

# 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	Practices to Improve School Lunch Quality and Equality in Public Food Services
Short name of the project	Quality School Lunch
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

1.2. Responsive public services
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### 4. Potential lead applicant

Name of the organisation (original)	Savonia-ammattikorkeakoulu Oy
Name of the organisation (English)	Savonia University of Applied Sciences
Website	www.savonia.fi/en/homepage/
Country	FI



Type of Partner	Higher education and research institution
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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.

LITMEA | Smart Food Cluster, Lithuania  
 Alytus district municipality, Lithuania  
 Finnish Society for Food Education Ruukku, Finland  
 City of Iisalmi, Finland  
 City of Kuopio, Finland  
 Servica Food Services, Finland

### 5.1 Specific challenge to be addressed

The challenge is to make public school food services more accessible, inclusive, and responsive, especially for children and youth with special educational needs. Current systems often fail to meet their requirements for nutritional quality, food education, special diets, sustainable choices, and overcoming physical or mental barriers to enjoying a healthy school lunch.

In Finland and Lithuania, 90–94% of pupils with special needs are in mainstream schools, representing 15% of pupils in Lithuania and 21% in Finland. Lithuania's 2024 Education Act amendment requires all schools to accept pupils with special needs if parents and specialists agree. Finland's 2024 amendment to the Basic Education Act (effective August 2025) strengthens inclusive practices and early support. However, food education is not yet part of early support frameworks, despite its importance for wellbeing and inclusion. Children with concentration or social difficulties often struggle to eat properly in noisy, overstimulating canteens, even though school meals should provide one-third of daily nutritional needs.

In Poland, since 2022, primary schools must offer a hot meal. While there are no national subsidies,

local governments—such as in Rybnik—cover staff and facility costs, with parents paying for food. Challenges include accommodating special diets and promoting healthy eating and clean tap water use.

The broader food environment is increasingly complex, making it harder for families to make healthy, sustainable choices. While agencies provide inclusion materials, these focus mainly on academic tools, not the wider school environment. Inclusive lunch breaks and equitable access to food services remain underdeveloped.

This project addresses the need for innovative, user-centred public service models that integrate inclusive food education and responsive school meal systems. It aims to strengthen the capacity of public authorities and schools across the Baltic Sea Region to deliver equitable, sustainable, and health-promoting food services for all children.

## 5.2 Focus of the call

The partner regions face structural challenges that limit access to high-quality, inclusive food services and education. Kuopio and Iisalmi, cities in the Eastern Finland, and Alytus district municipality in Lithuania are rural and sparsely populated, while Rybnik (Poland) has a legacy of heavy industry. The Russian war in Ukraine has significantly increased multiculturalism in the regions, particularly through influx of Ukrainian refugees. These factors affect the socio-economic status of many residents. Since the Russian war in Ukraine, all regions have experienced economic decline due to reduced investment, business, and travel. Budget cuts in municipalities have further constrained innovation, especially in services for children.

Improving regional attractiveness—particularly for young families—is essential to counteract migration to capital areas or abroad. High-quality, responsive public services are a key factor in retaining and attracting residents.

This project supports the call's objective by improving access to essential services—specifically inclusive food education and school food services. It will develop practical, scalable guidelines to enhance service quality and accessibility. Emphasis will be placed on reducing isolation and ensuring equitable access for all. The project will increase livability in the target regions and offer transnational value across the Baltic Sea Region through strong community and youth engagement.

## 6. Transnational relevance

Countries in the Baltic Sea Region differ in their progress toward inclusive and sustainable school systems. Finland has long promoted inclusiveness and provides free school lunches to all pupils, regardless of socio-economic background. These meals follow national nutrition guidelines and are partly supported by EU schemes. However, challenges remain in improving quality and sustainability, such as reducing food waste and increasing plant-based options.

In contrast, Lithuania and Poland are at earlier stages of implementing inclusive education. Lithuania is advancing in integrating children with special needs into mainstream schools, making it timely to ensure food education and services also reflect these needs. In Rybnik, Poland, families pay for school meals, while the municipality covers staff and infrastructure. Rybnik has introduced innovative procurement practices to ensure meals are both healthy and sustainable, incorporating environmental

and social criteria.

This diversity of contexts offers strong potential for transnational learning. By sharing experiences and practices, the project will enhance the capacity of schools and municipalities to create more inclusive food environments. It will support teachers, staff, and parents in making lunch breaks more supportive for children with special needs.

Peer learning and practical examples from across the region will empower food service providers, educators, researchers and communities to improve everyday practices. The project will strengthen the relevance and adaptability of tools for inclusive school food systems across the Baltic Sea Region.

## 7. Specific aims to be addressed

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

We aim to build trust among project partners by engaging in mutual learning and open exchange. This begins with familiarizing ourselves with each partner country's and municipality's current practices in food education and school lunch systems. Through joint analysis of strengths and challenges, we will identify opportunities for improvement and co-develop solutions that support municipalities in meeting their obligations—particularly in addressing the needs of children with special educational needs.

To support this process, we will organize transnational workshops and site visits. These activities will allow partners to observe practices in real-life settings, deepen understanding of local contexts, and foster dialogue among educators, food service providers, and municipal staff. The shared experiences will strengthen collaboration, inspire innovation, and ensure that the solutions developed are grounded in practical realities and transferable across the Baltic Sea Region.

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

This small-scale partnership will serve as a launchpad for a new collaborative network focused on inclusive and sustainable school food systems in the Baltic Sea Region. The project will bring together municipalities, schools, food service providers, and experts to exchange knowledge and co-create solutions tailored to regional needs.

The aim is not only to initiate cooperation but to lay the groundwork for long-term collaboration. Through joint planning, shared learning, and trust-building activities, the partners will prepare for a larger, follow-up project where the concepts and activities developed in this initiative can be piloted and scaled.

The network will also seek to connect with existing BSR initiatives and platforms, ensuring alignment with broader regional goals and increasing the visibility and impact of the project outcomes. By fostering lasting relationships and shared ownership, the project will contribute to a more resilient and innovative public service ecosystem.

### Bringing the Programme closer to the citizens

The project will engage local communities through workshops and stakeholder meetings in each partner municipality. These events will involve educators, food service providers, municipal staff, parents, and youth to present the project's goals, share examples, and gather feedback. Partners will visit selected municipalities and public service providers to showcase the initiative and promote dialogue around inclusive and sustainable school food systems. This will help demonstrate how the Programme benefits citizens in their daily lives.

Project results will be shared transnationally through partner networks, ensuring that good practices

reach a wider audience across the Baltic Sea Region and strengthen the Programme's visibility and impact at the local level.

Allowing a swift response to unpredictable and urgent challenges

Inclusive education systems are inherently flexible and better equipped to respond to changing circumstances. Schools that apply inclusive methods are accustomed to adapting curricula, teaching strategies, and support services to meet diverse needs—skills that are essential in times of crisis or disruption.

This project will strengthen that adaptability by promoting inclusive food education and service models that can be quickly adjusted in response to emergencies, such as public health crises, economic shocks, or sudden demographic changes. By fostering collaboration between municipalities, schools, and service providers, the project will enhance local capacity to respond swiftly and effectively to unforeseen challenges, ensuring that no child is left behind.

## 8. Target groups

Public food services - planning and piloting tools and practices

Municipalities (education and culture department, teachers and principals at public schools) - understanding of food education in pedagogy, recognizing pupils challenges and special needs and enabling them.

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. Infrastructure and public service provider	Is responsible for determining menus and composition of school lunches	Cities of Kuopio and Iisalmi, North Savo, Finland; Alytus district municipality, Lithuania; City of Rybnik, Poland
2. Local public authority	Is responsible for organizing premises and facilities for school lunch	Cities of Kuopio and Iisalmi, North Savo, Finland; Alytus district municipality, Lithuania; City of Rybnik, Poland

3. Education/training centre and school	Teachers and rectors at local public schools; they are responsible in practice how food education is implemented over the school lunch and school day	Finland, two selected schools from Kuopio and Iisalmi; Lithuania, two selected schools from Alytus district municipality; Poland, two selected schools from Rybnik
4. Interest group	Older children/youth with their families take responsibility of food education with schools	Finland, one school selected from Kuopio or Iisalmi; Lithuania, one school selected from Alytus district municipality; Poland, one school selected from Rybnik

## 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 lead partner: Savonia University of Applied Sciences, Kuopio, North Savo, Finland. Savonia is a public authority (a higher education organization owned by municipalities of North Savo). Savonia's Food System research area has expertise in children's nutrition, food services, food products, diets, and sustainable food system.

Partner: LITMEA | Smart Food Cluster brings together food industry stakeholders in Lithuania and has a growing network of over 120 members. The cluster focuses on developing functional and innovative food products, fosters partnerships between food industry stakeholders and educational institutions, with the aim to contribute to raise awareness about nutrition, sustainability, and food technology.



Partner: City of Rybnik, Poland. Rybnik is a city in southern Poland, with 130 000 inhabitants, located in the Silesian Voivodeship. The city runs 58 public kitchens serving food for 10 500 children in primary schools and kindergartens. Rybnik has created a Sustainable Public Meal Toolkit to support sustainability in public food services

Partner: Finnish Society for Food Education Ruukku, Helsinki, Finland. Ruukku is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) promoting and developing food education in Finland. Ruukku aims to improve sustainable well-being and health by increasing food knowledge and respect for food.

Partner: Servica Food Services, North Savo, Finland. Servica prepares nearly 30 000 meals every day in their kitchens. In addition to preparing basic daily meals, Servica's special expertise is in implementing special diets; nutritionists bring their expertise to support the entire food service.

Associated organization: School on Fork Foundation, Poland; City of Kuopio, Finland; City of Iisalmi, Finland; Alytus district municipality, Lithuania

## 11. Workplan

The work is done under one work package and divided into three different Tasks. In Task 1, the partners will identify and map different special needs of children and requirements of municipalities among the partners as well as practical challenges that those bring to food services and schools in municipalities. Associated partners (municipalities, food services) are involved in the mapping through interviews (teachers, food service employees, administration, families). The partners will also map country-specific existing tools and practices applied to children with special needs and to sustainable public services. Outcome of Task 1: State-of-the art analysis and definition of special needs of school children and requirements of municipalities to create a common understanding of those.

In Task 2, the partners will benchmark and visit the associated municipalities and schools of each partner country, to introduce tools already created by the partner countries (such as food education tools and the online Sustainable Public Meal Toolkit) to support food education and eating of school lunch among children with special needs. Based on Task 1 and Task 2 learnings, the partners will modify the existing tools to meet target countries' cultural, social and physical environmental requirements. The modified tools will be piloted within food services and schools to address possible shortcomings. Outcome of Task 2: Modified tools for food education for different needs and construction of a balanced, healthy and sustainable school lunch.

In Task 3, the partners will continue coworking to create a policy brief recommendation for municipalities to improve quality and access to public food services among all children (including those with special needs) in each country. Also, guidelines will be created for public food service providers with the goal of identifying and developing standardized practices (including school environment and facilities) to ensure the efficient delivery of school meals for children with special needs. Outcomes of Task 3: a policy brief and a guideline manual.

## 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 0.00
<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	How many associated partners we can involve? What means bringing the Programme closer to the citizens?
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Questions related to budgeting and expenditure	How to balance the budget between the partners?
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Any other questions	<i>(max. 1.000 characters incl. spaces)</i>
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## 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>