



**Plan Einstein  
Academy**

Innovation  
Transfer Network



# Plan Einstein Investment Plan

THESSALONIKI

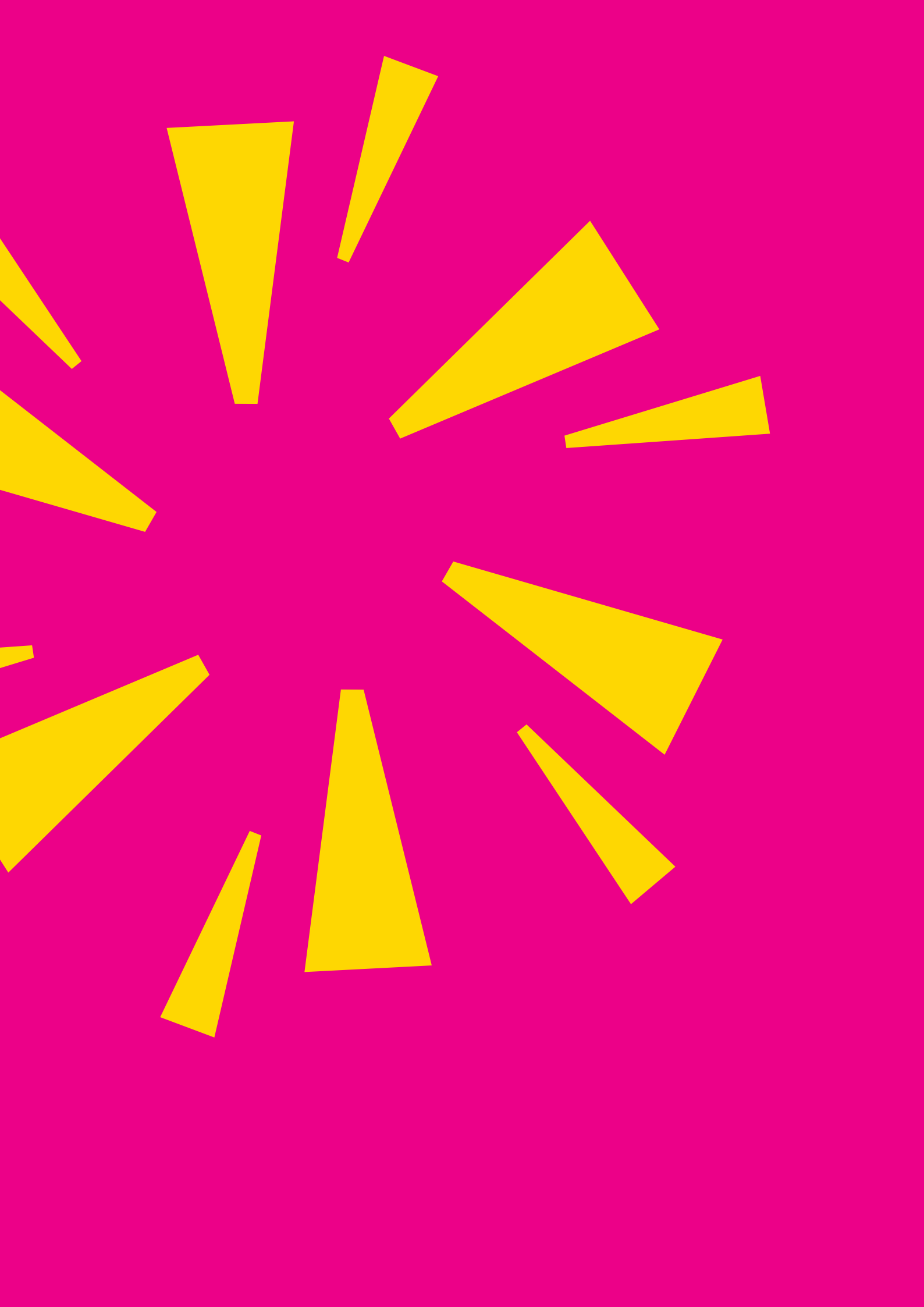
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# Background

## 1.1. About the investment plan

This document is the 'Investment Plan' of the City of Thessaloniki in Greece setting out how it intends to implement the 'Plan Einstein' model in the pilot neighbourhood of Giannitson. Plan Einstein is an approach to local social cohesion originally developed by the City of Utrecht in the Netherlands through an Urban Innovative Action project that ran 2016-2019 (see below). The Investment Plan is the central output of the City of Thessaloniki from its participation in the URBACT IV Innovation Transfer Network 'Plan Einstein Academy'. This network ran from September 2024 until August 2026 with the aim of fostering transfer of the 'Plan Einstein' concept to five other cities in Europe, including Thessaloniki.

The Investment Plan is the result of a participatory process with local stakeholders in Thessaloniki who came together in an 'URBACT Local Group'. It represents a collective effort to bring together ideas, priorities, and concerns involving municipal departments, civil society organisations, and local actors who have been working closely with migrant and refugee communities for almost a decade.

The Plan is also the result of transnational exchange and learning with the other partner cities in the network – not only learning from the good practice example provided by the City of Utrecht, but also exchange and mutual inspiration between the other partner cities: Coimbra (Portugal); Suceava (Romania); Warsaw (Poland); and Zagreb (Croatia).

Grounded in local experience and collaboration, the Investment Plan seeks to support practical, sustainable approaches to inclusion that can endure beyond individual projects or funding cycles. It focuses on simple, place-based actions capable of strengthening everyday interaction, neighbourhood participation, and long-term local cooperation. This approach is rooted in the creation of a lightweight neighbourhood coordination structure functioning as a local 'Living Lab' in the pilot neighbourhood of Giannitson.

## 1.2. Introduction to Plan Einstein

Plan Einstein is a neighbourhood-based approach to social inclusion and social cohesion originally developed in Utrecht, built around the principle of “living together, learning together, and working together.”

Rather than separating asylum seekers from local communities, the model promotes early participation and meaningful encounters between newcomers and long-term residents through shared spaces, low-threshold activities, and everyday interaction.

Applying the model in different local contexts does not mean organising the exact same set of activities in each. Rather, the model adapts to local contexts, cultures and preferences to create spaces and activities that fit the neighbourhood – so long as they respect the core principles of Plan Einstein.

The approach places particular emphasis on:

- ▶ mixed participation with everyone treated as equals;
- ▶ accessible and community-based activities;
- ▶ cooperation between local actors; and
- ▶ skills and experiences that remain valuable regardless of future legal status, life trajectory or location.

Experiences from different neighbourhoods of Utrecht have already highlighted that co-housing solutions can be part of the local approach, but are not an obligatory part of the Plan Einstein model. It is also a model that can be built up and improved gradually, with a broader range of activities, improved spaces and increased participation and engagement over time.



### 1.3. Plan Einstein Academy

Plan Einstein Academy was a two-year project funded by the URBACT IV Programme as an Innovation Transfer Network.

The network comprised six European cities.

Lead Partner:

Utrecht (Netherlands).

Transfer partners:

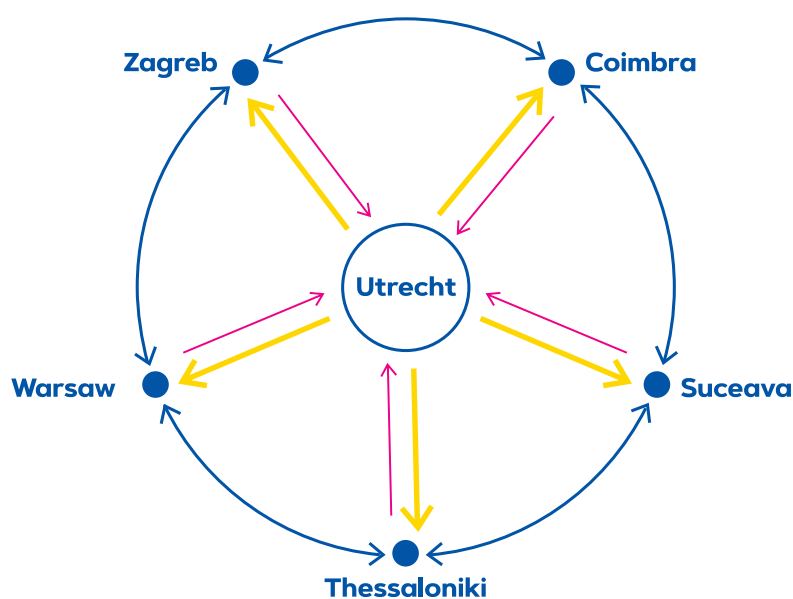
Coimbra (Portugal)

Suceava (Romania)

Thessaloniki (Greece)

Warsaw (Poland)

Zagreb (Croatia)



Through the project, partner cities explored how the principles of Plan Einstein could be adapted to their own local realities through a structured process of transnational exchange, peer learning, and local experimentation.

Through study visits, thematic workshops, and exchanges with partner cities, local stakeholders were able to reflect on how Plan Einstein principles could respond to the specific realities of Thessaloniki.

For Thessaloniki, the network provided an opportunity to rethink inclusion beyond emergency responses and towards more stable, neighbourhood-level approaches linked to social cohesion, housing, and community participation. It helped strengthen the understanding that social cohesion is not achieved through isolated projects, but through continuous local cooperation and everyday interaction.

# Local context

## 2.1. City profile

Thessaloniki is Greece's second-largest city and a major urban centre in South-East Europe. Located along the Thermaic Gulf, the municipality covers approximately 19.3 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of around 320,000 residents, while the wider metropolitan area exceeds one million inhabitants across eleven municipalities.

Founded in 315 BC, Thessaloniki has historically functioned as a crossroads city shaped by successive waves of migration, trade, and cultural exchange. Today, this layered identity continues to define the city, where long-term residents, internal migrants, refugees, and third-country nationals coexist within a dense and socially diverse urban environment.

The city's economy combines traditional sectors such as logistics, commerce, tourism, and food services with growing activity in construction, education, and small creative industries. At the same time, Thessaloniki faces increasing urban pressures linked to housing affordability, uneven access to services, ageing infrastructure, and socio-economic inequalities between neighbourhoods.

These challenges are particularly visible in areas where newcomers and low-income residents live side by side, making social cohesion and inclusive neighbourhood development both a necessity and an opportunity for the city.





## 2.2. Migration context

### Migration profiles

Thessaloniki has long been a destination and transit point for migrant populations due to its geographical position near the Balkan route and its role as a major transportation hub in northern Greece. In recent years, the city has hosted refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants from a wide range of countries, including Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Somalia, alongside long-established migrant communities from Albania and Bulgaria. While migration patterns have shifted since the 2015–2016 refugee arrivals, Thessaloniki continues to receive newcomers seeking safety, employment opportunities, or access to support networks.

The city hosts a significant number of asylum seekers awaiting decisions on their applications, often for prolonged periods.

Employment opportunities exist primarily in low-paid and insecure sectors such as construction, agriculture, hospitality, and informal labour. At the same time, access to stable housing remains increasingly difficult due to rising rents, limited availability, and administrative barriers.

### Local migration policy landscape

The wider metropolitan area has several accommodation facilities for asylum seekers, including the Diavata Reception and Identification Centre and the accommodation centres of Lagadikia and Vagiochori.

Beyond the reception centres, Thessaloniki stands out within the Greek context for having formalised local policies addressing migrant and refugee integration. In 2018, the Municipal Council adopted an Integrated Action Plan for Refugee and Migrant Integration, developed through the city's participation in the URBACT Arrival Cities Action Planning Network.

The city subsequently strengthened its institutional framework by establishing the Department for the Support and Integration of Migrants and Refugees, alongside the Municipal Advisory Board and the Integration Centre for Migrants.

Integration also forms part of the city's broader strategic agenda through the Resilient Thessaloniki 2030 Strategy, particularly under the objective of building an inclusive city that invests in its human capital.

At the same time, important gaps remain between policy ambitions and neighbourhood realities. Existing national programmes largely focus on recognised refugees and individual support measures, while opportunities for community-level interaction, shared activities, and long-term social cohesion remain limited. This creates an important space for neighbourhood-based approaches inspired by Plan Einstein.

## Key challenges

- ▶ **Housing Pressures** – Access to affordable and stable housing is one of the city's most pressing challenges. Rising rents and limited housing supply affect both newcomers and local low- to middle-income residents. For asylum seekers, lack of documentation and unstable legal status further increase vulnerability and housing insecurity.
- ▶ **Social Cohesion and inclusion** – Although Thessaloniki is socially diverse, opportunities for meaningful interaction between newcomers and long-term residents remain limited. Existing support structures often focus on individual assistance rather than community-level engagement, while language barriers and fragmented services continue to hinder inclusion.
- ▶ **Employment and Economic Vulnerability** – Many migrants and asylum seekers remain concentrated in informal or low-paid sectors with limited protection and unstable working conditions, reinforcing social and economic marginalisation.
- ▶ **Education and Youth Inclusion** – Multicultural schools play an important role in local social inclusion, yet support for non-Greek-speaking students remains uneven, particularly at secondary education level. Opportunities for intergenerational and community-based learning are also limited.

## Strong local ecosystem

Despite these challenges, Thessaloniki benefits from a strong local ecosystem of international organisations, NGOs, schools, grassroots initiatives, and social innovation actors active in the fields of humanitarian support, housing, legal support, healthcare, education, youth work, inclusion and community engagement.

This ecosystem represents one of the city's strongest assets. However, coordination remains uneven, funding is often short-term, and opportunities for sustained interaction between newcomers and local residents remain limited.



## 2.3. Reflections on the Local Context

Thessaloniki is a city with long-standing experience of migration, a strong and committed civil society, and a municipal administration that has consciously invested in integration-related structures and policies. At the same time, the city faces growing pressures linked to housing scarcity, socio-economic vulnerability, and limited access to inclusive public spaces.

Opportunities for meaningful encounters between newcomers and long-term residents remain uneven, and there is a lack of stable, accessible spaces where interaction can develop into trust, participation, and shared ownership. These conditions risk reinforcing parallel lives, despite the presence of supportive policies and active organisations.

The Investment Plan responds to this context by focusing on simple, place-based actions capable of strengthening everyday interaction, neighbourhood participation, and long-term local cooperation. It seeks to embody the principles of Plan Einstein through a human-centred, neighbourhood-based, and collaborative approach.

# Local methodology

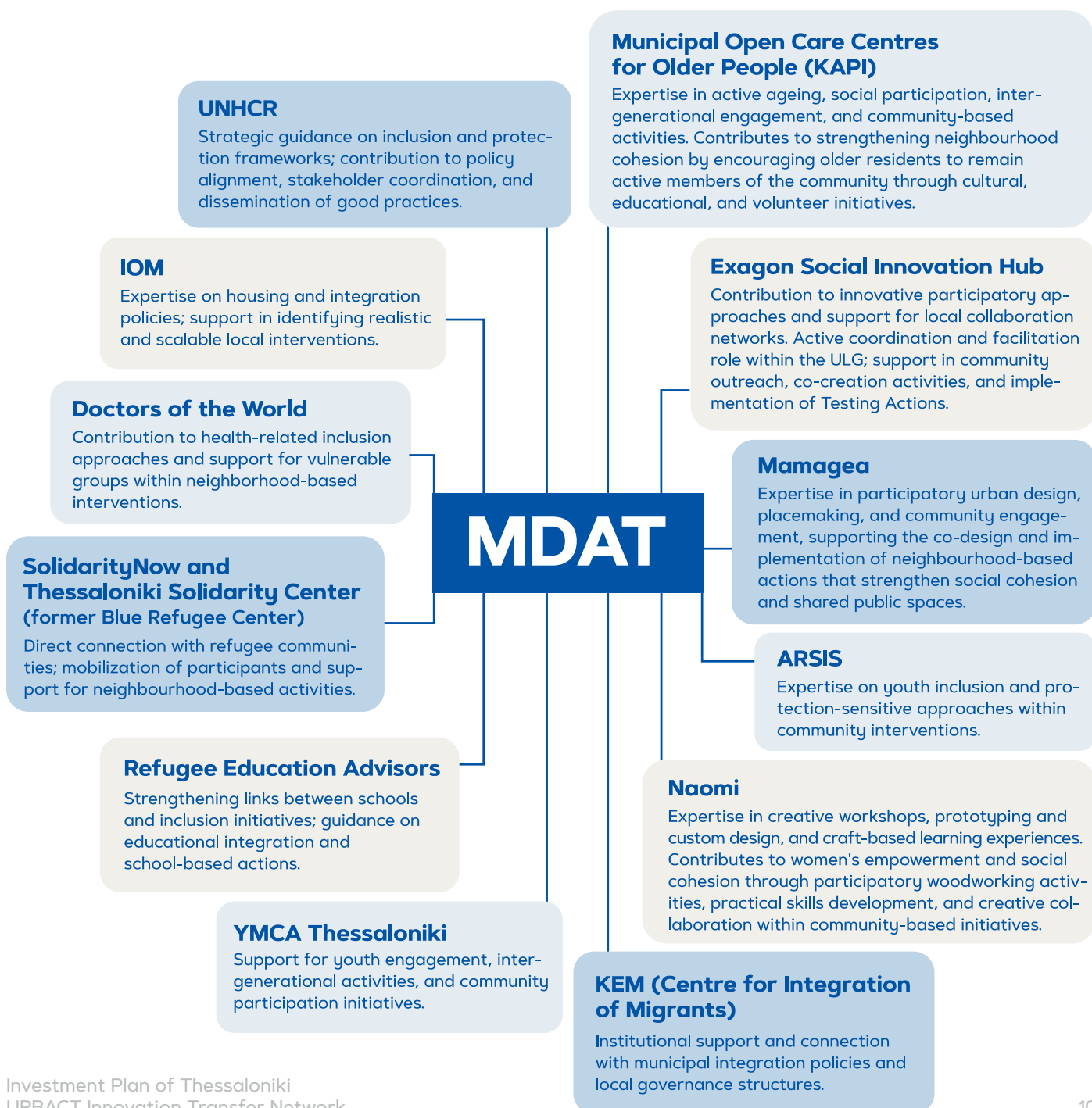
## 3.1. The URBACT Local Group

The heart of the local methodology was the creation of an “URBACT Local Group” (ULG) as the main mechanism for local co-creation at the outset of the project. It brought together organisations already active in the fields of migration, integration, social services, youth work, and education. The objective was not simply to convene partners within another project structure, but to create a working group with the capacity for sustained collaboration beyond the lifetime of Plan Einstein.

## Composition and evolution

The ULG included:

- ▶ international organisations
- ▶ NGOs and civil society organisations
- ▶ municipal and regional actors
- ▶ schools and Refugee Education Advisors
- ▶ social innovation initiatives and grassroots groups
- ▶ community representatives and local residents





While the initial meetings were attended mainly by institutional and NGO actors, the group gradually expanded to include more neighbourhood-based initiatives, educators, and community-level voices. This evolution strengthened the local relevance of the process and contributed to a more place-based understanding of local needs and opportunities. This composition shows a shift from a strictly migration-focused group toward a broader community and education-oriented coalition — something that significantly influenced the later direction of the Investment Plan.



## How the ULG worked together

From February 2025, the ULG held a series of meetings, workshops, and bilateral exchanges that progressively shaped the Investment Plan.

The ULG adopted a participatory and iterative working method, combining:

- ▶ In-person bilateral meetings for discussion, learning, and co-design
- ▶ Participatory workshops to explore actions and test ideas
- ▶ Small-group exchanges during informal networking sessions
- ▶ Reflection on testing actions to understand what is feasible in
- ▶ Thessaloniki's context
- ▶ Gradual expansion of the group to include voices that were underrepresented in the initial phase

This approach supported both collective learning and the progressive refinement of priorities. Beyond consultation, the ULG served as a space for:

- ▶ exchange of experiences;
- ▶ reflection on local challenges;
- ▶ testing and refinement of ideas;
- ▶ identification of realistic actions and partnerships.

The first meetings focused primarily on understanding the Plan Einstein methodology and building relationships between stakeholders. Later meetings shifted towards co-designing pilot actions, identifying neighbourhood priorities, and developing the intervention logic of the Investment Plan.

Overall, the ULG meetings followed a progressive and iterative rhythm, moving from orientation and shared learning towards co-design and strategic framing. Each meeting built on the previous one, ensuring that the Investment Plan emerged as a locally grounded, collaboratively developed framework, rather than a predefined or externally imposed model. This gradual process allowed the group to move from broad discussion towards more concrete and locally grounded proposals.



## 3.2. Neighbourhood focus: Giannitson

Initially, ULG members repeatedly highlighted that housing insecurity and lack of access to employment were the key barriers to long-term participation and inclusion that needed to be addressed on a priority basis in the city.

However, through its discussions, the ULG increasingly realised that it was probably not realistic to envisage the transfer of Plan Einstein in these terms. The group also recognised the value of low-threshold activities capable of bringing people together through everyday interaction.

Discussions increasingly focused on the importance of trust-building and early engagement support for newcomers in navigating everyday life, simple, community-driven formats; and participation and shared ownership rather than passive service delivery.

The ULG members decided to focus on the neighbourhood of Giannitson as a pilot neighbourhood for exploring the transfer of Plan Einstein. It selected this neighbourhood due to its relevance to ongoing discussions around inclusion and social cohesion in the city. It reflects both the challenges and opportunities of inclusion work in Thessaloniki.

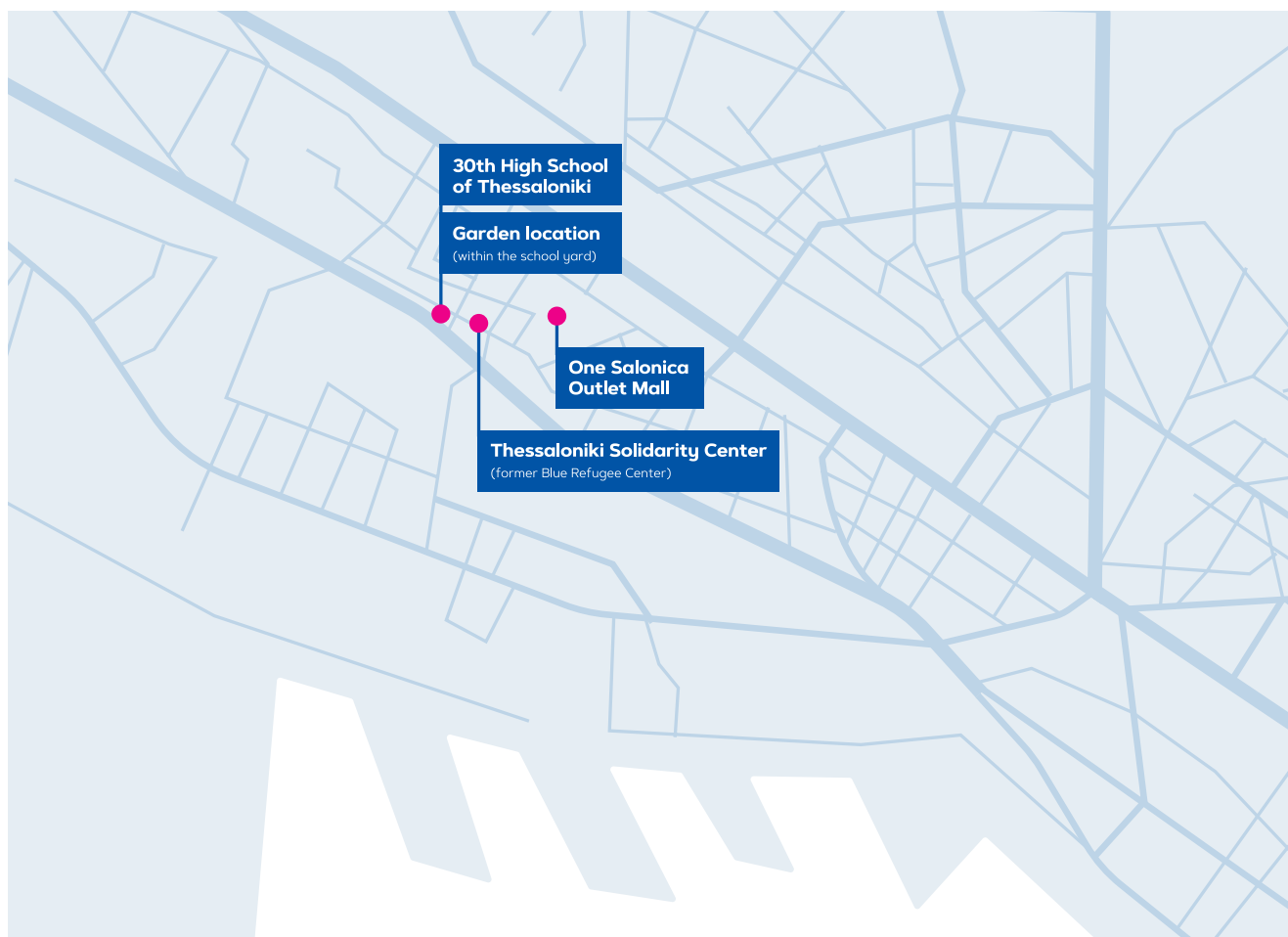
The neighbourhood is characterised by a dense residential fabric with many lower-income households. It is also characterised by its active local economy, including the One Salonica Mall, a major commercial landmark attracting visitors from across the metropolitan area, as well as a high concentration of small businesses, including shops operated by migrant and refugee families.

Diversity is reflected in everyday neighbourhood life. At the same time, the area faces several structural challenges common to urban neighbourhoods experiencing economic pressure, including unemployment and precarious work, limited public recreational space, and a lack of community-level initiatives that bring residents together in shared settings, informal economic activity, and

Crucially, the neighbourhood is also the location of the Blue Refugee Center, operated by the NGO SolidarityNow since 2016. This functions as an information and support hub for refugees and migrants in Northern Greece, providing essential services and pathways to integration. Despite its important services, the centre had also seen complaints from local neighbours, highlighting the need for the kind of approach in the neighbourhood that Plan Einstein offers.

This shift towards a more focused neighbourhood-based approach marked a critical turning point in the local transfer journey, enabling discussions to move from broad considerations of policy challenges towards practical experimentation grounded in the realities of the targeted neighbourhood.

It was also considered that the neighbourhood also offers strong potential for scalable impact. Small spatial improvements, community-led activities, and stronger cooperation between local actors can generate visible social benefits while creating a model that may later be adapted in other neighbourhoods of Thessaloniki.





### 3.3. Testing actions & lessons learned

#### Co-designing local testing actions

Initial ideas for possible small-scale activities in the target neighbourhood of Giannitson included welcome and orientation support, informal language and skills exchange, cooking and storytelling workshops, women's groups and clothing exchange initiatives.

However, the discussions kept reinforcing the key idea that schools represent one of the most stable and accessible integration structures in Thessaloniki, particularly in multicultural and socio-economically vulnerable neighbourhoods.

On this basis, the group agreed to test three realistic small-scale actions in the neighbourhood: a community garden in a multicultural school; a woodworking workshop for women; and a backgammon and traditional games event. The experiences and lessons learned from these testing actions are set out on the following pages.

#### Testing Action N1 – Community Garden in a Multicultural School

This Testing Action focused on the creation of a **community garden within the yard of a multicultural school** located in a low-income neighbourhood near the Blue Refugee Center. A previously underused outdoor area was transformed into a shared flower and vegetable garden through the active involvement of students, teachers, parents, local residents, and community organisations.

The intervention adopted a **participatory and low-threshold approach**, using gardening as a practical activity capable of fostering interaction across diverse social and cultural groups without requiring advanced language or technical skills. Through collective planning, planting, and maintenance, participants contributed to the improvement of a shared space while strengthening relationships within the school community and the wider neighbourhood.

#### The main objectives of the action were:

- ▶ strengthening **social cohesion and inclusion** through collective activities;
- ▶ improving the local environment through the creation of an accessible green space;
- ▶ fostering a sense of **shared ownership and responsibility**;
- ▶ encouraging participation through simple and inclusive engagement methods;
- ▶ reinforcing connections between the school and the surrounding neighbourhood.

Implementation included the identification of a suitable space, co-design of the garden layout, collective preparation and planting activities, and the establishment of simple shared maintenance arrangements. The process emphasised cooperation, informal interaction, and practical learning.

### Key Outcomes

- ▶ Creation of a functional community garden within the school premises;
- ▶ Active participation of students, families, local residents, and community actors;
- ▶ Visible improvement of the school environment;
- ▶ Strengthened relationships between the school and the neighbourhood;
- ▶ Demonstration that **small-scale and low-cost interventions can generate meaningful social impact and community interaction.**

The Testing Action confirmed the value of **place-based and participatory interventions** anchored in existing local institutions such as schools. Its positive reception demonstrated both feasibility and replication potential within other neighbourhoods of Thessaloniki. The experience also informed the intervention logic of the Investment Plan, reinforcing the importance of modest, community-driven actions that combine social interaction, local ownership, and practical implementation.





## Testing Action N2 – Woodworking Workshop for Women

This Testing Action focused on the organisation of a **participatory woodworking workshop** for women from refugee and local communities. Through collaborative, hands-on activities, participants worked in pairs to construct small wooden bird feeders, using making and shared practice as tools for interaction beyond linguistic and cultural barriers.

The workshop created a **safe and inclusive environment** where women from different backgrounds could connect, exchange experiences, and develop practical skills through collective action. Refugee women and local residents participated equally, strengthening mutual trust and cooperation while contributing to small-scale environmental improvements within the neighbourhood.

The main objectives of the action were:

- ▶ strengthening **social cohesion and inclusion** through shared creative activities;
- ▶ promoting **women's empowerment**, confidence, and autonomy through skills development;
- ▶ encouraging interaction through **non-verbal communication and collaboration**;
- ▶ supporting neighbourhood biodiversity through the creation of ecological structures;
- ▶ reinforcing participants' connection with local shared spaces and the wider community.

The implementation followed a simple and accessible participatory methodology, including:

- ▶ introduction to basic woodworking tools and safety procedures;
- ▶ collaborative work in pairs to encourage peer learning and cooperation;
- ▶ use of visual instructions and practical demonstrations to minimise language barriers;
- ▶ opportunities for creativity and personal expression through decoration and design adaptations.

The process prioritised participation, shared experience, and informal interaction rather than technical perfection.

### Key Outcomes

- ▶ Women from refugee and local communities collaborated equally throughout the workshop;
- ▶ Construction of 8 wooden bird feeders;
- ▶ Development of basic woodworking skills and increased participant confidence;
- ▶ Strengthening of informal relationships and trust among participants;
- ▶ Installation of the bird feeders in local green and shared spaces, contributing to neighbourhood biodiversity.



The Testing Action demonstrated how **low-threshold, hands-on activities can foster meaningful social interaction and empower participants**, particularly women who may face barriers to participation in public life. By combining practical learning, creativity, and neighbourhood engagement, the action highlighted the potential of small-scale participatory initiatives to strengthen social cohesion and community ownership. Within the Investment Plan, the activity serves as an example of how modest, community-driven interventions can connect social inclusion, skills development, and place-based engagement in a realistic and replicable way.



### Testing Action N3 – Neighbourhood Backgammon & Traditional Games Gathering

This Testing Action focused on the organisation of an open and inclusive **Neighbourhood Backgammon & Traditional Games Gathering**, bringing together residents from different generations and cultural backgrounds through play-based interaction. Elderly residents who regularly engage in backgammon in local cafés were invited to meet with students and young people from nearby schools in a relaxed and informal community setting.

Alongside the backgammon activities, the event included a small exhibition and demonstration of traditional board games from different cultures, highlighting the shared historical and intercultural dimensions of play. Participants had the opportunity to explore and try games originating from various countries, supported by simple informational material presenting their rules and historical background.

A central component of the action was **intergenerational learning and informal knowledge exchange**, with older participants introducing younger generations to backgammon strategies, traditions, and stories associated with the games. Particular attention was given to the inclusion of children and young people from multicultural backgrounds, supporting interaction and shared neighbourhood experiences.

The main objectives of the action were:

- ▶ strengthening **intergenerational exchange and dialogue**;
- ▶ promoting **social cohesion** through accessible and familiar activities;
- ▶ encouraging **intercultural interaction** through traditional games from different cultures;
- ▶ facilitating informal knowledge transfer and storytelling;
- ▶ activating neighbourhood spaces through a welcoming and participatory community event.

The implementation followed a simple and accessible participatory format, including:

- ▶ setup of backgammon tables and friendly neighbourhood matches;
- ▶ formation of mixed teams or pairs involving students and elderly residents;
- ▶ presentation and free-play stations for traditional board games;
- ▶ distribution of informational leaflets on game history and rules;
- ▶ facilitation by coordinators encouraging participation and interaction.

The activity prioritised informal encounters, learning through play, and shared enjoyment, creating a relaxed environment that encouraged communication and connection across generations and cultures.

## Key Outcomes

- ▶ Participation of residents from diverse age groups and cultural backgrounds;
- ▶ Strengthened intergenerational interaction within the neighbourhood;
- ▶ Increased engagement between students, elderly residents, and migrant families;
- ▶ Greater awareness of the intercultural and historical dimensions of traditional games;
- ▶ Creation of an inclusive and repeatable community event model.

The Testing Action demonstrated how **simple, culturally familiar activities can function as effective tools for community-building and social inclusion**. By activating shared spaces and facilitating informal encounters, the initiative contributed to strengthening neighbourhood relationships and fostering a stronger sense of belonging.

Within the Investment Plan, the action illustrates the value of **low-cost, easily replicable, and community-driven interventions** capable of generating meaningful interaction and supporting social cohesion in Thessaloniki's multicultural neighbourhoods.





### 3.4. Shared Vision

The shared vision of the ULG did not emerge through a single discussion or formal exercise. Instead, it evolved progressively through continuous dialogue, reflection on feasibility, collective learning, and discussion of local realities throughout the meetings.

Key factors shaping the vision included:

- ▶ discussion of Testing Actions and their practical limitations;
- ▶ recognition of the immediate needs of newcomers;
- ▶ acknowledgement of constraints within existing policy and service frameworks;
- ▶ the need for realistic and sustainable action;
- ▶ the value of community-based and human-centred approaches
- ▶ identification of schools as stable anchors for inclusion;
- ▶ appreciation of the importance of a durable local collaboration network.

By the fourth meeting, a clear consensus had emerged: the objective was not simply to implement temporary activities, but to contribute to a **long-term local ecosystem for inclusion**, rooted in structures capable of lasting beyond individual projects.

The following statement captures the shared direction collectively shaped through the ULG process:

#### Shared Vision Statement

"Our vision is a socially cohesive neighbourhood in Giannitson where shared public spaces, schools, and local networks act as stable anchors for inclusion, participation, and community resilience beyond the duration of Plan Einstein."

This vision provides the foundation for the following intervention logic and action framework developed within the Investment Plan.

The ULG recognized that sustaining these ambitions would require a lightweight neighbourhood coordination mechanism. This thinking ultimately led to the proposal for a local Living Lab presented in the Implementation Framework.



# Intervention Logic

## 4.1. Overall objectives

To deliver on this vision and translate Plan Einstein principles into practice at neighbourhood level, the ULG identified the following Overall Objectives:

### **Overall Objective 1 – Strengthen Stable, Community-Based Structures for Inclusion:**

The multicultural school is already a stable community anchor. Investing in this neighbourhood reinforces the role of the school and its surroundings as a permanent inclusion hub.

### **Overall Objective 2 – Foster Everyday Encounters and Shared Experiences:**

The garden project demonstrated the potential of micro-spaces for informal contact. Expanding this idea into other shared neighbourhood spaces (benches, walkways, small pop-up markets) supports everyday encounters.

### **Overall Objective 3 – Build a Durable Collaboration Network Across Sectors:**

Working in this specific neighbourhood forces organisations, local authorities, schools, and residents to coordinate regularly — which in turn builds the durable network the ULG aspires to sustain beyond Plan Einstein.

### **Overall Objective 4 – Support Early Integration Needs to Enable Participation:**

The neighbourhood functions as a first site where newcomers navigate everyday life — from shops to schools to public services. Strengthening orientation and practical support in this area helps remove barriers that would otherwise limit participation in community life.

These overall objectives reflect the collective learning of the ULG, particularly the understanding that inclusion efforts must be anchored in places and structures that endure, rather than in short-term or isolated activities.

## 4.2. Operational strategic objectives

To operationalise the above overall objectives in line with the structure of Plan Einstein identified during the course of the Plan Einstein Academy network, the following strategic objectives have been defined for the Investment Plan:

- 1 To create **spaces for meaningful encounters** in the neighbourhood
- 2 To organise or facilitate **activities for meaningful encounters** in the neighbourhood
- 3 To develop an **ecosystem approach** to local social cohesions
- 4 To create a **co-housing** solution for local people and asylum seekers.

**Note:** During the initial transferability assessment, Thessaloniki identified all three core aspects of Plan Einstein (1–3) as critical, reflecting the city’s strong emphasis on neighbourhood-based social cohesion, shared spaces, and collaboration with local actors. Among the four optional modules, co-housing was identified as a clear priority.

The application of Plan Einstein principles within existing shelters, integrating Plan Einstein into policy and the inclusion of voluntary migrants (the other elements identified in the network’s Transferability Study) were considered to be important, but areas which could be potential areas for future development rather than being a subject of focus in this Investment Plan at this stage.



## Vision

A socially cohesive neighbourhood in Giannitson where shared public spaces, schools, and local networks act as stable anchors for inclusion, participation, and community resilience beyond the duration of Plan Einstein.

## Overall Objectives

1

Strengthen Stable,  
Community-Based  
Structures for Inclusion

2

Foster Everyday  
Encounters and  
Shared Experiences

3

Build a Durable  
Collaboration Network  
Across Sectors

4

Support Early  
Integration Needs to  
Enable Participation

## Operational strategic objectives

1

To create **spaces for  
meaningful encounters**  
in the neighbourhood

2

To organise or facilitate  
**activities for meaningful  
encounters** in the  
neighbourhood

3

To develop an  
**ecosystem approach** to  
local social cohesion

4

To create a **co-housing**  
solution for local people  
and asylum seekers.

# Plan of Action

To deliver on this vision and translate Plan Einstein principles into practice at While housing emerged as the most significant structural challenge identified through the ULG process, the Testing Actions focused on neighbourhood-level interventions that could be implemented immediately with available resources. The co-housing objective therefore complements, rather than replaces, the social cohesion actions presented below.

## 5.1. Summary action tables

This section presents the proposed actions for implementing Plan Einstein in Giannitson identified through the ULG process – structured under each of the operational strategic objectives defined in the Intervention Logic above. This ensures consistency between the strategic framework and the proposed implementation pathway.

These actions reflect a realistic and community-based approach focused on strengthening inclusion, collaboration, and neighbourhood-level participation in Thessaloniki and the tables set out key aspects of future implementation including who is involved, the likely timing and an overview of the resourcing needs.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

### To create spaces for meaningful encounters in the neighbourhood

| Action                                            | Description                                                                                                                               | Output indicator                                                                                                                 | Lead Actor    | Key partners                             | Resourcing needs                                                                            | Timeframe                       |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Blooming Together: Community School Garden</b> | Consolidation of the multicultural school garden as a shared neighbourhood space for students, families, residents, and community actors. | 1 fully functional school garden, regular mixed participation of school community, + locals & newcomers, min. 6 shared uses/year | MDAT          | School, NGOs, parents' groups, residents | Gardening tools, plants, facilitator support, maintenance materials, communication material | Short-term start; long-term use |
| <b>Neighbourhood Micro-Space Activation</b>       | Small-scale transformation of underused outdoor spaces into welcoming meeting points through seating, greenery, and community use.        | 1-2 spaces activated<br>Visible space improvement                                                                                | Municipality  | Residents, NGOs, local businesses        | Benches, planters, cleaning materials, volunteer support, small operational budget          | Medium term                     |
| <b>Thessaloniki Solidarity Center</b>             | Use of selected spaces within Thessaloniki Solidarity Center for informal neighbourhood activities and interaction.                       | Regular open hours<br>Mixed attendance<br>increased early engagement                                                             | SolidarityNow | NGOs, Municipality, community groups     | Indoor communal space, basic equipment, refreshments, communication support                 | Ongoing                         |

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

## To organise or facilitate activities for meaningful encounters in the neighbourhood

| Action                                      | Description                                                                                                  | Output indicator                              | Lead Actor                                    | Key partners                        | Resourcing needs                                          | Timeframe         |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Garden Days &amp; Seasonal Workshops</b> | Collective gardening sessions and seasonal activities linked to the school garden.                           | 8–10 sessions/year<br>Stable participation    | School                                        | School, local residents, volunteers | Gardening consumables, facilitator, basic tools           | Ongoing           |
| <b>Games Without Borders</b>                | Intergenerational chess and backgammon activities bringing together elderly residents, youth, and newcomers. | 3–4 tournaments/year<br>Mixed participation   | Thessaloniki Solidarity Center, SolidarityNow | Schools, cafés, NGOs                | Tables, chairs, game sets, communication materials        | Short–Medium term |
| <b>Neighbourhood Open Days</b>              | Seasonal community events combining activities, information                                                  | 2–3 events/year<br>Joint activities organised | School /Municipality                          | NGOs, residents                     | Event coordination, equipment, flyers, refreshments       | Ongoing           |
| <b>Participatory Woodworking Workshops</b>  | Hands-on workshops where local and refugee women collaboratively build simple objects for neighbourhood use. | 3–4 events/year                               | NGOs                                          | Community groups, schools           | Tools, wood materials, facilitators, protective equipment | Medium term       |



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

#### To develop an ecosystem approach to local social cohesion

| Action                                                                    | Description                                                                                | Output indicator                                     | Lead Actor   | Key partners            | Resourcing needs                                           | Timeframe   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Neighbourhood Coordination Group</b>                                   | Informal coordination mechanism bringing together local actors active in the area.         | 3–4 meetings/year<br>Shared priorities defined       | Municipality | NGOs, school, residents | Meeting space<br>Facilitation<br>Basic documentation       | Ongoing     |
| <b>Shared Neighbourhood Activity Calendar</b>                             | Simple shared planning tool for activities and local events.                               | 1 shared calendar                                    | Municipality | Local partners          | Staff or volunteer time, Online shared communication tools | Short term  |
| <b>ULG on the Ground</b><br><b>Open ULG Meetings in the Neighbourhood</b> | Organisation of selected ULG meetings and workshops directly within the intervention area. | 2 meetings/year                                      | Municipality | ULG members             | Local hosting space, facilitation, basic logistics         | Medium term |
| <b>Capacity Building for Community Actors</b>                             | Small-scale capacity-building sessions for local actors and volunteers.                    | 2–4 sessions/year<br>Increased facilitation capacity | NGOs         | Municipality            | Trainers, workshop materials, shared space                 | Medium term |

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

## To create a co-housing solution for local people and asylum seekers

| Action                                          | Description                                                                                         | Output indicator                                  | Lead Actor                                   | Key partners                             | Resourcing needs                                                              | Timeframe   |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Shared Living Lab</b>                        | Exploration of small-scale co-housing models adapted to local realities and existing housing stock. | Feasibility note, Identified pilot option         | MDAT, Municipality (Housing / Social Policy) | MDAT, housing experts                    | Coordination time, expert support, meeting space                              | Short term  |
| <b>Co-Housing Pilot Initiative</b>              | Testing of a small co-housing arrangement involving local residents and asylum seekers.             | 1 pilot co-housing unit with stable tenancy       | MDAT                                         | MDAT, NGOs, residents, Municipality      | Rental support / guarantees, basic furnishing, legal & administrative support | Medium term |
| <b>Living Together Support &amp; Mediation</b>  | Informal mediation and community-building support for co-housing participants.                      | Stable co-housing arrangements, Reduced conflicts | NGOs                                         | Municipality Social Services, volunteers | Facilitators, meeting space, communication tools                              | Ongoing     |
| <b>Linking Co-Housing to Neighbourhood Life</b> | Connecting co-housing participants to neighbourhood activities and shared spaces.                   | Active participation                              | NGOs / School                                | Community actors                         | Coordination time<br>outreach materials                                       | Ongoing     |



# Implementation Framework

The implementation of this Investment Plan follows a gradual, place-based approach, designed to support learning, feasibility, and long-term sustainability. Rather than initiating multiple actions simultaneously across the city, the plan concentrates on a single neighbourhood as a pilot area, enabling the municipality and its partners to:

- ▶ test cooperation and governance arrangements under real local conditions;
- ▶ learn from small-scale implementation and adapt actions accordingly;
- ▶ build trust between institutions, civil society actors, and residents;
- ▶ assess transferability before considering expansion to other neighbourhoods.

This phased approach reflects the understanding developed through the URBACT Local Group process that effective inclusion requires time, proximity, and continuity, rather than rapid or fragmented interventions.

The starting point for implementation is the multicultural school and its surrounding spaces, identified as stable and accessible anchors within the neighbourhood. The initial testing action—the transformation of a neglected space into a community garden—has already demonstrated both feasibility and community engagement, providing a practical foundation on which subsequent actions can build.

The following sections outline the approach to implementation in more detail.

## 6.1. Governance Structure

Implementation relies on shared ownership, with roles distributed according to institutional capacity and proximity to the neighbourhood:

**MDAT along with the Municipality of Thessaloniki will play a coordinating role**, ensuring alignment with existing local strategies (Resilient Thessaloniki 2030, migrant integration policies, education objectives). The municipality's role is not to deliver all actions directly, but to enable, connect, and support local actors and partnerships, including by providing access to public spaces, alignment with policy frameworks, and small-scale infrastructure support.

At neighbourhood level, a small and flexible coordination group, a **living lab**, will be established, composed of diverse actors with subtly different roles and responsibilities:

- ▶ School: hosting activities, integrating actions into school life, engaging students and families.
- ▶ NGOs & Civil Society: facilitation of activities, community outreach, thematic expertise (health, social inclusion, education).
- ▶ Residents & Parents: participation, co-maintenance of spaces, informal leadership roles.

The role of the group will focus on:

- ▶ coordinating activities and timelines,
- ▶ clarifying roles and responsibilities,
- ▶ addressing practical challenges as they arise,
- ▶ knowledge exchange and ensuring continuity beyond individual events or funding streams.

This living lab is intentionally lightweight, avoiding complex governance structures that are difficult to sustain.



## 6.2. Financing the Plan

This is an Investment Plan, but it deliberately avoids overestimating financial needs. Most actions are low to medium cost, relying on existing resources, partnerships, and incremental investment. Funding principles include:

- ▶ Prioritisation of small, tangible investments with visible local impact.
- ▶ Combination of municipal resources, external funding, and in-kind contributions.
- ▶ Avoiding dependence on a single funding source.

Most small-scale actions can be implemented through limited operational resources and existing partnerships. However, future scaling of neighbourhood-based interventions, small public space improvements, or adaptations of school-related infrastructure may require medium-scale investment support through municipal, national, or European funding instruments.

Some potential funding sources include:

| Level                          | Potential Funding Sources                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Municipal</b>               | Small-scale urban improvement budgets.<br>Social policy and education-related funds.<br>Maintenance budgets for public spaces.                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>National &amp; European</b> | ESF+ (social inclusion, education).<br>ERDF (small-scale urban regeneration).<br>CERV (social cohesion, citizen participation, inclusion and community engagement).<br>AMIF (where applicable).<br>Horizon Europe (research, social innovation)<br>Future URBACT-related follow-up initiatives. |
| <b>Other Sources</b>           | Corporate social responsibility (CSR) contributions from local businesses.<br>Donations in kind (plants, tools, materials).<br>Voluntary contributions and community fundraising for specific activities.                                                                                       |

The school garden pilot demonstrates how limited funding, combined with coordination and community involvement, can produce meaningful results.

## 6.3. Phasing and Timeline

Implementation will follow a phased approach:

### **Phase 1 – Consolidation (Short-term)**

- ▶ Formalise neighbourhood coordination group.
- ▶ Stabilise and maintain the school garden.
- ▶ Map additional small-scale spaces for activation.
- ▶ Secure minimal operational resources.

### **Phase 2 – Expansion (Medium-term)**

- ▶ Activate 1–2 additional shared spaces.
- ▶ Introduce regular low-threshold activities linked to the school and neighbourhood.
- ▶ Strengthen coordination mechanisms and documentation.

### **Phase 3 – Transfer and Scaling (Long-term)**

- ▶ Document lessons learned.
- ▶ Explore replication in other neighbourhoods.
- ▶ Integrate successful approaches into municipal policy frameworks.

This phased logic ensures flexibility and avoids unrealistic commitments.



## 6.4. Monitoring and Learning Framework

Monitoring will focus on learning, adaptation, and continuous improvement rather than exclusively on quantitative outputs. The framework aims to support both local implementation and the identification of transferable practices that may inform future replication in other neighbourhoods of Thessaloniki.

### Key Monitoring Dimensions

#### Participation

- ▶ Number and diversity of participants.
- ▶ Balance between newcomers and long-term residents.

#### Use of Space

- ▶ Frequency of use of the garden and other shared spaces.
- ▶ Informal presence outside organised activities.

#### Network Functioning

- ▶ Regularity of coordination meetings.
- ▶ Continued engagement of key actors.

#### Qualitative Change

- ▶ Perceived sense of ownership.
- ▶ Feedback from school staff, parents, and residents.
- ▶ Observed changes in interaction and cooperation.

### Key Monitoring Tools

Simple, accessible monitoring tools will be used, including:

- ▶ short reflection notes,
- ▶ participant feedback,
- ▶ photo documentation,
- ▶ brief annual summaries.

## 6.5. Risk Identification and Mitigation

| Risk                                  | Likelihood | Impact | Mitigation Measures                                           |
|---------------------------------------|------------|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Loss of interest after initial phase  | Medium     | Medium | Anchor actions in school routines and neighbourhood ownership |
| Limited funding availability          | Medium     | Medium | Focus on low-cost actions; diversify funding sources          |
| Over-reliance on specific individuals | Medium     | High   | Distribute roles; document processes                          |
| Political or policy changes           | High       | High   | Use schools and neighbourhood spaces as stable anchors        |
| Community tensions or resistance      | Low-Medium | Medium | Maintain open communication and inclusive participation       |



## 6.6. Closing Reflections

Implementation Framework reflects the shared understanding developed within the URBACT Local Group: that meaningful and sustainable inclusion is achieved not through isolated or time-bound projects, but through everyday cooperation, shared use of space, and locally embedded structures.

The long-term sustainability of this Investment Plan is not dependent on continuous external funding, but rather on a set of interrelated enabling conditions. These include:

- ▶ the integration of actions into existing and stable local institutions, particularly schools;
- ▶ the strengthening of relationships between local actors, residents, and organisations operating in the neighbourhood;
- ▶ the use of simple and flexible governance arrangements that support coordination without creating additional administrative burden;
- ▶ the gradual development of community ownership over shared spaces and activities.

By adopting a gradual and pragmatic approach – starting with small-scale actions, remaining grounded in neighbourhood realities, and working collectively across sectors – Thessaloniki positions itself to translate the principles of Plan Einstein into lasting change at neighbourhood level. This approach reinforces the city's capacity to respond to social challenges in a way that is participatory, resilient, and transferable.

Particular emphasis is placed on institutional embedding, ensuring that activities become connected to existing municipal, educational, and community structures rather than remaining isolated project-based initiatives. In this context, the neighbourhood surrounding the Blue Solidarity Center functions both as a testing ground for new approaches and as a reference model for inclusive, place-based urban action that can inform future interventions in other parts of Thessaloniki.



