



Deaconess
Foundation

Equal, Inclusive and Reconciled Societies

Development Cooperation Programme Results
Report 2022–2025

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Cover photo: Cristina Dugange, 21, was unable to continue her education after becoming a mother at the age of 17. In 2022, Cristina participated in a training programme organised by the Foxes Community and Wildlife Conservation Trust, which had a substantial impact on both her attitude and financial circumstances.

She completed her apprenticeship training in a stationery shop and managed to get capital to start her own small grocery store in Ikanga village by raising and selling piglets provided by the project.

Cristina's store sells charcoal, sugar cane, lemonades, spices, tomatoes, and eggs. Her business is thriving, and she has managed to triple her income. In the future, she hopes to expand her store and offer a wider variety of items.

Layout: Mia Kolari

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU	The European Union
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SPI	Students’ Peace Initiative
VoRAE	Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians

Executive summary

The Deaconess Foundation is a social foundation group that has worked directly with marginalised and stigmatised communities, providing impactful solutions to societal challenges since 1867. Between 2022 and 2025, the Foundation implemented a development cooperation programme comprising **15** projects in Ukraine, Moldova, Kosovo, Tanzania, Somalia/Somaliland, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Finland. Outside of Finland, the programme was implemented through **18** partner civil society organisations (CSOs). With a strong community presence, these CSO partners have led project delivery, working closely with rights-holders, authorities, businesses and **25** other CSOs. The programme supported young people in marginalised positions, minorities and persons affected by conflict, prioritising women, girls, and persons with disabilities.

This report shows the progress made towards achieving the desired impact: “Marginalised young people, minorities, and people affected by conflicts enjoy equal rights, opportunities and psychosocial wellbeing in communities and societies”. By the end of 2025, the programme reached over 87,280 direct rights-holders, including 53,780 women and girls as well as 2,570 persons with disabilities.

The programme combined direct support for rights-holders with strengthening duty-bearers, engaging the private sector, and influencing policy. This was grounded in a human rights-based approach and aligned with national and international frameworks, including Finland’s development policy and sustainable development goals. Ownership of the programme gradually shifted towards partner organisations, which increasingly contributed to project and programme design, while rights-holders progressively shaped activities through feedback and engagement mechanisms.

The programme successfully facilitated community engagement, educational opportunities, and business and employment prospects. These contributed to greater financial independence, improved wellbeing and participation, reduced poverty, a stronger belief in the future, and a greater realisation of rights for the programme’s participants. The policy and advocacy efforts of the CSO partners resulted in 30 national-level policy and other institutional documents that better support inclusion, contributing to the increased representation of groups in marginalised positions in these processes.

CSO partners improved their organisational capacities and grew in their capacity as policy actors, contributing to reforms in anti-discrimination, minority rights, employment, and mental health. Effective partnerships with businesses increased inclusive employment. Employment was also supported by successfully combining soft skills, leadership, entrepreneurship, and vocational skills training, with mentoring and the provision of start-up kits.

Employment, minority services, and non-discrimination mechanisms became more inclusive and responsive through capacity building of authorities, improved cooperation and dialogue, and policy development, benefiting groups in marginalised positions in Eastern Europe and in Tanzania. Insider reconcilers trained in peacebuilding, psychosocial

support and trauma healing facilitated conflict prevention in the Horn of Africa. Meanwhile, officials contributed to the sustainable reintegration of repatriated women and girls in Kosovo by applying their new skills in a trauma-informed approach.

The participation and agency of rights-holders increased significantly due to improved access to education, employment, and community engagement. Participants found the programme highly beneficial for building their confidence, gaining skills and motivating them to seek employment. Over 2,000 participants secured employment, self-employment, or livelihoods as a result of the programme. Awareness-raising efforts on civic participation increased engagement through campaigns, advocacy, and involvement in policy dialogues. Individuals and communities gained a stronger understanding of their rights and their ability to bring about change. Women and young people in marginalised positions increasingly assumed leadership roles, contributing to greater visibility and representation in communities and decision-making processes. Thanks to psychosocial support, educational assistance, and re-engagement programmes, participation in education increased.

The programme also achieved strong visibility and influence in Finland. Communication activities reached over 800,000 people and engaged new audiences, including diaspora communities and private sector actors. Advocacy efforts at national, European Union and international levels raised awareness of the situations of marginalised groups and strengthened recognition of rights issues, particularly concerning Roma communities.

The programme was implemented in a highly volatile environment marked by conflict, economic instability, and climate-related shocks. The war in Ukraine, inflation, drought, and political instability affected operations and participant engagement. However, partners adapted through flexible planning, relocating activities and strengthening coordination, thereby ensuring continuity despite the challenging conditions. Risk management systems were progressively strengthened and proved effective in anticipating and mitigating key risks.

The programme demonstrated strong sustainability overall, particularly in terms of strengthening civil society capacity, fostering inclusive employment practices, and enhancing the participation and agency of rights-holders. However, key sustainability challenges include limited resources, uneven institutional ownership, staff turnover, and persistent structural inequalities.

Learning, accountability, and transparency were central to the programme throughout. Evaluations and self-reviews informed programme development, highlighting the importance of continuous support, integrated approaches, and participatory methods. Programme implementation was supported by a dedicated team within the Deaconess Foundation. The total budget of about €8.1 million was used cost-effectively to maximise impact, sustainability, and collaboration. Around 65% of this budget was directed to partner countries.

1. Programme implementation and strategic alignment

1.1 Programme implementation 2022–2025

The Deaconess Foundation's development cooperation programme (2022–2025) was implemented through 15 projects in eight East African and Eastern European countries and Finland in partnership with 12 CSOs. These partnerships are based on shared expertise in working with groups facing multiple forms of discrimination and inequality, as well as common strategic goals and advocacy efforts. Our main partners include minority, youth and women's organisations, as well as organisations working at the intersection of mental health, psychosocial support and peacebuilding. All of these have direct connections to programme participants. A further 25 CSOs collaborated with the programme partners in project implementation.

The programme aimed to create sustainable solutions that would directly impact on the lives of individuals while fostering long-term structural change. This involved closely integrating our work with rights-holders and cooperation with duty-bearers. The programme addressed gaps in public services while strengthening the capacity and accountability of authorities. It also created connections and partnerships with businesses, including links between businesses and job-seeking participants. From 2022 to 2025, these efforts involved collaborating with around 170 public sector actors, such as ministries, national agencies, and municipal authorities, and 260 private sector actors.

Programme objectives

The programme aimed to promote equality, inclusion, and wellbeing among the most marginalised youth, minorities, and those affected by conflict in countries where it operated.

The programme has six key outcomes which together contribute to achieving the desired impact



Priority areas

The programme focused on three interconnected strategic areas to promote inclusive, equal, and reconciled societies:

Livelihood and skills development of the most marginalised: The programme provided training for young persons facing marginalisation, minorities, and displaced persons to support their employability and develop their personal life management skills. To promote sustainable change, the programme collaborated with the private and public sectors to support their capacity building.

Active and resilient civil society: The programme strengthened the advocacy, policy-influencing and networking skills of CSO representatives and groups in marginalised positions. We also created environments and spaces that enabled dialogue between civil society, governments and the private sector.

Peace and trust in communities: The programme focused on raising awareness and developing the skills of insider reconcilers and officials in trauma and psychosocial support. Moreover, it linked community-based reconciliation initiatives with national peace processes and reconciliation frameworks.

Geographical focus

The programme focused on two regions: **Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, and East Africa**. Some activities were also carried out in Finland, focusing on communication and business collaboration, as well as in the USA and Kenya, focusing on research, capacity support, and reconciliation-related events.

In Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, the programme covered Kosovo, Moldova, and Ukraine, and focused on strengthening the rights of Roma women and girls, Roma youth, repatriated and refugee women and girls, and displaced women and men. It also supported public institutions in providing inclusive, equal, and effective services and fostered a diverse, effective, and resilient civil society.

In East Africa, the programme covered Ethiopia, Somalia/Somaliland, South Sudan and Tanzania. The focus was on improving the employability, livelihoods and participation of young people facing marginalisation, as well as advancing trust and peace by supporting reconciliation practitioners in leadership roles and promoting healing.



1.2 Human Rights Based Approach and cross-cutting objectives

The programme achieved a progressive-to-transformative level of change, evolving from strong community-based work and improved rightsholder representation to greater recognition of partner CSOs as actors civil society, network and policy actors. It influenced policies and in-

stitutional practices throughout key programme areas, including anti-discrimination, employment, inclusive business recruitment, mental health, minority rights, and the rights of internally displaced persons, returnees, refugees, and women within these groups.

Human rights principle	Programme alignment
Universality, interrelatedness and indivisibility	The programme supported groups facing multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination, including Roma women and girls, young people facing marginalisation, persons with disabilities, returnees, refugees, undocumented persons and conflict-affected populations. Many partner CSOs are led by representatives of these groups. A holistic approach addressed civic, economic, social, equality, and mental health rights simultaneously at the individual, community, and institutional levels. For example, integrating MHPSS into peacebuilding connected health, protection, and participation with broader social cohesion and trust-building efforts. The programme also engaged with institutions as duty-bearers to strengthen their capacity to uphold these rights.
Equality and non-discrimination	The programme contributed to changes in law, policy, and practice to reduce discrimination, including the strengthening of anti-discrimination frameworks in Eastern Europe and Kosovo. It boosted the capacity of public officials and employers to deliver inclusive services and promoted cooperation between rights-holders and duty-bearers. Targeted measures supported the employment, entrepreneurship, and participation of groups facing marginalisation. CSOs strengthened their knowledge of international equality standards, and awareness of the inequalities faced by target groups was increased. Rights-holders became more confident and aware of existing services and of their rights. Project partners and targeted duty-bearers strengthened their capacity to collect and monitor interventions and services using disaggregated data (by sex, age, disability, and minority status), with this disaggregation applied at both project and programme levels.
Participation and inclusion	Inclusive approaches were used, including using local mediators, community-based work, outreach, and the engagement of experts by experience (people with lived experience). The programme actively involved rights-holders in needs assessments, consultations, co-creation, and feedback processes. Support for employment and entrepreneurship, improved access to services, and peer-to-peer networks enabled participation. Duty-bearers gained practical skills in consulting rights-holders, particularly in cooperation with CSOs. Partners received training on disability inclusion, gender equality, the human rights-based approach and safeguarding (Section 3.2). In some countries, new collaborations were established with disability organisations. When working with women and girls, activities engaged families and welcomed family members to build trust, support women's participation and identify and mitigate potential risks. Activities were adapted, relocated, or rescheduled as needed to ensure participant safety.
Accountability and transparency	Information was shared widely with rights-holders and the wider public through inclusive approaches, such as involving experts by experience, community workers, meetings, social media posts, and the media. Transparency was ensured through participatory planning, monitoring, strong MEAL systems, and regular reporting and learning. Partner CSOs strengthened their safeguarding capacity and improved their internal procedures. For example, most partners established safeguarding focal points (see sections 3.2 and 5.1). Rights-holders participating in the programme were informed about the programme-level complaint procedures in multiple accessible ways. At the same time, partners monitored national and local public policies and services, strengthened their expertise and gained new insights into how to enhance public accountability and influence policy processes.

The programme contributed to cross-cutting objectives as follows:

Gender equality	The programme made strong contributions to empowerment, psychosocial wellbeing, economic inclusion, and participation of women facing marginalisation, while also influencing policies and institutional practices.
Non-discrimination with an emphasis on disability inclusion	The programme partners increased their knowledge of the rights of persons with disabilities and how to mainstream disability inclusion in their work. In Ukraine and Moldova, they improved their understanding of the specific needs of Roma with disabilities. Returnee women with psychosocial disabilities received support, and both partners and duty-bearers enhanced their capacity and knowledge in responding to their needs. In Tanzania, non-discrimination was promoted by significantly increasing the participation of persons with disabilities in community life, improving access to inclusive services, and strengthening their representation through the formation of new associations of persons with disabilities. In Somaliland, the participation of deaf young people was particularly increased through collaboration with a deaf association, translation services and targeted life-skills coaching. The programme promoted direct affirmative action, as well as inclusive and tailored services for minorities, young people facing marginalisation, and conflict-affected populations. It strengthened the capacity of duty-bearers, both in the public sector and among businesses to promote inclusion, non-discrimination, and equal access to services and employment. It increased the participation and agency of rights-holders and engaged CSOs, enhancing their role in society and policy processes. The programme also contributed to anti-discrimination legislation, inclusion strategies, and peacebuilding frameworks.
Climate resilience	The programme strengthened climate resilience by helping people facing marginalisation adapt to climate change. It reduced participants' reliance on climate-sensitive livelihoods, such as rainfed agriculture, by providing support for employment and entrepreneurship, thereby lowering their vulnerability to climatic shocks. Some training activities incorporated climate-smart agricultural and business practices to build participants' adaptive capacities. In regions facing extreme climate stress, the programme's targeted support, such as vocational training for young people displaced by drought, helped communities cope with and recover from climate-related hardships, bolstering overall resilience. Training discussions acknowledged the impact of climate-related economic pressures on youth livelihoods, emphasising the importance of diversifying income sources and adopting resilience-oriented planning.
Low emission development	Given the programme's focus on social change, its activities have an inherently small carbon footprint. According to an external screening, most of the programme's greenhouse gas emissions originate from air and road transport, as well as electricity consumption. Travel-related emissions are reduced through careful, needs-based planning by combining essential field visits and using lower-emission transport where possible (e.g. motorcycles instead of cars in rural areas), while also prioritising virtual meetings and training sessions. Some partners already use renewable electricity, while others are transitioning to it.
Protection of the environment	Many programme interventions had an inherently low environmental impact (for example, counselling and skills training services), and partners took measures like reducing waste through paperless processes and conserving resources in daily operations. In addition, some programme activities directly supported environmental sustainability: for instance, raising public awareness about waste management and water conservation, and adopting cleaner technologies (such as solar lighting or biomass briquettes) to reduce deforestation and land degradation. Some of the programme activities promoted environmentally responsible practices among rights-holders and increased awareness of sustainability principles. In Ethiopia, for example, participants in sectors such as auto mechanics, industrial motor control systems, technical secretarial services, small-scale service businesses, and beauty and salon services were encouraged to consider environmental impact, waste reduction, and the sustainable use of local resources when developing business plans.

1.3 Relevance and alignment with international and national frameworks

The programme contributed to national policies and international frameworks by promoting gender equality, non-discrimination and the rule of law. It strengthened civil society and public institutions, supported inclusive policies and peacebuilding, and improved dialogue between communities and duty-bearers.

Aligned closely with **Finland's development policy objectives**, the programme promoted human rights, equality and non-discrimination, while strengthening inclusive participation and opportunities for those in the most vulnerable positions. Adopting a human rights-based approach, the programme contributed to reducing inequalities, strengthening civil society and duty-bearer capacities, and advancing sustainable livelihoods, education, and employment—particularly for women, young people, and persons with disabilities. The programme also supported stability, peace, social cohesion and democratic development in East Africa and Eastern Europe.

- **Finland:** The programme promoted and supported responsible private-sector engagement and encouraging partnerships with businesses in developing contexts, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.
- **Ethiopia:** The programme contributed to Finland's priorities on education, livelihoods, and resilience by supporting vocational skills, employment pathways and the inclusive participation of young people and women facing marginalisation.
- **Somalia/Somaliland:** Activities aligned with Finland's focus on peacebuilding, stability and youth employment by strengthening skills, entrepreneurship, and inclusive economic participation, while contributing to reconciliation processes.
- **Tanzania:** The programme supported Finland's priorities of gender equality, livelihoods and inclusive economic development by promoting employment and entrepreneurship among young people facing marginalisation and persons with disabilities, while strengthening inclusive service provision and local authorities' capacity.
- **Ukraine:** The programme supported Finland's objectives on good governance, the rule of law and resilience by improving access to services for vulnerable groups and strengthening inclusion. It also contributed to humanitarian priorities by supporting access to essential services and protection for affected populations.

The programme operated systematically within existing national policy and institutional frameworks. Activities supported national priorities on social inclusion, employment, gender equality, and minority rights, and contributed to translating these policy commitments into practice by collaborating with public institutions, participating in

policy processes and integrating into existing systems. For example, in Ukraine, this was evident in contributions to national policies such as the Roma National Strategy and Women and the Peace and Security National Action Plans, as well as broader EU accession-related reforms. This was particularly achieved by strengthening the participation of groups in marginalised positions in decision-making processes and structured engagement with authorities. In Ethiopia, projects were aligned with key national frameworks—including the National Employment Policy and Strategy, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Strategy, the National Social Protection Policy, and the Gender Equality Strategy—by operationalising them through vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and inclusive programming that facilitated young people's access to labour market opportunities and public services. Overall, integrating interventions within national frameworks strengthened both institutional ownership and ensured the sustainability of results beyond the project period.

1.4 Partnerships and increased local ownership

During the programme period, ownership has gradually shifted more towards partner organisations. While the Deaconess Foundation initially led the project planning, partners became increasingly involved in designing projects that started later in the programme period. Although the Deaconess Foundation retains overall project leadership, partners oversee the implementation of the projects.

Partners play a strong role in decision-making at the operational level, with considerable autonomy to adapt approaches and tailor interventions based on contexts and participants' needs. At the same time, certain elements—such as guidelines, reporting frameworks and some strategic and budgetary decisions—remain more centralised, indicating scope to further deepen power-sharing.

Partners have been involved in some programme-level processes, including the development of the theory of change and results framework for the new programme, and the programme evaluation. This reflects the gradual change that has taken place during the programme period and suggests further potential to strengthen shared ownership in strategic decision-making and programme design.

According to feedback, most of the programme partners view the Deaconess Foundation as a partner rather than a mere donor. They value the collaboration, mutual learning and the opportunities to develop their work that the partnership provides. A discussion was organised between the partners on localisation and shifting the power in 2025 to give them a further opportunity to voice their wishes and concerns following a questionnaire on the subject. The issues raised by the partners were addressed during the year.

As partners did not voice many issues regarding power balances during the discussion, the Deaconess Foundation suggested establishing a Partners' Forum. This would be a space where the partners could discuss any matters they wish without the involvement of the Deaconess Foundation. These issues could then be brought to a shared discussion. However, due to practical reasons relating to the partner that agreed to lead the Forum, the first meeting of the Forum did not take place before the end of the programme period.

Capacity sharing and strategic alignment strengthened results

The partners report that the programme **reflects their organisational priorities well and aligns closely with their strategies**, such as inclusive development, youth empowerment, peacebuilding, and supporting groups facing marginalisation. Capacity sharing efforts strengthened the partners' institutional development and their ability to deliver on their own goals. Overall, the strong alignment between the programme framework and partner strategies helped partners advance their own organisational objectives alongside programme results.

The partners link the Deaconess Foundation's support for strengthened management systems and higher quality of interventions through training and other capacity-sharing activities. The emphasis on safeguarding, disability inclusion, and rights-based approaches has reinforced partners' ethical and accountability standards in challenging environments. **Peer learning among partners** was highly appreciated as it enabled them to share locally grounded knowledge and innovations. This strengthened collaboration and regional impact.

The partners highlight the importance of trust-based and flexible collaboration. Regular communication, coordination meetings, and technical support were important for implementation, particularly in complex environments. The partners recommended improving collaboration with the Deaconess Foundation by enhancing joint planning, increasing shared reflection on results and lessons learned, and creating more structured opportunities for partner-to-partner learning and knowledge exchange. These suggestions will inform the next programme.

Rights-holders shaped activities through participation and feedback

The ownership of rights-holders was reinforced through their direct involvement in planning, organising, and implementing activities, as well as through continuous engagement mechanisms such as forums, consultations, and regular communication channels. In many cases, partner organisations represent the rights-holders themselves (e.g. young people, women, or minority groups), which strengthens the link between programme decisions and community priorities.

Rights-holders took part in project planning and implementation in varying degrees. In most projects, feedback on activities was collected through discussions, reflection sessions, questionnaires and/or self-assessment tools and was used for adaptive decision-making and to ensure that interventions remained relevant and responsive. Many projects had clearly designated safe spaces for dialogue, enabling rights-holders to express their views, concerns and recommendations, and resulting in them clearly shaping project content and determining priorities.

For example, reconcilers from Equatoria and Upper Nile Region in South Sudan requested structured psychosocial support for themselves, which led to the introduction of self-care rituals during training. Many of the reconcilers later credited these adaptations with sustaining their motivation and emotional resilience.

In Moldova, participants gradually took on more active roles in the activities, including the co-facilitation of discussions, peer support and engagement in consultations with local authorities. This approach strengthened ownership of the process and increased the confidence of Roma women and young people to participate in community-level dialogue beyond project activities.

Some projects actively involved organisations representing persons with disabilities or other CSOs in project implementation to strengthen inclusive outreach and representation. All projects worked in close cooperation with local, regional and/or national duty-bearers. Stakeholders participated in shaping interventions by taking part in participatory planning, steering committees, and other context-specific forums or events.

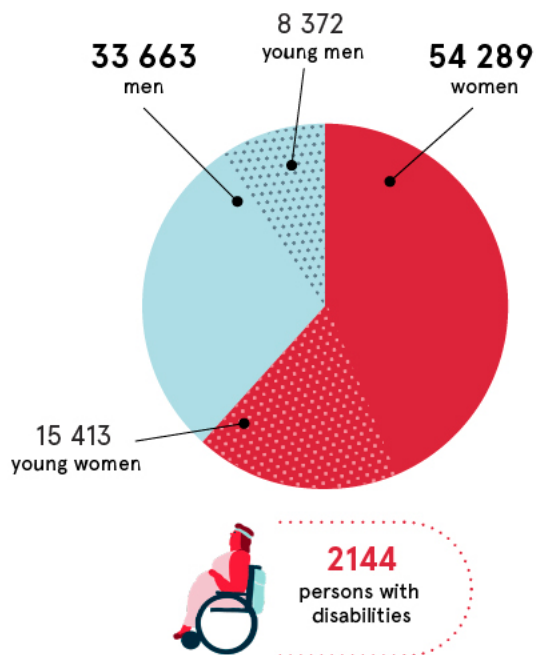
“This job gave me not only income, but also dignity, strength and the opportunity to be included and treated equally in the workplace.”

- VENERA KOPILI, FERIZAJ, KOSOVO

2. Programme results 2022–2025

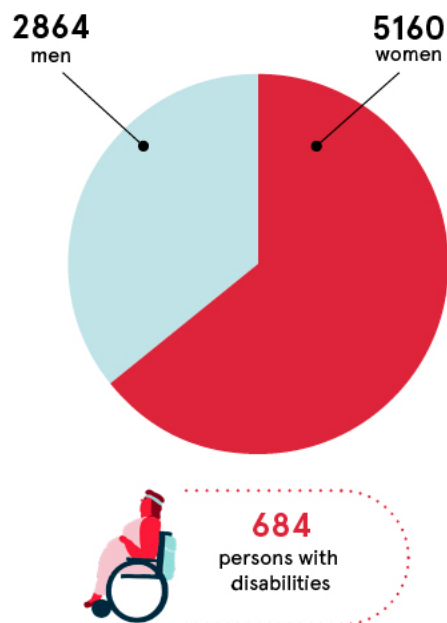
Direct rights-holders reached:

87 952



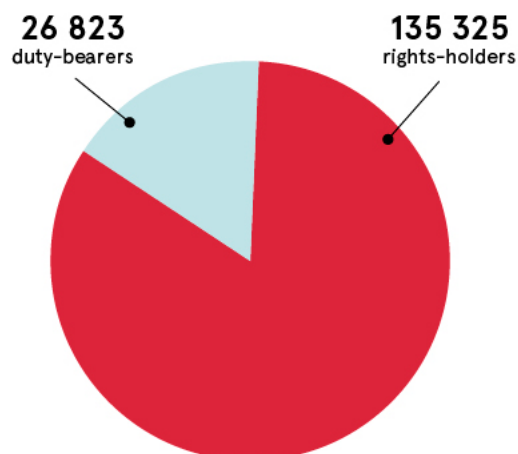
Representatives of duty bearers reached:

8 024



Indirect beneficiaries of the programme:

162 148



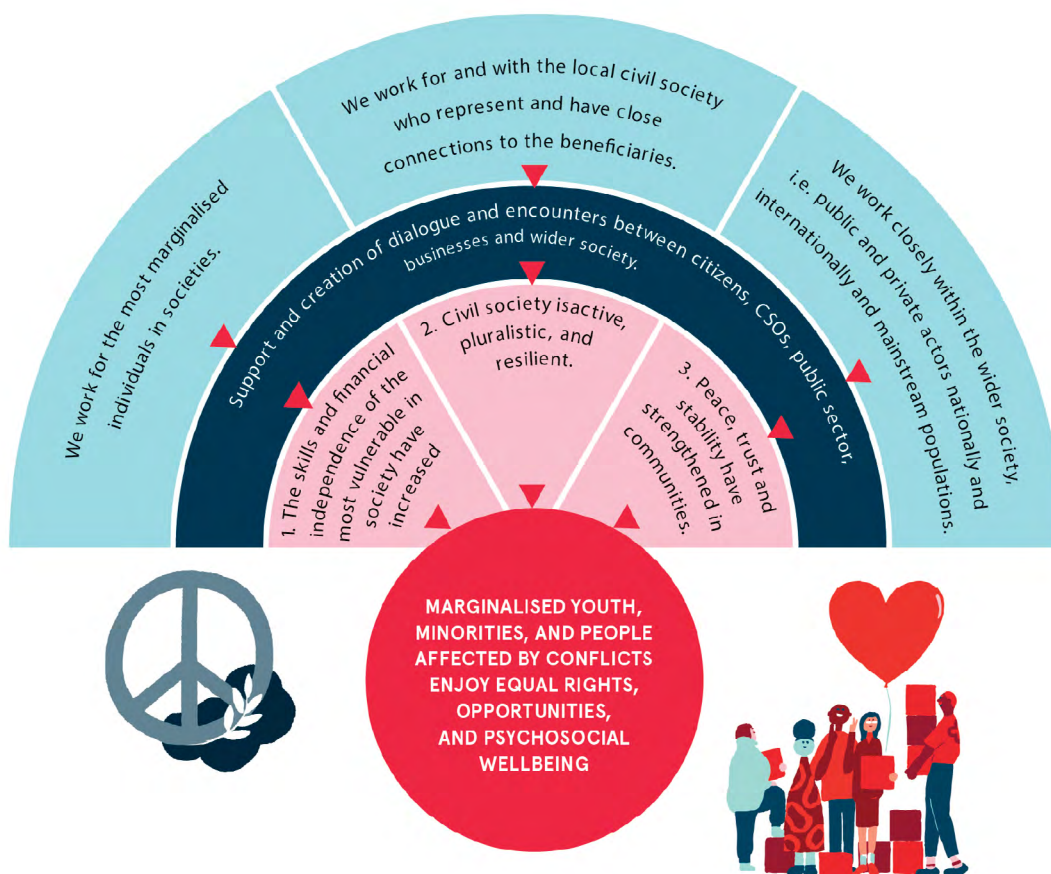
2.1 Achievements against the programme's theory of change

The programme's theory of change was based on the idea that an equal, inclusive, and reconciled society is possible when 1) even the most marginalised members of the society have equal access to, and opportunities for, a decent livelihood, 2) civil society is active, pluralistic, and resilient, and 3) there is peace and trust within communities.

The Deaconess Foundation's programme work, partly leaning on results achieved by projects that started before the programme period, achieved the following:

1. The programme has contributed to improving the livelihoods of young people in marginalised positions, minorities, and those affected by conflict. This was achieved by equipping them with the relevant skills and qualifications for future employment, through life skills training, psychosocial support, entrepreneurship training, and labour market-aligned skills training, and by successfully facilitating business creation and job opportunities (**outcome 5**). The programme also promoted a more inclusive and sustainable labour market by actively engaging with the private sector to raise awareness, strengthen partnerships, and influence employer attitudes and commitments, particularly in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Kosovo. As a result, business-
2. The participation of rights-holders in communities and societies was strengthened, particularly through community engagement, and improving access to services and employment. Efforts to raise awareness of civic participation helped increase engagement, giving individuals and communities a stronger understanding of their rights, potential and ability to create change (**outcome 5**). Dialogue between rights-holders and officials raised awareness among duty-bearers of participants' needs, including those of persons with disabilities, contributing to engagement in hundreds of policy processes and concrete changes in laws, strategies, and policy documents (**outcomes 1, 3, and 5**). Public services became more responsive to rights-holders, particularly in Ukraine and Kosovo (**outcomes 1 and 3**). The impact

Simplified theory of change of the programme



of the work of partner CSOs was amplified through expanded networks and partnerships, increased knowledge, and strengthened organisational capacity and policy influence. This positioned them increasingly as recognised policy actors in areas such as anti-discrimination, Roma inclusion, youth policy, and mental health. Over the programme period, half of them joined global and European networks, gaining access to new working groups and funding opportunities. Their support to 40 smaller CSOs and to activists helped build skills and awareness around policy work, which further strengthened civil society (**outcome 1**).

3. The Deaconess Foundation's programme contributed to the sustainable re/integration of repatriated and refugee women and girls in Kosovo. This was achieved by equipping municipal officers with the skills to adopt a trauma-informed approach, thereby strengthening both their professional capacity and resilience. The quality and responsiveness of services for the target groups improved as a result (**outcomes 4 and 5**). The programme promoted peace and reconciliation in the Horn of Africa by strengthening the leadership, skills and wellbeing of insider reconcilers, who play a pivotal role in resolving conflicts, while ensuring the inclusion of women and young people in reconciliation processes. These insider reconcilers provided support to internally displaced people, returnees and refugees, and facilitated community-level reconciliation efforts that helped to prevent retaliatory violence, address tensions, and rebuild trust among conflicting groups. The programme also supported the development of regional mechanisms and networks that link local peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives with broader peace processes. Together with our partners, insider reconcilers promoted the integration of mental health and psychosocial support into peacebuilding and national frameworks in Kenya and Somalia (**outcome 4**).

2.2 Impact

The programme aims to ensure that young people facing marginalisation, minorities and those affected by conflicts enjoy equal rights, opportunities and psychosocial wellbeing within their communities and societies.

At the end of the programme period, data for the two impact-level indicators were collected to review the long-term results. These indicators measured improvements in the wellbeing of programme participants and more inclusive national policies and institutional documents.

Indicator: *Percentage of targeted youth, minorities and persons affected by conflicts whose wellbeing improved. Types of changes in wellbeing*

Stable livelihoods and strengthened psychosocial wellbeing

The programme achieved its impact target of improving participants' equal rights by creating more life opportunities and strengthening their psychosocial wellbeing. Results were collected through an online questionnaire in which programme participants assessed the long-term impact themselves. The sample included respondents from nine countries, of whom 63% were women and 37% men.

The key improvements in rights-holders wellbeing were:

- 94%** of respondents reported an improvement in their self-esteem (a lot or to some extent);
- 91%** of respondents reported an improvement in their belief in the future;
- 77%** of respondents reported an improvement in their livelihood;
- 73%** of respondents reported participating more in their communities.

The indicator results showed clear improvements in psychosocial wellbeing, highlighting its central role in enabling individuals to engage in employment and participate in society. Improved self-esteem and belief in the future were the most commonly reported changes in 2024 as well.

Furthermore, 73% reported increased participation in their communities.

This suggests improvements in economic and psychosocial wellbeing, as participation often requires both material and non-material resources.

Improvements in rights

Programme participants reported significant improvements in relation to the following rights:

- 87%** reported improvement to right to equal treatment
- 86%** reported improvement to right to gender equality
- 84%** reported improvement to right to health
- 55%** reported improvement to right to disability equality

*improvement refers to "a lot" or "to some extent"

The collected data showed very good results in terms of programme participants' experiences of improved rights. In addition, participants improved their knowledge of their rights, with 74% saying they feel confident claiming them from the authorities.

Indicator: The number and names of national policies and other types of institutional documents and actions that support the inclusion of minorities and youth

National-level policy change supporting the inclusion of minorities

During the programme period, the successful efforts of the programme partners to influence institutional reforms, such as anti-discrimination policies, employment quotas, and national strategies for promoting the rights of Roma, enabled minorities and internally displaced people to access services and employment more equitably. This strong and continuous policy work has contributed to consolidating the rule of law by promoting anti-discrimination and equality in legislation, and has strengthened the dialogues between policy makers, civil society organisations and citizens facing marginalisation.

Data for this indicator was specifically collected from three different projects in Kosovo, Moldova and Ukraine, due to the planned high-level policy work during the programme period. However, almost all projects under the programme included actions aimed at influencing policy and institutional change regarding minorities, persons with disabilities, internally displaced people, people affected by conflicts, and returnees.

Through these projects, 30 national policies or other institutional documents were developed, changed, or revised. The results demonstrated the strength of policy and advocacy efforts made by partners in Eastern Europe, and highlighted the necessity of revising policies related to equality and anti-discrimination.

In Kosovo, one of the major successes was the amendment process of the Law on Protection from Discrimination, which resulted in significant improvements in the draft legislation. The partner organisation Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (VoRAE) contributed to the process by providing recommendations, and over 80% were adopted in the revision. The revised draft explicitly recognised antigypsyism as a specific form of discrimination and included stronger provisions to address hate speech and hate crime, which were not present in earlier drafts. These additions represented a significant step towards ensuring more comprehensive legal protection for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities.

Progress was also achieved in developing a comprehensive database on cases of discrimination, managed by the Office for Good Governance of Kosovo. VoRAE supported the development by providing expertise on the situation of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians in Kosovo. The technical development of the database was completed during the programme period, and once operational, it is expected to contribute to improved monitoring, reporting, and institutional response to discrimination cases.

During 2022–2025, our partner organisation the International Charitable Organisation Roma Women's Fund Chiricli in Ukraine contributed to 15 national policies, institutional documents and actions. Some of the key policies were:

- State Strategy for promoting the realisation of the rights and opportunities of persons belonging to the Roma national minority in Ukrainian society until 2030 (implementation support, monitoring, advocacy inputs);
- Development and consultation of the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Roma Strategy;
- Interagency working group on implementation of the Roma Strategy under the Government of Ukraine (strengthening Roma participation and consultative mechanisms);
- Institutional cooperation framework with the Office of the Ukrainian parliament commissioner for human rights on Roma rights monitoring and protection;
- Inclusion of Roma perspectives within Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction policy discussions.

In Moldova, during 2022–2025, the project contributed to six national policies relevant to the Roma community's inclusion through consultations, advocacy, and policy work. One of the biggest successes was the Government Programme for supporting the Roma population in the Republic of Moldova 2022–2025. The project contributed to its implementation through community-level work with Roma women and young people, dialogue with authorities and improved access to services. In addition to the Government Programme, the project contributed to the following national policies:

- The Development programme for inclusive education 2024–2027
- The National Development Plan 2025–2027
- The National Strategy on Gender Equality 2022–2025
- National processes related to the implementation of international minority rights and anti-discrimination commitments
- The Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2025–2028.

The documents did not focus on the Roma community specifically, however they contained measures relevant to the inclusion of Roma communities and other vulnerable groups, and Roma civil society organisations had the opportunity to participate through consultations and advocacy processes.

For the programme's third impact level indicator *Number and percentage of targeted youth, minorities and persons affected by conflicts having increased equal access to employment services* no comparable data were available, and therefore no results are reported.

2.3 Outcomes

OUTCOME I

The capacity of the project partners and other targeted civil society actors has been strengthened

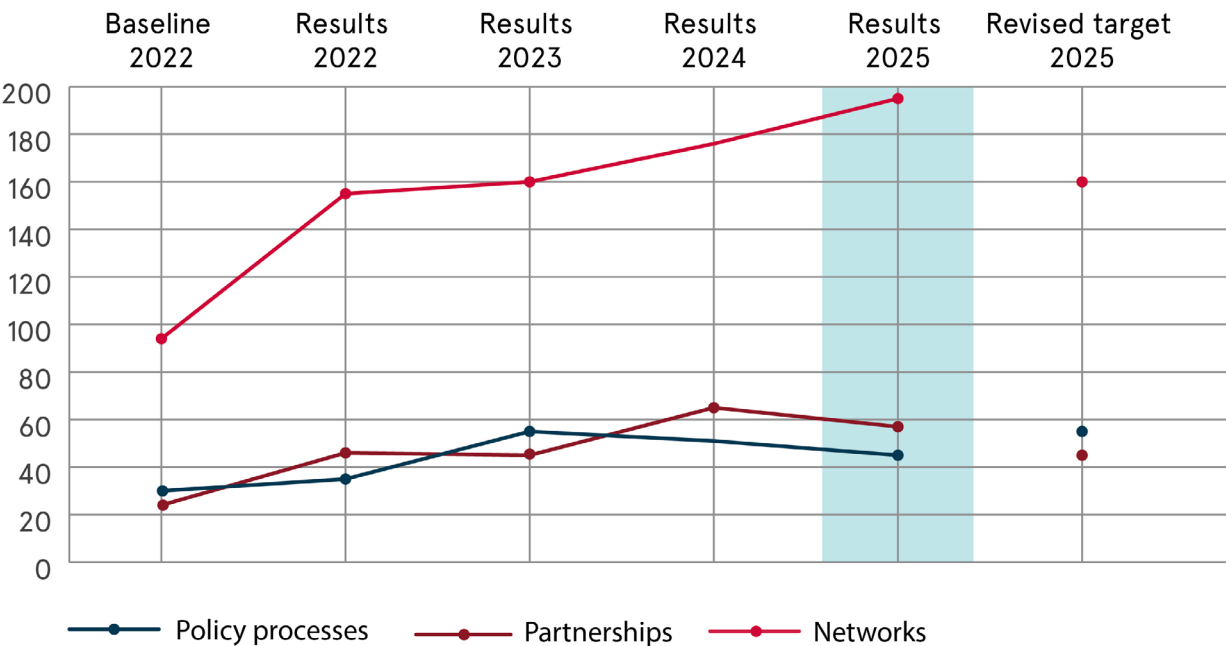
From 2022–2025, the programme achieved significant progress in both partners’ policy influence and organisational capacity. Partners contributed to concrete changes in laws, national strategies, and institutional practices, particularly in the areas of anti-discrimination, Roma inclusion, youth policy, mental health, and survivor protection. At the same time, partners’ organisational capacity strengthened measurably and sustainably across governance, safeguarding, inclusion, and project management systems. All in all, during the programme period, several partners transitioned from project implementers to recognised policy actors, contributing to more inclusive, rights-based governance and long-term civic sector resilience across Eastern Europe and East Africa.

Significant policy influence

Between 2022 and 2025, the programme achieved a growing policy impact, with partners contributing to hundreds of national, regional, and international policy processes. Their advocacy work supported concrete legislative reforms, national strategies, and institutional mechanisms, exceeding programme targets ahead of schedule. The results strengthened the representation of groups facing marginalisation – including Roma communities, women, young people, persons with disabilities, and survivors of violence – in formal policymaking and public institutions.

Beyond individual policy changes, the programme helped position partner organisations as trusted experts and long-term institutional actors. In several countries, policy commitments related to inclusion, anti-discrimination, employment, mental health, and safeguarding were translated into practical implementation mechanisms. In conflict-affected contexts such as Ukraine and South Sudan, sustained civil society engagement also helped to preserve civic space, protect minority rights, and maintain dialogue during periods of instability and crisis.

Indicator 1. Number of the policy processes, partnerships and networks in which project partners and other targeted civil society actors are involved.



Main achievements in policy and legislative frameworks between 2022 and 2025

2022

- National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian Communities (2022–2026): VoRAE participated in the working group that developed the strategy, which was approved by the Prime Minister's Office at the end of the year (Kosovo).
- Establishment of an Anti-Gypsyism Commissioner: VoRAE provided expert input and European good practices to the national human rights committee in the process of establishing an official commissioner to address discrimination against Roma communities (Kosovo).
- National Action Plan for the Roma Strategy: the Roma Women Fund Chiricli provided expertise to lawmakers in developing the implementation plan for the National Roma Strategy (Ukraine).
- Recommendations on the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons: A set of recommendations was submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers to safeguard the rights of displaced Roma people, particularly those lacking identity documents (Ukraine).
- Youth Employment Promotion: The Somaliland Youth Peer Education Network Y-PEER participated in a national employment forum focused on improving youth employment opportunities (Somaliland).

2023

- Anti-discrimination Legislation and Foreigners' Policy: Partners contributed significantly to the development of anti-discrimination and migration-related policies (Kosovo).
- Facilitating Birth Registration: Progress was achieved in legislative procedures to improve birth registration for undocumented persons (Ukraine).
- National Roma Strategy and Budget Allocation: For the first time in its history, Ukraine allocated a state budget for implementing the National Roma Strategy and established regional action plans as a result of partners' advocacy efforts (Ukraine).
- National Youth Policy: Partners contributed to the development of Somaliland's national youth policy (Somaliland).
- Youth Development Policies: Partners influenced regional youth policies in the Somali Region of Ethiopia.

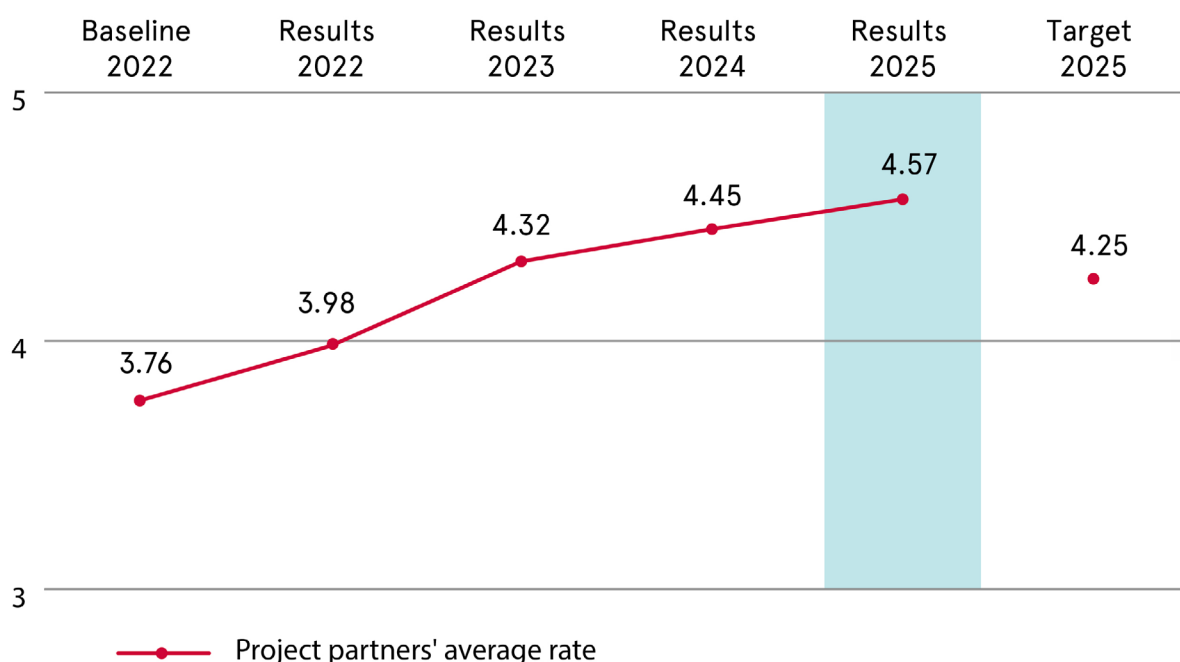
2024

- Amendment of the Law on Protection from Discrimination: The revised law now provides stronger protection for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities (Kosovo).
- Approval of the National Roma Action Plan: The government adopted the action plan following long-term expert support provided by partner organisations (Ukraine).
- Inclusion of Religious Leaders in Policy Processes: Partners promoted the participation of religious leaders in formal policy processes at both national and regional levels (South Sudan and Ethiopia).
- National Framework for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support: Partners supported the development of a framework linking mental health and peacebuilding approaches (Kenya).

2025

- Inclusion of the Concept of Anti-Gypsyism in Legislation: The internationally recognised concept of anti-gypsyism was incorporated into the draft anti-discrimination law, marking a major milestone in the protection of Roma communities (Kosovo).
- Employment Promotion Mechanism: A permanent institutional mechanism was established to promote minority employment in the public sector, including regulatory changes allowing more flexible recruitment criteria for underrepresented groups (Kosovo).
- Minority History in School Curricula: An agreement was signed with the Ministry of Education to integrate Roma culture and history into the national curriculum (Kosovo).
- National Equality and Employment Policies: The Organization for Welfare and Development in Action participated in 18 national policy processes, including the development of gender equality and employment policies in Ethiopia (Ethiopia).
- Peace Negotiations and National Cohesion: The Inter-Religious Council of South Sudan participated in national peace consultations and dialogue related to the political transition process (South Sudan)

Indicator 2. Project partners' and other targeted civil society actors' organisational and project management performance have improved on a scale from 1 to 5.



Stronger partner organisations

The programme achieved significant progress in strengthening the organisational and project management capacity of partners, exceeding the 2025 targets. Capacity development improved internal systems and compliance, as well as the quality, credibility, and societal impact of partners' work.

Particular progress was made in safeguarding and protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, with all partners completing safeguarding training and adopting or updating internal safeguarding policies during 2023–2025. In Tanzania and South Sudan, safeguarding practices were also embedded at community level through village protection committees and engagement with religious leaders.

Partners strengthened their disability inclusion capacity through targeted training, practical tools such as disability checklists, collaboration and peer learning. Key actions included training on disability rights, accessibility, reasonable accommodation, intersectionality, psychosocial disabilities, and disability-sensitive data collection. Collaboration with organisations of persons with disabilities was carried out, among others, in Ethiopia, Somaliland, South Sudan, and Tanzania.

Monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning systems improved considerably through tailored support, including practical "reporting clinics" that strengthened partners' confidence in data collection, analysis, and results-based management. Improvements were reflected in stronger planning, reporting quality, and endline self-assessments.

Financial and administrative systems also became more robust, as more partners recruited qualified financial staff, improved compliance, and strengthened internal coordination. In Tanzania, the Foxes Community and Wildlife Conservation Trust achieved charitable organisation status, marking a major milestone in governance and legal recognition.

In addition, partners — particularly in East Africa — expanded their expertise in youth work, entrepreneurship training, and life-skills education. Across all regions, organisations also strengthened their capacity to engage in advocacy and participate in local, national, and international policy processes.

Key success factors behind the results

Credibility, expertise, and inclusive approaches

- A major success factor was the strong reputation and trusted expert role that partner organisations had established prior to the programme. Authorities and communities recognised them as reliable actors with proven methods and long-standing experience in advocacy and service development. Their work was further strengthened by inclusive approaches that actively engaged young people, women, persons with disabilities, and minority groups, such as Roma communities. This ensured that activities responded to the needs of marginalised populations.

Supportive political context and policy alignment

- In Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans – particularly in Kosovo, Ukraine, and Moldova – EU integration processes created favourable opportunities for policy influence. Partners used EU and Council of Europe standards to advocate for reforms aligned with international best practices, while decision-makers were generally open to external expertise. Results were made more sustainable by aligning interventions with national employment, education, and social protection strategies, which helped translate policy commitments into concrete action.

Partnerships, networking, and capacity strengthening

- Another important driver of success was extensive participation in national and international policy processes, partnerships and networks. Partners engaged in various policy and coordination processes, strengthening both civil society capacity and multi-stakeholder cooperation. Continuous investment in organisational capacity – including financial management, project administration, safeguarding, and MEAL systems – also significantly improved partners' effectiveness and operational resilience.

Flexible and tailored support

- Strong trust between the Deaconess Foundation and its partners was essential for effective implementation. Flexible collaboration models and the ability to adapt activities to changing contexts supported long-term cooperation. The Deaconess Foundation's approach of providing tailored support, combining joint training with organisation-specific assistance, proved particularly valuable.

Key challenges hindering the success

Crisis-affected operating environment

- The war in Ukraine and other regional crises shifted political attention away from certain policy priorities and disrupted partners' work. In several contexts, organisations had to redirect resources toward urgent humanitarian responses, often outside their core expertise. At the same time, disinformation, hate speech, polarisation and insecurity created additional barriers to advocacy and civic participation.

Resource constraints and high workloads

- Advocacy work became increasingly resource-intensive in a context of overlapping crises and competing priorities. Many partner organisations lacked sufficient staff and funding to consistently engage in all relevant processes, forcing them to carefully prioritise. Heavy workloads also reduced the time available for internal learning and organisational development.

Institutional instability and weak governance structures

- Frequent staff turnover in ministries and public administrations required continuous re-engagement and relationship-building. Elections, government changes and broader political instability also caused delays to legislation and policy implementation. Opportunities for civil society participation remained inconsistent and often informal.

Administrative and coordination challenges

- Working with multiple donors meant that partners had to navigate different reporting requirements and results frameworks simultaneously. Challenges in data collection, monitoring, and analysis persisted throughout the programme, highlighting the need for ongoing technical support and shared learning.

OUTCOME 2

Businesses operate more sustainably and businesses and other employers employ more inclusively

During 2022–2025, the programme advanced sustainable business practices and inclusive employment. Initial efforts focused on awareness raising and employer engagement, later evolving into more structured cooperation and tangible job outcomes. Results grew steadily, with nearly 150 businesses hiring young people and women in marginalised positions, thereby demonstrating the impact of advocacy and partnerships. While progress varied across contexts, positive momentum was observed in all settings despite differing labour market conditions.

Strengthening inclusive employment through employer engagement

Across the programme period, the number and diversity of employers engaging in inclusive hiring increased significantly, although results varied by country context. The strongest results were achieved in East Africa, where employer engagement expanded rapidly, and targets were exceeded. In Tanzania, nearly 100 employers recruited young people in marginalised positions by 2025, supported by apprenticeship models and strong private sector partnerships. In Somaliland, over 100 job placements were created in multiple sectors, including tailoring, ICT, beauty services, and public institutions. In Ethiopia, strong market linkage creation enabled the engagement of 15 employers, resulting in over 100 young people accessing stable, long-term employment. In Kosovo, 13 employers provided employment opportunities for repatriated women, reflecting a gradual shift from awareness-raising to more structured cooperation.

In East Africa in particular, the number of employers did not increase exponentially over time, as a core group of employers who were engaged in the early years remained actively involved and continued to recruit programme participants. This highlights the importance of sustained engagement and trust-building rather than short-term expansion. At the same time, livelihood pathways diversified, especially in Tanzania, where many participants transitioned to entrepreneurship in order to increase and stabilise their income, reinforcing the importance of linking skills development to both employment and self-employment opportunities.

Improved business awareness in sustainability, human rights and inclusive employment

During the first years of the programme, activities focused on awareness-raising through events, dialogue, and partnerships between civil society organisations and businesses. These efforts increased understanding of cor-

porate responsibility, human rights risks, and inclusive employment practices, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises and stakeholders in Finland.

In Kosovo and East Africa, there was an increase in employer interest in inclusive hiring, supported by stronger market linkages and targeted advocacy. By 2025, the results showed that employment outcomes were strongest where awareness-raising was combined with practical interventions such as vocational training, mentoring, and direct employer engagement. In Ethiopia, annual workshops for employers have played a key role in encouraging them to recruit young people in marginalised positions.

Main achievements between 2022 and 2025

- The programme strengthened links between young people in vulnerable positions and employers, particularly through apprenticeship models in Tanzania, and targeted employer engagement in Ethiopia and Kosovo.
- Skills development became increasingly aligned with labour market needs, supported by feasibility studies and labour market assessments, leading to improved employment outcomes.
- Employer engagement expanded significantly over time: in Tanzania, demand exceeded targets and included the hiring of young people with disabilities. In Kosovo, formal partnerships in the form of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) and later direct hiring signalled a shift toward more structured cooperation.
- Nearly 150 businesses across contexts provided employment opportunities for hundreds of young people, reflecting the combined impact of training, market linkages, and employer collaboration.
- Awareness-raising and networking activities, including events in Finland, contributed to stronger partnerships, dialogue, and more positive attitudes toward inclusive employment and responsible business practices.

Key success factors behind the results

- The strong reputation and long-term presence of partner organisations enabled trust-building with employers and communities, gradually shifting attitudes and supporting the transition from awareness-raising to recruitment and sustained employment.
- Structured approaches such as apprenticeships, employer outreach, and MoUs effectively linked participants to employment, reinforced by skills training aligned with labour market demand.

Key challenges hindering the success

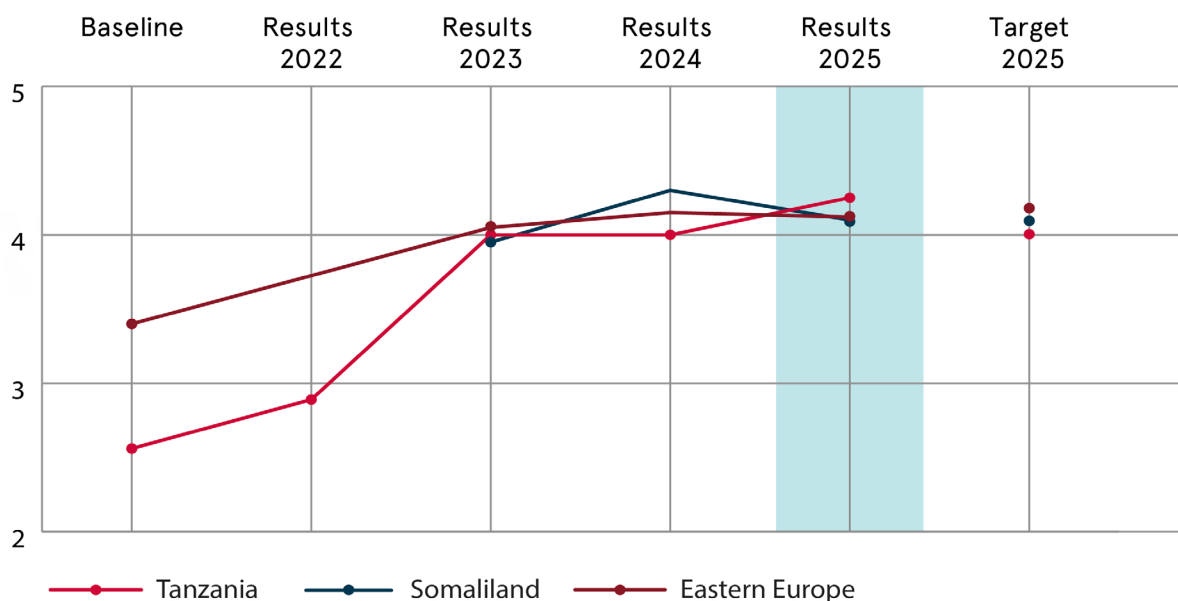
- Limited formal employment opportunities and widespread informality, particularly in Ethiopia and Somaliland, restricted the scale of results. Even with improved skills, participants often faced strong competition and limited access to stable jobs.
- Persistent stigma toward groups facing marginalisation required continuous awareness-raising and trust-building. At the same time, differences between participant readiness and employer expectations—such as working hours or skill levels—affected employment outcomes, especially in Kosovo.
- Employment outcomes depended heavily on real-time labour demand, making results less predictable. In addition, limited resources constrained broader employer outreach, particularly in engaging larger private sector actors and scaling inclusive hiring practices.

OUTCOME 3

Services provided by local authorities and other service providers to marginalised youth and minorities are more inclusive, functional and of good quality

Between 2022 and 2025, outcome 3 results showed clear improvements in the quality and inclusiveness of services in Eastern Europe and East Africa. High service ratings reflect strengthened capacities of authorities and service providers, supported by programme interventions. Advocacy efforts by programme partners in Eastern Europe contributed to 24 policy documents highlighting the specific needs of marginalised youth and minorities.

Indicator 1. Improved quality, inclusiveness and functionality of services provided by local authorities and other service providers to marginalised young people and minorities



Between 2022 and 2025, the programme achieved its desired results by improving the inclusiveness and accessibility of services. This was done through capacity building for officials, improving and strengthening cooperation with the service providers, and contributing to and advocating for policy changes. The groups facing marginalisation, such as Roma communities, persons with disabilities and young people in vulnerable positions, received better and more tailored services enabling them to participate more fully in their communities and societies.

Throughout the programme period, data was collected in six countries – Kosovo, Moldova, Ukraine, Somaliland and Tanzania.

Main achievements:

- Strengthened skills and understanding of inclusion among officials and service providers through trainings and roundtables
- Strengthened cooperation between CSO's, authorities and communities to provide targeted services based on the needs of people in vulnerable situations
- New regulations and policies which supported positive institutional change and long-term inclusion of people facing marginalisation in public services

The partners collaborated with the relevant authorities and communities and organised training for various service providers on the themes of disability, minority rights and inclusion. This resulted in more coordinated and responsive services. These approaches were tailored and targeted to the specific context and country. For example, in Kosovo, the trainings and roundtable meetings improved the accessibility of employment services for Roma. In Tanzania, the Village Child Protection Committees and district authorities improved their skills and knowledge in safeguarding, inclusion, and the needs of vulnerable youth and children with disabilities.

Learning and best practice sharing between CSOs and local authorities, as well as with service providers, improved understanding of the different needs and situations of minorities and young people. For example, it demonstrated how discrimination directly affects marginalised communities in employment markets, social services, and

healthcare. In Tanzania, CSOs provided district and other officials with important data on persons with disabilities, who had previously not had even accurate numbers of persons with disabilities living in the area. This information will enable local authorities to make more informed decisions regarding service provision.

Joint planning processes involving authorities, civil society organisations and, in some countries, service users contributed to the development of more inclusive and accessible services that better respond to the needs and circumstances of groups facing marginalisation. Designing services together made it easier to engage authorities and also build trust among end-users, which improved public services.

Training and support offered by programme partners have also raised the awareness of end-users of the reporting channels to report unequal treatment and how to use them.

The number of documents that include specific needs of young people in marginalised position and minorities are developed or revised by local authorities and other service providers

INDICATOR	RESULTS 2022–2025	TARGET 2025
The number of documents that include specific needs of young people in marginalised position and minorities are developed or revised by local authorities and other service providers	24	17

Through its policy work, the programme achieved institutional change in service delivery. Between 2022 and 2025, local authorities and other service providers developed or revised 24 documents that incorporated the specific needs of people facing marginalisation. In Kosovo, policy initiatives such as employment quotas and new recruitment mechanisms (e.g., “Professional 3”) supported better access to public sector jobs for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities.

The programme partners have effectively used their expertise to revise and develop policy documents. The partner in Moldova took part in studies on the intersectional discrimination of Roma women with disabilities. These studies revealed the significant barriers to receiving basic services, such as social benefits, healthcare or employment services. The partner in Ukraine provided recommendations for the new Roma Action Plan based on their mapping and monitoring of Roma communities through the Social Atlas report.

During 2022–2025 the programme:

- offered training on the needs of people facing marginalisation to 1,546 representatives of local authorities and service providers
- reached 711 authorities, such as National Police of Ukraine, to promote the human rights of the Roma
- supported partners to map the needs of minorities and young people in vulnerable positions with 6 studies

Challenges

Although public institutions generally have inclusion policies and legal frameworks in place, implementation remains uneven. How inclusive services are in practice depends largely on available resources, staff capacity and cooperation with civil society. While there are examples of good-quality services, they are not yet consistent across sectors or regions.

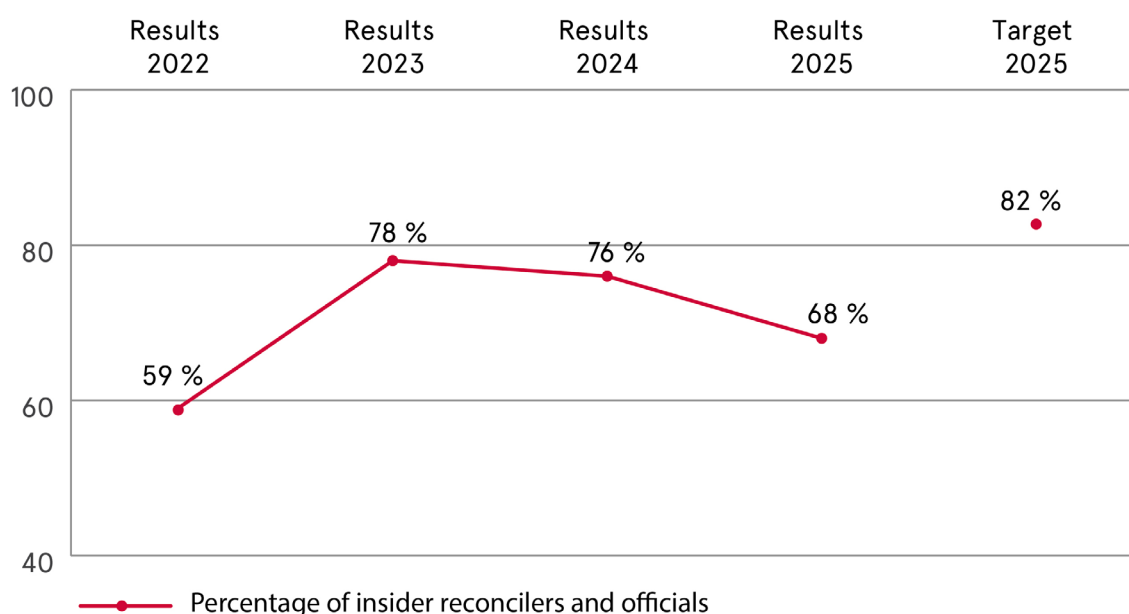
Rights-holders—including Roma women, internally displaced people, persons with disabilities, and those facing intersectional discrimination—continue to face structural and institutional barriers when accessing services. In addition, limited financial and human resources remain a key constraint in delivering and sustaining inclusive services. A challenge in some countries is also the lack of services provided in end-users' own languages, for example in Roma language, or sign language, and the interpretation depends on Roma mediators or CSO staff members.

OUTCOME 4

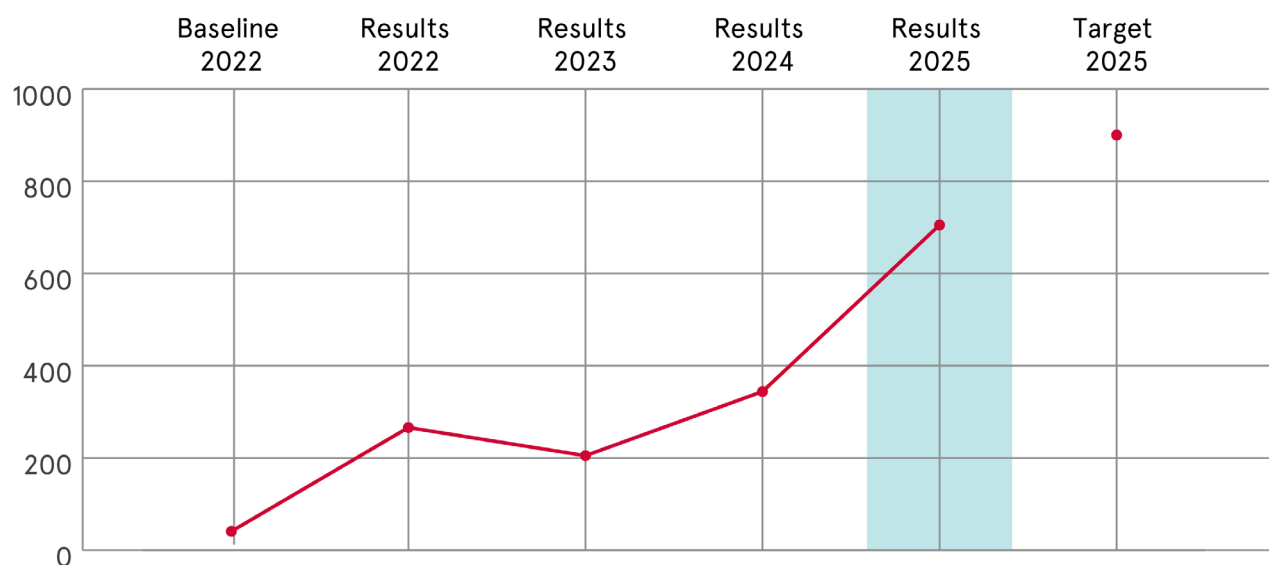
Roles and capacities of insider reconcilers to stabilise conflicts, and of officials to provide specialised psychosocial services are strengthened

Strong results across South Sudan, Kenya and Somalia were achieved in 2022-2025: trained insider reconcilers widely applied their skills in trauma healing, psychosocial support, reconciliation and mediation, far exceeding targets, while their participation in peace processes significantly increased. In Kosovo, nearly all trained officials integrated their new knowledge and skills to provide better psychological services for refugees and those repatriated. In Eastern Africa, new frameworks and initiatives strengthened the integration of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) into peace-building, including the regional MHPSS Network and the Student Peace Initiative. However, challenges remain, particularly due to political instability and limited government engagement.

Indicator 1. Percentage of insider reconcilers and officials who, after the trainings, use new skills and knowledge in reconciliation work and specialised services for refugees or repatriated.



2. Number of insider reconcilers participating in peace and reconciliation processes.



Insider reconcilers used new skills and knowledge in reconciliation work and officials provided better psychological services for refugees and repatriated individuals

In South Sudan, 192 insider reconcilers actively applied their newly acquired skills and knowledge in practical settings during 2022–2025 – which significantly exceeded the target of 52. These insider reconcilers – religious leaders, women and young people from faith-based organisations – used their skills mainly in trauma healing, psychosocial support and mediation work.

In Kenya and Somalia, a total of 379 insider reconcilers reported using the skills and knowledge they had gained from different trainings. This was more than double the targeted number. For instance, in 2025, research team members from the National Cohesion and Values Commission used trauma-informed skills during different group discussions and key informant interviews in their research work on polarising narratives in Kenya. Other common ways to apply skills were to develop healing-centred methodologies for reconciliation activities and to facilitate trauma healing circles. In addition, in 2025 alone, 145 students and faculty personnel were trained from 5 universities in Somalia, Somaliland and Ethiopia as part of the Student Peace Initiative (SPI) programme. They will all use their new knowledge as insider reconcilers in their institutions and communities.

In Kosovo, a training programme for officials to provide better psychological services for refugees and repatriated started at the end of 2023, and in 2024–2025 remarkable success was demonstrated in the application of the knowledge and skills: 98% of participants (228 out of 233)

reported integrating key competencies into their practice. These included providing psychological first aid, employing trauma-sensitive approaches, building trust with clients, offering psychosocial support while recognising personal limits, and utilising an effective referral system.

Increased participation of insider reconcilers in peace and reconciliation processes

In South Sudan, the number of insider reconcilers participating in peace and reconciliation processes has increased significantly during the past two years. The highest level was reached in 2025, when a total of 483 insider reconcilers participated in various national, community, and family-level reconciliation processes. The total result in 2022–2025 quadrupled the target (from 200 to 849), and the inclusion of women, young people, elders, and persons with disabilities across the peace landscape broadened legitimacy and community ownership.

In Somalia and Kenya, this number increased gradually during 2022–2025, reaching well over double the target (from 266 to 671). The country plans drafted in the first regional annual co-creation workshop (2022) were developed over the programme period. In 2025, MHPSS was included in the National Reconciliation Framework Strategic Plan in Somalia, and the National Framework for Integration of MHPSS in Peacebuilding was developed in Kenya.

The number of different processes in the region increased by a few, exceeding the estimated target of 6 to 11. The processes included Peace Day celebrations, National Healing and Reconciliation Programmes, National Prayer Days, Early Warning and Early Response Programmes,

national reconciliation processes and commissions, and local processes such as healing circles, Community Reconciliation Programs, Post-Cattle Theft Return Reconciliations and Family Conflict Reconciliations. Furthermore, in 2025, 200 insider reconcilers participated in the National Conference for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation, convened jointly by the South Sudan Council of Churches and the Interreligious Council of South Sudan. During the two-day conference, insider reconcilers from across the country shared testimonies

from Malakal, Juba, Upper Nile, and Equatoria, illustrating how trauma healing, rumour management, and interfaith mediation helped communities defuse tensions. They presented locally driven reconciliation models, engaged policymakers on the value of grassroots peace infrastructures, and committed to cascading these approaches in their home communities. The conference became a rare space where national, political, and local actors engaged constructively.

Main successes:

Faith-led approaches proved culturally resonant in community settings of South Sudan:

in 2025 alone, sermons, healing sessions, family mediations, radio broadcasts, and community dialogues by insider reconcilers reached more than 15,000 people. This helped reduce fear, prevent retaliation, and stabilise conflict-prone areas across South Sudan. The inclusion of women, young people, elders, and persons with disabilities in these peace spaces broadened legitimacy and community ownership.

East Africa MHPSS Network was created to provide a platform for the Horn of Africa region (2022):

The aim of the network is to fill the gaps identified in integrating MHPSS into peacebuilding, transitional justice, and reconciliation processes in East Africa. The network will provide capacity-building sessions, knowledge and experience exchange platforms for member organisations. The network has a supportive role, aiming to support country action plans developed by member organisations and implement programmes jointly developed by them.

The Student Peace Initiative (SPI), created in Somalia in 2023:

The SPI was piloted at the Simad University in Mogadishu and expanded in 2025 to four other universities: Somalia (Galmudug State University), Somali-

land (Beder University, University of Hargeisa) and Ethiopia (Jigjiga University). The SPI engages with students in psychological first aid and psychoeducational facilitator training, and leadership development training that empower them to promote peace and wellbeing in their communities.

MHPSS included in the National Reconciliation Framework Strategic Plan in Somalia (2025):

This is a five-year plan that focuses on grassroots engagement and capacity building to address mental health challenges and promote sustainable peace and unity in Somalia.

Development of National Framework for Integration of MHPSS in Peacebuilding, Kenya (2025):

This framework was initiated in the co-creation workshops of the Peace & Trust project, and the work was done in collaboration with the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, Kenya.

Successful Training Program in Kosovo (2023-2025):

Strong engagement and professionalism of the Trainers of Trainers, as well as the close and effective cooperation with the Commission for Social Welfare and Families, support the success of the training program that gives officials knowledge and skills to provide better psychological services for refugees and repatriated individuals.

Challenges

In South Sudan, continued political unrest and sporadic violence posed challenges to the safe implementation of reconciliation initiatives and community engagement, particularly in regions experiencing active conflict. Besides political instability, one of the challenges in East Africa continued to be that most of the engagement tends to come from civil society actors and less from government duty-bearers. However, progress was made since earlier years, especially in Somalia and Kenya. In addition, more government duty-bearers participated in the regional, annual co-creation workshops each year.

In Kosovo, the implementation of the training program confirmed the importance of flexibility and closer coordination with state institutions. The delays experienced in 2024 showed the need to better align administrative procedures with programme objectives, while keeping the needs of frontline professionals and people in vulnerable positions at the centre. In 2025, improved coordination and joint planning with state institutions supported the completion of the postponed sessions and helped improve the overall coordination of training delivery.

OUTCOME 5

Participation and agency of the minorities, marginalised youth and persons affected by conflicts are increased in local communities and societies.

Between 2022 and 2025, participation and agency increased significantly across the programme through education, employment, and community engagement. Employment and community engagement were the dominant pathways, nearing or exceeding targets. East Africa showed rapid growth from low baselines, with the largest increase in community participation. While participation in education improved significantly, it remained lower overall, particularly in Eastern Europe. These changes benefited women and young people in marginalised positions, including minorities, internally displaced and repatriated persons, refugees, persons with disabilities, and single mothers. The results for this outcome were collected in Kosovo, Moldova, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Somaliland, and Tanzania.

Increased employability, livelihood opportunities and social inclusion among women and youth

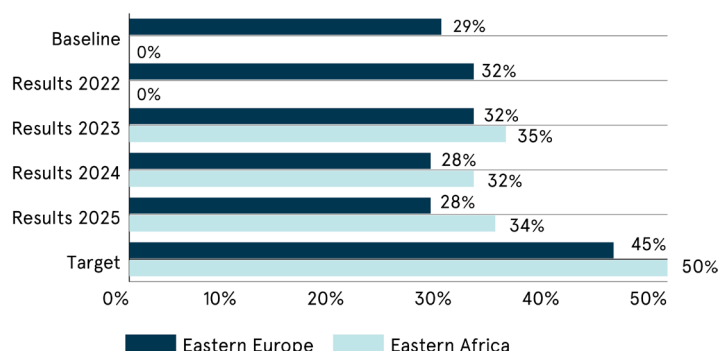
The programme has successfully facilitated the creation of business and employment prospects, community engagement, and educational opportunities for its participants.

Significant progress in participation has been achieved through increased employment. The programme strengthened participants' employability by providing a combination of life skills, psychosocial support, vocational training and entrepreneurship training aligned with labour market needs. These initiatives built participants' practical life skills, confidence, and problem-solving abilities, all of which are essential for entering the labour market. Participants accessed formal and non-formal education, including university and short-term vocational courses, supported by mentoring, career guidance, and follow-up that helped them apply skills in real work settings. Partnerships with employers supported participants' transition to work. In Eastern Europe, this was more strongly linked to employment services and job placement, while in East Africa, apprenticeships and start-up support played a stronger role in enabling employment and self-employment.

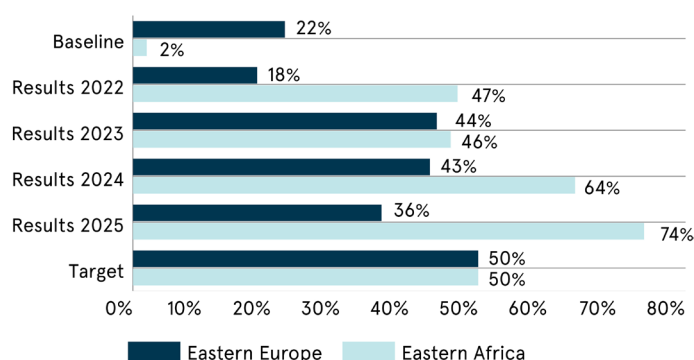
These integrated approaches contributed to increased readiness for employment, improved the capacity to navigate labour market challenges and

Indicator 1. Increased participation of minorities, marginalised young people and people affected by conflicts in local communities and societies.

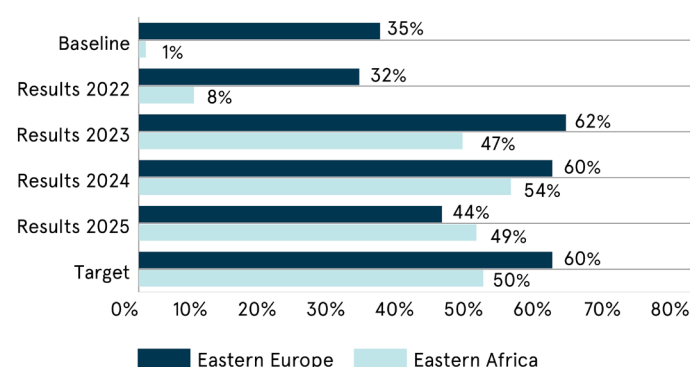
EDUCATION



EMPLOYMENT



PARTICIPATION



The decline between 2024 and 2025 can be attributed to smaller budgets in two projects and missing data from Eastern Europe.

produced tangible employment and livelihood outcomes. Even where immediate employment was not achieved, participants demonstrated improved employability, increased motivation to seek opportunities, and stronger engagement in economic activities, contributing to gradual economic inclusion.

Efforts to raise awareness among participants of the importance of civic participation, as well as to increase self-confidence and motivation to act, have contributed to increased engagement across the programme. The data suggests that young people and women increasingly engaged in social, civic, and professional spaces, contributing to their integration and visibility within the community. The spectrum of engagement was broad, ranging from informal interactions with neighbours and participation in community groups to membership of associations and networks, involvement in women's and youth groups, representation in committees, engagement in advocacy activities, and participation in local decision-making processes. In East Africa, participation also included taking on roles in committees, volunteering in community initiatives, and engaging in awareness-raising campaigns, reflecting a strong level of community engagement.

In Eastern Europe, the programme supported participants to become leaders within their communities. Women successfully transitioned into mentorship roles. Taking advantage of the intense electoral period, the programme in Kosovo supported women's participation and leadership which resulted in 46 women being included in political party lists.

Participation in education increased gradually across 2022–2025, particularly through engagement in formal education, including secondary education and university studies. In several contexts, participants returned to school or continued their studies, reflecting improved motivation, confidence, and support from psychosocial interventions and mentoring. These changes indicate a gradual strengthening of participants' ability and willingness to pursue education independently. In Eastern Europe, however, participation in formal education remained relatively limited and often secondary to other forms of engagement.

By contrast, participation in formal education increased significantly more in East Africa. More definite progress emerged in 2024–2025, particularly through increased school attendance and reduced dropout rates in Ethiopia and Somaliland. However, participation in formal education remained constrained overall by economic pressures, care-giving responsibilities, and structural barriers, which often limited sustained engagement. In Eastern Europe, these constraints were largely linked to social norms, whereas in East Africa they were more strongly attributed to economic factors. Despite these challenges, the results indicate

gradual improvement in education participation outside programme support, contributing to longer-term opportunities for employability and inclusion.

Participation in communities, education, and employment proved to be mutually reinforcing, as increased confidence and social engagement support re-entry into education and access to job opportunities, while skills and income from education and employment further strengthen individuals' ability to actively participate in community and civic life.

Strengthened civic engagement and policy participation among marginalised groups

Participation in civic actions, initiatives, campaigns, and policy dialogues increased during the programme period, reflecting greater confidence, awareness, and agency among target groups. In Eastern Europe, participants engaged in multicultural festivals, information campaigns, and advocacy initiatives addressing issues such as Roma rights, gender equality, access to education and historical memory. They also took part in structured policy dialogues with local and national authorities, including on the Roma Strategy and Ukraine recovery processes, helping to bring community priorities—particularly those of internally displaced and other Roma—into formal decision-making spaces.

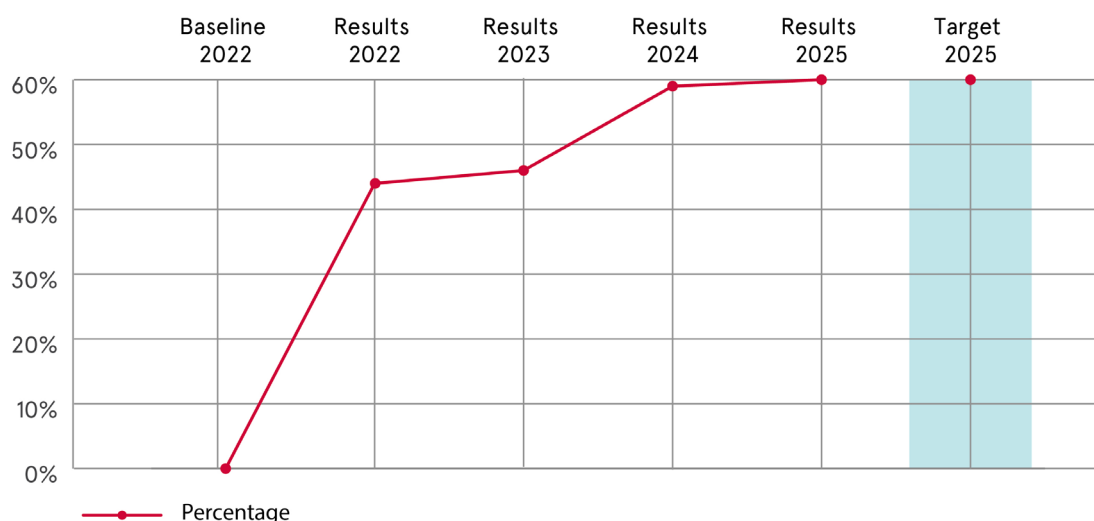
These civic actions were organised by the programme participants themselves. Activities such as awareness campaigns, public events, and dialogue forums helped to break down stigma and promote inclusion. They also strengthened participants' ability to articulate community needs and engage with institutions. Roma representatives began regularly attending meetings, participating in national and international events, and influencing policy discussions.

Overall, civic engagement in Eastern Europe progressed from participating in programme-supported activities to becoming more actively involved in advocacy and policy processes. Participants increasingly contributed to community initiatives, collaborated with authorities and amplified their collective voice through campaigns and dialogues. This has contributed to greater representation of groups facing marginalisation in public and policy arenas.

Strong progress in employment and livelihood pathways for young people facing marginalisation and minorities

Programme data shows a consistent increase in the number of participants who secured employment, self-employment or developed livelihoods following programme support and training.

Percentage of minorities, marginalised youth or persons affected by conflicts who are employed, have established an own business, or have developed other decent livelihood.



Strong linkages with employers, apprenticeship and internship opportunities, and start-up support, combined with mentoring and business networks, facilitated transitions into work. Entrepreneurship training also enabled participants to establish small businesses in the service sector, such as beauty services, tailoring, maintenance, and small trade. In Eastern Europe, these efforts were complemented by strong engagement with employment services, formal private-sector partnerships, and women’s business networks, which supported transitions into employment and entrepreneurship.

In East Africa, strong alignment with labour market demand and technical and vocational education and training systems contributed to high employment outcomes, including full employment of trained young people in Ethiopia. Employment and livelihood-linked participation increased from 2% to 64% among programme participants in Tanzania, with a total of 354 persons employed, self-employed or having developed other decent livelihoods over the programme period, including 67 young persons with disabilities. Many participants combined different livelihood strategies, such as wage employment and small-scale entrepreneurship, to stabilise income and reduce economic vulnerability.

Overall, the results show a clear increase in employment and livelihood outcomes, highlighting the programme’s contribution to reducing economic vulnerability and strengthening long-term resilience and financial independence among marginalised groups.

Key results 2022–2025

- A total of over 2,000 participants secured employment, self-employment or developed livelihoods over the programme period.
- Historic progress was achieved in terms of municipal governance in Kosovo, with increased representation of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian women in decision-making: one participant was appointed as Deputy Mayor for Communities and another as Advisor to the Ministry of Local Government Administration.
- In collaboration with the Somaliland Police Force, young female prisoners participated in life skills sessions for the first time. Among those who were later released, none reoffended or returned to prison, and some continued to receive individual coaching after their release.
- Civic engagement expanded with close to 150 campaigns, advocacy initiatives, and policy dialogues led by programme participants.

Challenges

- Limited availability of stable jobs, weak labour markets, and economic pressures that push participants to prioritise income over education or civic engagement.
- Gender norms, discrimination (including against minorities and persons with disabilities), and limited family or community support restricted participation, particularly among women and young people.
- Some participants lacked basic skills (literacy, numeracy, business skills) or required more prolonged support to build confidence, readiness and independence.
- Limited access to resources and opportunities, including insufficient access to start-up support and follow-up funding.

OUTCOME 6

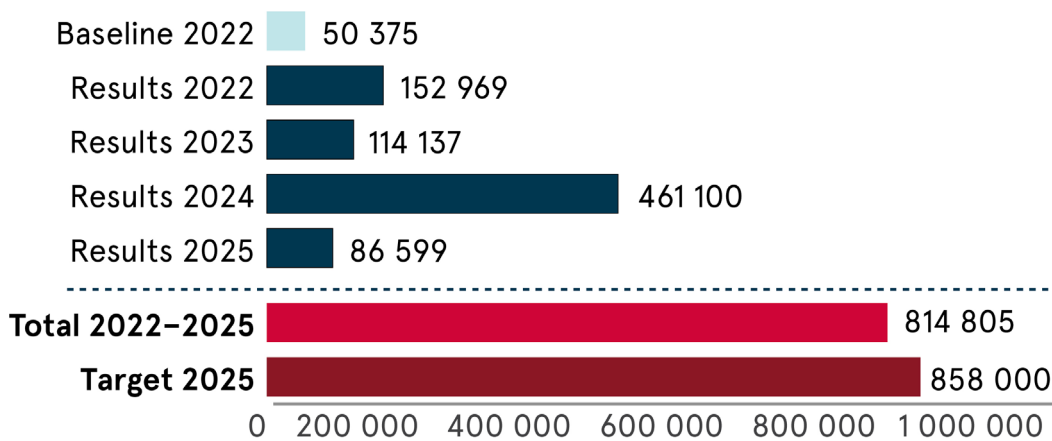
Awareness in Finland has increased on development cooperation, issues of marginalised youth, minorities, and reconciliation, as well as business potential in Africa.

Overall, the programme communications reached more than 800 000 people in Finland, which is about ten times more than the number initially targeted. In addition, several hundred thousand more people were reached through media coverage. The programme also expanded its reach to new audiences, specifically the East African diaspora.

From the start, it wasn't just about communicating to diaspora communities but also engaging with them by co-creating communication initiatives. This approach strengthened the credibility and reach of programme communications.

As part of this approach, the **East Africa Youth Peace Network was launched in 2024** on the initiative of young people with a diaspora background. It brought together young people from East African diaspora communities in Finland to promote peace and reconciliation, strengthen youth participation in peace processes, amplify their voices in Finnish society, and build connections with peers in East Africa.

Indicator 1. Number of views of articles, blogs and social media posts related to DF's development cooperation



To achieve the outcome target, the Deaconess Foundation published programme-related content on its website, social media, intranet and other channels. The Foundation also organised events and approached the media to spark interest in the themes related to the programme work.

Reaching new audiences and shifting towards participatory communication

During the 2022–2025 period, programme communications broadened in terms of both who the programme reached and how it engaged audiences. Communications expanded to reach diverse audiences, including diaspora communities, young people, private sector actors and non-governmental organisations, moving beyond a primarily general public focus. At the same time, engagement shifted from information sharing to more interactive and participatory approaches, including influencer collaboration and co-creation with partners and diaspora actors, which strengthened both relevance and impact.

During the programme implementation, the Deaconess Foundation identified the Finnish East-African diaspora as a key contributor and target audience of communications related to the programme work in East Africa. The cooperation with the Finnish Somali Media Network started in 2024.

Targeted engagement and thought leadership

The programme successfully engaged with small and medium-sized Finnish companies by promoting sustainable business opportunities in Africa and responsible ways of doing business. More than 180 businesses participated in different events, while webpage articles and posts reached even more private sector representatives.

The programme advanced discussion on decolonisation and localisation within the Finnish development cooperation sector, engaging with key stakeholders such as the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, CSO decision-makers, and fundraising professionals. This approach generated a lot of interest, and the representatives of the Deaconess Foundation were invited to several events to discuss the issues further.

The Deaconess Foundation positioned itself more firmly in Finland as an expert actor on Roma in Eastern Europe and the Balkans and strengthened cooperation with multiple Finnish authorities and stakeholders through communication and advocacy initiatives (e.g., the Deputy Chancellor of Justice, the Human Rights Centre, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs Human Rights Unit).

Expanding reach and improving communication practices

Programme themes gained visibility in Finnish media through 13 articles, 6 opinion pieces and a radio interview released in outlets such as Yle, Helsingin Sanomat, Kaleva, Maa-ilman Kuvalehti, Iso Numero and Radio Helsinki. Combined, these are estimated to have reached several hundred thousand readers, contributing significantly to the outcome indicators.

During the programme period, the Deaconess Foundation participated in creating Fingo's ethical development communication guidelines, committed to them and trained its partners in ethical communications.

The programme achieved high visibility through major campaigns:

- **Näe minut** campaign reached over 50,000 Finnish people with information about Roma rights in Eastern Europe and Roma women's grassroots activism. Influencer collaboration helped to reach new audiences, especially young people.
- **Afriikka on uutisia enemmän** campaign aimed at diversifying Finnish people's views on Africa using influencer collaboration and relatable storytelling. The campaign videos reached almost 130,000 Finnish people.
- **Ihmisarvoista EU-politiikkaa** campaign promoted the European Union's role in advancing human rights and peace ahead of the European Parliamentary elections. The campaign posts reached more than 50,000 people.

Challenges

While most of the outcome targets had to be revised, some of them even several times, during the programme period because of the unexpectedly high reach of communication activities, there was a lot of fluctuation in annual results. Whenever bigger campaigns with a lot of paid advertising were launched, the reach naturally peaked, while annual results were lower in years with less paid social media advertising.

A consistent challenge in development communications is how to ensure programme participants' voices are heard directly, rather than being filtered through Finnish intermediaries. This challenge is aggravated by the distance between Finland and other programme countries and the programme rights-holders' capability to produce content for communications.

Results in advocacy

The programme aimed to create structural change through advocacy in Finland and the programme countries and at the EU and international levels to promote inclusion and equality. While most of the partners' advocacy efforts fall directly under programme outcomes, the work led by the Deaconess Foundation is listed here.

During the programme period, the range of advocacy channels and methods expanded and diversified. This in-

involved combining direct engagement with decision-makers, including meetings with members of parliament and EU representatives, with wider public campaigns. These were complemented by events, publications, and expert inputs that reinforced the programme's visibility and influence.

While direct legislative changes remain limited, the advocacy work contributed to policy processes, agenda-setting, and increased the recognition of groups facing marginalisation, laying important groundwork for longer-term structural change.

Across the programme period, advocacy work contributed to incremental but visible structural influence at national, EU, and international levels, particularly in advancing the rights of Roma and other groups facing marginalisation. The programme partners consistently fed evidence and recommendations into EU and international mechanisms, such as the European Commission and the Council of Europe, helping shape discussions on anti-racism, minority rights, and inclusion.

Advocacy increased the visibility of the human rights situation of Roma, also in the context of the war in Ukraine. It promoted recognition of Roma women's rights defenders, improving international awareness and support for their role. At the same time, close collaboration with partners ensured that advocacy remained grounded in local realities, with the perspectives of rights-holders—especially Roma communities—effectively informing advocacy efforts at the international level.

"I significantly increased my understanding of my basic rights, including access to information, available support mechanisms, and relevant contacts in case of need."

– PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT

3. Risk management

3.1 Changes in operating environment and risk response

Between 2022 and 2025, the programme operated in a rapidly changing and increasingly complex environment shaped by conflict, economic instability, and climate-related shocks. The Russian war of aggression in Ukraine was a major shock, creating both immediate humanitarian consequences and wider regional and global impacts. At the same time, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to influence programme implementation, particularly in 2022.

Across all programme countries, rising living costs and economic pressures affected both programme delivery and participants. Increased prices for transport, accommodation, fuel, and materials raised operational costs and reduced the purchasing power of partners and participants. These pressures required a reprioritisation of activities and more flexible use of resources in several programme countries.

Economic hardship also affected participants' livelihoods and their motivation to be involved in longer-term programme activities. In several countries, basic needs and income insecurity reduced participants' ability to attend trainings or invest in self-employment. Programme partners responded by adapting timelines, combining activities, and prioritising core interventions.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to have operational impacts, particularly in 2022, when partners relied on hybrid and flexible delivery models. Online and low-visibility approaches remained important in contexts where physical access was constrained not only due to public health concerns, but also insecurity or political restrictions.

The ability of programme partners to adapt implementation modalities—through relocation of activities, flexible planning, and close coordination with stakeholders—was essential to ensuring the continuity of programme delivery across all countries.

Eastern Europe and Western Balkans

In Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, the operating environment was strongly shaped by the war in Ukraine and its spillover effects.

In Ukraine, the ongoing war has created severe and persistent security risks. Air raids, infrastructure disruptions, and displacement affected both participants and staff, requiring frequent adjustments to implementation. Activities were relocated, postponed, or moved online, and partners adopted low-visibility formats and stricter security protocols to ensure participant safety. The war also

increased psychosocial stress among both participants and staff.

In Moldova, the arrival of large numbers of displaced persons from Ukraine put pressure on national systems and services. Programme partners had to respond to the increased demand for targeted support to Roma communities, including highly vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, while continuing planned programme activities.

In Kosovo, programme implementation was affected by high inflation and institutional constraints. Budget constraints within public institutions reduced the availability of services, particularly in employment programmes targeting marginalised communities.

Across the region, inflation, displacement, and the high mobility of both participants and professionals remained key challenges. These factors affected continuity, participation, and long-term engagement, requiring flexible and adaptive approaches by programme partners.

East Africa

In East Africa, the operating environment was characterised by a combination of economic hardship, insecurity, and an increase in climate-related risks.

Economic challenges, particularly inflation and currency depreciation, affected programme delivery across the region. In Ethiopia, for example, the devaluation of the birr and rising prices significantly increased operational costs. At the same time, participants were under growing financial pressure, which affected their ability to participate in activities or pursue livelihood opportunities.

Climate-related shocks, especially droughts, became more frequent and severe, particularly in the Somali Region of Ethiopia and in Somalia. Prolonged drought led to water shortages, loss of livelihoods, and increased vulnerability among communities. These conditions shifted community priorities toward immediate survival needs, reducing participation in development-focused activities and requiring programme adaptations. At the same time, there was an increased demand for the livelihood and skills training activities provided by the programme.

Security and political conditions varied across countries but remained a key challenge. In South Sudan, ongoing political instability, restrictions on civic space, and insecurity affected the organisation of community dialogues and reconciliation activities. Administrative requirements and limitations on public gatherings required partners to shift to smaller group formats and maintain close coordination with authorities and community leaders.

In Somalia, insecurity and political tensions affected programme implementation. Planned activities, such as large workshops, could not be organised in-country due to security concerns, and some activities were relocated or adapted. Broader political developments also increased tensions and further constrained civic space.

Across the region, partners relied on flexible planning and community-based approaches to ensure safe and continuous programme implementation.

3.2 Risk management

The Deaconess Foundation's risk management system comprises three interconnected levels: organisational, programme and project. At the project level, risks are identified, analysed, and continuously monitored together with partners using risk matrices tailored to each project's context. These project-level risks feed directly into the programme-level risk matrix, which is updated annually and serves as a key tool for prioritising and mitigating risks across countries and thematic areas. At the organisational level, risks are managed through institutional systems and escalated to leadership when necessary, to ensure strategic oversight and timely response.

Between 2022 and 2025, significant efforts were made to strengthen the coherence and effectiveness of this multi-level system. In 2022, improved linkages were introduced between the project and programme risk matrices, alongside annual partner meetings focused on risk assessment and mitigation. These dialogues enabled a systematic analysis of operating environments and recurring risks, such as security, socio-political instability, and climate-related challenges. Capacity development needs among partners were also identified.

In 2023, the system was further structured by introducing an annual "risk management cycle", which clarified roles, timelines, and processes at all levels. A new organisational risk management tool, Granite, was adopted to enhance monitoring and enable escalation of risks to senior management and the Foundation's whistleblowing channel was established. Programme- and project-level matrices were refined to include for example emerging socio-political risks. At the same time, safeguarding and protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment were strengthened through the appointment of a safeguarding focal point in the programme team, mandatory training and self-assessments completed by both the Foundation's and its partners' staff, development of partner policies, and the introduction of the foundation's whistleblowing mechanism to partners.

In 2024, risk management processes were consolidated. Risks identified in development cooperation were systematically integrated into the Granite system, thereby strengthening organisational oversight. Regular monitoring practices were maintained, with significant risks monitored on a quarterly or monthly basis. Continuous

dialogue with partners ensured responsiveness to contextual changes. Capacity-sharing initiatives were implemented to address identified risks, focusing on safeguarding, disability inclusion, humanitarian work, and the "Do No Harm" principle. Targeted safeguarding support was provided to partners, alongside training courses and the appointment of safeguarding focal points. External expertise also supported the development of the Foundation's own safeguarding guidance.

The safeguarding framework was finalised and operationalised by 2025. Learning and continuous improvement were supported through partner exchanges in the focal points group. Risk management also addressed emerging areas, including artificial intelligence, with training provided to partners on the ethical, secure and responsible use of artificial intelligence in programme work.

During 2022-2025, there was a transition from establishing and testing risk management processes to institutionalising, systematising and expanding them. The programme-level risk matrix has proven to be an effective tool for guiding risk management across the programme and has held up well throughout the period. Existing risk categories and mitigation measures were sufficient to address emerging challenges. Several of the identified risks did materialise—particularly in terms of security, socio-political and operational risks—but these were anticipated and managed through existing mitigation plans. One external factor, namely changes in migration dynamics linked to Kosovo visa liberalisation, required the addition of a new risk category.

The Foundation's ability to identify, mitigate and respond to risks at all levels of its development cooperation programme's operations has been strengthened through continuous investment in policy development, tools, training and the capacity of the Foundation's staff and partners.

"I understand that violence is not acceptable and that support exists. I feel safer and more confident to ask for help if needed."

- PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT

4. Sustainability

OUTCOME 1

The capacity of the project partners and other targeted civil society actors has been strengthened

The programme demonstrates high sustainability under outcome 1, particularly with regard to the institutional and social dimensions. Partner CSOs strengthened their advocacy, organisational governance, safeguarding practices, and policy engagement. These capacities are embedded within organisations and their networks, enabling them to actively shape policy and decision-making processes, support people facing marginalisation in a more participatory and impactful way, and uphold strong governance and safeguarding practices beyond the programme period.

Partners were increasingly recognised as policy actors, contributing to national strategies and legislative processes on anti-discrimination, Roma inclusion, youth policy, mental health, and survivor protection. Strong advocacy and alignment with national frameworks enhanced institutional sustainability, while strengthened peer networks and leadership among minority- and women-led CSOs reinforced social sustainability.

The outcome primarily contributed to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Regarding SDG 16, the programme strengthened inclusive and accountable institutions by building the capacity of civil society actors, insider reconcilers, and local authorities to engage in policy processes, human rights monitoring, and peacebuilding.

As for SDG 17, multi-stakeholder partnerships were both a method and an outcome. Sustained collaboration between CSOs, public institutions, employers, and community actors embedded inclusive practices into existing systems. Formal and informal partnerships improved coordination, policy alignment, and the sustainability of results beyond the programme period.

The Leave No One Behind principle was strongly realised by enabling organisations representing the most marginalised groups to influence decision-making processes and public accountability.

OUTCOME 2

Businesses operate more sustainably and businesses and other employers employ more inclusively

Outcome 2 shows moderate to strong sustainability, primarily across the social and institutional dimensions. Sustainable change was driven by long-term engagement with employers and public employment actors, which helped normalise more inclusive recruitment practices and embed them within labour-market structures.

Social sustainability is evident in improved employer attitudes toward workforce diversity and increased acceptance of groups facing marginalisation in employment. Institutional sustainability is reinforced through cooperation with public employment offices and training institutions.

In the programme countries, employers increasingly adopted inclusive recruitment practices that contribute to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), as well as SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) through improved access to employment for people facing marginalisation, including women. Multi-actor collaboration also reflects SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

The Leave No One Behind principle was operationalised by encouraging employers to employ specifically those furthest from the labour market.

OUTCOME 3

Services provided by local authorities and other service providers to marginalised youth and minorities are more inclusive, functional and of good quality

Outcome 3 demonstrates moderate sustainability, mainly within the institutional and social dimensions. Local authorities and service providers improved their capacity to deliver more inclusive, accessible and responsive services for minorities and young people facing marginalisation.

Joint planning, training and data sharing between CSOs and authorities strengthened inclusive service delivery.

While local authorities and service providers participated actively in programme activities, inclusive practices have not yet been fully embedded in standard procedures, mandates, or budgets. Tools, guidelines and improved practices exist, but their consistent application relies on motivated individuals or continued CSO engagement.

More inclusive and functional services, in particular for groups facing marginalisation, contribute to SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Leave No One Behind was operationalised by ensuring that the specific needs of minorities, persons with disabilities, displaced persons and undocumented individuals informed service design and policy development.

OUTCOME 4

Roles and capacities of insider reconcilers to stabilise conflicts, and of officials to provide specialised psychosocial services are strengthened

Outcome 4 demonstrates strong sustainability in the social and institutional dimensions. Capacities of insider reconcilers and officials were strengthened through training.

ma-informed, psychosocial and peacebuilding approaches that are embedded within institutions and community structures.

Training-of-trainers models, accreditation of curricula, and integration into national and regional peacebuilding and social welfare frameworks support long-term institutional uptake. Community-based reconciliation networks enhance durability through local ownership and trust.

This outcome contributes primarily to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Community-based reconciliation, trauma-informed approaches, and civil society participation contributed to more inclusive peace processes and social cohesion and strengthened the role of women and young people. Leave No One Behind was realised by prioritising women, young people, conflict-affected populations, displaced persons, and trauma survivors who are often excluded from formal peacebuilding mechanisms.

OUTCOME 5

Participation and agency of the minorities, marginalised youth and people affected by conflicts are increased in local communities and societies

Outcome 5 demonstrates strong sustainability across the social and economic dimensions. Participants gained employability skills, confidence, psychosocial wellbeing, and expanded their social networks to support their continued participation in community, economic and civic life. Peer networks, mentorship models, and increased engagement in education and livelihoods indicate durable individual- and community-level change.

Economic sustainability was supported by market-relevant vocational training, psychosocial support, and job placements that enabled participants to generate ongoing livelihoods beyond the programme period.

The programme directly expanded access to decent livelihoods for people facing marginalisation, contributing to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Across programme countries, participants gained employment, self-employment, or found other ways to earn a sustainable income. Leave No One Behind principle was strongly embedded, as the programme prioritised those facing multiple and intersecting forms of exclusion, ensuring their agency, voice and participation.

Reducing inequality was the programme's overarching contribution. By prioritising ethnic minorities, women, persons with disabilities, refugees and conflict-affected populations, the programme improved access to employment, services, and participation in community and civic life. The increased participation of previously excluded groups in institutions, networks, and decision-making processes demonstrates tangible progress toward SDG 10 and operationalisation of the Leave No One Behind principle.

Gender equality (SDG 5) was also embedded throughout the outcomes. Women's economic empowerment, leadership development, and participation in peacebuilding and advocacy strengthened women's agency and decision-making power. Examples include improved labour market participation among Roma women in Kosovo and women-led peace and reconciliation initiatives in fragile contexts.

Environmental sustainability was not a primary focus of the programme, and no significant direct environmental impacts were documented during the programme period.

The programme mainly supported the achievement of programme countries' national sustainable development plans by strengthening implementation capacity, operationalising inclusive policies, and linking grassroots needs with national frameworks. By providing evidence, technical expertise, and structured participation of rights-holders, the programme helped translate policy commitments into more concrete measures, institutional mechanisms, and action plans.

Key cross-cutting sustainability challenges:

- **Incomplete institutionalisation:** Many results have not yet been fully embedded in the formal mandates, procedures, or budgets of public institutions. Continued application often depends on individuals or CSO engagement rather than system-wide adoption.
- **Resource and funding constraints:** Sustainability is limited by insufficient long-term or core funding for services and follow-up, particularly for psychosocial support, youth programmes and inclusive service delivery.
- **Capacity retention and turnover:** While the programme developed significant skills among civil society and public sector actors, continuous capacity building and knowledge transfer are needed to sustain these competencies. Staff changes or limited training resources after the programme can erode progress.
- **Uneven ownership:** Commitment and uptake vary across institutions and contexts. Where local authorities have not fully assumed responsibility, sustainability is weaker. The programme mitigated this by fostering MoUs, joint planning and co-delivery with government and community entities. However, full transfer of responsibility is still a work in progress.
- **External contextual risks:** Political instability, economic volatility, labour market constraints, and persistent social norms (e.g. discrimination) continue to affect the durability and scaling of results beyond the programme's control.

5. Learning, accountability and transparency

5.1 Evaluations and lessons learnt

Project / programme	Evaluation type	Year of evaluation
#reconciliation	External evaluation	2023
Kymppi 2.0	External evaluation	2023
Mustaqbaldoon I	External evaluation	2023
Roma Women's Power I	External evaluation	2023
Youth Action for Future	External evaluation	2024
Strengthening the Roma participation in Ukraine	External evaluation	2024
Empowerment and social justice for Roma women in Kosovo	External evaluation	2024
Youth Agency in Mufindi	External evaluation	2024
Programme evaluation	External evaluation	2024
Partnering for Change	Self-review	2025
Supporting socioeconomic re/integration of repatriated and refugees	Self-review	2025
Youth Action for Skills	Self-review	2025
Mustaqbaldoon II	Self-review	2025
Trust and Peace	Self-review	2025
Peace and Trust in communities	Self-review	2025
Roma Women's Power II	Self-review	2025

Programme and project evaluations serve as bases for learning and accountability. They have been considered and used as guiding principles in the design of our next programme to support the planning of projects and identification of capacity-building needs.

In the final year of the programme period, Deaconess Foundation's partners conducted evaluations of projects finishing in 2025. To provide more ownership for the project participants and to obtain new approaches related to lessons learned and best practices, a new evaluation method – self-review – was adopted. The shift from external evaluations to project self-reviews facilitated by external consultants was successful and cost-effective. The process was designed to assess and identify successes and challenges by project management and implementation team themselves, and in many projects also with stakeholders, duty-bearers and rights-holders. The self-reviews served as a key learning method to increase

knowledge of the project's success factors, as well as challenges hindering results.

Several lessons emerged among partners regarding what makes interventions effective. One key lesson is the importance of continuous support and follow-up. For example, in Ethiopia, regular follow-up and coaching after training enabled project teams to provide guidance, address challenges, and support participants in adjusting their livelihood strategies. In Somaliland, combining skills training with mentorship and livelihood support improved employment outcomes. Similarly, in South Sudan, sustained accompaniment and mentoring were identified as essential for maintaining engagement and quality implementation. The partners also emphasised that combining different forms of support leads to better results, such as integrating technical training with entrepreneurship education and post-training support in Ethiopia, or combining advocacy with practical support and evidence col-

lection in Moldova to improve the responsiveness of the authorities.

Partners also stressed that structured participation and engagement mechanisms improve outcomes. In Ethiopia, linking civic engagement with livelihood opportunities increased motivation and long-term involvement. In Kosovo and Moldova, combining evidence with joint work with other actors strengthened policy influence. In South Sudan, community acceptance and effectiveness increased through working with trusted religious leaders and using locally grounded approaches. These lessons will be used in future work, for example through strengthening mentoring and follow-up elements and continuing to look for innovative ways to combine different support approaches.

5.2 Accountability and transparency

During the period 2022–2025, transparency and accountability remained central to the Deaconess Foundation’s programme, reinforcing programme quality and long-term impact. These principles were based on high levels of ownership by all actors and supported through shared expertise partnerships, capacity development, continuous learning and communication about programme work (see outcome 6). Trust and credibility among communities and constructive relationships with authorities consistently formed the basis for ensuring ownership, transparency, and accountability. Extensive advocacy efforts at national and global levels further supported these objectives (see section 2.3).

Programme work under Outcome 1, which focused on strengthening the capacities of partners and civil society actors, directly advanced accountability and transparency. During the programme period, partners enhanced their professional, operational, and governance practices, including financial management and project management and safeguarding. Capacities in monitoring and evaluation were strengthened to support results-based management and transparency. The Deaconess Foundation also upgraded its complaints mechanism and promoted its use among partners and participants, ensuring safer and more accessible channels for feedback and reporting. Strengthening safeguarding remained a priority, with partners improving their safeguarding capacities and promoting ethical conduct, protection of vulnerable groups, and prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment.

Collaboration with authorities and communities played a central role in promoting transparency. In several contexts, public institutions participated in and monitored project implementation, increasing accountability and strengthening ownership. At the same time, partners engaged in advocacy and policy processes that enhanced public sector accountability and ensured that policies

respond to the needs of communities in marginalised positions. Civil society actors were supported to monitor policies, engage with authorities, and align their activities with government strategies.

The programme continued to strengthen shared accountability through participatory programme planning and regular coordination mechanisms, such as monthly project meetings and steering committees. Financial transparency and anti-corruption measures were ensured through strict internal controls, transparent procurement processes, and systematic documentation. A zero-tolerance approach to corruption was applied throughout, supported by regular reporting, audits, and oversight mechanisms by partners and the Deaconess Foundation.

In restrictive or conflict-affected settings, including Ukraine, the operating environment affected transparency, access to information and civil society engagement. In these contexts, partners applied measures related to confidentiality, secure communication and risk management, while continuing to operate in line with transparency and accountability requirements.

To strengthen the programme’s management, communication and networking, the Foundation maintained its memberships of various organisations, including the programme support organisations’ network and Fingo’s working group on quality and effectiveness (LaVa). During the first half of 2024, the Deaconess Foundation co-chaired the network and the working group with the Finnish Red Cross.

“I now feel more included, better informed, and more capable of influencing decisions that affect my life and my community.”

- PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT

6. Management

The Deaconess Foundation Group has been advancing human dignity and providing impactful solutions to societal challenges since 1867, with a particular focus on supporting those in the most vulnerable situations. The group is structured around two distinct entities: Rinnekodit, which represents the private arm and delivers specialised social and healthcare services; and the Deaconess Foundation's non-profit work, which focuses on promoting participation, empowerment, and inclusion for people facing multiple inequalities. The Group also partially owns the educational institutions Diakonia College of Finland and the Diakonia University of Applied Sciences, specialised in providing vocational and higher education opportunities for students, particularly those facing unequal starting points, for example refugees, minorities and persons with diverse disabilities.

The International Affairs Unit, responsible for the development cooperation programme, belongs to the non-profit arm. The International Affairs Unit had 14 employees in 2025. The team members are professionals with strong expertise in programme and project management, as well as in relevant thematic areas and country-specific programme expertise. The team brings together diverse educational, professional, linguistic, and international expertise. The development cooperation programme team in Finland had nine staff members. The total number of person-years for the programme in 2024 was 5.69. The programme also benefits from the Foundation Group's shared services,

particularly in the areas of Legal Affairs, Data Protection and Responsibility, Procurement, Financial Administration, Human Resources, and ICT services. In addition, it benefits of the expertise of the non-profit arm's thematic teams, including Vamos youth work, the Psychotraumatology Centre, Roma work, and the D community centres.

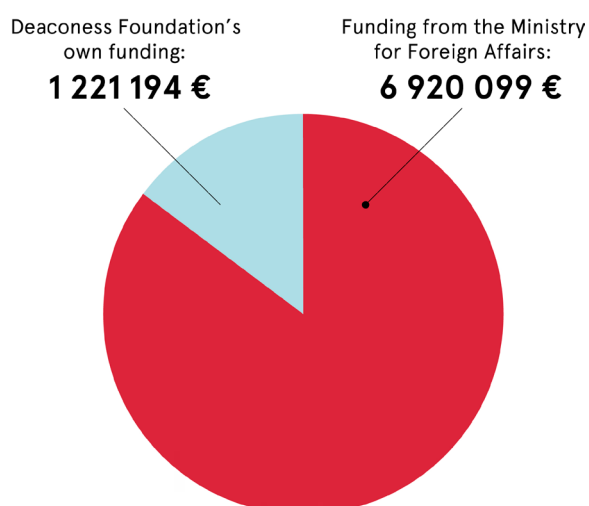
A total of 8,141,293 euros was spent on the programme during 2022-2025, including funding from both the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Deaconess Foundation's self-funding. Self-funding accounted for 15% of the budget.

The programme budget was used cost-effectively, with the aim of achieving high effectiveness. Over the four-year programme, the budget structure allocates 65% of funds to programme countries, with the remaining 35% covering costs in Finland. The partnership-based approach promotes localisation without reliance on country office structures, which increases cost-effectiveness but also impacts and sustainability.

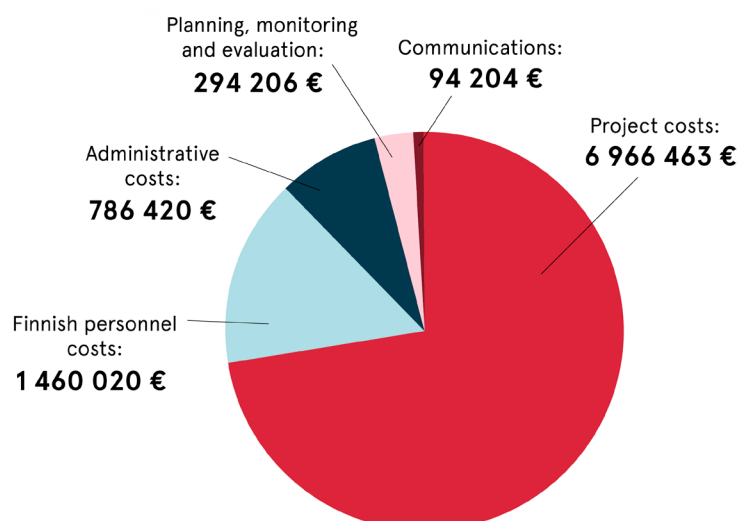
The programme created synergies that in turn saved resources. For example, partner expertise was shared within the programme through capacity-sharing activities. As the programme increased partners' know-how on how to access funding sources and networks, their financial opportunities were increased, thereby contributing to the financial sustainability of the interventions.

A total of 8,141,293 euros was spent on the programme during 2022-2025, including funding from both the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Deaconess Foundation's self-funding. Self-funding accounted for 15% of the budget.

Funding:



Distribution of costs:



“The skills and training I received through this project enabled me to find better opportunities. This has significantly increased my household income, allowing me to provide better food and education for my family.”

- PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT

“The biggest change in my life has been the opportunity to continue my education, become more actively involved in community work, and engage in dialogue with local authorities. Through the project, I gained both knowledge and confidence to participate more actively in civic processes and to contribute to discussions affecting my community.

This has not only strengthened my sense of agency but also opened new opportunities to connect with others, share experiences, and take part in initiatives aimed at improving local conditions. As a result, I feel more included, better informed, and more capable of influencing decisions that affect my life and my community.”

- PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT

“The biggest change is the way I see myself. I am disabled and i experienced a lot of challenges and stigma that put me down, but after this, I see myself strong, worthy, and someone who deserves better.”

- PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT

“I think it’s very important to live without discrimination, to have the right to education, and so on. I live in the “Roma” section of the city, and we’ve always faced ethnic profiling from the police; the police targeted my family and my mother. But we’ve been trained, and we’re assisted by lawyers and other experts. We’ve learned how to communicate with the authorities and the police. We’ve achieved improvements in our neighbourhood (a bus stop, a paved road, shops—all thanks to our active communication with the authorities and the project team). Even though I currently work in a nail salon, I want to be a lawyer and help people.”

- PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT

“This project was the reason I cancelled a dangerous irregular migration (tahriib) trip. It also created a sense of hope in me that girls can build a life and succeed within the country if they dedicate themselves to hard work and persevere.”

- PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT

“The biggest change is my self-confidence and financial independence. Before the project, I felt I didn’t have a voice, but now I can stand up for myself, support my family, and contribute positively to my community.”

- PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT



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