

EUI CAPACITY BUILDING EVENT REPORT

Bouncing forward: Designing SUD strategies
for resilience

Country-specific event, 23-24 April 2025, Latvia



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SUMMARY

The European Urban Initiative¹ organized a [Capacity Building Event for Latvian municipalities](#) and Functional Urban Areas on 23-24 April 2025 in Cēsis (Latvia), titled Bouncing forward: Reinforcing SUD strategies for resilience. The overall objective of the event was to **equip city practitioners and policy makers to build resilience** to prevent and mitigate risks², and integrate such topics to reinforce their Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) strategies.

WHY A CAPACITY BUILDING EVENT ON RESILIENCE IN LATVIA?

Under Latvia's Territorial Development Planning Law, every municipality must develop a Sustainable Development Strategy, a Territorial Plan, and a Development Program—the latter serving as a key tool for assessing local resources, guiding investment, shaping the municipal budget, and aligning with national and EU priorities. The Development Program includes a situation analysis, a strategic vision (up to 7 years), and a regularly updated action and investment plan (minimum 3 years), incorporating both local and external funding sources. It supports goals such as economic growth, public service efficiency, smart governance, accessibility, climate resilience, and community involvement through participatory budgeting. For 2021–2027, Latvian municipalities benefit from over €4.3 billion in EU cohesion funding, plus €0.7 billion in national co-financing, to advance strategic EU objectives like a greener, smarter, more connected, and socially inclusive Europe. The Ministry of Smart Administration and Territorial Development (VARAM) launched a consultation to municipalities in 2024, which highlighted resilience and crisis preparedness as their most pressing needs in capacity building.

The curriculum of the event aimed to share **relevant knowledge and tools** to help the participants to identify risks, to seek solutions for prevention and mitigation and overall, to increase resilience of Functional Urban Areas (FUA) in particular in the context of climate adaptation and civil protection. More broadly, the content and delivery of the event was aimed at achieving four specific objectives:

1. To introduce **resilience** as a useful concept and practical tool in the context of key socio-ecological risks and challenges relevant for Latvian municipalities;

¹ The European Urban Initiative (EUI) is the EU instrument supporting urban areas of all sizes with innovative actions, capacity and knowledge building on sustainable urban development under the European Cohesion Policy. Thus, the EUI contributes to the following:

- developing transferable and scalable innovative solutions to urban challenges;
- boosting the design and implementation of sustainable urban policies, strategies and practices in an integrated and participative way;
- promoting knowledge sharing and capitalisation for the benefit of urban policy makers and practitioners.

² Glossary of terms: Resilience relates to the ability of cities to withstand shocks, crises and disruptions. Preparedness is the ability / extent of systematic preparations of governmental and emergency stakeholders to manage disruptions. Risk management is a managerial / governmental technique or process involving identifying, assessing, and mitigating relevant risks.

2. To provide **relevant methodologies** for risk assessment and preparedness in Functional Urban Areas;
3. To identify innovative and successful **solutions** and mitigation measures thus adapting Sustainable Urban Development strategies to emerging challenges.
4. To support **action planning** for SUD of the functional urban areas related to resilience and risks management.

The topic and content of the event was inspired by the relevance of climate adaptation and civil protection, both as **universal principles and goals governing SUD strategy development** and based on the preliminary needs assessment by municipalities. Indeed, the rapidly changing external environment is affecting both civil protection risk assessments and climate challenge scenario planning, revealing many commonalities between the two. Strategic planners serve as a vital link between both areas by leveraging data and best practices to drive continuous improvement.

THE EVENT AT A GLANCE

79 participants attended the event (including experts and foreign case study representatives), with 52 representing Latvian municipalities and functional urban areas during one or both days of the event.

In addition to the representatives from functional urban areas and municipalities which were the key target group of the event, other key national stakeholders and organizations were present, such as Ministry of Smart Administration and Regional Development, Ministry of Climate and Energy, and Latvian State Fire and Rescue Service. The key energy infrastructure company Sadales tīkls was also present, in addition to a number of thematic experts and representatives from the European Commission (DG Regio) and the European Urban Initiative.

Finally, the event involved representatives of seven case studies, coming from five Member States:

- European cities: municipality of Cēsis (Latvia), city of Lodz (Poland), Metropolitan Area Association of Lublin (Poland), city of Tampere (Finland), city of Trnava (Slovakia),
- Regional bodies: Kvarken Region (Finland and Sweden)
- National institutions: Ministry of Interior (Finland).

The event's agenda included a panel discussion with Latvian and international experts, a series of interactive workshops highlighting innovative practices from across the EU, an expert-led simulation exercise focused on managing a civil emergency, and a series of practical roadmap sessions for the participating municipalities.

The present report offers an overview of the key sessions, in the context of the event's objectives.

1. RESILIENCE AND CRISIS PREPAREDNESS IN LATVIA

1.1. POLICY PLANNING AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The National Development Plan of Latvia (2021–2027) defines resilience as a core principle for national sustainability, security, and adaptability. It encompasses four key dimensions: knowledge and economic resilience through a skilled, innovative workforce; climate and environmental resilience to address ecological risks and energy dependence; emotional and psychological resilience to support mental health and well-being; and societal and national security resilience to strengthen civil protection, disaster preparedness, and civic engagement in the face of evolving geopolitical and hybrid threats. This holistic view positions resilience not just as crisis recovery, but as proactive adaptation and growth.

Latvian municipalities are central to operationalizing national resilience through local action. They are tasked with crisis management, civil protection planning, community engagement, and cross-sector collaboration. Under the Civil Protection and Disaster Management Law, municipalities must develop and maintain Civil Protection Plans (CA Plans) based on risk assessments, defining responsibilities and disaster management measures across all phases. These plans guide local responses during emergencies, ensuring shelter, evacuation, and care, while aligning with national strategies and legal frameworks. Municipalities also organize training, provide resources, and coordinate with ministries and other stakeholders to build a resilient civil protection system.

1.2. RESILIENCE AND PREPAREDNESS IN THE SCOPE OF THE EVENT

In line with the above-described framework, the relevance of the two topics selected to be covered by the event becomes clear. Civil protection refers to the system of protecting and safeguarding key values, lives, property and resources in times of crisis (regardless of the cause of disruption). Climate adaptation is a specific domain of actions designed to build resilience to and mitigate risks associated with climate change. The latter has a range of specific impacts in cities due to urban density and concentration.

Additionally there is significant overlap between the data used in civil protection risk assessments and climate change impact scenario planning. Additionally, urban planning plays a critical role in civil protection—particularly through dual-use infrastructure.

Put together, both civil protection and climate adaptation are also **closely linked to the priorities and principles of Sustainable Urban Development** (SUD) and EU Cohesion Policy. Specifically, climate adaptation is in line with Greener, low carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy, and both topics relate to bringing Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories (including cities and FUAs).

That said, Latvian municipalities have a **significant role in planning** and mobilizing the resources for crisis response, including volunteer firefighting and local dual infrastructure facilities. Requiring an integrated approach, municipalities must be aware of multiple risks across different domains and build their capacities accordingly.

2. INSIGHTS FROM CASE STUDIES

The cases presented and discussed at the event were selected based on the relevance of the principal topics (climate adaptation and civil protection) in their SUD strategies. After a brief overview presented by each one of the case representatives in Plenary, the respective breakout discussions started with a summary of the case, followed by a Q&A session. This format allowed specialists from participating Latvian municipalities and FUAs to engage more deeply with the content and ask questions. The most relevant insights from each of the presented cases and breakout discussions are the following:

2.1 CESIS

The Latvian city of Cesis (Cēsis) was represented by Ms Inta Ādamsons from the Municipality of Cēsis, with particular attention to **nature-based solutions** used for the purpose of climate adaptation. Three key ideas from Cēsis that resonated the most with the participants were the following:

- Creating a strategic plan on the municipal level to steer the existing resources to build resilience to climate change.
- Adopting nature-based solutions to improve rainwater management and mitigation of flash floods.
- Starting a “Public Space Activation Process” to create more walkable, safe and vibrant public spaces in downtown areas.

2.2 LUBLIN

The Polish Metropolitan Area Association of Lublin was represented by Mr Radostaw Guz, with the focus on managing a sudden refugee influx by **mobilizing local resources**, with particular attention to assisting vulnerable groups. Three key ideas from Lublin that resonated the most with the participants were the following:

- Identifying all key local stakeholders for the case of civil protection emergency.
- Establishing cooperation agreements between the Municipality, NGOs and private sector, to be mobilized in case of emergency.
- Developing multifunctional services and dual use infrastructure in the municipality.

2.3 ŁÓDŹ

The Polish city of Lodz (Łódź) was represented by Ms Aleksandra Trzcińska, with primary focus on **climate adaptation and local communities' engagement**. Three key ideas from Łódź that resonated the most with the participants were the following:

- Developing stormwater drainage solutions for the municipality.
- Creating “green islands” to curb the effects of Urban Heat Island (UHI).
- Enabling public participation to design community gardens.

2.4 REGION OF KVARKEN

The Region of Kvarken, jointly referring to the municipalities of Vaasa and Umeå, was represented by Mr Mathias Lindström. Three key ideas from Kvarken that resonated the most with the participants were the following:

- Strengthening cross-border and inter-municipal cooperation and identify common investment models.
- Developing a geographical proximity-based collaboration model (defying the administrative borders).
- Developing people-based and formalized cooperation platforms around long-term objectives.

2.5 TAMPERE

The Finish city of Tampere was represented by Ms Anniina Autero, Head of Development at the Municipality. Three key ideas from Tampere that resonated the most with the participants were the following:

- Applying a shared situation awareness tools such as SURE (Smart Urban Security and event REsilience).
- Applying the WeGenerate digital twin to create simulations and train for real-life crisis situations.
Broadening the use of smart technologies in general in the context of Latvian municipalities.

2.6 TRNAVA

The Slovak city of Trnava was represented by Ms Andrea Hagovská, showcasing the city's experience in the area of climate adaptation, mitigating heat stress and **community-based approaches**. Three key ideas from Trnava that resonated the most with the participants were the following:

- Improving the use of participatory planning tools in Latvian municipalities, taking into account the local conditions.
- Strengthening the political and public support of resilience in urban planning to foster the sense of ownership.
- Implementing data-driven and integrated approaches to urban decision-making and train municipal staff.

3. INSIGHTS FROM SIMULATION EXERCISE

Before the simulation on building preparedness and resilience, **preparation for mass evacuations in Finland** was presented. To ensure societal resilience and comprehensive security, vital functions of society must be maintained. These include public order and safety, rescue and maritime services, border security, emergency response centers, and the management of migration, including large-scale immigration. The safeguarding of these functions is a **shared responsibility** involving authorities, businesses, NGOs, communities, and individuals.

Regional risk assessments complement national assessments, providing detailed insights into local threats and preparedness needs. Coordinated by Regional State Administrative Agencies and rescue departments, these assessments foster a shared understanding of risks and enhance regional resilience through broad cooperation.

Evacuation planning emphasizes:

- Prioritizing support for vulnerable populations,
- Encouraging self-initiated movement,
- Coordinated, phased evacuations, and
- Clear communication strategies.

Evacuation involves **multi-agency cooperation** at all levels of governance. Rescue services coordinate planning, while municipalities play a supportive and enabling role, providing infrastructure, food, communication, and managing housing and resettlement. In wartime, municipalities also ensure continuity of critical services like daycare and education.

Overall, comprehensive security requires **strong collaboration** across sectors and levels, with individuals recognized as essential contributors to societal preparedness.

The simulation exercise brought together municipal professionals from across Latvia to collaboratively address a **complex crisis scenario** — a prolonged urban power outage escalating into wider public disruption and evacuation. The goal was to test local capacities for crisis response, coordination, and resilience planning in the face of compounded climate and civil protection challenges.

Participants were divided in different working groups and created different response plans to the crisis. Several commonalities were observed across working groups, highlighting shared areas that were mastered by the participants and areas where capacity building was still needed:

- Several groups struggled to **shift from abstract discussion to structured, actionable planning**. In many cases, decision-making was fragmented, with over-reliance on personal experience rather than systemic or evidence-based approaches.
- While most participants were familiar with their municipal civil protection plans, many defaulted to these documents rather than developing innovative solutions to

evolving crises. Creativity waned during more intense stages, suggesting the **need for better training in dynamic scenario adaptation.**

- Leadership often emerged late, and **roles within teams were not clearly defined** at the outset. When leadership was established, productivity and focus improved significantly.
- The inclusion of diverse roles (urban planners, civil protection officers, NGOs, media) provided a broad perspective, though **integration across these viewpoints was inconsistent.**

Despite challenges, **all groups proposed effective strategies**, such as repurposing municipal buildings as shelters, using drones for information distribution, and leveraging community assets like wells and churches for water and shelter. Emphasis was placed on protecting vulnerable populations (elderly, hospital patients), organizing evacuation routes, and developing clear, concise public communication.

To further improve the capacities of Latvian local authorities and functional urban areas, several recommendations should be integrated:

- Revisit and update local civil protection plans to reflect new risks and ensure practical applicability.
- Improve interdepartmental cooperation and create formal working groups to coordinate preparedness efforts.
- Enhance public engagement and trust, especially in crisis communication.
- Promote simulation-based learning ("resilience games") to train staff, raise awareness, and test existing procedures.
- Seek national and EU funding to support implementation of cross-sectoral, integrated preparedness strategies.

The simulation reinforced that cities are the frontline of crisis response, and resilience is only as strong as the collaboration between local authorities, communities, and systems. Future efforts should build on this exercise to foster a proactive, coordinated approach to urban crisis preparedness and climate adaptation.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND WAYS FORWARD

The event showcased the importance of resilience thinking in sustainable urban development strategies. The practices and tools presented brought inspirational insights, engaging the participants to discuss their applicability in the local context of the respective municipalities.

The aspects in which Latvian municipalities and Functional Urban Areas have a particularly strong footing are the specific local knowledge (topography of risk, local needs, priorities and capacities, institutional and decision-making structure, etc.). What is highly valued in this context are the locally-grown solutions based on this knowledge, and the resourcefulness demonstrated in facing the current challenges in civil protection and climate adaptation.

The aspects in which Latvian municipalities might seek improvements include personal capacity and training, using the information available, collaboration, integrated planning, co-creation at community level, employing innovative digital tools, developing dual use infrastructure, engaging in crisis simulations, ensuring access to funding.

In addition to the insights noted above, the overall message to take home was the **importance of adaptability in the context of uncertainty**. Resilience should be considered in its many dimensions - civil, digital, environmental, social. While the underlying causes of crises are global (i.e., climate change, geopolitical changes), the emergencies unfolding are essentially local in their impacts. Long-term pressures and stresses further undermine the capacities of municipalities to manage sudden contingencies. This is where the value of resilience becomes clear, as it requires building a more robust and adaptable system before a crisis or disaster unfolds (regardless of its kind or the underlying cause). A strong base of resources and connections built in times of normalcy can be mobilized in times of emergency. One of the most relevant examples here is dual use infrastructure.

As to the practical outcomes of the event, the participants worked on Roadmaps tailored to their municipality, identifying the steps to take to integrate resilience into their SUD strategies. Below is a selection of their ideas and commitments to go forward:

- A need for a greater clarity and commitment to cities and FUAs as the main interface for crisis response and planning;
- A commitment to assess the main challenges in Civil Protection plan and identify the relevant stakeholders on the FUA level;
- A desire to strengthen the work with local community stakeholders to support municipal efforts;
- A decision to seek out national, regional, and EU funding to support the planning and development process or relevant thematic and cross-sectoral plans;
- An interest to activate 'resilience simulation' games as a tool to raise awareness among other planners and relevant partners.

The key phrase uttered multiple times throughout the event was "building capacities", that is, on the level of FUAs, nationally, regionally (Baltics), and across Europe. On this note, capacity building events, [City to City Exchanges](#), [Peer Reviews](#) and other opportunities offered by European Urban Initiative provide relevant avenues for Latvian municipalities and Functional Urban Areas to take resilience thinking to the next level.



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