# URBACT IV

# Action Networks

## 2026 - 2029

### Guide for applicants

Co-create – Implement - Transform

# Introduction

URBACT offers cities a unique opportunity to learn from other peers in Europe in order to improve the way cities are managed. URBACT networks foster the exchange of experience and good practice across cities, building urban stakeholders' capacity to develop efficient solutions. One could say that URBACT is an accelerator of sustainable integrated urban development in Europe enabling cities to benefit from the tried and tested URBACT Method.

URBACT IV continues to bring cities together with its calls for URBACT Networks. This guide will introduce you to the URBACT networking framework. It shall provide a better understanding of what you can expect by joining an URBACT Action Network (2026 – 2029).

It contains detailed information on designing a proposal for the Action Network - how to set a partnership, how to shape your network exchange and learning programme of activities. It also clarifies the commitment and contributions expected from you as well as the added value you will get from being a partner in an URBACT network.

This guide should be read alongside the related Terms of Reference for the Call for Proposals. In addition, the URBACT Programme Manual shall be used as the main reference document for detailed information around management of networks – links are provided in the guide where relevant. In case you wish to be a Lead Partner it also outlines the main URBACT rules and procedures, as well as the network budget development.

We hope that this Guide to Action Networks will provide you with useful advice for high-quality network proposals.

Join us! Together, we drive change for better cities!

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# What does it mean to participate in an URBACT network?

Since 2002, more than 1 000 EU cities involved in URBACT have experienced the added value of transnational cooperation, the exchange of knowledge beyond national borders, and support around participatory and integrated approaches to policy-making for sustainable urban development.

Joining an URBACT Network will allow your city to benefit from a structured and organised process of exchange and learning with peers across Europe. Your city can benefit from the tried and tested URBACT Method which uses integrated, participatory and action learning approaches to develop solutions for your city.

## The essentials

URBACT Network is an exchange and learning tool for cities:
- ✓ to improve the understanding of the EU integrated sustainable urban development framework by learning and exchanging knowledge with other European cities and experts;
- ✓ to build skills through the exploration of pertinent solutions and action learning;
- ✓ to provide a safe space for experimentation of innovative approaches, managing multi-stakeholder groups and testing of new methods and tools for effective policy-making;
- ✓ to create a positive impact and ensure the sustainable transformation with integrated and participatory project management approaches.

## Transnational activities

Europe's cities often face similar challenges. Yet, although there are many solutions, it can be difficult to share these in a structured way. URBACT enables the learning environment, innovative approaches and the know-how to help cities co-design solutions to urban challenges. By bringing together cities from diverse backgrounds URBACT widens the scope of shared experiences and approaches. Through peer review with partners across Europe and exposure to different perspectives and practices one will generate new ideas for its own city as well as support other local authorities to build better solutions to their local challenges.

Transnational exchange and learning activities include site visits showing concrete examples of cities dealing with their local challenges. While exchanging with the host city staff and stakeholders questioning their approach, partner cities often reconsider their own approaches to similar issues.
By participating in the transnational activities organised by the networks, you will also have the opportunity to benefit from the thematic and methodological inputs provided by European urban experts, academics and researchers as well as practitioners and policy and decision makers at different levels.

Commitment to take an active part in the transnational exchange and learning activities is mandatory. The active contribution of all partners in the transnational activities is a key condition for a rich and effective exchange and learning process for all partners.

The tasks to be performed:
- ✓ preparation and active contribution to the transnational exchange and learning network activities around specific policy content requiring professional proficiency in English,
- ✓ possible hosting of a transnational event,
- ✓ ensuring a proper administrative management related to transnational activities.

Transnational activities in URBACT networks are conceived as a logical sequence of exchange and learning moments that will feed into partner activities at local level, and more especially support the delivery of expected outputs on the ground. Continuity in terms of participation to transnational meetings is crucial. Although clearly you may consider bringing in new participants, depending on the themes being covered during each meeting, it is recommended that the officer in charge of the URBACT Network at local level ("the local coordinator") is always on board.

## Local activities

As a partner you will have the opportunity to practice integrated and participatory approaches within the framework of the URBACT Local Group to be created in each partner city. This means applying the integrated approach - considering different policy areas and governance levels at the same time, and ensure active engagement of relevant stakeholders by practicing effective participatory methods & tools. URBACT offers wide assortment of tools to co-design and implement integrated policies with citizens, NGOs, public partners, businesses.

URBACT Local group offers safe space for learning by doing and networking with relevant partners. The URBACT Local Group will bring together representatives of different departments within the local administration (in order to ensure horizontal integration), including elected representatives, decision-makers, in charge of the policy areas being addressed. This participatory process should involve representatives of communities, residents, beneficiaries linked to the policy you intend to deal with, as well as representatives of delivery agencies, third sector and private interests when relevant. The requirement to develop a participatory approach through the URBACT Local Group should not lead to duplication, and partners can build on existing local partnerships when appropriate.

URBACT Local group can be used also as a platform for networking in order to strengthen the links with EU cohesion policy funds and build relationship with key local decision-makers notably the relevant managing authorities in charge of operational programmes.

All partners must be committed to engaging with local stakeholders and to mobilising the resources needed (in terms of human, time and financial resources). This includes identifying as soon as possible the "right" local coordinator for the network.

The co-production of expected outputs by the URBACT Local Group is a compulsory requirement for all partners involved in URBACT Networks. This is a co-creation process which requires ongoing work over the whole lifetime of the network. Partners should link the local work to what is happening in transnational meetings and should record key learnings throughout the duration of the network.

## Tailor-made expertise support for enhancing capacity in policy-making

The Programme provides each URBACT Network with a specific budget for the appointment of validated URBACT Experts to support the exchange and learning process.

Each URBACT Network will appoint a network Lead expert who will assist the network over its entire duration in order to maximise the impact of exchange and learning activities.

Ad hoc network experts will also be recruited to provide support on specific needs identified by networks such as support with the design of exchange and learning activities, specific thematic expertise and support with methods & tools for effective integrated and participatory approaches.

## Active participation in programme capacity building activities

In addition to the network activities, the URBACT Programme offers regular support to partners over the entire duration of the networks.

The URBACT Programme Secretariat organises a variety of training and capacity-building sessions for partners and local stakeholders involved in approved networks. Attendance and active participation of partners in these activities is expected. Partners in URBACT networks benefit from exclusive training and capacity-building activities, notably:

- tailor-made capacity-building events like the URBACT Summer University;
- support on cross-cutting themes – Digital transformation, Gender equality, Green transition;
- targeted training schemes for specific stakeholder groups, including elected representatives, local practitioners, among others.

Through these training sessions, URBACT aims to achieve sustained impact by improving the way cities work with their communities beyond the life span of the URBACT network.

Specific training sessions will be organised for the Lead Partner's team on topics which can help deliver the project successfully. In addition, all network partners as well as network Lead experts will be invited to attend general information and guidance sessions as well specific practical working sessions in order to share and exchange together about the learning experience in different networks.

## Communication, knowledge and visibility activities for URBACT beneficiaries

If no one talks about it, it is as if it did not happen. This is why communicating about ongoing activities and final results is crucial. Besides meeting the necessary EU publicity and visibility rules (as described in the URBACT Programme Manual "Communication at network level"), the network's findings and lessons learnt should be shared more widely, with all urban practitioners who may be facing similar policy challenges across Europe. Producing the right content through suitable channels – with a target audience in mind – will be of great help when seeking mindset changes and getting more people on board.

Over the years, URBACT has developed different communication channels and tools to communicate on the work of URBACT networks and cities. At EU level, the URBACT website gives visibility to all approved URBACT networks through dedicated network pages where networks can upload articles, videos and materials produced by the cities for an external audience. In addition, the work of URBACT networks

and cities is promoted to a wide EU audience through URBACT newsletters, social media, reports, publications, infographics and videos.

The URBACT programme also puts forward the work and outputs of cities involved in URBACT networks during EU events like the URBACT City Festivals, the European Week for Cities and Regions, the EU Cities Forum, UN-HABITAT events like World Urban Forums, and makes connections between URBACT networks and other initiatives/organisations working on sustainable urban development (European Commission, European Urban Initiative, Urban Agenda for the EU, Council of European Municipalities and Cities, European Investment Bank, and others).

Finally, the URBACT Knowledge Hub brings together, analyses, and synthetises content and good practices coming from URBACT networks and other organisations when necessary. Various knowledge sharing activities are facilitated where partners can be invited to share their experience with wider audience.

# PART I

# Action Network    Essentials

This section provides essentials around the URBACT networking framework. It shall give a better understanding of what one can expect by joining an URBACT Action Network. It clarifies the commitment, expected activities and outputs, as well as, the added value of the learning journey.

# Action Networks Journey

In an URBACT Action Network, cities exchange experiences, co-develop solutions and implement a portfolio of actions, generating practical knowledge on how urban change can be delivered in practice. Action implementation is the core driver of learning, allowing cities to experiment, adjust approaches, identify what works, and prepare for scaling up successful actions through local or European funding.

Cities in Action Networks are expected to build on an existing strategy or policy framework, ensuring strategic coherence and political relevance. They commit to:

- Refining, implementing and monitoring a limited number of concrete actions addressing clearly identified local challenges;
- Mobilising an URBACT Local Group and organising Action Labs to co-implement actions through a participatory approach;
- Using transnational exchange to compare implementation approaches, overcome common barriers and refine actions throughout the network lifecycle.

Each partner city produces an **Action Portfolio**, documenting the actions implemented, the learning generated and the emerging results.

At network level, partners jointly produce an **Actions Playbook**, capturing collective learning and providing practical recommendations for other cities, policymakers and European organisations.

## ❭ Actions within URBACT Action Networks

A defining feature of URBACT Action Networks is the opportunity for partner cities to implement concrete actions during the lifetime of the network. Each partner city will benefit from a dedicated budget to support the delivery of selected local actions, enabling cities to move beyond planning and to implement and refine solutions in practice.

These actions should contribute to addressing the shared policy challenge explored by the network, while responding to the specific needs and context of each partner city. Actions are expected to build on an existing local strategy, policy framework or Integrated Action Plan, and contribute to advancing its implementation.

Action Networks build on the programme's established integrated and participatory approach to action planning, which brings together local stakeholders to jointly refine and implement urban solutions. Partner cities are encouraged to mobilise their local stakeholder ecosystem - public authorities, civil society, private sector actors and citizens, throughout the action implementation process. This approach ensures that actions remain relevant, feasible and anchored in local governance structures. The implementation of actions allows cities to test elements of their strategies in practice, generate learning and progressively refine their policy responses.

Urban policy delivery is not a linear process but a continuous cycle of planning, implementation, learning and adaptation. In Action Networks, cities are supported to move through this cycle by implementing selected actions and learning from their delivery.

Actions implemented in the network may therefore serve different purposes within this policy cycle, including:

✓ **Prototyping**

Cities may test small-scale pilot interventions that explore new ideas or innovative approaches to urban challenges. Prototyping allows partners to assess feasibility and gather initial insights before committing to larger investments.

✓ **Experimentation**

Cities can experiment with new policy tools, governance arrangements, services or interventions, testing alternative approaches and adapting them to the local context.

✓ **Evaluation**

Actions may focus on assessing existing initiatives or measures already underway, allowing cities to better understand their effectiveness and generate evidence to inform policy decisions.

✓ **Consolidation**

Cities may use the network to strengthen and refine ongoing initiatives, improving governance arrangements, partnerships or operational processes in order to prepare actions for scaling up or mainstreaming.

Through these different forms of action, cities develop practical knowledge about what works, under which conditions and with which stakeholders.

# Examples of possible actions

Actions implemented within the framework of URBACT Action Networks are expected to be practical interventions that test or improve ways of addressing urban challenges, while remaining feasible within the limited budget, duration of the network as well as generating practical insights and evidence.

URBACT is not designed to finance large-scale infrastructure investment or construction projects. Instead, the programme supports "soft" actions that improve policies, governance methods, services, participation mechanisms and organisational practices in cities. Actions therefore typically focus on testing new approaches, improving coordination between stakeholders, piloting services, or experimenting with new governance and policy tools. Even though large infrastructure investments, construction works or major capital projects are outside the scope of URBACT Action Networks, actions may contribute to preparing, testing or informing future investment projects.

Below are illustrative examples of the types of actions that could be implemented:

✓ **Piloting new services or policy tools:**

Cities may pilot services or operational tools designed to address a specific urban challenge. For examples:
- Piloting a new municipal advisory service for local businesses on circular economy practices.
- Piloting a one-stop-shop service for vulnerable residents to access housing or social support.
- Piloting a digital platform for citizen reporting or neighbourhood problem-solving.
- Trialling a temporary mobility service, such as shared cargo bikes for local deliveries.

These pilots allow cities to observe how the service works in practice, identify operational challenges and gather feedback from users.

✓ **Piloting new governance or coordination mechanisms:**

Actions may focus on improving how institutions and stakeholders work together to deliver urban policies. For example:

- Creating a cross-departmental task force within the municipality to coordinate climate adaptation measures.
- Establishing a local partnership platform bringing together public authorities, NGOs and private actors to tackle homelessness.
- Testing new participatory governance formats, such as neighbourhood assemblies or co-design workshops with citizens.
- Piloting new internal working methods to improve coordination between municipal departments.

Such actions help cities strengthen institutional capacity, collaboration and integrated policy delivery.

✓ **Temporary urban interventions and tactical actions:**

Cities may test temporary urban interventions that allow them to observe behavioural change or test spatial solutions before longer-term decisions are made. For example:

- Piloting temporary pedestrianisation or traffic calming measures in selected streets.
- Piloting temporary public space uses (pop-up parks, cultural activities or community spaces).
- Experimenting with temporary cycling infrastructure or mobility lanes.
- Creating temporary demonstration spaces for green infrastructure or nature-based solutions.

These actions enable cities to experiment with spatial solutions at low cost and low risk, while gathering evidence on their effects.

✓ **Community engagement and co-creation initiatives:**

Cities may implement actions designed to strengthen citizen participation and stakeholder engagement in policy delivery. For example:

- Launching a co-creation process with residents to redesign a local service or neighbourhood initiative.
- Piloting new participatory budgeting mechanisms for small local projects.
- Running community-led pilot initiatives addressing social inclusion or local sustainability challenges.
- Organising citizen labs or urban living labs to explore innovative solutions.

These actions support the participatory governance principles at the core of the URBACT method.

✓ **Capacity-building and organisational change:**

Some actions may focus on developing new capacities, tools or practices within the local administration or stakeholder ecosystem. For example:

- Developing and testing new monitoring tools or policy indicators for a city strategy.
- Piloting training programmes for municipal staff on integrated policy delivery.
- Piloting new procurement approaches that support social or environmental objectives.
- Developing new guidelines, toolkits or operational procedures within the municipality.

Such actions help cities strengthen their long-term ability to design and implement effective policies.

✓ **Piloting the transfer or adaptation of practices from other cities:**

Actions may also focus on adapting and testing solutions identified within the network. For example:

- Adapting a participatory budgeting model successfully implemented in another partner city.
- Piloting a community energy initiative inspired by another network partner.
- Replicating a local food governance model or urban agriculture initiative.

Through such actions, cities explore how solutions can be transferred and adapted to different contexts.

## ❯ 30 – month Journey Overview

Action networks will have a total duration of 30 months, from 1st November 2026 to 30th April 2029. The Network Journey will be structured around three core stages:

### ➔ Stage 1 – Activation stage – 7 months (November 2026 – May 2027)

All networks start with an activation stage. This stage is dedicated to the development of a detailed roadmap of network activities and a consolidation of a well-balanced and coherent partnership. This will be done within the framework of the well-established URBACT Baseline Study process to be carried out by the network Lead expert. It includes the state-of-the-art analysis for the policy challenges being tackled by the network, partner visits for understanding specific local policy contexts and the identification of common denominators as the basis for designing and defining the focus and types of activities for effective network exchange and learning in the following stages of the network. The latter will be presented in the key network output of the activation stage - the Network Roadmap.

**First three months of the Activation stage will be dedicated to the contracting and onboarding** for project partners and Lead experts. In January 2027, URBACT Secretariat will organise an in-person launch meeting for Lead partners and Lead experts of approved Action networks. In parallel, essential information sessions will be organised online for all partners for proper start of the network journey. The attendance to these sessions is compulsory. After these initiation sessions, all networks are invited to organise the proper network kick off meetings to discuss details arounds organisation of different activities taking place in the activation stage. Online format is suggested for these meetings.

**In the following part of the activation stage (January – May 2027),** partners will be able to set-up their local teams and identify stakeholders to be involved in URBACT Local Group and prepare the visits linked to the Baseline Study process. These visits shall also provide guidance to partners for defining the first component of the Action Portfolio - Strategic anchor & Action scope outlining the actions to be implemented in the following stages of the network.

The first in-person "**Ready for Action" Network meeting** gathering the entire partnership shall be organised in this period as well. The focus of this meeting shall be around the results of the Baseline Study process. The outcome of this meeting shall be a mutual agreement around the itinerary and focus of network exchange and leaning activities as well as the methodological framework for local activities and the desired impact to take place during the following stages of the journey.

During the activation stage, all networks will set up their respective **network pages on the urbact.eu website**. For this purpose, networks will have to produce and share with the URBACT Secretariat the communication materials aligned with the EU requirements. It includes the drafting of **a network communication plan**, outlining the common objectives, messages, intended target audience, agreed channels and operational communication activities. This document will complement the network roadmap and define the networks' ambitions for sharing results.

✓ **After the end of the Activation Stage (June – July 2027) the Network Roadmap as well as the proposed actions will be reviewed by the URBACT Secretariat in order to validate the budget framework for the implementation of actions (for more information please check the budget for actions in Part IV of the guide).**

➔ **Stage 2 – Develop & Deliver – 20 months (June 2027 – January 2029)**

It is the longest and essential part of the journey during which each network follows its own customised Network Roadmap. Main activities and deliverables of Stage 2 shall include:
- Transnational exchange and peer learning activities inspiring the design and the delivery of activities at local level.
- Organisation of Action labs in each partner city for the development and delivery of concrete actions on the ground.
- The co-production of an Action Portfolio by stakeholders gathered in an URBACT Local Group in each partner city.
- Co-Production of the bespoke Network final output – Actions Playbook.

**An URBACT Summer University will take place in August 2027** where the entire URBACT Action Networks community will be able to meet and build skills for the effective implementation of expected activities on the ground. More information about this event will be shared at the start of the networks.

**Targeted and tailor-made programme capacity building activities** will complement the network activities with further support in all the key aspects related to integrated and participatory implementation throughout the networks' duration. In addition, the use of the URBACT Toolbox will be strongly encouraged with possible live tutorials around various tools.

**Communication and outreach activities** shall take place including the management of a network webpage on the URBACT website, production of Network Journals and articles, communicating on social media, organisation of dissemination events, etc.

**Knowledge Hub** initiated by the URBACT Secretariat will focus on identifying relevant content coming from different networks or partner cities, in order to create or reinforce synergies and contributions among different parties and external partners.

**The Mid-term reflection (MTR) process** will enable to pause and reflect on the progress being made at the mid-term of the network journey. It will be a well-structured and guided process which should be useful for the network partners and of minimal administrative burden for all concerned. Based on the results of the MTR, networks will have the possibility to adjust and reprogram network activities and the budget. Further guidance will be provided on this point following approval of networks.

Upon request from URBACT beneficiaries, **National URBACT Points** can have an emphasised supporting role at local level during this stage. They will act as enablers for networking with key local stakeholders and decision-makers (notably the relevant managing authorities in charge of operational programmes) by organising relevant networking events and providing communication support to partners.

➔ **Final stage – 3 months (February 2029 – April 2029)**

The final three months of the Action networks journey could be described as "Back to the future". It is dedicated to the finalisation of the expected network outputs and sharing of results. During this stage, networks are expected to organise a final network event with the focus on showcasing the results of the network and partners' achievements.

But not only, it is also about "cleaning up after the party". In this final stage, main network management and coordination activities shall focus on the network formal closure.

# The URBACT Action networks journey in a nutshell (infographic)
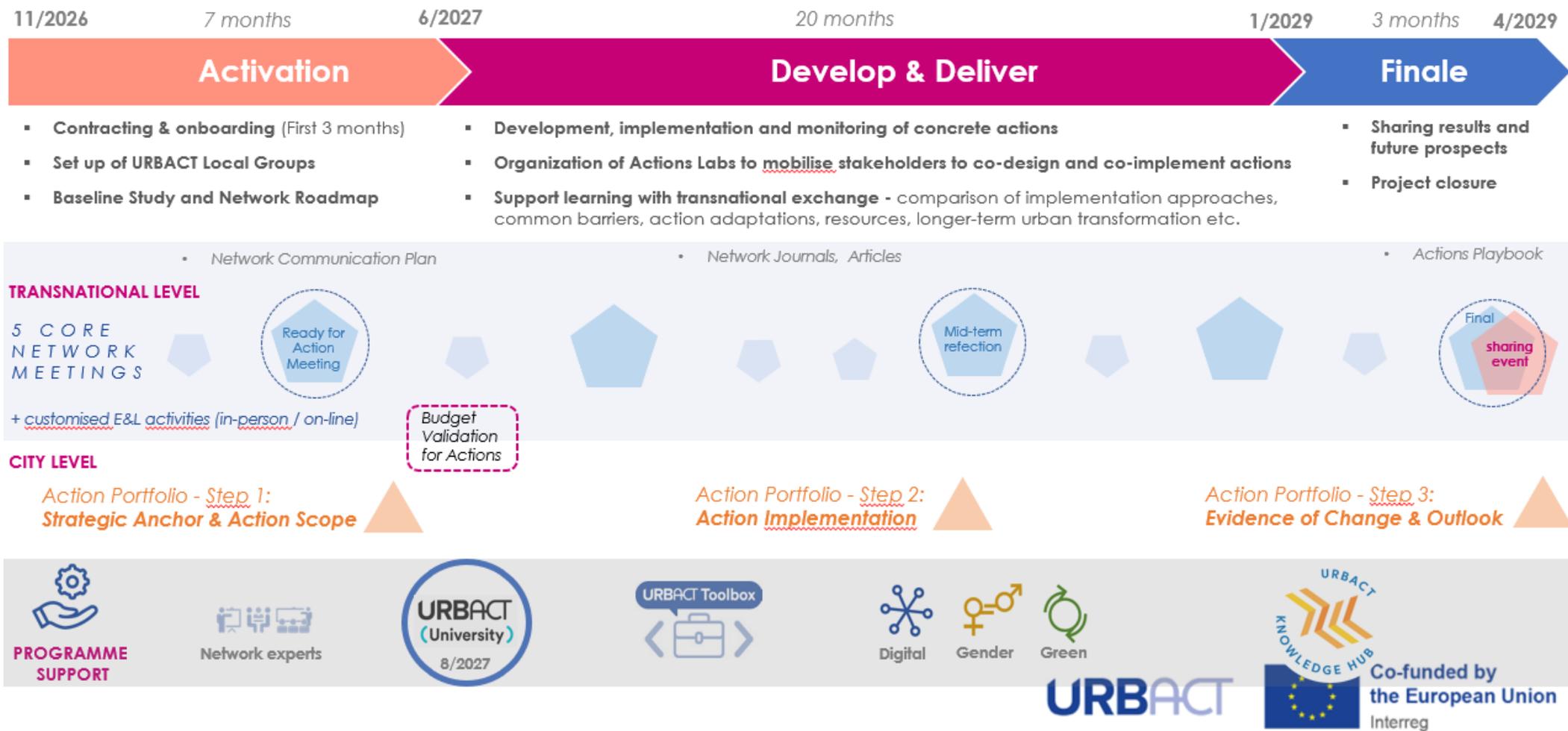
# The organisation of key activities and outputs

The activities in URBACT networks are always structured around 3 Work Packages (WPs).

> WP1 — Network Management
> WP2 — Network Level (Transnational) Activities
> WP3 — Local Level Activities

Each work package has its own aim. Work package 1 focuses on network management and coordination and is crucial to ensure the correct functioning of the network. Work Package 2 and Work Package 3 are intertwined and shall feed each other - a continuous flow of knowledge between the transnational and the local level activities should therefore exist, for effective results.
Communication and dissemination activities are spread throughout all Work Packages.

**Each work package outlines activities that shall take place** in order to achieve the desired outcomes. Regardless of uniqueness of network work programmes all networks shall follow the same framework for shaping the network activities.

Moreover, **Work Package 2 and 3 define a set of standard outputs** that should be produced by all networks. Programme aims to increase the impact and effectiveness of the exchange and learning in networks by focusing on the process and avoid unnecessary production of outputs. By analysing our various types of outputs and activities in past projects we have been able to identify the most useful elements in order to improve the overall URBACT experience for partners.

All proposed standard outputs shall be considered in network proposals. Proposed standardised outputs allow plenty of space for diversification and creativity within the given frames. A menu of possibilities and guidelines around what works best in any specific context are provided in the following sections of the guide.

All applicants are invited to propose as well customised network activities/ outputs in addition to standard expected outputs. Based on the principles and ideas defined in the application form these will be further developed and elaborated during the Activation stage based on the Baseline Study process. The Network Roadmap (key network output of Activation stage) will provide detailed description of different network activities which will respond to specific network needs for maximising the impact of exchange and learning in URBACT.

## Work Package 1 - Network Management

The activities to be developed under Work Package 1 aim to ensure the sound management and coordination of the network concerning both the overall project management and all aspects of administrative and financial management. These also include organisation of responsibilities between the partners by building a strong collaborative relationship and ensuring the effective communication flows within the network and external audience.

❭ **Key activities include:**

- To sign all the contractual documents at Programme and network level
- Recruiting, if necessary, appropriate staff to ensure efficient project management and communication

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- Regular coordination meetings to ensure strong communication between partners concerning project coordination
- Appointment and coordination of network Lead and Ad hoc experts in line with expertise framework provided by the programme
- Submission of official reporting documents by all partners – every 12 months
- Organise the Mid-term reflection process at the end of Planning actions stage
- Regular network management 'health checks' with the URBACT Joint Secretariat
- Final closure documents (end of the project) to be submitted by all partners
- To receive and transfer funds to partners (Lead Partner's responsibility)
- Ensuring communication on the network's activities and results with contribution from all project partners in compliance with EU publicity guidelines. It should take place on ongoing basis with regular updates of the project mini-site on the URBACT website.
- Delivering operational actions to implement the network communication plan (producing and publishing content on the network website and other channels), in addition to monitoring, evaluating and adapting the communication plan.
- Lead partners providing assistance and guidance to all project partners for external communication activities.
- Attending information and training sessions and other relevant events organised by the URBACT Programme (based on the invitation).

A dedicated online networking space will be enabled for all network partners in order to facilitate the coordination and flow of information. This online space will be used as a central channel for communication with the entire URBACT community. It enables an effective management of information, content, processes and outputs. This includes:

- A repository of key URBACT guidance and reference materials for different activities gathered in a dedicated "One stop support shop" suitcase/ folder.
- The targeted message boards for sharing news and key announcements
- The collaborative Calendar of all network and programme activities
- Automatic check-ins for gathering feedback around key deliverables
- Campfire for quick peer Q&A support
- Network folders with key outputs produced on the way
- Private network basecamp spaces managed by Lead partners

*Further details and information about different elements related to functioning and management of URBACT networks including all aspects of administrative and financial management is provided in the* **URBACT IV Programme Manual** *– BOOK ONE – The URBACT Networks.*


# Work Package 2 - Network level (Transnational) Activities

The aim of (transnational) network level activities is to support partners in improving their local policies in relation to the policy challenge. Including:
- Sharing: To explore solutions and foster the exchange of experiences among partners
- Learning: To strengthen the practical knowledge and skills of partners in the respective policy area
- Applying: To draw lessons from the transnational exchange on an ongoing basis and to apply them at local level, especially through the delivery of activities on the ground.

⟩ **Key Network-level activities include:**

A detailed methodological approach to structuring and organising transnational exchange and learning is key to a successful URBACT network. As transnational exchange is, by definition, collaboration between languages, learning styles, culture, governance models, a clearly defined framework is vital. The detailed methodology for the transnational network activities will be determined during the activation stage based on the Baseline Study process and presented in Network Roadmaps. All partners will have a role in the design process. Nevertheless, all applicants are invited to present key principles and ideas for shaping their network activities already in the application process.

Organisation of transnational exchange and learning activities should be comprised of different components including network meetings with specific thematic inputs, workshops, field visits, peer review sessions, and dissemination activities, etc. The following activities are expected:

### 1. At least 5 in-person transnational network meetings

Out of the at least five in-person transnational network meetings, three meetings shall have the standardised focus related to the specific milestone in different stages:
- ✓ Stage 1: "Ready for action" meeting;
- ✓ Stage 2: "Mid-term reflection" meeting
- ✓ Stage 3: Final network meeting and sharing event.

### 2. Customised set of exchange and learning activities:

Combination of in-person and online activities is expected. Applicants are expected to suggest general principles and ideas for organisation of these activities depending on the specific needs related to the network ambition and the policy challenge tackled. Exact number and formats shall be defined during activation stage based on the Baseline Study process. Further guidelines for shaping customised activities are provided in Part III of the guide.

⟩ **Key Network-level Outputs include:**

### 1. The Baseline Study and Network Roadmap

The Network Roadmap is a key network deliverable to be produced during the Activation stage. It will describe in detail the policy challenges the network is facing, placing it within the context of the EU's urban policy priorities. The insights from the Baseline study process will provide key details of each partner's background, the local conditions, context as well as potential for engagement. Most importantly, the Network Roadmap will set out the network's customised exchange and learning methodology based on the identified assets and barriers as well as the complementarities between partners.

The production of the Network Roadmap based on the Baseline study process is the main responsibility of the Lead Expert, but requires the input of all partners in the network. The Lead Expert (ideally accompanied by the Lead Partner) is required to visit and interview all partners in order to develop the partners' profiles for the study. The study will build on the different contributions provided by partners (local data, strategic priorities, delivery structures, related interventions etc.)

During these visits the Lead Expert (and Lead Partner) should present the URBACT framework and the specific objectives and focus of the Network, and review the local situation and experiences in relation

to the focus of the network. The partner visits should be organised in close cooperation with the partners and include possible meetings with the relevant project coordination staff, possible URBACT local group coordinator, elected representative(s), civil servants concerned with the policy challenge addressed, relevant delivery bodies and other local stakeholders identified as potential members of the URBACT Local Group. Clear political support for the participation of the city in the URBACT Network should be demonstrated by all partners involved and shall be investigated during the visits from the Lead Expert and Lead Partner.

Specific guidelines for the Baseline Study process will be available for approved Action Networks. Below are a few examples of good Baseline Studies from previous URBACT Networks:
- URBACT IV Action Planning Network – [Breaking Isolation](#)
- URBACT IV Action Planning Network – [One Health 4 Cities Baseline Study](#)
- URBACT III Action Planning Network – [URGE Baseline Study](#)


## 2. Co-development and implementation of the Network Communication Plan

Communication is everyone's business and, both for transparency but also increasing visibility reasons, all project partners should be involved with the development of the communication plan, setting objectives, messages, target audiences, channels and planning at network-level. The plan shall include specific content and milestones to be shared widely, as showcasing results from network activities, optional events open to attendants beyond project partners, news and articles. Further information around network communication are provided in the [Programme Manual](#) – Book 1.

## 3. Network Journals

Production of various thematic and methodological outputs shall take place during the lifetime of the network in order to ensure an effective uptake of knowledge. For this, structured process of interim updates on network progress is suggested. We expect different thematic and methodological productions to be captured and summarised in Network Journals:

✓ 3 Network Journals are expected to be produced and shared during Stage 2.

Preferably, these reports should aim to capture and connect learning for the partners in the network but these shall also have an adequate format for network communication - the knowledge generated by the network is interesting and useful for a wider audience of local, regional, national and EU-level policy makers and practitioners not directly involved in the network activities. Therefore, these shall include at least:
- Highlights from network activities;
- Thematic and methodological inputs related to the network exchange and learning activities;
- Partners' local activities and progress made in relation to the delivery of expected outputs;
- Brief presentation of tools developed and/ or used demonstrating integrated and participatory approaches.

Networks are free to design their own unique visual identity which can be inspired and combined with a variety of formats showcasing network activities in concise and effective way. The periodical network reports shall be shared as regular network webpage updates.

# 4. Network Articles

All Action Networks shall produce <u>at least three network articles</u> throughout the network duration in order to showcase the interim results of the network activities to a wider audience in a concise format. Each network article will reflect the state of play linked to the specific milestone of the network journey:

- ✓ First network article shall present network challenges and ambition. It will be published on the network webpage during the activation stage as a first network output dedicated to wider audience.
- ✓ Second network article shall be shared at mid-term (in Stage 2) summarising results from local activities and key network learning insights.
- ✓ The third article shall be shared in final stage and reflect final network results, impact at local level, as well as future prospects.

# 5. Final Network Output - Actions Playbook

At network level, partners shall jointly produce a <u>bespoke Actions Playbook</u> capturing learning from all partner cities and providing actionable guidance for other cities, policy-makers and European organisations.

<u>The Actions Playbook shall include, at a minimum, the following components:</u>

- ✓ **Synthesis of Implemented Actions and Delivery Experience**

A structured synthesis of the actions implemented across partner cities, focusing on how actions were delivered in practice. This component shall serve as a practical implementation reference for other cities and an evidence base for decision-makers considering policy adaptation or scaling. This section shall:

- Present the types of actions implemented;
- Identify common implementation challenges and enabling factors;
- Describe governance, organisational and delivery solutions applied;
- Analyse cost structures and resource mobilisation patterns;
- Summarise key conditions that influenced implementation success or failure.

- ✓ **Scaling and Replication Pathways**

A forward-looking framework building on the implementation evidence, identifying options for continuation, scaling and transfer beyond the network. This component shall support mainstreaming into local policy frameworks, follow-up of funding and investment decisions, and policy dialogue at national and European level. This section shall:

- Identify actions with demonstrated potential for scaling or replication, including preconditions;
- Distinguish clearly between transferable elements and context-specific factors;
- Outline policy, funding or governance adjustments required to sustain or expand actions;
- Assess risks, constraints and sustainability requirements.

**In addition to the Actions Playbook, networks are free to develop any other outputs** they think of relevance for an external audience i.e. tools for cities, recommendations to European policy makers, manifestos, etc.

# Work Package 3 – Local level activities

The URBACT Local Group aims to have an impact on local governance and practices by enabling safe space for the innovation in city administrations. It promotes the environment for active involvement of local stakeholders in co-creation processes on the ground. It fosters:
- Development of organisational culture by building bridges inside the city administration as well as with external actors.
- Building relationship with stakeholders involved by exploring and testing solutions together.
- Improved professional capacity by practicing tools & methods for effective design and delivery processes.

## ❭ Key activities include:

- Setting up and running a URBACT Local Group for the delivery of expected outputs on the ground.
- Organisation of participatory Action Labs focused on the development and delivery of actions. It can be used as a tool for triggering the stakeholders' engagement and the observation of practical barriers and enabling factors encountered during delivery of actions.
- Taking part in the exchange activities at transnational level and contribute to these activities (participation to seminars with relevant delegates, organisation of study visits, production of inputs, etc.).
- Taking part in the capacity-building activities organised by the URBACT Secretariat for local stakeholders involved in URBACT Local Groups.
- Share results and lessons learnt and good practices to local stakeholders involved in urban development and wider EU community.
- Publishing a news and a poster regarding the partner's implication in the URBACT network, according to the EU publicity requirements.
- Translating the network communication plan into communication activities at local level (e.g. local events, social media channels in local languages and coordinated efforts with the National URBACT Points).
- Making links with EU cohesion policy funds by building cooperation relationships with Managing Authorities of Operational Programmes.

## ❭ URBACT Action Labs:

As part of the action implementation process in URBACT Action Networks, cities are encouraged to organise Action Labs within the framework of their URBACT Local Group (ULG).

Action Labs are practical working sessions where local stakeholders are invited to collaborate - test, refine and learn from the implementation of actions. They represent a key mechanism for maintaining the participatory and integrated approach that characterises the URBACT method, while supporting cities in moving from planning to delivery.

Through Action Labs, partner cities can engage stakeholders directly in the experimentation, implementation and evaluation of actions, ensuring that solutions are continuously improved based on practical experience and feedback.

Action Labs can provide a structured space for collaborative problem-solving and reflection during the action implementation phase. Their objectives include:
- Supporting the co-design and refinement of actions before implementation
- Facilitating stakeholder involvement during action delivery
- Generating practical learning and feedback from implementation
- Identifying barriers, risks and necessary adjustments
- Exploring opportunities for scaling, replication or mainstreaming

Action Labs help ensure that actions remain relevant, feasible and anchored in the local governance ecosystem but also to think beyond the established processes and practices. This can include:

✓ **Action design and refinement:**
Before implementation, Action Labs can support the co-development of actions through activities such as:
- Problem definition and root cause analysis
- Stakeholder mapping and role definition
- Co-design workshops to refine the action concept
- Development or improvement of the action canvas or SMART action table
- Identification of risks, assumptions and implementation conditions

These activities help ensure that actions are well grounded in local needs and stakeholder perspectives.

✓ **Implementation support and problem solving:**
During action implementation, Action Labs can help stakeholders monitor progress and address challenges through:
- Regular progress reviews and milestone checks
- Identification of operational challenges or governance issues
- Joint problem-solving sessions
- Coordination between stakeholders involved in delivery
- Adjustments to the action design based on practical experience

This allows cities to adapt actions dynamically as implementation unfolds.

✓ **Stakeholder engagement and co-creation:**
Action Labs may also be used to engage broader groups of stakeholders or citizens in the delivery of actions. Possible activities include:
- Citizen workshops or neighbourhood consultations
- Co-creation sessions with local organisations
- Feedback sessions with action beneficiaries or users
- Participatory design or service testing activities

These activities help ensure that actions remain inclusive and responsive to community needs.

✓ **Learning and reflection**
A key purpose of Action Labs is to capture lessons from implementation, contributing to the development of the Action Portfolio.
Learning-oriented activities may include:
- Reflection sessions on what worked and what did not
- Identification of enabling factors and barriers

- Collection of qualitative evidence (testimonials, user feedback, stories)
- Documentation of changes in governance, practices or capacities
- Discussion on potential improvements or adaptations

These discussions help generate valuable insights for the city and the wider URBACT network.

✓ **Exploring future pathways**

Towards the later stages of the network, Action Labs can also support strategic reflection on the future of the actions. Activities may include:
- Assessing the potential for scaling or mainstreaming
- Identifying opportunities for replication in other neighbourhoods or cities
- Exploring potential funding sources or policy integration
- Defining next steps beyond the network lifetime;

✓ **Contribution to the Action Portfolio**

Insights generated through Action Labs contribute directly to the documentation of the Action Portfolio, particularly by:
- capturing stakeholder perspectives and learning from practice
- documenting implementation challenges and adaptations
- identifying early signals of change and impact
- supporting reflection on future development pathways

Through this process, Action Labs help ensure that the Action Portfolio reflects not only what actions were implemented, but also how cities learned from the process and strengthened their capacity to deliver urban policies.

## ❭ Key local-level output

### Action Portfolio

In URBACT Action Networks, cities work towards the production of an Action Portfolio, which becomes the main city-level legacy of the network. The Action Portfolio documents the actions implemented, the learning generated through practice, and evidence of change resulting from their delivery. By the end of the Action Network, cities will have:

- Implemented concrete actions;
- Documented what worked and what did not;
- Demonstrated impact across people, institutions and the city system;
- Identified pathways for scaling, replication or mainstreaming beyond the network lifetime.

The Action Portfolio is based on an existing local strategy, policy or action plan and is progressively developed during the lifetime of the network in order to demonstrate how an action system evolves and produces tangible change.

Action Portfolio consists of several components produced on the way:

**1. Strategic Anchor & Action Scope** (Delivered in Stage 1):
Each partner city shall produce a concise strategic reference note including the outline of actions to be implemented. The main content shall be drawn from the Baseline Study process. The component includes:

- A reference to the existing local strategy, policy framework or action plan underpinning the actions;
- An explanation of how the selected actions contribute to political priorities and long-term urban objectives;
- A description of the systemic challenge addressed.

In addition, cities provide information for the actions they intend to implement presented in the format of i.e. SMART action table or canvas, outlining:
- The problem being addressed, objectives and target group;
- Intended objectives and expected change;
- Key stakeholders and governance arrangements;
- Indicative resources and delivery timeframe;
- Key assumptions and risks.

Action canvases/ tables define the initial scope of actions and serve as a working basis for implementation and the specific budget allocation. They are expected to be refined and adapted during the delivery phase of the network.

## 2. Action Implementation (Delivered in Stage 2):
Each partner city shall document the action implementation process including key deliverables and learning. Actions shall be real interventions delivered on the ground, feasible within the network duration and proportionate to the resources available.

For each Action, cities shall observe and capture lessons derived from the implementation process, including:
- Stakeholder involvement and governance arrangements in practice;
- Resources mobilised (financial, human, political)
- Outputs delivered, timeline, milestones;
- Key implementation challenges, adaptations, trade-offs, adjustments made during delivery, procurement and organisational challenges;
- Early results and observable change;
- Practical lessons learned: barriers, enabling factors, capacity and governance needs, including elements that did not produce the expected results.

## 3. Evidence of Change & Outlook (Consolidated in stage 3):
Cities document the changes generated through action implementation in order to identify early signals of change and how learning feeds forward. It can include:
- Evidence of systemic, organisational or professional change triggered by action implementation;
- A concise set of indicators and qualitative evidence (outputs, early outcomes, testimonials, stories, visuals);
- Reflection on what is likely to be sustained, scaled or adapted;
- Clear next-step commitments beyond the network lifetime.

Evidence may include indicators, qualitative narratives, testimonials, visual material or other relevant sources. Full impact evaluation is not required; the focus is on credible evidence of contribution to change. It can reflect several levels:
- Individual / professional level: New skills, knowledge or confidence among staff and stakeholders; Changes in professional practices or mindsets.
- Institutional level: New or strengthened partnerships; Changes in governance arrangements or internal working methods; New routines, tools or procedures introduced. Capacity development within the local administration or stakeholder ecosystem.
- City / system level: Outputs delivered and services improved; Early outcome signals (e.g. access, use, behaviour, trust, efficiency); Policy, funding or regulatory changes initiated.

# Summary of network outputs

| | Standard network outputs<br>as required in application submission system Synergie CTE | | | Customised Outputs<br>to be developed by the network during the Activation stage | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| WP | Type of Output | Quantity | When | Type of output | When |
| 2 | Network roadmap (Baseline study) | One per network | At the end of Activation stage | | |
| 2 | Network communication plan | One per network | At the end of Activation stage | | |
| 2 | Transnational Network meetings (Core network in-person meetings) | At least 5 (3 with pre-defined specific focus in each stage) | 1 in Activation stage, 1 in Stage 2, 1 in final stage (with optional back to back final event) Additionally, at least 2 meetings in Stage 2 and 3 | Customised set of exchange and learning activities (in-person or online) | Notably during Stage 2 |
| 2 | Network Journals | 3 per network | To be shared in Stage 2 | Optional set of sharing products to be foreseen by each network based on the communication plan | To be defined in communication plan |
| 2 | Network articles | At least 3 per network | 1st at the end of Activation stage 2nd at the Mid-term 3rd in final stage | | |
| 2 | Final Network Output: Actions Playbook | 1 per network | In final stage | | |
| 3 | URBACT Local Group (contact list) | 1 per partner | At the end of Activation stage (and later depending on updates) | | |
| 3 | Action Portfolio | 1 per partner | Component 1 in Activation stage Final version in final stage | | |

All required standard outputs shall be considered in network proposals. All applicants are invited to propose as well customised network activities/ outputs in addition to standard network outputs. Based on the principles and ideas defined in the application form these will be further developed and elaborated during the Activation stage based on the Baseline Study process. Details around key principles for shaping different activities and outputs at network and local level to be proposed in the application form are further provided in Part III of the guide.

# PART II

## Setting up an Action Network

This section complements the Terms of Reference of the call for Action Network proposals with useful suggestions corresponding to the following sections of the application form:

- ✓ section 2 – Thematic content
- ✓ section 3 – Rationale of proposed partnership

# Defining the thematic focus

An URBACT Action Network is built around a shared policy challenge providing the platform for the exchange of lessons and experience around designing and delivering integrated and participatory policies for sustainable urban development. It contributes to the EU cohesion policy objective 5 – Europe closer to citizen. Moreover, the shared policy challenge addressed by the network creates a bond between partners.

The identification of the policy challenge to be addressed in the network is an initial key step when preparing an application in the framework of the call for proposals. Section 3 of the Terms of Reference document provides a thorough description of possible thematic coverage for Action planning networks. Here you will find additional reflections to be considered when defining the thematic scope, the network shall address.

❭ **Have you consulted what your colleagues from other departments are working on?**

The decision on the preferred policy issue should be based on an honest assessment of local priorities and challenges discussed within the candidate city, with colleagues from different departments, with elected representatives and other relevant stakeholders (including residents and final beneficiaries). You should make sure:

- ✓ there is a clear understanding of the policy challenges you intend to address,
- ✓ policy challenges are considered as priorities in the local political agenda and shared by other departments and stakeholders,
- ✓ there is a clear political willingness to support the design process of the Action Portfolio, and,
- ✓ the implementation of the Action Portfolio is identified in the foresight of city opportunities as well as feasible and timely in relation to the city funding priorities.

This preliminary assessment is essential for all partners involved in the network.

❭ **Would your policy challenge interest other cities in Europe?**

You should reflect on the relevance of the policy challenges identified for other European cities and more especially on the contribution that the Action network will provide to other policy-makers and practitioners facing similar local challenges in Europe and beyond. Action networks are first of all conceived as tools to increase the capacity of cities in the design of integrated and participatory policies for sustainable urban development, but they are also expected to generate knowledge (in the form of case studies, most recent policy trends in different thematic fields, policy recommendations, etc.) to feed into the debate at EU, national and regional levels.

❭ **How should the policy challenge be structured in your proposal?**

The thematic content of the network is an important component of the application form and the proposal should clearly set out the following points:

## A summary of the policy challenge addressed:

The application should include a clear and detailed analysis of the policy challenge, citing evidence of the scale of the problem (e.g. high levels of youth unemployment, low business start-up rates, incidence of $CO_2$ emissions etc.). It should provide some explanation of why this particular challenge was selected and how it is relevant for the network partners.

It is important to be very specific when developing a policy challenge. A well-defined and focused policy challenge will help cities develop better quality exchange and more focused solutions.

## The relevance of the policy challenge within the urban dimension of EU cohesion policy context:

Relevance is an important criterion in the selection of the Action networks. This must be communicated in the application form in two ways:

- ✓ Firstly, the policy challenge must be relevant for a high number of cities across Europe. Although URBACT is initially interested in exchange and learning within the networks, ultimately the programme has a particular interest in solutions relevant for all European cities.
- ✓ Secondly, the policy challenge should reflect the European Union urban policy priorities which are reflected within the URBACT Programme objectives defined by EU cohesion policy objectives (2021 – 2027). These provide a coherent clustering of the topics and activities supported. Complementing these objectives, network applicants shall also consider other relevant activities under the urban dimension of EU cohesion policy notably the European Urban Initiative including Urban Agenda for the EU. Additional other relevant initiatives for consideration are provided in the Terms of Reference of the call.

## Considering the cross-cutting principles:

In addition to the main theme addressed the networks will choose to work on, they will also have to reflect on how the network transnational activities and the Action Portfolio co-production process will address the cross-cutting thematic considerations, including:

- ✓ gender equality
- ✓ green transition
- ✓ digital transformation

Whether cities aim to address mobility issues, cultural heritage, financial engineering, energy transition or any other topic, applicants are invited to take the extra mile and consider how these holistic themes can be part of the challenges. A tailor-made capacity building support related to the consideration of the cross-cutting thematic dimensions will be provided by the programme to all approved networks.

⟩ **Are there policy challenges you always wanted to tackle but were afraid to start?**

The beauty of Action networks is that partners can potentially cooperate on any topics of shared relevance in line with their local needs, as long as this falls within the scope of EU cohesion policy. Even though a multitude of topics have been tackled by past URBACT networks there are themes that have been less presented or even never developed. The programme would like to emphasize this point in current call for Action networks and encourage cities to come forward with high quality proposals for these themes.

It is suggested to have a look at what previous URBACT networks have worked on by visiting their webpages on urbact.eu website. The search engine enables selecting themes and topics which can give you an idea about the structure of topics tackled in URBACT networks.

# Building the Partnership

An effective transnational partnership is central to the success of URBACT Networks. Since 2002, the URBACT Programme has supported more than 1 000 cities in nearly 150 different networks; it has therefore extensive experience to draw upon. URBACT also has a good understanding of the essential ingredients for a successful transnational network. In this section, we share our experience in order to support the development of high-quality network proposals.

Below are some key questions you should ask yourself to identify the right partners and ensure the rationale for the coherence of the proposed partnership for the Action Network:

  ✓ Is the identified policy challenge relevant for all partners?
  ✓ Does each partner have a shared understanding of the policy challenge to be addressed?
  ✓ Does each of the partners have an evident commitment to tackling the policy challenge with possible local links to Sustainable Urban Development through Cohesion Policy?
  ✓ Does each of the partners understand the commitment to develop and deliver actions within the URBACT framework?
  ✓ Does each partner commit to provide sufficient resources for their network activities as required?
  ✓ Lastly, it should be ensured that the proposed partnership is eligible in the proposed framework. The Terms of References of the call details the eligibility criteria for possible compositions of partnerships.

## Relevance of partners

The relevance of partners operates at two levels. Firstly, there is the question of the relevance of participating cities. Secondly, within those cities, there is the issue of local stakeholder relevance. The following considerations reflecting both levels should help you in selecting the partners and institutions to be involved:

  ✓ The challenge addressed must be a priority for all network partners. This can be evidenced in a number of ways. For example, it will be identified within local strategies and/or within the Operating Framework for EU funds, usually with identified resources attached. In some cases, the city will have previously tried to address this challenge, with limited degrees of success. Thirdly, different stakeholders within the city will have identified this challenge as being important, again reflected in their respective strategic planning.

  ✓ The experiences of all network partners are relevant and will contribute to the learning process of the whole partnership. Each partner city will contribute to the transnational exchange and learning activities with their own experiences and knowledge. These will be different for each partner depending on the local context, previous experiences.

  ✓ For certain topics the size and positioning of the city could be important comparable elements for the coherence check of partners' local situations i.e. maritime cities working on maritime issues.

  ✓ There is a clear understanding of the added value an involvement in an URBACT network will bring to the partner in relation to respective capacity building needs.

*In case you want to be a Lead Partner you might receive an expression of interest from cities interested in your policy challenge. You can first send them a simple questionnaire (see example below and a more detailed one* here*). On that basis you will be able to do the shortlist of the most relevant candidates and follow up with more detailed questionnaire or even a phone call before making a final choice.*

### EXAMPLE – SIMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ASSESSING RELEVANCE OF PARTNERS

Institution details
1. Partner institution (Name, Address, Postcode, City):
2. Are you a public body?
3. What is the size of your city?
4. Type of area (more developed, less developed, transition)?
5. Are you currently partner in an URBACT network or applying to join others? If yes which one(s)?
6. Contact Person (First name, Family name, Service, Function, Phone number, Mobile number, Email, Address, Postcode, City)
7. Who from your city would take part in transnational exchange meetings? (ability to speak English & in-depth knowledge of the topic needed)

Partner profile
8. Have you already been involved in an URBACT Network? What is your motivation to join this network?
9. What are the problems and challenges faced by the partner city in relation to the theme?
10. What are the existing policies, strategic frames and concrete actions developed by the partner city so far in relation to the policy challenge?
11. What could be the scope of the Action Portfolio to be produced by the partner city within the framework of the network?
12. Who will be involved in the initial URBACT Local Group to be set up by the partner city?
13. What is the potential contribution of the partner city to the network activities and what does the partner expect from the network?
14. What is the experience of the partner city in terms of working through transnational exchange in relation to the policy challenge?
15. What is the added value URBACT would bring to the city in terms of learning and capacity building?

*In the application form it is necessary to highlight possible complementarities and differences between the partners in terms of needs and previous experience.*

# SEVEN tips for Building a "Great" partnership

**❭ There is no such thing as a perfect size**

It is up to each network to decide about the ideal size of their partnership, as this depends on many factors. It is clear though that going for the minimum number of partners is very risky. It could be that one partner you want to involve drops out at the very last minute before you submit your application i.e. joins another Network proposal, does not provide the signed Letter of Commitment on time, etc. Anything can happen!

**❭ Ensuring the (geographical) balance of partnership**

The partnership for Action Network shall be in line with the specific partnership eligibility criteria provided in the Terms of Reference. At the same time, you should aim for geographical balance across Europe – a partnership shall cover at least 6 countries regardless of number of partners. In this regard, you should consider having a reserve candidate (possibly with the signed Letter of Commitment) that is ready to join, in case of a last-minute drop out.  In addition, a sufficient number of partners from more developed regions is expected in a balanced partnership. The map showing the categorisation of EU Regions for 2021-2027 can be found here.

**❭ Welcome newcomers**

Not all cities in Europe have had the opportunity to take part in an URBACT network and experience the "URBACT learning journey". Thus, URBACT's guiding principle is to ensure participation of a maximum number of cities in URBACT networks. URBACT is particularly seeking to support cities which are new to the programme, i.e. the city has not been a partner in URBACT II or III.  You should consider all these elements when selecting partners without sacrificing the quality and relevance of your project proposal. The partner search tool and contacting the National URBACT Points are two good ways to look for cities that have never been involved in URBACT before and that have the same interest with yours in joining an Action Network.

**❭ Be demanding, test the commitment**

Besides considerations on the size of the partnership, the focus should be on the "quality" of the partner and on the relevance of their participation in a specific network. Aim for coherence and complementarity in terms of partners' needs expectations and potential contributions. You should also make potential partners (and selected partners) aware of the 'URBACT networking framework' described in PART I and III of this guide and ask for commitment to these requirements. Therefore, the Lead Partner preparing a good questionnaire to collect information on partner cities in order to inform final partnership selection is very important.

**❭ Beware of the "sleeping partners"**

Once the network is approved and activities get started, some partners can turn out to be less active than expected. Therefore, developing a smaller partnership of 6 cities is also risky should some of them turn out to be 'sleeping partners'. Even though you can consolidate the partnership during activation stage with possible replacement of partners the dynamics in the partnership and the richness of the transnational exchange may be impacted.

**❱ Be smart – connect!**

To facilitate the partner matching process, the URBACT programme encourages you to use the Partner Search tool and contacts of National URBACT points which can be very useful for finding right partners from different countries. These are provided in section 12 – useful resources of the Call document. For questions regarding the eligibility of "non-city" partners you should always consult the URBACT Secretariat at an@urbact.eu. Do it early enough during the selection process as the eligibility verification process of non-city partners might take time.

**❱ The best tip to avoid mistakes**

Do not accept new partners on a "first come, first served" basis. Take time to speak with the relevant people in a candidate partner city before you decide on your final partnership. Try to avoid cities who reach you through consultants - this can be an indication that the city does not have real interest and/or capacity to become committed and active partner (this might be the case even for Lead Partner candidates).

Try to detect some potential flaws in candidate partners' interest:
- Just want to become an URBACT city, no matter what topic; (cities committed to more than 3 network proposals can already be considered questionable)
- want to become an URBACT city with my topic, no matter what network;
- want to become an URBACT city although not equipped to actually handle the topic and make a difference at local level;
- are more interested in the budget than the policy challenge;
- ambitious politician with no commitment of wider municipality administration (incl. staff allowed to travel etc.);
- ambitious officer with no support from politicians who understand the importance of the project.

# PART III

## Hints and Tips for Shaping network proposals

This section complements the Term of Reference of the call for Action Network proposals and the URBACT IV Programme Manual with useful suggestions corresponding to the following sections of the application form:

- ✓ section 4 – Activities and expected outputs
- ✓ section 7 – Use of expertise

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# Network level activities

## Customisation of network exchange and learning activities

There is no single preferred methodological approach to the customisation of the transnational exchange and learning in networks. URBACT does not adopt a prescriptive approach and welcomes innovative models and creative approaches. The most important thing is that the methodology proposed is realistic, clearly explained and has a logical rationale. It should also consider the specificities around the policy issues being addressed as well as the needs and the experience of all partners. Key success factors for effective learning in relation the theme shall be clearly demonstrated. In addition, the methodological approach should generate a continuous flow of knowledge between the transnational and the local level for the appropriate application of knowledge generated during different network activities.
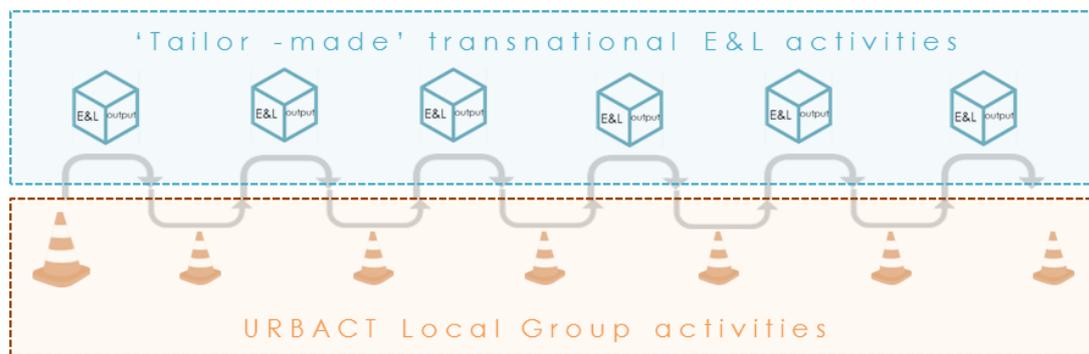


**)** **10 reflections for designing effective Exchange & Learning activities:**

1. Different lengths of transnational network activities can be foreseen. Physical sessions are likely to take place over a period of two to three days. If working online however, duration and format should differ, as discussed in points 7 and 8 below.

2. Transnational meetings should be interactive, stimulating and enjoyable. Consequently, regardless of the methodological approach, networks are expected to think seriously about the design and delivery of transnational sessions, so that participants get maximum benefit from the experience. Staff exchanges and bi/-tri lateral deep dive meetings, as well as specific study visits have proven to be very effective in past URBACT networks.

3. The thematic focus of the network will have an impact on the types of stakeholders that will be involved in the transnational meetings and thus on the type of activities that can be proposed during the sessions.

4. At the design stage of transnational E&L meetings, different activities can be considered. These include:
   - ✓ Inputs from a variety of expert speakers (these might be Lead Experts and/or Ad-hoc Experts working with the project, local experts on a particular topic or guest speakers from other networks and organisations)
   - ✓ Forensic site visits (with the active involvement of local stakeholders of the hosting city)
   - ✓ Peer review exercises
   - ✓ Group problem solving
   - ✓ Structured discussions and analysis sessions using dynamic facilitation techniques

5. The local stakeholders of the hosting city should play a key role in presenting their local situation in relation to the transfer process, needs and experiences/solutions. All partners should receive some orientation material in advance, so they arrive with some understanding of the local context, even if the meeting is online.

6. Advance planning is an important part of effective transnational seminars. At the very least, this means collaboration between the Lead Expert, Lead Partner and host partner around the agenda, contributors and the logistics. In some cases, Lead Experts have visited the host city in advance to see venues and meet the hosts. In other cases, they have organised online planning meetings in advance of the transnational seminars.

7. Even prior to the pandemic, URBACT networks were making increasing use of online tools and methods to reduce their carbon footprint. However, Covid-19 has provided a huge catalyst for the use of digital platforms which have been actively embraced by the Programme and its networks. Although face to face collaboration still offers the best basis for building trusted relationships, a growing range of activities can be conducted online and regardless of the pandemic, the future of urban collaboration is hybrid. URBACT has developed a range of resources to support this, which include the Hints and Tips materials and the URBACT Toolbox.

8. Online meetings require a technical rehearsal in advance, to ensure that the digital platform and all audio and visual inputs work correctly. Speakers also welcome the opportunity to check presentations and connections in advance of their inputs.

9. 'Housekeeping' matters also need to be considered carefully. These include finance, administration and communication issues. As much as possible, it is advisable to manage these aspects of the network outside the main business of the transnational seminars. This might mean via online meetings, separate to the exchange and learning sessions.

10. Finally, networks are using social media (in particular Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram etc.) to complement their transnational activities. All networks are encouraged to establish a social media profile and these tools can be very effective to enhance the internal communication among partners as well as to promote transnational events and to engage with a wider audience in proceedings (for external communication, see the related section).

## Tools for network learning and knowledge uptake

Knowledge coming from transnational exchange and learning activities should be effectively captured, organised and documented in order to be easily accessible to all stakeholders involved in the local co-production process. A few examples are listed below:

### Pre- and post-meeting briefing note
This tool is used to capture and document the E&L rationale. The pre-briefing note provides a clear understanding of the content to be covered at each network meeting (including necessary preparations) and reminds partners about the tasks that need to be undertaken before the meeting. The post briefing note documents the learning from the meeting for each session, and lists the tasks to be undertaken before the next meeting. This is being considered as very efficient tool for ULG coordinators to report learning from the transnational to local level and as a reminder of tasks.

### Key Learning grid

A basic tool used at the end of each transnational network meeting in order to capture key learning points for each partner and actions to be carried out at local level. The grid is reviewed by partners and the Lead Expert at each transnational meeting. It helps partners record the history of learning and monitor actions throughout the journey. It can be also used for internal network recording of the exchange and learning process.

### Support and follow up materials

The set of all the materials, handouts, produced for/at network activities. These can include compilation of PowerPoints, templates, canvases, main learning notes from different sessions, photos, short videos, peer learning points etc. These can help ULG participants design debriefings at local level. Private Network Basecamp space will be available to all approved networks for gathering and organising all network productions and making them available for network partners.

# Local level activities

Local level activities URBACT Networks are centred on the URBACT Local Groups (ULGs), established in each participating city.

❱ **What is an URBACT Local Group?**

The ULG is a fundamental tool that enables experimentation for innovation in city administrations. As the programme promotes multi-level participation, we expect the composition of these groups to reflect the project's thematic focus. This means that a network on digital transformation will have a different stakeholder mix to one promoting carbon reduction. Cities should think carefully about the composition of their ULG, ensuring appropriate coverage. Partners should also seek the participation of their relevant Managing Authority, to promote the visibility of their planning work, and to ensure alignment with the National Cohesion Policy Framework. The URBACT Toolbox includes tools on identifying appropriate stakeholders and establishing the ULG.

❱ **What's the role of the ULG Coordinator?**

Each city will appoint a coordinator for its ULG. This key person will function as the main contact point for other partners by attending transnational network sessions, as well as being the pivotal link within the ULG on the ground. The ULG Coordinator will be responsible for the delivery of the city activities and outputs described below. S/he will also be the key point of contact for the National URBACT Points (NUPs), throughout the lifespan of the project. NUPs should play a key role in capitalising network activities and results and supporting the networking activities with relevant national decision makers. The ULG/Local Project Coordinator will also act as the point of contact between the partner city and the URBACT Secretariat.

❱ **What's the format for ULG sessions?**

The ULG is an active working group that will be at the heart of the action planning process in each city. It may be a group designed especially for the URBACT project, or be a relevant group that is already in place. Each ULG will be different, reflecting local structures, priorities and actors. It is expected to meet

on a regular basis and to take account of the URBACT principles and tools to work efficiently and interactively. The URBACT Toolbox provides guidance around how to design and run these sessions well.

ULGs will organise a series of meetings and events, in line with the Network Roadmap, to drive the co-production process and create Action Portfolio The network level activities can provide inspiration to try out ideas, concrete solutions, and tools with the relevant stakeholders. The ULG process should be closely linked with the overall network methodology and feed the exchange and learning at transnational meetings.

The ULG can be used as laboratory to experiment and learn by doing. This includes the involvement of different stakeholders in policy making in order to assess the possible upscaling of specific actions, test stakeholders' engagement and build closer relationships. This is one of the essential factors for the successful integrated approach.

❭ **How often should the ULG meet?**

At the start of the project, each ULG should define its working patterns based on the general networking framework agreed within the network during the activation stage. This will include regular working sessions which are often linked to the transnational network meetings. For example, it can be very helpful to meet prior to a transnational meeting to prepare and ensure that the opportunity is optimised. Following the transnational sessions, it is also helpful to meet in order to share feedback and key learning points. ULGs have also found it useful to come together when key activities or outputs are due, such as the testing actions activities or draft Integrated Action plans.

The ULG Coordinator is responsible for the organisation of the ULG working sessions.

# Network Communication

Communication is a crucial process embedded into every step of an URBACT network. It ensures that URBACT cities can create a positive legacy, making project live beyond its life cycle.

To maximise the update and visibility of the work by URBACT beneficiary cities, approved URBACT networks will have to carry out the following activities (as thoroughly described in the URBACT Programme Manual, Book 1, Section F -Communication at Network level, p.91-102):

❭ **Assign a communication officer for the URBACT network:**

Whether from a Lead Partner or a Project Partner city, a key to success is to always have a referent person (communication officer) for the communication activities at network level. In most cases, **this role is fulfilled by someone from the Lead Partner team**, but it can actually be an **external provider** or even someone else **from another partner city** who is notably at ease with the position and related tasks — should this be the case, the corresponding budget for communications should be allocated accordingly. This officer is expected to be in close contact with the URBACT Joint Secretariat, and to participate in communication trainings organised by URBACT.

**❭ Deliver a communication plan:**

From the moment the network officially starts its activities and within six months (unless a different timeline is set in the call for networks), the network with the help of the communication officer has to submit to the Secretariat **a communication plan**. Specific guidance and advice will be provided by the URBACT Secretariat prior to the production of the communication plan.

**❭ Develop a network branding:**

Under the coordination of the network's communication officer, each network has to define a network tagline and boilerplate within the first couple of months after the approval of the network. Specific guidance on this will be provided by the URBACT Secretariat.

**❭ Develop a visual identity:**

Each URBACT network has to develop its own visual identity that will make it both distinct and recognisable to an external audience. This visual identity includes notably a colour palette, pictures or illustrations for social media profile pictures, etc. No network logos are expected- the only logo to be used in any kind of production/communication material is the URBACT logo.

**❭ Respect programme branding and EU requirements:**

Alongside their network visual identity, URBACT beneficiaries must always use URBACT logo. Any kind of material produced by the network has to bear the URBACT logo. *If this is not the case, costs of any materials or activities will not be eligible for reimbursement.*

Similarly, following the REGULATION (EU) 2021/1060 Art 50(1) all URBACT beneficiaries – Lead Partners and Project Partners – **must produce an A3 poster within six months from the approval of the network** and **must publish a news about the network in their respective institutional websites**.

**❭ Maintain a network webpage on the URBACT website:**

All URBACT networks (even closed ones) benefit from a dedicated webpage to communicate about good practices, case studies, recommendations or reports to an audience external to the beneficiary cities. In this sense, a network webpage acts as a "business card". For the network webpages, the Network Communication Officers are expected to create an **editorial planning** – **with articles, news, events and a library** – following the communication plan. The Network Communication Officer is then in charge of maintaining the network webpage on a regular basis with different contents, including quarterly network reports, articles, news, events, videos and other documents.

**❭ Use digital communication tools:**

While URBACT does not make any particular channel mandatory, **it is required for Network Communication Officers to set up an account on at least one social medium and regularly update it with content**. In this way, articles from the network webpage can be shared through social media and reposted by URBACT social media for greater visibility.

> **Sharing network final results:**

Besides the local mandatory products, networks are expected to also deliver a final network output: Action Playbook. This output needs to **capture the experience of the network, any lessons learnt and policy recommendations**. The Action Playbook can take whichever format the network's partners deem fit, in order to better reach the intended target audiences — series of thematic reports, publication, tools, videos, animations, etc. — the crucial thing is to consider the dissemination process for it. Final events can be a powerful way to spread this material, for example, as well as the network webpages.

In addition, the URBACT beneficiaries are encouraged to take contact with their National URBACT Points to coordinate about communication at national level.

# Network expertise framework

Adequate expertise support has proven to be crucial for effective capacity building in cities. Transnational networking and learning between peers require careful design of events with inspirational facilitation techniques. Proper design and delivery of integrated sustainable urban development policies in cities demands a transdisciplinary approach.
For this reason, expertise support for URBACT networks is structured around three core dimensions for ensuring effective exchange and learning:
- Expertise for the design and delivery of transnational exchange and learning activities
- Thematic expertise (related to wide array of themes and related subtopics in relation to sustainable urban development policy challenges)
- Methods and tools for integrated and participatory approaches for the design and delivery of sustainable urban development policies.

In addition, an adequate set of <u>communication skills </u>has proven to be vital for ensuring the overall quality of expertise support also in the context of hybrid working reality. These are required for all experts validated in the pool.

The Lead Expert role in URBACT networks remains pivotal for ensuring an effective learning. Expert candidates interested in this role will need to validate a set of "<u>URBACT Lead expert skills</u>" crucial for maximising the impact of network exchange and learning activities and knowledge production with proven leadership and coaching approaches.

All networks have 170 days of expertise, including the Lead Expert and the Ad-hoc Expert days.

## Network expert roles and missions

In order to improve the efficiency of the expertise support provided to URBACT networks, expertise made available to approved networks is presented in two distinct URBACT network expert roles:

> **A network Lead Expert** supports the partnership over the entire duration of the network which requires a high level of professional commitment (in case of appointment). A Lead Expert workplan will consists of up to 130 days of expertise spread over 30 months network duration. A Lead Expert supports the network with:

- The definition of the main focus of network activities based on the Baseline Study process. It includes designing the network work plan with a menu of exchange and learning activities with various formats, elaborating the main expected results and production of network outputs.
- The delivery of transnational exchange and learning activities with effective facilitation techniques.
- The knowledge of EU policy frameworks and the specific thematic fields tackled by the network.
- Coaching and supporting the use of effective methods and tools for the design and delivery of integrated and participatory processes in partner cities.
- The knowledge capture and uptake and communication of network results

This list of tasks is not exhaustive; each Lead Expert will have a dedicated work plan based on the suggested expertise support framework with defined task categories. A Lead Expert's role is to empower and support cities in their sustainable development processes, rather than teach or dictate.

*The shortlisted network Lead expert candidates will be proposed for appointment after network approval (The Terms of References of the present call provide detailed information about the appointment procedure for network Lead experts). One can be appointed as Lead Expert only in one URBACT network at the time.*

> **Network Ad-hoc Experts** provide support on specific needs identified by the network with shorter and more specific expertise tasks. Most network Ad-hoc expertise missions require shorter commitments (up to 5 days). Nevertheless, longer network Ad-hoc expertise missions (6 - 20 days) are also possible depending on specific network expertise requests. Sometimes Ad-hoc experts can also complement network Lead Expert support with specific and complementary tasks over the entire duration of the network – these kinds of missions usually exceed 20 days of expertise.

Network ad hoc expertise missions can include tasks supporting one or more specific expertise needs in line with different types of expertise, such as:
- supporting the design and facilitation of network meetings,
- providing specific thematic inputs at different exchange and learning activities,
- training on methods and tools for supporting integrated and participatory processes in partner cities,
- customised support at local level and with the production of specific network outputs.

This list of tasks is not exhaustive; each network Ad-hoc expert has specific set of missions defined with the work plan in line with suggested expertise support framework with defined task categories.

*All approved networks shall appoint at least two network Ad hoc experts during the life-time of the network. The support from Ad hoc experts is suggested notably during the Develop & Deliver stage of the network journey. There are no limitations in relation to number of Ad hoc expert missions in different URBACT networks.*

## The selection and appointment of experts

The selection and appointment of network experts will take place after the network approval. All networks shall appoint at least 3 network experts during the life-time of the network – a network Lead expert and at least two network Ad hoc experts. All selected experts appointed to carry out the expertise support shall be validated and included in the URBACT pool of experts. In case networks will not be able to find an adequate expert in the pool (due to the specificity of the expertise need), any expert can be invited to apply for validation – the call for experts will remain open over the entire duration of the URBACT programme.

The selected network experts are proposed via the expertise request form that shall be validated by URBACT Secretariat. For validation, the suitability, geographical balance and the gender balance of appointed network experts shall be considered. After the validation, URBACT Managing Authority makes the contractual arrangement with the expert whereas network Lead partners are responsible for coordination and certification of expertise services. Detailed guidance will be provided to approved networks.

*It should be noted that only experts who have not been directly involved in developing the application can be proposed. A strict conflict of interest procedure will be followed.*

## Mapping of expertise needs and organisation of tasks

Each network shall have a specific expertise budget including maximum of 170 days of expertise regardless of the number of partners.

The allocation of days to the Lead Expert shall not exceed 76% of the total budget (max. 130 days). Therefore, a minimum of 24% of the expertise budget (min. 40 days) shall be allocated to Ad-Hoc Experts supporting the network. Expertise support in Action network will be structured and organised in the following way:

- Support with Network development, dynamics, and network results management;
- Support to transnational network activities;
- Support to partners with the delivery of local activities;
- Support with the knowledge capture and communication of network results.

*Most of these listed tasks will have pre-defined suggestions of deliverables. Exact mapping of tasks together with expert workplan management and expert reporting templates will be provided to approved networks at the start of the journey.*

## Network Results management framework

In order to ensure the quality of expertise support across networks all Lead experts will need to participate in essential information and training sessions and embrace the tools proposed by URBACT. For this purpose, specific guides will be designed for delivery of expected services.

Lead experts play a key role for the network development and dynamics. The quality of the support provided will be assessed twice during network journey:
- The performance evaluation by partners at the end of Activation stage
- The Mid-term reflection process;

Network results management framework will be introduced to all Lead experts which includes:
- The use of digital tools (i.e. Miro) for monitoring partner progress and capacity building support
- The State of Actions Report to be shared at the Mid-term reflection
- Regular Check-in sessions with Lead experts to share the experience and ideas around the delivery of different support activities as well as the development of methodological approaches and tools.
- The use of well-established tools suggested by the programme for ensuring the balanced progress across networks notably related to the application of Integrated and participatory approaches in policy-making.
- The dedicated Lead expert space on Basecamp for programme support as well as 24/7 "peer support shop" - sharing experiences and ideas with other appointed network Lead experts.

# PART IV

## Administrative and financial information

This section complements the Term of Reference of the call for Action Network proposals and the URBACT IV Programme Manual with useful suggestions corresponding to the following sections of the application form and the application package:

- ✓ section 8 – Budgetary proposal (implementation of actions)
- ✓ Annex 4 – Template of the state aid self-assessment questionnaire

# Budget for implementation of actions

URBACT Action Networks allow cities to work together to identify, shape and implement solutions to common urban challenges. For this reason, it is indicated in the Terms of Reference of the call that 50% of the overall budget at the level of the network and partner should be dedicated to the implementation of actions.

The partners should indicate in the Application Form, section 4.3 - Description of Work Package 3. Local Level Activities the overall estimated budget for each action proposed for implementation during the project duration and in the section 8 – Budgetary proposal an estimated budget for implementation of action break down per relevant budget lines.

No need to detail in the application form the costs related to the proposed actions nor to choose one of the two options that can be envisaged for reimbursement of expenses incurred with the implementation of actions. During the Stage 1 – Activation stage the partners will define and detail the actions to be implemented at local level. Also, at the end of this stage a final budget should be proposed for each action.

There are **two options** for reimbursement of expenses related to the implementation of action:

- Based on **real costs**;
A combination of expenses on staff, external expertise and equipment budget lines can be used by partners for the budget dedicated to the implementation of actions. The management verifications for this option is the same as for the rest of expenses reported based on real costs, ie control and certification by the national controllers.

- Based on **draft budgets**.
In line with Article 53 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, a draft budget is established on a case-by-case basis and agreed ex ante by the body selecting the operation.

A combination of staff, external expertise and equipment budget lines can be envisaged when preparing the draft budget proposal. One draft budget proposal is made for each action to be implemented.

Approved networks will receive in the precontractual phase the methodology and detailed instruction on the use of the draft budgets' methodology.

Every cost entered into the draft budget must be clearly defined and appropriately justified. This step ensures alignment with the Programme's objectives and facilitates a transparent budgeting process. The JS will validate individually each proposed draft budget.

Draft budget proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

• Value for Money: Demonstrates cost-effectiveness and efficiency in achieving project objectives.

• Realistic Budgeting: The proposed budget should be practical and achievable given the planned activities.

• Relevance of Activities: Activities must directly support the project's goals and intended outputs.

**The particularity of the draft budget is that, once validated, it does not require control and verification by the Programme (nor the national controllers) during the project implementation. There will be no document-based controls of expenditures, the release of funds will depend on the successful achievement of outputs and results.**

This simplification reflects the Programme's intent to streamline administrative processes while maintaining accountability.

The finalisation of the budget dedicated to the implementation of actions should be done, normally, within the flexibility of 20% foreseen by the Programme Manual, ie a budget reallocation of up to 20% from a budget category to another or from one partner to another shall be possible. In case this threshold is overpassed a validation of the Monitoring Committee will be needed and also an addendum to the subsidy contract will be made in order to validate the new budget.

# State Aid

Applicants responding to the call for Action Networks must undergo an assessment to determine whether their proposed activities involve a potential risk of State aid.

**Partners that are part of network application forms have to respond to an EU survey regarding the state aid issue available at this [link](#) before by 17 June 2026 - 15.00 CEST**.

State aid is broadly defined as any aid granted by a Member State or through State resources in any form whatsoever which distorts or threatens to distort competition by favouring certain **undertakings** or the production of certain goods, insofar as it affects trade between Member States.

Under EU Law the term "undertaking" refers to any entity engaged in an economic activity, regardless of its legal status or the way it is financed. This implies that a city or a public body may be regarded as an undertaking and may be considered, for the purposes of State aid rules, as a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) or a large enterprise.

State aid risk in the URBACT IV Programme is assessed based on five cumulative criteria:
1. The aid is granted to undertakings (means any entity engaged in **economic activity**). Economic activity consists of offering goods or services on a given market.
2. The aid is provided by the Member State (imputability) or through **State resources** (public funds).
3. The aid favours certain organizations or the production of certain goods (**selectivity** criterion). Selectivity means that a measure targets certain undertakings, regions or categories of firms (e.g. SMEs or specific sectors) rather than others.
4. The aid confers an **advantage** that distorts or threatens to distort competition. An advantage can take the form of direct payment of state resources in the form of grants and subsidies as well as indirect benefits that affect the public budget such as tax breaks, rate rebates, low interest loans, sale of public land below market value and the provision of services for free or at below-market rates.
5. The aid measure **affects trade between Member states**. This criterion means that the aid granted to an organization may strengthen its position on a market where operators from different EU Member States could compete or provide similar services.

If all five criteria are met, the project must comply with State aid rules. If only one criterion is not met, State aid rules do not apply.

To support applicants in this process, specific [State aid guidance for applicants](#) is available.

In addition, an EU State aid self-assessment survey must be completed by each partner of the network prior to the submission of the application. In order to determine the category of undertaking to which

the applicant belongs, it is also necessary to complete the questions related to the SME definition. This information is particularly relevant for partners carrying out activities within the network that may fall under State aid rules.

Applicants are responsible for ensuring that the information provided is accurate and complete. Any declaration made in the EU survey may be subject to verification during the assessment of the application and throughout the implementation of the project.

This declaration on state aid is analysed by the Managing Authority/URBACT Joint Secretariat in parallel with the project assessment. As regards the documentation and information provided on the state aid issue, the Managing Authority/URBACT Joint Secretariat will give the opportunity, if needed, to partners to complement in order to clarify and allow a proper assessment of compliance with state aid rules.

If a risk of State aid is confirmed after the assessment(s), appropriate measures will be implemented, with approval of the Monitoring Committee, to ensure that the aid is compatible with internal market rules.

# THE "URBACT" Glossary

**The URBACT Method**

It is a series of processes and tools that enable an environment for promoting integrated sustainable urban development through effective learning and practice. The building blocks of the method are:

- ✓ Networking amongst EU cities to exchange good practices and find solutions to their policy challenges with expert support
- ✓ Applying the integrated and participatory approaches at local level to solving concrete challenges with variety of stakeholders within the framework of URBACT Local Group.
- ✓ Expertise support, capacity-building and training for urban practitioners to empower them to drive change within cities.
- ✓ Capitalisation and communication of knowledge and practices to reach and provide a wider community of urban practitioners in Europe and beyond with concrete solutions.

**Network Lead Partners and Project Partners**

Each network has to appoint a Lead Partner with full responsibility for network management, coordination of activities among the transnational partners, and implementation of the work programme. The Lead Partner also bears financial and legal responsibility and liability for the whole partnership towards the Managing Authority.

**URBACT Local Group**

The URBACT Local Group (ULG) is a fundamental building block of the URBACT programme. In every partner city, the ULG brings together all relevant local stakeholders related to the chosen policy challenge that the city wants to tackle. The ULG is the vehicle for a participatory process allowing relevant stakeholders to be involved in the co-production of Action Portfolios.

**URBACT Joint Secretariat**

The URBACT Joint Secretariat, housed within the French Managing Authority (L'Agence nationale de la cohésion des territoires), is in charge of implementing and managing the Programme on behalf of the Member and Partner States of the European Union. The Joint Secretariat follows and supports networks on all aspects of their work from peer-learning processes, capacity building, communication activities, and capitalisation efforts to management & financial support.

**URBACT Monitoring Committee**

It is a committee of EU Member/Partner States set up to monitor the implementation of the URBACT Programme, in agreement with the Managing Authority. The Monitoring Committee reviews the implementation of the Programme and progress towards achieving its objectives and functions. It adopts the methodology, criteria for selection and the eligibility rules before the launch of each call for proposals as well as approves the selection of Networks.

**National URBACT Point (NUP)**

The URBACT Programme currently runs 32 National URBACT Points covering 34 countries (Austria-Germany, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus-Greece, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France-Luxembourg, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Ukraine and Moldova). National URBACT Points, represented by ministries, associations of cities, universities, or consultant agencies, are in charge of communicating and supporting URBACT-related activities in their countries and in their native languages.

Cities should contact their National URBACT Points and explore what kind of support they can provide.

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# Together, we drive change for better cities