

Urban Agenda for the EU

Greening Cities Partnership

**Action
Plan**

**October
2024**





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¹ Pact of Amsterdam, chapter 4, clause 19.

Table of Acronyms

CALM	Coordinators and Action Leaders Meeting
CEF	Connecting Europe Facility
CF	Cohesion Fund
CO2	Carbon Dioxide
COP	United Nations Conference of Parties
CoR	Committee of the Regions
COM	European Commission
CPR	Common Provision Regulation
DE	District Energy
DG	European Commission's Directorate General
DG CLIMA	Directorate General for Climate
DG EAC	Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
DG EMPL	Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion
DG ENV	Directorate General for Environment
DG HOME	Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs.
DG REGIO	Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy
DG MARE	Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
DG AGRI	Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development
DGUM	Directors-General Meeting on Urban Matters
DUT	European Partnership "Driving Urban Transitions"
EC	European Commission
EAA	Ex-ante Assessment
EEA	European Environment Agency
EIB	European Investment Bank
EIF	European Investment Fund
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
ESPON	European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion
EU	European Union
EUI	European Urban Initiative
EUKN EGTC	European Urban Knowledge Network
EWRC	European Week of Regions and Cities
FUA	Functional Urban Area
GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GI	Green Infrastructure
GRETA	Green Energy Transition Actions
H2020	Horizon 2020

ITI	Integrated Territorial Investments
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
JPI	Joint Programming Initiative
JRC	European Commission's Joint Research Centre
MS	Member State
NBS	Nature-based Solutions
NCFF	Natural Capital Financing Facility
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NRR	Nature Restoration Regulation (previously referred to as Nature Restoration Law)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OP	Orientation Paper
OP	Operational Programme
PO	Policy Objective
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
ROI	Return of Investment
SDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
SMEs	Small and Medium sized Enterprises
SUD	Sustainable Urban Development
UAEU	Urban Agenda for the EU
UDG	Urban Development Group
UN	United Nations
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNI	Urban Nature Indexes
UNP	Urban Nature Plan (previously referred to as Urban Greening Plans)
WG	Working Group
WUF	World Urban Forum

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 policy, good governance or good practice examples which could serve as 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 a 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 is 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 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 EAA, 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

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

Nature-based solutions are actions to protect, sustainably manage, or restore natural ecosystems, that address societal challenges such as climate change, human health, food and water security, and disaster risk reduction effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2022/05/19/what-you-need-to-know-about-nature-based-solutions-to-climate-change>

Nature Restoration Regulation (previously named the Nature Restoration Law) was adopted and entered into force in August 2024. It aims to restore nature on at least 20% of the EU's land and sea areas by 2030, and ultimately all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050. Specific targets are included for urban ecosystems to ensure no net loss of urban green space or tree canopy cover by 2030, and thereafter to see an increasing trend until 'satisfactory levels' are reached. https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/nature-restoration-law_en

Urban ecosystem restoration targets are specific objectives outlined within the Nature Restoration Regulation and other EU policies aimed at reversing the degradation of urban ecosystems. These targets include measures to prevent further loss of urban green spaces, increase tree canopy cover, and improve the quality of biodiversity in urban area. https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/nature-restoration-law_en

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

Urban Nature Plan is a strategic and operational document elaborated by local level in order to reverse environmental degradation in cities and drive nature-positive actions. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 mandates all cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants to develop ambitious Urban Nature Plans (previously named Urban Greening Plans) https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/urban-environment/urban-nature-platform_en

Table of Contents

Table of Acronyms	3
Definitions	5
1 INTRODUCTION	8
1.1 Objectives of the Partnership	8
1.2 Governance of the Partnership	9
1.3 Background information.....	12
2 ACTIONS	14
Overview table of actions.....	14
Integration (of the Actions).....	16
2.1 Action N° 01 – Need for Green: Methodology for quantifying the demand for green infrastructure at local level.....	19
2.2 Action N° 02 – Indicator system for Urban Nature Plans	27
2.3 Action N° 03 – Policies for achieving urban restoration targets / Urban Nature Plans	35
2.4 Action N° 04 – Strengthening structural funding for urban green infrastructure ...	45
2.5 Action N° 05 – Enhancing the use of innovative funding by urban authorities to green cities	53
2.6 Action N° 06: Urban Ecosystem Restoration Handbook.....	62
3 CONTRIBUTION OF THE ACTION PLAN TO EU COMMITMENTS AND GLOBAL FRAMEWORKS.....	67
3.1 European dimension.....	67
3.2 Global (International) dimension.....	70
4 MONITORING	76
5 EU OPPORTUNITIES.....	79
5.1 Capacity Building.....	79
5.2 Innovative Actions Calls for Proposals	80

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objectives of the Partnership

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

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

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

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

- **ensuring knowledge** (methodologies, guidelines², indicators) for the deployment of concrete green infrastructure solutions at city level and national level;
- **strengthening the integration of green infrastructure** in the urban dimension of upcoming EU policies and in other sectoral policies;
- **increasing absorption of funding** for green infrastructure in an integrated manner.

² Guidelines, facts and figures from H2020 and Horizon Europe funded projects related to climate neutrality and EU Cities Mission pilot projects, also linking to findings from Climate City Contracts of EU Mission 100 cities



1.2 Governance of the Partnership



Figure: Part of the members of the Greening Cities Partnership during the in-person meeting held in Pontevedra (ES) on 04-05 April 2024.

1.2.1 Coordinator(-s) of the Partnership

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

1.2.2 Members of the Partnership

The Greening Cities Partnership consists of 31 members:

Cities (Urban Authorities):

- Nuovo Circondario Imolese (IT) – **Co-coordinator**
- City of Roeselare (BE) [Active from December 2023]
- City of Ostrava (CZ)
- City of Tampere (FI)
- Roma Capitale (IT)
- Ādaži municipality (LV)
- City of Utrecht (NL) - **Action Leader**
- Lisbon Metropolitan Area (PT) - **Action Leader**
- City Council of Pontevedra (ES) - **Action Leader**
- City of 's-Hertogenbosch (NL)

Regions:

- Brussels Environment (BE) - **Action Leader**
- Marshal's Office of the Masovian Voivodeship (PL)
- Flemish Environment Agency (BE) – [Active until December 2023]

National Authorities:

- Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration (RO) – **Co-coordinator, Action Leader**
- Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets (HR) - **Action Leader**
- Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy (PL)

European/National City Umbrella Organizations:

- Eurocities (BE) - **Action Leader**
- European Investment Bank (LU)
- Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (SI)
- European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN EGTC) (NL) - **Action Leader**

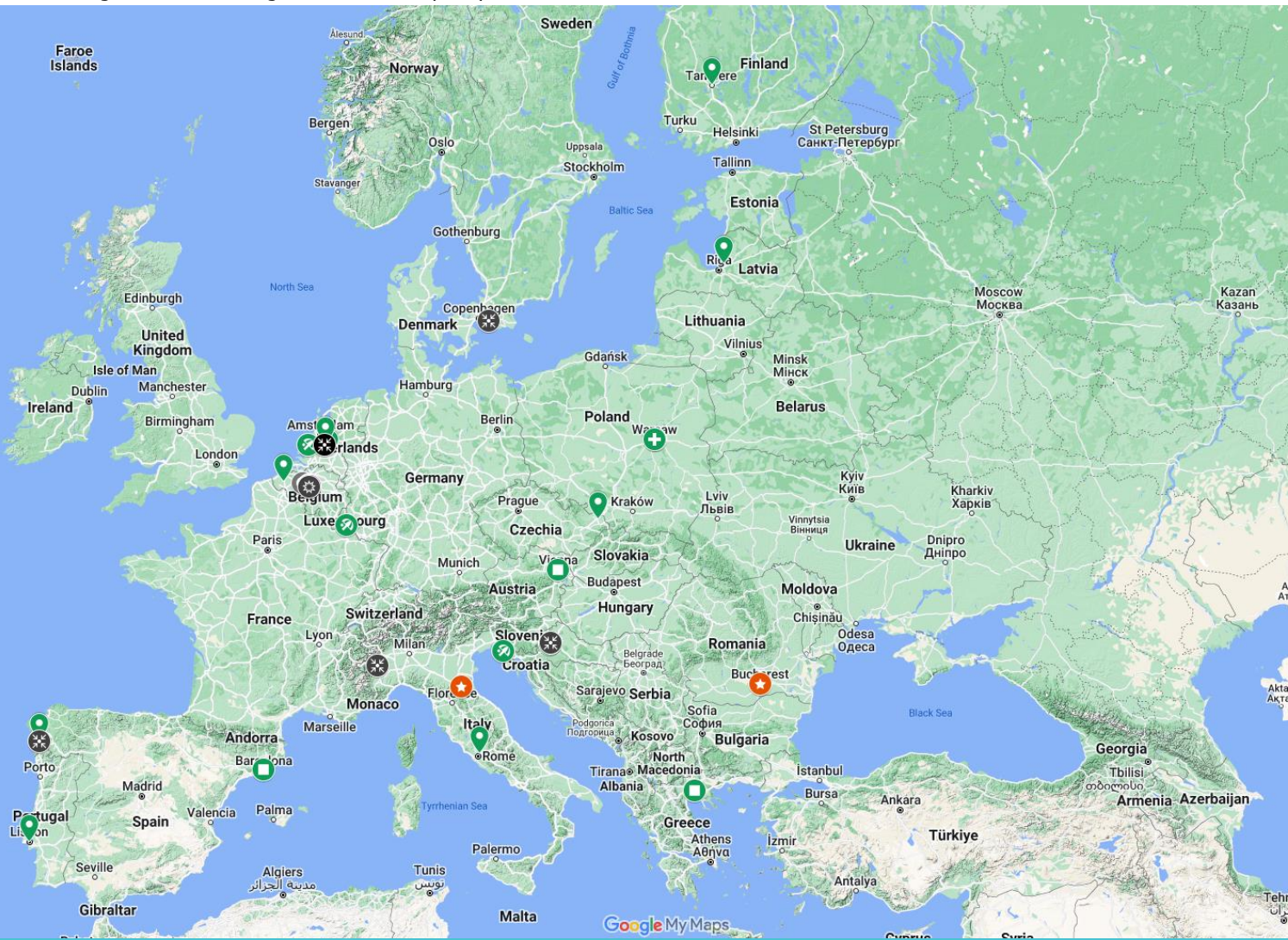
European Institutions:

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

Other Stakeholders:

- INCASÒL – Catalan Land Institute (ES)
- JPI Urban Europe/DUT Partnership (EU)
- Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) / Environmental Engineering Laboratory (Enve-Lab) (GR)

Figure: The Greening Cities Partnership map of Members



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

The Partnership was validated by an initial [Ex-Ante Assessment report](#), which recommended a thematic focus on green and blue infrastructure as an effective and efficient approach to address climate and biodiversity challenges in cities, while also linking it to the concept of nature-based solutions. The Partnership would also continue the work of the [Sustainable Use Land Use and Nature-based Solutions Partnerships](#) without overlapping Actions.

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

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

The **second physical meeting in Malmö (SE) in Q2 2023** continued to the stocktaking phase, namely identifying potential Actions and discussing around those selected as relevant. The Partnership was structured in four Working Groups for the following themes: indicators for GI; defining the demand/need for GI; guidelines for the GI implementation at the national and local level in relation to the needs for nature restoration defined by the NRR proposal; funding GI. At the end of the Malmö meeting a timeline for finalising the Scoping Fiches was proposed.

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

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

The **fifth in-person meeting took place in Pontevedra (ES) in Q2 2024**. During the meeting the partners finalised the list of the proposed Actions and decided the form of the first Draft Action Plan of the Partnership.

The **sixth physical meeting took place in Utrecht (NL) in Q3 2024**, with the main purpose of finalising the Action Plan and preparing for the implementation stage.

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 (CALM) was organised by EUI in order to learn from the experience of other UAEU Partnerships followed by an **in-person CALM in Brussels, in April 23 2024**, that brought together seven Thematic Partnerships of the Urban Agenda for the EU, the European Commission, the CoR, and the European Urban Initiative.

1.2.4 Consultations carried out during the development of the Action Plan

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

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

Finally, 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 45 contributions were received from the Member States of the UDG, as well as national and regional authorities, and other relevant 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 process were received and also 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 Ex-Ante Assessment identified a strong relevance and links with the following policies: UN Sustainable Development Goals; UN New Urban Agenda; European Green Deal; New Leipzig Charter; EU Biodiversity Strategy; EU Forest Strategy; EU Green Infrastructure Strategy; EU Climate Adaptation Strategy; EU Climate Law; European Climate Risk assessment, EU Zero Pollution Action Plan; EU Digital Strategy; New Bauhaus Initiative; and Territorial Agenda 2030.

Results of surveys were used by the Action Leaders to adapt the proposals in line with expectations and the needs of local and national/regional authorities, to use existing information and to avoid any possible overlapping with existing initiatives. Inputs from **193 local, regional and national authorities were collected** in January and February 2024 while also **45 contributions** were received during the public consultation process of the draft Action Plan, carried out between June and July 2024 (see previous chapter).

In the working group for identifying the demand for green infrastructure, the collaborative ESPON project **GRETA** ([Green Infrastructure: Enhancing Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services for Territorial Development](#)) was analysed to identify synergies. Additionally, various other initiatives from local and regional levels, such as the [Flemish Climate Portal](#) and climate adaptation tools, were analysed and discussed.

The working group for indicators reviewed a variety of urban nature indicator frameworks – including IUCN's Urban Nature Indexes and the Singapore Index on Cities' Biodiversity (CBI) among others – and documents - ncluding the Berlin urban Nature Pact, the Green City Accord, the Urban Nature Plan Guidance and Toolkit developed by DG ENV in collaboration with ICLEI and Eurocities, the European Commission's manual 'Evaluating the Impact of Nature-based Solutions: A Handbook for Practitioners', and the Spanish call for proposals on the renaturalisation of cities "Guidance for measuring and monitoring indicators for renaturalisation and resilience projects in Spanish cities" ("*Guía para la medición y seguimiento de indicadores para proyectos de renaturalización y resiliencia en ciudades españolas*") launched by Fundación Biodiversidad and the Ministry for Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge.

The Greening Cities Partnership continues to work with the European Commission, Member States, and local and regional authorities to support the implementation of the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) and help define "**satisfactory levels**"³ for green spaces and canopy cover by 2030 and beyond. The NRR, which was adopted and entered into force in August 2024, sets binding targets to restore degraded ecosystems and includes specific requirements for no net loss of green urban space and tree cover by 2030, with a steady increase in their total area thereafter. EU Member States are expected to submit National Restoration Plans by mid-2026, outlining how they will meet the targets set in the Regulation. Despite the success of the NRR's adoption, urgent action remains necessary to address the continued loss of green space in cities, towns, suburbs, and peri-urban areas across Europe. Urban areas are facing growing risks from climate change, such as extreme heat and flooding, while urban green spaces—which are essential for biodiversity, regulating air and water quality, and promoting citizens' physical and mental well-being—continue to diminish.

There is also an interrelation of GI and other UAEU priority topics, particularly of air quality, urban mobility, sustainable use of land and NBS, climate adaptation, and urban justice (a topic taken forward by the recently launched Cities of Equality Partnership).

For the funding component of the Action Plan, the **guidelines for public-private partnership (PPP)** constructions were informed by key resources, including Investing in Nature-Based Solutions: State-of-Play and Way Forward for Public and Private Financial Measures in Europe (European Investment Bank, 2023); the Circular Economy Action Plan (2015), Green Infrastructure Strategy (2013), Urban Agenda for the EU (i.e., Pact of Amsterdam, 2016), Europe 2020 Strategy (2010), and the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (2008). Additionally, the World Economic Forum's Insight Report – BiodiverCities by 2030: Transforming Cities' Relationship with Nature (January 2022) (https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_BiodiverCities_by_2030_2022.pdf) and the Network Nature Factsheet – Financing NbS in Municipalities: Exploring Opportunities from Municipal Funding drafted by IUCN for NetworkNature (H2020 project No. 887396) were considered.

The Grow Green project also provided valuable input on the financing mechanisms for urban greening projects ([Working-Document Financing-NBS-in-cities.pdf \(growgreenproject.eu\)](#)). Furthermore, the research project ClimateFit offered a scoping review of alternative financing models for NBS and maintenance costs for GI, enriching the financial strategy for the Partnership's Action Plan.

³ Article 3 point 3 and Article 5 point 2 and point 3.

2 ACTIONS

Overview table of actions

N°	Title	Short Description
1	Need for green - Methodology for quantifying the demand for green infrastructure at local level	This Action will provide a methodology to serve as a tool for municipalities in defining their demand/need for urban green infrastructure, which would serve a dual purpose: (1) fulfilling climate adaptation needs, while enhancing biodiversity needs (2) ensuring an evidence-based substantiation for green infrastructure.
2	Indicator system for Urban Nature Plans	This Action will develop a proposal for an indicator system local authorities, representing towns and cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants, can use to measure and monitor progress against their Urban Nature Plans, in line with the targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the Nature Restoration Regulation for urban areas and ecosystems. It will include a small set of core and supplementary indicators, clustered under different thematic areas of assessment.
3	Policies for achieving urban restoration targets/Urban Nature Plans	This Action aims to support the implementation of the Urban Nature Plans and urban ecosystem targets as included within the EU Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) in two distinct ways. Firstly, it will gather examples of and analyse existing policies relevant to the implementation of the targets, and secondly it will input into the Commission's upcoming work on the definition of a 'satisfactory level of urban green space and urban tree canopy cover, as described in the NRR.

4	Strengthening structural funding for urban green infrastructure	This Action consists of two parts. First, it aims to recommend to the European Commission, via a position paper, the design of a formal provision in future national-level fund regulations by earmarking resources for investment in and maintenance of green infrastructure. The recommendation will focus on the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund for the next EU financial period (2028-2034). The second part of this Action aims to provide an easier overview of available funding for green investments and maintenance via a one-stop shop.
5	Enhancing the use of innovative funding to enhance urban authorities to green cities	This Action identifies and shares knowledge on good practices regarding innovative funding to enhance urban authorities' green infrastructure. It focuses on three main issues. Firstly, it identifies good and bad practices that cities and private investors have experienced in public and private partnerships on green infrastructure projects. Secondly, it examines good and bad practices in the use of debt-based instruments such as green bonds and loans from the Natural Capital Financing Facility (NCF). Thirdly, it focuses on long-term financial constructions to finance green infrastructure projects and maintenance costs.
6	Urban Ecosystem Restoration Handbook	This Action brings together the findings of the partnership – from Action 1 on the 'need for green' to Action 5 on 'innovative funding for urban greening' – to provide a cohesive document in support of urban greening and the effective implementation of the NRR urban ecosystem targets. It will include an introduction to the partnership, its work, and the aims of the handbook. Linking the Actions, at least five cities will be selected as case studies to provide examples for each of the Actions; this means that each Action will include five city case study examples, and that each city will provide an example for each action.



Integration (of the Actions)

All Actions deal with green infrastructure or nature-based solutions from different perspectives, either with regard to knowledge, funding or regulation, or a combination of the three. Together, these Actions will inform the development of the Action 6, the Urban Ecosystem Restoration Handbook. If we look at the proposed Actions as a timeline for deployment of green infrastructure from pre-implementation to post-implementation, the proposed Actions behave as a streamlined, integrated process. In this regard, a strong correlation will be established in the development and in the implementation of the Actions:

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

- Will serve as a base for the implementation of **Action 3**, providing evidence-based data to guide decision-making.
- Will directly inform **Action 4** by quantifying the need for green infrastructure, supporting the case for structural funding recommendations.

Action 2 - Indicator system for Urban Nature Plans:

- Will complement **Action 1**, providing indicators to track the success of urban greening efforts.
- Will feed into the development and implementation of **Action 3**, supplying the necessary tools for monitoring Urban Nature Plans.
- Will substantiate the proposals under **Action 4** by offering metrics to ensure funding mechanisms are linked to measurable outcomes, and will contribute to **Action 5** by supporting the monitoring of the impact of financial mechanisms on greening.

Action 3 - Policies for achieving urban restoration targets / Urban Nature Plans:

- Will provide a policy framework that underpins the funding strategies proposed in **Action 4** and **Action 5**.
- Will set the groundwork for the achievement of urban ecosystem restoration targets by integrating policies, actions, and funding mechanisms.

Action 4 - Strengthening structural funding for urban green infrastructure:

- Will build on **Action 1** by using the quantified need for green infrastructure as a basis for recommending national-level funding earmarks.
- Will collaborate with **Action 5** by establishing structural and long-term funding mechanisms that cities can rely on to implement and maintain green infrastructure.
- Will contribute to the successful implementation of **Action 3**, ensuring that policies are backed by adequate funding channels.

Action 5 – Enhancing the use of innovative funding to enhance urban authorities to green cities:

- Will support **Action 4** by identifying innovative funding models, including public-private partnerships and debt instruments, to supplement traditional funding sources.
- Will provide cities with new financial tools to help implement **Action 3**, ensuring long-term financial sustainability for green infrastructure projects.
- Will feed into **Action 6** by contributing examples of innovative funding mechanisms and lessons learned to guide cities in securing financing for urban restoration efforts.

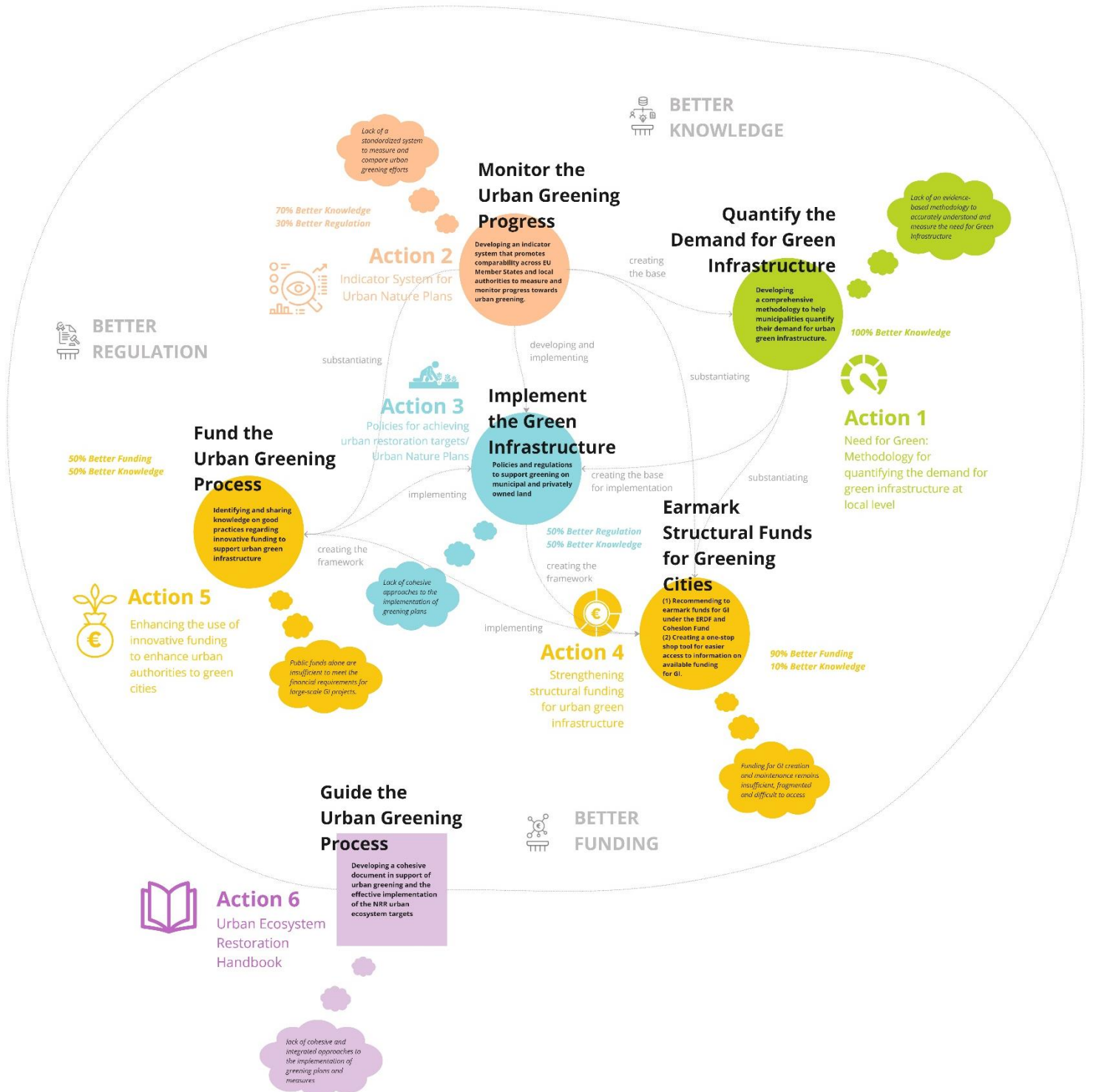
Action 6 – Urban Ecosystem Restoration Handbook:

- Will consolidate the outputs of **Actions 1-5** into a cohesive handbook, providing a comprehensive guide for cities to implement urban ecosystem restoration in line with the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR).
- Will integrate the methodologies and indicators from **Actions 1** and **2**, offering a framework for cities to quantify and monitor green infrastructure needs.
- Will build on the policies developed in **Action 3** and offer concrete case studies from cities to demonstrate practical implementation.
- Will incorporate the funding strategies from **Actions 4** and **5**, guiding cities on how to finance and sustain their greening projects long-term.

In conclusion, the Draft Action Plan is proposing 6 interconnected innovative Actions that will offer proposals for measuring, defining the need, implementing and maintenance, and funding possibilities.

Bellow you can see a visual representation of the Greening Cities 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/greening-cities>.

Urban Agenda for the EU Greening Cities Partnership Constellation of Actions



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



Quantify the Demand for Green Infrastructure

Developing a comprehensive methodology to help municipalities quantify their demand for urban green infrastructure.

100% Better Knowledge



Action 1

Need for Green: Methodology for quantifying the demand for green infrastructure at local level

Lack of an evidence-based methodology to accurately understand and measure the need for Green Infrastructure

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

Targeted stakeholders/governance level: Local Authorities.

Deadline: 31/12/2025;

Intermediary Deadline 1: Q2 2025 - First version;

Intermediary Deadline 2: Q4 2025 - Final version.

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



Better knowledge

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

2.1.2 What is the specific problem?

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

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

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

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

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

Additionally, the **New European Bauhaus Facility**, established in the Horizon Europe 2025-2027 Strategic Plan, is particularly relevant for Action 1, as it focuses on connecting the green transformation, social inclusion, and local democracy, circular and regenerative approaches for the built environment, and innovative funding and new business models for the transformation of neighbourhoods⁴.

The **EU Mission 100 climate-neutral cities until 2030** is also an important initiative contributing to this Action. The Mission involves local authorities, citizens, businesses, investors, as well as regional and national authorities to:

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

The selected cities have developed **Climate City Contracts**, including an overall plan for climate neutrality across all sectors such as energy, buildings, waste management, and transport. These contracts promote the idea that if city administrations plan and act transparently in the interplay of urban greening, biodiversity, climate protection, urban planning, mobility, energy, and waste management, they will inspire stakeholders and

⁴ The New European Bauhaus Facility is a unique, multi-annual EU funding tool designed to transform neighbourhoods through sustainable and inclusive design. It supports a combination of research and innovation (€120 million per year) and roll-out investments across EU programmes for neighbourhood transformations.



citizens to act as well. Green spaces and biodiversity are two relevant fields of action identified for climate impact adaptation in these contracts, making the proposed methodology a necessary tool in their implementation.

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

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

2.1.4 Which action is needed?

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

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

More specifically, the Action can contribute as follows to:

- Monitoring the link between green infrastructure, climate adaptation, biodiversity, ecosystem services and liveability;
- Contributing indirectly to enhancing community wellbeing and resilience;
- Implementing the European legislation and policies with regard to urban matters at local level;
- Elaborating Urban Nature Plans as in the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy;
- Investigating failure of implementation of green infrastructure;
- Facilitating the assessment of the full scope of benefits provided by green infrastructure;
- Substantiating decisions and raising the planning capacity of local authorities;
- Support the implementation of the Nature Restoration regulation.

2.1.5 How will the action be implemented?

Implementation will be done using ESPON targeted analysis as described in the Terms of Reference (https://www.espon.eu/sites/default/files/engage/files/2024-09/tor-ta-gill_2024-08-30_extract.pdf):

Phase 1: Development of the methodological and conceptual framework – The first task shall be to develop a clear conceptual and methodological framework that will be used to operationalise the research, including the quantitative and qualitative analyses, approaches to data collection and design of the method. The task should therefore include a comprehensive literature review of other methods, as relevant, and assess their strengths and weaknesses as possible building-blocks for the method, including in each of the stakeholder territories. The GRETA project, particularly the GRETA Briefing 3, would be a

useful starting point for this analysis. An index of best-practice examples of UGPs should also be gathered.

The methodological framework to be developed should include the development of common objectives for quantifying demand and for achieving legal or common policy obligations, assessing public interest, identifying areas with insufficient green infrastructure, evaluating environmental and climate adaptation benefits, guiding urban planning and policy decisions etc. Accordingly, the method should seek to develop a shared, clear conceptual definition of what constitutes green infrastructure in a local context (e.g. parks and green spaces, green roofs and walls, urban forests, rain gardens, permeable pavements, greenways etc.), in both the private and public sphere, including in respect of other concepts, such as ecosystem services, nature-based solutions etc.

Phase 2: Baseline analysis & data collection – While each of the stakeholder territories share many urban commonalities, their context is also highly differentiated. Task 2 shall therefore include a complete baseline analysis of the policy context in each of the stakeholder territories, including in respect of current approaches to green infrastructure planning. This may include surveys; stakeholder interviews; gathering environmental, spatial and demographic data; existing green infrastructure inventories etc. Each of the stakeholders will assist in this process. The objective shall be to identify a broad set of common qualitative and quantitative data requirements at the local level suitable as inputs for the methodology. The baseline analysis should also identify enabling factors and barriers for implementing green infrastructure and report any deficiencies and data that could impede the development of the method for assessing current and future green infrastructure demand.

Phase 3: Method development – The third task shall be the development of the method for quantifying the demand for green infrastructure at local level which should include the following broad elements:

- **Data Needs:** Qualitative and quantitative data required to quantify demand at local level, including spatial analysis, statistical analysis etc.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** How stakeholders can be engaged throughout the process to ensure the methodology aligns with local demands, needs and perspectives, and the identification of enabling factors and barriers etc.
- **Workshops and public meetings:** How participatory methods can be used to gather input, validate demand, identify priority areas, overcome conflicts and build consensus etc.
- **Demand Quantification and Forecasting:** Develop models to forecast future demand based on current trends, policies and projected changes in demography, climate, and urban development etc., including methods to assess and measure future scenarios, multiple benefits, supply and demand, synergies and trade-offs etc.
- **Reporting and Recommendations:** How to compile findings into a standardised report to present actionable recommendations for policymakers, including in respect of EU and national funding sources, through the use of maps, charts, infographics and graphs to visually represent data and demand findings and make complex information easily accessible and usable.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish a framework for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of green infrastructure demand, including key performance indicators, and a plan for regular updates to the data and analysis to reflect changes over time, including through the gathering of feedback from local stakeholders to constantly refine and improve the methodology.

Phase 4: Case study pilots –The method shall be iteratively tested and developed through its application in each of the stakeholder territories included in this Targeted Analysis. Accordingly, the method (Task 3) should be heuristically developed through the case study pilots. The aim of the case studies should be to evaluate the general applicability, practicality of the methods in practice, based on the characteristics of their individual contexts. In the case of national/regional stakeholders (RO, IT, HR, PO), a specific urban municipality should be selected (to be agreed with the relevant stakeholder). A case study report should be produced for each stakeholder territory which shall include, at a minimum:

- A comprehensive overview and analysis of the baseline context and data sources (Task 2);
- A report on the testing of the method, including methodological lessons learnt from the application in practice and how this informed the iterative development of the method (Task 3); and,
- The general findings from the case study and feedback from stakeholders on the utility of the method and its future use in practice.

Qualitative focus groups should be organised as part of the pilot testing, involving all of the stakeholders and selected local policy actors 'on the ground' in each case study in order to gain a general user perspective and feedback. The timing, location and approach for the interactive workshops shall be agreed with the Steering Committee following the completion of Task 1. The purpose of the focus group sessions should be to, inter alia, gather feedback on the baseline data inputs; develop a clear relationship between the method and actual policymaking process; and to identify training, other requirements and recommendations to ensure the systematic use of the model in practice, particularly through the local urban planning policy processes.

Phase 5: User manual – The objective of this Targeted Analysis is to devise a user-centred and practical method for quantifying the demand for green infrastructure at local level and which is intended to be used in actual policy deliberation processes to enhance applied institutional capacity-building, including through the spatial planning process. End users will primarily be planners or generalist policy practitioners and not always specialists in this field. Accordingly, the method must be robust, intuitive and readily understood. An outcome of the research should therefore be a dedicated step-by-step user-manual and training guide which describes general applicability, utility and practicality of the method, including how it can be integrated with or linked to the or other policy processes. As of October 2024, the call for tenders is open with October 14th as the deadline.

2.1.6 What resources are needed?

The ESPON application was written by the Action Leader with the help of the Working Group members. The implementation of the Action will make use of external expertise, so no day-to-day activities are expected. The application was accepted and several ad-hoc activities will be expected of the Working Group members, on top of what was already done (securing signatures for the cooperation agreement, drafting of the Terms of Reference), the most important of which is evaluation of tender offers. Funding is ensured through ESPON funds.

2.1.7 Are there any risks foreseen?

Risks need to be split into two categories:

- Overlapping with other initiatives;
- Implementation of the methodology

As far as the first one goes, this aspect will be covered by Tasks 1 and 2 described above.

As far as the latter goes, actual uptake of the methodology by local authorities is to a large extent beyond the control of the Partnership. However, the partnership, including some local authorities will closely follow-up the implementation and during the implementation interaction with a broader group of stakeholders will be organised. The Action Leader and members will continue to promote the methodology beyond the scope of the Urban Agenda for the EU to the best of their ability and strive to maximum involvement of all actors, but actual implementation is left to local authorities.

ESPON is a well-established institution with a proven track record so there is also no risk on its behalf to not deliver the expected results.

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

Action Leaders

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

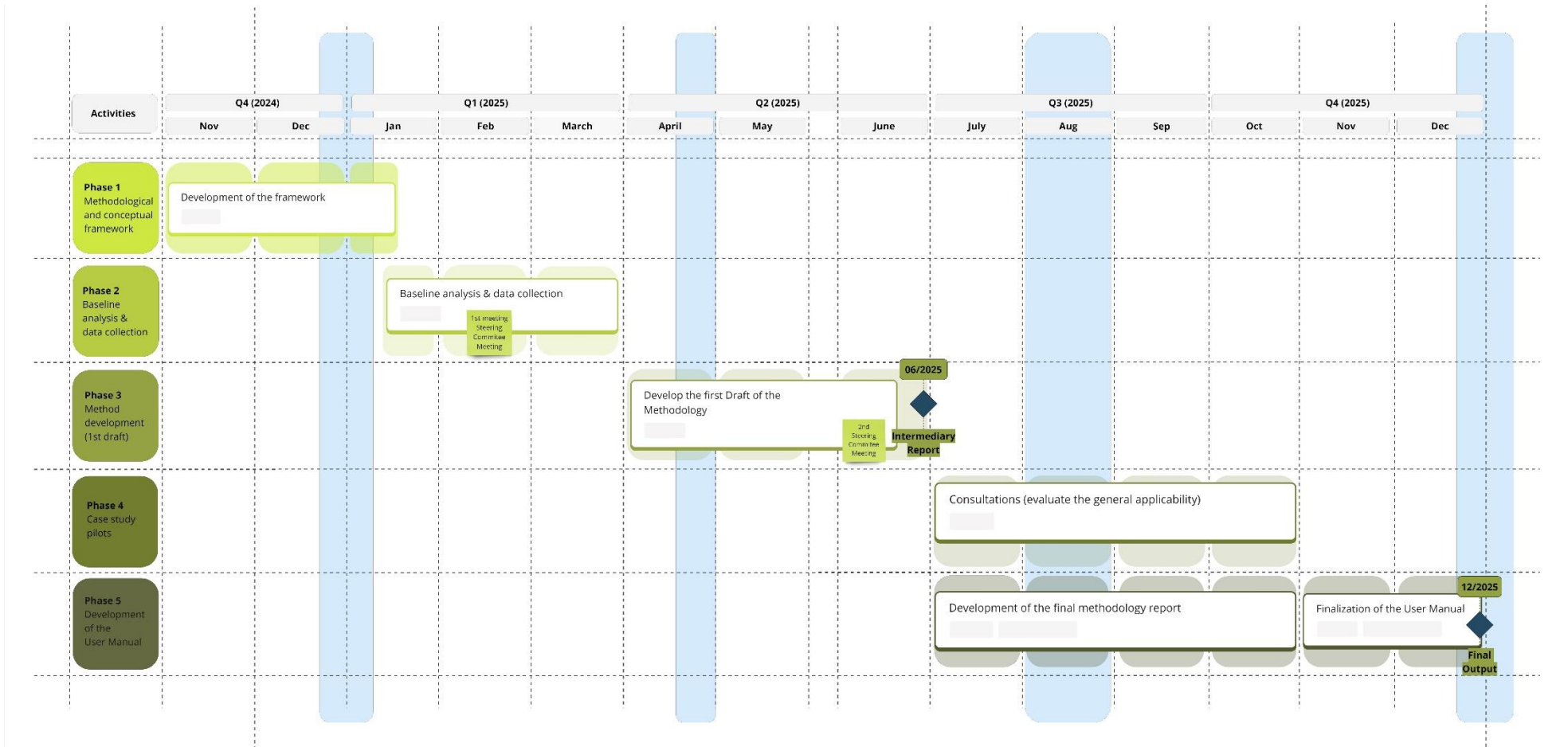
Contributors

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

Advisors

1. Eurocities, BE;
2. Joint Research Centre (JRC), EU;
3. Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO);
4. Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV);
5. Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC).

2.1.9 What is the timeline of the implementation?



2.1.10 Which outputs will be produced?

The final deliverable will contain at least:

- **A final main report (max. 80 pages) including:**
- Executive summary for policymakers;
- Stepwise methodology for quantifying demand for green infrastructure at a local level;
- Case study reports for each stakeholder territory;
- User manual for policymakers; and,
- Recommendations for future research, including data collection.
- **Technical annexes**, including all data, methods and everything that has to be known to make the study repeatable and verifiable;
- **A PowerPoint Presentation** (up to 30 slides) of the research results in the format and specific form agreed with the ESPON EGTC and – whenever related to maps and other interactive forms of data visualisation;
- **Data, maps and figures.**

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

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

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

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

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



This Action aims to collaboratively develop an **indicator system** that supports local authorities, including those representing towns and cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants, to measure and monitor progress towards Urban Nature Plans (UNPs), promoting comparability across the EU territory. It will encompass several thematic areas of assessment as well as a set of **common core and supplementary indicators**, setting out a methodology for their measurement.

Targeted stakeholders/governance level: local authorities and European level (DG ENV).

Deadline: 31/12/2025;

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

Intermediary Deadline 2: 30/09/2025 - Final version.

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



This Action contributes to two pillars: "Better Knowledge" (70%) and "Better Regulation" (30%). In terms of "Better Knowledge", the Action develops a proposal for an indicator system with which local authorities can assess the implementation of their Urban Nature Plans, across different thematic areas, building on, harmonising, and simplifying existing frameworks and initiatives on urban nature indicators. In terms of "Better Regulation", the Action will feed into the [Urban Nature Plan Guidance and Toolkit](#) (hosted on the Urban Nature Platform of the Directorate-General for Environment - DG ENV) to facilitate the local implementation of the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) targets.

2.2.2 What is the specific problem?

The EU is encouraging towns and cities to play a more active role in favour of renaturation and biodiversity to restore the health and functionality of European urban ecosystems, while better adapting urban environments to the climate crisis and its consequences.

Among the measures proposed, the Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV) has developed an [Urban Nature Platform](#), which hosts the [Urban Nature Plan Guidance and Toolkit](#). This interactive resource aims to guide towns and cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants in the drafting of ambitious Urban Nature Plans⁵ to reverse environmental degradation and drive nature-positive actions in the framework of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.

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

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

This Action aims to strategically inform and support the implementation of Urban Nature Plans as called for by the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which defines them as “measures to create biodiverse and accessible urban forests, parks and gardens; urban farms; green roofs and walls; treelined streets; urban meadows; and urban hedges.” With the adoption of the Nature Restoration Regulation in August 2024, the standardised monitoring of Urban Nature Plans will also help the implementation and assessment of its key targets for urban environments (Art. 8 - “Restoration of urban ecosystems”). DG ENV, in partnership with Eurocities and ICLEI, has preliminarily produced an interactive and iterative Urban Nature Plans Guidance and Toolkit, identifying *Monitoring and Reporting Systems* as a key milestone towards successful implementation.

At present, there is no common set of indicators at the European level to monitor and report on the implementation of Urban Nature Plans, thus allowing to compare trends and progress made by local authorities in different regions. This Action endeavours to bridge this gap with an evidence-informed proposal for indicators and data on urban greening and ecosystem restoration actions, with a view to promoting standardisation and comparability across towns and cities of different sizes and capacities in the European territory.

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

⁵ Urban Nature Plans were initially called Urban Greening Plans, however, the term was changed to avoid confusion with terminology used by the Green City Accord and the European Green Capital Award, thus better reflecting the focus on urban biodiversity enhancement).



2.2.4 Which action is needed?

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

- Establishing a set of relevant thematic areas (inspired by the European Commission's handbook 'Evaluating the impact of Nature-based Solutions' and reflecting the core targets of the NRR for urban ecosystems);
- Proposing a small number of **common core indicators** under each of thematic area to measure and monitor the progress of local authorities in the implementation of UNPs. In this regard, the technical and financial capacities of local entities, especially smaller municipalities, should be considered;
- Proposing a set of **supplementary indicators**, to be selected by local authorities based on local policy contexts and needs;
- Where relevant and possible, indicators will be matched to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (sub-)targets and indicators, building on the work of the Horizon 2020 CONEXUS project and of the COM's NBS Task Forces as part of Network Nature. This linking exercise can support standardisation and comparability among cities, while also contributing to reporting against the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- Proposing a **methodology** to carry out each indicator, highlighting potential challenges as well as capacity, data, and expertise needed (part of the methodological annex).

Following the development of the indicator system, a series of **complementary activities** are proposed in order to disseminate it and support the capacity of local authorities to implement it.

In consultation with DG ENV, we aim for the indicator system to support the successful implementation of the **Urban Nature Plans Guidance and Toolkit** by local authorities facilitating the harmonisation and comparability of results from data collection at local level. Comparability between towns and cities (of different sizes and capacities) in different European regions can significantly inform the implementation of current and future policies related to the restoration and protection of urban ecosystems not only at local level, but also at Member State and EU level.

Lastly, this Action contributes to expanding the evidence base for demonstrating the benefits of urban nature for European citizens and societies, across multiple policy sectors and governance scales. In this direction, we will collaborate with partners of Action 1, 3, 5 to feed city experiences and study cases into Action 6' Urban Ecosystem Restoration Handbook.

2.2.5 How will the action be implemented?

The Action will be implemented in three phases:

Phase 1: Initial version of the indicator system (December 2023-November 2024)

The following activities will be carried out during this phase:

- Mapping of existing assessment frameworks and indicator systems for urban nature;
- Analysis of the preliminary Partnership survey results;
- First draft of thematic areas for assessment and set of indicators prioritised by local authorities (drawing from the COM's Handbook "Evaluating the impact of Nature-Based Solutions").

These activities are implemented using an iterative methodology, including a literature review and grey literature, as well as by analysing the results of a survey conducted by the Partnership in January 2024. The objective of the survey was to gather the perspectives of urban policy stakeholders (especially local authorities) regarding the definition of key thematic areas for assessment and priority indicators for defining and assessing progress against Urban Nature Plans. Responses highlighted the need for urban greening interventions to be accompanied by a robust assessment methodology. Based on the responses of 43 local authorities, 8 thematic areas for assessment were identified by the Action, drawing on the 12 societal challenges identified in the EC's publication "Evaluating the impact of Nature-based Solutions: a handbook for practitioners". Clustered under the identified thematic areas, a total of 12 indicators were prioritised by respondents out of the total 47 listed, allowing the Action to delineate the basis for a first proposal of the indicator system.

Phase 2: Co-creation and consultation (November 2024-September 2025)

The following activities will be carried out during this phase:

- Reviewing and harmonising existing assessment frameworks and indicator systems for urban nature based on expert consultations;
- First draft of indicator system (including key thematic areas, core and supplementary indicators);
- Conducting two workshops with experts and representatives from local authorities
- Conducting semi-structured interviews with representatives from towns and cities of different sizes and capacities;
- Validation of final proposal of the indicators system;
- Contracting of external expertise to draft methodological annex.

The activities carried out will allow for the enrichment and validation of the indicators identified in Phase 1. The result of this Phase 2 will be the final proposal of the indicator system and it will include a methodological annex accompanying the proposed core and supplementary indicators.

Phase 3: Communication and dissemination (October 2025-December 2025)

The following activities will be carried out during this phase:

- Organisation of communication and dissemination events aimed at building the capacity of cities to implement the indicators system and elevate the impact of the

- Action. These activities will exploit already planned events at the EU level (i.e. European Week of Regions and Cities, Eurocities events, ICLEI's European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns, JPI Urban Europe and Driving Urban Transitions (DUT) events, 2025 Cities Forum, etc.);
- Promotion of multimedia material (i.e. presentation, short video) aimed at the dissemination of the system of indicators.

2.2.6 What resources are needed?

All phases of the Action rely on active engagement and contributions from members of the Partnership and stakeholders of Action 2. In Phase 2, the implementation of the Action will rely on the contracting of external expertise to develop the methodological annex to the indicators.

The indicator system will be part of the final Urban Ecosystem Restoration Handbook (Action 6) and, pending consideration from the DG ENV, integrated into the Commission's online platform for Urban Nature Plans. In this regard, continuous communication and exchange with DG ENV will be needed to ensure the Action's results will be uptaken at the EU level, supporting the implementation of UNPs by local authorities.

2.2.7 Are there any risks foreseen?

Foreseen implementation risks at this stage:

- More limited capacity of towns and smaller cities to be involved in the activities and thus of being represented (a possible mitigation strategy is to target outreach to towns and smaller cities via the cities and MS networks active in the Partnership).
- The implementation of the Action will rely on the willingness and interest of cities to engage in its activities, particularly by sharing their experiences and knowledge related to UNP indicators. A potential risk is limited participation from cities beyond those already represented in the Partnership.
- Lack of support at MS and EU level to consider the system of indicators and integrate it into the UNP platform hosted by DG ENV;
- Issues related to language accessibility - the final outputs and meetings/workshops planned by this Action should take into account the issue of language barriers. This might have an impact on the active involvement of local authorities;
- Ensuring sufficient support is provided to the Action by the EUI expertise support service, considering that managing the allocation of expert days across all Actions, is essential to guarantee adequate support for each.
- Uncertainty regarding future regulations related to UNPs and evolving policy landscape, given the limited duration of the Greening Cities Partnership (until end of 2025).
- Lack of partners engagement and support to carry out planned activities.

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

Action Leaders

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

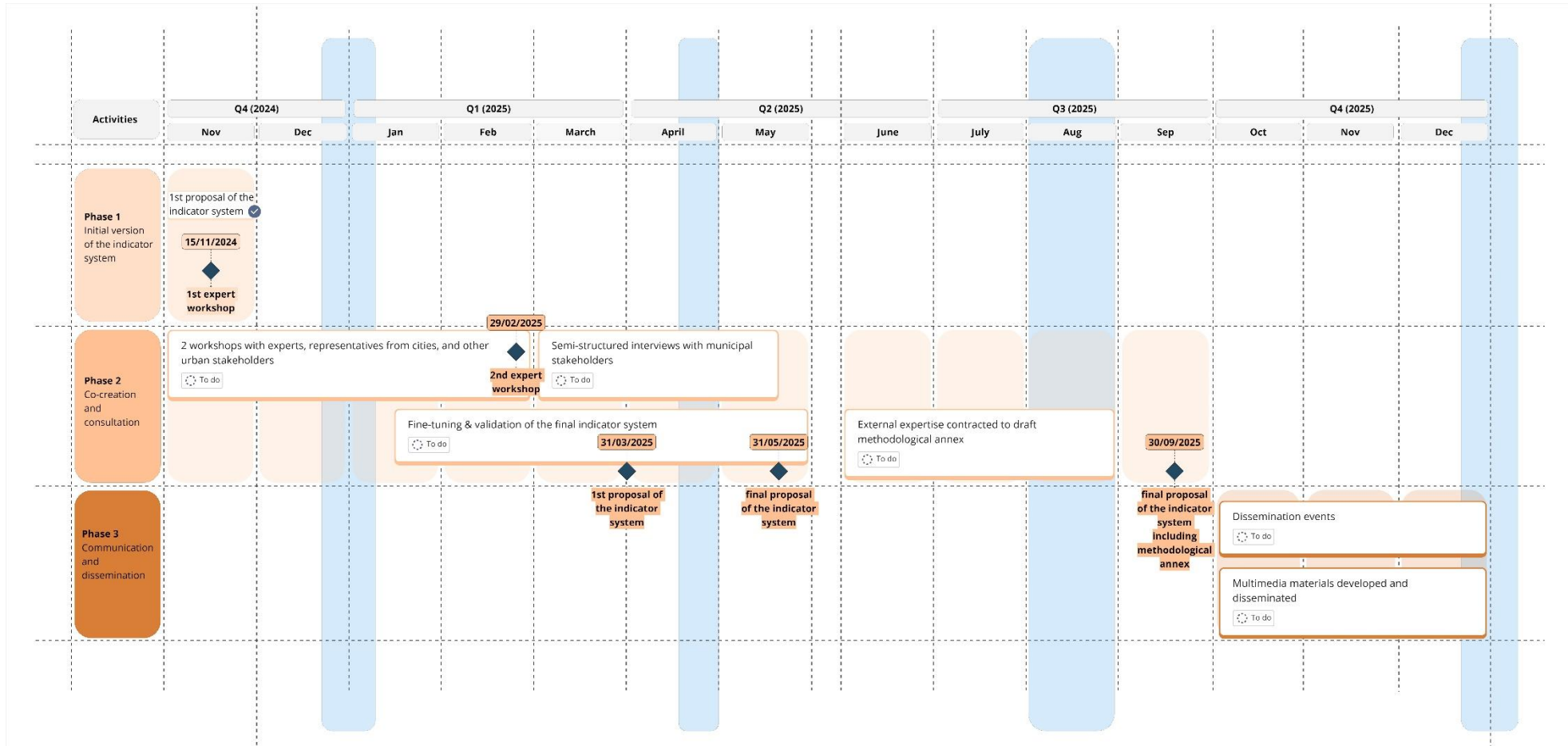
Contributors

1. City of Tampere, FI;
2. Eurocities, BE;
3. Marshal's Office of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship, PL;
4. Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, RO;
5. City of 's-Hertogenbosch, NL;
6. INCASÒL - Catalan Land Institute, ES;
7. City of Roeselare, BE;
8. JPI Urban Europe/DUT Partnership, EU.

Advisors

1. Joint Research Centre (JRC);
2. Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV).
3. Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC)

2.2.9 What is the timeline of the implementation



2.2.10 Which outputs will be produced?

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

Intermediate outputs:

- **Indicator system:** First proposal for the indicator system for monitoring Urban Nature Plans | Deadline: 31/03/2025;
- **Workshops:** 2x workshops with experts and relevant urban stakeholders | Deadline: 28/02/2025

Final outputs:

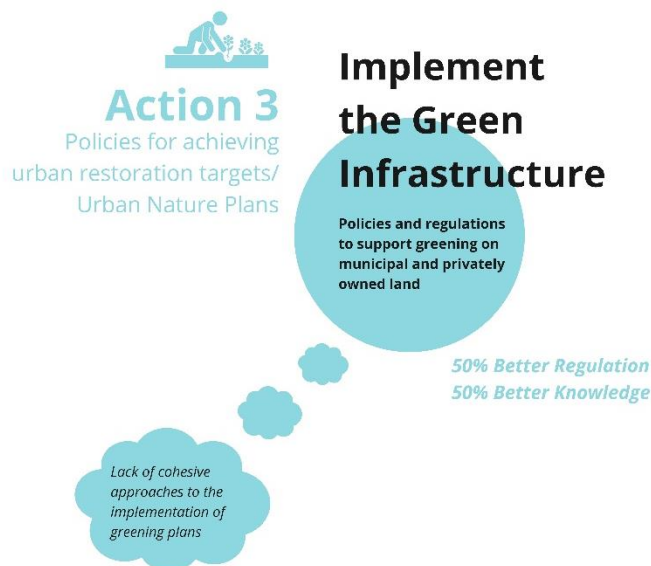
- **Final version of the indicator system:** final version integrated into part of Action 6's Urban Ecosystem Restoration Manual | Deadline: 30/09/2025;
- **Methodological appendix:** for the determination of indicators | Deadline: 30/09/2025;
- **Series of events:** communication and dissemination activities to promote knowledge and uptake of the indicator system among European towns and cities | Deadline: 15/12/2025;
- **Multimedia materials:** PowerPoint presentation and short video for further dissemination of the indicator system | Deadline: 31/12/2025.

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

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

- The **European Commission's Urban Nature Platform** initiative and, in particular, the future Urban Nature Plan Toolkit. Action 2 aims to leverage synergies with this initiative, proposing a practical tool for monitoring progress against UNPs'targets.
- The **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030** and the **Nature Restoration Regulation**. In its proposed core indicators, Action 2 will reflect the key targets mandated for urban areas and ecosystems including the quantity and quality of urban green spaces, tree canopy cover, and protected natural areas on public land.
- The proposal for an **EU Directive on Soil Monitoring and Resilience**. While it is still in discussion, it will impact cities as a result of the proposal, under the Law, for Member States to designate soil districts and competent authorities to monitor soil health and land take. The proposal lays down the soil descriptors and criteria for monitoring and assessing soil health that could be considered in the system of indicators.

2.3 Action N° 03 – Policies for achieving urban restoration targets / Urban Nature Plans



This Action aims to support the implementation of the Urban Nature Plans and urban ecosystem targets as included within the EU Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) in two distinct ways. Firstly, it will gather examples of and analyse existing policies relevant to the implementation of the targets, and secondly it will input into the Commission’s upcoming work on the definition of a ‘satisfactory level of urban green space and tree canopy cover, as described in the NRR.

Targeted stakeholders/governance level: Local Authorities and EU level (DG ENV).

Deadline: 30/11/2025.

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

This Action contributes to both Better Knowledge – by providing space for exchange of information (webinars, events) and inputting into an informative handbook including with case studies (50%) – and for Better Regulation – by supporting the implementation of the urban ecosystem restoration targets and inputting into the Commission’s definition of a ‘satisfactory’ level of urban green space and tree canopy cover (50%).



2.3.2 What is the specific problem?

In May 2020, the EU published the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems. The Strategy called for an increase in urban green space and green infrastructure, and for all towns and cities to develop ambitious urban greening plans (now referred to as urban nature plans) to support this. It also called for the developed of a now adopted EU Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR). This Regulation sets binding targets to restore specific habitats and species, including urban ecosystems. The Greening Cities Partnership aims to support local and national authorities in the implementation of the NRR urban ecosystem targets as well as with the definition of a “satisfactory level” of urban green space and canopy cover as required post-2030. The NRR addresses the urgent need to stop the loss of green space in cities, towns, suburbs and peri-urban areas in Europe as part of the need to address the interlinked crises of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. Urban areas, and cities in particular, are at ever increasing risk from the impacts of climate change, including from excessive heat, and from flooding. At the same time, urban green space, which is being steadily lost, is essential for supporting biodiversity, helping to regulate air and water quality, and for the physical and mental well-being of citizens.

Therefore, the Partnership proposes to **support the implementation of the crucial urban objectives of the Nature Restoration Regulation**, namely article 8:

8.1. By 31 December 2030, Member States shall ensure that there is no net loss in the total national area of urban green space and of urban tree canopy cover in urban ecosystem areas, determined in accordance with Article 14(4), compared to 2024. For the purposes of this paragraph, Member States may exclude from those total national areas the urban ecosystem areas in which the share of urban green space in the urban centres and urban clusters exceeds 45 % and the share of urban tree canopy cover exceeds 10 %.

8.2. From 1 January 2031, Member States shall achieve an increasing trend in the total national area of urban green space, including through the integration of urban green space into buildings and infrastructure, in urban ecosystem areas, determined in accordance with Article 14(4), measured every six years from 1 January 2031, until a satisfactory level as set in accordance with Article 14(5) is reached.

8.3. Member States shall achieve, in each urban ecosystem area, determined in accordance with Article 14(4), an increasing trend of urban tree canopy cover, measured every six years from 1 January 2031, until the satisfactory level identified as set in accordance with Article 14(5) is reached.

Implementation of effective urban nature restoration targets requires the understanding of the needs of an urban area in terms of green space - how much is needed and where, and what types of green space – an effective monitoring and evaluation system, and crucially a local strategy and an implementation plan⁶.

⁶ Action 1 and 2 of this partnership will deal with understanding and quantifying the needs from green space in a city, and what indicators can be established to track the development of green infrastructure. This work should enable a local authority to better understand what a good level of green space they should aim for to meet their needs in the future (akin to the proposal to set ‘satisfactory levels’ proposed in the NRR)

One main barrier, in terms of achieving any urban green targets that have been set, is the lack of cohesive and integrated approaches to the implementation of greening plans and measures due to challenges of engaging wide range of stakeholders and aligning different needs, including co-creation practices, with wider local community, as well as ensuring cooperation between departments at different government levels. Disjointed actions, lack of knowledge, poor communication and coordination between different departments further obstruct the implementation of efficient solutions – in fact collaboration between stakeholders on a horizontal and vertical level is crucial. The engagement and support from diverse stakeholders, including local businesses and citizens, are often inadequate, highlighting a gap in innovative and effective strategies for their involvement. Existing regulatory policies and support on the use of local and national instruments for increasing greenspace at local level, both on municipal as well as privately owned land, are proving ineffective. Firstly, many local authorities are focused on other priorities, and the increasing of green space, with land as such a precious resource, is seen as a low priority. There remains a belief that you can't grow green, only grey (i.e. you cannot decouple urban development from loss of urban green – which is not true). The management of green spaces by private landowners is particularly challenging, where current regulations are struggling to oversee and enforce sustainable practices, such as limiting the ability to cut trees, sealing land for parking or other construction or a struggling to translate greening into value for private landowners. Many other challenges face local authorities keen to scale up the use of green infrastructure, even when targets have been established and funding has been secured – including finding experts such as ecologists and landscape architects, builders willing to undertake major green infrastructure developments even finding nurseries to be provided locally appropriate trees can be very challenging.

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

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

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

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

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

2.3.4 Which action is needed?

This Action will support the implementation of the Urban Nature Plans and urban ecosystem targets as included within the EU Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR). Firstly, the focus on policies will support cities by providing **specific case study examples of good practice policies** needed to successfully achieve the urban ecosystem restoration targets of no net loss of urban green space and tree canopy cover. At least five cities will be selected as case study examples throughout the partnership providing real-term examples of how policies – and the need for green and indicators in Actions 1 and 2 respectively – can be implemented.

Policies will include insight into how to enhance horizontal coordination and integration of targets into local plans, collaboration among local departments to foster their synergistic co-action and avoid conflicting regulations, presentation of methods for getting local political entities onboard, and for getting support from the community, businesses, and the private sector. To better illustrate these approaches and share best practices, case study examples will be provided, as mentioned above.

Regarding greening **municipal-owned land**, regulatory policies and non-legislative measures to increase urban green space and tree canopy cover on municipal-owned land will be presented through case study examples (e.g. regulations, policies and measures for new developments and existing developments, brownfield sites, empty buildings, street regeneration, etc.). Equally, the greening of **urban privately owned land** would be covered in the same level of detail (e.g. through local regulatory policies, non-legislative instruments, and measures to increase urban green space and tree canopy cover on privately owned land).

Secondly, this Action will input into the Commission's upcoming work on the **definition of a 'satisfactory level' of urban green space and tree canopy cover**, as described in the NRR. As such, the partnership shall gather input from cities across Europe as to how to define a 'satisfactory' level of urban green space via online and in-person workshops and bring this feedback to Commission-led events planned for early 2025. We will additionally provide such information – how a satisfactory level of urban green space and tree canopy cover could be defined – within the final Handbook to provide those more ambitious cities with the option to build on the final Commission definition, once available and as necessary.

2.3.5 How will the action be implemented?

Action 3 will build on two other Actions of the Partnership: **Action 2**, which will develop an indicator system for Urban Nature Plans; **Action 1**, which will develop a methodology for quantifying the need and demand for green infrastructure.

The first part of this Action will start from the point where a local authority had assessed and understood its need for urban green space according to the methodology developed under Action 1.

In the first step, the partners will review the survey results gathered at the start of this partnership to carry out an initial analysis of policies for regulating land use and supporting the implementation of the urban ecosystem targets under the NRR. In a second step, and building on this analysis, an external expert will be hired to under-take more in-depth review of relevant cities' policies. These cities will provide a case study example across the Actions in the partnership, creating a common thread. The cities and policies to be analysed by the expert will be chosen based on involvement in the partnership, relevance to the

needs, and geographic representation. At least five cities will be selected, with at least two people within those cities interviewed by the expert to gather a thorough understanding of how the relevant policies were developed and implemented. Interviews will cover questions related to this Action but also to the other Actions, thus questions will be drafted in consultation with all relevant partnership partners. Finally, the expert will produce a short report summarising their findings. This analysis and the case study examples will feed into the final Handbook.

In the second part of this Action, partners will capitalise on planned events as well as plan for webinars to gather input from a wide range of cities as to the definition of a 'satisfactory level' of urban green space. This information will be gathered via a common tool (e.g Slido) and eventually feed into the Commission's stakeholder events planned for 2025 on this topic. Further, this feedback will be included within the final Handbook as further information for those cities wishing to go 'beyond' the Commission definition of a 'satisfactory level' of urban green space and tree canopy cover, once adopted and as necessary.

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

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

2.3.6 What resources are needed?

Partnership members as well as external stakeholders will be invited to contribute at various stages – for example, the partners of the partnership will be asked to invite their members to relevant workshops. In addition, an external expert will be hired to conduct the interviews with cities and produce a report. Depending on the final form in which the results of the Action will be disseminated and communicated to stakeholders on EU and national/regional and local levels, resources for the organization of the different workshops, online platforms, publications, software, etc. may be needed.

2.3.7 Are there any risks foreseen?

To gather information regarding policies for restoring urban nature more stakeholders and involved parties will need to collaborate and provide timely inputs, suggestions and feedback. There may be delays in hiring an external expert, and in the output from such an expert. In defining 'satisfactory' levels of green space and tree canopy cover, input could be insufficient to develop a strong basis for a recommendation.

Therefore, it can be expected that obstacles and delays might occur, especially in earlier stages of the process, before the potential indicators (Action 2) and evaluation methodology (Action 1) are narrowed down to a point where they can be applied to all conditions and locations of concern.

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

Action Leaders

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

Contributors

1. INCASÒL – Catalan Land Institute, ES;
2. Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia, SI;
3. Marshal's Office of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship, PL;
4. JPI Urban Europe/DUT Partnership.

Advisors

1. Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV);
2. Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC).

2.3.9 What is the timeline of the implementation?

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

Output 1: Policies for achieving urban ecosystem restoration targets

Phase 1: Preparation and Initial Research (December 2024-February 2025)

- Terms of Reference and application for external support | December 2024;
- Internal review of survey results and initial analysis of policies | January-February 2025;
- Draft of city interview questions for external expert in collaboration with other Action leaders | January-February 2025.

Phase 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Policy Discussion (March-October 2025)

- Series of webinars/workshops on policies and needs in collaboration with external interviewer | March-October 2025;
- Draft case study template in collaboration with other Action leaders | April-May 2025.

Phase 3: Reporting and Case Study Development (Months September-November 2025)

- Case study template for cities to be completed and included in final Handbook (Action 6) | September-November 2025;
- Draft section for handbook: September-November 2025;
- External expert report on policies | November 2025.

Output 2: Defining satisfactory levels of urban green and tree canopy cover

Phase 1: Initial Consultations and Proposal Development (November 2024 – February 2025)

- Series of webinars: November 2024 – January 2025;
- Draft proposal(s) ahead of political event: February 2025.

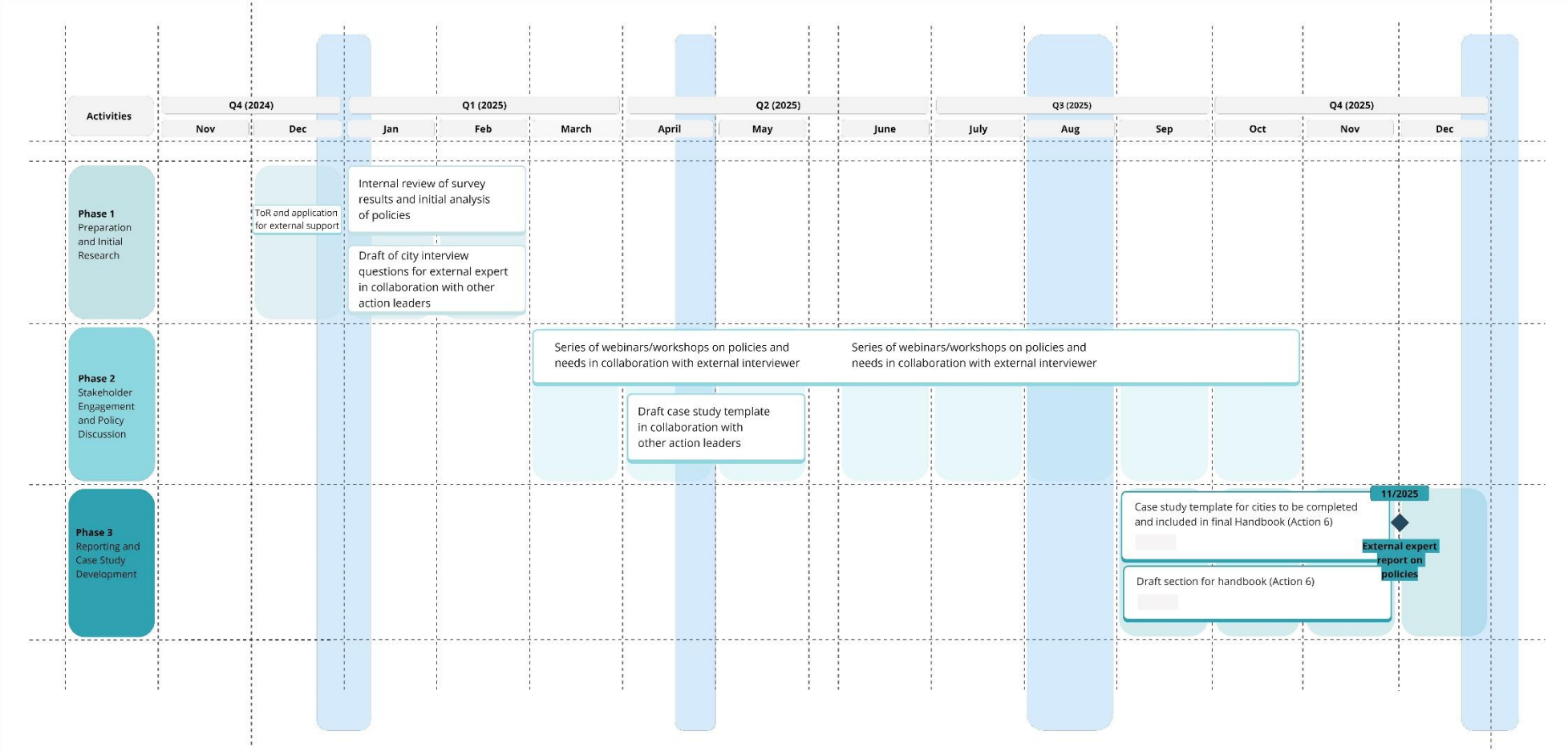
Phase 2: Political Engagement and Events (February-June 2025)

- High level political event ahead of May Ministerial meeting (20 May 2025) and DGUM (24-25 April 2025) – February - April 2025;
- Presentation at Ministerial meeting (tbc): May 2025;
- European Commission stakeholder workshop – April-June 2025;
- Session at Cities Forum (Krakow) – June 2025.

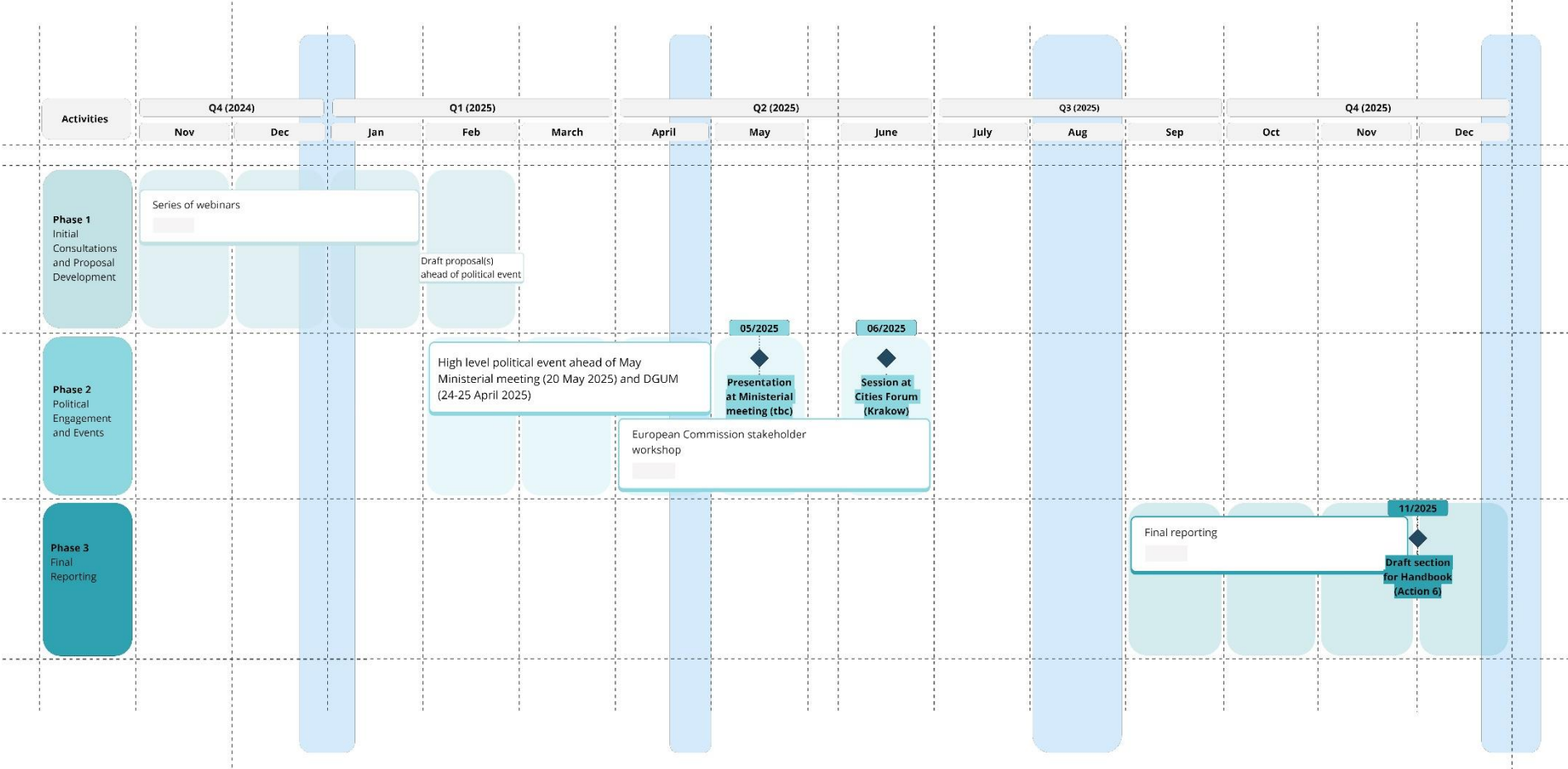
Phase 3: Final Reporting (September-November 2025)

- Draft section for Handbook – September-November 2025.

Output 1: Policies for achieving urban ecosystem restoration target



Output 2: Defining satisfactory levels of urban green and tree canopy cover



2.3.10 Which outputs will be produced?

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

A workshop series will be held aimed for collecting input on innovative practices from participants from the already conducted survey. A final output of this Action will be a Guidebook with recommendations for meeting the needs for Greening Cities Partnership (development of GI) at the national, regional, and local levels, focusing specifically on greening publicly owned land, privately owned land and cultural heritage sites and assets with relevant case studies overview. Final stakeholder event in form of webinar(s) will be organized in order to promote the Guidebook to relevant stakeholders, build capacities among national and local level actors and enable dissemination of results.

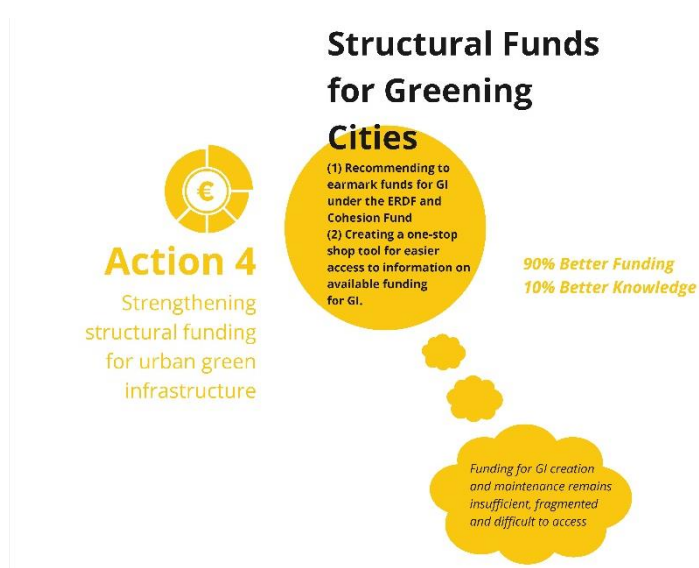
2.3.11 Territorial Impact Assessment

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

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

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

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



This Action consists of preparing a position paper with two recommendations. The first will be on the earmarking of funds for GI under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund of the next financial period of the EU (2028-2034). The second will focus on the facilitation of access to information on funding opportunities for GI especially Portico.

Targeted stakeholders/governance level: European Commission; Local, Regional and National Level of Governments; European Parliament Research Service.

Deadline: 30/06/2025;
Position Paper: 28/02/2025.

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

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

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



Better funding



Better knowledge

2.4.2 What is the specific problem?

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

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

Despite the benefits of GI, financing such projects remains problematic. The survey regarding funding of GI filled in by nearly 200 cities shows that experienced barriers in finding financial support are insufficient funding, technical know-how, bureaucracy and capacity building. Also lack of structural funding for maintenance seems to be a problem. 45% of the cities experience "red tape in EU region funds" as a bottleneck in funding for GI. Only 15% of the cities have experience with PPP constructions, and three quarters of the cities is in need of a guidance on PPP constructions.

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

Another problem is barriers in access and use of information on funding opportunities. The information available is scattered across many websites, platforms and funding guides. This makes it very difficult for funding officers from local authorities to plan and adapt their strategies and needs in relation to the funding available. The EU tool Portico especially for cities is an improvement but it doesn't solve the problems sufficiently. As a result, the funding process is very complex and inefficient. Moreover, many cities in the EU, especially small and medium-sized ones, do not have sufficient administrative and technical know-how to prepare applications for project-based funding. There is also the language barrier (some calls for proposals are only available in English) and some funds require very specific

technical information (such as risk assessments, environmental reports and analyses), which is very difficult for many cities to deliver.

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

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

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

We also wish to recommend improvements especially of the already existing tool for cities Portico, containing updated information on opportunities to obtain EU financial support for GI projects and its maintenance.

2.4.4 Which action is needed?

The Action consists of preparing a position paper which will contain two formal recommendations. The first one focuses on securing adequate funding exclusively for urban greening, i.e. the creation, development and maintenance of GI. Therefore, we will prepare the recommendation to the COM to ensure the design of a formal provision in the future regulation on the ERDF and the CF (or equivalent future funds) on national level by earmarking resources for investment in and maintenance of green infrastructures. The

recommendation will be focused on the ERDF and the CF of the next financial period of the EU (2028-2034). It will be recommended that, at national level, **25% of the funds allocated to SUD** under article 11 of the Regulation 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the ERDF and the CF, should be specifically earmarked for the creation, development and maintenance of GI.

The second recommendation, also to the COM, will focus on facilitating the access to information on EU funding opportunities for GI. Given the complexity of the EU financial support system, the number of programmes and instruments, it should be made easier for cities, especially small and medium-sized ones, to access knowledge about funding opportunities for both investment in GI and its maintenance. The barriers that cities experience when searching for funding to develop and maintain GI will be derived out of the previous survey and by testing Portico by use of project proposals. The formal recommendation will include improvements for Portico.

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

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

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

2.4.5 How will the action be implemented?

The implementation of the Action consists of two phases:

Phase 1: Drafting the Position Paper (October 2024-February 2025)

- Developing the position paper in order to underline the need for funding of local level for green infrastructure | October – December 2024;
- Collecting barriers and suggestions using previous surveys and testing the use of Portico with GI projects, and formulate recommendations | October – December 2024;
- Final version of the position paper | February 2025.

Phase 2: Coalition Building and Dissemination (January-June 2025)

- Building the coalition, disseminating information on recommendations during Polish Presidency in the EU Council, gaining stakeholder support | January - June 2025.

For successful implementation, the Action would need the support of the COM and the Research Service of the European Parliament. The WG would have to organise a participation and engagement process with DG Regio (1 meeting per governance level) in order to draft a position paper with a clear recommendation to the COM to design a formal

provision in the future regulation on ERDF and CF for the next financial period of the EU (2028-2034) in relation to SUD.

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

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

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

2.4.6 What resources are needed?

The success of the Action will rely on the active engagement and contributions of Partnership partners and stakeholders involved in Action 4. Phase 2, which focuses on building a coalition, will also require collaborators who are committed to engaging in the coalition's efforts. For the Position Paper (Phase 1), external experts will be essential: one with experience in drafting and promoting position papers, and another with specialist knowledge of strategic documents emphasizing the importance of green infrastructure, with a particular focus on operationalizing the principles and indicators identified for greening cities.

2.4.7 Are there any risks foreseen?

1. Any earmarking in EU structural funding is a limitation to other policy areas and other policy objectives and priorities. To achieve the earmarking desired, it is necessary to have a broad base of political support to interact and implement it in a very complex and diverse policy and political environment. The risk is to enlist the broad support of significant partners (for example – no uptake in informal cooperation formats).
2. The recommendation must also take into account the current discussion on the future of cohesion policy, its priorities and possible changes to the earmarking mechanism.
3. Long term maintenance of green urban areas is mostly financed by municipalities itself (survey on funding). EU funding tends to focus on green infrastructure projects rather than maintenance. As a result, obtaining ERDF funding for maintenance of green urban areas will be more difficult. The risk will be that investments especially in the quality of green infrastructure in cities will slowly be undone again after several years.

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

Action Leaders

1. City of Utrecht, NL;
2. Lisbon Metropolitan Area, PT.

Task: Drafting the position paper with the two recommendations. Collaborating with contributors, particularly Eurocities and EUKN, to build a coalition for green infrastructure funding and generate political momentum leading up to the Ministerial meeting on 20-21 May 2025.

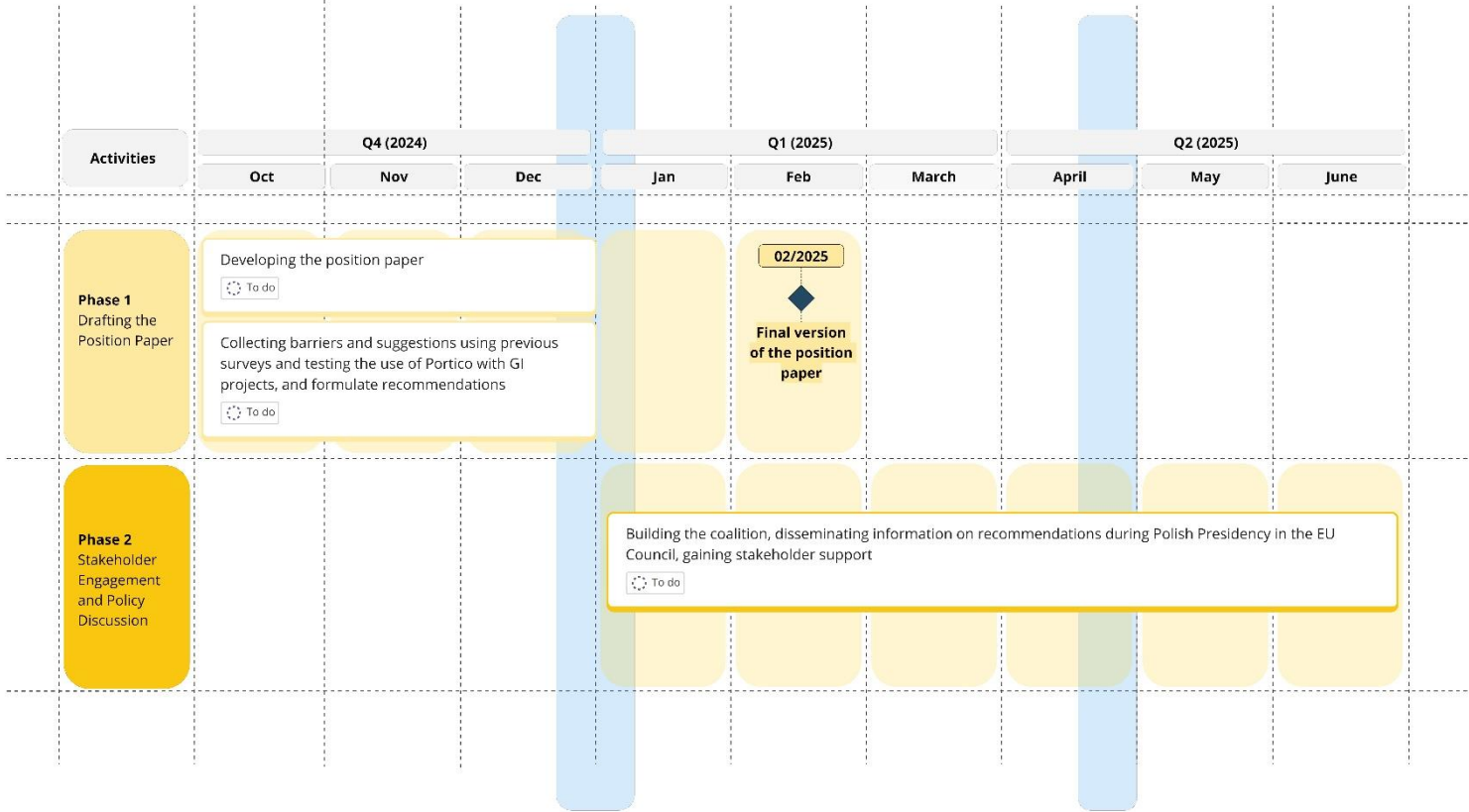
Contributors

1. Eurocities, BE;
2. European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN EGTC), NL;
3. City of Ostrava, CZ;
4. Brussels Environment, BE;
5. Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia, SI;
6. Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy of the Republic of Poland, PL;
7. Roma Capitale, IT;
8. European Investment Bank (EIB), LV.

Advisors

1. Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO);
2. Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC).

2.4.9 What is the timeline of the implementation?



2.4.10 Which outputs will be produced?

Position paper with two recommendations to the COM:

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

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

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

2.4.11 Territorial Impact Assessment

In the context of the first recommendation to the COM for future earmarking of at least 25% of the article 11 ERDF resources at national level to be allocated to GI the impacts should undergo Territorial Impact Assessment. If this Action is successful and contributes to future regulation on the ERDF and the CEF for the next financial period of the EU (2028-2034) impact on territories will be recognisable.

As for the second recommendation, improvements of Portico to facilitate the search of cities for possible funding opportunities for GI, such assessment is not required.

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

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

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



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

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

Targeted stakeholders/governance level: European Commission; European Investment Bank (EIB); European Institutions; Local, Regional and National level of governments; UAEU Partnership Greening Cities (Action 4); private investors.

Deadline: 31/12/2025.

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

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

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



Better funding



Better knowledge

2.5.2 What is the specific problem?

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

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

From a private perspective, entering a PPP for a green infrastructure project can be challenging due to the undefined value of the assets and the difficulty in calculating expected profits. More generally, there is an inherent challenge in translating the environmental and social value generated by GI into monetary terms. Moreover, quantifying the impact of GI compared to grey infrastructure is more complex, as GI tends to produce positive effects across various levels (a phenomenon known as “information failure” in market terms) and identifying reliable performance data for GI can be difficult.

Another point to consider, particularly with debt-based financing, is the extended timeframe required to achieve returns on investment. Investors in green infrastructure (GI) often need to wait five to ten years, or even longer, before realizing any benefits. For forestry investments, the timeline can stretch to 30 years before returns are generated, making these types of investments less appealing to the private sector, which typically seeks a shorter exit horizon. Also, the private sector is often hesitant to investing in GI due to an uncertain regulatory environment or change in political direction of the city, which could hamper the business plan previously made.

In addition, investments in green infrastructure are generally riskier and more unpredictable due to their reliance on natural cycles, especially when compared to grey infrastructure. This makes it easier to understand why GI projects may be less attractive to private investors.

From a public perspective, allowing the private sector to enter in the urban development poses a series of considerations as well. The process through which a greening project is typically designed and implemented is often through a public tender. This method poses challenges for establishing long-term financial partnerships, as it primarily focuses on

economic efficiency rather than the environmental and social benefits, which are crucial for nature-based solutions (NBS).

Issues common to both sectors

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

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

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

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

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

Focusing on the contribution of EU policy framework it is necessary to identify and draft a twofold answer, namely, how the European Union copes with private finance for green infrastructure and how it deals with it⁷. Synergies could be explored with the New European Bauhaus (NEB) Facility, which dedicates one of its Research and Innovation destinations to investigating new business models and innovative funding for the transformation of neighbourhoods.

The Orientation Paper stated that in terms of Better Funding, the Partnership could develop new knowledge and strategies for increasing absorption of funding for GI in an integrated

⁷ As to the latter, even though the EU policy frameworks covers sufficiently well NBS, it must be noted that their implementation greatly depends on Member States as there is a lack of mandatory measures as well as of quantitative and measurable standards. And although in both the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) for the 2014-2020 period and the CEF (Connecting Europe Facility) regulation, PPPs are viewed as a potentially effective means of delivering infrastructure projects it is also highlighted how it is necessary to foresee that the public tender procedure is linked to value-for-money considerations rather than budgetary constraints. Any guidance should provide tools designed specifically for the formation of an institutionalized PPP for the creation of NBS projects with its own characteristics that it must have in light of the peculiarities highlighted above.

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

2.5.4 Which action is needed?

Good and bad practices in alternative funding methods for green infrastructure can guide urban authorities towards more effective use of innovative financing for GI projects and maintenance. Showcasing examples and initiating discussions on common challenges faced by multiple cities will help in developing these alternative financial instruments and lowering barriers for other cities to explore their potential. While there is already some knowledge on this topic, it is crucial to broaden the experiences with these instruments and actively share them with other cities. Smaller cities, in particular, tend to look up to bigger cities and often follow their lead. There is a need to deepen cities' understanding in three key areas: public-private partnerships, alternative financial instruments such as debt-based options from the banking sector, and financial solutions for long-term projects and maintenance. It is essential to review the experiences cities have had with public-private partnerships in green infrastructure projects.

A key recommendation before addressing the three topics mentioned above is to establish an interdepartmental group within your municipality dedicated to all projects related to green infrastructure. This will enhance urban financial management and effectively address the multi-sectoral approach required for GI, helping to avoid the fragmentation that often hampers implementation. Such an initiative would also streamline and simplify coordination, not only within the municipality but especially in relation to private sector partners. The advantage of this solution is that it would essentially come at no direct cost.

Public-Private Partnership: From a private perspective (and to a lesser extent for the public sector), it is essential to start generating more data and indicators on the positive economic effects of implementing NBS projects. Some progress has already been made, for example, by using value transfer functions that apply willingness-to-pay measurements from original valuation studies. However, it is crucial to further disseminate this information. A guide that outlines best and worst practices, along with common lessons learned and clear output indicators, will make PPPs more appealing and encourage broader use of this instrument.

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

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

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

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

2.5.5 How will the action be implemented?

Based on the state of the art of existing initiatives including ongoing EU project and taking account of the result from the consultation process, the Action will be implemented based on the following plan of activities:

Phase 1: Data Collection and Case Study Identification

- **Task 1:** Develop a **template** to collect best practices from cities on three thematic topics: (1) Public-Private Partnerships, (2) Financial instruments, and (3) Long-term investment and maintenance. Identify a **first set of cities** for online interviews, coordinated by Roma Capitale for PPPs, EIB for financial instruments, and Brussels Environment (with support from EUROCITIES, ICLEI, and IUCN) for long-term investments. Cities with relevant experience will be contacted, and an Excel file with organizations (public and private) will be created. Cities will be contacted, and templates will be sent out, with online meetings preferred where possible.
- **Task 2:** Once the template is ready, at least three best practices for each thematic topic (a total of nine case studies) will be identified and collected through interviews. An external consultant will conduct the interviews and collect case studies. At the end of this activity, a compilation of different private finance mechanisms and city experiences with GI projects and maintenance will be created.

Phase 2: Workshops and Roundtable Discussions

- **Task 3:** Prepare a workshop based on the interviews to summarize the gaps, bottlenecks, and barriers encountered by cities in using private financing tools. Identified barriers include risk assessment, lack of human resources, language barriers, small project sizes, lack of maintenance funding, and absence of long-term guarantees.
- **Task 4:** Organize a roundtable discussion between selected cities and financial institutions, moderated by an external consultant, to address these barriers and discuss potential solutions.

Phase 3: Final Recommendations and Inspirational Booklet Development

- **Task 5:** Summarize the drivers and practical recommendations from the roundtable discussion. Recommendations may include reframing legislative frameworks, unifying EU-wide legislative actions, and suggesting simplified financial tools for municipalities.
- **Task 6:** Develop an inspirational booklet on innovative funding solutions and new mechanisms for GI financing, including simplified legal and practical requirements.

Finally, support from the European Commission, the EIB/JASPERS, and external consultancy will be required for innovative funding frameworks for urban authorities and long-term financial sustainability, including maintenance.

2.5.6 What resources are needed?

Each Working Group (WG) member will contribute to scouting potential cities, contacting them, and completing the survey template. External experts will be required from January to December 2025, with tasks divided among all WG members.

External expertise will be required for the following tasks:

- **Task 2:** An external consultant will conduct interviews and collect at least nine case studies (three best practices for each of the three thematic topics). This task is estimated to require 10 days of work.
- **Task 3:** An external consultant will be needed to summarize the gaps, bottlenecks, and barriers identified in the survey and interviews. This task is estimated to require 3 days of work.
- **Task 4:** The same or another external consultant will moderate the roundtable discussion between selected cities and financial institutions. This will require an estimated 5 days of work, including preparation and follow-up.
- **Task 5:** An external consultant will be engaged to summarize the drivers identified during the roundtable and to produce practical recommendations. This will require an estimated 5 days of work.
- **Task 6:** An external consultant will develop an inspirational booklet on innovative funding solutions and rethink simplified mechanisms for GI financing. This task will require 7 days of work.

Assistance from the European Investment Bank (EIB) will be required to analyze private funding instruments, and support from a university or institution experienced in alternative financing for urban greening projects will be needed to help identify bottlenecks and recommend solutions. Additionally, ICLEI, EUKN, and UAI will be necessary for disseminating the outcomes of this Action.

2.5.7 Are there any risks foreseen?

Three main risks are recognized in this Action:

1. The success of this work relies on the **willingness of external parties** (both private and public) to collaborate with our Working Group. Since their cooperation is voluntary, we have no formal means to compel their participation. Their involvement and willingness to share experiences are therefore uncertain. This risk can be mitigated by establishing personal contact with city representatives and private sector stakeholders, explaining the importance of their input and encouraging their participation.
2. The **quality of information** gathered from cities and the private sector may be insufficient. Their involvement alone does not guarantee a positive outcome. It is crucial to obtain the most accurate and relevant insights, including lessons learned from any partial failures. Careful selection of cities for engagement and direct interviews with well-prepared, specific questions will help ensure higher-quality information and avoid poor responses.

3. **Limited cooperation from the private sector, particularly from the EIB.** The EIB is a key stakeholder and partner in this Action, given its expertise, contacts, and resources. Without active involvement from the EIB, the Action could face challenges. It is essential to establish direct contact and foster a collaborative approach to ensure their participation and cooperation.

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

Action Leaders

1. City of Utrecht, NL;
2. Lisbon Metropolitan Area, PT;
3. Brussels Environment, BE.

Contributors

1. Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia, SI;
2. City of Ostrava, CZ;
3. Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy of the Republic of Poland, PL;
4. Roma Capitale, IT;
5. European Investment Bank (EIB), LV;
6. JPI Urban Europe/DUT Partnership, EU.

Advisors

1. Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO);
2. Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC).

2.5.9 What is the timeline of the implementation?

Phase 1: Data Collection and Case Study Identification

- **Task 1:** Develop the template for collecting best practices and identify the first set of cities for online meetings (Roma Capitale for PPPs, EIB for financial instruments, Brussels Environment for long-term investment and maintenance) – **Deadline: 20 December 2024**
- **Task 2:** Online interviews and collection of at least three best practices for each thematic topic (nine case studies in total) – **Deadline: 28 February 2025**

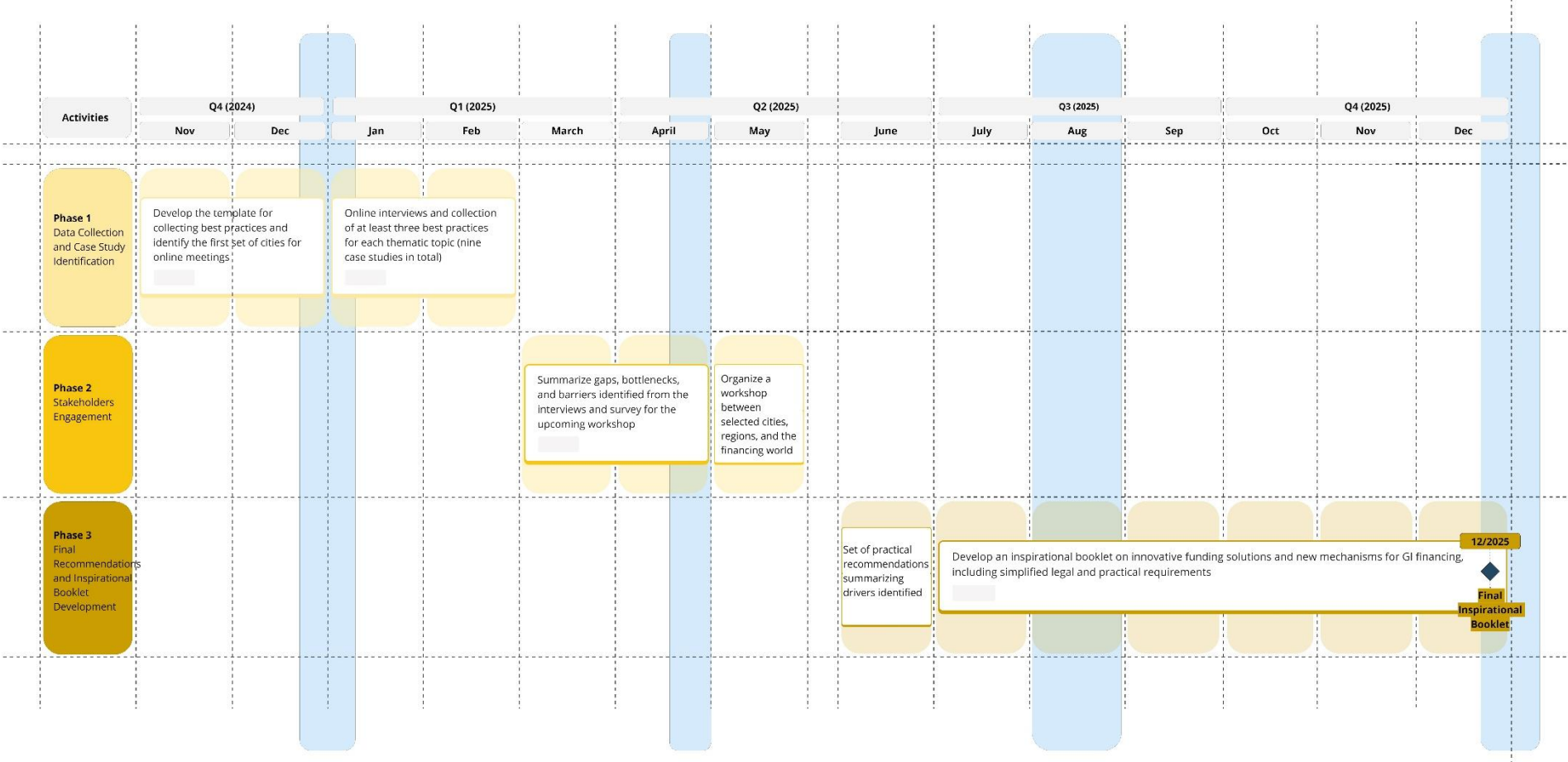
Phase 2: Stakeholders Engagement

- **Task 3:** Summarize gaps, bottlenecks, and barriers identified from the interviews and survey for the upcoming workshop – **Deadline: 30 April 2025**
- **Task 4:** Organize a workshop (roundtable discussion) between selected cities, regions, and the financing world – **Deadline: 30 May 2025**

Phase 3: Final Recommendations and Inspirational Booklet Development

- **Task 5:** Resume all drivers identified to remove barriers and summarize them through a set of practical recommendations – **Deadline: 15 June 2025**
- **Task 6:** Develop an inspirational booklet on innovative funding solutions and new mechanisms for GI financing, including simplified legal and practical requirements – **Deadline: September–December 2025**

What is the timeline of the implementation?



2.5.10 Which outputs will be produced?

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

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

The inspiration booklet will deal with three topics:

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

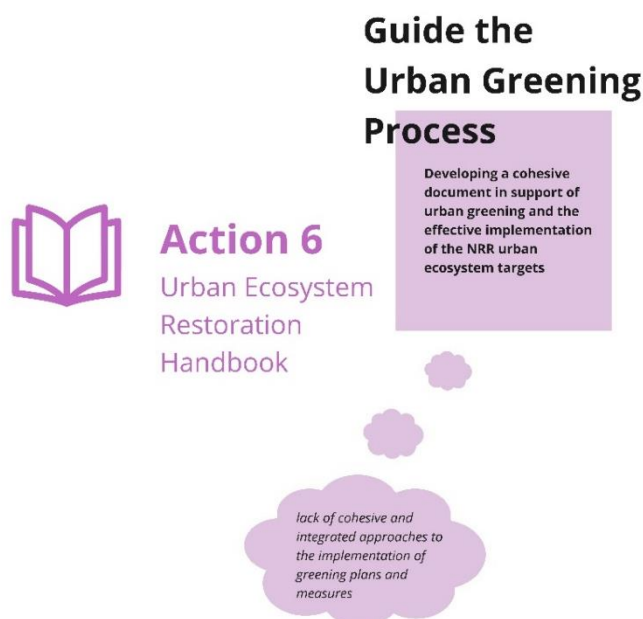
The exact output can be either a PDF file which will be published on Portico, for example, or a web page, which is more demanding in terms of financial and human resources. We will then hold an online conference to promote the result of the survey. The first one will be with the subjects we had contact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

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

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

We should avoid duplicate funding instrument that are intrinsically linked (new climate funding initiative, new resilience funding instrument for cities) for not confusing cities. New legislative proposals for funding should also be opened to all cities independently from their size (small, medium, and big city).

2.6 Action N° 06: Urban Ecosystem Restoration Handbook



This Action brings together the findings of the partnership – from Action 1 on the ‘need for green’ to Action 5 on ‘innovative funding for urban greening’ – to provide a cohesive document in support of urban greening and the effective implementation of the NRR urban ecosystem targets. It will include an introduction to the partnership, its work, and the aims of the handbook. Linking the Actions, at least five cities will be selected as case studies to provide examples for each of the Actions; this means that each Action will include five city case study examples, and that each city will provide an example for each Action.

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

Deadline: 31/01/2026.

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

This Action contributes to all three of the Urban Agenda partnerships as it brings the partnership’s work together.

It contributes to:

- **Better Knowledge** – providing a handbook with key information as to how to implement the Nature Restoration Regulation including case study examples and ‘recommendations’
- **Better Regulation** – supporting the implementation of the NRR urban ecosystem targets and providing options for the definition of a satisfactory level of urban green space

- **Better Funding** - including recommendations for financing and funding, including in relation to structural funds



Better regulation



Better knowledge



Better funding

2.6.2 What is the specific problem?

Urban ecosystems are under immense pressure from rapid urbanization, climate change, and biodiversity loss. Despite the growing recognition of the benefits of green infrastructure (GI) and nature-based solutions (NBS) in mitigating these challenges, cities often lack the necessary tools and guidance to implement effective urban ecosystem restoration. While the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) provides binding targets for the restoration of urban ecosystems, there is a clear gap in practical resources and examples of how to achieve these targets at the local level.

Local authorities need clear, actionable guidance on how to integrate NRR targets into urban planning, with best practices from cities that have successfully implemented GI projects. Furthermore, financing and maintenance of such projects remain key barriers, as many municipalities struggle to secure long-term funding or innovative financing solutions. The lack of cohesive documentation and examples means that cities may not have the knowledge to translate policies into tangible results, leading to uneven implementation across the EU. The Urban Ecosystem Restoration Handbook aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive, practical resource that synthesizes findings from the Greening Cities Partnership and offers actionable guidance through case studies and best practices.

2.6.3 How do existing EU policies/legislations/instruments contribute

The Urban Ecosystem Restoration Handbook aligns closely with existing EU frameworks, such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the EU Green Infrastructure Strategy, and the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR), which provide a solid foundation for urban greening and ecosystem restoration. These frameworks emphasize the need for cities to adopt nature-based solutions and meet ambitious urban green space targets. However, while these policies offer strategic direction, gaps remain in their practical application at the municipal level, particularly around the coordination between national and local authorities, long-term funding, and the integration of green spaces in urban planning.

The Handbook addresses these challenges by translating high-level EU policy objectives into actionable guidance for cities, offering tools, case studies, and methodologies that are tailored to urban realities. It will provide cities with clear examples of how to implement the NRR's urban ecosystem targets while highlighting the need for improved funding mechanisms and better access to information. This will help cities overcome barriers such as fragmented governance, insufficient technical capacity, and limited financial resources, making EU policies more effective and aligned with local needs.

Action 6

2.6.4 Which action is needed?

The handbook will provide a coherent overview of the steps cities need to take to successfully implement the urban ecosystem targets as included in the Nature Restoration Regulation. It will outline the key information from each Action and include case study examples.

2.6.5 How will the action be implemented?

Action 6 will build on all other Actions, bringing their key findings together into a clear handbook with a common thread of city case studies to provide good practice examples throughout the Actions. The first step will be to agree on the city case studies, primarily those cities involved in the partnership, and the interview questions to pull out the information required in the case studies.

After information from the other Actions are complete enough, Action leaders will provide input into the first draft of the handbook. The drafted handbook will then be shared with selected experts for evaluation and feedback, after which it would be revised accordingly. Once finalised, the handbook will be disseminated and promoted to relevant stakeholders on different governance levels but with a focus on the local level – via webinars, newsletters, and other communications channels.

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

- European Week of Regions and Cities, Brussels (BE), October 2024;
- Eurocities Environment Forum, Vienna (AT), November 2024;
- Political meeting with EP, COM and MS, beginning of 2025;
- Ministerial meeting under the Polish Presidency, Warsaw (PL), May 2025;
- Cities Forum, Kraków (PL), June 2025;
- Eurocities Environment Forum, Malmö (SE), November 2025.

2.6.6 What resources are needed?

Partners from the partnership will feed into the content of the handbook. An external expert may be required for the design and layout work.

2.6.7 Are there any risks foreseen?

For its successful and well-timed realization, initial drafting and creation of this handbook will require input and collaboration of many involved parties – namely the Action leaders – which is where issues with coordination of a large number of stakeholders may occur. Delays to one Action could result in the delay in drafting chapters for the handbook and thus design and formatting also. In addition, delays could occur in the period of receiving feedback on the first draft.

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

Action Leaders

3. Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets, HR;
4. Eurocities, EU;
5. European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN EGTC), NL.

Contributors

1. INCASÒL – Catalan Land Institute, ES;
2. Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia, SI;
3. Marshal's Office of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship, PL;
4. JPI Urban Europe/DUT Partnership, EU.

Advisors

1. Directorate-General for Environment, DG ENV;
2. Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC).

2.6.9 What is the timeline of the implementation?

The work on this Action will start in the final three months of the partnership as the above-mentioned Actions are completed.

Phase 1: Preparation and Structuring

- Draft chapter outline of handbook – July 2024;
- Agreement of case study cities – October 2024;
- Draft of interview questions for case study city interviews – October 2024;
- Draft of case study template for handbook – December 2024;
- Detailed proposal for handbook chapter length – December 2024;

Phase 2: Design

- Proposal for handbook style / design needs (hardcopy and digital) – December 2024;
- Identification of design and formatting (expert support) – February/March 2025;

Phase 3: Drafting and Review

- Handbook first draft by Action leads | Month 8-11;
- Feedback from experts | Month 12;

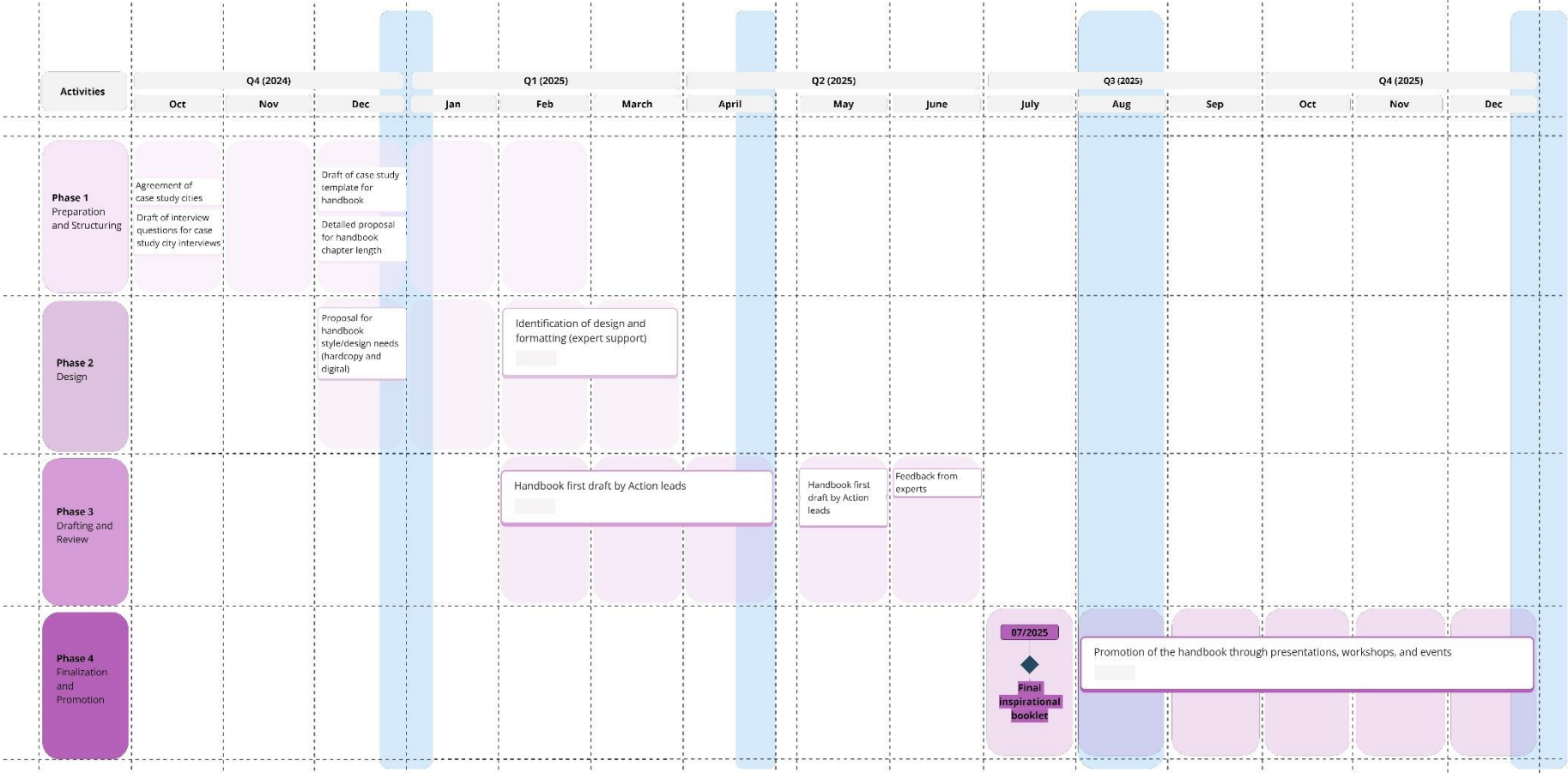
Phase 4: Finalization and Promotion

- Handbook final version | Month 13;
- Promotion of the handbook through presentations, workshops and events | Month 14-18.

2.6.10 Which outputs will be produced?

Action 6 represents the final output of the partnership bringing the results of the various Actions together. The Action will be developed as two key parts; the first, a printable pdf document summarising the key findings, recommendations, and case studies for urban greening; the second, a virtual handbook published on the European Commission's Urban Nature Platform providing links to further information. The Platform will be used as the 'one stop shop' it was designed to be to gather knowledge on urban greening to support the implementation of the NRR. This way it also provides an 'afterlife' to the work of the partnership as new case studies, findings, and guides can be gathered here.

What is the timeline of the implementation?



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

3.1 European dimension

3.1.1 Cross-cutting issues

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

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

The Cross-cutting issues are:

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

The **Greening Cities Action Plan** integrates the cross-cutting issues across all six Actions. It promotes **urban policy for the common good, inclusiveness, and accessibility** by addressing environmental needs and enhancing quality of life for residents through urban greening initiatives. Actions 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 emphasize equitable access to green spaces, environmental justice, and improving the living conditions of all citizens, while Action 6 consolidates these aspects with case studies that show inclusive, nature-based solutions.

In terms of **integrated and innovative approaches**, the Plan advances both financing and technological tools. Actions 4 and 5 specifically focus on improving access to innovative funding methods, including public-private partnerships and long-term

financing mechanisms. Digital solutions like **Portico**⁸ (Action 4) help cities access relevant funding opportunities, while Action 5 explores the potential of business plans as digital tools to evaluate financial sustainability for green infrastructure projects.

The Plan supports **urban governance, participation, and co-creation** by encouraging collaboration between local governments, private entities, and citizens in the development of Urban Nature Plans (Actions 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6). The participatory approach, including city-level consultations and workshops, is embedded in these Actions to ensure broad stakeholder engagement.

By fostering **multi-level governance**, the Plan ensures alignment across local, regional, national, and EU levels. Actions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 involve coordination with EU frameworks like the NRR and collaboration between cities and national authorities, making multi-level cooperation central to successful implementation. The Plan's Actions (1, 2, 3, and 6) also **harmonize measures across spatial levels** by developing adaptable policies and tools to be applied in cities of different sizes and geographic contexts, ensuring balanced territorial development through strategic urban greening.

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

⁸ <https://portico.urban-initiative.eu/what-is-portico>



The Plan contributes to **sound and strategic sustainable urban planning** by delivering practical methodologies (Action 1), indicators (Action 2), and policy recommendations (Action 3) that guide urban greening efforts in a cohesive, evidence-based manner, promoting resilience, and biodiversity.

Finally, the Plan directly supports the **acceleration of the 2030 Agenda SDGs, New Urban Agenda, and Habitat III principles**. Actions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 focus on urban sustainability, nature-based solutions, and green infrastructure, aligning with SDG targets for sustainable cities, climate action, and life on land. The comprehensive Urban Ecosystem Restoration Handbook (Action 6) serves as a key output, consolidating these elements to support the implementation of the NRR and EU biodiversity targets.

3.1.2 Link to the New Leipzig Charter



The New Leipzig Charter⁹ (adopted on 30 November 2020 under German Presidency of the Council of the European Union) provides a key policy framework document for sustainable urban development in Europe. The Charter highlights that cities need to establish integrated and sustainable urban development strategies and ensure their implementation for the city as a whole, from its functional areas to its neighbourhoods.

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

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

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

In terms of fostering a "productive city," the Action Plan introduces a legislative framework and innovative funding strategies that encourage the integration of nature-based solutions into urban economies. These measures not only enhance the city's aesthetic and

⁹ Source: New Leipzig Charter- The transformative power of cities for the common good (2020). https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/whats-new/newsroom/12-08-2020-new-leipzig-charter-the-transformative-power-of-cities-for-the-common-good_en (Accessed: February 16, 2024).

environmental standards but also stimulate economic growth by creating green jobs and attracting investment in sustainable projects.

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

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

3.2 Global (International) dimension

3.2.1 New Urban Agenda (Habitat III)



The New Urban Agenda was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador, on 20 October 2016. It was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly at its sixty-eighth plenary meeting of the seventy-first session on 23 December 2016¹⁰.

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.

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 contributes¹¹ 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

¹⁰ Source: The New Urban Agenda (2016). <https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/> (Accessed: February 16, 2024).

¹¹ Source: Review of the contributions of the Urban Agenda for the EU to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (2021). <https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/sites/default/files/2022-12/Review%20of%20the%20UAEU%20contributions%20to%20the%20NUA%20-%20Final%20report.pdf> (Accessed: February 16, 2024).

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

A. Transformative Commitments

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

B. Effective Implementation

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

- **National Urban Policies:** By recommending a legislative framework for green infrastructure, the Plan supports the creation of national urban policies that prioritize sustainability.
- **Urban Legislation and Regulations:** The proposed Actions for developing guidelines for green infrastructure policies at all levels of government contribute to strengthening urban legislation and regulations.
- **Urban Planning and Design:** The methodology for quantifying the demand for green infrastructure, central to the Action Plan, facilitates informed and sustainable urban planning and design, ensuring developments are responsive to the needs of urban populations. Furthermore, Action 3's commitment to providing comprehensive guidelines for national, regional, and local authorities on implementing green infrastructure policies underpins the principle of integrated urban planning. These guidelines aim to ensure that green infrastructure is



seamlessly incorporated into urban landscapes, fostering more resilient and sustainable cities in alignment with the NUA's vision.

- **Local Economy and Municipal Finance:** Through advocating for enhanced structural funding and innovative financing models, the Action Plan addresses the pillar of local economy and municipal finance, underlining the importance of financial sustainability in urban greening efforts.
- **Local Implementation:** Enhancing local implementation capacities is crucial for the realization of the NUA's objectives. The Action Plan, through its focus on identifying best practices and promoting innovative funding models, directly supports this goal. Additionally, Action 3 plays a pivotal role by offering clear guidelines for the implementation of green infrastructure policies across different government levels. This ensures that urban greening efforts are not just visionary but actionable at the ground level. Moreover, the inclusion of Action 2, which develops a set of indicators for evaluating urban nature plans, is instrumental in this regard. These indicators provide Cities with the tools to measure and monitor their progress towards urban nature restoration, ensuring that efforts are not only implemented but are also effective and aligned with the NUA's transformative commitments and implementation pillars.

3.2.2 The Sustainable Developments Goals of the UN



The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. Central in the document are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹².

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

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

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

SDG 13: Climate Action

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

SDG 15: Life on Land

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

¹² Source: THE 17 GOALS. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (Accessed: February 16, 2024).

support species, and maintain ecosystem services, contributing to the conservation of terrestrial ecosystems.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

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

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

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

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



3.2.3 The Paris Agreement adopted at COP21



PARIS2015
UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE
COP21·CMP11

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 version¹³.

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

Mitigating Climate Change

The Action Plan's initiatives directly support the mitigation of climate change by promoting urban greening and the development of green infrastructure. Trees and green spaces play a crucial role in absorbing CO₂, thereby reducing the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. This natural form of carbon sequestration is vital for keeping global temperature rise well below 2°C, as targeted by the Paris Agreement.

Adapting to Climate Impacts

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

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

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

Promoting Sustainable Development

While addressing climate change, the Action Plan also promotes sustainable urban development. By integrating economic, social, and environmental considerations, the initiatives within the Plan support the transition to low-carbon, sustainable cities. This

¹³ Source: The Paris Agreement (2015). What is the Paris agreement? <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement> (Accessed: February 16, 2024).

multifaceted approach not only addresses the immediate goals of the Paris Agreement but also ensures long-term sustainability and improved quality of life for urban populations.

Fostering International Collaboration

The Action Plan embodies the Paris Agreement's call for global cooperation in the fight against climate change. By sharing knowledge, best practices, and innovative solutions for urban greening across EU member states and beyond, the Plan facilitates international collaboration and mutual learning. This exchange of expertise is crucial for enhancing global climate action and achieving the ambitious goals set forth in the Paris Agreement. In essence, the Action Plan by the Urban Agenda for the EU, Greening Cities Partnership, serves as a concrete mechanism for Cities and urban areas to contribute to the achievement of the Paris Agreement's objectives. Through its comprehensive approach to urban greening, the Plan not only helps limit global temperature rise but also enhances urban resilience, promotes sustainable development, and fosters international collaboration in climate action.

3.2.4 UN Global Biodiversity Framework



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

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

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

4 MONITORING

Action	Action Leaders	Targeted stakeholder/ governance level	Deadline	State of Play
Action n°1	Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, RO	Local Authorities.	31/12/2025	The ESPON application was successfully accepted. The Action Leader, with the help of the Working Group members, drafted the application, secured cooperation agreements, and completed the Terms of Reference. The implementation will use external expertise, with no day-to-day activities expected. The most immediate task for the Working Group is to evaluate tender offers, with funding secured through ESPON. The first version of the methodology is expected by Q2 2025.

<p>Action n°2</p>	<p>City Council of Pontevedra, ES; European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN EGTC), NL.</p>	<p>Local Authorities and European Level.</p>	<p>31/12/2025</p>	<p>The preliminary public survey analysis has been completed, leading to the first (preliminary) proposal of an indicator system. Workshops with urban stakeholders and experts are scheduled for Q4 2024 and Q1 2025. The first draft of the indicator system is expected by 31/03/2025, with the final version, along with the methodological appendix, ready by 30/09/2025.</p>
<p>Action n°3</p>	<p>Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets, HR; Eurocities, BE; European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN EGTC), NL.</p>	<p>Local Authorities and EU Level (DG ENV).</p>	<p>30/11/2025</p>	<p>Identification of case-studies cities has started. An external expert will be contracted to conduct further research. The Action is preparing for political events, including the Ministerial Meeting in May 2025 and the Cities Forum in June 2025.</p>
<p>Action n°4</p>	<p>City of Utrecht, NL; Lisbon Metropolitan Area, PT.</p>	<p>European Commission; Local, Regional and National Level of Governments; European Parliament Research Service.</p>	<p>30/06/2025</p>	<p>Action 4 is in its preparatory phase. The initial phase of drafting the position paper is about to start, and the Action co-leads and Working Group members are ready to apply for external expert support.</p>

<p>Action n°5</p>	<p>City of Utrecht, NL; Lisbon Metropolitan Area, PT; Brussels Environment, BE.</p>	<p>European Commission; European Investment Bank (EIB); European Institutions; Local, Regional and National Level of Governments; UAEU Partnership Greening Cities (Action 4); private investors.</p>	<p>31/12/2025</p>	<p>Action 5 is in the initial stages of implementation and the team begins collecting best practices for public-private partnerships, financial instruments, long-term investment and maintenance. Preparations for the online interviews are underway, and an external expert application is being formulated to provide necessary support.</p>
<p>Action n°6</p>	<p>Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets, HR; Eurocities, BE; European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN EGTC), NL.</p>	<p>Local, Regional and National Authorities; European Institutions.</p>	<p>31/01/2026</p>	<p>Action 6 is progressing with the chapters of the Urban Ecosystem Restoration Handbook being drafted and the selection of case study cities currently underway. Additionally, the Action co-leads and working group members are actively preparing for their participation in relevant political events and forums.</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 Greening Cities Partnership will be asked to report regularly their progress via a 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 Package¹⁴ 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 an 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 Exchanges¹⁵ 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.

¹⁴ <https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/urban-agenda-eu>

¹⁵ 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 Reviews¹⁶ 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 call¹⁷ had three topics. One of them being “Greening cities”. During several Partnership meetings, EUI had presented the projects funded under this topic and had created linkages between some of them and the Greening Cities Partnerships. 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.

¹⁶ For more and updated information visit the dedicated EUI webpage: <https://www.urban-initiative.eu/capacity-building/pilot-call-c2c-exchanges>

¹⁷ <https://www.urban-initiative.eu/calls-proposals/second-call-proposals-innovative-actions>