



# Stakeholders' workshop on **Sustainable Public Meals Resilient to Crises** April 19, 2023, Riga, Latvia

## Summary of group discussions

We, the organisers, thank Riga City Council for hosting the workshop and the many stakeholders for joining the event.

The Stakeholders' workshop addressed sustainable public meals and strategies to react in situations of crises. The morning session featured presentations from invited stakeholders and project partners. The afternoon session was organised as discussions that took place in four thematic groups, each focused on a crisis:

1. **Disturbance in the supply chain** (for example if goods were out of stock or lack of compliance with organic standards);
2. **Staff-related issues** (for example staff shortages or lack of skilled personnel);
3. **Resource efficiency** (for example power cuts, food waste, increasing power costs); and
4. **Changes in the production structure** (for example sudden closure of public kitchens).

Each of the four groups counted ca. 8-10 persons representing a random selection of invited stakeholders and project partners. Each group was facilitated by a team of two project partners. During half an hour, each group discussed these questions:

- Could you please give an example of a crisis in relation to the provision of the public meal?
- Why do you think this is an important crisis?
- Whom would be most affected by this crisis, and what spaces/locations?
- What is important to do to overcome this crisis? What could be the main alternative to continue the provision of public meals?
- Who would need to take the lead to solve this crisis? Who would you need to collaborate with to solve the crisis?
- How much time would be needed to implement a solution to this crisis?
- What are important communication actions in situations of this crisis?
- How might things have changed after the crisis was solved?
- What could be done to avoid this crisis in the future?

In the following sections, you will find summaries of the discussions from the four groups.



### **Disturbance in the supply chain**

Correct and sufficient amounts of goods are required to keep up production in a public kitchen. To avoid production disruption in situations of supply chain disturbance, public kitchens and public procurement can make use of local suppliers or imported food. For the small producers to be able to provide sufficient volumes of product for the public meals, they are required to collaborate with other small producers to reach the required quantities. Producers' joined storage or logistics operations could be part of the solution.

Just-in-time delivery can be replaced by long-term planning of procurement, for example by informing suppliers 4 weeks in advance about volumes and products needed. This would give the supplier more flexibility to get hold of the products ordered. Suppliers could be interested in shorter contracts than 6 months as this could allow for more price flexibility. Working with farmers is more long-term as farmers would need to be informed about demand (product and volume) 1.5 year in advance due to cropping seasons.

Lack of transparency in the supply chain is another issue. For example, in Baltic countries the municipality has a procurement contract with one supplier, but the supplier receives goods from many other sub-suppliers. It is difficult for the municipality to control if the supplier complies with the agreements in the procurement contract because of lack of information about the quality and origin of the product. Several cases about food fraud have been reported because of this situation.

### **Staff-related issues**

Crises caused by staff issues are regarded as "at the moment crises". Often, staff crises are connected with lack of qualified workers, especially chefs. To manage staff-related crises, it is important to have a routine for shifting workers between units in the kitchen, and to regularly train existing staffs.

Staff issues concerns the whole supply chain, not just kitchens. In some cases, it may be a solution to replace staffs with technology, especially in situations of staff shortages. In this case, the staff has to be trained carefully on the new technique. Otherwise, the new technology might not be used and the investment is useless.

Another solution to manage staff shortages is to find a provider of catering services (to replace in-house cooking).

### **Resource efficiency**

The discussion identified several important resources to address: energy and electricity, logistics, and food for many people (e.g., in situations of refugees). Electricity (costs and shortages) is of major concern to public kitchens. Rising energy and electricity costs are very difficult to cover for kitchens with a fixed budget.

Public kitchens depend on well-functioning logistics and to be at the forefront of a situation of crisis, it is important to have back-up solutions for failure in logistics. It was discussed that short-term backup preparations, like bigger food storages came as big help when adjusting to long lasting crises like the Covid-19 outbreak.

In situations where public kitchens must provide food for many more people (e.g., as for refugees) it is important that public kitchens identify resources (food, staffs, kitchens etc.) and find ways to coordinate these resources in order to provide food for many people. Being well-prepared is fundamental as "panic is nobody's friend".



### **Changes in the production structure**

Collaboration between different levels (e.g., municipality, procurement, kitchen) is important to properly make use of the existing production structure for preparing public meals. This is especially relevant in situations when public kitchens are shut down (as during the pandemic), or the need for public meals is significantly increased. It is good to have a communication plan to know whom to contact first in the case of a crisis, and to identify main points of contacts (e.g., a list of potential food suppliers) for various actions needed to solve a crisis. There needs to be a clear flow of communication. Another important tool is to elaborate back-up plans and guidelines (e.g., for how many days the backup food must be kept), and to regularly check-up on these tools. Kitchens, public procurement officers, and municipalities should be trained and informed about these tools. Remember to think the whole crisis scenario through in training situations. These procedures would be helpful in situations of crisis.

### **Next steps in the StratKIT+ project**

The main discussion points and recommendations from the workshop will be used to expand the StratKIT Sustainable Public Meal Toolkit ([sustainable-public-meal.eu](https://sustainable-public-meal.eu)) with more tools and a new section with tools for crisis management.

During August, the project will organize workshops in each of the StratKIT+ countries. Stakeholders will be invited to join for validating the new tools. Later in the autumn, the project will produce training material and host training sessions to encourage the use of the toolkit.

The StratKIT network that connects stakeholders in the public meal around the Baltic Sea is continuously developed. You may join the network via this link [Network - StratKIT](#)

### **Contacts for further information:**

Karen Hamann ([karen@ifau.dk](mailto:karen@ifau.dk)) and Leena Viitaharju ([leena.viitaharju@helsinki.fi](mailto:leena.viitaharju@helsinki.fi))

*Summary prepared by Karen Hamann (IFAU), Evelin Piirsalu and Piret Kuldna (SEIT), Henrike Perner (agrathaer), Iida Alasentie and Leena Viitaharju (University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute).*

*June 21, 2023*