

SUMMARY OF GROUP WORK DISCUSSIONS

Programme objective 7 workshop & networking event

FROM PROJECT TO PRACTICE - MAKING PUBLIC SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS LAST

29 – 30 September 2026, Kuldīga, Latvia

Introduction

2nd edition of programme objective 7 workshop and networking event held in Kuldīga, Latvia on 29 and 30 September 2026.

The goal of the event was **to build strong(er) programme objective 7 – Improved public services and solutions for citizens - community** by providing a platform for **knowledge sharing between projects**, discussing shared challenges, looking for solutions and learning from each other focusing on various aspects of project lifetime with a specific focus on improving public services in the Central Baltic programme area.

Event participants had the opportunity to **learn about project results** achieved, their practical application, durability and long(er)-term perspective.

BREAKING BARRIERS, a small-size project, the first of its kind supported by Central Baltic programme in programme objective 7 has finished 2 years ago while the project results - Jointly developed and tested methodology (guidelines) for teachers and parents – is in use and has shaped the way the inclusive education is provided in Ventspils, Latvia and beyond.

CLEAN BEACH, another small-size project, demonstrated easy-to-use sampling kits project piloted to monitor microplastics pollution involving citizens through guided activities and digital tools.

SuRuMo (Sustainable Urban Mobility), a regular project, presented the successfully completed on-demand transport piloted in Kurzeme region of Latvia with over 1,400 passengers transported, 526 trips carried out, and nearly 17,000 kilometres covered. Participants were able to test the on-demand transport themselves.

Several group works were held. Participants reflected on **successful approaches**, analysed **project failures**, and explored methods for better **understanding the needs of different target groups and stakeholders**. Through group discussions, participants identified **key lessons that can strengthen project implementation, stakeholder engagement and long-term sustainability and durability of project results**.

Group work I - What worked and why?

Group work I focused on practice accumulated to approach and **involve project target group / stakeholders / public service users** into development of a solution to improve or create the public service targeted by the project.

One of the strongest recurring messages from all groups was **the importance of personal communication**. Participants repeatedly highlighted that direct contact, personal invitations and face-to-face meetings are far more effective than generic mass communication. Successful projects rely on building trust and maintaining regular interaction with stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle.

Another important success factor was **early involvement of stakeholders**. Several groups emphasised that stakeholders and **target groups should be involved already during project planning** and application. **Early engagement improves ownership, helps identify real needs and reduces the risk** of developing solutions that are not relevant for users.

The workshop also highlighted the importance of **working through existing networks and communication channels**. Rather than creating entirely new channels, projects should use platforms, organisations and key community members that target groups already know and trust.

Participants further stressed the value of:

- clear communication;
- clearly defined responsibilities;
- demonstrating benefits for participants;
- finding key persons and champions;
- maintaining step-by-step communication processes;
- creating opportunities for practical learning and participation.

Group work II – Longer-term perspective / “Failure Lab”

With the purpose of creating an open conversation about what is / did not work and turning the failures into practical lessons group work II in the form of “Failure Lab” focused on approaches / strategies projects are applying in their work plan to **ensure the usage of the public service** the project targets.

Strong focus on result orientation in project implementation was highlighted by participants. Participants noted that project teams sometimes overlook compliance, eligibility or ownership issues. Several examples demonstrated the **importance of ownership structure of project results** to ensure their usage.

Language barriers emerged as another underestimated challenge. Even when teams initially assume a common understanding among participants, communication difficulties may arise among different target groups. Future projects should explicitly address language accessibility when planning workshops and events.

Intellectual property rights were identified as an issue that should be discussed and agreed upon early in partnerships, particularly when projects are developing products, tools or services.

Finally, participants acknowledged the importance of **openly discussing challenges and difficult partnerships** rather than avoiding conflict. Transparent communication and early intervention help prevent small issues from becoming major obstacles.

Group work III – Users: “Walk in Their Shoes” / Understanding Project Target Groups

The "Walk in Their Shoes" exercise focused on understanding the experiences of different target groups before, during and after participation in project activities. Groups selected the user group they would like to analyse and tried to **“walk in their shoes” moving from “we involved users” to a concrete analysis of the user experience.**

For young people, challenges included excessive screen time, loneliness, passive lifestyles and limited interaction with nature. Participants concluded that **projects should provide accessible opportunities for outdoor experiences and involve youth in planning activities.**

For teachers and school staff, major concerns related to reporting requirements, bureaucracy and increasing regulatory demands. The workshop concluded that projects should provide **practical support, peer learning opportunities and visible benefits** that strengthen professional confidence and motivation.

For elderly people, **digital communication alone was considered insufficient.** Successful engagement requires direct communication, community-based intermediaries, meetings, mailings and trusted local contacts. Participants emphasised the importance of understanding communication preferences and involving senior citizens from the earliest stages.

For researchers and higher education students, key barriers included bureaucracy, administrative burden and lack of involvement during early project phases. Groups recommended involving the target already during application preparation and **maintaining continuous opportunities for testing and feedback.**

Group work IV – From Challenge to Solution / Partnership and Stakeholder Management

Group work IV discussions focused on challenges related to project partnerships. **Stakeholder mapping** method for analysing influence and interest was explored, helping project teams prioritise engagement efforts and identify key actors.

Participants identified common risks such as:

- low partner commitment;
- insufficient internal support within partner organisations;
- communication failures;
- staff turnover;
- changing priorities during project implementation.

The groups stressed that **regular partner meetings are essential** for maintaining engagement and transparency. Monthly meetings, **clear deadlines, reminder systems and designated coordination responsibilities** were identified as effective management tools.

One important lesson concerned **project continuity**. Since staff changes are common in long-term projects, organisations should maintain organised project documentation and ensure that knowledge is shared among multiple staff members. This reduces disruption when project personnel change.

A very good example of how to approach stakeholder involvement shared by one of the participants was the **stakeholder engagement level scale** methodology focusing on **current and desired stakeholder involvement level**.

Conclusion

The workshop demonstrated that **successful cross-border projects depend as much on people, relationships and communication as on technical project management**. The strongest lessons emphasised **early stakeholder involvement, personal communication, continuous partner engagement and user-centred design**. At the same time, participants highlighted the need for careful attention to **compliance requirements, knowledge management, language accessibility and sustainable partnership structures**. Together, these lessons provide practical guidance for improving the effectiveness and impact of future cooperation projects.

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