

URBAN AGENDA FOR THE EU



Compact Cities – Sustainable Urban Planning and Sprawl Mitigation

Background Document for applicants

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Final Version



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Contact: urbanagenda@urban-initiative.eu

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GLOSSARY

CALM	Coordinators and Action Leaders Members
CEMR	Council of the European Municipalities and Regions
CoR	European Committee of the Regions
DGUM	Directors General for Urban Matters
EAA	Ex-Ante Assessment
EIB	European Investment Bank
EUI	European Urban Initiative
UAEU	Urban Agenda for the EU
UATPG	Urban Agenda Technical Preparatory Group
UDG	Urban Development Group
OFC	Other Forms of Cooperation
TP	Thematic Partnership
TPO	Thematic Partnership Officer

1. CONTEXT OF THE CALL AND SELECTION PROCESS

This Call for expression of interest for Partners aims at establishing the **Thematic Partnership** under the Urban Agenda for the European Union (UAEU) on **Compact Cities – Sustainable Urban Planning and Sprawl Mitigation**.

The topic was proposed within the Gijon Agreements at the Informal Ministerial Meeting on 14 November 2023. This call follows the Ex-Ante Assessments (EAA) on “**Compact Cities – Sustainable Urban Planning and Sprawl Mitigation**”.

The EAA was proposed as a new step towards the creation of Partnerships and Other Forms of Cooperation (OFC) in the scope of the new phase of the UAEU established by the Ljubljana Agreement. The EAA was developed between 12 November and 16 May 2025, to deploy a pragmatic, effective and result-oriented approach aiming at increasing the impact of future UAEU deliverables. The EAA has the purpose to optimise focus, timing and activities of the multi-level cooperation, as well as safeguard suitable level of partners’ thematic and procedural expertise, in view of proposing an analysis and recommendations as to the conditions to launch a Call to create a new Partnership of the UAEU.

The EAA report highlights the importance of the launch of the Thematic Partnership and propose recommendations for a possible thematic focus of this Partnership in relation to Better Knowledge, Better Funding and Better Regulation pillars. The final EAA report was adopted by the **Directors General on Urban Matters (DGUM) on 16 May 2025** and the decision was taken to launch the Call for the selection of Partners of the new Thematic Partnership. The eligible categories of Partners are specified under each priority theme, in section 4 below.

The Call will remain open - until 1st of October 2025.

The Call will remain open from **27th of August until 1st of October 2025**. The assessment of applications will be conducted by the expert responsible for the EAA and the selection criteria used to assess the applications were discussed and agreed in the UDG meeting on 26 June 2025. These are presented in section 5 of this document.

The Call materialises **into an online webform** to be filled in by applicants, one for each theme. The online form are accessible on the UAEU website: <https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/>

The survey questions are based on the selection criteria. Once the Call is closed, a proposed list of selected partners will be presented to the Directors General on Urban Matters in November 2025, seeking for their decision. If the DGUM’s decision is positive, the Partnerships on Compact Cities – Sustainable Urban Planning and Sprawl Mitigation will be officially established.



2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON UAEU AND PARTNER RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 What is the Urban Agenda for the EU?

The following sections aim to identify the **key objectives and features of the Urban Agenda for the European Union (UAEU)**. Applicants who wish to have more in-depth knowledge can visit the [UAEU website](#) read the following relevant material which contains more comprehensive information and details.

- [Pact of Amsterdam \(2016\)](#)
- [Assessment Study of the Urban Agenda for the European Union \(2019\)](#)
- [New Leipzig Charter \(2020\)](#)
- [and its Implementation Document \(2020\)](#)
- [Ljubljana Agreement \(2021\) and Multiannual Working Programme for the Urban Agenda for the EU - the Next Generation \(2021\)](#)
- [Urban Agenda for the EU: Multi-level governance in action \(2021\)](#)
- [Gijon Agreements \(2023\)](#)

The Urban Agenda for the EU is an **innovative multi-level governance initiative on urban policy**, developed in the scope of intergovernmental cooperation on urban matters, and officially established by the [Pact of Amsterdam](#) in 2016. It enables cities, Member States, city networks, the European Commission, other EU institutions, the Union's advisory bodies, and other stakeholders to come together to **jointly tackle pressing urban matters** and deliver concrete outputs for the benefit of EU citizens. The Urban Agenda for the EU is **boosting the role of cities** in national and EU policymaking to better connect the EU with citizens' needs. It is a key delivery mechanism at EU level for the [New Urban Agenda \(Habitat III\)](#).

Making **multi-level governance** tangible has been recognised as one of the most important successes of the Urban Agenda for the EU. Multi-level governance is crucial beyond this initiative and at the EU level, it is widely promoted through **Cohesion policy** in order to target the investments in the most efficient and balanced way.

The Urban Agenda seeks to stimulate action along three key objectives (or "pillars"): **Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge**.



Figure 1 - Source: EUI

In addition, the UAEU aims to address several cross-cutting issues¹ and thematic priorities. The Pact of Amsterdam led to the selection of an initial list of 12 priority themes for challenges to be addressed in Thematic Partnerships. In 2018, two more themes were added, and two Thematic Partnerships launched accordingly² (Assessment study, 2019). Lastly, in 2021 the Ljubljana Agreement defined another four thematic focuses: Greening Cities, Sustainable Tourism (both launched in winter 2022) and Food and Cities of Equality (both launched in winter 2023). The Gijon Agreements (2023) proposed a selection of priority themes for future partnerships and agreed on seven new cross-cutting issues.

The complete list of themes tackled through Partnerships so far is the following:

1. Urban Poverty
2. Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees
3. Housing
4. Air Quality
5. Urban Mobility
6. Digital Transition
7. Circular Economy
8. Jobs and Skills in the Local Economy
9. Sustainable Land Use
10. Public Procurement
11. Energy Transition
12. Climate Adaptation

-
13. Culture/Cultural Heritage
 14. Security in Public Spaces

-
15. Greening Cities
 16. Sustainable Tourism

-
17. Food
 18. Cities of Equality

¹ The seven cross-cutting issues are: Urban policy for the common good; Integrated and innovative approaches; Effective urban governance, participation and co-creation; multilevel governance; place-based approach and 3 spatial levels of the new Leipzig Charter; Planning and balanced territorial development; International dimension.

-
19. Water Sensitive Cities
 20. Building Decarbonisation: Integrated Renovation Programmes and Local Heating and Cooling Plans

The 20 Thematic Partnerships have brought together more than 370 partners/members ranging between local, regional and national authorities, European Institutions, NGOs and Umbrella Organisations, research institutions, programmes and networks as well as private companies.

2.2 The process of the UAEU

As per the Pact of Amsterdam, a Partnership achieves results in about three years, but the partners may agree to prolong their activities. Each Partnership is tasked to prepare an **action plan which contains actions** (and possibly recommendations) that aim at addressing issues that hamper urban development in the specific thematic area and that are meant to be implemented after. The actions target one (or more) specific pillar(s) of the UAEU on Better Regulation, Better Knowledge and/or Better Funding and are addressed at the local level, national level and/or EU level. As for the type of actions, these may include the development of (new) data and indicators, guidance documents and handbooks, roadmaps/strategies, the design of a new governance structure, impact assessments, policy recommendations, toolkits etc. Each action has an action leader and contributors. Each action describes the issue at stake and explains what action is needed to solve this issue, including how it will be concretely implemented, by when and by whom. For more inspiration on how previous actions have been defined and implemented, you can consult the [Urban Agenda for the EU Brochure](#) as well as the [Monitoring Table of Actions \(version 2021\)](#), the [UAEU website](#) and [Portico](#).

The Partnership follows a structured process to develop its action plan, beginning with a scoping phase that involves brainstorming and creating an orientation paper, focused on potential subthemes of Compact Cities. This phase is shortened due to prior EAA contributions, which serve as a baseline. Next, the stocktaking phase involves analysing challenges, identifying solutions, and selecting actions. The draft action plan is then publicly reviewed and refined based on feedback from the European Commission, Members of the Urban Development Group and other interested stakeholders. Final approval occurs at the Directors General meeting on Urban Matters, after which implementation begins. The process includes multiple meetings and collaboration among Member States, the European Commission, and other stakeholders, as outlined in the Pact of Amsterdam.

2.3 The governance bodies of the UAEU

'The strategic steering of the UAEU is provided by the **Directors-General on Urban Matters (DGUM)**, which is the high-level decision-making body initiated prior to the

Urban Agenda for the EU. The DGUM is composed of all Member States, the Commission and city representatives and associations (European Committee of the Regions (CoR), Eurocities, Council of the European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), and is co-chaired by the country holding the EU Presidency and the Commission (European Commission, 2017).

‘The **Urban Development Group (UDG)** (expert working level) is made up of representatives of the Member State ministries responsible for urban issues, as well as other representatives of the multiple levels of governance (EC, EP, EIB, CoR, EESC, city representatives Eurocities and CEMR). The UDG is an informal advisory body to the Directors-General’s on Urban Matters (DGUM). Its role is to both review the progress of the Partnerships and discuss issues pertaining to the UAEU at the intergovernmental level (European Commission, 2016). In principle, DGUM makes decisions based on the opinion forming process at the level of the UDG’ (Assessment study, 2019).

‘It was considered that the work of the Partnerships requires “operational guidance and interpretation of aspects of the Pact of Amsterdam and its Working Programme in between UDG meetings.” (Bulgarian Presidency of the EU Council, 2018) [...] The mandate, scope, responsibilities and tasks of an **Urban Agenda Technical Preparatory Group (UATPG)** was thus created as a non-decision-making body, to act “as a technical executive group, supporting the actual Presidency of the Council in preparing UDG and DGUM meetings only with respect to the items related to UAEU”, and coordinate the technical issues related to the preparation of UAEU Partnerships (ibid). The UATPG is composed of 10 members, including: six Member States at a time – representing the rolling Presidencies (the two past Presidencies, the current one and the three succeeding ones); Commission (with the UAEU Technical Secretariat); three members in total from the European Committee of the Regions, Eurocities and CEMR’ (Assessment study, 2019).

2.4 Role of Partners within the Partnership

The following sections aim at capturing some of the expected roles of the partners in the scope of the Partnership in a succinct and non-exhaustive manner. The Pact of Amsterdam and the Multiannual Working Programme contain more comprehensive information and details on these roles.

Cities

Urban authority representatives are at the heart of the UAEU. They identify the challenges they face at the local level and act as partners by contributing to the work on the actions and to their implementation (also as action leaders), by bringing inputs, by making the link to relevant activities or resources and by taking part in meetings. They also liaise with other cities to create bigger impact on the implementation of actions.

City organisations (European and national) and URBACT

City organisations such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), EUROCITIES, other bodies representing Urban Authorities at European and national levels, as well as EU programmes dedicated to sustainable urban development such as URBACT and the European Urban Initiative (EUI) bring their expertise and experience on the exchange of good practices and knowledge. They act as a partner, by contributing to the work on the actions and to their implementation (also as action leader), by bringing inputs, by making the link to relevant activities or resources and by taking part in meetings. They disseminate the outcomes of the UAEU to the cities which are part of their networks and promote synergies with a second circle of cities, who may in turn, contribute to the Partnership.

Member States

They act as a partner, by contributing to the work on the actions and to their implementation (also as action leader), by bringing inputs, by making the link to relevant activities or resources and by taking part in meetings.

Member States ensure that the UAEU outcomes reach the local authorities in their Member State, e.g. by sharing the outcomes with cities that are not directly participating in the UAEU. Member States may provide financial resources to the implementation of the UAEU, e.g. through the organisation of meetings/events, the translation of documents in their national language, the support for the participation of cities etc.

EU Institutions

The **European Commission** acts as a facilitator of the UAEU by providing EU funds to support the Partnerships' activities and by making the link with the EUI Permanent Secretariat. The Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy coordinates the EU support and helps to connect to relevant services within the European Commission to support the design and implementation of actions. The European Commission services act as partners of the Partnership, by contributing to the work on the actions and to their implementation (also as action leader), by bringing inputs, by making the link to relevant activities or resources and by taking part in meetings.

The **European Parliament** may consider the results and recommendations of the Partnerships for the agenda of relevant Committees when discussing relevant new and existing EU legislation and the [European Urban Forum](#) may play an advisory role in the UAEU process.

The **European Committee of the Regions** and **European and Economic and Social Committee** may act as partners by contributing to the work on the actions and to their implementation (also as action leader), by bringing inputs, by making the link to relevant

activities or resources and by taking part in meetings. They may contribute to the outreach of the UAEU, with dedicated activities aiming to involve a broader range of local authorities and civil society organisations.

The **European Investment Bank** (EIB) acts as a partner by contributing to the work on the actions and to their implementation (also as action leader), by bringing inputs, by making the link to relevant activities or resources and by taking part in meetings.

Other stakeholders

Other stakeholders act as partners, by contributing to the work on the actions and to their implementation (also as action leaders), by bringing inputs, by making the link to relevant activities or resources and by taking part in meetings.

Coordinators

Coordinators act as the main representative of the Partnership (towards the governance process and the general public), drive the overall work of the Partnership and facilitate positive relationships between members. This leadership role offers high visibility across official meetings including the Directors-General for Urban Matters (DGUM) and synergy Meetings with other UAEU Partnerships. Coordinators are overseeing Partnership activities, acting as the main point of contact especially for external communication. They chair meetings, drive the work between sessions, liaise with other Coordinators, and monitor progress. Additionally, they contribute to the implementation of actions, often serving as action leaders, providing input, and links with relevant initiatives and resources.

Coordinators are strongly assisted for the administrative and operational aspects by the EUI Thematic Partnership Officers secured by EUI as part of the Support Service Package. See section 2.5.

2.5 The European Urban Initiative

As stipulated in the Cohesion policy regulatory framework for 2021-2027, the [European Urban Initiative \(EUI\)](#) shall support the UAEU, and upon request from one or more Member States, it may also support intergovernmental cooperation on urban matters. The support will be delivered by the EUI Secretariat, hosted by the Region Hauts de France. It will build on the outputs from the previous years of work and implementation and will seek to integrate as much as possible elements of the relevant urban-related initiatives and programmes as well as the work streams of the EUI. The UAEU will benefit from wider support in the context of the EUI, notably National Urban Contact Points that will assist in the communication, dissemination and capitalisation activities of the UAEU and support relevant outreach.

The support provided by the EUI includes all phases of the implementation of a Thematic Partnership / OFC, starting from the setting up of a new Partnership (including the Ex-Ante Assessments of Partnership proposals), and possibly Other Forms of Cooperation

on an ad-hoc basis up to the implementation of the Action Plan. Since 2023 the EUI provides a comprehensive support package for all new Thematic Partnerships established after 2021. This support package includes the following services:

- **Administrative Support:** Each UAEU Thematic Partnership will be secured with a Thematic Partnership Officer (TPO) for a duration of up to 3 years. The TPO provide advice and guidance about partnership planning, management, and monitoring.
- **Initiation Phase Service:** During the initiation phase the EUI Secretariat will provide partnerships with initiation meetings and provision of support material relating to the UAEU structure, templates, timelines for key deliverables and principles of managing the UAEU TP.
- **Provision of External Expertise Service:** Each Thematic Partnership will benefit from up to 70 expert days per year. The experts will be contracted when knowledge, know-how and expertise are not already available inside the Thematic Partnership or when there is not sufficient capacity to achieve a certain goal.
- **Reimbursement of Travel and Accommodation:** Financial support is offered to urban authorities and associations or groupings of urban authorities to actively participate in their UAEU Thematic Partnership in-person meetings to compensate for their limited resources and to actively participate in the Coordinators and Action leaders' in-person Meetings (CALM). This service is limited to cities with up to 500.000 inhabitants.
- **Communication and Dissemination Support:** The EUI secretariat offer communication and dissemination support, including information sessions and trainings, linked to the EUI Communication & Dissemination Strategy 2021 – 2027. Thematic Partnerships have the possibility to promote and disseminate content linked to their activities through news articles on the UAEU website, via the [EUI Knowledge and Exchange Sharing Platform Portico](#), EUI newsletter, events and UAEU social media accounts.
- **Creation of Synergies:** Overall, the EUI Secretariat supports synergies between the UAEU Thematic Partnerships and other EUI work streams. Furthermore, it organises Coordinators and Action Leaders' Meetings (CALM) to offer a structured moment where the UAEU Thematic Partnership coordinators and action leaders of all ongoing Thematic Partnerships can exchange directly about the status of implementation of the Thematic Partnership, Action Plan and related events.

The EUI Secretariat will, together with the UAEU Thematic Partnerships, monitor the status of the UAEU development and implementation.

3. THEMATIC FOCUS

3.1 Justification to launch a Thematic Partnership on Compact Cities – Sustainable Urban Planning and Sprawl Mitigation

The present Call for Expressions of Interest aims to identify committed and capable partners for the establishment of the UAEU Thematic Partnership on Compact Cities. The theme aligns closely with key EU strategic priorities, namely the European Green Deal, the New European Bauhaus, and Cohesion Policy, by promoting sustainability, social cohesion, and spatial innovation. The initiative is timely in light of emerging legislative frameworks such as the Directive on Soil Monitoring and Resilience, which are expected to shape land use and spatial governance. Establishing the partnership at this stage would enable more coordinated input into the European Semester, particularly in guiding national urban reforms through country-specific recommendations. Building on the achievements of previous partnerships, this initiative establishes a strategic platform to address persistent urban challenges and drive forward integrated, forward-looking policy solutions.

3.2 Thematic focus

A significant part of the European Union territory is covered by urban land use, making the management of urban areas a key element of sustainable development policy. Urban sprawl, characterised by dispersed, low-density, and car-dependent development, is widespread across European regions and brings substantial environmental, economic, and social costs. These include landscape fragmentation, soil sealing, biodiversity loss, congestion, increased greenhouse gas emissions, and pollution. In response, the Compact cities concept has gained recognition as a guideline for sustainable urban development. Approach encourages environmental and economic objectives through containment of urban sprawl, densification, regeneration and reuse of buildings and land. Benefits include more efficient public transport, cost-effective infrastructure, equitable access to services, and preservation of natural and undeveloped land. Transport-oriented development, focusing on compact urban centres around transport hubs, complements these principles by advancing accessibility and sustainable land use.

At EU level, recent policies and regulations reflect this shift towards compact urban development. The Nature Restoration Law sets targets for urban green spaces, the proposed Soil Monitoring Law emphasise sustainable soil management, and revisions to the TEN-T Regulation encourage development of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP). Other frameworks on state aid and procurement also influence regeneration projects. Nevertheless, compact cities policies present inherent trade-offs across sustainability dimensions. Challenges such as rising housing costs and gentrification require systemic solutions to ensure social sustainability. Without prioritising green infrastructure and nature-based solutions, compact urbanisation may worsen heat islands, pollution, and green space loss. Urban planning must therefore prioritise the common good, consistent with the principles outlined in the New Leipzig Charter.

Spatial governance and planning capacity are of great importance to the compact cities concept. Coordinated planning across administrative boundaries, especially within functional urban areas, supports sustainable development. This includes aligning EU Cohesion Policy with national and regional frameworks, revising land-use regulations, and addressing suburbanisation and sprawl. Integrating sectoral policies such as transport planning, shared mobility, and parking regulations further promote compact and efficient urban forms.

Since the launch of the Urban Agenda for the EU, Thematic Partnerships, including Nature-Based Solutions and Sustainable Land Use, Urban Mobility, Greening Cities, and Housing, have produced valuable guidance, tools, and recommendations advancing compact cities principles. Nonetheless, certain areas warrant further attention, including e.g. the social impacts of urban densification, the financing of compact cities development, the enhancement of peer learning platforms. Looking ahead, opportunities exist to improve coordination of spatial planning with EU objectives within integrated and flexible frameworks. Due to the thematic complexity, from land regulation and affordable housing to infrastructure retrofitting and FUA coordination, the TP should be structured around targeted sub-themes to ensure strategic focus and deliverability. A core perspective should be the role of compact development in supporting regeneration, land efficiency, and socio-environmental balance.

The tables below outline potential sub-themes under the Urban Agenda's pillars of Better Regulation, Better Funding, and Better Knowledge for the future Thematic Partnership on Compact Cities – Sustainable Urban Planning and Sprawl Mitigation.

Table 1: Potential Sub-themes for Better Regulation

Sub-theme	Reasoning / Relevant Regulation
1. Anticipating impacts of the national implementation of Soil Monitoring Law and Nature Restoration Law on land use planning and compact cities policies	Soil health, urban green areas and the reduction of urban sprawl are central to achieving SML and NRL goals. However, monitoring these issues is still not mandatory in all countries and the form which these EU regulations will take when translated into national regulations is not clear in many Member States. Thematic partnership can support the creation of comprehensive monitoring frameworks that track soil degradation, soil sealing, and the encroachment of urban development into previously undeveloped areas, as well as exploring the impacts of these regulations on compact cities objectives and the trade-offs present in compact city policies.
2. Mainstreaming compact cities principles in the New	NEB, with its vision of creating places that are environmentally friendly, socially just and visually inspiring, offers potentially great synergies with the theme of compact cities. Thus, the partnership should explore paths toward further integrating compact cities objectives with NEB. The work of the partnership could benefit from NEB's focus on promoting and providing recommendations on the design of beautiful urban spaces, green solutions, reuse of buildings



Sub-theme	Reasoning / Relevant Regulation
European Bauhaus	and spaces, inclusivity and equal access to urban amenities and opportunities. The partnership, with its focus on regulation, funding and knowledge could assist NEB by providing inputs on policy aspects, drivers of and barriers to urban regeneration, densification and containment, with the aim of furthering the development of beautiful, sustainable and inclusive compact cities. The connection with NEB could be particularly beneficial in guiding liveable densification, ensuring that denser urban planning does not lead to unattractive, monotonous or overbuilt urban areas
3. Mainstreaming urban regeneration and densification concerns in EU regulation on state aid, public procurement and services	State aid rules, which are a part of the EU's competition policy, significantly impact urban regeneration policies and initiatives through regulating subsidies, tax breaks, or selling land below market value to create favourable business cases. Furthermore, EU rules on public procurement can complicate the negotiation process between local authorities and developers, particularly for mixed-use developments. The Services Directive and the principle of "freedom of establishment" also impact the drivers of urban sprawl, for instance by making it more challenging for planners to manage policies that control out-of-town retail developments. The partnership should, therefore, use the theme to mainstream compact city considerations in state aid and procurement regulations
4. Horizontal coordination of sectoral policies impacting land use	Effective work on themes related to compact cities requires a whole-government approach to align policies and actions across sectors, urban, environmental, economic, and social objectives. Without horizontal coordination, conflicting priorities may emerge, especially in complex contexts of compact cities where diverse stakeholders are involved.
5. Improving the enforcement of urban planning regulations	Despite existing regulations, weak enforcement remains a significant barrier to achieving compact cities objectives (e.g. gaps between policy ambition and implementation practice - climate resilience, compact urban form, and circular land as objectives often not reflected in the actual implementation of development projects, there are also deviations from approved planning instruments driven by political or economic pressure in areas of high development interest or environmental sensitivity). Thematic partnerships can play an important role in advocating for stronger enforcement mechanisms at the national and local levels, ensuring that EU urban planning directives are effectively applied.
6. Alignment of land policies, property rights and public value capture instruments	An integrated approach that combines land value capture mechanisms with tools like pre-emption rights enables municipalities to secure land before private developers, ensuring that urban growth aligns with public interests rather than purely economic incentives. These rights empower municipalities to acquire land before private developers do, ensuring that urban development serves the public interest. This proposed system must recognize soil as a shared resource, managing it for sustainable use



Sub-theme	Reasoning / Relevant Regulation
with compact cities principles	and conservation. By doing so, it aims to tackle pressing challenges such as land degradation, urban sprawl, and soil sealing.
7. Fostering social innovation for sustainable urban planning	Social innovation initiatives are often organised through bottom-up or collaborative governance and can be pursued by the non-profit sector, businesses and governments at various levels. Social innovation presents opportunities for finding innovative solutions in the field of compact cities – for instance, by promoting urban regeneration and affordable housing through initiatives such as cohousing and community land trusts. The theme should explore the potential of regulation to stimulate and scale up social innovation relevant to compact city policies.
8. Coordination of transport and land use planning policies	Transport policies at the national and sub-national levels can either promote or mitigate urban sprawl through promoting either car-centric mobility or public transport, especially in peri-urban zones. Transport policies are not always integrated with land use planning and its objectives; therefore, the partnerships should explore the relationships between transport and land use policies in various territories and the ways in which they should be coordinated to mitigate sprawl. Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) represents an interesting strategy to enable connectivity in peri-urban areas without producing sprawl, which is especially important for small and medium-sized cities in FUAS. TOD is only present as a policy in certain territories. Its implementation can face barriers such as policy silos, the lack of land use planning coordination between municipalities, and structural issues such as inter-municipal competition. The partnership should explore the possibilities for the integration of transport policies into broader urban planning and governance frameworks.

Table 2: Potential Sub-themes for Better Funding

Sub-theme	Reasoning / Funding Programme
9. Aligning EU funding mechanisms with compact cities objectives	While EU funding is available for urban development, it is often fragmented and not sufficiently tailored to the unique challenges of compact urbanisation. Current EU funding mechanisms (CP, EIB, CEF, etc.) do not always effectively address the spatial and environmental complexities of compact cities, including land use efficiency, affordable housing, and sustainability. This gap in alignment requires the creation of a more cohesive financial framework that ties compact cities development to broader EU priorities. The upcoming “Policy agenda for cities” to be presented by the end 2025 play a major role and the partnership should seek to coordinate with this policy process. Thematic partnerships can advocate for the alignment with compact cities principles and contribute to ensuring that funding structures are more coherent and accessible across different urban scales, especially taking into account the differences between large, medium-sized and small cities and FUA approaches.



Sub-theme	Reasoning / Funding Programme
10. Exploring innovative instruments for land value capture	Land value capture mechanisms are of great importance for ensuring that urban development generates sufficient funding for public goods such as infrastructure and affordable housing. However, EU mechanisms for land value capture are underdeveloped, and there is a need for more innovative financial instruments to enable municipalities to reinvest the increased land market value into sustainable urban development projects.
11. Aligning future EU-Level funding for affordable housing with compact city principles	As EU funding for affordable housing is expected to be consolidated and increased over the next years with the creation of the European Affordable Housing Plan, which is presently expected to be published in 2026, following an extensive consultation process in 2025. The Partnership should examine the relationship between compact city policies and affordable housing investments, exploring how housing policies could be informed by considerations of spatial development. The urban context of social and affordable housing initiatives is widely recognised as key to their success, with the need to ensure inclusion and accessibility aligning with compact cities objectives. Furthermore, land policy plays a key role in ensuring housing affordability - e.g. through land value capture mechanisms and spatial planning for affordable housing.
12. Financing urban regeneration and retrofitting in compact cities	Urban regeneration and retrofitting are essential for transforming compact cities into sustainable environments. They significantly boost energy efficiency and preserve vital infrastructure. However, the challenge of financing these initiatives cannot be overlooked, especially when it comes to scaling up efforts and securing long-term investments. It is imperative for cities to actively seek out innovative funding mechanisms to support the comprehensive infrastructure upgrades that compact cities demand. Particular attention should be paid to the specific challenges of small and medium-sized cities
13. Gathering best practices on innovative financing for compact cities	Conventional funding sources often struggle to tackle the spatial and environmental challenges of densification which underlines the need for innovative financing solutions. For example, revenue from carbon pricing can be reinvested in sustainable urban projects, while subsidies for densification can incentivize the development of higher density housing while remaining affordable. Density credits for transit-oriented development (TOD) encourage private investment in well-connected, high-density areas. Through collecting and analysing best practices, thematic partnerships can assist cities in developing financial strategies to achieve the goals of sustainable compact urban policies and mobility development.
14. Exploring opportunities for FUA funding	The cooperation between large, medium-sized and small cities within functional urban areas is essential for mitigating urban sprawl, as the lack of coordination and inter-municipal competition are often among the main drivers of diffuse and car-centric urban development in peri-urban areas, producing significant economic, environmental and social costs. In addition to policy coordination, funding at FUA level could contribute to better coordination and cooperation in various policy areas, including the cross-cutting issue of urban sprawl. Certain instruments, such as ITI, have been used in the past to fund programmes at FUA level; the Partnership should



Sub-theme	Reasoning / Funding Programme
	explore these opportunities and provide input for the further development of FUA funding.

Table 3: Potential Sub-themes for Better Knowledge

Sub-theme	Reasoning
15. Mainstreaming transformative urban models	To tackle the challenges of urban sustainability, urban planning should evolve beyond traditional methods and embrace innovative, transformative models that prove systemic change. Frameworks like <i>the Stationary City</i> , <i>Post-Growth City</i> , and <i>Doughnut Economy</i> provide forward-thinking approaches to urban systems, advocating for the optimization of existing resources and promoting sustainable development within current urban infrastructures.
16. Improving data and monitoring tools for urban planning	There is a gap in comprehensive and standardized data necessary for effective land-use planning and tracking changes. Enhanced monitoring of urban growth, land usage, and proximity is needed for implementing compact city models. There is a need to integrate platforms such as the Urban Audit Database, Copernicus Programme, and Urban Atlas for real-time data and decision support in land-use planning and ecological sustainability.
17. Raising awareness on importance of FUA coordination on land-use policies	To manage urban growth effectively, it is of great importance to raise awareness about the necessity of coordinating land-use policies across administrative boundaries in functional urban areas (FUAs). This coordination is important for promoting sustainable development and demands the alignment of objectives at both local and regional levels. Building on the outcomes of the SLU05 action on FUA cooperation, this action seeks to raise awareness of the necessity of cross-boundary coordination in land-use policies. By emphasizing its benefits and fostering knowledge exchange, this initiative supports the sustainable land-use goals identified by previous partnerships.
18. Enhancing the capacities of urban administrations to implement EU sustainable spatial planning policies and guidelines	To effectively implement EU sustainable spatial planning policies, urban planners need to be equipped with the knowledge, tools, and frameworks that align with EU sustainability goals, land-use regulations, and innovative urban models. Strengthening the capacity of urban planners involves providing practical guidance, fostering and offering training to ensure local planning integrates EU guidelines effectively. A comprehensive toolbox could be developed to guide urban planners in implementing EU regulations, to help planners address issues such as land-use optimization, climate adaptation, and nature-based solutions (NBS).
19. Addressing conceptual inconsistencies in spatial planning	In urban planning, key concepts such as land take, and 15-minute cities are often interpreted inconsistently. This lack of uniformity creates challenges in policy alignment and effective implementation of sustainable urban strategies. To create a unified and coordinated approach to urban development, it is important to address these discrepancies and ensure clarity in the terms used.



Sub-theme	Reasoning
20. Increasing awareness of trade-offs in urban containment and densification approaches	There is a need for better understanding of the trade-offs between economic, social, and environmental objectives in compact cities policies among policymakers and other stakeholders. While urban containment policies are designed to protect open land and ecosystems and prevent the negative environmental impacts of urban sprawl, they create trade-offs between competing land-use demands. For instance, limiting greenfield development may make developable land scarcer, leading to higher land prices and increase housing unaffordability. Densification can also lead to the reduction in urban green spaces, exacerbate urban heat islands and reduce the opportunities for the implementation of green infrastructure and nature-based solutions. Mixed-use developments (integrating retail, production, housing, and other functions) can also create conflicts with noise standards and place a strain on existing infrastructure, including transport. Thematic partnerships should explore these trade-offs in-depth, providing a platform for national and local governments to discuss potential conflicts and develop regulatory solutions that balance environmental, social, and economic needs.
21. Mapping and analysing density and sustainable urban growth regulations in cities	Achieving compact and sustainable urban growth requires an understanding of existing regulatory frameworks that impact land use. Thematic partnerships can support the mapping and analysis of key regulations, including e.g. urban growth and containment boundaries, minimum density requirements near transport hubs, density targets, and mixed-use development mandates. By assessing best practices and identifying regulatory gaps, cities can strengthen their planning strategies to efficient land use and ensure that density policies align with sustainable mobility and environmental objectives.
22. Enhancing knowledge on the specific needs of small and medium-sized cities	Small and medium-sized cities differ from large cities in their needs, objectives, capacities and the trade-offs related to compact cities policies. Furthermore, these considerations often differ between small and medium-sized cities which are part of FUAs and those that are not influenced by commuting areas of larger cities. The partnership should explore in greater depth the differences in needs of small and medium-sized cities, in comparison to the better-researched needs of large cities, which also have greater capacities to implement compact cities policies. The variation in these needs across urban scales and across different territories should inform the partnership's recommendations for funding and regulations.
23. Capacity building through European urban cooperation	Due to the importance of municipal authorities in land use planning and other policies significant for compact cities, capacity building and urban cooperation between local authorities could prove valuable. The partnership should scale up, develop and incentivise urban cooperation projects to reach more cities, to achieve better cooperation results and to implement them locally, and to channel-up cooperation outcomes into better policy-making and long-term institutional changes in a bottom-up manner.



4. CATEGORIES OF PARTNERS

Eligible applicants include:

- **Cities of all sizes** (including city regions, Functional Urban Areas and Agglomerations)
 - small (less than 50.000 inhabitants)
 - medium (between 50.000 and 250.000 inhabitants)
 - large (more than 250.000 inhabitants)
- **Regions and Regional Development Agencies**
- **Member States** (through relevant national level ministries and agencies)
- **Partner States** (Norway and Switzerland)
- **European and national city umbrella organizations** (examples include: Eurocities, ICLEI, CEMR, Eurotowns)
- **Other stakeholders** such as:
 - **Universities and Research Institutions**
 - **Sector-specific associations, NGOs as well as local and regional entities** in fields such as urban planning, spatial development, sustainable transport, and land-use management, which contribute to knowledge exchange and capacity building for more compact, resilient cities;
 - **National level associations** representing the interests of small and medium-sized municipalities;
 - **International organisations** active in sustainable urbanisation, such as UN-Habitat, OECD, etc.

5. SELECTION CRITERIA

5.1 Specific selection criteria for applicants as Partners

The specific selection criteria below will be assessed on the basis of a 0 – 5 scale (See *Table 4 below for details*).

- a) **Motivation to become a member**, advance one or more identified policy domains (*Tables 1-3 in Chapter 3*) in a way that contributes to betterment of EU policy by better regulation, funding and knowledge and brings specific contribution at the city level. Provide evidence of the/a relationship between the specific expertise provided by an applicant (*criterion b*) and the specific issue or set of issues that motivate the applicant to be part of this specific partnership. Applicants should show awareness of [previous activities in UAEU Partnerships](#) that may be related to the sub-themes and issues of their concern. Applicants need to demonstrate willingness to participate in meetings, share experience and disseminate knowledge; willingness to participate in EU policy dialogue etc.
- b) **Expertise** and qualifications of the applicant with regard to at least one of the sub-themes and issues included in *Tables 1-3 in Chapter 3*.
In the case of small and medium-sized cities, the expertise may be limited to specific aspects of the issue concerned and may have been developed through cooperation agreements with local, regional or national stakeholders. In case applicants possess knowledge/experience other than the ones mentioned above, they should clearly state it in the expression of interest. Expertise should be clearly demonstrated through description of past projects and initiatives. Knowledge of EU policies related to the Compact Cities theme is an asset.

Key area of expertise

- (1) Expertise should be provided in:

Spatial planning and spatial governance, as well as sector-specific policy areas that significantly influence compact cities development. This includes experience in integrated land-use planning, zoning regulations, strategic urban design, and regulatory frameworks supporting densification, brownfield regeneration, and infill development. Familiarity with metropolitan/FUA cooperation is an asset

Other relevant areas of expertise

- (2) Expertise with relation to spatial planning in the following fields would be an asset:

(2.1.) Sustainable mobility and multimodal transport systems, including knowledge of public transport planning, active mobility (walking, cycling), shared mobility services, and Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) frameworks. Expertise in

transit-oriented development (TOD), last-mile connectivity, and reallocation of public space in favour of sustainable modes is particularly valuable

(2.2.) Digital tools and smart planning, such as the application of digital twins, GIS and geospatial data analysis, and ICT-based solutions to support evidence-based urban planning, infrastructure management, and optimisation of public service delivery. Experience with digital participatory tools or dashboards for urban governance is also relevant

(2.3.) Green urbanism and nature-based solutions, including the design and implementation of green corridors, eco-districts, and climate-resilient public spaces. This also encompasses resource-efficient systems for energy, water, and waste within urban environments, as well as practical application of circular economy principles and ecosystem services in compact urban contexts

(2.4.) Housing policy and inclusive urban regeneration, particularly in addressing affordability challenges, gentrification pressures, and social exclusion. Relevant expertise includes development of integrated housing strategies, support for social, cooperative, or affordable rental housing models, and the integration of housing into wider compact cities planning

(2.5.) Economic instruments and financing mechanisms relevant to compact cities policies, including knowledge of EU, national, or regional funding programmes, innovative financing models (e.g. land value capture), and incentives for brownfield reuse, energy-efficient renovation, or densification projects

- c) **Outreach to relevant stakeholders and participation** in networks and cooperation programmes at local, regional, national and EU level, also based on previous experiences, with reference to Compact Cities and/or urban policy issues, as well as the sub-themes and issues included in Tables 1-3.
- d) **Readiness to participate with own human and financial resources:** availability and commitment of human and financial resources throughout the duration of the Partnership. As per the Multi Annual Working Programme, this will not be the prevailing criterion for small and medium-sized cities.

5.2 Specific selection criteria for applicants as Coordinators

All the above specific selection criteria (a-d) and in addition:

- e) **Project management expertise:** 1. specifically concerning projects and initiatives in multilevel governance and European/international contexts, based on evidence from previous experience 2. including expertise in dissemination and institutional communication at EU and national level

- f) **Commitment** to adequate allocation of human and financial resources throughout the lifecycle of the Partnership
- g) **Proposal of a plan for the kick-start** of the Partnership's work based on the outcomes of the Ex-Ante Assessment and for the management of the new Partnership.



Table 4: Assessment grid for specific criteria for applicants (members and coordinators)

Specific Selection Criteria for Members	Points*
a) Motivation to become a member	0-5
b) Expertise	0-5
c) Outreach	0-5
d) Readiness to participate with own human and financial resources	0-5
Additional Selection Criteria for Coordinators	
e) Project management expertise	0-5
f) Commitment	0-5
g) Proposal of a plan for the kick-start	0-5

*Points:

0	insufficient
1	very poor
2	poor
3	sufficient
4	good
5	excellent

5.3 Horizontal selection criteria applicable to the Partnership

The Partnership will represent a diversity of members at different levels of governance. The horizontal criteria aim at guaranteeing a composition of the Partnership consistent with the objectives of the Urban Agenda for the EU and of the new Partnership on Compact Cities. These will be considered once the specific selection criteria described below are assessed, in order to make a selection amongst the highest scoring participants. In line with objectives of the Urban Agenda for the EU the selection criteria for the potential members of the Compact Cities UAEU Partnership are as follows:

- i. **Multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach:** in line with the Pact of Amsterdam, the Partnership will be composed of **about 15 to 20 partners** from all levels of government and from different types of organisations. In order to ensure the representativeness of the local level, the Partnership will include **at least five cities** (urban authorities), as well as European and national city umbrella organisations and (ideally) a university or research institution.



- ii. **Size of cities:** at least one 'small-sized city' (below 50.000 inhabitants) and one 'medium-sized city' (below 250.000 inhabitants) will be part of the Partnership. In line with the Ljubljana Agreement Multi Annual Working Programme, 'if no small and medium-sized urban authorities are selected in the open call, a nomination of small or medium-sized urban authorities can follow. Nominations can be proposed by Member States, Committee of the Regions and URBACT (upon approval of the Monitoring Committee) to the DGUM.' As the horizontal criteria will not be scored, the small and medium-sized cities with the highest assessment score(s) on the specific selection criteria will be selected.
- iii. **Geographical balance:** During the selection process, one of the aims will be to ensure a relative geographical balance between the members in terms of the EU 27 and a variety of geographic situations – whether cities are situated in river deltas, inland, in mountainous areas etc all posing different water challenges.
- iv. **Prior involvement in the UAEU:** Prior involvement in the UAEU is not required. The selection should give the opportunity to new cities/organisations to be involved as far as possible.
- v. **Coordinators:** maximum of two will be appointed, at least one from a city (regardless of size). In their expression of interest, applicants should indicate if they would like to be considered for the role of a Coordinator.