

# Project idea form - small projects

Version 2.1

Registration no. (filled in by MA/JS only) \_\_\_\_\_

## Project Idea Form

Date of submission 04/06/2025

### 1. Project idea identification

Project idea name	"Empowering vulnerable communities in the Baltic Sea Region through an evidence-based, community-led prevention system to reduce social and health problems"
Short name of the project	Empowered prevention
Previous calls	yes <input type="radio"/> no <input checked="" type="radio"/>
Seed money support	yes <input type="radio"/> no <input checked="" type="radio"/>

### 2. Programme priority

1. Innovative societies
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### 3. Programme objective

1.1. Resilient economies and communities
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### 4. Potential lead applicant

Name of the organisation (original)	Tervise Arengu Instituut
Name of the organisation (English)	National Institute for Health Development
Website	www.tai.ee
Country	EE



Type of Partner	Sectoral agency
	local or regional development agency, environmental agency, energy agency, employment agency, etc.
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Which organisation(s) in the planned partnership take part in a project within the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme for the first time? Please list the respective partners.

Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control Department, Lithuania

Prevention Sverige, NGO from Sweden

FINDER, NGO from Berlin, Germany

### 5.1 Specific challenge to be addressed

Local communities in the Baltic region face rising challenges in youth well-being, including substance use, delinquency, and mental health issues. While alcohol and tobacco use among youth is declining, the use of e-cigarettes, inhalants, and non-medical pharmaceuticals is increasing (ESPAD Report 2024). These challenges create significant economic burden - untreated youth problems cost municipalities millions in crisis interventions, justice system involvement, and lost productivity. Youth behavior is influenced by risk and protective factors, which can be addressed through effective prevention. However, implementation varies greatly. Baltic municipalities increasingly collect youth data but lack systematic approaches to translate findings into action. In Estonia, communities with risk factor data struggled to prioritize and select appropriate interventions (Siilbek & Streimann, 2024). Similar challenges exist in Lithuania and across the region - data alone doesn't create change. Local actors need a structured, science-based system that turns data into sustainable action. The Communities That Care (CTC) system addresses this through community engagement, local needs assessment, and

evidence-based interventions. CTC aims to: (1) strengthen local ownership of prevention; (2) reduce duplication of resources; (3) foster collaboration; (4) ensure sustainability; and (5) provide tools for solving complex problems (Jasuja et al., 2005). Studies show CTC improves youth outcomes by reducing substance use, delinquency, school failure, injuries, crime, violence, social exclusion, and mental health problems (Toumbourou et al., 2024). US longitudinal studies show CTC communities achieve 25-41% greater reductions in youth problem behaviors compared to control communities, with at least 8:1 return on investment (Hawkins et al., 2012; Kuklinski et al., 2021). Small Baltic municipalities face these challenges with limited resources and professional capacity. While Sweden and Germany have successfully implemented CTC in 50+ communities, other Baltic countries lack the infrastructure for systematic prevention. This creates an urgent need for transnational knowledge transfer. Trust, shared responsibility, and cooperation are critical for building resilient communities where youth can thrive and prevention is a shared, long-term priority.

## 5.2 Focus of the call

Small and rural Baltic municipalities face distinct prevention challenges: scarce professional resources, fragmented services, and limited access to evidence-based programs. The Communities That Care (CTC) system offers a structured, science-based approach tailored to these realities.

CTC helps communities interpret risk data, engage stakeholders, and implement effective interventions. In areas with few preventive services, CTC's five-phase model strengthens what already exists through coordinated local action. Why CTC fits small communities: (1) Coalition-based work unifies fragmented services, (2) structured guidance compensates for limited local expertise, (3) cross-sector partnerships build trust and shared ownership, (4) community involvement supports sustainability beyond project cycles. CTC strengthens local capacity by building inclusive, trust-based partnerships and long-term cross-sectoral cooperation. Based on the Social Development Strategy (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996), CTC fosters strong ties through participation, skills, and recognition—creating belonging and shared responsibility. Through transnational collaboration, small Baltic municipalities access 15+ years of partners experience, peer mentoring and shared tools, avoiding pitfalls. CTC returns \$11.13 per dollar invested. By age 23, youth in CTC areas show 17% less antisocial behavior, 17% less drug use, 55% less alcohol use, and up to 30% higher college completion (Kuklinski et al., 2021).

## 6. Transnational relevance

The partnership includes Estonia (lead partner), Sweden, Germany, and Lithuania. Estonia leads the project implementation and coordination. The Swedish and German partners bring complementary expertise in CTC adaptation and implementation. The German partner, the national implementation body — closely working with the State Prevention Council of Lower Saxony, the organization that adapted CTC for Germany starting in 2009 — contributes 15 years of experience from over 50 municipalities. Swedish partners bring their own implementation experience and adaptation models for the regional context. Together, these partners ensure both methodological quality and practical feasibility. Lithuania joins as a partner with similar post-Soviet context and youth challenges as Estonia, aiming to implement CTC efficiently through shared learning. The partnership's strength lies in combining implementation expertise from established CTC countries with the fresh perspective and high motivation of Baltic partners. CTC operates on three levels in each country: (national or area)



experts (coordination, training, materials, research), local authorities (implementation, stakeholder engagement), and community stakeholders including youth (active participation in planning and assessment). This multi-level approach combines bottom-up community empowerment with top-down strategic support. We will establish networks for local coordinators to exchange experiences across borders and create an expert group to develop comparative youth surveys and research. The partnership deliberately includes diverse community types—from rural municipalities to small cities—ensuring CTC's adaptability across different contexts. This diversity strengthens our collective learning and the system's relevance for the entire Baltic region.

## 7. Specific aims to be addressed

### Building trust that could lead to further cooperation initiatives

The project aims to lay the foundation for a long-term Baltic Sea Region CTC network that connects Estonia, Lithuania, Sweden, Germany and other interested countries in the region. This network would become an integral part of the broader European and international CTC community. While the CTC system has demonstrated effectiveness across diverse cultural settings, maintaining fidelity to the original model is essential. At the same time, thoughtful cultural adaptation is necessary to ensure that the approach resonates with local needs and expectations. This delicate balance requires ongoing dialogue, mutual trust, and collaboration across borders. Furthermore, the project supports the creation of local cooperation networks within participating communities and municipalities. These networks promote cohesion, sustainability, co-creation, shared ownership, empowerment, and a sense of collective efficacy.

### Initiating and keeping networks that are important for the BSR

Sweden and Germany hold valuable experience and expertise in the field of prevention, which can significantly benefit the Baltic countries. Regular in-person meetings add depth to the collaboration, strengthen mutual understanding, and help build trust across borders. These interactions lay a strong foundation for expanding the network over time. The project facilitates the development of parallel and interconnected networks: one among prevention system developers and another among implementing municipalities and local communities. This dual-level networking structure supports both strategic development and grassroots implementation. An essential part of the CTC process is the youth survey, which enables participating countries and communities to compare the needs of young people and identify risk and protective factors specific to each context. This creates a common ground for learning, benchmarking, and further regional cooperation, while fostering a sense of shared purpose.

### Bringing the Programme closer to the citizens

The Communities That Care (CTC) model, based on the Social Development Strategy, builds social bonds by offering opportunities, teaching skills, and recognising contributions. It enables every community member—parents, teachers, youth workers, entrepreneurs—to support youth using their own strengths.

This project supports the formation of a Baltic Sea CTC network, helping countries adapt the model in culturally sensitive ways while keeping core principles intact. In participating communities, the project encourages cooperation between local people and organisations. It helps identify young people's needs and strengthens their sense of belonging. By involving different generations in shared goals, the

project supports trust, shared responsibility, and local initiative. The aim is to establish a prevention system that continues as a whole beyond the project's lifetime.

Allowing a swift response to unpredictable and urgent challenges

The Social Development Strategy strengthens social cohesion by building shared norms, trust, and a sense of belonging. In unpredictable and rapidly changing situations, such as crises or conflicts, this cohesion helps communities stay connected despite differing worldviews. When people feel part of a caring community, they are more likely to support one another and act collectively. By involving local actors across sectors and generations, the CTC model fosters mutual understanding and preparedness. This enables faster, more coordinated responses to urgent challenges, while reducing fragmentation and promoting resilience.

## 8. Target groups

The project will actively involve local public authorities and their institutions, including public schools, as they hold key responsibilities for youth well-being, education, and social services. Local authorities will also play a central role in building the capacity of other local stakeholders. Research institutions will contribute expertise in evidence-based prevention and impact evaluation, support the training and coaching of local coordinators, and assist in engaging key stakeholders through tools, strategies, and training. Regional development organisations and national authorities will help integrate the CTC approach into long-term territorial and policy strategies. All target groups are directly affected by the growing social and mental health challenges faced by youth and possess the mandate and competence to address these issues through strategic planning, cross-sectoral collaboration, and sustainable implementation. They will be actively involved in needs assessment, training, implementation, and the application of project outputs for long-term prevention planning.

Please use the drop-down list to define up to five target groups that you will involve through your project's activities.	Please define a field of responsibility or an economic sector of the selected target group	Specify the countries and regions that the representatives of this target group come from.
1. Local public authority	Local public authorities responsible for youth services, education, health promotion, and community development.	Local governments and their institutions, including public schools in Estonia and Lithuania (Sweden and Germany)
2. Education/training centre and school	Formal and non-formal education, youth development, and capacity building.	Estonia, Lithuania, (Sweden, Germany)

3. Higher education and research institution	Evidence-based policy development, and community-based intervention evaluation, academic research.	Estonia (NIHD), Sweden (Swedish Institute for Applied Prevention Science), Germany (Finder Akademie)
4. National public authority	Ministry of Social Affairs; Ministry of Interior; Ministry of Justice; Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture	Estonia and Lithuania
5. Regional public authority	Regional development organizations	Estonia and Lithuania

## 9. Contribution to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Please indicate if your project idea has the potential to contribute to the implementation of the Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (<https://eusbsr.eu/implementation/>).

yes ☒ no ☐

Please select which policy area(s) of the EUSBSR your project idea contributes to most.

PA Health

The MA/JS may share your project idea form with the respective policy area coordinator(s) of the EUSBSR. You can find contacts of PACs at the EUSBSR website (<https://eusbsr.eu/contact-us/>).

☐ If you disagree, please tick here.

## 10. Partnership

The partnership includes Estonia (lead partner), Sweden, Germany, and Lithuania. Estonia leads the project implementation and coordination. The Swedish and German partners are non-profit organizations with close ties to the University of Washington, contributing expert knowledge on adapting and implementing the CTC system in the Baltic Sea Region. Sweden has already adjusted the model and tools to fit local cultural and structural contexts. Lithuania joins as a partner with similar social and structural needs, aiming to implement the CTC system in their own national context. These partners share a regional commitment to prevention and youth well-being and bring complementary strengths: scientific expertise, practical implementation experience, and policy relevance. The

partnership aims to foster mutual learning, ensure model fidelity, and adapt solutions in culturally appropriate ways. We aim to involve different types of communities—rural and small cities—that stand to benefit most from the CTC system. CTC operates on three levels in each country: national experts (responsible for coordination, training, materials, and research), local authorities or organisations (responsible for local implementation, training, and stakeholder engagement), and community stakeholders and youth (actively involved in planning, assessment, and implementation to lead local change). Local government involvement is a core element of the process. CTC combines both bottom-up and top-down approaches: it empowers communities to lead change based on local needs while ensuring strategic coordination and support from higher levels. We aim to build international networks for local coordinators to learn from each other. A network of experts will also support the development of CTC-related research and youth surveys, generating comparative data across countries.

## 11. Workplan

The project supports the development of resilient communities in the Baltic Sea Region by strengthening local capacity to prevent youth-related social challenges, improve mental health, and foster long-term well-being through the Communities That Care (CTC) prevention system. CTC builds a locally rooted and evidence-based foundation for social sustainability, helping communities better withstand and recover from external disturbances such as health crises, rising inequalities, and demographic decline. Key activities include: Capacity-building workshops for local implementation teams; translation and adaptation of essential CTC materials; implementation steps in selected rural and small urban municipalities; creation of support structures in Estonia and Lithuania to enable long-term scaling; establishment of a transnational Baltic Sea CTC network at expert and practitioner levels; comparative analysis of youth well-being through the CTC Youth Survey; development of guidance materials and policy recommendations for national use. The CTC system combines bottom-up engagement and top-down coordination. It mobilises local stakeholders—including municipalities, schools, youth organisations, and social services—to co-lead planning and early action based on shared values and evidence. At the same time, national-level actors and research institutions provide strategic oversight, tools, and coaching. This integrated approach improves communities' ability to respond to structural and external social challenges in a coordinated, data-driven way. The project promotes fair and inclusive development by engaging underserved communities and addressing territorial disparities in access to prevention systems. It strengthens social cohesion, supports smarter community-level planning, and contributes to a more resilient macro-region. The outputs—trained local teams, functioning national support systems, adapted tools, and cross-national networks—will support innovation in social governance and remain in use well beyond the project timeframe.

## 12. Planned budget

ERDF budget (planned expenditure of partners from the EU)	EUR 500,000.00
Norwegian budget (planned expenditure of partners from Norway)	EUR XXX
<b>Total budget (including preparatory costs)</b>	<b>EUR 500,000.00</b>





### 13. Project consultation

Please indicate if you wish to have a consultation (online meeting) with the MA/JS to discuss your project idea

yes ☒ no ☐

### 14. Questions to the MA/JS

Questions related to the content of the planned project	Are initial implementation activities (not full pilot cycles) eligible as main actions under a small project? How detailed do we need to be in defining which target groups will use each specific output? Is it acceptable that each country in the partnership progresses at a slightly different pace with implementation activities? Can the Baltic CTC network (expert and practitioner levels) be counted as a durable output under small project criteria? What are the expectations regarding cross-border value for target groups that are primarily local (e.g., municipalities)? Does shared methodology and joint learning satisfy the transnationality requirement? To what extent should we demonstrate the transferability of our results to other Baltic Sea Region countries that are not part of the partnership? Is it possible to organise cross-border peer exchanges (e.g. study visits between municipalities) as a justified project activity?
Questions related to budgeting and expenditure	Are costs related to translation and localisation of external tools (e.g. training manuals) eligible under external expertise or other specific budget lines? Can staff costs include time spent on coaching and supporting local communities beyond the applicant's own organisation (e.g. mentoring municipalities)? Is it possible to cover costs for subcontracted training providers, if they are not formal project partners? Are travel and accommodation costs for participants from non-partner municipalities eligible if they take part in central training activities? Can costs related to coordination and facilitation of the Baltic CTC network be included under project management or communication? How flexible is budget reallocation between cost categories during the project implementation?
Any other questions	If the primary impact of the project is capacity and system-building rather than service delivery, how can we best reflect this in indicator reporting?

### 15. Additional information

*(max. 1.000 characters incl. spaces)*





### **Your account in BAMOS+**

Please remember that to officially submit your application you need to access our electronic data exchange system BAMOS+. More information about the process of applying for your account in BAMOS+ you will find here:

<https://interreg-baltic.eu/gateway/bamos-account>