climate-resilient urban destinations, promoting sustainability while enhancing the visitor experience.
- Will incorporate findings from Action 4 by showcasing how diversified tourism products can help sustain local businesses, ensuring they are viable and resilient in the face of changing tourism patterns.

Bellow you can see a visual representation of the Sustainable Tourism Action plan and the key relationships between its actions. You can visualise the last version of the graphic representation at high quality and in an interactive way, by visiting the dedicated webpage of the partnership: <https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/partnerships/sustainable-tourism>.



## 2.1 Action N° 01 – Guidelines for enabling climate-friendly and resilient urban destinations



Urban destinations should address the consequences of climate emergency, in terms of mitigation and adaptation. The Glasgow Declaration, adopted in 2021, provides a framework for developing action plans for climate change in tourism aligned with measurement, decarbonisation, regeneration, collaboration and financing.

**Targeted stakeholders/governance level:** Local & regional authorities, DMOs, businesses

**Deadline:** 31/12/2025

**Intermediate Deadline 1:** 31/01/2025 – Identification of case studies in urban tourism destinations

**Intermediate Deadline 2:** 31/05/2025 – Guidelines

**Intermediate Deadline 3:** 31/12/2025 - Dissemination

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



#### Better knowledge

The tourism sector, and especially urban destinations, should tackle the challenges posed by the climate emergency and develop climate-friendly value chains. However, there is still a lack of knowledge and capacity building to understand how to orientate future actions in this area.

# Action 1

The goal of this action is to create guidelines that help urban destinations develop climate action plans (considering also exchange and synergies with the 100 Cities of the Horizon Europe Mission on "Climate Neutral and Smart Cities" and their Climate City Contracts), effectively communicate them, promote climate-friendly offer, attract climate-friendly demand, and encourage better behavior from visitors in tourism destinations.

### **2.1.2 What is the specific problem?**

The partnership has identified several key challenges that need to be addressed for effective climate action in urban tourism destinations. One of the primary issues is the lack of governance mechanisms that involve public and private stakeholders, residents, and visitors to address the impacts of climate change at the destination level. Additionally, there is a need to empower Destination Management / Marketing Organizations (DMOs) to evolve into true managers of the destinations.

The involvement of local communities, including residents, in multi-level governance schemes is currently low, and there is a pressing need to reinforce tourism policies that contribute to the well-being of these communities. A significant shortage of skills and knowledge has been identified in preparing and implementing climate action plans at the destination level, which limits progress in this area.

Moreover, innovation projects focusing on circular and climate-friendly tourism, water resource management in tourist areas, and sustainable mobility—especially in regions with poor public transportation—are lacking. To effectively cope with the climate emergency, destination resilience plans must also be developed.

There is also a critical need to increase the adoption and visibility of sustainability tools, while simultaneously promoting consumer demand for sustainable tourism options. Furthermore, a gap exists in knowledge about the role of culture and cultural heritage in fostering sustainable and circular practices for defining tourism offer.

Capacity-building programs, technical support, and financial assistance are also insufficient, particularly for tourism stakeholders such as SMEs, in order to facilitate the green transition. Finally, the environmental impact of tourism in urban areas, especially in relation to waste management, water resource pressure, air quality (due to airports and cruise ships), and biodiversity loss, must be addressed.

In addition to these challenges, the action also highlights issues related to better regulation and funding. There is a lack of understanding on how to prioritize sustainable tourism service providers in public sector procurement processes. Additionally, regulations and guidelines for tourism SMEs need to be developed, particularly in areas such as reducing food waste and increasing circularity of the services. Incentives for promoting sustainable mobility are also needed, along with the establishment of more funding lines to support the implementation of climate action plans.

This comprehensive approach seeks to address these challenges and foster a sustainable and resilient future for urban tourism destinations in the face of the climate crisis.

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

Urban destinations should face the consequences of climate emergency, by focusing on mitigation and adaptation strategies. The reference framework is the Glasgow Declaration, adopted in the COP-26 in Glasgow in November 2021. The Declaration calls for urgent action from all stakeholders to commit to develop climate action plans in tourism aligned

with the proposed pathways of measurement, decarbonization, regeneration, collaboration and financing.

Additionally, EU tourism stakeholders are already implementing climate mitigation and adaptation measures, jointly agreed under the Transition Pathway for Tourism and European Agenda for Tourism 2030. As stated by the stock-taking report of the Transition Pathway, destinations and services are increasingly required to adapt the tourism offer to changing climate conditions and establish mechanisms for crisis preparedness and management.

To support these efforts, the European Commission has published key reports on estimating and addressing the impact of climate change on tourism, such as *Regional impact of climate change on European tourism demand*, *Strengthening cultural heritage resilience for climate change*, and *Compendium of good practices and solutions of climate change adaptation in the Outermost Regions of the EU*. The action is also aligned with the objectives of the project 'Sustainable EU Tourism – Shaping the Tourism of Tomorrow' launched in 2023, which support DMOs in becoming more sustainable and resilient. The study on crisis management and governance in tourism launched in 2023 also addressed crisis preparedness for extreme weather events. Furthermore, in March 2024 the European Commission has published a Communication on managing climate risks in EU .

The action considers as a reference methodologies, tools and good practices offered by the Covenant of Mayors, as well as the EU Missions on Adaptation and Climate Neutral and Smart Cities, Green Deal initiatives for cities, such as the Green Capital and Green Leaf awards, the Green City Accord, the EU Cities Mission, the Circular Cities and Regions Initiative, the Smart Cities Marketplace, CIVITAS on urban mobility Living.in.EU and others.

On the other hand, tailor-made expertise through the Commission's Technical Support Instrument (TSI) can help Member States undertake necessary reforms to enhance the sustainability and resilience of the tourism ecosystem. This support can be offered to national, regional, and local authorities across multiple Member States.

Regarding the Tourism Transition Pathway, the action is aligned with these specific topics:

- Topic 4: Comprehensive tourism strategies development or update
- Topic 5: Collaborative governance of tourism destinations
- Topic 6: Sustainable mobility
- Topic 7: Circularity of tourism services
- Topic 8: Green transition of tourism companies and SMEs
- Topic 12: Research and innovation projects and pilots on circular and climate friendly tourism
- Topic 27: Support visibility of funding opportunities for tourism actors

## 2.1.4 Which action is needed?

The action is intended to develop guidelines focused on how urban destinations can prepare climate action plans, communicate them, promote climate-friendly offer, attract climate-friendly demand and promote better tourists' behavior in the destinations. Furthermore, it addresses the need of resilience plans in the tourism industry.

## 2.1.5 How will the action be implemented?

The action is developed in three phases:

### **Phase A:** Identification of case studies in urban tourism destinations

This phase is aimed at identifying relevant case studies coming from urban tourism destinations in Europe related to the preparation of climate action plans, the promotion of climate-friendly offer, the attraction of climate-friendly demand and the promotion of better tourists' behavior in the destinations, among others. The case studies will be structured under the five pillars of the Glasgow Declaration: measurement, decarbonisation, regeneration, collaboration and financing. The case studies will serve a basis to define the practical guidelines in the second phase.

- Activity 1.1: Definition of criteria to identify and select case studies and tool for collecting the information.
- Activity 1.2: Identification of case studies and successful practices.
- Activity 1.3: Interviews or focus groups to fine-tune the collection of information.

The collection of information will be done through several means and sources, among others:

- Experiences from the partnership.
- Platforms and tools listed in 2.1.11. i.e. EU Tourism Stakeholder Platform, Tourism Transition Platform pledges, Glasgow Declaration implementation reports, Smart Destinations Best Practices, NECSTouR Climate Hub, etc.
- Experiences identified during the Action Plan consultation process.
- EU running projects.

### **Phase B:** Analysis of case studies and preparation of a decalogue of practical guidelines.

Based on the cases and experiences collected in the first phase, this second stage will have the aim to develop ten practical guidelines for urban climate-friendly destinations. Each guideline will be accompanied by examples from the identified case studies and structured around the five axes of the Glasgow Declaration.

- Activity 1.4: Analysis and identification of the main practical guidelines.
- Activity 1.5: Selection of the most suitable examples to feed each guideline.

### **Phase C:** Collect and spread-out information

This phase will focus on disseminating the guidelines through webinars, training or other dissemination activities. Each project partner will identify its dissemination channels and contribute to the partnership's communication efforts.

- Activity 1.6: Digital document containing all the information (Practical Guidelines)
- Activity 1.7: Webinar to introduce the findings carried out by project partners organized by ICLEI
- Activity 1.8: Training/lecture based carried out by project partners
- Activity 1.9: Dissemination activities in each urban destination carried out by projects partners.
- Activity 1.10: Peer reviews carried out by project partners involved in the action.

## 2.1.6 What resources are needed?

The action will be basically developed with the project partners' own resources, but some activities, such as the analysis and preparation of a decalogue of practical guidelines or the organization of a webinar to introduce the findings carried out by the action, will require external expertise.

## 2.1.7 Are there any risks foreseen?

Some risks identified along with foreseen mitigation measures are listed below:

- Lack of participation. Prior communication will be established to assess partners' availability, interest and resources.
- Time constraints. The timeline will take into account these risks to ensure tasks are completed.
- Insufficient expertise availability. The scope of outputs will be adapted to the available resources.
- Low participation in webinars/trainings. Partners will leverage their networks to disseminate the activities and engage local stakeholders.
- Limited funds for activities in the destinations. The activities will be designed based on available resources.
- Lack of awareness about the environmental impact of tourism. Efforts will focus on increasing awareness, particularly in cities that don't view themselves as tourist destinations.

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

### Action Leader(s)

Barcelona Provincial Council

### Contributors

Municipality of Larissa

Municipality of Heraklion

Ljubljana Tourism

Fundació Visit València

Visit Brussels

Ministry of Tourism and Andalucía Exterior

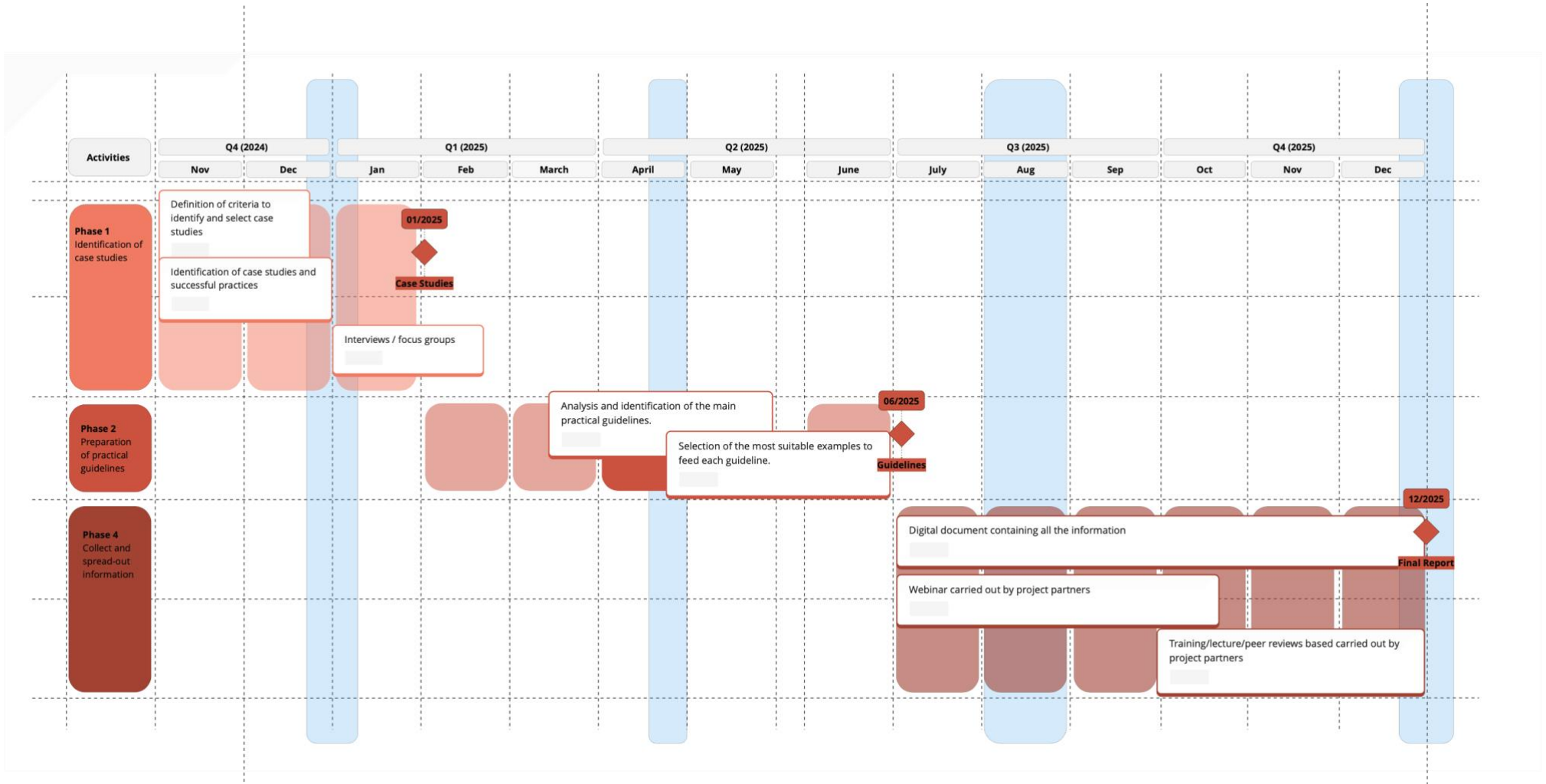
Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications of Estonia

ICLEI European Secretariat

Eurocities

European Commission Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW)

## 2.1.9 What is the timeline of the implementation





## 2.1.10 Which outputs will be produced?

- Guidelines for the development and communication of climate-friendly urban destinations and guidance for climate action plans
- Webinar to introduce the guidelines and case studies
- Training/lecture based on the guidelines and case studies
- Dissemination activities in each urban destination
- Peer reviews

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

Some tools and initiatives already identified:

- Sustainable EU Tourism project on making destinations sustainable and resilient.
- Focus topics of the T4T Expert Group (DG GROW). For e.g. 3rd quarter of 2024 the expert group (green transition sub-group) will address a topic of changing holiday patterns due to climate change.
- EU Stakeholders Support Platform for Tourism.
- Commitments and pledges for the transition of EU tourism.
- Compendium of good practices for Smart Tourism Capitals.
- Tools developed by the UNWTO on the Glasgow Declaration and Circular Economy repository in One Planet Platform.
- Methodologies, tools and good practices offered by the Covenant of Mayors, as well as the EU Missions on Adaptation and Climate Neutral and Smart Cities
- Macroeconomic strategies Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS Index): A third-party evaluation of destination's Environmental, Social, Supplier and Destination Management performance. This benchmark serves to rank global destinations based on their sustainability performance, allows us to collect best practices, and stimulates healthy competition.
- Guidelines for preparing Tourism Climate Action Plans by the Euro-MED Sustainable Tourism Community.
- The UNWTO Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism and the related work that will follow
- SMARTA-NET project on mobility (DG MOVE).
- Be.CULTOUR project on circular cultural tourism (ICLEI)
- CITY DNA (European knowledge sharing alliance for cities and urban regions) - The organisation also runs a Sustainability Knowledge group.
- NECSTOUR - Network of European Regions for Sustainable and Competitive Tourism.

### Key publications

- Envisioning tourism in 2030 and beyond. The changing shape of tourism in a decarbonizing world, The Travel Foundation
- Regional impact of climate change on European tourism demand, JRC
- A Guide to Action on Climate Change, Miles Partnership
- Climate action in the tourism sector: an overview of methodologies and tools to measure greenhouse gas emissions, UNWTO.
- Blueprint for regional climate action plans. Interreg Euro-MED Sustainable Tourism Community.



- Handbook for the adaptation of destinations to the climate change (In Spanish, Manual para la adaptación de los destinos turísticos al cambio climático), INVATTUR
- Transition Pathway for Tourism. European Commission
- Beyond Tourism Guidebook, Be.CULTOUR project (ICLEI)
- European Commission Communication "Managing climate risks – protecting people and prosperity"
- European Environment Agency's report "European Climate Risk Assessment (EUCRA)"
- European Travel Commission Report "Climate change and tourism in Europe"
- Digital inventory of tools and practices for tourism: Tools and practices - European Commission (europa.eu)
- EU guide on data for tourism destinations: Smart Tourism Destinations
- Measuring and monitoring the sustainability of tourism at regional level in Spain: Indicator framework and compilation guide (OECD)

## 2.2 Action N° 02 – Support for destinations to enable the use of sustainability certifications for the SMEs tourism transition



This action will generate good practices and case studies for destinations in order to promote the use of certifications for SMEs on tourism transition in line with the upcoming Green Claim legislation. The action will create a handbook for DMOs, provide good practices for SMEs on Green Transition, and develop a pool of credible and transparent certifications. Additionally, the action will develop a series of activities to raise awareness about certification use.

Targeted stakeholders/governance level: SMEs, Local & regional authorities, DMOs

**Deadline:** 31/12/2025

**Intermediate Deadline 1:** 31/01/2025 – Identification of Case Studies in Urban Tourism Destinations

**Intermediate Deadline 2:** 31/05/2025 – Best Practices Analysis of Case Studies and Material / Tools Preparation

**Intermediate Deadline 3:** 31/12/2025 – Dissemination

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



This primary goal of this action is to generate good practices and case studies for destinations that encourage the adoption of certifications for SMEs on tourism transition, particularly in line with the Green Claim legislation. This action contributes to the Better Knowledge pillar, supporting also regulation and funding.

# Action 2

## 2.2.2 What is the specific problem?

The partnership has identified several key problems that need to be addressed in the context of sustainable tourism development. First, there is an insufficient empowerment of Destination Management/Marketing Organizations (DMOs) to implement sustainable management tools and best practices in the local market. There is also a pressing demand for improved data-sharing practices that can foster innovative tourism services and help to manage destinations more sustainably. Additionally, there is a need to involve local entrepreneurs in the green transition, as well as to develop and implement local and regional certification schemes.

Another challenge is the lack of innovation projects focused on sustainable tourism. The availability, standardization, and interoperability of data between tourism stakeholders and destinations remain limited. Moreover, stakeholders often lack the knowledge, skills, and resources required to navigate the digital transition and fully leverage new technologies and existing data. There is also a clear need to raise awareness among SMEs to dispel concerns about certifications and to establish best practices that position certifications as effective tools for generating demand.

Furthermore, capacity-building programs and technical and financial assistance are necessary to support tourism stakeholders, including SMEs, in the green transition. Collaboration is needed to harmonize sustainable tourism statistics and indicators across the tourism value and supply chain, from destinations to SMEs, going beyond the current EU Tourism Dashboard. The creation of partnerships between DMOs, tourism companies, and SMEs is also crucial. These partnerships would work towards providing certified or assessed sustainable destinations and certified tourism supply chain SMEs, such as sustainable accommodations and tour operators, through online platforms.

Europe is undergoing a significant transformation, promoting a green and digital shift across its industries and ecosystems. This transformation aims to enhance sustainability, competitiveness, and long-term resilience. The action also affects some aspects related to better regulation and funding. There is a lack of knowledge on how to prioritize sustainable tourism service providers in the transition towards a more transparent and reliable market for SMEs. Additionally, there is a need to implement new regulations on Green Claims, alongside existing EU legislation that affects tourism SMEs, such as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and the European Commission's Green Transition (ECGT) legislation, which empower consumers by offering better protection against unfair practices while providing clearer information.

There is also a need to prioritize sustainable tourism service providers in public sector procurement. The creation of guidelines for tourism SMEs on sustainability and the circular economy is another essential action. Finally, the validation and development of a comparable matrix of existing labels and certification systems and schemes are necessary steps for improving regulation.

In terms of funding, this action highlights the importance of financing the implementation of good practices. It also emphasizes the need to provide incentives for the sustainable green transition of SMEs and to offer micro-financing options to support green transition efforts.

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

The European Commission's Directive on Green Claims is a positive step towards regulating environmental claims by businesses, fostering environmental responsibility, and strengthening consumer trust. However, the forthcoming implementation of this Directive may pose relevant challenges for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. Notably, the directive, along with other recent legislations such as the Eco-design for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR), the Right to Repair Directive, and the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), and Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition (ECGT) directive that ensures better protection against unfair practices, have increased data collection, assessments, and reporting requirements, which may place additional burdens on SMEs.

For European SMEs, adhering to European standards is advantageous as these standards are more accessible and tailored to their specific needs. Furthermore, European standards also serve as a unified reference across countries, requiring adoption at the national level and eliminating conflicting national standards.

However, the intensified regulatory landscape is particularly daunting for SMEs, which often lack the financial and technical resources available to larger corporations. These requirements can hinder their ability to market themselves as environmentally responsible, a crucial aspect of competitiveness today. Consequently, many SMEs may choose not to promote their green initiatives to legal uncertainties, financial constraints, or the fear of fines and reputational damage. Raising awareness, promoting good practices, and streamlining certifications can play a pivotal role in overcoming these challenges and ensuring that SMEs continue to contribute to sustainability efforts.

This action aims to collect and evaluate good practices and case studies for Destinations in order to promote the use of Certifications for SMEs on tourism transition in line with EU Directives, with a particular focus on the Green Claims legislation. This will be done through the creation of a Handbook for DMOs, guidance for SMEs on Green Transition, and the development of a pool of credible and transparent certifications and activities for certification use awareness based on the third-party auditing.

The Action is aligned with specific topics of the Tourism Transition Pathway, in particular:

- Topic 3: Improving statistics and indicators for tourism
- Topic 4: Comprehensive tourism strategies development or update
- Topic 5: Collaborative governance of tourism destinations
- Topic 8: Green transition of tourism companies and SMEs
- Topic 12: Research and innovation projects and pilots on circular and climate friendly tourism
- Topic 13: Promoting the use of the PEF and OEF methodology and the development of sectorial category rules for the tourism ecosystem
- Topic 20: Awareness raising on changes in tourism demand and the opportunities of twin transition for tourism
- Topic 27: Support visibility of funding opportunities for tourism actors

### 2.2.4 Which action is needed?

The aim of this action is to identify existing knowledge and policy recommendations for the tourism ecosystem and to showcase strategies and best practices that can be transferred to urban destinations. These efforts are in line with the European legislation on

sustainability for tourism SMEs. The action is carried out through the evaluation of case studies, workshops and collections of best practices.

The identification of good practices and case studies for urban destinations, promoting the use of certifications for SMEs on tourism transition in line with the Green Claim legislation, is a key component of this action. This includes the creation of a Handbook for DMOs, outlining good practices for SMEs in green transition, and the development of a pool of credible and transparent certifications and awareness activities for certification use, based on the third-party auditing.

## 2.2.5 How will the action be implemented?

The action will be developed in three phases:

### **Phase A:** Designing the tool for data collection

The goal of this phase is to identify relevant case studies from urban tourism destinations across Europe related to the scope of the action. These case studies will be organized in a structured manner and serve as the basis for defining practical guidelines in the following phases.

- Activity 2.1: Definition of criteria for identifying and selecting case studies and tool for collecting the information. Identification of the key questions to be addressed.
- Activity 2.2: Identification of case studies and successful good practices and design of the questionnaire.
- Activity 2.3: Identification of target group and respondents. Conduction of interviews or focus groups to refine the process of information collection.

The collection of information will be done through several sources, including:

- EU and non-EU programs targeting similar goals, such as EU Funded projects like D3HUB
- Problem trees for communication and participation, highlighting the main issues from the analysis.

This phase utilizes the expertise of the partnership and leverages on previous methodologies. The EU Survey tool (GRDP complaint) will be employed and the survey will be sent in coordination with other actions addressing questions to similar target groups.

### **Phase B:** Analysis of case studies and preparation of materials/tools

- Activity 2.4: Analysis of current experiences within the Partnership on Sustainable Tourism of the Urban Agenda for the EU through a survey, identifying needs and practical guidelines.
- Activity 2.5: Identification of other experiences or possible schemes implemented for SMEs transition in green and digital practices. Selection of the most suitable good practices.
- Activity 2.6: Identification of the suitable financial tools for supporting the SMEs green and digital transitions, including EU funding schemes (COSME, NextGen, UA Innovative Actions).
- Activity 2.7: Use of problem trees for communicating and showcasing the main issues identified in the analysis.

### **Phase C:** Collecting and disseminating information

The focus of this phase is on disseminating the materials produced through webinars, training sessions, and other dissemination channels. Each project partner will identify its own dissemination methods and participate in joint communication activities.

- Activity 2.8: Production of a digital handbook for DMOs on good practices, guidelines, and certifications experiences for greening the SMEs in line with Green Claims and other relative EU legislation.
- Activity 2.9: Host a webinar to introduce the toolkit/best practices, led by project partners and featuring contributions from external experts.
- Activity 2.10: Conduct training/lecture based on the findings explored by project partners with expertise support.
- Activity 2.11: Carry out dissemination activities in each urban destination, led by projects partners.
- Activity 2.12: Organize peer review sessions among interested project partners.

## 2.2.6 What resources are needed?

The action will mainly rely on the resources of the project partners, though some activities such as the design of the tool for data collection, the analysis of results and the digital handbook for DMOs will require support in terms of external expertise.

## 2.2.7 Are there any risks foreseen?

Several risks have been identified, along with strategies to mitigate them:

- Lack of participation by the partners. Early communication with partners will ensure their availability, interest and resources.
- Insufficient time to complete the tasks. The timeline will be planned taking into account potential delays.
- Insufficient expertise support. The scale of outputs will be adapted to fit available resources.
- Low participation in webinars or trainings. Partners will leverage their networks to disseminate the activities and engage local stakeholders.
- Limited funds for organizing activities in the destination. Activities will be defined according to the available budget.
- Lack of awareness about the environmental impact of tourism. This issue is observed in many cities that do not perceive themselves as tourist destination and will be addressed through targeted efforts.

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

### Action Leader(s)

Municipality of Heraklion

### Contributors

Barcelona Provincial Council

Municipality of Larissa

Ljubljana Tourism

Fundació Visit València

Visit Brussels

Ministry of Tourism and Andalucía Exterior

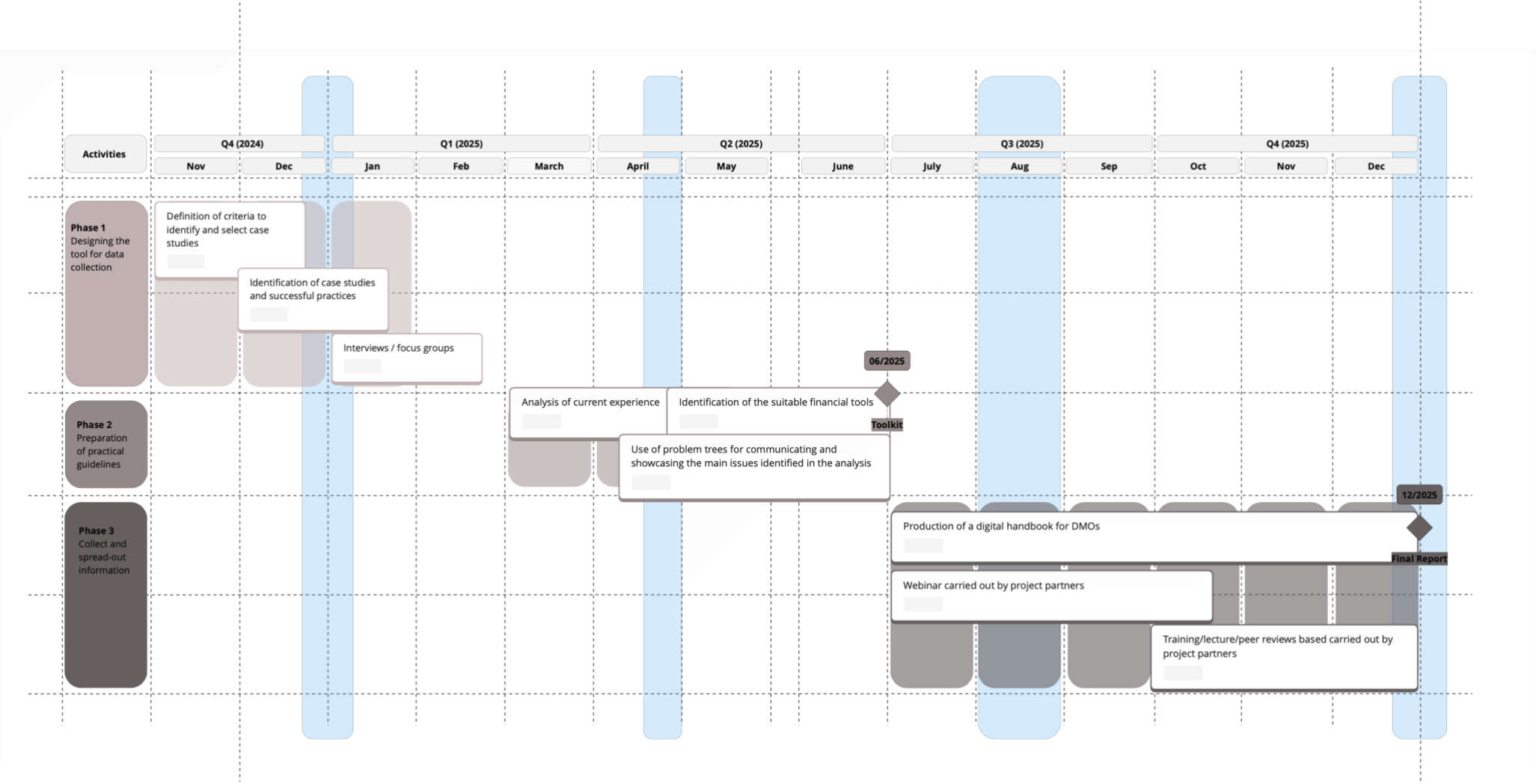
Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications of Estonia

ICLEI European Secretariat

Eurocities

European Commission Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW)

## 2.2.9 What is the timeline of the implementation?





## 2.2.10 Which outputs will be produced?

- Handbook for DMOs on good practices & guidelines, financial schemes and sustainability certifications experiences for greening the SMEs
- One Webinar to introduce the handbook
- Training/lecture based on the handbook
- Dissemination activities in each urban destination
- Peer review sessions

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

Some tools and initiatives already identified:

- Sustainable EU Tourism project on making destinations sustainable and resilient
- Work programme priorities of the T4T Expert Group on Green transition (DG GROW)
- Agenda for Tourism 2023, EU-EC
- The EU Ecolabel for Tourist Accommodation Services
- PEFCRs for Hotel accommodations
- EU Tourism Dashboard, JRC
- EU Stakeholders Support Platform for Tourism
- EU Tourism Dashboard
- Commitments and pledges for the transition of EU tourism
- Compendium of good practices for Smart Tourism Capitals
- Products groups and criteria, EU
- Criteria for Sustainable Destinations, Hotels, Travel Agents, MICE by GSTC
- Sustainability in Booking.com
- Hotel Sustainability Basics, WTTC
- Travalyst, Initiative for Sustainable Accommodations
- LIFE programme
- Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS Index): A third-party evaluation of destination's Environmental, Social, Supplier and Destination Management performance. This benchmark serves to rank global destinations based on their sustainability performance, allows us to collect best practices, and stimulates healthy competition.
- The UNWTO Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism and the related work that will follow.
- European Tourism Indicators System for Sustainable Destination Management
- [https://eisma.ec.europa.eu/news/call-expression-interest-crisis-management-and-governance-tourism-2023-07-17\\_en](https://eisma.ec.europa.eu/news/call-expression-interest-crisis-management-and-governance-tourism-2023-07-17_en)
- [https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sustainable-eu-tourism-shaping-tourism-tomorrow\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sustainable-eu-tourism-shaping-tourism-tomorrow_en)
- D3HUB Competence Centre (d3hub-competencecentre.eu)
- European Tourism Data Space – DEPLOYTOUR Project – EU
- Cyclops Project - EU

- Sustainable EU Tourism Shaping Tourism Tomorrow / Supporting Sustainability and Resilience of EU Tourism Destination Project – Intellera Consulting and Scholz & Friends
- Building Capacity for the Tourism Ecosystem Project – EU
- Transitioning to a More Sustainable and Resilient Ecosystem – Empowering Tourism SMEs Project - EU
- CITY DNA (European knowledge sharing alliance for cities and urban regions) - The organisation also runs a Sustainability Knowledge group.
- NECSTOUR - Network of European Regions for Sustainable and Competitive Tourism.

#### Key publications

- Transition Pathway for Tourism, EU
- Green Claims Directive Proposal
- Eco-design for Sustainable Products Regulation
- Eco-design working plan 2022-2024
- The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)
- Empowering consumers for the green transition through better protection against unfair practices and through better information EU Directive
- Non-Financial reporting
- New EU Circular Economy Action Plan
- European Commission, A new industrial strategy for Europe, COM (2020)102
- Environmental Green Claims, Business Companion
- Position paper on the Commission proposal for a Directive on Green Claims, Euro Commerce
- Public Procurement Reform and Ecolabel, EU-EC
- Development of EU Ecolabel criteria for retail financial products, JRC
- What is Certification, Global Sustainable Tourism Council

## 2.3 Action N° 03 – Developing competences for tourism professionals and local & regional authorities in the field of digital touristic services & products



The goal of the action is to foster key competences among tourism professionals, maximizing the impact and added value of digital tools. In line with the Urban Agenda for the EU, the action aims to create a toolkit that lowers barriers to accessing knowledge and fundings while addressing the challenges in the tourism industry.

Targeted stakeholders/governance level: Local authorities, Tourism professionals, Professionals developing digital services/products, Tourism responsible on country level/Ministry of Tourism.

**Deadline:** 31/12/2025

- Setting up the stakeholder groups at PP level – November-December 2024
- Introduction Workshop – until 28 February 2025
- Intermediate Deadline 1: 31/03/2025 - Survey co-design among partners with inspiration from stakeholders
- Survey distributed among stakeholders – April 2025
- Intermediate Deadline 2: 31/05/2025 - Results of the survey – drafting of joint research report (synchronized with an in-person meeting of the WG)
- Match-making Workshop – June –August 2025
- Intermediate Deadline 3: 30/09/ 2025 - First draft of toolkit
- Intermediate Deadline 4: 30/11/2025- Finalized toolkit output in digital version
- Intermediate Deadline 5: 31/12/2025 - Communication & awareness campaign to all stakeholders

**Action 3**

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



**Better knowledge** **Better funding** **Better regulation**

This action primarily contributes to the Better Knowledge pillar by aiming to close possible gaps in competences related to digital tourism services and products and by raising awareness and providing access to existing sources of knowledge and expertise.

In addition, this action also contributes to the Better Funding pillar by highlighting possible sources of funding, facilitating application for funding opportunities and aligning with initiatives such as the EU Pact for Skills<sup>2</sup> and the PanTour<sup>3</sup> project. Additionally, looking at projects and stakeholders at local level, the action presents similarities with the development of a Local Pact for Skills. Moreover, this action contributes to adaptations in funding guidelines, such as the EU Funding Guide for Tourism & European Social Fund focusing on tourism, or the current ESF+ funding.

This action can also influence the Better Regulation pillar, as this action identifies gaps and causes in dealing with digital products and services and new technologies in the tourism sector. The action can have an impact on EU and local regulations, such as the European Data Strategy, the Data Governance Act, the Data Act and the AI Act concerning digital products. With the results of this action in mind, regulations may be shaped to address knowledge and competency gaps before they emerge.

### 2.3.2 What is the specific problem?

The specific problem addressed by this action is the lack of standardized competencies, knowledge among tourism professionals in the European Union, particularly in sustainable tourism and the integration of new digital products. The tourism industry is rapidly evolving, with advancements in digital technologies and increasing emphasis on sustainability. As the use of data and technologies in tourism is getting more widespread among destinations and tourists, there is a growing need for professionals to gain the corresponding skills and knowledge.

While many EU-level initiatives and projects are currently carried out, it is challenging for many professionals in the tourism sector to keep track of these developments. Furthermore, the connection between green and digital products is not always clear to tourism professionals therefore, and that makes crucial to point out the added value of digitalization for sustainable tourism.

Digitalization in the tourism industry can significantly enhance sustainability in the tourism industry. Digitalization can lead to data-based decision making, making possible to destinations and local governments to use data to track tourism patterns and measure the environmental impact of the tourists' presence.

<sup>2</sup> [https://pact-for-skills.ec.europa.eu/index\\_en](https://pact-for-skills.ec.europa.eu/index_en)

<sup>3</sup> PANTOUR: Pact for Next Tourism Generation Skills - <https://nexttourismgeneration.eu/pantour/>

Moreover, destinations can use digital tools in order to optimize their capacity management, preventing over-tourism and promoting lesser-known attractions. This can be made possible, for example, by measuring the capacity utilization of the POIs and giving alternatives on how to get there by public transportation, in order to reduce overcrowding and lead to a more equally spread tourism among the destinations. This in turn can support local businesses and cultures, while maintaining or even improving tourism acceptance among residents.

Digital tools can also empower tourists to make more informed and environmentally sensitive choices by showing them their direct impact on the destinations, such as tracking their carbon footprint and rewarding more sustainable modes of transportation. Furthermore, innovations like virtual reality and augmented reality have the potential to make destinations more sustainable by spotlighting hidden stories and cultures of a destination, for example creating itineraries among less frequented places of a destination and using virtual and augmented reality to present the history of those places without altering the physical place.

Digitalization offers an important opportunity for the tourism industry to become more sustainable and promote the local economy, but this requires skilled and well-trained professionals who can harness the benefits and minimize the risks of these technologies.

The key challenges can be summarized in four main points. First of all, there is a lack of unified definition of sustainable tourism. While the need for sustainable tourism practices, covering social, environmental, and economic aspects, is growing, there is no common understanding for sustainable tourism among professionals across the EU.

In addition, the access to knowledge is limited by time and resources. The existing knowledge and competencies in sustainable tourism and digital products are not easily accessible to all professionals. There is a need to bridge the gap and make relevant skills and expertise available to professionals across the EU.

Moreover, the networking and collaboration process is fragmented. The lack of a centralized network for tourism stakeholders results in a fragmented approach to knowledge-sharing and collaboration. This hinders the collective efforts of professionals to address common challenges and embrace best practices. Although initiatives like Capacity for Tourism are already tackling this challenge, there is still a gap to be addressed.

Lastly, there are no common data standards in tourism. Data collection and storage methods vary widely within the EU but also within the member states. A common data standard, or at least a common framework, would lead to more efficient processes and foster the development of digital tourism services and products in the EU. In order to address these challenges, the European Data Strategy, along with the Data Act and the Data Governance Act, aim to create a unified EU data market, providing legal clarity on data access and usage, while fostering trust in voluntary data-sharing across all sectors. For the tourism ecosystem, these initiatives unlock the potential of rapidly growing data volumes across related industries, enabling the development of new data-driven, sustainable, and innovative practices, tools, and services, while enhancing the existing ones. Data technologies and associated skills are crucial given the increasing importance of data sharing, access, reuse and interoperability for the European tourism sector and its ecosystem.

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

An alignment with smart city initiatives is essential as cities increasingly aim to become smarter and integrate digital technologies within their action. Digital competencies in tourism complement broader smart city efforts, allowing professionals to integrate digital touristic products into the overall smart city framework and fostering a holistic approach to urban development. This action contributes to several key topics outlined in the pathway for sustainable tourism, including:

- Topic 3: Improving statistics and indicators for tourism
- Topic 5: Collaborative governance of tourist destinations
- Topic 8: Green transition of tourism companies and SMEs
- Topic 9: Data-driven tourism services
- Topic 10: Improving the availability of online information on tourism offers
- Topic 11: Easily accessible best practices, peer learning, and networking for SMEs
- Topic 16: Support for the digitalization of tourism SMEs and destinations

Moreover, this action connects various existing projects and instruments such as:

- Pantour!
- TOURBIT
- Resetting.eu
- Eudigitour.eu
- Pact for Skills
- Skills Partnership for Tourism
- Stakeholder Support Platform
- European Data Strategy
- The Data Act
- The Data Governance Act
- European Data Space for Skills
- Inventory of digital tools and practices in tourism
- Green Comp
- Academia Digital in Portugal
- EU Data Space for Tourism
- European Skills Agenda
- Jobs & Skills initiative
- TSI 2022: The Ministry of Tourism of Greece is collaborating with the OECD and the European Commission to improve the enabling environment for Greek tourism SMEs, focusing on promoting innovative solutions for the resilience and competitiveness of micro-enterprises
- SITUR.GOV.RO, the national digital platform in Romania
- TOURIN
- TOUR-X
- Pacts4All
- D3HUB - EU Competence Centre for Data Management in Smart Destinations
- Deployment of the European Tourism Data Space
- The European Skills Agenda

These initiatives and projects collectively support digital transformation, sustainability, and innovation within the tourism ecosystem across Europe. Raising awareness on all these different tools and projects and enhancing the reuse of the solutions adopted is a challenging element in this sense.

Additionally, the AI Act of the European Union, adopted in May 2024, can contribute to this action as artificial intelligence can be seen as a digital tool that requires specific knowledge

and competencies in tourism. The AI Act can help to understand the needed skills but can also help to shape regulations that anticipate risks associated with the use of the artificial intelligence.

Moreover, a recent report of the European Commission on "[Jobs in EU Tourism](#)" focuses on staff and skill shortage in the European tourism industry, with only one in five participants aware of EU initiatives like the Pact for Skills in Tourism.

By promoting common data standards and indicators, replication and expansion of best practices and solutions would be fostered as the assessment of locations, sectors, or organisational levels where the practices can be implemented would provide useful elements for scalability.

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

The action provides a structured approach to analyzing skill and knowledge gaps and offering possible solutions to address them. It establishes a standardized framework, promoting a shared understanding of sustainable tourism practices and the integration of digital products. By leveraging a unified European approach, the action contributes to harmonizing practices and advancing the tourism industry in the digital age.

The future goal is to have a well-established European approach to analyse knowledge and skill gaps for competencies in sustainable tourism and digital products.

This Toolkit serves as a blueprint to identify gaps in skills and knowledge, understand their causes and develop strategies to address them.

Using the EU Transition Pathways Stakeholder Support Platform, the toolkit aims to share findings, best practices and ensure ongoing professional development and knowledge exchange. In addition, the platform could facilitate the contact and the exchange of knowledge among the members.

This action tackles multiple facets of the identified problem. First of all, it tackles the standardization of competencies, being the Toolkit aimed at making knowledge and competencies available, while bridging the gap in the diverse training methodologies and responsibilities among EU member states. The action also promotes unified understanding of sustainable tourism: by defining competencies for digital products and services in terms of sustainable tourism the action contributes to creating a shared understanding and promoting consistent practices across the EU. Furthermore, the action fosters access to knowledge and skills, enhancing the exchange of knowledge on ongoing thematic initiatives in the EU.

Furthermore, the action promotes regulation and funding awareness, making the access to possible funding option easier by sharing knowledge and possible funding opportunities. The action also spreads awareness on common data standards and best practices on the topic. As there are many different tools used in the tourism industry for collecting and saving data, the collaboration with the partners can be challenging when different methods are used. To overcome this obstacle, the action can also leverage the on-going initiatives regarding data, like:

EU Data Space for Tourism

European Skills Agenda

The Data Act

The Data Governance Act

European Data Space for Skills.

Last but not least, the action leads to more sustainable and green actions and destinations while increasing the skills in digitalization which have a huge potential to foster the green transition (as in the European Skills Agenda).

The action's benefits extend to both urban and rural areas.

This action promotes enhanced sustainable tourism practices, with standardized competencies and data contributing to the adoption of sustainable practices to encourage responsible tourism in both urban and rural areas by minimizing environmental impacts. By improving the competencies of stakeholders, the initiative also stimulates economic growth by attracting more tourists, creating job opportunities, and supporting local businesses in urban areas. Additionally, the action fosters the integration of digital tools for the preservation of cultural heritage, improving the cultural experiences for both tourists and urban residents.

A key aspect of the action is its contribution to the green transition, as it enhances digital tools and processes that support sustainability efforts within tourism destinations. Moreover, the establishment of a network encourages inclusive community engagement, ensuring that the benefits of tourism are shared equitably among urban residents. The initiative aligns with the concept of "smart cities" by promoting the adoption of digital technologies to improve tourism management and enhance the overall urban experience.

In addressing the specific needs of urban environments, the action tailors competencies to the dynamics of cities, recognizing their unique challenges and opportunities. The toolkit is designed to address the specific needs of cities in terms of cultural richness, sustainability, and responsible tourism practices. The initiative also fosters collaborative urban governance, promoting cooperation among different stakeholders to support the collaborative nature of urban governance.

Furthermore, the focus on sustainable tourism practices is aligned with the emphasis given by the Urban Agenda for the UE to environmental responsibility and sustainability in urban planning and development. By embracing digitalization, the action ensures that the growing prevalence of digital technologies in cities enhances tourism experiences and aligns with current trends in smart urban development.

In summary, the action provides a comprehensive solution to the identified problems, advancing sustainable tourism practices, fostering collaboration and enhancing the overall urban tourism landscape across the European Union.

By establishing a standardized process and promoting a shared understanding of sustainable tourism practices and the integration of digital products, this action helps to harmonize practices and foster key competencies in tourism professionals regarding digital products and services.

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

The implementation will be divided into three phases. All partners must conduct the following actions:

**Phase A:** Digital Services/Products and Stakeholders Mapping



Setting up the Stakeholder group (Activity 3.1).

Each partner of this action must constitute a stakeholder group to map the gaps and needs, which will be addressed through a survey. A general presentation of this action will be shared with potential stakeholders to introduce the purpose and give an overview of existing measures in the EU through an introduction workshop or an online meeting.

An effective way to create a Local Stakeholder Group is by establishing local/regional tourism and innovative hubs, composed of key private and public actors. These HUBS facilitate the exchange of best practices between the tourism and cultural sectors and can act as promoters of strategies and accelerators of innovative projects, identifying emerging trends and opportunities in the sectors while providing sustainability to local policies<sup>[1]</sup>.

Before setting up the survey, the target group will be defined in order to ensure the questions are tailored accordingly. Each partner must hold at least one workshop or online meeting with their stakeholder group during the survey creation process. The survey will also be translated into the national language of the stakeholder groups and shared with partners outside of this partnership.

Setting up & conducting the survey (Activity 3.2):

The survey process begins with an introduction to digital services/products for stakeholders.

Based on the results of the survey on digital knowledge and skills gaps, hub members can work closely to strengthen the digital skills of the tourism workforce.

### **Phase B:** Survey & Solutions

Analyzing the Survey (Activity 3.3):

After the conduction of the survey, each partner will analyze and summarize the results to identify gaps in skills and knowledge, the causes of the gaps and potential solutions.

Finding Solutions (Activity 3.4):

Using the results of the survey, suitable solutions to close the defined gaps and to address their causes will be identified. Every partner must conduct a match-making workshop or meeting with the stakeholder group to determine how to close the gaps and develop the needed competencies. After the completion of workshops and online meetings, the outcomes will be compiled in a toolkit. The EU Transition Pathways Stakeholder Support Platform will also be utilized to ensure the results are available digitally and can easily be updated, also possibly building upon existing projects and tools.

### **Phase C:** Ensuring Sustainability & Monitoring

Making the toolkit sustainable and monitor the activities (Activity 3.5):

The final step is to ensure the sustainability of the toolkit. This involves regular updates of the toolkit, ensuring it remains relevant to stakeholders, incorporating knowledge on emerging trends and technological advancements and funding sources, and removing outdated content. This action can also be adaptable to other topics, such as greening cities, and transferable to stakeholders not directly involved in the partnership.

To ensure the toolkit remains relevant, a series of measures can be implemented, such as the implementation of feedback forms and surveys to gather input from stakeholders, the definition of key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the success of the dissemination activities, and the conduction of periodic reviews to assess and improve the effectiveness of the dissemination strategy.

<sup>[1]</sup> The City of Venice is actively participating in the creation of a HUB to promote local food and wine heritage and develop digital skills as part of the Interreg Italy-Croatia TestEAT project. The Venice HUB will define the "challenges" for innovation in the city's food and wine industry and work with local educational and research institutions to initiate innovation labs (involving professionals, researchers, students, and educators) that will devise possible innovative solutions, such as improving the digital skills of the tourism workforce (online menus and ordering, time management, social media, and digital marketing).

### 2.3.6 What resources are needed?

To execute this action, the primary requirement is human resources, specifically the support of external expertise for survey creation, analysis of the results, and mapping solutions to identified causes and gaps. Partner organizations must also contribute human resources for the implementation of the actions and expert knowledge of ongoing EU projects, reports, and access to networks relevant to the action.

Additionally, technical expertise is required for designing, analysing the survey, and developing the toolkit. Financial resources are also necessary to ensure the toolkit meets the expected standards.

### 2.3.7 Are there any risks foreseen?

The following risk can be identified:

- Lack of interest: Stakeholders may not show sufficient interest in the project and participation may decline, reducing buy-in and hindering progress towards the objectives set by the action. To mitigate this, it's important to clearly communicate the benefits and advantages of this action and its tools to stakeholders in order to actively engage them in the process.
- Inclusivity: Ensuring inclusivity across diverse linguistic, cultural, and economic backgrounds is crucial. Multilingual resources should be provided, and cultural sensitivities and accessibility challenges should be considered.
- Delay in expertise provision: Delays in received expertise support may slow down the implementation of the entire action, being expertise support crucial in some steps mentioned above.
- Outsourcing of skills development: Skills development is often outsourced by local authorities or tourism professionals, and that may lead to increased dependency on external providers with higher long-term costs. The action needs to show the value of developing in-house skills to maintain transparency and control.

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

#### Action Leader(s)

Rhine-Neckar Region Association

#### Contributors

Municipality of Galati

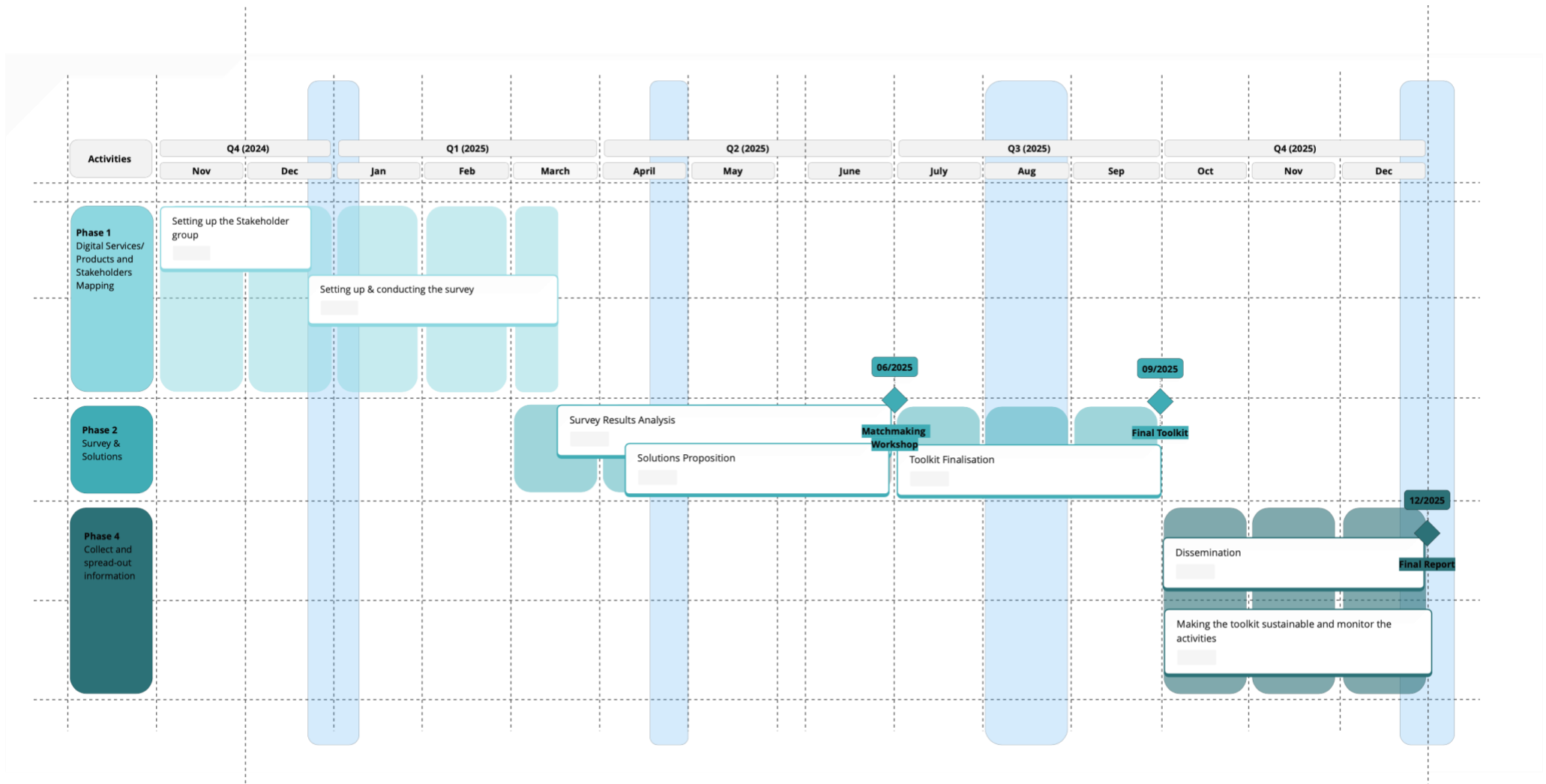
City of Venice

City of Porvoo

Intermunicipal Community of Coimbra Region

Mirabilia Network  
Municipality of Genoa  
Association for the promotion of tourism in Oradea and the region, RO  
Partners' stakeholder groups

## 2.3.9 What is the timeline of the implementation?



## 2.3.10 Which deliverables and outputs will be produced?

### PHASE A:

- Stakeholder's groups set-up (O) - local, regional or even national HUBs
- Survey (D)
- Introduction workshop (O)

### PHASE B:

- Report with survey result analysis (D)
- Match-making workshop (O)
- Toolkit (D) - it is a description of the process on how entrepreneurs can be helped to find their needs and knowledge gaps and connect them with tech companies or service providers to improve their competences in the field of sustainable tourism.
- The toolkit will be comparable, adaptable and transferable due to the fact that the survey will be the same in every partner country, and it can be improved with new emerging technologies and services, every year.

Furthermore, the survey will be available on the EU Transition Pathways Stakeholder Support Platform (DG GROW tool).

### PHASE C:

- Monitoring system (O)

This action will produce two workshops or online meetings per partner in the creation phase of the survey and while mapping the gaps and their causes to the possible solutions as intermediate outputs. In addition to these outputs, a presentation of the action will be prepared and distributed in order to give a better understanding of the process to the groups of stakeholders.

The main output will be the toolkit to find possible solutions for every gap in terms of competencies regarding digital products and services in the field of sustainable tourism.

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

- EU Digital Single Market Initiatives: While promoting digitalization and innovation in tourism, these efforts may unintentionally create spatial imbalances by primarily benefiting regions or urban areas with advanced digital infrastructure, leaving others behind.
- EU Accessibility Regulations: Although essential for improving accessibility in tourism, stringent regulations without adequate support mechanisms may disproportionately burden smaller or less developed destinations, leading to spatial imbalances in compliance and implementation.
- EU Digital Skills Agenda: Initiatives aimed at enhancing digital skills in the tourism sector may favor regions with well-established education and training infrastructures, potentially widening disparities in digital readiness among tourism professionals.

## 2.3 Action N° 04 – More resilient and sustainable destinations through diversification of tourism offer

### Diversifying Tourism Offer



Providing recommendations on legal and financial incentives contributing to diversification of the tourism offer

### Action 4

More Resilient and Sustainable Destinations through Diversification of Tourism Offer

Vulnerabilities in the tourism ecosystem, including high seasonality, overtourism, and uneven geographical distribution of tourists

The diversification of the tourism offer is at the heart of the transformation of the tourism ecosystem, particularly in urban destinations. It can be categorised into three interconnected dimensions: Time, Space and Activities. Diversification is essential to strengthening the resilience and sustainability of destinations. It helps to decongest destinations, redistribute tourist flows across time and space, address seasonality and activate a broad range of local assets and urban areas through a diversified tourism offer.

**Targeted stakeholders/governance level:** Local and regional authorities, Destination marketing organisations, SMEs

**Deadline:** 31/12/2025

Intermediate Deadline 1: October 2025 - A handbook for urban authorities and other stakeholders compiling the good practices and lessons learned, recommendations and case studies on the different focus elements to foster the diversification of tourism offer.

Intermediate Deadline 2: November 2025 - Two dedicated workshops to promote the handbook, test the draft recommendations, share relevant lessons learned and explore identified good practices.

Intermediate Deadline 3: December 2025 - Three promotional videos aimed at raising awareness within local communities on sustainable tourism and the produced outputs.

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

# Action 4



**Better knowledge** **Better funding** **Better regulation**

The action primarily contributes to the Better Knowledge pillar. This action supports ongoing efforts to enhance knowledge on challenges, opportunities and measurement, by gathering good practices and lessons learned. It will explore multidimensional solutions from the perspective of urban destinations, with a focus on funding possibilities and incentives to effectively support diversification. Recommendations based on these good practices, lessons learned, and financial incentives contributing to diversification of the tourism offer provide an opportunity to suggest improvements to relevant regulations, at different governance levels, thereby contributing to Better Funding and Better Regulation pillars.

## 2.4.2 What is the specific problem?

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic crisis hit the EU tourism ecosystem hard, with a significant loss of revenue, workforce and activity. Like any other types of destinations, cities had to temporarily reimagine their approach to tourism and seek alternative solutions to comply with health and safety requirements while attracting different segments of the tourism market.

While some signs of recovery have emerged, the pandemic exposed critical structural vulnerabilities in the tourism ecosystem that need to be addressed to ensure its long-term competitiveness, sustainability and resilience. Challenges such as high seasonality, overtourism and unequal geographical distribution in some destinations determine the intensity and characteristic of tourism flows, the pressure on infrastructure, services and resources and the balance between the tourism sector, the local population and the environment. These challenges also have urban dimensions, which are crucial to take into account for the sustainable and resilient recovery of the tourism ecosystem.

Additionally, many destinations prioritize short-term profits from mass tourism, which leads to the overuse of natural and cultural resources, environmental degradation, and disruptions to local communities.

In the context of evolving consume preferences and high vulnerability of the sector towards external shocks, as seen with Russia's war in Ukraine, rising energy prices, inflation, and climate change, the need for a shift in tourism approaches is ever-present in cities and other destinations. As part of a sustainable tourism approach, cities aim to use resources more effectively and foster a positive impact on the ground in collaboration with different levels of government and relevant stakeholders including local communities.

Sustainable tourism requires long-term planning, investment in eco-friendly infrastructure, and collaboration with local stakeholders, which can be costly and complex. Moreover, resistance from businesses and tourists who often prioritize convenience and affordability over sustainability, complicates widespread adoption of sustainable solutions. According to the UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization), around 5% of global CO2 emissions are linked to tourism, with estimations rising to 5,3% in 2030. Also, in heavily visited tourist destinations, waste production can increase by up to 30% during peak tourism seasons, straining local waste management systems in urban and rural destinations.

Diversification of the tourism offer is at the heart of this transformation. It encompasses destinations' efforts to expand or adapt the tourism offer and effectively activate its assets to cater to different visitor needs and desires. Diversification also helps extend the tourism season beyond peak times, balance the intensity of tourism activity across destinations in the same territory, and promote a balanced socio-economic development and competitiveness in the destination, while reducing risks associated with tourism.

However, cities' ability to adapt to these changes varies significantly. Concrete guidance and examples of good and innovative practices, as well as lessons learned, are needed to support locally diversified and customised touristic solutions.

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

Although the topic of tourism diversification, seasonality and unbalanced tourism (or overtourism) are not new, they remain high priorities in the renewed EU tourism agenda, which aims to transform the tourism ecosystem into a more sustainable and resilient model. Topic 26 of the Transition Pathway for Tourism includes action focused on diversifying and developing tourism services for the benefit of both residents and visitors. The European Agenda for Tourism 2030 also calls on the European Commission, Member States and other stakeholders to diversify tourism services "to service diverse audiences in all seasons and various locations" and "particularly across seasons and various locations".

The European Commission supports knowledge sharing, networking and capacity building and the dissemination of good practices related to the diversification and resilience of destinations, addressing overtourism and seasonality. For example, the European Capital of Smart Tourism initiative rewards destinations working on innovative solutions in the categories of sustainability, digitalisation, cultural heritage and creativity and accessibility. Similarly, the European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism<sup>4</sup> initiative (the successor of the EDEN initiative)<sup>5</sup> selects and promotes inspiring smaller lesser-known tourism destinations pioneering sustainability and innovation. In 2023, the European Commission launched the Supporting sustainability and resilience of EU tourism destinations<sup>6</sup> project (also known as Sustainable EU Tourism – Shaping the Tourism of Tomorrow) to identify key challenges for making tourism more sustainable and resilient. The project provided also targeted recommendations and peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and a communication campaign targeting DMOs and tourists and their behaviour.

The European Commission has also published the Communication Towards a Common European Tourism Data Space: boosting data sharing and innovation across the tourism

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<sup>4</sup> [https://smart-tourism-capital.ec.europa.eu/about/european-green-pioneer-smart-tourism\\_en](https://smart-tourism-capital.ec.europa.eu/about/european-green-pioneer-smart-tourism_en)

<sup>5</sup> The European Commission published in 2022 the EDEN Best Practices Report, which showcases best practices from the initiative including on diversification of tourism offer in the respective destinations. <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/49254>

<sup>6</sup> [eTendering - Data \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eTendering/Data)



ecosystem<sup>7</sup>. The Data Space for Tourism will provide a trusted and secure common European data space for tourism, for sharing, access and re-use of tourism related data for all the stakeholders of the tourism ecosystem. Data sharing and re-use will have a positive impact on the transformation of the tourism ecosystem, by supporting data-driven approaches and new, innovative services and solutions. Data sharing will also support better and more sustainable management of destinations along common standards and interoperable protocols.

From a funding perspective, various EU programmes and funding instruments provide opportunities<sup>8</sup> to support the diversification of tourism, on topics such as the extension of geographical and time scope of activities in tourism destinations. Relevant measures were also included in many countries' Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs). In the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy programmes, Member States and regions have shown an interest in supporting actions to diversify tourism offer, as well as addressing overtourism and manage seasonality, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund. In addition, sustainable tourism was one of the three topics of the second call for proposals of the European Urban Initiative-Innovative Actions<sup>9</sup> with an overall indicative budget for the call of EUR 120 million from the ERDF. Seven cities were selected in May 2024 and will be able to profit from up to EUR 5 million each to test the proposed urban innovative solutions, including in the field of sustainable tourism and the diversification of the tourism offer.

The Commission also funds projects on different aspects related to diversification and resilience<sup>10</sup> through dedicated calls under the Single Market Programme (previously COSME). The Horizon 2020 programme (predecessor of Horizon Europe) has also supported numerous research and innovation projects that focus on diversification of the tourism offer from the multiple perspectives, such as developing new products and new impact-focused methods or supporting lesser-known destinations. Examples of these projects are TEXTOUR<sup>11</sup>, IMPACTOUR<sup>12</sup>, Be.CULTOUR<sup>13</sup>, SmartCulTour<sup>14</sup>, and SPOT<sup>15</sup>.

In the Palma Declaration of 2023<sup>16</sup>, EU Member States committed to "encourage tourism stakeholders to put the continuing well-being of local residents in the heart of tourism development, building on the unique cultural and natural assets of the destination in a responsible and sustainable way". The European Commission was also invited to "develop and strengthen the EU tools for best practice sharing... to make tourism truly sustainable,

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<sup>7</sup> European Commission (2023) "Towards a Common European Tourism Data Space: boosting data sharing and innovation across the tourism ecosystem" C(2023)4787. [https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/publications/communication-commission-towards-common-european-tourism-data-space\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/publications/communication-commission-towards-common-european-tourism-data-space_en)

<sup>8</sup> The Guide to EU Funding for tourism identifies a total of 17 EU funding programmes that support sustainable tourism, some of which could offer opportunities for diversification of the tourism offer and to address seasonality and overtourism [https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/tourism/eu-funding-and-businesses/funding-guide\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/tourism/eu-funding-and-businesses/funding-guide_en)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.urban-initiative.eu/calls-proposals/second-call-proposals-innovative-actions>

<sup>10</sup> For example, the 2015 call for proposals on increasing tourism flows in the low and medium seasons which supported 11 projects.

<sup>11</sup> <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101004687>

<sup>12</sup> <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870747> <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870747>

<sup>13</sup> <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101004627> <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101004627>

<sup>14</sup> <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870708>

<sup>15</sup> <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870644>

<sup>16</sup> Consilium (2023) Palma Declaration: "The path towards social sustainability of tourism in the EU" Press release available at <https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/palma-declaration-path-towards-social-sustainability-tourism-eu/>

focusing on the economic, social and environmental aspects and on the governance of the tourism sector.”

Considering the elements mentioned above, the opportunity for a meaningful action on diversification lies in consolidating the lessons learned from these initiatives into one single entry point for the benefit of urban destinations. The Urban Agenda Partnership on Sustainable Tourism can then provide further recommendations addressing the three dimensions on diversification and adapting them to the post-Covid context, based on collected good practices and from recently tested solutions in partner cities contributing to the implementation of the action.

#### **2.4.4 Which action is needed?**

Relying on a single type of tourism or focusing on high-peak season travel can lead to economic vulnerability, overcrowding, environmental degradation, and strain on existing infrastructure. By diversifying tourism activities, destinations can attract a broader range of visitors profiles and ensure a steady flow of income, reducing dependence on seasonal tourism. This diversification not only also enhances the visitor experience, but also encourages visitors to explore lesser-known areas and fosters connection with local culture and communities. Diversifying tourism offers strengthen the resilience of destinations, making them more flexible and adaptable to market shifts, minimizing negative impacts, and promoting long-term sustainability. The action focuses on three interconnected dimensions: time, space and activities.

##### *Diversification across time*

This dimension addresses seasonality in urban destinations, aiming to extend the tourism season more evenly throughout the year. By promoting off-peak season opportunities, destinations can reduce pressures of peak season travels and around specific events. This may enable the activation of assets and resources that may not be available during the busier periods while attracting a wider audience.

Urban destinations can also boost tourism activity throughout the day by analysing data showcasing the distribution of visitors in particular spots during the day, less frequented periods such as early and late hours. These quieter times should be better communicated and marketed to visitors and residents. In particular, the URBACT network Cities After Dark<sup>17</sup> observes the night-time as an opportunity to boost economy, while addressing various challenges such as safety, regulation and environmental impacts (e.g., noise and light pollution). Nightlife is an essential economic driver in many popular tourist destinations, and it can serve as a form of diversification, as long as a careful balance between night-time activity and the quality of life of residents is ensured.

##### *Diversification across space*

Tourism is an important sector for urban economies, even if it's often unequally distributed across a destination. Diversifying tourism offer across space requires a comprehensive understanding of how public space can be used for touristic and non-touristic activities, as well as the carrying capacity of an urban destination, even at neighbourhood level and in the destination's surrounding territory. Diversification of the tourism activity in this sense allows to extend the geographical extent of the tourism activity and in some cases also relieving the pressure on overcrowded tourism hotspots and areas where tourism congestion is an issue.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://urbact.eu/networks/cities-after-dark>

In a similar manner as in the case of diversification across time, diversification across space can activate underutilized assets and resources by promoting lesser-known areas with high tourism potential. Urban destinations can also act as a gateway to surrounding regions, creating connections between urban, peri-urban and rural tourism offer. This approach balances the benefits of tourism across the urban destination and its surrounding areas. However, careful attention must be paid to ensure these new areas are adequately connected to the rest of the city and that effective tourism flow management systems are in place.

By extending the geographical reach of tourism, cities can expand its positive impact. Tourism is a highly interconnected ecosystem, and broadening its scope can have positive spill over effects on other areas. Diversification of tourism can reinforce the ecosystem's transformative role. However, the success and sustainability of actions in this dimension relies also on how negative externalities of tourism (including gentrification) are well mitigated.

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis forced cities to reimagine their approach to tourism. Outdoor tourism, for example, is an example of post-pandemic diversification strategy, encouraging visitors to explore nearby areas that offer nature-based activities and promote physical and mental wellbeing. The use of sustain able transport modes, such as cycling, can enhance visitor's experience especially in areas linked by short- and long-distance cycle routes, including EuroVelo routes. Activating these activities in a sustainable way can reinforce destination's capacity to attract new audiences and improve the quality of life for both visitors and residents.

#### *Diversification across activities*

The destinations need to cater to a wider audience, including international, national and local visitors with different profiles, in order to reduce the dependency on specific segments of the tourism sector and increase its resilience against potential future shocks. This requires expanding the tourism offer by developing new products and activities that build on existing or to-be developed assets.

According to the 2021 Eurobarometer survey on EU tourism attitudes, the availability of activities in the destination was the fourth most important factor for choosing a destination, after cultural offerings, price of the overall trip and the natural environment in the destination. Recent trends also show a growing demand for personalised, unique, authentic and immersive experiences that focus on the wellbeing of visitors, local communities and the environment. Interest in outdoor and nature-based experiences even in urban destinations has also increased in the post-Covid period.

However, diversification efforts must avoid a negative impact on local communities or the environment. Tourism activities should respect the local communities, minimize environmental footprint, and ideally contribute to the revitalisation and regeneration of the destination, actively contributing to localizing the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

#### *Common enabling factors*

To facilitate effective and sustainable diversification across these three dimensions, several enabling factors can facilitate a more effective and sustainable contribution of tourism to sustainable urban development. These include a common vision for tourism that is integrated in the city's sustainable urban development plan, and aligns tourism with other socioeconomic activities. This vision has to be co-created and co-implemented by all relevant stakeholder and a clear distribution of responsibilities between actors should be

ensured. The presence of effective multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance structures following the principles of the quadruple helix (government, academia, private sector and civil society) is also essential, but also the presence of Destination Management / Marketing Organisations (DMOs) with adequate resources and expertise is particularly crucial.

Furthermore, the introduction of an effective monitoring system that provides real-time data to manage tourism flows and fosters evidence-based decision making is another relevant enabling factor, together with the creation of effective communication strategies to promote the destination and tourism offers.

The ability to access and use funding opportunities at local, regional, national and EU levels to support the diversification of the tourism offer, based on identified territorial needs, is also fundamental.

## 2.4.5 How will the action be implemented?

Considering the three dimensions and the common enabling factors for effective and innovative diversification of the tourism offer in urban destinations, the action will involve three key activities. These activities will also build on other available resources related to the diversification of the tourism offer, including the outcomes of relevant projects financed under ERDF, EUI Innovative Actions, the Single Market Programme (and COSME) and Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe, as well as the experience of involved members of the Partnership.

### 1) Collection of information on practices in urban destinations<sup>18</sup>

A desk review will be conducted on existing studies, reports and materials related to tourism diversification, tourism flows management and decongesting strategies. Whenever relevant, EU funded project could contribute to the wealth of knowledge, including the identified Horizon 2020 projects, relevant tourism innovative actions from the second call for Innovative Actions of the European Urban Initiative and good practices co-financed by EU cohesion policy funds.

This activity will be complemented by a dedicated survey designed to collect information on existing practices on diversification of tourism offer in destinations. This survey will be disseminated within and outside the partnership in order to reach a wide range of practices across the EU.

Whenever possible, partners involved in the implementation of the action can feed ongoing local projects related to diversification of the tourism offer into this activity. For example, the City of Venice, also as partner in the Interreg Italy-Croatia co-financed "REEL" project, will be addressing the common challenge of diversification and relocation of tourist flows in Italy and Croatia by investing in alternative routes based on film settings. The City of Venice will contribute by sharing its expertise in developing digital itineraries that showcase lesser-known locations.

### 2) Highlighting lessons learned and drafting recommendations.

The lessons learned that will be extracted from the desk research and the exchange of information among the partners will highlight good practices and contribute to elaborate practical recommendations for authorities and stakeholders.

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<sup>18</sup> Under this Activity, the University of Zadar - Department of Tourism and Communication Studies, which actively participated as an expert collaborator within ST Partnership, will have an important role in the implementation as well.

These recommendations will cover key elements to support the diversification of the tourism offer across the three interconnected dimensions and to strengthen the resilience of urban destinations:

- Proposing a set of indicators for measuring and monitoring the diversification of tourism - By identifying the most suitable indicators for measuring and monitoring the current and future development of tourism, the impacts of tourism and its environmental impact, taking into account the development of the Common European Tourism Data Space. In this way, urban authorities can identify potential opportunities and control the development of tourism in different areas to minimize the negative impact in time and to intensify the positive effects of tourism.
- Zoning and promoting/limiting certain tourist activities - By determining different types and sizes of zones, specific tourist activities can be controlled. This applies, for example, to zones adapted to pedestrian traffic, zones with limited vehicle traffic, zones of idle traffic (parking lots), zones related to different types of accommodation facilities, zones related to various tourist products and services (e.g. cultural and historical sites, sport and outdoor activities, street festival and markets, coffee shops, bars, night clubs, restaurants, etc.) and others.
- Creation of recommendations on a system of financial incentives or other non-financial tools for certain tourist activities - The development of a system of financial incentives can improve to control the trajectories of development of tourist activities in urban areas, balancing the offer across space, time, and activities. This refers, for example, to opportunities leading to the development of new and innovative tourist products and services in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and based on the main destinations' assets. These new tourism products can contribute to raise the quality of tourist products and services, foster knowledge exchange and the development of digital skills. At the same time it can enhance networking opportunities, and promote the development of communication campaigns of innovative tourism products and services also through the use of digital tools and taking into account the development of the common EU Tourism Data Space. This could also include support for thematic digital itineraries that contribute to delocalizing flows, enhancing marginal and lesser-known areas within the destination and promote better connection with main tourism assets, in line with the growing trend of experiential tourism.
- Promotion of the principles and goals of sustainable tourism development  
The implementation of marketing campaigns designed for local stakeholders in the destination is fundamental for promoting the principles of sustainable tourism. These campaigns can emphasize the principles and objectives of the sustainable development of tourism at local level, for instance having kids and young people among the main targets, or tourists in order to foster deseasonalization.

Fostering community engagement and positive tourists-visitors relations– The diversification of the tourism offer should also take into account the needs of the residents. By ensuring active and meaningful involvement and participation of local residents in the design, implementation, management and evaluation of existing and new tourism activities, urban destinations can create a balance between the needs of residents and visitors. Actions could involve co-design and co-implementation methods, participatory management and collaborative decision-making models, transparency measures, open and effective channels for consultations, and participatory budgeting in the field of sustainable tourism. By ensuring that local communities can benefit from tourism, the action will foster a

sense of ownership and pride, making sustainable tourism a collaborative and positive effort.

### 3) Dissemination of the outcomes and peer learning

To ensure that the recommendations reach the intended target, partners will organise dedicated dissemination activities such as conferences or workshops to present good practices, and will make use of social media platforms for distributing three promotional videos to raise awareness on sustainable tourism. These activities will seek to address common challenges and solutions to the diversification of the tourism offer in urban destinations, while also offering a variety of experiences to reflect the diversity of context in the EU.

Partners will explore further opportunities for capacity building, including the City-to-City exchanges or other opportunities under the European Urban Initiative, in order to promote concrete projects and approaches to the diversification of the tourism offer in urban areas.

## 2.4.6 What resources are needed?

For the implementation of the action, involved partners will contribute to the design and implementation of various planned activities and outputs based on their knowledge, expertise and interest. In terms of knowledge, expertise on the different dimensions, access to relevant tourism-related networks and survey designs will be key to ensure the effectiveness of the foreseen action. Support from external expertise will be sought to strengthen the process where key gaps are identified.

Although no dedicated funding is allocated for the implementation of the activities of this action, involved partners can contribute to the collection of best practices and the production of lessons learned and recommendations through the implementation of ongoing projects in their respective cities, with these projects serving as practical case studies to support the action's objectives.

As part of the dissemination component, the partners will also need to allocate human resources to organise events and awareness raising activities.

## 2.4.7 Are there any risks foreseen?

- **Low stakeholders participation:** A lack of engagement from key stakeholders, such as local businesses, residents, tourists, and government bodies, could hinder the collection of essential insights needed to design effective tourism strategies.
- **Lack of relevant data:** Insufficient or inaccurate data on tourism flows, environmental impacts, and local needs can make the implementation of well-informed and effective recommendations particularly challenging, due to the inability to monitor or measure progress toward sustainability.
- **Limited funds:** Sustainable tourism projects often require significant investment in infrastructure, education, skills, digitalisation and dissemination of results. Without proper funding, even high-quality outputs may not gain sufficient visibility or achieve their intended impact.
- **Change in the political and regulatory landscape:** Shifts in political leadership, priorities, or regulatory frameworks can disrupt ongoing projects, lead to reallocation of resources, or introduce different policies undermining long-term efforts for sustainability.
- **Unclear allocation of responsibilities:** If responsibilities among stakeholders (government, private sector, NGOs) are not clearly defined and the timeframe for implementation is not set, there is a risk of inefficiency and duplication of efforts.

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

### **Action Leader(s)**

City of Zadar

### **Contributors**

City of Genova

European Commission

City of Šibenik

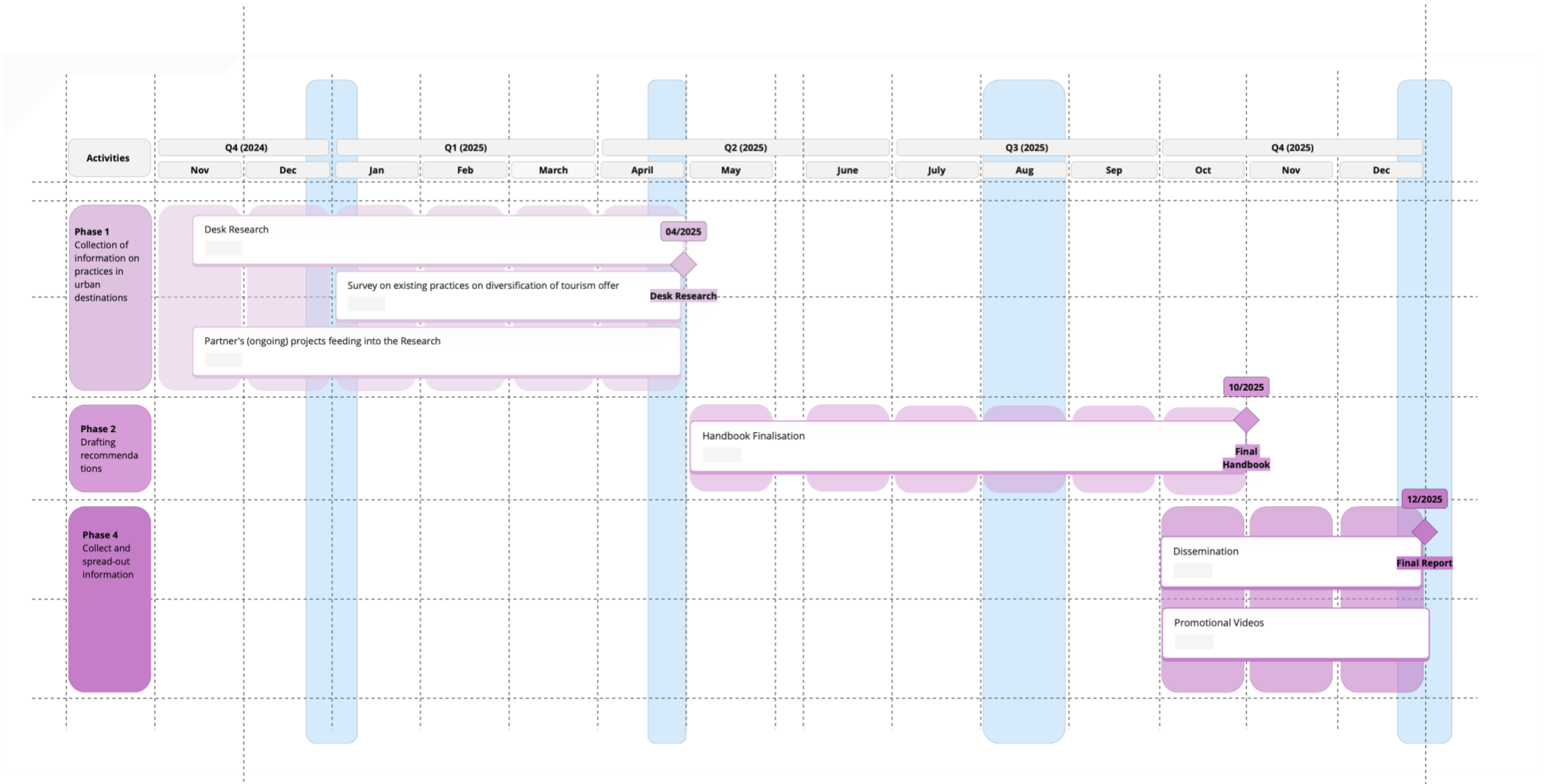
Ljubljana

Diputacio de Barcelona

Eurocities

City of Venice

## 2.4.9 What is the timeline of the implementation?





## 2.4.10 Which deliverables and outputs will be produced?

- A handbook for urban authorities and stakeholders, compiling good practices, lessons learned, recommendations and case studies on the different focus areas to foster the diversification of tourism offer – deadline: October 2025
- Two dedicated workshops to promote the handbook, test draft recommendations, share relevant lessons learned and explore identified good practices – deadline: November 2025.
- Three promotional videos dedicated to raise awareness among local communities about sustainable tourism and highlighting produced outputs – deadline: December 2025.

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

Transition Pathway for Tourism, European Agenda for Tourism 2030: Diversifying tourism offers is more likely to take place in well-developed regions with strong infrastructure for tourism diversification (e.g., cultural, eco, or adventure tourism) attracting more investment. However, this could leave other less developed regions behind, exacerbating spatial imbalances.

European Capital of Smart Tourism initiative: This initiative rewards cities excelling in accessibility, sustainability, digitalization, and cultural heritage. Rural or underdeveloped regions might struggle to diversify their tourism offer due to lower levels of digitalization or sustainability infrastructure, leading to uneven benefits across Europe.

European Tourism Data Space: Regions and places with better data infrastructure and capabilities (e.g., urban or tech-forward regions) may leverage these insights more effectively than regions with limited access to data resources or digital tools, resulting in spatial imbalances.

Initiatives, regulations and projects, in general, to consider for tackling this issue:

- Transition Pathway for Tourism
- European Agenda for Tourism 2030
- European Capital of Smart Tourism initiative
- European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism
- Palma Declaration of 2023
- Member States Recovery and Resilience Plans
- European Urban Initiative – Innovative Actions
- Portico European urban knowledge platform
- European Tourism Data Space
- EU Stakeholders Support Platform for Tourism
- EU-CONEXUS - European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability
- Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (UNWTO)
- Kohesio platform

Projects: Sustainable EU Tourism - Shaping the Tourism of Tomorrow, TExTOUR,, IMPACTOUR, Be.CULTOUR, SmartCulTour, SPOT, REEL, Tourism-friendly cities, Cities After Dark, REVIVAL - Revitalization and Reuse of the lost heritage in the Adriatic landscape, RECOLOR - Reviving and Enhancing artWorks and Landscapes Of the adRiatic.

## 2.4 Action N° 05 – Destinations accessible for all



Ensuring that tourism destinations are accessible to everyone means recognizing diverse needs of different tourist segments and adapt the tourism offer accordingly, ensuring that all tourists can equally enjoy the destinations. Accessibility for all to tourism facilities, products, and services should be a central part of any responsible and sustainable tourism policy.

**Targeted stakeholders/governance level:** Local and regional authorities, Destination marketing organisations, SMEs

**Deadline:** 30/11/2025

Intermediate Deadline 1: September 2025 - A handbook for creating a suitable environment and assumptions for accessible tourism and tourism for all in urban destinations (based on survey results, previous research, best practices and other relevant literature).

Intermediate Deadline 2: June 2025 - A presentation of best practices of accessible tourism and tourism for all in urban destinations (based on the best practices).

Intermediate Deadline 3: October 2025 - Two workshops on implementation and promotion of accessible tourism and tourism for all.

Intermediate Deadline 4: November 2025 - Three promotional videos dedicated to raise awareness of local communities on accessible tourism and tourism for all.

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

**Action 5**



**Better regulation** **Better knowledge**

The action will primarily contribute to the Better Knowledge pillar, by acquiring information on accessibility-related challenges and best practices in urban destinations. However, considering recent relevant legislative developments, the action can contribute to the better implementation of EU-level legislation on accessibility, therefore contributing to the Better Regulation pillar.

## 2.5.2 What is the specific problem?

Over the past 30 years, various socio-cultural, political, economic and technological changes have significantly increased the number of trips. Despite this progress, certain segments of the tourism market, such as persons with disabilities and elderly people, continue to face a wide range of barriers, including physical, sensory, cognitive and cultural challenges before, during and after their trips. According to a 2021 Eurobarometer report, at the stage of travel planning 39% of EU citizens (and higher amongst older persons) found it difficult or very difficult to obtain information on the accessibility of destinations for persons with disabilities or reduced mobility. This challenge is further aggravated by inaccessible infrastructure, services and products, and discriminatory practices at the destination itself. Travelling during peak tourism seasons is particularly challenging these groups due to large crowds, noise, and other restrictions. Moreover, in addition to physical and sensory barriers, high travel costs are a significant deterrent for many persons with disabilities, as their specific needs often make their travel costs higher than those faced by persons without disabilities.

According to article 9 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), accessibility is a “vital pre-condition for effective and equal enjoyment of different civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights by persons with disabilities”. The EU and its Member States are part of this Convention which impose legal obligations to ensure that the physical environment, information and communication, transport, facilities and services provided to the public ensure equal access for persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others. This includes identifying and eliminating any barriers that impede equal participation of persons with disabilities in society. These measures should also apply to sustainable tourism in order to ensure that everyone can equally enjoy tourism experiences.

A lack of accessibility results in missed opportunities for destinations both in terms of the local economy and the local population. Approximately 1.3 billion people worldwide experience significant disabilities, including 87 million people in the EU. Moreover, 20.6% of the EU population is aged 65 or over, almost half of them reporting some form of disability. This constitutes a big segment of the market and population, whose specific needs are not adequately addressed. According to the results of the 2021 Eurobarometer study, 39% of EU citizens considered information on the accessibility of tourism services a key factor in their choice for destinations.

Therefore, it is extremely important that tourist destinations acknowledge and adapt to the specific needs of this tourist segments in order to ensure the sustainable development of

tourism in the destination. Local disability associations should also be involved in addressing accessibility issues in these destinations.

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

Accessibility has been a priority for EU support, especially in areas relevant to sustainable tourism. Over the past decade, the EU has made significant progress in accessibility legislation across various fields, including ICT, product production and copyright law, all of which indirectly impact the tourism ecosystem. Most recently, the European Accessibility Act (EAA)<sup>19</sup> requires economic operators to ensure that products and services on the market are accessible, following key requirements<sup>20</sup>.

The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 is the current main EU-level guide on accessibility policies and builds on the achievements of previous frameworks. As a key deliverable of this strategy, in September 2023 the European Commission presented a proposal for a Directive establishing a European Disability Card and a European Parking Card for persons with disabilities valid in all Member States<sup>21</sup>. These cards will facilitate the cross-border recognition of disability status issues by national competent authorities, complementing existing national cards and certificates. As a result, persons with disabilities would be granted equal access to special conditions and preferential treatment in public and private services, such as free entry, reduced prices, priority access, personal assistance, braille or audio guides, mobility aids and assistance animals. A political agreement between the European Parliament and the Council of the EU on the proposal was reached in February 2024<sup>[11]</sup>. Since most of the special conditions apply to transport, cultural and tourism events and sites, the proposal is crucial for improving the accessibility of urban destinations.

In the context of sustainable tourism and in line with the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, accessibility is also a priority under the Transition Pathway for Tourism (topic 25) and the European Tourism Agenda 2030. These frameworks call for authorities at different governance levels and relevant stakeholders to raise awareness of the importance of accessibility in tourism, improve accessibility in the provision of tourism services and apply EU rules on accessible public procurement. The recent Palma Declaration of Tourism Ministers<sup>22</sup> also emphasized that accessibility is a pillar of social sustainability of tourism.

To address the knowledge gap and collect all relevant information and good practices on accessibility, the European Commission launched the European Accessibility Resource Centre "AccessibleEU Centre". This one-stop-shop provides capacity building, expert training, monitoring and networking opportunities, with a particular focus on resources relevant to tourism.

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<sup>19</sup> Directive 2019/882

<sup>20</sup> These requirements concern certain products and services spelled out in article 2 and 3 and Annex I and III of the European Accessibility Act

<sup>21</sup> In this regard, the Directive establishing the European Disability Card and the European Parking Card for persons with disabilities establishes that Member States shall ensure that public authorities make the information on the special conditions, preferential treatment, and parking conditions and facilities that they offer to persons with disabilities publicly available, including through their websites where available, or by other suitable means. Member States shall also encourage private operators to make information on the special conditions, preferential treatment, and parking conditions and facilities they offer publicly available in accessible formats.

<sup>22</sup> <https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/palma-declaration-path-towards-social-sustainability-tourism-eu/>

EU funding also plays an important role in ensuring accessibility, especially in tourism. Under the Cohesion Policy, accessibility is a horizontal principle applied to all funding stages, from programme design to implementation of actions and evaluation. Many national, regional and Interreg programmes have incorporated dedicated accessibility interventions to facilitate equal access to services at national and subnational levels across many fields, including under ERDF support for sustainable tourism. Projects like Handiscover<sup>23</sup> and ENTOURAGE<sup>24</sup>, supported under Horizon 2020, have explored different perspectives on accessibility in sustainable tourism. Under COSME, the European Commission supported the development of accessible tourism itineraries<sup>25</sup> and fostered accessible entrepreneurship and management<sup>26</sup>. The Sustainable EU Tourism project<sup>27</sup> is gathering replicable best practices and offer peer-to-peer learning opportunities on accessibility. Additionally, the "In-Tour" project, co-funded by Erasmus+, provides training activities for tourism employees in order to improve their skills for better serving travellers with special access requirements.

The European Commission also recognises significant efforts and innovative solutions on accessibility made by local authorities. The Access City Award<sup>28</sup> rewards cities which made significant progress in ensuring physical and virtual urban spaces are accessible for persons with disabilities. Accessibility is also a key dimension evaluated as part of the European Capital of Smart Tourism. These awards serve as valuable sources of good practices and inspiration for cities, including for addressing accessibility in sustainable tourism.

## 2.5.4 Which action is needed?

Accessible tourism is not to be meant as a new type of tourism offering segregated experiences only for people with disabilities. Instead, accessibility should be integrated into all types of tourism offers, ensuring everyone can participate equally in the destination's activities.

Accessibility, whether visual, physical, neurological, auditory, cognitive, medical or psychological, is essential for people with disabilities to travel and enjoy destinations. However, accurate and reliable information about accessibility is crucial for visitors at each stage of the visit. Without it, people with specific access needs cannot even consider travelling far from home.

Urban tourist destinations often lack sufficient accessible tourism services and infrastructure for individuals with specific accessibility needs. Coupled with limited

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.handiscover.com/en-US/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101032961>

<sup>25</sup> A dedicated call for proposals on this topic was launched in 2015 and 2013. The results of selected projects can be accessed in the following links: <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/29421>; <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/26685>

<sup>26</sup> A call for proposals was launched in 2014 and the results of selected projects can be seen in the following links: <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/29422>

<sup>27</sup> <sup>[1]</sup> Sustainable EU Tourism – Shaping the Tourism of Tomorrow - European Commission (europa.eu)

<sup>28</sup> The annual Access City Award recognises EU cities that are making an outstanding effort to become accessible for persons with disabilities. The juries consider measures taken and planned in the areas of built environment and public spaces; transport and related infrastructure; information and communication, including new technologies (ICTs); and public facilities and services. 1st place winner will receive 150,000€; 2nd place winner 120,000€; 3rd place winner 80,000€.

knowledge about those needs, this restricts the full utilization of cultural and tourist assets of these areas.

To address this challenge, urban authorities should conduct comprehensive assessments of their destination and of visitors' diverse needs. They should also facilitate the availability of information on accessibility of tourism sites, services and products. This action requires close collaboration with all relevant stakeholder in the destination and local disability organizations, and training activities for tourism providers, authorities and partners on addressing accessibility needs in an effective way.

In cases where physical accessibility at specific tourism sites is not possible, urban authorities should adopt a broader understanding of accessibility to ensure that adequate solutions can be found beyond physical dimension of accessibility. Whenever relevant, urban authorities may explore the possibilities offered by technology to address these gaps and provide inclusive alternatives to enjoy tourism sites.

New EU-legislation relevant to accessibility, such as the directive on the European Disability Card and the European Parking Card for persons with disabilities, presents opportunities to improve sustainable tourism in urban areas.

## 2.5.5 How will the action be implemented?

A series of activities are planned for the implementation of the action:

- 1) Collection of information on practices in urban destinations<sup>29</sup>

This activity involves desk research on existing studies, reports or materials related to accessibility in tourism. Relevant EU-funded activities and projects can contribute valuable knowledge, including Horizon 2020 projects, relevant tourism innovative actions from the second call for Innovative Actions of the European Urban Initiative and good practices co-financed by EU cohesion policy funds.

To complement this, a survey may be developed to gather further data on current accessibility practices in tourism urban destinations. This survey will be disseminated within and outside the partnership in order to reach a wide range of cities and practices across the EU.

Whenever possible, partners involved in the implementation of the action can contribute to this activity with ongoing projects implemented at local level. For example, Šibenik is a partner in the SITE project - Shaping Inclusive Tourist Experiences, co-financed by ERDF under the 2021-2027 Interreg IT – HR programme. The SITE project aims to increase the attractiveness of tourism destinations and to foster tourism across the year through the cross-border dissemination of the culture of Universal Design (UD) in the tourism ecosystem by promoting social inclusion, participation and fostering the use of ICT solutions to reduce barriers (architectural, sensorial, communicative) that limit access to people with disabilities or other needs, as families and elderly persons, favoring non-discriminatory solutions.

- 2) Identifying good practices, reflecting on lessons learned and drafting recommendations for urban authorities and for better implementation of EU level accessibility regulations.

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<sup>29</sup> Under this Activity, the University of Zadar - Department of Tourism and Communication Studies, which actively participated as an expert collaborator within ST Partnership, will have an important role in the implementation as well.

Following the initial desk research, this collected knowledge will be compiled into a handbook of recommendations, based on best practices and lessons learned. This task will also build on other available resources related to strategies for improving accessibility of the tourism offer in urban destinations, including the outcomes of relevant projects financed under ERDF, EUI Innovative Actions, the Single Market Programme (and COSME), Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe and other EU funding programmes. These recommendations will help local authorities in implementing EU accessibility regulations in a series of focus areas:

- Tools for mapping and analyzing accessible infrastructure and tourism services in urban destinations, using indicators measuring accessibility in urban destinations.
- Development of a one-stop shop for gather comprehensive information about the accessibility of the destination and the availability of special conditions or preferential treatment, to facilitate the communication with persons with specific accessibility needs, in line with the accessibility requirements set forth in Directive 2019/882 (the European Accessibility Act)<sup>30</sup>, the Directive on the European Disability Cards and the EU standard EN 301 549<sup>31</sup>. This solution will also provide tools to support tourism stakeholders in improving the accessibility of their websites, products and services, while offering relevant training opportunities for tourism workers.
- Development of recommendations to enhance the accessibility of tourism attractions and services through inclusive design (approaches, entrances, signs, audio-visual aids, digital, etc.) and the availability of accessible information in tourism sites for persons with disabilities (translation of documents and signs into Braille, adaptation of websites of tourist boards and public institutions for persons with disabilities, placement of signs at different heights, creation of audio-visual guides, etc.) in collaboration with relevant governmental and nongovernmental organizations.
- Implementation of educational and training activities for tourism professionals, tour guides and other relevant tourism providers on how to cater to visitors with disabilities.
- Creation of specific tourism products, such as sensory-based routes for individuals with visual or hearing disabilities

### 3) Dissemination of the outcomes

The partnership will organize a series of dissemination activities, such as conferences and workshops, to share the recommendations with urban authorities and other stakeholders. Further opportunities to circulate recommendations to relevant authorities in the context of the implementation of recent relevant EU level legislation in the field of accessibility will be also explored by the partners involved in the action.

## 2.5.6 What resources are needed?

The partnership will need a support in terms of expertise in accessibility familiar with tourism-related networks and knowledge about specific accessibility needs.

The partnership will also need resources to monitor the impact the actions. Furthermore, capacity and human resources to organise dissemination events and encourage awareness

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<sup>30</sup> Directive (EU) 2019/882 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the accessibility requirements for products and services, OJ L 151, 7.6.2019, p. 70–115.

<sup>31</sup> EN 301 549 Accessibility requirements for ICT products and services, [ETSI EN 301 549 - V3.2.1 - Accessibility requirements for ICT products and services](#)



raising are also necessary. Coordination among stakeholders is essential to promote accessible tourism in an efficient way.

While no specific funding is allocated for these activities, partners can contribute to the collection of best practices and the production of lessons learned and recommendations through the implementation of ongoing projects in their respective cities. Furthermore, the partners can be involved in the design and implementation of the various foreseen activities and outputs according to their respective knowledge, expertise and interest. A thematic expertise support with access to relevant tourism-related networks and capacity in supporting survey designs will be key to ensure the effectiveness of the action.

### 2.5.7 Are there any risks foreseen?

- Low stakeholder engagement: Without active participation from key stakeholders, such as local businesses, residents, tourists, and public authorities, gather insights necessary for improving tourism accessibility can be challenging
- Lack of relevant data and expertise: Incomplete or inaccurate information about local accessibility and needs could obstacle progress and prevent proper monitoring
- Limited funding: Creating accessible destinations for all requires significant investment in infrastructure, education, skills, digitalisation and dissemination of results. A lack of visibility for the results can minimize the impact of the action.
- Changes in timing of adoption of the EU-level legislation: Delays or changes in the implementation of EU regulatory frameworks could create uncertainty and postpone the adoption of initiatives on accessibility in tourism
- Unclear allocation of responsibilities: Lack of clarity in determining the roles among stakeholders (government, private sector, NGOs) can result in an incomplete or delayed the implementation of the actions.

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

#### Action Leader(s)

City of Zadar

#### Contributors

City of Genova

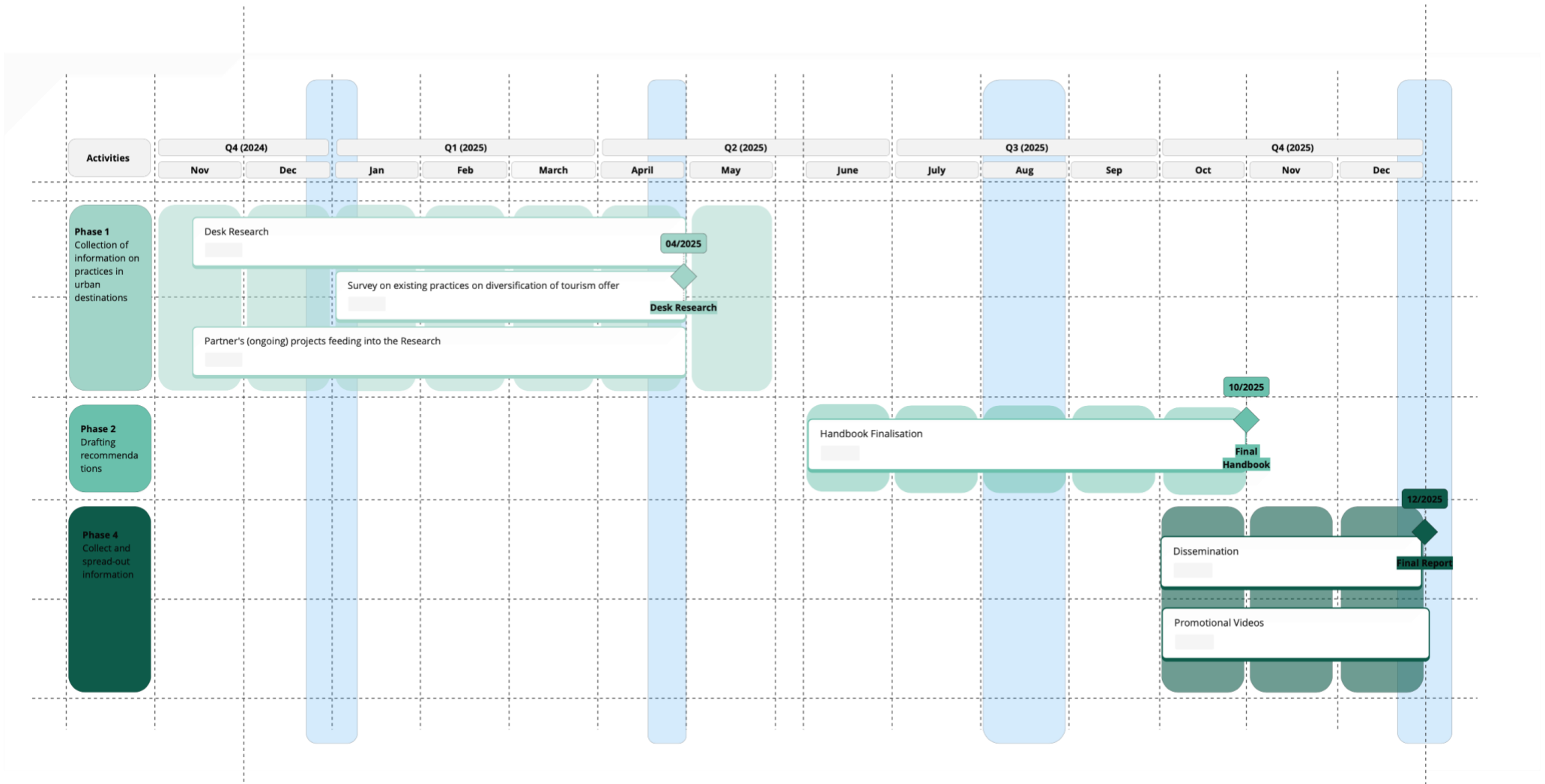
European Commission

City of Šibenik

Ljubljana

Diputacio de Barcelona

## 2.5.9 What is the timeline of the implementation?



## 2.5.10 Which outputs will be produced?

- A handbook for creating an inclusive environment and assumptions for accessible tourism in urban destinations (based on previous research, survey results, best practices and other relevant literature) – deadline September 2025
- A presentation showcasing best practices in accessible tourism and tourism for all in urban destinations (based on the best practices collected) – deadline June 2025
- Two workshops focused on implementation and promotion of accessible tourism and tourism for all – deadline October 2025
- Three promotional videos aimed at raising local communities' awareness on accessible tourism and tourism for all – deadline November 2025

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

European Accessibility Act (EAA): This act aims to enhance accessibility for people with disabilities across various sectors, including tourism, by setting standards for services and products like transport, accommodations, and public spaces. Potential spatial imbalances could arise because regions with stronger economic support or better infrastructures might quickly become fully accessible, while others lag behind, deepening inequalities in accessible tourism across Europe.

Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030: This strategy outlines a comprehensive plan to ensure full participation of people with disabilities in all areas of life, including travel and tourism. However, spatial imbalances may emerge as the capacity of destinations to implement these accessibility improvements will vary between regions.

European Disability Card: This initiative helps standardize accessibility benefits and reduce barriers for people with disabilities when traveling. Spatial imbalances related to this initiative could occur if certain regions or countries implement the Disability Card system more effectively than others. As a result, travelers with disabilities may gravitate towards destinations where the card is better recognized, which could further create wider gaps in tourism flows and investments.

Initiatives, regulations and projects, in general, to consider for tackling this issue:

- European Accessibility Act
- Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030
- European Disability Card
- European Parking Card
- Transition Pathway for Tourism
- European Agenda for Tourism 2030
- Palma Declaration of 2023
- European Accessibility Resource Centre "AccessibleEU Centre"
- Access City Awards
- European Capital of Smart Tourism

Projects: Handiscover, ENTOURAGE, INCLUSIVE PLAY, In-Tour, Spaces4All, RESTAT, SITE project - Shaping Inclusive Tourist Experiences, TOURISM4ALL - Development of a cross border network for the promotion of the accessible tourism destinations.

## 2.6 Action N° 06 – Strategies on Protection of Local Retail as an Asset for Tourism



The action addresses the growing concern of cities about the “monoculturalization” of city centres. This phenomenon, driven by an increasing number of visitors, impacts local economies and retail infrastructures leading to a limited diversity. To support the authenticity, attractiveness and vibrancy of historical centres, as well as foster a diversified and inclusive local economy, this action aims to identify and promote good practices in the field.

Targeted stakeholders/governance level:  
Deadline:

Local Authorities, SMEs  
31/12/2025

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



The action primarily seeks to contribute to the pillar of Better Knowledge. The action will build on existing efforts to gather knowledge on challenges, opportunities, and lessons learned, based on the collection and analysis of good practices. Additionally, the action will support evidence-based urban policymaking (informing regulations from local to EU levels and raising awareness among tourists), and provide tailored solutions to key challenges.

**Action 6**

## 2.6.2 What is the specific problem?

Tourism is one of the most important and fastest-growing sectors in Europe, which makes a significant direct and indirect positive contribution to EU economic growth, job creation and safeguarding livelihoods. The tourism ecosystem is predominantly made by small and medium enterprises, with 99.9 % represented by SMEs and other small stakeholders, most of which consist of micro and small companies. This particularly includes hotels, bars and restaurants, where many owners operate independently or under franchise from larger groups.

Tourism also has far-reaching impacts on, and is impacted by, several other sectors such as transport, cultural and creative industries, agri-food, and retail and commerce. In particular, the retail sector represents a strategic asset for the tourism economy, both in terms of destination attractiveness and economic returns. For instance, in Catalonia up to 21% of direct and indirect tourism-related spending goes to the retail sector. This highlights how tourism shopping and purchasing activities can be complementary.

However, different models of “tourism spending” can shape the visitor experience. One model focuses on quantity, feeding the fast-paced souvenir economy, while another model emphasizes quality, supporting local traditional products. Economic benefits coming from retail and commerce activities must be balanced with social and environmental concerns. In visiting destinations, incentives to understand the local culture and strengthen social bonds can be provided to inform tourist behavior. At the same time, local authorities should implement adequate regulations to protect the health of the local retail economy.

While the Covid-19 crisis led to a shift towards more sustainable and responsible tourism practices, leading to the configuration of a new ‘form tourism’, mass tourism and souvenir business still dominate many tourist activities, contributing to the monoculturalization and touristification of city centres.

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

The Regulation - EU - 2023/2411 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu) on the protection of geographical indications for craft and industrial products, entered into force on 16 November 2023. This regulation is a priority for the European Commission as geographical indications (GI) for craft and industrial products contribute to the EU’s GDP, to intra-EU and external trade, employment, rural development, preservation of cultural heritage and development of tourism in the specific geographical areas.

This new Geographical Indications system allows producers to legally defend their products against lower-quality imitations, while also acting as a marketing tool to boost businesses. The system also preserves traditional working methods, encourage the transfer of know-how to new generations of workers and craftsmen, and retaining workforce. The GI system allows producers to demonstrate the quality of their products through an EU logo, fostering consumers’ trust and promotes cooperation by requiring producers to agree on the definition of the products’ territory, characteristics, as well as enforcing rules and standards. It also encourages collaboration with local authorities, which in return support these efforts. The new regulation allows the EU to negotiate trade with non-EU countries. Protecting GIs without the need for additional registration in those countries. In cases of infringement, the EU can take diplomatic action. Registration in the EU also extends GI’s protection in all the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) member countries

that are signatories of the Geneva Act on Appellations of Origin and Geographical Indications.

Starting from 1 December 2025, it will be possible to request protection of a geographical indication at EU level for the names of craft and industrial products. In close cooperation with the European Commission, Member States and the EUIPO necessary steps are being taken to fully implement the new scheme by December 2025. The European Commission is preparing implementing and delegated acts and developing a solid communication and promotional campaign. The first EU Craft and Industrial GIs (CIGIs) will be registered in the second half of 2026.

Furthermore, the European Commission has also supported several initiatives aimed at showcasing and supporting local good practices in sustainable tourism. The most relevant are: EDEN – European Destinations of Excellence, the European Capital of Smart Tourism (since 2018), the ECTN Cultural Tourism award (since 2014) organized by the European Cultural Tourism Network (ECTN) in partnership with Europa Nostra, the European Travel Commission and NECSTouR, and most recently the European Capital of Small Retail.

## 2.6.4 Which action is needed?

The proximity economy and local retail contribute significantly to creating local value, both in socio-economic and marketing terms. They provide job opportunities and anchor commercial and entrepreneurial activities and services locally, thereby reinforcing the socio-economic texture of the city and region. On the other hand, these sectors also contribute to the concept of “place identity”, often representing local craftsmanship and traditional culinary products that are part of the cultural and historical DNA of the place and reflect the local way of life.

To protect the authenticity of city centres and cultural heritage sites, as well as to support the health of the retail local economy, appropriate regulatory actions and awareness-raising initiatives should be implemented at local and regional level, in line with EU regulations. These include issuing local regulations and legislation on tourism-related commercial and catering activities to limit the number of tourist shops and restaurants in historical centres of the city, in line with the European Services Directive. For instance, the City Council of Venice issued a municipal regulation to limit the proliferation of economic activities of low quality that are not compatible with the need to protect cultural heritage and to preserve shops and commercial activities that also serve the residents. The development of awareness raising campaigns to inform tourists and visitors about more socially and environmentally responsible behavior is also essential. This can be achieved through digital communication campaigns highlighting the cultural, social, and economic value of local craft shops, locally produced goods, and traditional food establishments (focusing on the value of local supply chains). An interesting example in this direction is the #EnjoyRespectVenezia campaign, launched by Venice to raise awareness about the impact of tourism and promote responsible travel as a contribution to sustainable development.

Additionally, competitions among local retailers and producers to get the ‘locally made’ label, like the initiative launched in Bruges, aim to highlight local craftsmanship and quality. In Šibenik the introduction of incentives, such as tax relief or support schemes to encourage the establishment and/or opening of traditional crafts and trades, alongside co-financing for marketing initiatives had a tangible impact on the quality of the retail sector.

Mapping the current retail landscape, listing business premises in the city centers and proposing the creation of thematic streets and quarters in the city center and encouraging the opening of specialized shops (art galleries, tasting rooms, handmade souvenir shops,

silent crafts, etc.), is another effort needed in many urban contexts. The organization of sale fairs and events helps to create a pleasant and vibrant shopping atmosphere.

In addition to these initiatives, creating a “doing business” catalogue and other tools is important for actively attracting desirable businesses to city centers aligning them with established needs and themes. Designating ground floors business premises in city centers exclusively for small local businesses, family-run crafts, boutiques and restaurants can make local commerce thriving. Lastly, securing stable local jobs through year-round support for retail business activities may help to counter seasonality trends in tourism which affect local employment, as demonstrated in Šibenik.

## 2.6.5 How will the action be implemented?

To successfully implement the action and achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the action will be structured in a series of sub-actions.

### Activity 6.1: Research

6.1.1: This research will conduct a methodological and comparative case study in 10-15 European cities of varying sizes (small, medium, and large) across different countries. The study will identify both similarities and unique aspects of monoculturalization in these cities, mapping and assessing the loss of shop diversity in each participating city. By examining these cases, the study aims to uncover commonalities in how cities define retail diversity and measure trends of monoculturalization. The research will analyze how overtourism undermines shop diversity in these cities. (Timeline: November 2024 – June 2025)

6.1.2: Monitor the development of research activity via informal meetings and checkpoints throughout the duration of Activity 6.1.1. The Activity will be led by Eurocities, in collaboration with other partners. (Timeline: November 2024-June 2025)

### Activity 6.2: Dissemination

6.2.1: Communicate the progress via partners’ networks and channels. The Activity will involve all the partners (Timeline: June 2025 – onwards)

6.2.2: Organization of two to three webinars to present good practices identified in the research study and disseminate the results of the report. The Activity will be led by Genoa and Venice. (Timeline: starting from September 2025)

6.2.3: Presentation of the results at a high-level tourism event to ensure the dissemination among key stakeholders. The Activity will be led by Eurocities and Amsterdam, while the presentation will take place in one of the most relevant events on EU Cohesion Policies and local economic development, such EU Week of Regions and Cities or the Eurocities Economic Development Forum 2025. (Timeline: October 2025)

### Activity 6.3: Advocacy

6.3.1: These activities will feed into ongoing advocacy efforts towards EU institutions via stakeholder consultations and meetings with DG GROW and/or other DG of the European Commission responsible for the issue. The Activity will

led by Eurocities in collaboration with the city of Amsterdam\*. (Timeline: November 2024 – onwards)

\*The expert group will comprise relevant stakeholders and experienced cities in the field as collaborators with the ST Partnership Members. In particular, Eurocities, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Bruges. The action is closely aligned with the European Alliance on Balanced Urban Tourism.

## 2.6.6 What resources are needed?

- Identify financial incentives and additional options for financing (via one of the partners)
- Engage external expertise for carrying out research and analyzing results.
- Allocate sufficient human resources to support the implementation of the action.
- Alignment with the European Alliance on Balanced Urban Tourism, to support the realization of the comparative research at the basis of the action.

## 2.6.7 Are there any risks foreseen?

- Low participation in surveys
- Insufficient data for analysis
- Political elections which could result in changes in political priorities
- Limited support from partnership members
- Time constraints to complete the activities and proposed actions
- Limited funds and resources to fully implement the initiatives

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

### Action Leader(s)

Eurocities

### Contributors

City of Genoa

DG REGIO & other DGs

DG GROW

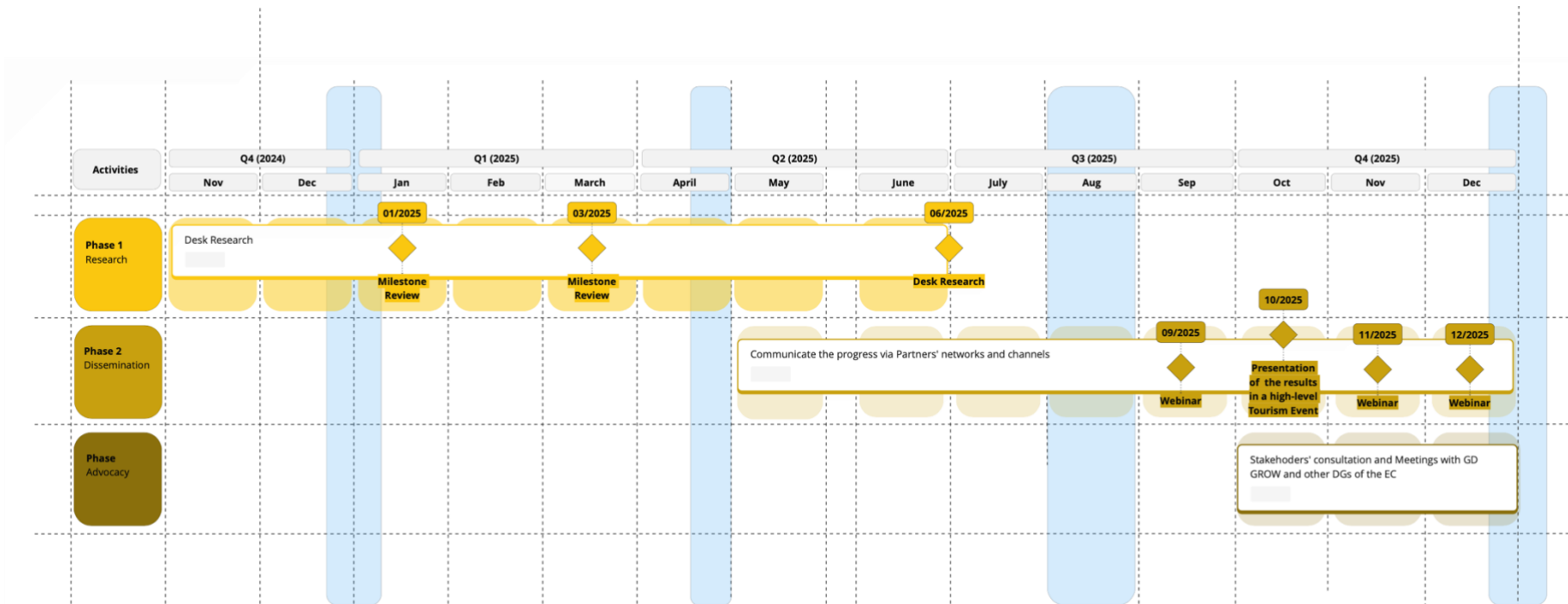
City of Šibenik

Visit Valencia

City of Venice



## 2.6.9 What is the timeline of the implementation?



## 2.6.10 Which outputs will be produced?

The main output will be a report of good practices in the field of sustainable tourism related to retail. Additionally, the document will be promoted via:

A research-based report on good practices in areas such as business promotion strategies in the city center, desirable business and activities and themed streets.

Two to three online webinars including at least: 20 stakeholders (i.e. local authorities, associations, etc.) from seven countries with a total of 50 participants.

Presentation of the report at a high-level tourism event to ensure dissemination among key stakeholders

Communication through the networks of project partners

# 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 the integration of different policy aspects to avoid contradictory consequences and make interventions in urban areas more effective, as outlined in the 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) Harmonizing 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.

Legend: blue cell=cross-cutting issue addressed; white cell=cross-cutting issue not addressed

	Action 1	Action 2	Action 3	Action 4	Action 5	Action 6
Promoting urban policy for the common good, inclusiveness, accessibility, security and equality.						

Enhancing integrated and innovative approaches, notably through financing and in correlation to the green, digital and just transitions.						
Supporting effective urban governance, participation, and co-creation.						
Promoting multi-level governance and cooperation across administrative boundaries.						
Harmonising measures at different spatial levels and implementing place-based policies and strategies.						
Supporting sound and strategic sustainable urban planning, and balanced territorial development.						
Contributing to the acceleration of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda SDGs, the New Urban Agenda and Habitat III principles.						

### 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 neighborhoods. 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.

The Action Plan of the Sustainable Tourism Partnership meticulously aligns with the principles and aspirations of the New Leipzig Charter, marking a significant step toward realizing sustainable urban development in Europe

Legend: Table on how each Action addresses the different pillars of the New Leipzig Charter

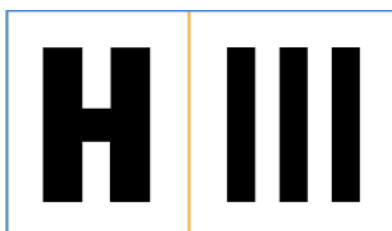
Action 1: Guidelines for enabling climate-friendly and resilient urban destinations	
<b>The Green City</b>	This action directly aligns with the goal of promoting sustainability and resilience in urban areas by developing guidelines for climate-friendly urban destinations and tourism practices. It addresses the need for integrated and sustainable urban development strategies, as advocated in The Green City dimension of the Charter.
<b>The Just City</b>	
<b>The Productive City</b>	

<b>Action 2:</b> Support for destinations to enable the use of sustainability certifications for the SMEs tourism transition	
<b>The Green City</b>	By encouraging businesses to adhere to environmentally friendly practices, cities can advance their goals of environmental protection and resource conservation, in line with the principles of the New Leipzig Charter's vision for The Green City. Moreover, by reducing the ecological footprint of SMEs, cities can enhance the overall environmental quality and resilience of their urban areas, creating healthier and more sustainable living environments for residents and visitors alike.
<b>The Just City</b>	
<b>The Productive City</b>	By adopting sustainable practices, businesses can improve their long-term viability and resilience, reducing operational costs, and mitigating risks associated with environmental degradation. This contributes to the creation of a more dynamic and resilient urban economy, characterized by diverse and innovative businesses that are better equipped to thrive in a rapidly changing global landscape.
<b>Action 3:</b> Developing competences for tourism professionals and local & regional authorities in the field of digital touristic services & products	
<b>The Green City</b>	
<b>The Just City</b>	
<b>The Productive City</b>	Through the enhancement of digital competencies and the advocacy for digital integration in tourism, urban areas can amplify the effectiveness and competitive edge of their tourism sectors. This fosters a climate of innovation and productivity within urban economies.
<b>Action 4:</b> More resilient and sustainable destinations through diversification of tourism offer	
<b>The Green City</b>	This action mitigates the environmental impact of tourism by diminishing reliance on specific tourism segments, thus easing issues such as seasonality and overcrowding. By broadening the spectrum of activities and attractions, cities can attract a more varied visitor demographic, ensuring a more balanced distribution of tourist influx throughout the year.
<b>The Just City</b>	Diversification initiatives contribute to forging more inclusive and equitable urban landscapes by ensuring that the benefits of tourism are equitably distributed among local communities and businesses. Through the promotion of local cultural heritage, support for small-scale tourism ventures, and active engagement with local residents, cities can cultivate a sense of ownership and belonging among their inhabitants, thereby fostering social cohesion.
<b>The Productive City</b>	
<b>Action 5:</b> Destination accessible for all	
<b>The Green City</b>	
<b>The Just City</b>	By promoting accessibility in tourism destinations, cities can create more inclusive and equitable environments that cater to the needs of diverse populations.
<b>The Productive City</b>	
<b>Action 6:</b> Strategies on protection of Local Retail as an asset for tourism	

<b>The Green City</b>	
<b>The Just City</b>	This action addresses concerns related to the preservation of local retail and cultural heritage in city centers, promoting a more diverse and inclusive urban environment. By protecting local businesses and supporting traditional crafts and trades, cities can maintain the authenticity and vibrancy of their historical centers while fostering socio-economic diversity.
<b>The Productive City</b>	Supporting local retail and proximity economy contributes to the productivity and economic vitality of cities by creating job opportunities, supporting entrepreneurship, and stimulating local economic growth. By investing in traditional crafts, local food production, and cultural heritage, cities can capitalize on their unique assets and differentiate themselves in the tourism market.

## 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)

The Action Plan contributes to the UN New Urban Agenda (NUA) by aligning with its transformative commitments for sustainable urban development and supporting effective implementation through various pillars and sub-sections.

### **Sustainable Urban Development for Social Inclusion and Ending Poverty:**

The Action Plan addresses this category by promoting social inclusion and poverty reduction through actions such as developing competencies for tourism professionals (Action 3) and supporting destinations to enable the use of sustainability certifications for SMEs (Action 2). These actions aim to enhance economic opportunities and empower local communities, thereby contributing to social inclusion and poverty.

### **Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Prosperity and Opportunities for All:**

Actions such as diversifying tourism offerings (Action 4) and ensuring accessibility for all (Action 5) contribute to this category by promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth in urban destinations. By expanding tourism products and services and ensuring equal access to tourism opportunities, these actions create economic opportunities for all residents and support inclusive urban prosperity.

### **Environmentally Sustainable and Resilient Urban Development:**

The Action Plan also supports environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development through actions such as enabling climate-friendly and resilient urban destinations (Action 1) and diversifying tourism offers (Action 4). By promoting climate-friendly practices, reducing dependence on specific tourism segments, and addressing issues such as seasonality and overcrowding, these actions contribute to building resilience and sustainability in urban destinations.

In terms of effective implementation, the Action Plan aligns with the pillars and sub-sections outlined in the NUA:

**Building the Urban Governance Structure:** The Action Plan establishes a supportive framework for sustainable tourism development by promoting collaboration among stakeholders, enhancing competencies, and facilitating the dissemination of best practices.

**Planning and Managing Urban Spatial Development:** Actions such as enabling climate-friendly destinations (Action 1) and supporting destinations to use sustainability certifications (Action 2) contribute to planning and managing urban spatial development by promoting sustainable land use and infrastructure development.

**Means of Implementation:** The Action Plan provides means of implementation for sustainable tourism development through capacity building, knowledge sharing, and stakeholder engagement, thereby supporting the effective implementation of the NUA.

## 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).

The Sustainable Tourism Action Plan contributes to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:



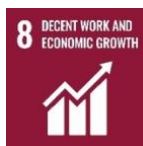
### **Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities**

The Action Plan focuses on enhancing urban sustainability through initiatives such as greening cities, promoting sustainable tourism, and improving accessibility for all. These efforts align with Goal 11's objective of making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.



### **Goal 13: Climate Action**

By promoting climate-friendly urban development strategies, implementing nature-based solutions, and addressing climate-related challenges such as seasonality and resilience, the Action Plan contributes to mitigating climate change and its impacts, in line with Goal 13.



### **Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**

Through actions aimed at diversifying tourism offerings, supporting local retail businesses, and enhancing competencies among tourism professionals, the Action Plan fosters economic growth and decent work opportunities within urban areas, aligning with Goal 8.



### **Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being**

The Action Plan's emphasis on promoting equitable access to green spaces, enhancing public health through urban greening initiatives, and improving the overall well-being of urban residents contributes to achieving Goal 3 by ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages.



### **Goal 10: Reduced Inequality**

By promoting inclusive urban prosperity, equitable access to tourism opportunities, and social inclusion through greening initiatives, the Action Plan contributes to reducing inequalities within urban communities, thereby supporting Goal 10.



### 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](https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement) (Accessed: February 16, 2024).

#### **Enhancing Resilience:**

Through actions aimed at promoting resilience in urban destinations, such as diversification of tourism offerings and development of climate-resilient infrastructure, the Action Plan helps cities adapt to the impacts of climate change. By building resilience, cities can better withstand extreme weather events and other climate-related challenges, aligning with the goals of the Paris Agreement to enhance adaptive capacity and strengthen resilience to climate-related hazards.

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

The Action Plan's focus on implementing sustainable urban development strategies aligns with countries' efforts to enhance the ambition of their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) over time. By implementing measures outlined in the Action Plan, cities and regions can contribute to achieving the targets set out in their respective NDCs, thereby supporting the overall objectives of the Paris Agreement.

## 4 MONITORING

Action	Action Leader	Targeted stakeholders/ governance level	Deadline	State of Play
<p><b>Action n° 1</b></p> <p>Guidelines for enabling climate-friendly and resilient urban destinations</p>	Diputacio de Barcelona	<p>Local &amp; Regional Authorities</p> <p>DMOs</p> <p>SMEs</p>	<b>31/12/2025</b>	The Action is in preparatory phase. Stakeholders to be addressed and good practices have been initially identified and the Working Group will initiate developing the criteria of the best practice selection.
<p><b>Action n° 2</b></p> <p>Support for destinations to enable the use of sustainability certifications for the SMEs tourism transition</p>	Municipality of Heraklion	<p>Local &amp; Regional Authorities</p> <p>DMOs</p> <p>SMEs</p>	<b>31/12/2025</b>	The Action is in preparatory phase. Stakeholders to be addressed and good practices have been initially identified and the Working Group will initiate developing the criteria of the best practice selection.
<p><b>Action n° 3</b></p> <p>Developing competences for tourism professionals and local &amp; regional authorities in the field of digital touristic services &amp; products</p>	Rhein-Neckar Association	<p>Local &amp; Regional Authorities</p> <p>Tourism Professionals</p> <p>Professionals Developing digital services/products</p> <p>National Authorities related to Tourism Policy</p>	<b>31/12/2025</b>	The Action is in preparatory phase. The Action Leader and the WG Members will initially exchange with DG GROW to align with EU Data Space.

<p><b>Action n°4</b></p> <p>More resilient and sustainable destinations through diversification of tourism offer</p>	<p>City of Zadar</p>	<p>Local &amp; Regional Authorities</p> <p>DMOs</p> <p>SMEs</p>	<p><b>31/12/2025</b></p>	<p>The Action is in its preparatory phase.</p>
<p><b>Action n°5</b></p> <p>Destination accessible for all</p>	<p>City of Zadar</p>	<p>Local &amp; Regional Authorities</p> <p>DMOs</p> <p>SMEs</p>	<p><b>31/12/2025</b></p>	<p>The Action is in its preparatory phase.</p>
<p><b>Action n°6</b></p> <p>Strategies on Protection of Local Retail as an Asset for Tourism</p>	<p>Eurocities</p>	<p>Local &amp; Regional Authorities</p> <p>SMEs</p>	<p><b>31/12/2025</b></p>	<p>The Action is in its preparatory phase.</p>

As part of an effort to create synergies and monitor the development and implementation of the actions of all Urban agenda for the EU Thematic Partnerships, starting from 2025, the Sustainable Tourism Partnership will be asked to regularly report their progress via procedures and tools developed and managed by EUI. The first reporting session is estimated for summer/autumn 2025.

# 5 EUI Opportunities

As the Permanent Secretary for The Urban Agenda for the EU, EUI has developed and is implementing a Support Service Package<sup>32</sup> aimed to make the participation of all UAEU members easier, more effective, and efficient. Since autumn 2022, this also includes informing and supporting them in making use of the other EUI opportunities.

Below is a list of the available EUI opportunities which have been presented, discussed, and are considered to be used during the Action Plan implementation. Between these the City-to-City exchange and the Peer Review are considered a great complementary method for the implementation phase.

## 5.1 Capacity Building

Through capacity building, EUI aims to **enhance and strengthen cities' abilities** to develop **Sustainable Urban Development** policies, strategies, and practices in a collaborative and inclusive manner. Our capacity building approach is nurtured by the wish to create links and knowledge sharing among cities around the EU.

### 5.1.1 City-to-City Exchanges



City-to-City Exchanges<sup>33</sup> are **in-person visits or online exchanges** carried out between an applicant city and a one or two peer cities. Peer cities share new working methods and innovative approaches on specific implementation challenges identified by the applicant city. The challenges relate to the design and implementation of Sustainable Urban Development strategies.

Applications may be submitted by **urban authorities of any size from EU Member States**. Other stakeholders may participate in the exchange if justified by the urban authority.

You can apply for a City-to-City Exchange at any moment, **the call is continuously open**. In general, you can count on starting the actual visits three months after submitting an application.

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/urban-agenda-eu>

<sup>33</sup> For more and updated information visit the dedicated EUI webpage: <https://www.urban-initiative.eu/capacity-building/pilot-call-c2c-exchanges>

## 5.1.2 Peer Reviews



**Peer Reviews**<sup>34</sup> take the form of workshops in which cities are peer reviewed by other cities and relevant stakeholders in order to benchmark their Sustainable Urban Development strategies. There are two possible roles in the process: **City under Review** and **Peer Reviewer**.

**Cities under Review** benefit directly by getting targeted advice on improving their design and implementation of Sustainable Urban Development strategies and practices in an integrated and participative way.

**Peer Reviewers** benefit equally from this process as they are bringing forward their good practices and get new ideas from all the cities that are brought together by the Peer Review.

Applications may be submitted by urban authorities of any size from EU Member States that are involved in the design and implementation of a Sustainable Urban Development Strategy (in line with Article 11 of the ERDF Regulation).

## 5.2 Innovative Actions Calls for Proposals

The Innovative Actions Calls for Proposals provide opportunities for cities, as enablers of innovation, to take the risk and turn ambitious and creative ideas into pilot projects that can be tested in real urban settings.

At the moment of writing this report, EUI already launched three calls for projects. The second call<sup>35</sup> had three topics. One of them being "Sustainable Tourism". During several Partnership meetings, EUI had presented the projects funded under this topic and had created linkages between some of them and the Sustainable Tourism Partnership. A constant exchange between the partnership and these projects is highly recommended and considered during the implementation phase.

Moreover, it is estimated that EUI will launch a fourth call for projects to support cities in their effort to innovate. Partnership members are invited to follow the news about it and consider using these opportunities during the implementation phase.

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<sup>34</sup> For more and updated information visit the dedicated EUI webpage: <https://www.urban-initiative.eu/capacity-building/pilot-call-c2c-exchanges>.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.urban-initiative.eu/calls-proposals/second-call-proposals-innovative-actions>