

Urban Agenda for the EU

Cities of Equality Partnership

**Action
Plan**

**September
2025**





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Disclaimer:

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

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Definitions

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

General Definitions

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

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

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

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

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

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

Definitions specific for the topic of the partnership

Intersectionality is an analytical framework for understanding how a person's various social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. Intersectionality identifies multiple factors of advantages and disadvantages.

Spatial segregation refers to the physical separation of groups within urban environments based on race, ethnicity, income, disability or other characteristics. This phenomenon often leads to uneven access to resources and services, perpetuating social and economic inequalities in cities.

Participation and **active citizenship** is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity, the accessibility and, where necessary, the support to participate in and influence decisions



and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society. (*Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*)



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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objectives of the Partnership

The “Cities of Equality” Partnership builds on the EU commitment to ensure equality and social inclusion at EU level through the Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, including the Union of Equality strategies adopted in 2020 and 2021¹ by the European Commission, the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan, and the Roadmap for Women’s Rights, adopted by the Commission in 2025; and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Istanbul Convention, to which the EU is a party. In this context, the Partnership brings added value by tackling the specific challenges and needs linked to equity and equality in cities. It aims to create urban environments where all individuals, whatever their origin, status or characteristics, have equal opportunities and access to quality and inclusive services.

To achieve this goal, the partnership places the principle of intersectionality at the heart of its approach, as it enables the recognition of all forms of discrimination and disadvantage. By taking into account the specific challenges and needs faced by diverse individuals and communities, the partnership aims to put in place inclusive and effective tools and strategies to advance equality within cities.

The partnership’s priority themes focus on tackling spatial segregation at city and neighbourhood level, and engaging communities for fair, inclusive and open access to services in a meaningful democracy. To meet these challenges, the partnership has sought to develop actions that take account of the three pillars: better funding, better knowledge and better regulation.

By bringing together European institutions, member states, cities and other stakeholders, the Cities of Equality partnership aims to foster the sustainable development of European cities as fairer, more accessible and inclusive and democratic spaces. By adopting an intersectional, people-centred approach, it seeks to avoid negative externalities that could exacerbate social and spatial inequalities and climate injustice, and to ensure that urban policies benefit all, especially the most disadvantaged populations.

¹ Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 (<https://europa.eu/!wvxx9P>); EU Gender Equality Strategy (<https://europa.eu/!cOrVHB>); EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025 (<https://europa.eu/!K8w6g7>); EU Roma Strategic Framework (<https://europa.eu/!FFvKyN>); LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (<https://europa.eu/!mmbq3W>)

1.2 Governance of the Partnership



Figure: Part of the Members of the Cities of Equality Partnership during the in-person meeting held in Heerenveen (NL) on 7-8 March 2025.

The Cities of Equality Partnership includes partners representing two national authorities, five metropolitan and urban authorities, four umbrella and network organisations, eight European institutions.

1.2.1 Coordinators of the Partnership

The Partnership is jointly coordinated by the French National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (ANCT) and the Metropolitan City of Rome.

1.2.2 Members of the Partnership

The following organisations and institutions are members of the Partnership:

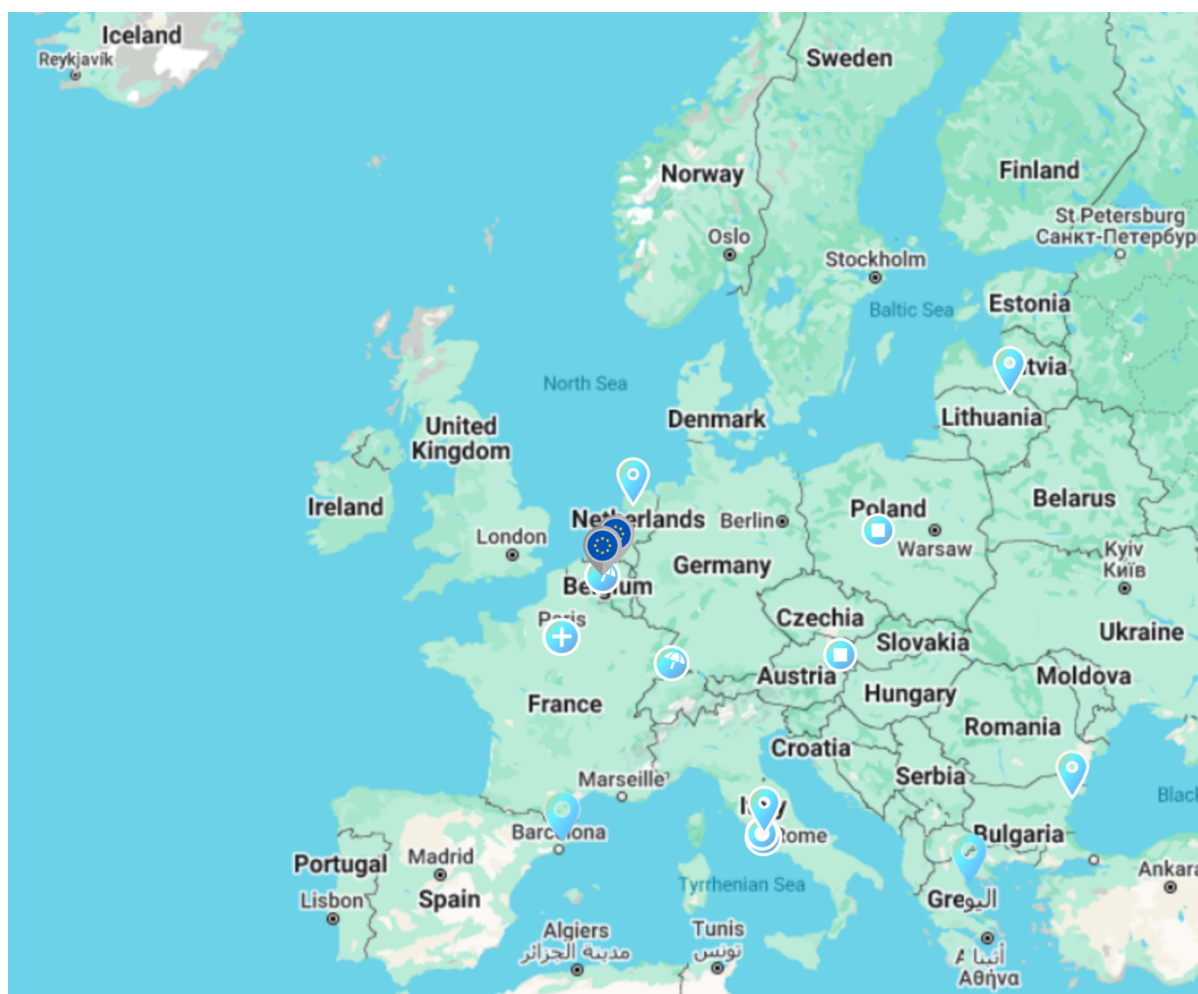
- National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (ANCT), France (**Coordinator**)
- Metropolitan City of Rome Capital, Italy (**Coordinator** and **Action co-leader**)
- Austria Tech / Driving Urban Transitions Partnership (DUT Partnership), Austria
- Konin Agglomeration Association, Poland
- Municipality of Varna, Bulgaria
- Municipality of Heerenveen, Netherlands (**Action co-leader**)
- Birzai District Municipality Administration, Lithuania
- Barcelona City Council, Spain
- Municipality of Komotini, Greece
- Eurocities, Belgium
- ICLEI European Secretariat, Germany (**Action co-leader**)
- Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), Belgium (**Action leader**)

- UniverCities, Italy (**Action leader**)
- European Commission Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO)
- European Commission Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM)
- European Commission Directorate-General for Energy (DG ENER)
- European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC)
- European Commission Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST)
- European Commission DG Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD)
- European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL)
- European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC)

Table: List of Cities of Equality Partnership members

National Authorities	Urban and Metropolitan Authorities	Umbrella Organisations	Other Stakeholders	EU institutions
National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (ANCT) (FR)	Metropolitan City of Rome (IT)	Eurocities (BE)	UniverCities (IT)	EC - Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO)
Austria Tech / Driving Urban Transitions Partnership (DUT) (AT)	Municipality of Varna (BG)	ICLEI European Secretariat (DE)		EC – Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM)
	Konin Agglomeration Association (PL)	Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) (BE)		EC – Directorate-General for Energy (DG ENER)
	Municipality of Heerenveen (NL)			EC – Directorate-General for Education and Culture
	Birzai District Municipality Administration (LT)			EC DG Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD)
	Barcelona City Council (ES)			EC Joint Research Centre (JRC)
	Municipality of Komotini (GR)			EC – Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST)
				EC – Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL)

Figure: Map of the Cities of Equality Partnership members.

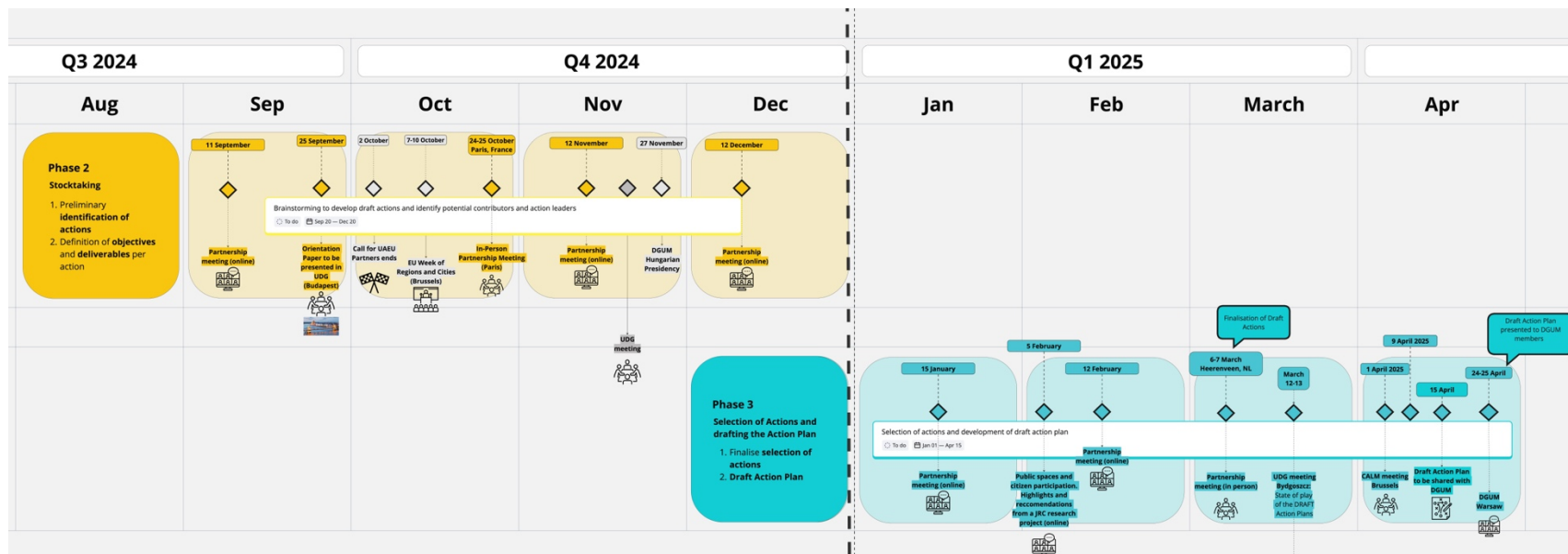


1.2.3 Working method, process and timeline of the Partnership in defining the Action Plan

The Draft Action Plan of the Cities of Equality Partnership was developed through a participatory and iterative process. Since the launch of the Partnership, fifteen partnership meetings have shaped this process—three in person and twelve online. The first in-person partnership meeting in Rome (June 2024) focused on defining the thematic scope and establishing Working Groups. The second, in Paris (October 2024), enabled Partners to co-create, cluster, and prioritize the proposed Actions. The third, in Heerenveen (March 2025), led to the finalization of the Draft Action Plan, including the refinement of Actions, identification of Action Leaders, and proposals for tasks and timelines.

The in-person meetings were complemented by regular online sessions dedicated to both content-related discussions and coordination matters, ensuring continuity, inclusiveness, and shared ownership throughout the process.

Timeline for the preparation of the Cities of Equality Action Plan



1.2.4 Consultations carried out during the development of the Action Plan

The development of the Action Plan resulted of several internal consultations involving the members of the Cities of Equality Partnership. The initial set of 23 draft actions was identified through an online survey conducted in September–October 2024. The list was then refined during an in-person meeting held in Paris in October 2024, where partners worked together to narrow the focus to four priority actions. Further consultation took place through another online survey in January 2025, aimed at identifying action leaders and potential contributors. Based on the outcomes of this survey, the partners agreed to merge two of the draft actions, resulting in a final list of three core actions. This iterative process ensured that the Action Plan was shaped by collective input and consensus among partners.

The Draft Action Plan will undergo public consultation from 6 May to 6 June 2025. Feedback gathered will be incorporated into the Action Plan, which will be published in its final version in July 2025.



2 ACTIONS

Overview table of Actions

Nº	Title	Short Description
1	Creating a framework to assess spatial segregation and access to services	The Action will develop a framework and relevant protocols to collect disaggregated data and to assess social inclusion, desegregation and equality in their cities on spatial segregation and access to services including by considering accessibility for persons with disabilities.
2	Mainstreaming equality in result-based funding instruments	Providing recommendations to systematically integrate equality considerations into performance-based funding instruments. By identifying current limitations and gaps, the action will provide recommendations and practical tools for embedding equality and non-discrimination criteria, e.g. related to the gender, age and disability perspectives, into funding design, implementation, and evaluation processes.
3	Collecting and exchanging best practices on citizen engagement and co-governance methods, tools and frameworks	This Action will map innovative urban citizen participation mechanisms and case studies illustrating their application in equity-related topics and facilitate interactive capacity building sessions for local governments and other actors.

Integration

The three Actions of the Cities of Equality Action Plan are conceived as interdependent components of a coherent strategy to advance equality in urban settings. Rather than standing alone, each Action feeds into and strengthens the others, creating meaningful synergies across the pillars of better knowledge, better regulation, and better funding.

Action 1 lays the groundwork by developing a common data framework to assess spatial segregation and access to services. By identifying inequalities and data gaps, it aims to equip cities with evidence-based tools to make better-informed decision and reduce bias. These disaggregated data and indicators will directly inform Action 2, which aims to embed equality criteria into result-based funding instruments. Action 1 ensures that the funding logic proposed in Action 2 is grounded in accurate, accessible, inclusive, and spatially disaggregated information, enhancing both the targeting and effectiveness of investments.

Meanwhile, Action 3 complements both by focusing on participation and co-governance. It showcases inclusive innovative methods to engage citizens — including those who are disadvantaged, marginalised and underrepresented in decision-making — in shaping urban strategies and assessing service quality. The participatory tools and case studies gathered in Action 3 provide valuable input for Action 1 (involving communities in data collection and validation) and reinforce Action 2 by demonstrating how citizen engagement can improve the design and accountability of funding programmes.

Together, the Actions form a circular and reinforcing process: participatory knowledge (Action 3) feeds inclusive data (Action 1), which informs funding logic (Action 2), which in turn enables cities to scale up participatory and inclusive interventions. This integrated approach supports systemic change, enabling cities to tackle structural inequalities through more informed, democratic, and outcome-oriented policies.

To ensure the aim of this action plan and that no one is left behind, the deliverables and events of this action plan will ensure accessibility features for persons with disabilities.



Visual representation of the interconnections between the three Draft Actions:

Constellation of Actions

of the Urban Agenda for the EU Partnership on Cities of Equality



Cities of Equality Partnership



Launched in January 2024



12 members



Draft Action Plan to be finalised in April 2025



www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/partnerships/cities-of-equality



Action 1

Creating a framework to assess spatial segregation and access to services



BETTER REGULATION

Giving local and regional authorities a tool to better design and target policy interventions tackling spatial segregation, while informing relevant EU funding instruments and strategies

providing content & supporting implementation

BETTER FUNDING



Action 2

Mainstreaming equality in result-based EU funding instruments

Need to re-think and streamline EU funding instruments for equality and social interventions in line with the evolving EU funding structure



BETTER KNOWLEDGE



Action 3

Collecting and discussing good practices of equity-attuned participatory governance

Co-created practice-based guidance for local governments to engage communities and foster participatory governance

providing content & supporting implementation

Unequal civic and political participation of all social groups on local social, economic and environmental matters

Cities of Equality Action Plan: Contributing to more equal and inclusive urban areas

The Cities of Equality Draft Action Plan is composed of three complementary actions designed to contribute to more equal and inclusive urban areas in Europe. Combining desk research, interactive workshops with local authorities and stakeholders, and policy-oriented publications, the three action will tackle spatial segregation and accessibility of services, the design of future EU funding instruments and tools and methods for better and more inclusive citizen engagement.

portico



#CitiesofEquality

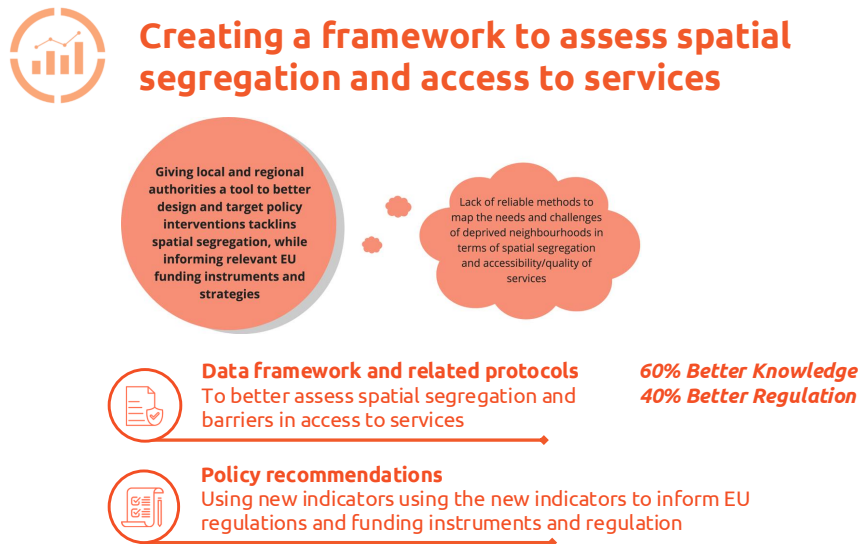
EUROPEAN URBAN INITIATIVE



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Supported by the European Urban Initiative, which receives EU funding to provide support to the Urban Agenda for the EU on behalf of the European Commission for the period 2021-2027.

2.1 Action 1 – Creating a framework to assess spatial segregation and access to services



This activity is aimed at providing policy makers with a framework and relevant protocols to collect disaggregated data and to assess social inclusion, desegregation and equality in their cities on two levels, i.e. spatial segregation and access to services, including (but not limited to) in the areas of employment, education and training, housing, transportation, health- and social-care and culture. By the term “access to service”, the Action aims at assessing the geographical distribution, availability and accessibility of services in the urban area, such as education, transport, employment, housing, social inclusion, healthcare; potential informational, technological, social or cultural barriers to accessing services, including digital accessibility; and the accessibility of the built environment to people with disabilities or limited mobility, as a pre-condition for full participation in society and economy, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to which the EU and all its Member States are parties.

Targeted stakeholders/governance level: Policy makers at local, regional, national and EU level

Deadlines:

- January 2026: Mapping of existing data protocols, sources, instruments and good practices on identifying spatial segregation and pockets of poverty and monitoring access to services;
- September 2026: Development of a comprehensive data framework and related protocols;
- December 2026: Policy recommendation document and public event

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

The action contributes to all the pillars:

Better regulation (10%) is supported by improving existing regulation on inclusive data collection in the area of spatial segregation, including the effect of climate change on deprived communities, and access to services and by favouring a better horizontal and vertical coordination when it comes to data collection and assessment, thus contributing to the systemic coherence between different policies in their contribution to social inclusion and equality. Moreover, the activity promotes a direct participation of citizens and inhabitants in the collection of data and in the assessment of local services, thus increasing the engagement of protected population groups in decision-making processes.



Better regulation

Better knowledge (70%) is supported by the identification of inclusive practices with regards to data collection, both qualitatively and quantitatively (including spatially) to enable equality at urban level and to provide tools to monitor progress and evaluate the impacts of sustainable urban development strategies and interventions.



Better knowledge

Better funding (20%) is supported by developing recommendations on how to use relevant identified indicators to inform the funding instruments, including EU funding in shared management and the use of territorial instruments (such as ITI, CLLD) in the next funding period.



Better funding

2.1.2 What is the specific problem this Action is aiming to address?

The existing bias in data at urban level is often an unspoken territory. One-size-fits-all approaches towards the collection and treatment of data reduce the ability of local, national and EU policy makers to correctly assess the needs and the barriers of disadvantaged groups, limiting the implementation of policies and solutions to foster equality at urban and neighbourhood level. The reasons behind this diversity-blindness in data are multiple, including issues related with confidentiality for specific groups, the lack of capacities or resources at city level, the lack of interoperability of data collected at different levels. Collecting inclusive data is fundamental to address the complex challenges that cities need to face, as better data can improve the knowledge of urban problems and support the assessment of strategies and interventions. This is particularly true in the two areas which the Action aims at covering: spatial segregation and access to services. Understanding urban segregation and pockets of poverty requires the collection of spatial and socio-economic data from different formal and informal data sources to understand both the current state of the art in cities and the potential negative externalities of urban policies which could reinforce segregation. When it comes to access to services, information on the barriers caused by gender, socio-economic status, geographical location, racial or ethnic origin, disability, age, sexual orientation or other aspects, including from an intersectional perspective, are often missing. Involvement of disadvantaged groups in data collection

Action 1

exercises is often limited, often skewing the representativeness of the data. In both cases, there is a need for granular, neighbourhood-level data that can be collected by different actors, including citizens of each gender, and vulnerable, marginalised or “invisible” communities themselves. Better cooperation amongst public authorities, statistical institutes and other key stakeholders, including civil society organisation, social partners, community representatives, residents and universities and research institutions could also contribute to overcoming data biases and gaps. In its implementation, the Action will strive to promote interoperability with existing standards whenever possible.

2.1.3 Which existing EU policies, legislations or instruments are relevant for this Action?

As indicated in the Ex-Ante Assessment Report, a number of EU platforms are relevant for this Action, including certain data repositories managed by the EU, such as Eurostat, the Social Scoreboard, the Urban Data Platform Plus (managed by the JRC), STRAT-BOARD (managed by the JRC), Kohesio and the Cohesion Open Data Platform (managed by DG REGIO), the Copernicus Data Space Ecosystem (managed by DG DEFIS), and the URBACT Social Data Knowledge. Moreover, the Action will look into relevant national/regional/local practices (such as household budget surveys or the [Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities \(RFSC\)](#) and EU-funded projects, whether in the R&I field (through Horizon2020 and Horizon Europe), or in the human rights domain (financed under the CERV programme or by the Fundamental Rights Agency). Finally, with its focus on spatial segregation and access to services, the Action is aligned with and contributes to the goal of the Cohesion Policy, the Union of Equality Strategies and Roadmap for Women’s Rights, the European Pillar of Social Rights and its current and upcoming new Action Plan, the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, the EU Accessibility Act and the AccessibleEU Initiative, the European Green Deal, the Commission Recommendation C(EU) 2023/2836 on promoting the engagement and effective participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policymaking processes, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency’s Framework for Human Rights Cities, and the data collection requirements in relevant EU legislation on equality, such as the Directive (EU) 2024/1500 on standards for equality bodies. While all these initiatives support a stronger equality and participation across the European Union, data gaps and biases remain, affecting the potential impacts of these policies. As such, this Action wants to cover this gap, from the equality and urban perspectives, in order to support not only a better decision-making at local, regional, national and EU level and the implementation of the existing mechanisms, but also to inform more effective instruments in the next financing cycle.

2.1.4 Why is this Action needed?

The Action is expected to support cities in their strive towards more equal and inclusive urban areas, by providing them a framework that can help a better-informed evidence-based decision-making process at local level. By collecting better and more representative and disaggregated data and exposing data gaps and biases, cities can become more aware of potential areas of interventions, in terms of new policies to adopt, of areas to regenerate, or of services to transform. Moreover, with better data, not only can cities take appropriate actions, but they can also design initiatives right, making sure that the solutions adopted respond to the needs of all the residents, in particular of those more disadvantaged and marginalised.

2.1.5 How will the Action be implemented?

To successfully deliver this Action, 4 activities are foreseen, as described here below.

Activity 1 focuses on mapping existing data protocols, sources, instruments and good practices on identifying spatial segregation and pockets of poverty and monitoring access to services and the urban environment, including in terms of accessibility for persons with disabilities. The aim of this activity is to set the scene of the state of the art with regards to existing qualitative and quantitative indicators, successful data collection and elaboration protocols (including cooperation between relevant stakeholders and participatory data collection approaches such as co-creation, citizens science and citizen-led assessments), and available data sources from cities, exposing data gaps and biases. In the selection of practices, due attention will be paid to make sure that the analysis is representative of all sizes and geographical diversity of European cities, and non-discriminatory. These indicators should support cities in understanding disadvantaged areas or communities, pockets of poverty and social exclusion, and unequal access to services and resources. The activity will rely on external expertise and is divided into three sub-activities:

- Sub-activity 1.1: prepare Terms of Reference (ToR) for the external expert(s)
- Sub-activity 1.2: establish relevant topics for data collection
- Sub-activity 1.3: review of existing literature and data collection practices by the external expert(s)

Activity 2 builds on the results of Activity 1 to assess the practical experience of cities with data collection on spatial segregation and access to services, by consulting urban practitioners, policymakers and regulators at municipality level, civil society, statistical offices (at local, regional, national and EU level) to map data gaps and biases and share good practices. This will be done through a series of workshops and a survey. The activity is divided into three sub-activities:

- Sub-activity 2.1: organisation of 2 to 3 workshops with relevant stakeholders
- Sub-activity 2.2: preparation of a survey
- Sub-activity 2.3: circulation of the survey and analysis of responses

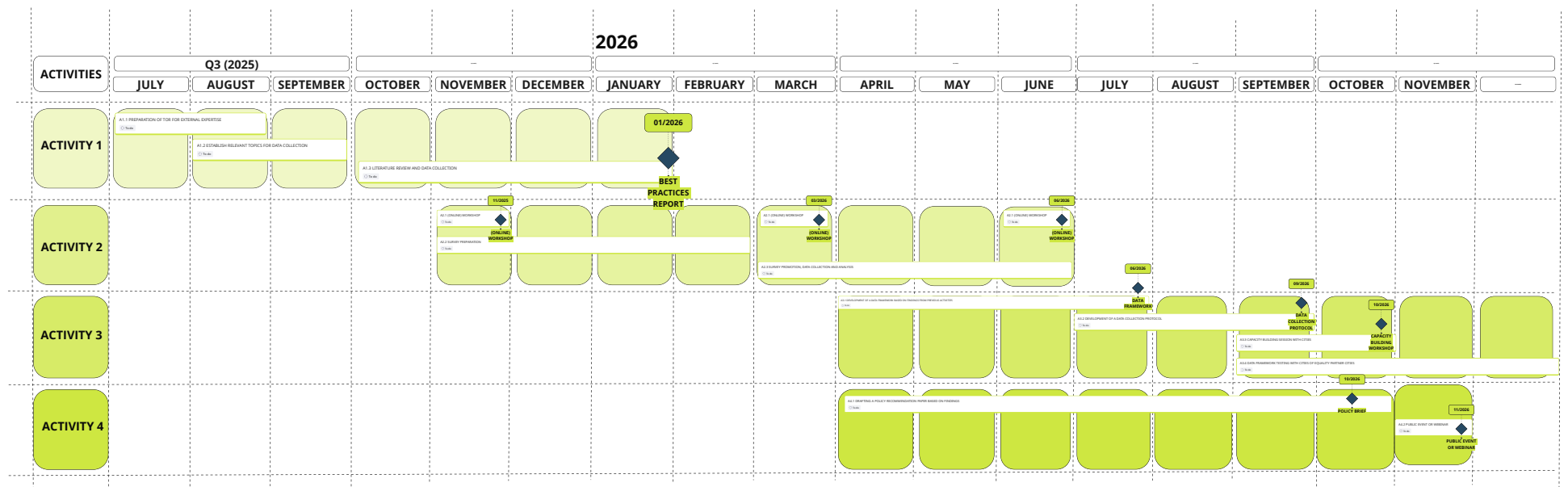
Activity 3 completes the previous activities by developing a comprehensive data framework and its protocols. The activity is divided into three sub-activities:

- Sub-activity 3.1: elaborate the findings of the previous actions into one data framework
- Sub-activity 3.2: elaborate data collection protocols connected to the data framework, tailored to the diversity of cities across the EU (e.g., in terms of size)
- Sub-activity 3.3: organize one capacity building session for cities on how to use the data protocols and how to implement the data collected in their processes
- Sub-activity 3.4: test the data framework and the protocols in cities involved in the Partnership.

Activity 4 connects the Better Knowledge activities carried out so far with the Better Regulation and Better Financing pillars by using the new indicators to inform funding instruments and regulation in view of the new performance-focused context of future EU spending. The activity is divided into two sub-activities:

- Sub-activity 4.1: draft a policy recommendation paper
- Sub-activity 4.2: organize one public event or webinar ensuring its accessibility (physical, multilingual, disabilities) by all stakeholders.

Action N. 1: Draft timeline of activities, sub-activities and related outputs



2.1.6 What resources are needed?

In terms of internal resources, there is a need of contributors from a wide variety of fields of expertise, which the Partnership includes, such as data experts, urban designers, architects and experts in specific policy domains (such as healthcare, education, transport, accessibility, gender mainstreaming in urban planning and design, etc.). Moreover, it is important that the source of this expertise is diverse, including representatives from cities, the EU, umbrella organisations, no-profit, etc. To support the dissemination of the outputs and the organisation of webinars or events, a contribution from the communication and events teams from the Partnership member is expected.

In terms of external expertise, this will be needed to carry out the mapping and review work in Activity 1 and potentially to draft the survey foreseen in Activity 2. Moreover, synergies could be built with actors external to the Cities of Equality but involved in other Partnerships, such as the Greening Cities, Sustainable Tourism, and Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees partnerships. Finally, a collaboration could be foreseen with the World Bank (involved together with the European Commission on a study on sub-national poverty mapping), and networks such as EUKN and URBACT. Specific policy labs organised by EUI and URBACT could provide further expertise for the implementation of this action and support the engagement of relevant stakeholders. Potential costs to implement the action include costs to organise events and, potentially, cost to access databases.

2.1.7 Are there any foreseen risks?

The most relevant risk for this Action is the lack of sufficient internal resources to complete its foreseen activities, also in light of the relatively small size of the Cities of Equality Partnership. To mitigate the risk, time-consuming tasks within Activity 1 have already been assigned to external experts. If the need arises, the same could be applied to other tasks, in particular within Activity 2 and/or 3.

Another relevant risk is that the output produced (and in particular the framework and the protocols) are not actionable and useful for cities. To mitigate this risk, a dedicated sub-activity has been identified to test, validate and refine these outputs with cities, at least those belonging to this Partnership.

2.1.8 Which members of the UAEU Partnership will be involved in implementation of the Action?

The Action Leader for this Action will be UniverCities. The other partners involved in the Action are:

- Eurocities
- CEMR
- ANCT
- Municipality of Heerenveen
- Konin Agglomeration Association
- City of Varna
- Barcelona City Council
- Metropolitan City of Rome
- DG REGIO
- JRC

2.2 Action 2 – Mainstreaming equality in result-based funding instruments



Mainstreaming equality in results-based funding instruments



This Action aims to ensure that equality considerations are systematically integrated into performance-based funding instruments at all levels of governance. By identifying current limitations and gaps, the action will provide recommendations and practical tools for embedding equality and non-discrimination criteria, such as those related to the gender, race, sexuality orientation, disability and other intersecting grounds, into funding design, implementation, and evaluation processes, including EU funding under shared management under the 2028-2034 funding framework.

Targeted stakeholders/governance level: Policy makers at local, national and EU level

Deadlines:

- December 2025: Review of good practices in the use of performance-based funding
- August 2026: Guidance document/handbook
- December 2026: Stakeholder and policy engagement activities

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

The action contributes to all the pillars:

Better regulation (50%) is supported by promoting a more coherent and structured integration of equality objectives into the regulatory frameworks governing result-based funding instruments. By encouraging horizontal and vertical coordination between managing authorities, policymakers and cities, the Action fosters a more systemic approach to embedding equality into funding mechanisms. It also supports the alignment of performance indicators with EU equality goals, thus contributing to more inclusive and responsive regulatory practices.



Better knowledge (30%) is supported by identifying missed opportunities, limitations and gaps in the current use of funding instruments for promoting equality. The Action will develop practical recommendations and tools to embed equality considerations into the design, implementation and monitoring phases of funding instruments, ensuring that public investments contribute directly to reducing inequalities at urban level.



Better funding (20%) is supported by collecting and analysing promising practices across cities and managing authorities, mapping how equality criteria are (or are not) used in funding instruments. By doing so, the Action will build a knowledge base that informs current and potential future funding programmes and enhances the capacity of stakeholders to mainstream equality through financial tools.



2.2.2 What is the specific problem this Action is aiming to address?

European Union funding plays a pivotal role in advancing equality and social inclusion across its member states, regions and cities. Through various funding programs and initiatives, the EU supports projects focused on combating discrimination, and enhancing access to services, addressing the specific needs of disadvantaged groups and territories, complementing EU and initiatives in the Member States in the area. For example, Cohesion Policy funds, such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), and the Just Transition Fund (JTF), represent key EU instruments for supporting territorial, economic, and social cohesion. The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) actively contribute to equality by funding targeted investments and important reforms that are expected to have a lasting effect, with a focus on ensuring that marginalised and disadvantaged groups benefit from these recovery efforts. Moreover, Cohesion Funds include the horizontal principle to prevent any discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation during the preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of programmes. In particular, accessibility for persons with disabilities shall be taken into account throughout the preparation and implementation of programmes. While many of current EU funds are not performance-based in the 2021-2027 period (unlike the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)), they still play an important role in achieving EU objectives.

Despite strong commitments and regulatory provisions on equality and inclusion in the overall EU funding ecosystem, these efforts could be strengthened from the perspective of maximising the impact of EU funding at local level. There is a need to learn from current challenges and building the capacity of local, regional, national and EU stakeholders for this purpose.

In many cases, equality, including gender equality, and non-discrimination are treated as horizontal principles or specific objectives, but these do not often translate in successful and impactful changes on the ground. For example, gender-responsive budgeting, which links resource allocation directly to gender objectives, piloted in the 2021-2027 EU multiannual financial framework, remains underused and inconsistently applied. Other disadvantaged groups and their specific needs, such as persons with disabilities and their need for accessibility requirements, are often left behind. Performance indicators rarely

Action 2

reflect equality outcomes. As a result, large-scale investments risk reinforcing existing inequalities rather than addressing them.

For instance, while Cohesion Policy programmes that have programmed infrastructure support under ERDF are required to respect principles of equality, inclusion, and non-discrimination (such as the horizontal enabling condition that requires the establishment of a national framework to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) and have the option to categorise investments according to their impact on gender equality using the gender tracking methodology, there are still challenges in systematically assessing the differentiated impact of infrastructure, or urban development projects on diverse communities. ESF+ initiatives aimed at employment may not account for persistent gender and disability gaps or other barriers faced by marginalised and disadvantaged groups. This is further compounded by limited guidance and capacity among managing authorities and implementing bodies to apply equality criteria in practice.

Current EU funding frameworks do not sufficiently reflect the realities of local and regional governments, which are often closest to citizens yet face limited capacity to apply complex equality criteria. This gap results in underutilisation of tools such as gender-responsive budgeting, gender mainstreaming and equality impact assessments, despite their proven potential to improve local outcomes.

While the European Pillar of Social Rights set important foundations for promoting equality and inclusion that are integrated in existing EU funding programmes and will steer support in, challenges remain in translating these principles into practice through the implementation of EU funds that could be better addressed in the future EU funding framework. There is a need to more systematically integrate equality considerations into the design, delivery, and evaluation of funding instruments, including in performance-based approaches, so that that public investment contributes to inclusive and just urban development. Action 2 aims to bridge this gap by translating legal obligations into practical tools, such as surveys, guiding questions and toolkits, that enable managing authorities to operationalise these principles in real-world funding processes.

The Action acknowledges that the future of EU funding beyond 2027 may look different, according to the Commission's proposal for the 2028-2034 multiannual financial framework (MFF) adopted on 16 July 2025 and on 3 September 2025. Some of the key features related to equality and social cohesion of the proposal include:

- streamlined and performance-based investment and reform support for Member States and regions under the National and Regional Partnership Plans with a minimum 14% earmarking to social expenditure,
- common rules on the application of gender equality principle and gender mainstreaming methodology across programmes,
- a shared tracking and performance framework for EU funding, including single list of intervention fields and output and result indicators, and
- targeted support for equality and EU values under the proposed AgoraEU programme.

While the exact scope of support for social inclusion remains to be defined, pending the outcome of the negotiations, there is an opportunity to strengthen equality consideration in the new framework to ensure more impactful EU investments in social inclusion and equal opportunities at all levels, including under EU shared management funding.

2.2.3 Which existing EU policies, legislations or instruments are relevant for this Action?

While existing EU funding instruments, such as, Cohesion Policy, the Social Climate Fund, InvestEU and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, acknowledge the importance of equality and inclusion, its practical implementation of these principles can vary. In the case of Cohesion Policy, equality is treated as a horizontal principle to be respected at all stages of programme design and implementation. Both ESF+ and ERDF contribute to Policy Objective 4 “A more social and inclusive Europe”, which supports equal access to quality and inclusive services and investments that promote social inclusion, equal opportunities, and contribute to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. A range of tools including intervention fields, output and result indicators, equality-related enabling conditions, and a gender tracking methodology, which support the integration and monitoring of equality objectives. However, the use and depth of these tools can differ across Member States and regions, and further efforts are needed to ensure consistent, integrated and measurable operationalisation of equality commitments across all instruments. Given the upcoming Commission proposal for the MMF and the paradigm shift in the approach to EU funding post-2027, expected in June/July 2025, the Action will also need to assess the implications of the proposal for inclusion and equality funding.

As highlighted in the Orientation Paper and Ex-Ante Assessment, more effective guidance and capacity-building are needed to support managing authorities and local authorities in embedding equality in performance-based financing. The lack of coherence between policy goals and implementation tools limits both the efficiency and the impact of EU funding in delivering inclusive outcomes.

Further efforts are needed to ensure the consistent, integrated and measurable operationalisation of equality commitments. Action 2 supports this goal by equipping managing authorities and local actors with tools to embed equality into performance-based financing frameworks.

2.2.4 Why is this Action needed?

This Action supports progress by providing concrete guidance, tools, and examples for mainstreaming equality into performance-based funding instruments, including from the experience of EU funds such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility. It addresses the gap between high-level equality commitments and their practical implementation by translating abstract principles into measurable criteria and performance indicators, and by drawing on tools such as gender-responsive budgeting, the Action will help ensure public investments deliver tangible equality outcomes, seeking to foster and measure the highest impact on equality of investments.

The Action will ensure that recommendations are grounded in local practice by drawing on the diverse experiences of LRGs, who are key to translating funding principles into tangible results for communities. By equipping managing authorities and local actors with the means to embed equality in funding design and evaluation, including in the context of future EU funding, the Action ensures that public investment more effectively addresses structural inequalities. For cities, this means access to funding that is better aligned with local needs and capable of supporting accessible and inclusive urban development. It also enhances transparency and accountability in the use of public resources, helping ensure that funding reaches those most at risk of exclusion. Ultimately, it enables urban areas to deliver on both social justice and strategic development goals.

2.2.5 How will the Action be implemented?

To successfully deliver this Action, four activities are foreseen, as described below.

Activity 1 focuses on mapping the use of existing funds regarding equality in relation to performance-based approaches, as well as identifying current limitations and missed opportunities in mainstreaming equality within EU and national performance-based funding instruments. The activity will examine how equality considerations are reflected (or not) across key stages of funding design, implementation and evaluation. This activity will specifically address the different grounds of discrimination, such as gender, age, disability, race, sexual orientation in line with the horizontal principles of EU Cohesion Policy and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. This will be done through a survey to collect these findings. The survey findings should inform the development of the proposed guidelines and guiding questions, offering Managing Authorities tested models and operational pathways to implement equality commitments effectively across diverse territorial and policy contexts. The activity is divided into five sub-activities:

- Sub-activity 1.1: develop the terms of reference to procure an external expert.
- Sub-activity 1.2: conduct a survey with guiding questions for use in Territorial Impact Assessments and similar evaluation tools.—The aim is to provide a comparative analysis of equality-related criteria in existing funding frameworks, and identify how inequality evidence (e.g. disaggregated data, intersectional indicators) can inform budget allocation priorities. Guiding questions should explicitly connect social impact metrics to funding prioritisation mechanisms.
- Develop a set of guiding questions for the Commission and managing authorities to assess the intersectional impact of EU-funded investments and related regulatory frameworks. These questions should also address spatial disparities in access to services (e.g. food, housing, mobility), promote the use of disaggregated and community-generated data, and support the identification of equity-related objectives. Where appropriate, they should inform the use of conditionalities or incentives to ensure that performance-based allocations respond to structural inequalities and deliver measurable social outcomes.
- Sub-activity 1.3: review and identify good practices in performance-based funding in cities in relation to equality and social inclusion and address specific grounds of discrimination, as well as analyse the lessons learned, funding barriers and gaps. This review should include concrete examples of how resources have been allocated based on social return, measurable equity outcomes, or linked to equality-sensitive conditionalities and incentives, as well as gender-responsive budgeting and equality-sensitive conditionalities, showing how funding allocations can be tied to measurable equality outcomes.
- Sub-activity 1.4: collect and analyse national, municipal and regional examples of how equality has been embedded in funding criteria, selection processes, and performance monitoring frameworks.
- Sub-activity 1.5: identify participatory tools for the co-design of funding proposals. This includes:
 - Mapping participatory practices already adopted by cities and regions;
 - Exploring community-based co-financing models such as civic crowdfunding and match-funding, particularly where community investment and verified impact milestones can be combined with public performance-based disbursements.

Activity 2 tests the findings found through the survey by organising online workshops with cities, local authorities and other relevant stakeholders. These workshops aim to create a space for exchange, discussion and capacity building for local authorities to develop training measures to strengthen local authorities' capacity to handle EU funding in relation to equality and social inclusion. The activity is divided into three sub-activities:

- Sub-activity 2.1: develop an interactive format that allows to share the findings, participants to exchange and share good practices (e.g. include breakout session based on focus area, challenges and experiences);

- Sub-activity 2.2: hold the online workshop with cities, local authorities and managing authorities;
- Sub-activity 2.3: collect feedback from the sessions to refine the findings from the survey.

Activity 3 translates insights from previous activities into a practical and adaptable digital toolkit/handbook to support cities and managing authorities in:

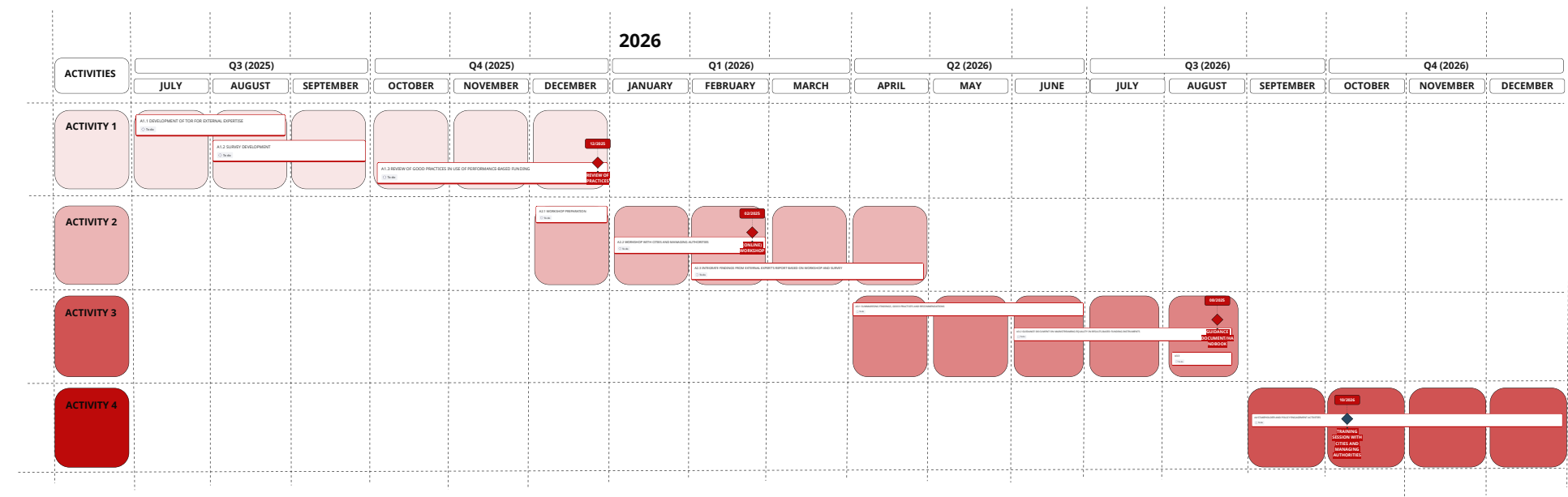
- Integrating equality, social and climate objectives in the performance-based approach to EU funding;
- Embedding intersectional principles into performance-based and result-oriented approaches, ensuring that funding mechanisms are responsive to diverse needs and structural inequalities;
- Applying actionable guidance, checklists, and case-based templates to improve the design, implementation, and monitoring of equity-sensitive funding criteria across policy levels and sectors.
 - The toolkit should:
- Present concrete examples and scenarios illustrating how equity-related evidence (e.g. disaggregated data, intersectional indicators, community-generated insights) can inform ex ante prioritisation and ex post evaluation of funding;
- Include operational guidance on how to embed equality-sensitive conditionalities and social impact incentives into funding design and implementation (e.g. It will draw on existing approaches such as gender-responsive budgeting to illustrate how equality can be mainstreamed into budgetary processes and funding criteria);
- Offer tested models and step-by-step pathways for allocating resources based on measurable social return and equity outcomes;
- Provide adaptable templates, visual explainers, and checklists to support local uptake across diverse territorial contexts. The guidance will remain flexible to align with ongoing discussions on the future of EU funding and will include concrete tools and recommendations, alongside targeted advocacy towards EU institutions. The activity is divided into three sub-activities:
- Sub-activity 3.1: summarise findings, good practices and recommendations.
- This would involve:
 - Synthesising the findings from the survey and comparative analysis (sub-activity 1.2) into a baseline set of equality-related standards applicable to result-based funding instruments;
 - Structuring these criteria to be actionable across local, regional, and national managing authorities, while remaining aligned with EU Cohesion Policy principles and horizontal enabling conditions;
 - Ensuring these recommendations are incorporated into the practical guide (sub-activity 3.2) to promote harmonised and measurable implementation of equality objectives in funding programmes;
- Reflecting the intersectional dimensions of equality by illustrating how funding decisions and project impacts vary across biological, social, cultural, and structural axes of inequality. This may include:
 - Case studies demonstrating intersectional outcomes;
 - Inclusive communication materials (e.g. infographics, explainer videos) tailored to diverse stakeholder groups;
 - Specific recommendations on how to embed intersectional principles in performance- and result-based funding frameworks.
- Sub-activity 3.2: develop a practical guide for mainstreaming equality in result-based funding for the early stages of existing applications.
- Sub-activity 3.3: share the digital guide in various languages and with accessibility requirements.



Activity 4 engages the different stakeholders and increase a policy engagement after the mapping of the existing funding opportunities and developing the handbook. This activity will be implemented through a quintuple helix approach, involving actors from academia and education, industry, public institutions, civil society, media and culture, and the environmental sector. URBACT's communication channels would be strategically leveraged to disseminate Action 2 results and engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders. The activity is divided into four sub-activities:

- Sub-activity 4.1: organise a training session for the stakeholders that are involved in applying for funding opportunities to present the findings, good practices and handbook;
- Sub-activity 4.2: provide support to the cities, managing authorities and local authorities;
- Sub-activity 4.3: provide a space to follow up on progress between the different funding opportunity rounds;
- Sub-activity 4.4: ensure continuous visibility and update on the handbook based on the changes happening (e.g. the new MMF regulation).

Action N. 2: Draft timeline of activities, sub-activities and related outputs



2.2.6 What resources are needed?

This Action will require internal human resources from partners with expertise in equality, funding instruments, policy analysis, and multi-level governance. Contributions from city representatives, managing authorities, and umbrella organisations will be key, particularly for stakeholder engagement, identifying promising practices, and co-developing tools. Communication and event coordination support will also be needed to deliver the workshop and ensure broad dissemination of outputs.

External expertise will be required for Activity 1, specifically to conduct the comparative analysis of existing EU and national/regional and local funding instruments that follow a performance-based approach and assess how equality criteria are integrated. Additional external support may be considered for Activity 2, such as survey design or facilitation of the workshop.

Financial resources will be needed to cover expert fees, workshop logistics (venue or virtual platform, facilitation), and the production of outputs (e.g. design, editing, translation) including covering accessibility requirements and materials. Software requirements are minimal, limited to standard project collaboration tools and survey platforms. Additional costs may include translation services and graphic design for the guidance and policy brief, as well as potential access to specialised data or reports. It will be important to coordinate with participating members early on to assess whether these costs can be supported, and to explore potential co-funding or in-kind contributions where appropriate.

2.2.7 Are there any foreseen risks?

Key risks include limited availability of internal resources and expertise across partners to support all activities, particularly given the complexity of funding instruments and equality mainstreaming. There is also a risk of low engagement from managing authorities or political reluctance to address structural inequalities through funding reforms. To mitigate this, the Action will involve stakeholders early, mapping existing available research on equality and EU funding, build on existing practices, and frame equality as a driver of effective investment. Economic pressures on cities may deprioritise equality goals unless linked clearly to funding efficiency and impact. Finally, in a shifting political context, rising anti-equality narratives may challenge the legitimacy of this work. Strong evidence, inclusive messaging, and alignment with EU policy frameworks will be essential to manage these risks and build momentum.

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

The Action Co-Leaders for this Action will be CEMR and the Metropolitan City of Rome. The other partners involved in the Action are:

- Eurocities
- UniverCities
- ANCT
- ICLEI Europe
- Municipality of Heerenveen
- Konin Agglomeration Association
- Barcelona City Council
- City of Varna
- AustriaTech/DUT

2.3 Action 3 – Collecting and discussing good practices of equity-attuned participatory governance



Collecting and discussing good practices of equity-attuned participatory governance

Co-created practice-based guidance for local governments to engage communities and foster participatory governance

Unequal civic and political participation of all social groups on local social, economic and environmental matters



Practice-oriented guidebook of participatory mechanisms

*70% Better Knowledge
30% Better Regulation*



Policy paper

Featuring key insights to improve local and EU policymaking on equity-attuned urban participatory governance

This Action will map innovative urban participatory governance mechanisms and good case studies illustrating their application in equity-related topics and facilitate interactive capacity building sessions for local governments and other actors.

Targeted stakeholders/governance level: Local governments (primary stakeholder), civil society organisations, and EU policymakers (secondary stakeholders)

Deadlines:

December 2025: mechanisms and case studies collected and drafted

July 2026: Interactive sessions held

December 2026: Guidebook completed

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

Better regulation (15%). This Action will collect and broker practical insights on the application of innovative participatory mechanisms, which can then be used to improve local-level policy making. At the EU level, this Action will gather evidence on the needs of cities to be able to apply such processes (e.g. funding, regulatory change).



Better regulation

Better knowledge (80%). This Action will enhance the quality of knowledge about inclusive participatory processes in urban planning and governance. This will be facilitated through the interactive discussion and review of good practices among partners and key actors, including local governments, grassroots organizations, and academia, to generate fit-for-purpose knowledge to promote an enabling environment for equity-attuned citizen participation.



Better knowledge

Better funding (5%). The Action will map innovative financing mechanisms for participatory governance in the good practices, and assess how cities are funding their participatory practices, including whether EU funds are being used for this purpose.



Better funding

2.3.2 What is the specific problem this Action is aiming to address?

Many urban residents lack opportunities to participate in and influence local decision-making. Issues around diminished trust in government, social polarisation, overwork caused by increased cost of living, lack of the accessibility of the processes, and others act as barriers stopping residents from being a part of shaping their city. Some social groups are more capable of being engaged in formal local governance, namely educated middle-class, which creates unequal representation of interests through unequal civic participation. Furthermore, beyond the demographic divide, and the lack of an intersectional approach which is sensitive to issues related to age, gender, socio-economic factors, interculturality or disability, among other, the types of urban participatory practices often lack co-creative elements, reducing participation to mere consultation. Consequently, this risks the creation of local policies that have less support by the population, and even unexpected negative consequences for disadvantaged population groups that were not adequately considered. For services and policies of local governments to represent the needs and wishes of their constituents, inclusive participatory processes are needed.

2.3.3 Which existing EU policies, legislations or instruments are relevant for this Action?

Conceptually, the Action aligns with the Union of Equality strategies and the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017) and its Action Plan (2021) because the goal of participation is to advance equality and honour social rights. Since this Action pertains to local participatory practices, there is not much overlap with EU policies, legislations or instruments. Yet, this Action can contribute to the current European Commission's political priority "Protecting our democracy, upholding our values" and connects to the [Commission Recommendation C\(2023\) 8627 final](#). This latter encourages the engagement and effective participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policy-making processes at different levels of governance².

² The Recommendation encompasses both co-creation and deliberative processes and "it encourages Member States to provide more opportunities for citizens and civil society organisations to effectively participate in public policy-making processes carried out by public authorities at the local, regional and national levels, in line with established standards and good practices". The Commission recommendations stresses that "participation in public policymaking should be inclusive and reflect to the best possible extent the demographic configuration and diversity of a constituency, as well as the needs of underrepresented groups or of persons with disabilities". See [EUR-Lex - C\(2023\)8627 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

The Action will investigate how EU funds are being used to support local participatory processes in the case studies. This may include key bottom-up Cohesion Policy instruments such as ITI, CLLD, RiS3 and RiS4.

2.3.4 Why is this Action needed?

This Action will better equip local governments to apply innovative participatory practices, and to overcome commonly shared challenges in doing so. It will also raise awareness of the current level of EU support (financial and otherwise) for these important functions, and existing funding bottlenecks. As a result, the Action should a) help create more opportunities for urban residents to comfortably, creatively and boldly shape their city, b) equal opportunities for the most disadvantaged groups of citizens, and c) help local governments advocate for more support from other governance levels to facilitate such important processes that are intersectional and intentionally inclusive.

2.3.5 How will the Action be implemented?

Activity 1 (July-September 2025): Collect innovative urban public participation mechanisms

- A1.1: Create an accessible list of interesting participatory governance mechanisms known within the Partnership
- Output: List of participatory mechanisms in an excel sheet

Activity 2 (September-December 2025): Collect and draft summaries of European and international good case studies on equity-attuned participatory governance which illustrate the above mechanisms.

- A2.1: Collect good case examples from Partners in the excel sheet from A1.1
- A2.1: Create a simple case study template with standardised sections, which covers important details and also guides assessment of a) how the participatory process in each case was funded (e.g. some of our cases should be ones where key bottom-up Cohesion Policy instruments such as ITI, CLLD, RiS3 and RiS4 were used to (co-) fund participatory urban practices.), b), its impact on the target population, and the extent to which each case is successfully reaching disadvantaged groups, and c) any challenges faced.
- A2.2: Conduct desk research (and interviews where possible) to draft 2-3 case studies per category of participatory mechanism, according to the template in A2.1. The case studies should have diversity in geography and city-size and should be tagged according to various thematic topics related to equality (e.g. sustainability action, youth engagement, migrant inclusion, accessibility for disabilities, citizenship education, collaboration between local governments and community-led initiatives, innovative finance etc.).
- Output: Compilation of 2-3 completed and thematically tagged case study templates per category of participatory mechanism.

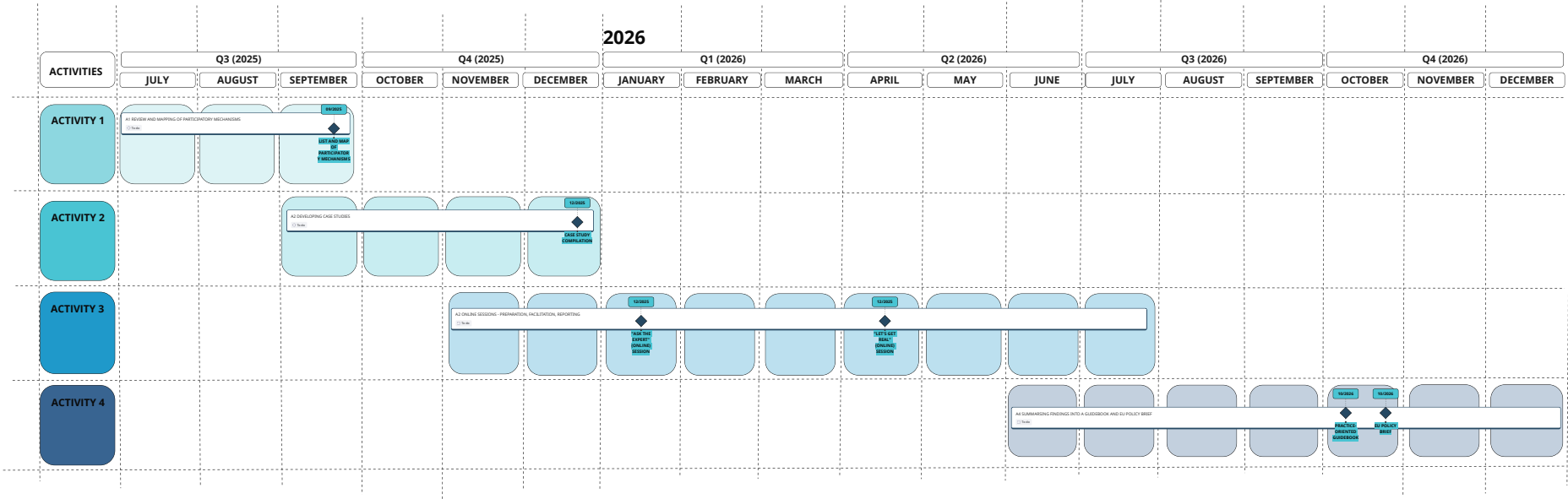
Activity 3 (July 2025-July 2026): Prepare and facilitate accessible interactive online exchanges of two kinds. Firstly, “ask the expert” sessions (one local government is the guest expert and participants will be able to learn from their experience on a specific participatory mechanism in an interactive way) and secondly, “let’s get real” workshops (a platform for open, but facilitated exchange between local governments and civil society, citizens and communities on the key challenges associated with specific participatory mechanisms (e.g. trust, funding, political will etc). These sessions will also promote the EUI city-city exchanges as a follow-up capacity building opportunity for local government participants and involve members of other current UAEU Partnerships as guest experts or participants. Key representation of participants from disadvantaged groups will have to be ensured for the success of the exchanges.

- A3.1: Create agenda of topics and pool of potential “experts”.
- A3.2: Create agenda templates and organise other logistics.
- A3.3: Host and document sessions and post key insights and partial session recordings on YouTube and other social media.
- Outputs: Reports/minutes of sessions for later use in guidebook, recordings and social media material.

Activity 4 (July 2025-December 2026): Summarise findings from interactive sessions into a practice-based guidebook on participatory mechanisms plus a short policy paper supplement aimed at EU level

- A4.1: Draft a 'living document' for the guidebook which mirrors the case study template sections and also includes an interactive, visual map on Miro of participation mechanisms and space for web-links to the good cases
- A4.2: Fill in the living document alongside Activity 3 implementation, based on case studies and insights from interactive sessions.
- A4.3: Finalise guidebook content and visual design, including accessibility requirements, and leverage Partners’ social media channels to disseminate guidebook.
- A4.4: Create a short policy paper featuring key insights to improve local and EU policymaking on equity-attuned urban participatory governance.
- Outputs: Practice-oriented guidebook of participatory mechanisms, illustrative good case studies and interactive Miro visual map. Short supplementary policy paper aimed at local and EU decision makers. The guidebook and policy paper will be housed under [Portico’s Knowledge and Skills database](#), with all the individual case studies additionally uploaded to [Portico’s Urban Practices database](#).

Action N. 3: Draft timeline of activities, sub-activities and related outputs



2.3.6 What resources are needed?

The Action will primarily use internal resources of Partners and draw from voluntary commitment from external local governments who serve as “experts” in the online exchange sessions. An EUI expert in participatory urban governance will be asked to help harvest information from the online sessions, and to draft and write the guidebook. Assistance from another EUI expert may be requested to visually design the guidebook.

2.3.7 Are there any foreseen risks?

Due to the small Partnership, there is a risk that Partners are not able to contribute sufficiently to the Action activities. Many Partners are already quite busy, so the Activities need to be feasible. If limited engagement is sensed, the Action co-leads will reduce the scope of participatory mechanisms, case studies and number of interactive sessions accordingly.

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

The Action will be co-led by ICLEI Europe and the Municipality of Heerenveen. The following partners will contribute to the implementation of the activities:

- Metropolitan City of Rome
- Barcelona City Council
- Konin Agglomeration Association
- City of Varna
- AustriaTech/DUT
- UniverCities
- CEMR
- Joint Research Centre

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 (Gijón Agreement clause 5).

The Cross-cutting issues are:

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

The table below shows how the Actions included in the Cities of Equality Draft Action Plan address the principles of the cross-cutting issues established by the Gijón Agreement.

Cities of Equality Partnership – Actions			
	Action n.1	Action n.2	Action n.3
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.			

3.1.2 Link to the New Leipzig Charter

The Cities of Equality partnership and its action plan are in line with the New Leipzig Charter, with a strong application of the principle of “no one left behind” The New Leipzig Charter (adopted on 30 November 2020 under German Presidency of the Council of the European Union) provides a key policy framework document for sustainable urban development in Europe. The Charter highlights that cities need to establish integrated and sustainable urban development strategies and ensure their implementation for the city as a whole, from its functional areas to its neighbourhoods. Moreover, specifies that all social groups, including the most disadvantaged, should have equal access to services of general interest, including education, social services, health care and culture. 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.³

By translating the concepts of “just city”, “green city” and “productive city” into concrete actions, it promotes urban equality and social inclusion, to fostering equal opportunities and environmental justice for all. Its intersectional approach, which considers different forms of discrimination and related disadvantage, reflects the Charter's holistic vision of making cities inclusive and accessible to all.

The working methods used by the partnership, and those planned for the implementation of actions at local level, echo the principles of the new Leipzig Charter. They promote citizen participation and co-creation by involving residents in the design of local services and public life. They are also based on multi-level governance, ensuring coordination between the various institutional levels (EU, States, regions and cities) for coherent implementation of urban policies.

The partnership and its action plan added value by translating the principles of the new Leipzig Charter into local strategies adapted to the realities of the territories. It contributes to the creation of a knowledge base about the impact of urban policies. It reinforces also the consideration of equality issues in European policies, in particular by cohesion funds and equality strategies.

3.2 Global (International) dimension

3.2.1 New Urban Agenda (Habitat III)

The New Urban Agenda was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador, on 20 October 2016. It was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly at its sixty-eighth plenary meeting of the seventy-first session on 23 December 2016. The New Urban Agenda represents a shared vision for a better and more sustainable future. If well-planned and well-managed, urbanization can be a powerful tool for sustainable development for both developing and developed countries.

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, and give particular attention to addressing multiple forms of discrimination faced by, inter alia, women and girls, children and youth, persons with disabilities, elderly persons, homeless people, and displaced persons and migrants.

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

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

A. Transformative Commitments

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

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

³ 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).

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)⁴

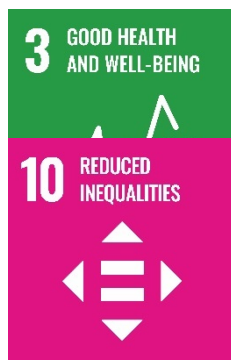
The 'Cities of Equality' partnership is well aligned with the provisions of the NUA, as it aims to promote social inclusion and sustainable urban development, in order to "leave no one behind" by ensuring equal rights and opportunities, addressing all forms of discrimination, guaranteeing adequate levels of public participation and equal access to services and public infrastructures/spaces.

The links between the partnership's Action Plan and the two main sections of the NUA's Implementation Plan, Transformative Commitments and Effective Implementation, are evident in the brief overview that follows, from which it is clear the holistic and cross-cutting approach followed by the working groups.

Action 1 of the Action Plan, by providing disaggregated data collection, aims to improve knowledge of the complexity of urban development and the need for it to take place under sustainable and inclusive paradigms. Action 2 focuses on the mapping and possible uses of existing European funding sources (and approaches of future ones) for the planning and design by local authorities of interventions at the urban level that aim to pursue policies of equality and non-discrimination, environmental justice, and social inclusion. Finally, action 3, through the collection and exchange of good practices, intends to guarantee a greater involvement of citizens in participatory procedures and, therefore, a more significant contribution of citizenship to decision-making processes.

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)⁵.



An urban planning tailored to the needs of the community supports city welfare in the light of environmental and social justice. Civic participation, as this partnership has meant it and wants to promote it, will be a central tool for achieving this goal.

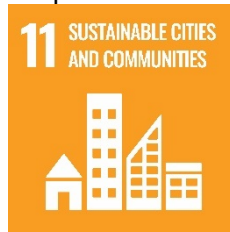
The holistic and cross-cutting approach that this partnership has intended to promote, overcoming the extreme targeting of the population and referring to it as 'citizenship' and to groups in distress as 'underrepresented' or 'disadvantaged' encourages, from our point of view, equality in the round, even that which concerns the 'gender' macro-area.

A city that responds to the specific needs of all is a city that reduces inequalities. A local authority, supported in its action by accurate data

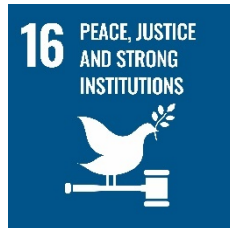
⁴ Source: Review of the contributions of the Urban Agenda for the EU to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (2021). <https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/sites/default/files/2022-12/Review%20of%20the%20UAEU%20contributions%20to%20the%20NUA%20-%20Final%20report.pdf> (Accessed: February 16, 2024).

⁵ Source: THE 17 GOALS. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (Accessed: February 16, 2024).

leading to a planning responsive to the needs of the population, actively works to fight inequalities.



The capacity building programs foreseen for the implementation of the partnership's three actions contribute to the support and construction of virtuous processes of civic and social connections. Communities that can embrace diversity, value the complexity of lives and defend their space while respecting the environment as a common good, are sustainable communities capable of building sustainable cities



The partnership has taken into account this goal because environmental sustainability is an indispensable side of urban planning. This sustainability also has an impact on the accessibility to services, which are not only those related to health or social matters, but also those related to mobility and green spaces.

Participatory processes, which this partnership aims to support, strengthen the institutions that promote them, building trust and a sense of belonging. A community that builds its identity through communication and participation is a conscious society that welcomes change. It will itself be a builder of peace and justice.

3.2.3 The Paris Agreement adopted at COP21

The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France, on 12 December 2015. Its overarching goal is to hold 'the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels' and pursue efforts 'to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.' Since 2020, countries have been submitting their national climate Action plans, known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs). Each successive NDC is meant to reflect an increasingly higher degree of ambition compared to the previous version.⁶

The Cities of Equality Partnership contributes to the objectives of the Paris Agreement by fostering climate-resilient, inclusive urban development. Its actions align with Article 2 of the Agreement by supporting equitable access to sustainable urban services and addressing structural inequalities that can amplify vulnerability to climate impacts, such as lack of accessibility for persons with disabilities. Through accessible intersectional and participatory approaches, the Partnership enhances adaptation capacity (Article 7), promotes just transitions (Preamble), and integrates equality into financing frameworks (Article 9), ensuring that public investment supports both social justice and climate goals. Actions focusing on spatial segregation, access to services, and mainstreaming equality in funding directly support low-emission and inclusive development pathways. Furthermore, the emphasis on citizen engagement and data-driven policy supports transparency and local ownership, echoing Article 12 on public participation and Article 13 on accountability. In this way, the Partnership strengthens the implementation of climate action across levels of governance, advancing both climate and equality objectives in European cities.

⁶ Source: The Paris Agreement (2015). What is the Paris agreement? <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement> (Accessed: February 16, 2024).

4 MONITORING

Action	Action Leaders	Targeted stakeholders / governance level	Deadlines	State of Play
 Action 1 Creating a framework to assess spatial segregation and accessibility of services	UniverCities	Policy makers at local, regional, national and EU level	January 2026: Mapping report September 2026: Data framework and related protocols; December 2026: Policy recommendation document and public event	
 Action 2 Mainstreaming equality in result-based EU funding instruments	CEMR and Metropolitan City of Rome	Policy makers at local, national and EU level	December 2025: Review of good practices in the use of performance-based funding; August 2026: Guidance document; December 2026: Stakeholder and policy engagement activities	
 Action 3 Collecting and discussing good practices of equity-attuned participatory governance	ICLEI Europe and Municipality of Heerenveen	Local governments (primary stakeholder), civil society organisations, and EU policymakers (secondary stakeholders)	December 2025: mechanisms and case studies collected July 2026: Interactive sessions held December 2026: Guidebook completed	

5 ANNEX 1. TABLE OF ACRONYMS

CCI	Cross-cutting issues
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CF	Cohesion Fund
CLLD	Community-led local development
CoR	Committee of the Regions
DG	European Commission's Directorate General
DG EMPL	Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion
DG ENER	European Commission's Directorate General for Energy
DG ENVI	European Commission's Directorate General for Environment
DG EPL	European Commission's Directorate General for Employment
DG HOME	Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs.
DG REGIO	European Commission's Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy
DGUM	Directors-General Meeting on Urban Matters
EC	European Commission
EEA	European Economic Area
EIB	European Investment Bank
EIF	European Investment Fund
EPSR	European Pillar of Social Rights
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESF+	European Social Fund plus
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
FUA	Functional Urban Area
INTERREG	European Regional Development Fund
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investments
JRC	European Commission's Joint Research Centre
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MS	Member State
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PoA	Pact of Amsterdam
SDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

UDG	Urban Development Group
UDN	EU Urban Development Network
UN	United Nations
DGUM	Directors General on Urban Matters
EAA	Ex-Ante assessment
EUI	European Urban Initiative
UAEU	Urban Agenda for the EU
UDG	Urban Development Group
UATPG	Urban Agenda Technical Preparatory Group



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