

Regional Sustainability Influencer Academy /INFLUENCE

Kick-off Meeting and Introduction to Regional Development Planning

Wed 9 September 2026, Valmiera, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences

Introductory meeting, where participants will get to know the programme, planned activities and expected outcomes.

Lienīte Priedāja-Klepere, INFLUENCE Project Manager, will introduce the academy and its objectives. Ieva Kalniņa, Head of the Territorial Planning Department at Vidzeme Planning Region, will introduce the Vidzeme Planning Region Development Programme and explain how regional development and planning documents are prepared.

The session will also provide practical insight into how young people's ideas and proposals can contribute to the future development priorities of Vidzeme. This will create a foundation for the participants' work on their own policy proposals during the academy.

Regional Development and Geopolitical Challenges: Visit to Alūksne Municipality

Wed 30 September 2026, Alūksne Municipality

The academy will visit Alūksne Municipality to explore local development challenges and priorities. Participants will meet with municipal representatives and discuss regional development, geopolitical developments related to Latvia's eastern border, tourism and local economic development.

The visit will also include meetings with active local entrepreneurs, providing participants with a practical perspective on the opportunities and challenges of developing a sustainable local economy.

Future Mindset and Visioning Skills

Wed 7 October 2026, Cēsis

This workshop will engage participants in developing ideas for the next planning period of the Vidzeme Planning Region. The focus will be on creating proposals that are regionally relevant, feasible, supportive of entrepreneurship and oriented towards future challenges.

Participants will learn how to move from a "good idea" to an evidence-based and validated policy proposal, using data, research and stakeholder perspectives.

The workshop will be led by Vita Brakovska. Inese Suija-Markova, Deputy Mayor of Cēsis Municipality and Chairwoman of the Development Board of the Vidzeme Planning Region, will provide a perspective from the regional decision-making level.

Sustainability and the Role of Business in Regional Development

Wed 21 October 2026, online session

This session will explore the role of business in sustainable regional development. Representative of VALMIERA GLASS GROUP (“Valmieras stikla šķiedra”) - Head of Environment, Health&Safety Department will share their experience and perspectives on sustainability and the challenges facing businesses today.

The discussion will focus on how business priorities can be connected with regional development policy and contribute to sustainable economic development and regional resilience.

Geopolitical Conflict and Economic Security

Wed 4 November 2026, online session

This session will explore how geopolitical developments affect regional development, businesses and economic security. Participants will discuss current challenges facing Latvia and the wider Baltic Sea region.

Kārlis Bukovskis, Deputy Head of the European Commission Representation in Latvia and Head of the Political Section, will provide an expert perspective on geopolitical developments and economic security.

The session will also include a small business entrepreneur, who will share a personal perspective and practical experience of how geopolitical and economic changes affect business decisions and everyday operations.

Bioregions and Sustainable Regional Development

Wed 11 November 2026, online session

This session will introduce participants to the Gauja National Park Bioregion – the first established bioregion in the Baltic States, located in Vidzeme.

Lāsma Ozola, Head of the Zero Waste Community of Cēsis Municipality, will share practical insights into fostering sustainable, resource-efficient approaches at the local level, natural resource management and cooperation between municipalities and other stakeholders.

Influencing at the EU Level

Wed 25 November 2026, 3:00–5:00 PM, online international session

This international session will explore how regional priorities are connected to EU-level decision-making and advocacy. Participants will also learn about BSSSC (Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation), a political network established in 1993 that brings together regions and public authorities

Please note that minor changes to the programme are possible.

across the Baltic Sea Region and strengthens the voice of regions in Baltic Sea cooperation and European policy-making. BSSSC Chairwoman Inese Suija-Markova will provide insights into the network's role in fostering regional cooperation and strengthening the position of Baltic Sea regions in shaping European policies and addressing shared regional challenges.

The session will also highlight the role of Vidzeme Planning Region as the BSSSC Coordinator in 2026–2027, with a focus on resilience and security, energy transition, mobility and connectivity, youth engagement and the role of regions in multi-level governance.

Latvian and Finnish participants will exchange experiences and ideas on how young people and regional actors can contribute to policy-making at the European level. The session will be held in English.

Policy Proposals: Presentation, Validation and Evaluation

Wed 9 December 2026, Valmiera

The final in-person workshop will focus on presenting and evaluating the policy proposals developed by the participants.

Participants will present and defend their proposals based on their research, stakeholder interviews and validation results. The workshop will focus on how evidence-based ideas can be communicated to decision-makers and potentially contribute to the future development of Vidzeme.

The workshop will be led by Vita Brakovska.

Impact of Changes in the EU Operating Environment on Regions

January 2027, online international session

The final international session will bring together participants from the Latvian and Finnish academies to discuss how changes in the EU operating environment may affect regional development.

The session will also address disinformation and media literacy. Participants will take part in a digital educational game with tasks on fact-checking, identifying disinformation, recognising visual manipulation and analysing news sources.

The session will connect participants' regional experiences with the wider European context and conclude the academy programme.