

Interview #2: former local government official (Brest oblast)

Q: How do you assess the impact of CBC programs on the development of your region?

A: The CBC programs really helped us tackle things that had been sitting on the back burner for years. Take the road from Brest to Domachevo. That stretch was in such bad shape that some people avoided using it altogether. With the program's funding, we finally got it repaired, added proper drainage, and even improved the signage. It wasn't flashy, but it made a real difference for people who relied on it every day, whether for work or visiting family across the border.

Another project I remember was in Malorita. The old community center there had been falling apart for ages – leaky roof, drafty windows, the works. With the funding, we fixed it up, installed some new equipment, and made it a proper space for gatherings and workshops. People started using it again for everything from local meetings to kids' dance classes.

Of course, it wasn't all smooth sailing. The central government was always wary about anything that looked like it might be promoting "european values." So we focused on practical stuff – roads, buildings, clinics – things that were hard to argue against. At the end of the day, these projects improved daily life for a lot of people, and that's what mattered.

Interview #9: former CBC project coordinator (Hrodna)

Q: What challenges did you encounter in implementing CBC programs?

A: The biggest challenge was keeping everyone on board. The European partners wanted to focus on transparency and reforms, but local officials were more interested in things like fixing roads or building new facilities. We had to find a middle ground.

For example, in Svisloch, we wanted to set up a system for tracking local government spending. The idea was to make it easier for residents to see where the money was going. The local officials weren't thrilled about it, so we reworked it into a project about teaching people how budgets work. It wasn't exactly what we'd planned, but it still gave people useful tools.

Another project that sticks out was in Voronovo, where we organized financial literacy workshops. The security services were pretty suspicious at first – they wanted a list of every participant and every topic we planned to cover. It was frustrating, but we managed to get it done by staying focused on practical skills.

Still, the most rewarding part was seeing the impact. In Oshmyany, we helped the local clinic get new diagnostic equipment. Before that, people had to go to Hrodna for simple tests, which was a hassle. Now, they can get those tests done locally, which saves them time and money. Projects like that made all the challenges feel worth it.

Interview #11: representative of environmental NGO (Vitebsk)

Q: How do you evaluate the EU's contribution to solving environmental issues through CBC programs?

A: It made a big difference, especially for projects that had been ignored for years. One example is the Dvina River near Polotsk. It was full of industrial runoff, and no one had the resources to do anything about it. With funding from Latvia - Lithuania – Belarus Programme, we installed filters at a couple of key factories and started monitoring the water quality regularly. It didn't fix everything, but it was a solid start.

In the village of Mezhrachye, we worked on replanting trees along the riverbanks. This helped stop soil erosion and gave the farmers some relief – their fields were being washed away every spring. The planting was simple, but it made a noticeable difference over time.

We also ran workshops for schoolkids in Gorodok. The idea was to teach them about protecting rivers and forests. The kids really got into it – some of them even organized a clean-up day for a local stream. It's small, but it shows how these programs didn't just fix immediate problems; they also got people thinking about the future.

Interview #12: NGO representative (Minsk)

Q: What strategic role did CBC programs play for Belarus?

A: The main thing was that they gave us resources we wouldn't have had otherwise. For example, in Pinsk, we worked on a project to boost tourism. One woman in Stolin used a microgrant to open a small guesthouse for birdwatchers. She turned her backyard into a proper business – put up cabins, made a website, and even started hosting small tours. Now, she gets visitors from the whole Belarus and Poland, before the war in Ukraine.

Another project I worked on was in Luninets, where we tried to improve waste management. The local landfill was filling up fast, so we introduced a sorting system to reduce the amount of waste going there. We also ran some workshops to teach people about recycling. It wasn't perfect – some people were skeptical at first – but it started changing how they thought about waste.

The tricky part was always balancing the politics. Anything that sounded like it might lead to political change got shut down pretty quickly. For instance, we once proposed a series of forums where residents could discuss local issues. That didn't fly, so we reframed it as "community workshops" on practical skills. You had to get creative, but it was worth it when you saw the results.
