

Project idea form - small projects

Version 2.1

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

Project Idea Form

Date of submission 02/06/2025

1. Project idea identification

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Project idea name | The Future of Rural Areas: Experienced Youth, Innovation and Community Synergy |
| Short name of the project | TFORA |
| 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

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|-------------------------|
| 1. Innovative societies |
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3. Programme objective

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

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|-------------------------------------|---|
| Name of the organisation (original) | Ukmergės miesto vietos veiklos grupė, asociacija |
| Name of the organisation (English) | Ukmergė City Local Action Group, Association |
| Website | https://ukmergesmiestovg.lt |
| Country | LT |



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|-----------------|------------------------|
| Type of Partner | Local public authority |
| | municipality, etc. |

Contact person 1

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|-------|-----------------------------|
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Contact person 2

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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.

Ukmergė City Local Action Group, Association, Forvardas School (LT), NGO “Socially Responsible Business” (LT), Estonian Rural Development Foundation (EE), Latvian Rural Forum (LV)

5.1 Specific challenge to be addressed

Rural areas in Lithuania and across the Baltic Sea region are undergoing profound transformation. These territories face intertwined challenges: demographic decline, an aging population, persistent experienced youth outmigration, and a critical lack of innovation and modern services. As a result, many small communities are experiencing economic stagnation, weakened social cohesion, and difficulty in attracting or retaining new residents, especially young people and families. Despite these challenges, rural areas also hold untapped potential. They offer space, natural resources, cultural heritage, and community values that can serve as the foundation for new models of living, working, and social interaction—especially in a post-pandemic era where interest in decentralised, place-based innovation is growing.

The key challenge we aim to address is how to reimagine rural regions as places of opportunity, where local communities—not only survive, but thrive—by becoming more inclusive, dynamic, and connected. To do so, we must engage and empower experienced youth, activate local leadership, and create cross-sectoral partnerships that introduce innovation in governance, economy, education, and service delivery.

This project targets: Experienced young people and youth organisations, as changemakers capable of

shaping the future of their localities; Local municipalities and community leaders, who need new tools and approaches to support innovation and retain residents; Rural entrepreneurs and small farmers, who require support to diversify and adapt to new markets; Civil organizations, as vital enablers of trust, participation, and co-creation.

Through cross-border collaboration, we will co-develop future scenarios, launch rural innovation labs, support youth-led pilot initiatives, and establish a network of actors across the Baltic Sea region committed to rural transformation. The project aims to reverse the prevailing narrative of decline by cultivating resilience—economic, social, and cultural—grounded in local assets, supported by digital tools, and driven by community energy.

5.2 Focus of the call

This project supports the cohesive development of small rural areas by addressing key challenges such as experienced youth outmigration, demographic aging, and limited access to services (especially education) and innovation. These issues weaken the social and economic fabric of many Baltic Sea region communities, threatening their long-term resilience. We aim to reverse this trend by empowering rural actors—especially youth, municipalities, and local organisations—to become drivers of transformation. Through cross-border collaboration, the project will develop and pilot new tools such as rural innovation labs, foresight scenarios, and community-led initiatives that strengthen local identity, build skills, and support inclusive economic activity.

By promoting peer learning, transnational networks, and place-based solutions, the project creates a supportive environment for small communities to reimagine their future. It fosters pride, participation, and cooperation, contributing directly to social cohesion, intergenerational equity, and balanced development in the Baltic Sea region.

6. Transnational relevance

The challenges facing rural areas—population decline, experienced youth outmigration, aging societies, and limited innovation—are not unique to one country. They are shared across the Baltic Sea region. Small towns and remote communities from Lithuania to Finland, Sweden to Poland, face remarkably similar structural issues that weaken their local resilience and long-term sustainability. However, responses to these challenges are often fragmented and localised. By working transnationally, we can move beyond isolated efforts and build a common framework for rural revitalisation—one that is informed by diverse experiences, adapted to local contexts, and enriched by mutual learning.

Transnational cooperation enables the identification and scaling of effective solutions. It connects municipalities, youth organisations, and rural innovators across borders to co-create new approaches, test them in different contexts, and share what works. These exchanges broaden perspectives, accelerate innovation, and foster long-term relationships between regions.

Moreover, the Baltic Sea region shares cultural, economic, and environmental linkages that make collaboration not only beneficial but necessary. Many rural challenges, such as labour mobility, service accessibility, and digital exclusion, extend beyond national borders and require joint strategies. This project will contribute to a cohesive rural policy landscape, where communities learn from each

other and act together. Through foresight work, shared innovation labs, and capacity-building, we aim to create a network of rural actors committed to transforming the future of small places—together.

7. Specific aims to be addressed

Building trust that could lead to further cooperation initiatives

The project builds trust by empowering experienced youth, young families and municipalities to work together locally and transnationally. Experienced youth are engaged as equal partners in shaping rural futures, while municipalities gain tools to better support and listen to young voices. Cross-border collaboration, joint activities, and shared pilots create mutual understanding and long-term relationships between regions, fostering a culture of trust that can grow into future cooperation.

Initiating and keeping networks that are important for the BSR

The project creates lasting transnational networks by connecting municipalities, youth organisations, and rural innovators across the Baltic Sea Region. Through shared learning, pilot projects, and regular exchanges, partners build strong ties around common rural challenges. These networks will continue beyond the project, fostering collaboration, knowledge transfer, and regional cohesion among small communities

Bringing the Programme closer to the citizens

The project brings the Programme closer to citizens by actively involving local communities—especially experiences youth—in shaping solutions for rural challenges. Through innovation labs, co-creation events, and public workshops, citizens become co-designers of change in their own regions. By making EU cooperation visible and tangible at the local level, the project fosters trust, engagement, and a stronger sense of European belonging.

Allowing a swift response to unpredictable and urgent challenges

The project allows a swift response to urgent demographic and economic challenges facing rural areas, such as experienced youth outmigration, population aging, and declining local economies. By establishing agile innovation labs, local actors can rapidly co-create solutions tailored to their community's needs. Transnational collaboration accelerates the spread of effective practices, enabling rural regions to adapt quickly and build long-term resilience.

8. Target groups

The project brings together a broad and inclusive range of target groups that reflect the strategic objectives of the EUSBSR—particularly in education, innovation capacity, social inclusion, and sustainable regional development.

1. Experienced youth and youth organizations – Addressing Priority Areas (PA) Education and Culture, the project empowers young adults as active contributors to rural revitalization. Experienced youth will shape future scenarios, lead pilot actions, and help build more inclusive and attractive communities.
2. Education and training institutions – Supporting PA Education and Innovation, this target group includes rural schools that are directly affected by declining student populations, school closures, and unequal access to quality education in rural areas. These institutions are key to addressing the education gap by developing new, inclusive approaches (for example approach that is used in Forvardas school (LT) - multi-age group teaching. This setup is especially relevant for rural schools with low student numbers, making Forvardas a strong example of educational innovation for

depopulating or remote areas.

3. Local municipalities and public authorities – As agents of territorial cohesion and digital transition, municipalities will pilot citizen-centric services, inclusive planning methods, and cross-sector collaboration.

4. Entrepreneurs, farmers, and cooperatives – In line with PA Bioeconomy and SME support, these actors will engage in green innovation labs, sustainable business model development, and cross-border market exploration.

5. Civil society and NGOs – Promoting PA Inclusion, civil society actors will ensure grassroots participation, build trust, and strengthen democratic resilience in local decision-making.

6. Environmental and climate actors – Supporting PA Climate and PA Nutri, environmental organisations will embed sustainability and climate-smart thinking into all aspects of project design and delivery.

| 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. Interest group | Fostering youth-led innovation, creative thinking, and entrepreneurship by empowering young people to turn their ideas and dreams into real solutions that shape the future of rural communities | Lithuania (Ukmerge), Latvia (Vidzeme and Latgale region), Estonia (Võru and Ida), Finland (South Karelia), Sweden (Sörmland), Poland (Warmia-Masuria), Germany (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) |
| 2. Education/training centre and school | Addressing declining education access in rural areas by keeping schools active, improving learning quality and making rural life more attractive for young families through inovational education system | Vilnius (Forvardo, LT), South Karelia (FI), Võru County (EE), Västernorrland (SE), and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (DE) – regions piloting mixed-age rural classes and community-based schools. |

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| 3. Sectoral agency | Facilitating innovation management, regional development, and knowledge transfer in rural and small-town contexts | Lithuania |
| 4. NGO | Mobilizing community participation, supporting social inclusion, promoting youth engagement, and co-developing local initiatives that strengthen rural resilience and civic innovation. | Lithuania, Latvia (Vidzeme and Latgale region), Estonia (Võru and Ida), Finland (South Karelia), Sweden (Sörmland), Poland (Warmia-Masuria), Germany (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) |
| 5. Local public authority | Local development planning, public service provision, citizen engagement, and implementation of pilot actions that support rural revitalisation, youth retention, and community-based innovation | Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia |

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 Education |
| PA Innovation |
| PA Spatial Planning |



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 project partnership brings together a complementary group of LT organisations and plans to expand to include strategic partners from across the BSR, ensuring balanced geographic representation and a wide range of expertise relevant to rural revitalisation. Confirmed partners include:

Ukmergė City Local Action Group, Association (LT)—Lead partner, coordinating the project and applying its long-standing expertise in community-driven rural development. Based in Ukmergė, it ensures the project's alignment with grassroots needs and LEADER principles.

Ukmergė District Municipality (LT)—Pilot site for implementing participatory planning, youth engagement activities, and testing rural revitalisation models, including school-based and community-led initiatives.

Forvardas School (LT)—innovative, learner-centred school in Vilnius. It contributes expertise in inclusive, interdisciplinary education, with a focus on addressing the closure of rural schools and engaging youth in local development through creative, mixed-age learning methods.

NGO “Socially Responsible Business” (LT)—A civil society actor focused on sustainable entrepreneurship and community development. It supports social innovation labs, business mentoring, and promotes community-based economic models.

These partners represent key sectors: public governance, education, civil society, and innovation support. They are directly affected by and positioned to influence the challenges facing rural Lithuania—such as youth outmigration, school closures, and economic stagnation.

Planned additional partners:

Estonian Rural Development Foundation (EE)—Brings experience in rural business support and SME development in remote areas.

Latvian Rural Forum (LV)—A civil society network specialising in community activation, participatory planning, and rural youth inclusion.

LUKE—Natural Resources Institute Finland (FI)—Contributes research and foresight capacity for rural scenario-building, sustainability assessment, and impact monitoring.

Why this partnership:

The selected partners reflect the multi-actor, cross-sectoral approach needed to address complex rural challenges. They also cover a strategic range of regions—from innovation leaders to structurally weaker areas—allowing for mutual learning and scalable solutions. The consortium aims to expand further to include partners from Sweden, Poland, or Denmark to enhance regional balance and thematic relevance in education, digitalisation, and green rural transformation.

11. Workplan

The project will implement a set of interlinked activities designed to revitalise rural areas in the BSR through experienced youth engagement, community innovation, and inclusive education models.



Central to the project is a pilot site in Ukmerge district Municipality (LT), which will serve as a living lab to test integrated, locally driven solutions.

Main Activities:

Trend Analysis and Foresight: The project will localize and apply the methodology from the RURALIZATION trend analysis to the Lithuanian and Baltic rural context, identifying key drivers and weak signals shaping rural futures.

Youth Vision Workshops & Hackathons: Young people will co-create future visions and pilot solutions for rural living, education, and entrepreneurship. This will include mentorship, small grants, and public showcases.

Innovation Labs in Rural Areas: Multi-stakeholder labs will bring together municipalities, schools, entrepreneurs, and NGOs to co-design and test sustainable and digital solutions adapted to small-scale communities.

Pilot Implementation in Ukmerge: The pilot will apply a school-based solution inspired by the Forvardas School model, particularly its mixed-age, student-centred, and interdisciplinary learning approach. The goal is to test its adaptability in a rural setting where shrinking student numbers threaten school closures. The pilot will explore how such flexible, inclusive models can make rural education more resilient and attractive to young families.

Capacity Building for Local Authorities and Communities: Training sessions for municipal staff and local leaders will focus on participatory planning, rural youth engagement, and inclusive service design.

Transnational Exchange and Knowledge Transfer: Site visits, peer learning events, and international workshops will facilitate cross-border sharing of practices and tools, led by expert partners such as LUKE (FI), Latvian Rural Forum (LV), and Estonian Rural Development Foundation (EE).

Communication and Policy Outreach: A campaign will raise awareness of the project's goals and empower citizens to participate. Final outputs will include a policy brief, a rural school resilience toolkit, and guidelines for scaling tested models.

Involvement of Target Groups:

Target groups—including youth, local authorities, schools, NGOs, and rural entrepreneurs—will be directly involved through co-creation events, pilot activities, training, and peer exchanges. Youth will take a lead role in shaping visions and testing ideas. Educators and schools will develop new learning content. Municipalities will embed tested tools into local development strategies.

Use of Final Outcomes:

The final outcomes—including scalable pilot models, learning content, and engagement tools—will be used by: Local and regional authorities to improve planning and service delivery

Schools and training institutions to adopt more inclusive and flexible rural education practices

NGOs and youth groups to lead community-driven initiatives

12. Planned budget

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



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 *(max.1.000 characters incl. spaces)*

Questions related to budgeting and expenditure *(max.1.000 characters incl. spaces)*

Any other questions *(max. 1.000 characters incl. spaces)*

15. Additional information

This project fosters collective planning to unlock local resources and strengthen cohesion in rural areas. In Ukmerge and beyond, we promote integrated, participatory development—offering more than isolated incentives by supporting vibrant, inclusive environments. Attracting and retaining young people requires not only job creation but also municipal openness to their ideas and leadership. Participatory action must be continuous, not occasional, embedded in long-term local strategies. Municipalities will be supported to identify local assets, activate community-driven solutions, and build strong cross-border networks that bring in knowledge and resources. Inspired by models like Castel del Giudice, we aim to create places where newcomers, returnees, and youth are not passive beneficiaries but active contributors to local transformation.



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>