

Investment Plan

VALMIERA MUNICIPALITY



July 2026

About Valmieras Municipality

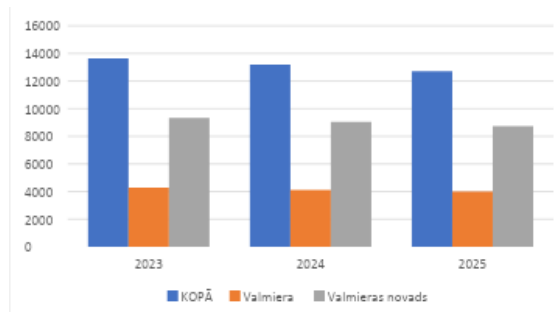
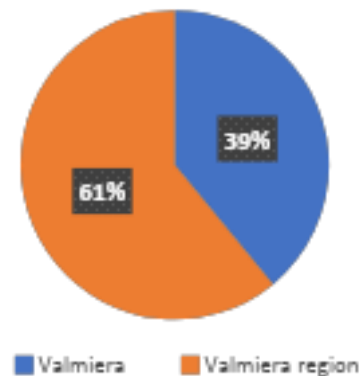
Valmiera is located in north-east Latvia, situated 107 km northeast of Riga and 50km from the Estonian border. The municipality was established in 2021 after territorial reforms. The core area has a population of 24,233 across 19.35 km², but it serves as the regional centre for a wider rural county area spanning 2,946 km² and with a population of 51,067 (2024, CSP).

The principal local industries are the food sector, fibreglass production, metalworking, wood processing and furniture making. Top 3 turnover share: agriculture, forestry and fisheries (28%), wholesale and retail trade (17%), fibreglass production (12%). GDP is the 2nd highest in Latvia, just after Riga, EUR 24,344 (2022), but much less than the EU average of €37,600. GDP per capita is EUR 20,800 (2021), lower than the national average of EUR 26,600 and well below the EU average of EUR 37,600.



According to 2025 data from the Central Statistical Bureau (CSP), there are 12,726 young people aged 13 to 30 living in Valmiera Municipality. The number of young people has shown a slight downward trend over the past three years, from approximately 13,000 in 2023 to 12,726 in 2025.

The territorial context affects the lives of young people in Valmiera. To mitigate this, the strategy includes mobile youth support units and digital platforms to reach young people in remote areas, ensuring equitable access despite limited public transport and dispersed facilities.



Education is

our city's biggest priority, making up **47% of our budget (€58.72 million)**. But building a supportive community takes more than just funding—it requires listening to our young residents and addressing the shortages of teachers and support staff in our schools.

A survey of 850 local youth highlighted exactly what they need to thrive:

- **A Voice:** More opportunities to express opinions and be heard.
- **Connection:** Better information on available activities and more trusted mentors.
- **Safe Spaces:** Positive, constructive places for leisure and socialising.
- **Motivation:** Support to combat isolation, low engagement, and school dropouts.

Our Goal: We are launching new outreach initiatives designed *with* young people to build a more inclusive, empowering environment.

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1. Policy context

Valmiera is a relatively new local authority, established in 2021 from 8 municipalities, each with its own approach to youth.

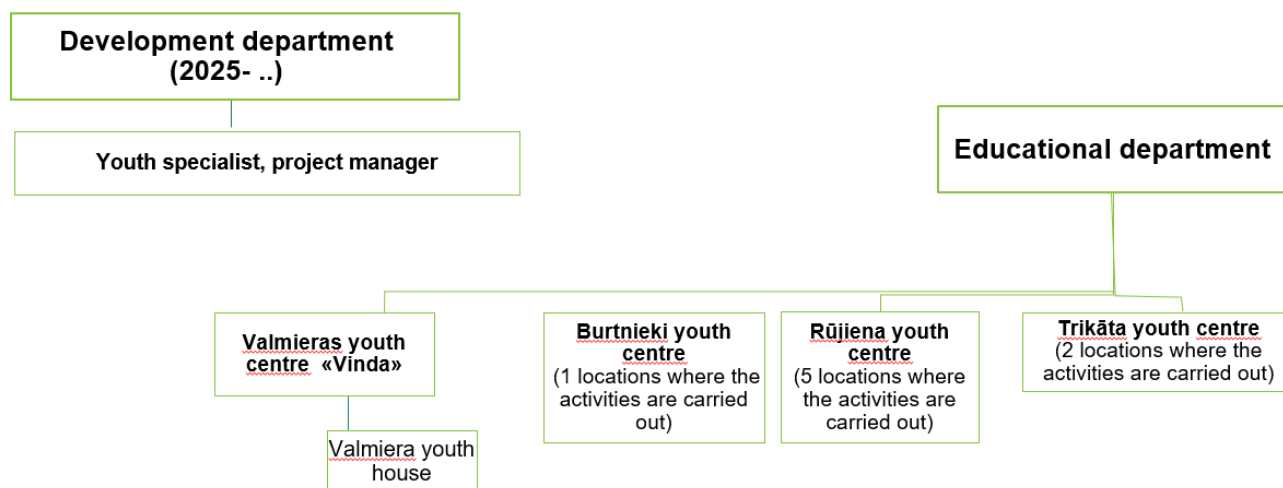
Youth work is one of Valmiera's development tasks set out in its Sustainable Urban Development programme for 2022-2028. This includes a thematic action programme designed to reduce school dropout rates and enhance educational quality. In line with the national Child Rights Protection Law, a municipal child rights protection programme is being developed to coordinate national, municipal, and civil society inputs. This will involve coordinated inputs from education, social services, health care, police and youth work.

An important development in the field of youth policy at the national level occurred on February 19, 2026, when the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia adopted amendments to the Youth Law, raising the age threshold for youth from 25 to 30 years. A person between the ages of 13 and 30 is now considered a young person under the law, allowing a broader group to access support measures, education, and municipal youth programs.

In line with national law, Valmiera involves civil society organisations in youth services, fostering collaboration that makes stakeholders feel valued and integral to improving youth well-being.

In relation to young people, Valmiera has several existing assets on which it can build, and that might be of interest to others. These include a wide range of services offered by the four local youth centres (Valmiera, Rūjiena, Burtnieki and Trikāta). Youth work also includes:

1. Organising day camps
2. Volunteering programme
3. Youth Initiative Competition
4. Summer employment programme
5. Various thematic events in line with EU and global trends related to the Green Deal, inclusivity and digitalisation



This structure shows that two different departments work with youth – no combined vision.

Valmiera also runs a youth initiative idea competition with an open call and a €5000 budget to support successful projects. The city offers well-established youth activities. In Valmiera, there is the Valmiera Youth



Centre "Vinda", which provides education and adult non-formal education classes, as well as the Valmiera Youth House, where young people can spend their free time. At the same time, outside Valmiera, there are four youth centres - in Rūjiena, Mazsalaca, Burtnieki and Trikata, supported by a tradition of highly professional youth work in Latvia. Overall, the structure needs improvement in the whole municipal territory.

The biggest challenge is that Valmiera Municipality currently lacks a unified youth strategy. Youth specialists and policy responsibilities are split between the Development and Education departments, resulting in fragmented governance,

inconsistent service delivery, and no single accountable body for outcomes across the municipality's 2,946 km² territory. This programme exists to solve that problem.

Valmiera has an existing Youth Affairs Advisory Committee that includes key local agencies focused on youth. To ensure effective collaboration, the committee will be reorganised into the Valmiera Urbact Local Group (ULG), with clear roles, regular meetings, and mechanisms for stakeholder input to enhance its functionality and impact.

Valmiera recognises the issues of youth poverty, segregation and inequality. Its motivation for taking part is to learn from other cities about ways to improve services and, consequently, the well-being of its young residents.

1.1. Key Evidence from Testing Actions

Valmiera has completed three structured testing actions under the WISH CITIES URBACT IV Innovation Transfer Network programme. Taken together, these three actions demonstrate the full co-design cycle: young people set the priorities (Testing Action 1), experts and institutions respond to them (Testing Action 2), and all stakeholders — youth workers, young people, and external experts — collectively build the policy architecture to sustain the work (Testing Action 3).

1.1.1. Children and Youth Elections — June 2025

SPOTLIGHT: 'Democracy Begins at Home' — The Pilot Action That Started It All

Before Valmiera had a unified youth strategy, before the URBACT WISH CITIES programme began, and before the Youth Forum on Mental Health was even imagined, there was a quieter but profoundly important experiment: bringing children to the ballot box on election day.

The initiative '*Demokrātija sākas ģimenē*' — Democracy Begins at Home (or Democracy Starts in the Family) — was developed at the Latvian Academy of Arts in 2021 by Beatrise Lasmane and Ulla Ozollapa. Its founding insight is simple but radical: long-term democratic participation begins not in a civic education classroom, but in a family — the first place a child learns that their voice matters. By bringing children to real polling stations on real election days, casting real ballots on age-appropriate questions, the initiative builds the muscle memory of democratic participation before young people are old enough to vote.

Valmiera Municipality adopted the initiative and ran it for the first time on 7 June 2025, concurrent with the municipal elections. It was partly supported through the WISH CITIES URBACT IV programme. The results exceeded all expectations: 1,263 children and young people participated across the municipality, at 34 polling stations staffed by 48 volunteers. Three age groups each voted on questions tailored to their stage of life.

Pre-school children voted on what activity they would like in autumn — colouring sheets won with 67% of the vote, and those sheets were subsequently printed and distributed to every library and pre-school in the municipality, making the result tangible. Primary school children voted on what to do at a library event; the result shaped the autumn programme. And 8th–12th-grade students voted on the theme for the 2026 Youth Forum — mental health won with 54%, thereby directly generating the mandate for the March 2026 Forum described in section 1.1.2.

That last result is the clearest illustration of how this pilot action shaped this Investment Plan. A child's ballot became a municipal policy priority. Officials or experts did not choose the Youth Forum on Mental Health — it was chosen democratically by young people themselves, using a process designed to make that choice real and consequential.

The lessons embedded in the Investment Plan are direct. The annual Youth Elections cycle is now a formal mechanism in the 2026–2031 programme, institutionalised as the primary means by which young people set the agenda for the Youth Forum each year. The 'Democracy Begins at Home' methodology — real process, real consequences, real implementation of results — is the model for all youth co-design activity in Valmiera going forward. The initiative also continues: Valmiera plans to run the Children and Youth Elections annually, tied to the electoral cycle, with the colouring sheets, library events, and Forum topics that follow each serving as proof that participation produces change.

In 2025, Valmiera was joined by Liepāja and Bauska. The ambition is that this becomes a national model.

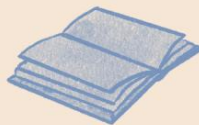
"True democracy doesn't begin at the ballot box — it begins at home, in the place where a child first learns that their voice matters." — Initiative 'Democracy Begins at Home', Latvian Academy of Arts, 2021





Ejam vēlēties kopā





VĒLĒŠANAS BĒRNIEM UN JAUNIEŠIEM
7. JŪNIJĀ VALMIERAS NOVADĀ




VALMIERAS NOVADS.



1.1.2. Youth Forum 'Mental Health' — March 2026

On 9 March 2026, Valmiera Primary School hosted the Youth Forum 'Mental Health' — a direct response to the mandate established through the 2025 Youth Elections. The Forum brought together young people, sector experts, and inspirational speakers, demonstrating the full cycle from democratic mandate to concrete municipal action.

- Opening address: Jekabs Redlihs (former professional ice hockey player and confidence coach) on mental resilience, overcoming self-criticism, and the daily work of building psychological strength
- Expert panel: sports physician Simona Upite, Mental Health Centre director Agris Starts, JSPA project coordinator Laura Caune, Valmiera Sports School director Liga Dzene, and Deputy Council Chairman Toms Upners — addressing the balance between academic, leisure, and social life
- Personal narrative: Emilija Berzina (X Factor Latvia Season 5 winner) on managing public anxiety, perfectionism, and social media pressure
- Seven parallel interactive workshops co-facilitated by professionals: emotion self-regulation, self-esteem, digital well-being, relationship boundaries, stress management, and physical activity as mental health support

URBACT Connection — The Youth Forum is delivered under the WISH CITIES URBACT IV Innovation Transfer Network programme and demonstrates the direct link between the Youth Elections mandate and tangible municipal action.

The poster is for the 2026 Youth Forum 'Mental Health'. It features a dark blue background with white and light blue text. At the top left, it says 'URBACT' next to the European Union flag and 'Co-funded by the European Union Interreg'. To the right, it says 'VALMIERAS NOVADS.' with a small white circle. The main title '2026 JAUNIEŠU FORUMS' is in large white letters, with the subtitle '„Mentālā veselība”' in a light blue script font. On the right, the date '09.03.2026.' is in large white letters, followed by 'PIRMDIENA' and '10.00 - 16.00' in white. Below that, it says 'VALMIERAS SĀKUMSKOLAS ZĀLĒ'. In the bottom left, there is a QR code with the text 'Pieteikšanās ŠEIT' next to it. In the bottom right, there are two circular portraits of speakers: Emilija Bērziņa and Jekabs Rēdlihs. Below each portrait is their name and a short bio. The background of the poster shows a blurred image of a crowd of people.

URBACT Co-funded by the European Union Interreg VALMIERAS NOVADS.

2026 JAUNIEŠU FORUMS „Mentālā veselība”

09.03.2026. PIRMDIENA 10.00 - 16.00 VALMIERAS SĀKUMSKOLAS ZĀLĒ

ŠEIT Pieteikšanās

ĪPAŠIE VIESI

EMILIJA BĒRZIŅA
JAUNĪETE, MUZIKĀLĀ ŠOVA
"X FAKTORS" PIETĀS SEZONAS
UZVARĒTĀJA

JĒKABS RĒDLIHS
BIJUŠAIS HOKEJISTS, PĀRLIECĪBAS
TRENERIS, SPORTA UN DISCIPLĪNAS
MENTORS

1.1.3. Urbact Local Group Co-Design Workshops with External Experts — Autumn 2025

The third testing action ran in parallel with the other two and represents the policy-level co-design process: the mechanism through which all parties involved in youth work — youth workers, young people, municipal officials, NGOs, educators, and external experts — jointly designed the 2026–2031 programme itself. Two structured workshops were held, each producing binding outputs that now form the foundation of this investment plan.

<u>Workshop</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Participants</u>	<u>Key Output</u>
Workshop 1: Stakeholder Assembly & Values Co-design	5 November 2025	All parties involved in youth work across Valmiera Municipality: youth workers, representatives of youth organisations, educators, social workers, municipal staff, NGO sector, and young people themselves	5 Core Values of youth work in Valmiera; 4 Operating Principles for programme development; 3 Strategic Directions for the 2026–2031 programme
Workshop 2: Programme Architecture & Action Plan	26 November 2025	ULG members, youth representatives, external experts, municipal department heads	The programme overarching goal; 3 core programme tasks; full action plan across all three strategic directions

What made these workshops a genuine testing action rather than a consultation exercise was the breadth of participation and the binding nature of the outputs. Participants included:

- Youth workers and youth centre staff from all territorial units, bringing direct front-line experience of what young people need and what current provision fails to deliver
- Young people themselves, ensuring that the priorities set in the Youth Elections (Testing Action 1) were directly represented in the room where policy was being made
- External experts invited to challenge, interrogate, and enrich the group's thinking — bringing knowledge of national youth policy trends, mental health provision, non-formal education methodology, and international URBACT good practice
- Municipal decision-makers with the authority to translate workshop outputs into formal programme commitments

The five values, four principles, three strategic directions, and full action plan that emerged from these workshops are not advisory recommendations — they are the agreed architecture of the 2026–2031 programme, ratified by all participants. The full detail of both workshops is set out in Section 1.8.

The Three Testing Actions as a System — Testing Action 1 (Youth Elections) gave democratic legitimacy: young people set the agenda. Testing Action 2 (Youth Forum) gave institutional response: experts and decision-makers acted on that agenda. Testing Action 3 (ULG Co-Design Workshops) gave structural durability: all stakeholders together built the system that will keep the cycle running for 2026–2031 and beyond. Each action depends on the others; none is sufficient alone.

1.2. Strategic Framework: Unified governance

Valmiera is implementing a new management model under the Development Department to formally separate youth work from the Education Department, resolving the institutional fragmentation that has led to siloed projects and inconsistent resource use.

- **Centralised Administration, Decentralised Execution:** The Valmiera Youth Centre serves as the legal core; operations are decentralised across regional hubs in Rūjiena, Mazsalaca, Strenči, and others
- **Personnel Capacity:** A professionalised staff of ~9 FTEs, including a Head of Youth Centre, Deputy for Administration, and dedicated Youth Workers for each territorial unit

The impetus for this integrated approach came from a WISH CITIES partner site visit to Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal, in spring 2025, where Valmiera representatives saw a strong example of a newly established, effective, and visually compelling youth policy. That visit catalysed a decision to develop a dedicated Youth Policy Development Programme 2026–2031 — a standalone strategic document setting out Valmiera's full

vision, values, and actions for youth work. This Investment Plan is the funding and delivery instrument that operationalises that Programme. The two documents are designed to be read together: the Programme sets the direction; this Plan provides the resources.

1.3. Innovation in Action: How Priorities Link to Delivery

Before setting out the specific innovations Valmiera is introducing, it is important to understand the context in which they sit. The municipality's youth work has historically been delivered through isolated projects, with no unified framework connecting what is done to why it is done, who is responsible, or when results are expected. The innovations described here are not stand-alone ideas — they are direct responses to the four strategic priorities that emerged from the 2024/2025 research and the November 2025 ULG stakeholder workshops.

Each priority addresses a documented gap. Each innovation is the practical mechanism for closing it. The table below makes these links explicit, naming the priority, the specific action or innovation introduced to address it, who is responsible for delivering it, and the timeframe and key performance indicator against which progress will be measured. This is the logic model that connects Valmiera's ambition to its accountability.

<u>Strategic Priority</u>	<u>Innovation / Specific Action</u>	<u>Responsible Doer(s)</u>	<u>Timeframe</u>	<u>Key Performance Indicator</u>
Participation: Young people lack meaningful ways to shape the services and decisions that affect them.	Youth Co-design & ULG: The reorganised Urban Local Group (15 members, 50/50 gender balance) institutionalises youth co-design as a governance mechanism. Youth Initiative Small Grants (annual competition, EUR 300/project). Youth Ambassador Network: two-tier system — Youth Council handles strategy; Volunteer Ambassadors (min. 1 per territorial unit) ensure peer-to-peer reach in schools and villages.	Youth Policy Unit Youth Council (ULG) NGO Partners	From 2026 Ongoing annually	Min. 20 projects supported/year. Min. 3 youth-led proposals adopted by City Council/year. Min. 1 Ambassador per territorial unit by end 2026.
Inclusion: Rural youth (69% of the total) are geographically excluded from services; youth with limited opportunities face structural barriers.	Mobile Youth Work: Dedicated mobile teams (2 persons/team) conduct structured outreach across all territorial units — min. 8 visits/month (96/year). Digital Outreach: For youth who cannot be reached in person, a minimum of 2 digital activities/month are mandated, using platforms where youth already are (including Discord)—Integration Projects for youth with limited opportunities.	Youth Centre (operational staff) Youth Workers per territorial unit NGO Partners	Mobile: from Q2 2027 Digital: from Q4 2026 Integration: from 2027	96 mobile visits/year. 24 digital activities/year. Min. 5 NEET youth engaged per integration project.
Employment & Career Readiness There is no coherent bridge between youth development and the local labour market, contributing to brain drain after age 18.	Summer Youth Employment Programme: 70 paid placements annually in municipal agencies. Career Support Centre: New career education and guidance infrastructure, connecting schools, vocational centres, and local employers. Job Shadowing Days & Labour Market Events Practical introductory experiences co-organised with local businesses (fibreglass, food processing, manufacturing sectors).	Youth Policy Unit HR / Municipal Agencies Local Employers (private sector partners)	Summer programme: annually from 2026 Career Centre: established by 2027	Min. 70 summer employment slots/year. 5% annual reduction in NEET rate. Min. 1 career event per year from 2027.

Well-being: Over 50% of youth report frequent stress; 27.1% report feeling lonely. These are systemic issues requiring systemic responses, not one-off events.	Annual Youth Forum Permanent, high-visibility platform for direct dialogue between youth and decision-makers. Topics voted by youth annually — through the Children and Youth Elections in election years, and through a youth survey or ULG co-design process in non-election years (proven: Mental Health Forum, March 2026). Unified Visual Identity brand applied across all youth centres reduces fragmentation and helps young people navigate the support system with confidence. Annual Well-being Survey covering both youth and youth workers, to track progress against the baseline and identify emerging needs.	Youth Policy Unit ULG / Youth Council All Youth Centres	Forum: annually (Q3) Brand: rollout Q4 2026 Survey: annually from 2026	Min. 1 Youth Forum/year. 15% reduction in reported stress by 2028. 10% reduction in loneliness rate by 2031.
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The four priorities above correspond directly to the three strategic directions agreed in the November 2025 ULG workshops (Section 1.8): Participation and Inclusion map to Direction 1 (Support for youth initiatives and personal development); Employment maps to Direction 2 (Diverse offer for meaningful leisure and career readiness); Well-being runs across all three directions as a cross-cutting theme.

1.4 The Reorganised Urbact Local Group (Youth Council)

The Valmiera County Youth Council will be the core of the ULG, comprising up to 22 members: 7 territorial representatives, 3 from Valmiera city, 10 from student self-governments, and 2 from NGOs/Volunteers. The council is mandated to hold at least one high-level Structured Dialogue meeting per year with municipal deputies, supplemented by regular co-design sessions and the annual Youth Forum. Regular meetings with external experts inform the new integrated youth work model, ensuring it reflects both international best practice and local needs.

Valmiera municipality currently lacks a unified youth strategy, resulting in fragmented governance, with youth specialists and policy structures split between the Development and Education departments. This leads to unclear institutional roles and inconsistent resource management. The idea for the policy planning document came from a project partner site visit to Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal, in spring 2025, where the Valmiera municipality saw a good example of a newly established youth policy that was effective and visually appealing.

The municipal youth strategy and IP are anchored in the 2024/2025 research study, "Evaluation of Support Systems and Mechanisms for the Social and Economic Inclusion of Youth with Limited Opportunities," conducted by Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences in collaboration with Valmiera Municipality. This study, which surveyed 643 local young people, provides a critical baseline for understanding the "hidden" challenges in Valmiera—specifically, it reveals that while infrastructure is sufficient, over 50% of youth report persistent stress and 27% experience chronic loneliness.

1.5. Evidence Base: Research Findings

The strategy is anchored in the 2024/2025 research study by Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, which surveyed 643 local young people. The 2025 Youth Elections independently validated the research findings from the perspective of young people themselves.

The Hidden Mental Well-being Crisis

Over 50% of youth experience frequent stress and tension; 27.1% feel lonely often or very often; only 28.3% say they have never felt depressed. The Youth Elections result — mental health voted top priority with 54% — validates these findings directly.

The Gender and Geography Gap

Females report significantly higher stress levels (65.1%) compared to males (41%). Urban youth experience greater pressure and loneliness than rural counterparts, requiring differentiated intervention strategies.

Barriers to Inclusion

While 87% of respondents are satisfied with their home life, a significant sub-group feels excluded due to life transitions. This is the strongest argument for youth co-design: services must be built with — not merely for — the most vulnerable young people.

Fragmented Information & Brain Drain Risk

Youth often do not know where to turn at transition points (leaving school, seeking health care). There is also a direct correlation between a sense of belonging and the desire to remain in the municipality after age 18, making civic engagement and quality youth services essential for talent retention.

1.6. Connecting Needs to Innovations

Need	Current Systemic Failure	Proposed Innovation
Agency & Self-efficacy	Passive engagement: data in silos; youth input rarely translated into change.	Youth Co-design: youth as active architects, addressing the 50%+ stress rate.
Psychological Safety	Quantitative blindness: only attendance tracked; 27% loneliness rate undetected.	Improved Youth Data: qualitative impact tracking monitors mental well-being.
Civic Belonging	Institutional alienation: high-level decisions behind closed doors.	Youth Forum: high-visibility dialogue platform — proven in March 2026.
Career Pathing	Generic outreach: sporadic consultations with no non-formal career guidance.	Integrated Career Consultation: Forum and co-design labs bridge education and the labour market.

1.7. Urbact Local Group Co-Design Meetings with External Experts

A core principle of Valmiera's approach is that administrators do not write the Youth Policy Development Programme 2026–2031 — it is built together with all stakeholders. Two structured ULG workshops with external experts, held in autumn 2025, produced the foundational architecture of the programme: its overarching goal, values, principles, strategic directions, and action plan.

Workshop 1: 5 November 2025 — Stakeholder Assembly

The first workshop brought together all parties involved in youth work across Valmiera Municipality for a joint discussion and working session. The agenda covered mutual introduction, mapping of the current situation, building shared understanding of youth work, and identifying core values and needs. Three key outputs were produced collectively:

Output A — 5 Core Values of Youth Work in Valmiera Municipality

Participants agreed on five foundational values that must underpin all youth work in the municipality. These are not aspirational statements — they are the agreed criteria by which every action and programme will be evaluated:

#	Value	What this means in practice
1	Emotional Well-being (Emociņālā LABS AJŪTA)	Every youth work interaction prioritises the psychological and emotional safety of the young person. Mental health is a prerequisite, not an afterthought.
2	Respectful Communication (Cieņpilna SASKARSME)	All relationships within the youth work system — between workers and youth, between institutions, and between youth themselves — are grounded in mutual respect and dignity.

3	Creative Cooperation (Radoša SADARBĪBA)	Collaboration between organisations, departments, and individuals is the norm, not the exception. Creativity is valued as a tool for problem-solving.
4	Local Identity (Vietējā IDENTITĀTE)	Young people are supported to develop pride in and connection to Valmiera — its territory, culture, and community — as a foundation for civic participation and talent retention.
5	Accepting Diversity (Pieņemoša DAŽĀDĪBA)	Youth work actively includes and celebrates all young people regardless of background, ability, or circumstance. Inclusion is structural, not merely rhetorical.

Output B — 4 Core Principles for Programme Development

In addition to values, the stakeholder assembly agreed on four operating principles that govern how the programme is built and implemented. These principles ensure the process itself reflects the values:

-) Jointly Developed Master Plan (Kopīgi izstrādāts LIELAIS PLĀNS): The programme belongs to all stakeholders. No single department or institution owns it; all parties co-author it.
-) Shared Responsibility of All Parties (Iesaistīto pušu ATBILDĪBA): Every stakeholder who participates in developing the plan takes on a formal responsibility for implementing their part of it.
-) The Familiar and the Innovative (Pierastais un INOVATĪVAIS): The programme builds on what already works in Valmiera while deliberately creating space for new, experimental approaches. Neither continuity nor innovation is sacrificed for the other.
-) Alignment of Goals and Resources (Mērķu un resursu SASKAŅOTĪBA): No action is added to the plan without a corresponding resource commitment. The programme is financially grounded, not aspirational.

Output C — 3 Strategic Development Directions

The assembly defined three strategic directions that structure all programme activity. Each direction addresses a distinct but interconnected dimension of youth policy:

-) Strategic Direction 1: SUPPORT for youth initiatives, life skills, and personal development — investing in young people's capacity to grow, lead, and contribute
-) Strategic Direction 2: Diverse OFFER for meaningful youth leisure — ensuring that every young person in every part of the municipality has access to quality, purposeful activity outside formal education
-) Strategic Direction 3: EFFECTIVE management of youth sector resources — building the governance, data, and coordination infrastructure that makes the first two directions sustainable

Workshop 2: 26 November 2025 — Programme Architecture and Action Plan

The second ULG workshop translated the values, principles, and strategic directions into a concrete programme structure. Participants confirmed the overarching goal and developed the action plan across all three strategic directions.

Overarching Goal (Virsmērķis)

Through the cooperation of all parties involved in youth work, to build an educated, motivated, critical-thinking, healthy, locally patriotic, respectful, and mutually supportive society in Valmiera Municipality.

Three core programme tasks were defined to operationalise this goal:

-) Improve the flow and accessibility of youth sector information for all stakeholders and young people across the municipality

-) Increase equality between youth in Valmiera city and those in rural areas of the municipality, addressing the geographic gap identified in the 2024/2025 research
-) Contribute to ensuring the mental health of young people in Valmiera Municipality — directly responding to the 50%+ stress rate and 27.1% loneliness rate in the baseline data

The Action Plan: Key Activities by Strategic Direction

The following activities were co-developed by the stakeholder group as the concrete expression of the three strategic directions. These form the operational core of the 2026–2031 programme:

Strategic Direction	Key Actions
1. SUPPORT for youth initiatives, life skills & personal development	Youth initiative small grants competition (annual); events and projects promoting growth, motivation, participation, critical thinking, health, emotional well-being, leadership, and local patriotism (especially using non-formal education); student self-governance in every educational institution; youth summer employment; career education and 'Career Support Centre'; labour market and entrepreneurship introductory events; job shadowing days; new parents support system; integration projects for youth with limited opportunities; digital youth work system; mobile youth work
2. Diverse OFFER for meaningful youth leisure	Maintenance and development of existing leisure offer and creation of new provisions; annual youth survey 'What do Valmiera's youth want?'; maintenance and development of material-technical base of leisure institutions; coordinated youth volunteering system; annual 'Youth Opportunities Festival' (informational and educational in-person event); inter-school friendship event
3. EFFECTIVE management of youth sector resources	Implementation of new governance structure (incl. Valmiera County Youth Council); mapping of youth development and support opportunities across the municipality; structured online information exchange platform; annual well-being survey for youth and youth workers; Youth Affairs Advisory Committee; transport solutions for service access across the territory; inter-institutional meetings 4x/year; experience exchange and masterclasses 1–2x/year; 'Best Youth Worker' and 'Youth of the Year' awards; statistical data collection; premises inspection and repair; new staffing units; participation in regional, national, and international events

Co-Design as Accountability

The action plan produced in these two workshops is not a wish list — it is a shared commitment. Every organisation present at the November 2025 workshops accepted joint responsibility for implementing their part of the plan. The ULG structure ensures that this accountability is maintained through quarterly inter-institutional meetings and the annual well-being survey, which covers both youth and youth workers.

2. The Investment Proposal

2.1. Background

Valmiera's investment proposal arises from a critical paradox: while the municipality is Latvia's second-highest GDP territory, its youth population — particularly in rural areas — faces increasing social exclusion and a lack of systemic support. Following the 2021 territorial reforms, the municipality inherited a 2,946 km² area where 12.9% of the population is aged 13–25. The current 'youth offer' is fragmented across departments, and research reveals a profound motivation gap. This proposal bridges the gap between industrial economic success and social well-being by placing youth at the heart of municipal strategy. The inspiration for this integrated approach came from a WISH CITIES partner site visit to Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal, in spring 2025, where Valmiera representatives witnessed a newly established, visually compelling, and structurally coherent youth policy. That experience catalysed the decision to move from piecemeal programming to a fully unified municipal youth strategy.

2.2. Our Starting Point

The baseline for this investment is characterised by high financial commitment to formal education but a significant gap in complementary non-formal youth services and cross-departmental coordination:

-) Institutional Fragmentation: Youth affairs are split between the Education and Development departments, leading to parallel projects, unclear accountability, and inconsistent resource management across the seven territorial unions
-) Staffing Crisis: There is a critical shortage of psychologists and social workers in schools and youth centres, placing immense pressure on teachers who are not trained for welfare support roles
-) Infrastructure Underutilisation: While 18 youth spaces and centres exist across the municipality, many lack a modern technical base, updated equipment, or branded identity — and struggle to attract the ‘inactive’ youth population in remote rural units
-) Passive Governance: The existing Youth Affairs Advisory Committee meets infrequently and has functioned as a consultative formality rather than a proactive driver of policy and innovation
-) Data Deficit: Youth well-being is tracked primarily through attendance headcounts, with no qualitative monitoring of stress, loneliness, or engagement quality — meaning the municipality is operating without early warning signals for social exclusion

Why Now?

The 2021 territorial reform created a window of opportunity: Valmiera now has the scale and mandate to build a unified system. The WISH CITIES URBACT programme provides the methodology, and the February 2026 Youth Law amendments provide the legal framework. All three conditions are aligned for the first time.

2.3. The Adapted Version of the Project'

Valmiera is transitioning from an ad-hoc project mindset to a Systemic/Integrated Youth Work Model. The model was developed by transferring and locally adapting proven innovations from WISH CITIES partner cities, structured around three strategic objectives that directly respond to the three problems identified above:

1. Objective — Unified Governance: A unified Youth Policy Unit established under the Development Department by Q4 2026, delivering role clarity, consolidated budgeting, and formal cross-departmental coordination with Education, Culture, Sports, and Social Services. This resolves institutional fragmentation and passive governance.
2. Objective — Inclusive Access: Mobile youth work (96 visits/year), digital outreach (24 activities/year), and the Youth Ambassador Network ensure that the 69% of youth in rural areas are reached on equal terms with urban youth. This resolves geographic exclusion and infrastructure underutilisation.
3. Objective — Youth Voice and Well-being: The annual Youth Forum, Youth Elections (in election years), co-design sessions, summer employment (70 slots), and qualitative well-being tracking replace passive headcount monitoring with genuine civic participation and measurable quality-of-life outcomes. This resolves the data deficit and the problem of passive governance.

2.4. Programme Logic Model

Problem	Objective	Key Actions	Outputs	Outcomes (by 2031)
Institutional fragmentation: youth affairs split between two departments; no	Objective 1: Unified Governance	Establish Youth Policy Unit (Q4 2026); reconstitute ULG (15 members); produce annual youth	Single accountable unit operational; min. 4 ULG meetings/year;	100% role clarity across departments; min. 3 youth-led proposals adopted by Council/year; all

unified strategy; passive governance body		investment map to Council	investment map published	departments contributing to shared investment map
Geographic exclusion: 69% of youth in rural areas without adequate access; 18 underutilised centres; no mobile provision	Objective 2: Inclusive Access	Deploy 2 mobile worker teams (from Q2 2027); launch digital outreach programme (Q4 2026); roll out Youth Ambassador Network (2026); unify brand across all centres (Q4 2026)	96 mobile visits/year; 24 digital activities/year; min. 1 Ambassador per territorial unit; unified identity live	15% increase in youth participation (2031); rural and urban youth access equivalent service offer; min. 5 NEET youth engaged per integration project
Mental health crisis & data deficit: 50% youth stress; 27.1% loneliness; only attendance tracked; no early warning system	Objective 3: Youth Voice & Well-being	Annual Youth Forum (topic voted by youth); annual well-being survey; summer employment (70 slots); Career Support Centre (by 2027); NFE programmes (1/year, 50 participants)	1 Youth Forum/year; 1 well-being survey/year; 70 summer placements/year; 10 career events/year; 1 NFE programme/year	15% reduction in reported stress (2028); 10% reduction in loneliness (2031); 5% annual NEET reduction; min. 10 international mobility participants/year (from 2027)

2.5. The Integrated Approach and the Participative Process

2.5. The Integrated Approach and the Participative Process

This proposal is grounded in systemic reorganisation rather than isolated activities. What follows explains concretely how integration works, what it means for budgets, and how the three dimensions of the URBACT integrated approach operate in Valmiera's specific context.

How integration works in practice

Integration in Valmiera does not mean creating a new shared pot of money managed by a central committee. Valmiera operates as a single municipality working toward one vision — the Youth Policy Development Programme 2026–2031 — and each department contributes to that vision through its own budget and activities, coordinated by the Youth Policy Unit.

In practice, the Youth Policy Unit works with Education, Culture, Sports, and Social Services to map which activities each department is already delivering — or planning to deliver — that contribute to the programme's three objectives. These contributions are consolidated into a single annual youth investment map, presented to the Municipal Council. This gives elected members — for the first time — a complete picture of what the municipality is investing in young people across all departments, in one place. The map also makes gaps visible: where no department is currently delivering against a priority, the Youth Policy Unit can identify the need and find the right home for it.

What does each department contribute? Education funds non-formal learning and school-based youth worker hours. Culture funds the Youth Opportunities Festival, inter-school events, and the annual Youth Forum venue and production. Sports funds the physical activity strand of well-being programmes and summer employment placements in sports facilities. Social Services funds NEET integration projects and outreach to youth with limited opportunities. The Youth Policy Unit's own core budget — drawn from the Development Department — funds staff, mobile work, digital infrastructure, Youth Elections, and the small-grants competition.

This model reflects how Valmiera actually works. It is not a bureaucratic contracting exercise between siloed departments — it is a coordinated effort by a single public authority that has chosen to put young people at the centre of its development strategy.

The URBACT Integrated Approach: three dimensions

Valmiera's integration model is structured around the three dimensions that URBACT defines as essential for genuinely integrated urban development:

- **Horizontal integration — across policy sectors:** The key innovation is that youth work is no longer the sole responsibility of one department. A young person experiencing mental health difficulties may

be supported through a Social Services referral, a Culture-funded safe space in a youth centre, a Sports-funded physical activity programme, and an Education-funded school counsellor — all coordinated through a single youth worker who holds the full picture. By involving local businesses and vocational centres, the process also ensures that skills align with the territory's economic needs, creating a pipeline from youth development into Valmiera's industries, including fibreglass production, metalworking, and food processing.

- **Vertical integration — across levels of governance:** The programme operates simultaneously at national level (aligned with the Youth Law, National Development Plan 2021–2027, and NEET reduction targets), municipal level (Youth Policy Unit within the Development Department, direct line to Council), and community level (Youth Council, Youth Ambassadors, Youth Elections). The structured dialogue mechanism — at least one formal meeting per year between the Youth Council and municipal deputies — is the vertical link in both directions: youth voice travels upward into policy; policy decisions travel downward into communities.
- **Territorial integration — across geographic diversity:** Valmiera city (31% of youth) has different needs from the rural parishes of Burtnieki, Naukšēni, or Brenguļi. Urban youth receive the full range of centre services, the Youth Forum, and the Career Support Centre. Rural youth receive mobile youth work (8 visits/month), the Youth Ambassador network in their schools and villages, and digital outreach. Transport and logistics costs for mobile work are a protected budget line — because geographic reach is a non-negotiable equity commitment.

The Participative Process: the reorganised ULG

Central to this proposal is the transformation of the URBACT Local Group (ULG) from a consultative body into a genuine co-governance mechanism. The ULG is being transformed into a 15-member body with a 50/50 gender balance, comprising NGOs, municipal staff, youth representatives, local businesses, and vocational education centres. Youth co-design sessions and the annual Youth Forum are institutionalised as formal mechanisms carrying a political mandate: at least three youth-led proposals must be adopted or funded by the City Council annually. The Youth Elections provide the democratic input; the Forum translates that input into proposals; the annual investment map provides the mechanism for those proposals to reach the departments with the budget to act on them.

The pipeline in practice

A 14-year-old in a rural parish who votes in the Youth Elections (civic participation, territorial reach) may attend a Youth Forum workshop on mental health (horizontal: Culture + Social Services), be visited by a mobile youth worker in their village (territorial), be supported by a Youth Ambassador at their school (vertical: community level), and eventually secure a summer employment placement at a local metalworking firm (horizontal: Employment + private sector). Each step is coordinated. No single department owns the journey. That is what an integrated approach means in Valmiera — and that is what this Investment Plan is designed to fund.

3. The Adapted Innovation Project

3.1. Value proposition

Valmiera is transitioning from a fragmented, department-siloed youth service model to a Unified, Data-Driven Youth Ecosystem that prioritises quality of life over headcounts. By centralising governance and deploying a decentralised mobile delivery system, we bridge the geographic gap for the 69% of youth in rural areas who are currently isolated from essential support.

Our investment case is built on a preventative Social Return on Investment (SROI) model. For every EUR 1 invested in high-quality, co-designed youth work, the municipality can expect to save EUR 3–5 in future social costs related to unemployment support, mental health intervention, crime prevention, and early school leaving. By addressing the 50% youth stress rate and 27.1% loneliness rate identified in the 2024/2025 research baseline — independently validated by the Youth Elections result — Valmiera is intervening upstream, before problems become crises.

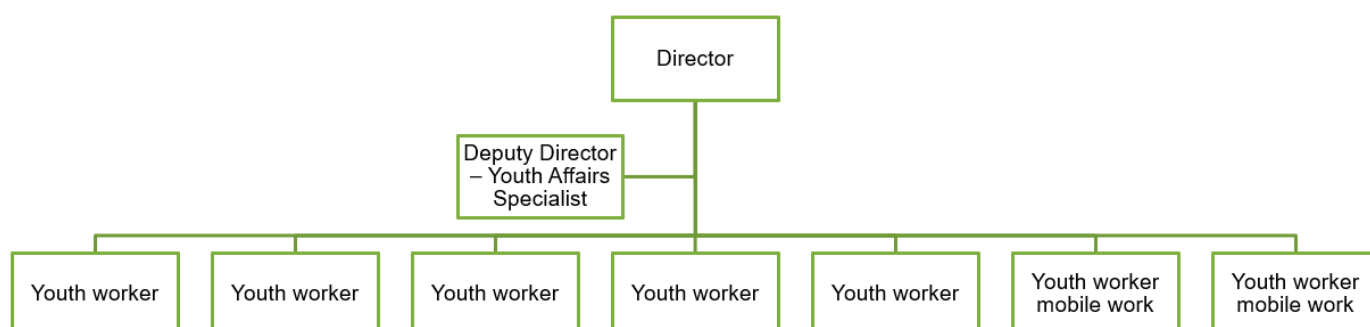
This project transforms Valmiera from an industrial economic leader into a human-centric municipality, securing long-term competitiveness by fostering civic belonging and talent retention. A young person who feels heard, supported, and included is more likely to remain in Valmiera, enter the workforce, and contribute to the local economy after completing their education.

3.2. Organisational Model

The new model replaces fragmented departmental ownership with a clear hierarchy of strategic, operational, and peer-level functions:

Level	Body / Role	Function	Accountability
Strategic	Youth Policy Unit (Development Dept.)	Policy direction, budget oversight, inter-departmental coordination, URBACT reporting	Municipal Council
Coordination	ULG (15 members, 50/50 gender)	Co-design, stakeholder input, Youth Forum oversight, annual proposals to Council	Youth Policy Unit
Operational	Head of Youth Centre + 8 FTEs	Day-to-day youth work, mobile teams, digital activities, centre management	Youth Policy Unit
Peer-level	Youth Council (22 members)	Youth Elections, structured dialogue with deputies, Youth Forum theme-setting	ULG
Peer-level	Youth Ambassadors (min. 8)	Last-mile communication in schools and villages, peer outreach	Youth Council
Specialist	NGO partners	Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps, NEET projects, specialised workshops	Youth Policy Unit

Development department Unit “Youth centre”



3.3. Risk Assessment

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation
Staff turnover in newly professionalised unit	Medium	High	Competitive salary bands (grades 9-11); succession planning; documented procedures
Youth disengagement from Elections/Forum cycle	Low	High	Forum topics set by youth vote; peer ambassadors in every school; ERDF-backed delivery continuity
Inter-departmental collaboration stalls	Medium	Medium	Formal agreements signed at Director level; joint KPIs; Youth Policy Unit holds coordination mandate
External funding gaps (mobile bus, digital tools)	Medium	Medium	Phased approach; private sector partnerships explored; ESF and state grant pipeline active
Rural geographic barriers persist.	Low	Medium	Mobile teams (96 visits/year) and digital activities (24/year) are contractual KPIs, not aspirational.
Political cycle disrupts strategy continuity.	Low	High	Strategy embedded in 2022-2028 Sustainable Urban Development programme; ULG provides non-partisan continuity

3.4. The Workplan

The workplan is structured across three phases and three objectives. Each action names the responsible body, deadline, indicative cost, and the KPI against which it will be measured. This table is the operational expression of the logic model in Section 2.4.

Phase 1 (2026): Foundation & Reorganisation

Action	Responsible	Deadline	Indicative Cost	KPI
Obj.1: Complete structural review; sign off unified organisational chart	Development Dept. Director	Q2 2026	Staff time	Chart approved by Council
Obj.1: Recruit and onboard 9.0 FTE Youth Centre unit at MAG 9–11	HR / Youth Policy Unit	Q3 2026	EUR 189,372/year	All posts filled
Obj.1: Establish Youth Policy Unit under Development Department	Development Dept. Director	Q4 2026	Staff time	Unit formally established
Obj.1: Produce first annual youth investment map across all departments	Youth Policy Unit	Q4 2026	Staff time	Map presented to Council
Obj.1: Reconstitute ULG (15 members, 50/50 gender, min. 4 meetings/year)	Youth Policy Unit	Q3 2026	Staff time	ULG operational
Obj.2: Roll out unified brand across all centres	Youth Policy Unit	Q4 2026	Within existing budget	Brand live at all centres
Obj.2: Launch digital outreach programme (Discord + online workshops)	Youth Workers	Q4 2026	EUR 5,000	24 digital activities/year
Obj.2: Establish Youth Ambassador Network (min. 1 per territorial unit)	Youth Council / Youth Workers	Q4 2026	EUR 5,000/year	Min. 8 Ambassadors active
Obj.3: Deliver 2026 Youth Forum (topic chosen by youth)	Youth Policy Unit / ULG	Q3 2026	EUR 8,000	Forum delivered; min. 100 participants
Obj.3: Launch annual well-being survey (youth + youth workers)	Youth Policy Unit	Q4 2026	Staff time	Baseline survey completed
Obj.3: Deliver summer employment programme (70 slots)	Youth Policy Unit / Municipal agencies	Q2–Q3 2026	EUR 65,000 (shared)	70 placements filled

Phase 2 (2027–2029): Implementation & Resource Optimisation

Action	Responsible	Deadline	Indicative Cost	KPI
Obj.1: Publish annual youth investment maps	Youth Policy Unit	Q4 each year	Staff time	Maps presented to Council annually
Obj.1: Deliver min. 4 ULG co-design sessions/year with external experts	Youth Policy Unit / ULG	Ongoing from 2027	Staff time + facilitation	4 sessions/year documented
Obj.2: Deploy mobile youth work (2 teams, 8 visits/month)	Youth Centre Director	Q2 2027	EUR 3,700–5,000/year	96 mobile visits/year
Obj.2: Acquire or lease branded mobile youth bus	Youth Policy Unit	2027 (if funding secured)	EUR 40,000–60,000 (CAPEX)	Bus operational
Obj.2: Launch NEET integration projects (ESF co-funded)	Youth Policy Unit / NGO partners	Q3 2027	EUR 12,000/project	Min. 5 NEET youth/project
Obj.2: Launch first Erasmus+ international mobility project	NGO partner	2027	External (Erasmus+)	Min. 1 project approved

Obj.3: Establish Career Support Centre	Youth Policy Unit / Education Dept.	Q2 2027	EUR 3,000–5,000/year	Centre operational; 10 career events/year
Obj.3: Deliver NFE programme (1/year, min. 50 participants)	Youth Workers / ULG	Annually from 2027	EUR 5,000–8,000	1 programme/year; 50 participants
Obj.3: Conduct mid-cycle well-being survey; present to Council	Youth Policy Unit / Vidzeme University	2027, 2029	EUR 5,000–10,000	Survey completed; results published
Obj.1: Submit min. 5 external funding applications/year	Youth Policy Unit / NGO partners	Annually	Staff time	EUR 20,000 external funding/year

Phase 3 (2030–2031): Consolidation & Impact Assessment

Action	Responsible	Deadline	Indicative Cost	KPI
All Obj: Scale up NFE programmes and youth initiative competitions	Youth Policy Unit / Youth Centre	2030–2031	Within core budget	20+ projects/year; 2+ NFE programmes
All Obj: Commission independent mid-term policy evaluation	Youth Policy Unit	2028	EUR 10,000–15,000	Evaluation report published
All Obj: Commission final evaluation and SROI assessment (NEF methodology)	Youth Policy Unit	2031	EUR 15,000–20,000	SROI validated; EUR 3–5 return per EUR 1
All Obj: Publish results; share model with URBACT network and Latvian municipalities	Youth Policy Unit / Communications	2031	Staff time	Results published; min. 1 peer learning event

3.5. Delivery Timeline

Milestone	Deadline	Responsible	Status
Youth Elections 2025 delivered (1,263 participants)	June 2025	Youth Policy Unit / WISH CITIES	COMPLETED
Youth Forum 'Mental Health' delivered	March 2026	Youth Policy Unit / ULG	COMPLETED
Unified Youth Policy Unit established	Q4 2026	Development Department Director	In progress
Inter-departmental collaboration agreements signed	Q4 2026	Youth Policy Unit	Planned
9 FTE staff recruited and onboarded	Q3 2026	HR / Youth Policy Unit	Planned
Unified brand rolled out to all 4 centres	Q4 2026	Youth Policy Unit	Planned
Mobile work infrastructure operational	Q2 2027	Youth Policy Unit	Planned
First NEET integration project launched.	Q3 2027	Youth Policy Unit / ESF	Planned
First Erasmus+ project delivered	2027	NGO Partner	Planned
Mid-term policy evaluation	2028	External Evaluator	Planned
Final evaluation and SROI assessment	2031	External Evaluator	Planned

3.6. Governance and Delivery Model

Strategic Oversight: Dedicated Youth Policy Unit within the Development Department

) Decentralised Delivery: Valmiera Youth Centre as legal core; base stations in Rūjiena, Mazsalaca, Strenči, and other regional units

-) Peer-to-Peer Governance: Youth Council (22 members) and Youth Ambassador Network (≥8 leaders) ensure last-mile reach
-) External Partnerships: NGO sector handling Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps; academic partners (Vidzeme University) supporting research and evaluation
-) Expert Engagement: Regular ULG meetings with external specialists — including psychologists, labour market experts, and digital educators — to co-design and continuously validate the integrated youth work approach

3.7. Overall Project Schedule

-) Q3 Annually: Youth Forum on a topic chosen by youth — through the Children and Youth Elections ballot in election years, or through a youth survey/ULG co-design process in non-election years (validated with the March 2026 Mental Health Forum)
-) Election years only: Children and Youth Elections held concurrently with municipal or parliamentary elections — 1,263 participants in June 2025; topic chosen through real ballot at 34 polling stations
-) Monthly: At least 8 mobile work trips to rural parishes and 2 digital skill activities

4. Budget

4.1. Project Costs

The great majority of funding for this programme comes from the Valmiera Municipality core budget (pamatbudžets). This is a deliberate and important statement: the 2026–2031 Youth Policy Development Programme is not dependent on external or project funding to operate. Its staffing, infrastructure, annual Youth Elections and Youth Forum cycle, and core activities are all funded from the municipal budget as a permanent commitment. External funding — from URBACT/ERDF, Erasmus+, ESF, and state grants — supplements and extends the programme but does not underpin it. This gives the programme structural stability that project-funded initiatives cannot offer.

The estimates below are indicative ballpark figures based on the confirmed Latvian public-sector salary grades in the approved new structure, known activity costs from the Youth Policy Development Programme 2026–2031, and reasonable assumptions regarding operational costs. They are intended to give a clear sense of scale and to demonstrate that the programme is financially grounded, not aspirational.

Staffing Costs — Youth Centre Unit (9.0 FTE)

The new structure sits within the Development Department under the 'Youth Centre' (Jauniešu centrs) unit. All salary figures include the employer's mandatory social insurance contribution of 23.59%. A Development Department Administrator provides administrative support to the unit but is funded by the Development Department's own budget and is not included here.

<u>Role</u>	<u>FTE</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Bruto salary</u>	<u>Monthly cost (incl. employer 23.59%)</u>	<u>Annual cost</u>
Director (Vadītājs)	1.0	MAG 11	EUR 2,003	EUR 2,475	EUR 29,694
Deputy Director (Vadītāja vietnieks)	1.0	MAG 10	EUR 1,605	EUR 1,983	EUR 23,794
Youth Worker — territorial base 1	1.0	MAG 9	EUR 1,310	EUR 1,619	EUR 19,412
Youth Worker — territorial base 2	1.0	MAG 9	EUR 1,310	EUR 1,619	EUR 19,412
Youth Worker — territorial base 3	1.0	MAG 9	EUR 1,310	EUR 1,619	EUR 19,412
Youth Worker — territorial base 4	1.0	MAG 9	EUR 1,310	EUR 1,619	EUR 19,412
Youth Worker — territorial base 5	1.0	MAG 9	EUR 1,310	EUR 1,619	EUR 19,412
Youth Worker — Mobile work	1.0	MAG 9	EUR 1,310	EUR 1,619	EUR 19,412
Youth Worker — Mobile work	1.0	MAG 9	EUR 1,310	EUR 1,619	EUR 19,412
TOTAL — Youth Centre unit (9.0 FTE)					EUR 189,372/year

Staff costs represent approximately 60–65% of total annual programme expenditure, consistent with international benchmarks for quality youth work services. The grade 9 rate for all youth workers — including the two mobile workers — reflects the professionalised nature of the role and the additional demands of outreach and rural delivery. The two dedicated mobile workers always operate as a pair, ensuring safety and enabling group activities in rural locations.

Activity and Operational Costs

<u>Cost Component</u>	<u>What it covers</u>	<u>Basis for estimate</u>	<u>Indicative Annual Cost</u>	<u>Primary Funding Source</u>
Mobile work — transport & logistics	Fuel and vehicle maintenance for 96 rural visits/year; two existing municipal vehicles; avg. 50–80 km per visit	~EUR 0.30/km × avg. 65 km × 96 visits × 2 teams	EUR 3,700–5,000	Municipal core budget
Mobile work — branded bus (one-off capital)	Single visually branded, accessible youth work minibus; improves reach and recognition across the territory.	Market estimate for second-hand accessible minibus + branding	EUR 40,000–60,000 (one-off)	External funding sought (LEADER / private sector)
Youth Forum (annual)	Venue, facilitation, expert fees, catering, materials for annual forum on youth-elected theme	Confirmed in Youth Policy Development Programme 2026–2031	EUR 8,000	Municipal core budget
Children and Youth Elections (election years only)	Ballot materials, polling stations, volunteer coordination, follow-up delivery of elected results. Held concurrently with municipal or parliamentary elections — not annual.	Based on 2025 delivery: 48 volunteers, 1,263 participants, 34 polling stations across full territory	EUR 3,000–5,000 (in election years only)	Municipal core budget
Youth Initiative Small Grants Competition	20 projects × EUR 300 each; annual open competition for youth-led initiatives	Confirmed in Youth Policy Development Programme	EUR 6,000	Municipal core budget
Summer Employment Programme	Stipends for 70 young people: 40 placements in municipal enterprises + 30 in municipal institutions; approx. 4–6 weeks at minimum wage. Coordination and admin costs sit with the Youth Policy Unit; stipend costs sit within the receiving departments.	~EUR 620/month minimum wage × 1.5 months × 70 placements	EUR 65,000 (shared across departments)	Municipal core budget (across departments)
Non-formal education (NFE) programmes	1 structured NFE programme/year (50 participants); 1 NFE activity/month per centre (5 centres); materials, facilitator time	Staff time absorbed in salary costs; materials and external facilitators estimated	EUR 5,000–8,000	Municipal core budget
Career events & job shadowing	10 career events/year; Ēnu dienas (job shadowing days); meetings with local employers in fibreglass, metalworking, food processing	Staff coordination time + event costs	EUR 3,000–5,000	Municipal core budget
Centre infrastructure & equipment	Annual maintenance and equipment refresh across all youth centres and spaces; technology and materials.	Ongoing upkeep of 18+ spaces across the territory	EUR 10,000–15,000	Municipal core budget
Staff training & professional development	Min. 1 training session/year per staff member; external supervision and psycho-emotional support for youth workers (explicitly required in strategy)	9 staff × training + 2 staff supervision sessions/year	EUR 4,000–6,000	Municipal core budget
External funding pipeline (target)	5 external project applications/year: Erasmus+, ESF, state grants, LEADER	Target set in Youth Policy Development Programme	EUR 20,000 target (external)	Erasmus+ / ESF / State / LEADER

<u>Summary</u>	<u>Indicative Annual Cost</u>
Staff — Youth Centre unit (9.0 FTE)	EUR 189,372
Activity and operational costs (excl. summer employment stipends)	EUR 42,700–57,000
Summer employment stipends (shared across departments)	EUR 65,000
TOTAL indicative annual operating cost	EUR 297,000–311,000
of which: municipal core budget (~90–95%)	approx. EUR 277,000–291,000
of which: external sources (~5–10%)	approx. EUR 20,000–30,000
One-off capital: branded mobile bus (external funding sought)	EUR 40,000–60,000

What do these figures show?

The programme costs approximately EUR 297,000–311,000 per year to run at full operation. Staff costs of EUR 189,372 account for around 61% of total expenditure — appropriate and expected for a people-intensive service. The municipality bears around 90–95% of the total cost from its own budget, confirming this as a permanent strategic commitment rather than a project. The only significant item not yet secured is the branded mobile bus, for which external funding is being actively pursued.

4.2. Investment Sources

Valmiera uses a multi-stream funding strategy that combines stable core budget commitments with targeted external programme funding:

) **Municipal Core Budget:** Funds all 9.0 FTE positions across the Youth Centre unit (Director at MAG 11, Deputy Director at MAG 10, and 7 Youth Workers at MAG 9), infrastructure maintenance across territorial unions, the annual Youth Forum, the Children and Youth Elections in election years, and the Youth Initiative Project Competition. This is the stable base that ensures continuity regardless of external funding cycles [High probability].

) **WISH CITIES / URBACT IV ERDF:** Co-finances the Youth Forum, Children and Youth Elections, co-design activities, and knowledge transfer with partner cities. Contribution confirmed through the URBACT Innovation Transfer Network programme [Medium probability].

) **Erasmus+ (Youth in Action):** Targeted for international mobility and youth exchanges — minimum 1 approved project per year from 2027. NGO partners lead applications [High probability].

European Social Fund (ESF) — Active Labour Market component: Identified as the primary source for NEET integration projects and the 'Improved Youth Data' qualitative tracking system—applications to be submitted by Q2 2027 [Medium probability].

) **Latvian State Budget — Youth Policy Development Grants:** Applied annually to specific mandated activities (Youth Council operations, structured dialogue meetings, youth employment programmes) [Medium probability].

) **Private Sector Partnerships:** Discussions initiated with major local employers (fibreglass and food processing sectors) for summer employment slots, mentorship contributions, and potential sponsorship of the mobile youth bus [Medium probability].

4.3. Identified Funding Gaps and Mitigation

Gap	Estimated Cost	Priority	Mitigation Strategy
Mobile youth bus (branded, accessible)	EUR 40,000–60,000	High	LEADER programme application; private sector co-funding; leasing model as interim solution
Digital toolkits and Discord-based engagement platform	EUR 8,000–12,000/year	Medium	ESF digital inclusion funding; Erasmus+ complementary activities
Scaling Youth Ambassador network (materials, training)	EUR 5,000/year	Medium	State youth policy grant; co-funding from schools
Additional psychologist/social worker posts	EUR 30,000–40,000/year	High	Health Ministry targeted grants; EU Social Fund mental health priority

5. Monitoring & Evaluation

5.1. The M&E Approach

Valmiera's approach to monitoring the Youth Policy Development Programme 2026–2031 is designed to ensure the transition from fragmented governance to a unified, data-driven ecosystem is transparent, evidence-based, and responsive. The approach moves beyond traditional headcount metrics to capture qualitative well-being outcomes. Critically, every indicator in the framework below is directly linked to a specific action in the workplan (Section 3.4) and to an objective in the logic model (Section 2.4). This ensures that monitoring is not a reporting exercise but a learning and adaptation mechanism.

- **Annual Policy Review:** Led jointly by the Youth Policy Unit and the Youth Council (ULG), assessing the programme's relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness against the 2026–2031 vision. Results are presented to the Municipal Council.
- **Quarterly Progress Reports:** Each regional Youth Centre submits a mandatory self-assessment covering budget expenditure, activity delivery, and KPI progress, consolidated into a municipal-level dashboard by the Youth Policy Unit.
- **Data-Driven Baseline:** The 2024/2025 Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences research provides the quantitative baseline for stress (50%), loneliness (27.1%), and engagement levels. An updated survey will be conducted in 2027 and 2029 to track progress against these baselines.
- **Democratic Feedback Loop:** The Youth Forum is held annually, with the topic chosen by youth — through the Children and Youth Elections ballot in election years, and through a youth survey or ULG co-design process in non-election years. This ensures the programme remains continuously responsive.
- **External Evaluation:** An independent evaluator will be commissioned for a mid-term impact assessment in 2028 and a final evaluation in 2031, providing objective verification of the SROI targets and policy outcomes.

5.2. Social Return on Investment (SROI) Framework

The preventative SROI model underpins the investment case. The following illustrative calculations are based on Latvian public expenditure data and comparable European municipal youth investment studies:

Intervention	Annual Investment	Estimated Prevented Cost	SROI Ratio
Early mental health support (Youth Forum + workshops)	EUR 15,000	EUR 45,000–75,000 (reduced mental health crisis interventions)	3:1 to 5:1
NEET integration projects (5 youth/project)	EUR 12,000/project	EUR 36,000–60,000 (reduced unemployment benefits, social care)	3:1 to 5:1

Summer employment (70 slots)	EUR 65,000 (stipends)	EUR 130,000–195,000 (reduced summer inactivity, improved retention)	2:1 to 3:1
Youth co-design and civic engagement	EUR 8,000	EUR 40,000+ (reduced disengagement, brain drain prevention)	5:1+

SROI Target

For every EUR 1 invested in this programme, Valmiera targets a return of EUR 3–5 in avoided future social costs. The independent 2031 evaluation will validate this figure using the [New Economics Foundation SROI methodology](#).

5.3. The Monitoring & Evaluation Framework

Indicator	Linked Objective	Linked Action	Baseline (2025)	Target	Schedule	Responsible
Youth stress levels	Obj. 3	Youth Forum; well-being survey	50% reported stress	15% reduction	Mid-term (2028)	Youth Policy Unit
Loneliness rate	Obj. 3	Youth Forum; NFE programmes	27.1% reported loneliness	10% reduction	Final (2031)	Youth Policy Unit
NEET youth engaged	Obj. 2 & 3	NEET integration projects (ESF)	Not tracked	Min. 5 per project	Annual from 2027	Youth Policy Unit / NGO
Youth participation rate	Obj. 2 & 3	Mobile work; digital outreach; Youth Forum	Passive engagement	15% increase	Final (2031)	Youth Centre Director
Youth Forum delivery	Obj. 3	Annual Youth Forum	0 structured forums	1 per year; topic chosen by youth	Annual	Youth Policy Unit / ULG
Children and Youth Elections	Obj. 3	Elections (election years only)	1,263 participants (2025)	+10% per cycle	Election years only	Youth Policy Unit
Staff capacity	Obj. 1	Recruitment of 9.0 FTE unit	Fragmented, understaffed	9.0 FTE at MAG 9–11	Q3 2026	HR / Youth Policy Unit
ULG co-design sessions	Obj. 1	ULG meetings with external experts	Ad hoc	Min. 4 per year	Annual	Youth Policy Unit
Youth-led proposals to Council	Obj. 1 & 3	ULG co-design; Youth Forum	0	Min. 3 per year	Annual	ULG / Youth Council
Mobile visits to rural parishes	Obj. 2	Mobile youth work teams	Not tracked	Min. 96/year	Annual from Q2 2027	Youth Centre Director
Digital activities delivered	Obj. 2	Digital outreach programme	Not tracked	Min. 24/year	Annual from Q4 2026	Youth Workers
International mobility participants	Obj. 3	Erasmus+ projects	0	Min. 10/year	Annual from 2027	NGO partners
External funding secured	Obj. 1	5 funding applications/year	EUR 0	EUR 20,000/year target	Annual	Youth Policy Unit
Annual youth investment map	Obj. 1	Cross-departmental mapping	Not produced	Published annually	Annual from Q4 2026	Youth Policy Unit

The Youth Policy Unit and Youth Council (ULG) are responsible for maintaining this framework across all seven territorial unions, ensuring that last-mile communication and service delivery are consistently met.

5.4. Alignment with National and EU Policy Frameworks

This investment plan is fully aligned with the following national and European policy frameworks:

-)] Latvian Youth Law (amended February 2026): Defines the municipal obligation to provide youth services for all persons aged 13–30; raises the threshold that directly increases Valmiera's target population by approximately 15%
-)] Latvian Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 (Latvia 2030): Priority area 'Human capital development'; target of increasing youth civic engagement and reducing NEET rates
-)] Valmiera Municipality Sustainable Urban Development Programme 2022–2028: Youth work is an explicit development task with dedicated budget allocation
-)] European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027: Pillars of Engage, Connect, and Empower — all three directly addressed by this investment plan's co-design, forum, and ambassador mechanisms
-)] URBACT IV Innovation Transfer Networks Programme: Valmiera is a validated transfer partner within the WISH CITIES network, with formal obligations to implement and report on the transferred innovations
-)] EU Child Rights Strategy 2021–2024 and successor framework: Mental health and social inclusion of children and young people as EU-level priorities, supporting ESF and ERDF funding eligibility

5.5. Sustainability Beyond URBACT

One of the most important questions for any evaluator or funder is: what happens when URBACT ends? For Valmiera, the answer is explicit and built into the financial architecture of this plan.

The programme's core costs — the 9.0 FTE Youth Centre unit (EUR 189,372/year), the annual Youth Forum (EUR 8,000), the Youth Initiative Small Grants Competition (EUR 6,000), the summer employment programme (EUR 65,000 shared across departments), and the mobile work transport costs (EUR 3,700–5,000) — are all funded from the Valmiera Municipal Core Budget. These are not project costs. They are permanent budget lines within a unit that sits inside the Development Department's organisational structure. When URBACT funding ends, these costs continue to be covered by the municipal budget, as they would be for any other municipal service.

URBACT and WISH CITIES funding contributes to the co-design activities, knowledge transfer, the Youth Elections, and the Forum production costs. These are the innovation and learning elements of the programme. By the end of the URBACT programme period, all of these activities will have been embedded in the municipal annual planning cycle and budget, with the Youth Forum and Elections confirmed as standing items in the Development Department's work programme.

Long-term ownership is further secured through three mechanisms. First, the programme is embedded in the Valmiera Municipality Sustainable Urban Development Programme 2022–2028, giving it a legal and strategic anchor that outlasts any single funding stream. Second, the Youth Policy Unit sits within the permanent municipal structure — it is not a project office that dissolves when funding ends. Third, the ULG and Youth Council are constituted under a formal by-law (nolikums), meaning their role in overseeing the programme continues regardless of which external funders are involved.

The 90–95% municipal core budget share is not a risk — it is the sustainability guarantee. Valmiera is not building a programme that depends on winning the next grant; it is building a permanent municipal service that external funding helps to innovate and improve.

What We Have Done, Gained, and Where We Go Next

When we started, Valmiera had no unified youth strategy. Youth work was split between two departments, the advisory committee met rarely, and 69% of young people in rural areas were effectively invisible to the system. We knew something was wrong — but we were tracking headcounts, not well-being.

That has changed.

Over the past year, we built something together. 1,263 children voted in real elections at 34 polling stations. They chose mental health as the priority — and we delivered a full-day Forum on exactly that, with experts, workshops, and honest personal stories. Two stakeholder workshops brought youth workers, young people, and decision-makers into the same room and produced the values, principles, and action plan that now underpin this entire programme. The document you are reading is not a plan written by administrators. It is a plan built by everyone it affects.

What we have gained is a foundation. A Youth Centre unit with 9 professional staff. A co-governance ULG with a mandate to put at least three youth-led proposals before the Council every year. An annual youth investment map that will, for the first time, show exactly what Valmiera spends on its young people across every department. And a validated methodology — the Democracy Begins at Home elections cycle — that Liepāja and Bauska have already joined, and which we believe can become a national model.

What comes next is straightforward: we deliver—Youth Forum in Q3 2026. Mobile youth work reaching every rural parish by Q2 2027. Career Support Centre open by the end of that year. An independent evaluation in 2028. A final assessment of social return on investment in 2031.

Valmiera municipality is a place where young people choose to stay — not because they have no other option, but because their voices matter and their futures are possible.