



Deaconess  
Foundation

# Equal, Inclusive and Reconciled Societies

Development Cooperation Programme  
Annual report 2024



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Cover photo: Farija Mehmeti, a Kosovar visual artist, paints because she refuses to be invisible, as a Roma and as a woman.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACRL	African Council for Religious Leaders
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU	The European Union
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
RAE	Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians
SPI	Students' Peace Initiative
Y-Peer	The Somaliland Youth Peer Education Network

# 1. Executive Summary

The Deaconess Foundation is a social enterprise that was established in Helsinki, Finland, in 1867. In 2024, it implemented a development cooperation programme **with 12 local civil society organisations** through **10 projects** in Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Kosovo, Tanzania, Somalia/Somaliland, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Finland. The programme prioritises supporting **women, girls, minorities, 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”. In 2024, **the programme reached over 16,000 direct rights-holders**, including **12,414 women and girls** as well as **519 persons with disabilities**.

**The participation of rights-holders in communities and societies continued to grow.** The programme successfully facilitated the creation of community engagement, educational opportunities, and business and employment prospects for its participants. These have contributed to greater financial independence and improved wellbeing for young people and women facing marginalisation, and reduced poverty levels.

Employment increased significantly through effective partnerships with businesses; however, the hiring of persons with disabilities remained limited due to reluctance on the part of employers. Employment was also supported by successfully combining soft skills, leadership, entrepreneurship, and vocational skills training, with mentoring and the provision of start-up kits. Participants found the programme highly beneficial in building their confidence, gaining skills and in motivating them to seek employment. Since 2022, around **1,470 people have found jobs, started businesses or developed other decent livelihoods**.

Awareness-raising efforts on civic participation helped increase engagement. Individuals and communities gained a stronger understanding of their rights and ability to bring about change. Thanks to psychosocial support, educational assistance, and re-engagement programmes, **30% of programme participants were able to attend education**.

Furthermore, dialogue between rights-holders and officials raised awareness among duty-bearers about participants’ needs, ensuring **more equal access to adequate services and more inclusive representation in policy reforms**. Public services became more responsive to rights-holders, especially in Ukraine and Kosovo.

Insider reconcilers trained in peacebuilding, psychosocial support and trauma healing enabled **conflict stabilisation** in the Horn of Africa. Meanwhile, by applying their new skills in trauma-informed approach, officials contributed

to the **sustainable reintegration** of repatriated women and girls in Kosovo.

The programme gained visibility in the Finnish media and on social media, as well as at public events. **Communication activities reached over 450,000 people in Finland**, and the programme continued to advance structural change through advocacy at national, EU, and international levels. It also contributed to the wider Finnish development cooperation agenda. The programme promoted sustainability by strengthening civil society organisations, community ownership, policy work, economic inclusion, and strategic partnerships.

Programme partners increased their visibility, expanded their networks, knowledge and policy influence. The impact of their work was amplified through numerous partnerships. **Their support to 40 smaller CSOs and activists helped to build skills and awareness around policy work, further strengthening civil society.**

Programme partners faced challenges in implementing the programme due to conflict, population displacement, political instability, economic crises, institutional weaknesses and shrinking civic space. They adapted by relocating activities, strengthening risk assessments, adjusting timelines, and coordinating with the relevant authorities and networks to ensure continuity and safety. Even under pressure, partners continued to advocate for rights, maintain community engagement and sustain reconciliation efforts.

The Deaconess Foundation further invested in developing results-based management, and knowledge exchange within the programme has been pivotal in this endeavour. This emphasis on capacity sharing also supported efforts to advance localisation, with partners taking an active role in strategic planning, development and programme evaluation. In the programme’s third year, 2,053,089 euros were used to cover expenses, including funding from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Foundation. Nine highly dedicated employees from the Foundation’s International Affairs Unit worked within the programme team.

# 2. Overview of the Deaconess Foundation's programme

## Programme implementation in 2024

The Deaconess Foundation's development cooperation programme for the period 2022–2025 was implemented through ten projects in eight East African and Eastern European countries, in partnership with 12 local civil society organisations (CSOs). These organisations represent minorities, young people facing marginalisation, women, and those affected by conflict, and they have direct connections to the project participants. A further 25 CSOs collaborated with the programme partners in project implementation.

The programme aims to create sustainable solutions that affect individuals, but also foster long-term structural

changes, through partnerships with the private and public sectors. In 2024, this involved collaborating with 140 public sector actors, including 20 different ministries, national agencies and bodies and various municipal-level authorities, as well as 177 private sector actors.

## Programme objectives

The programme aims to impact the realisation of equality, inclusion, and wellbeing among the most marginalised youth, minorities, and those affected by conflict in the operating countries.

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



## Priority areas

The Deaconess Foundation's programme focuses on three priority areas to promote inclusive, sustainable, equal, and reconciled societies. These three priorities are understood and implemented as interconnected. By interlinking them, we aim to more effectively decrease the poverty and conflict risks associated with global, national, and local inequalities and crises.

**Livelihood and skills development of the most marginalised:** We offer learning programmes for youth facing marginalisation, minorities, and displaced people that support their employability and develop their personal life management skills. To promote sustainable change, we collaborate with the private and public sectors and build their respective capacities.

**Active and resilient civil society:** We strengthen the advocacy, policy-influencing and networking skills of representatives of CSOs and marginalised groups. We also build enabling environments and structures for dialogue between civil societies, governments and the private sector.

**Peace and trust in communities:** We focus on raising awareness and developing the skills of insider reconcilers and officials, particularly in trauma and psychosocial support. Moreover, we link community-based actions in reconciliation with national peace processes and reconciliation frameworks.

## Geographical focus

The Deaconess Foundation's programme focuses on two regions: **Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans and East Africa**. The programme aims to foster close cooperation between partners within these regions. In addition, some programme activities are carried out in Finland, focusing on communication and collaboration with businesses and in the USA and Kenya, where the emphasis is on research, capacity support, and reconciliation-related events.

The Deaconess Foundation's programme in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans covers **Belarus, Kosovo, Moldova, and Ukraine**. In this region, the Foundation's work particularly strengthens the rights of Roma women and girls, Roma young people, repatriated and refugee women and girls, as well as displaced women and men. The programme also supports public institutions in providing inclusive, equal, and effective services and fostering a diverse, effective, and resilient civil society.

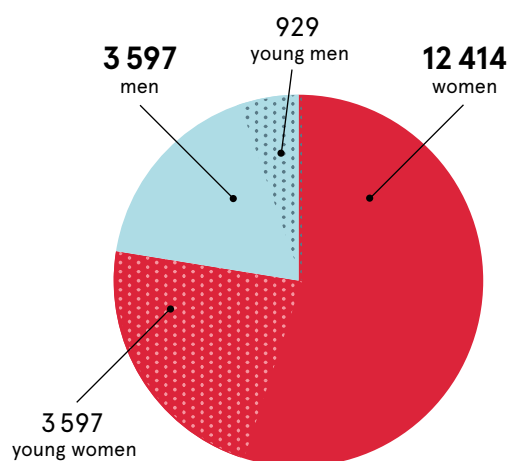
In East Africa, the programme covers **Ethiopia, Somalia/Somaliland, South Sudan, and Tanzania**. Here, the programme work focuses on improving the employability and participation of young people facing marginalisation and fosters trust and peace in the communities by providing support to reconciliation practitioners in the areas of leadership and wellbeing.



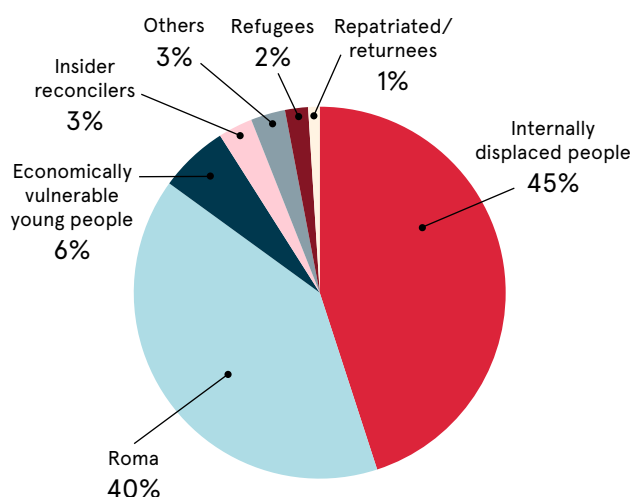
# 3. Programme results in 2024

Direct rights-holders reached:

**16 011**



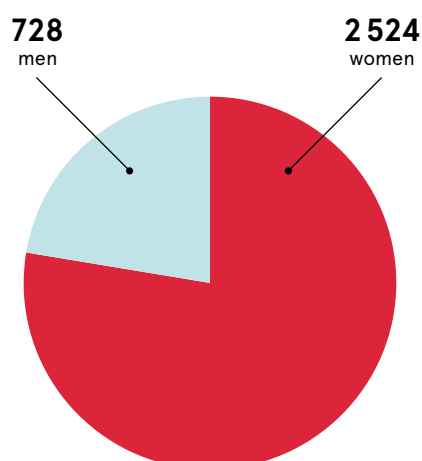
**519**  
persons with  
disabilities



This is a simplified chart,  
many of the rights-holders fall  
into more than one category.

Representatives of duty bearers reached:

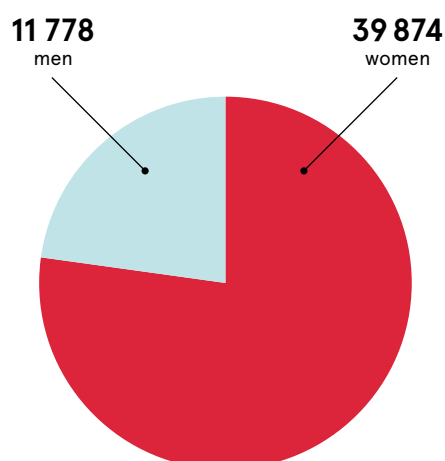
**3 252**



**137**  
persons with  
disabilities

Indirect beneficiaries of the programme:

**51 652**



### 3.1 Achievements in 2024 against the programme's theory of change

The programme's theory of change is 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.

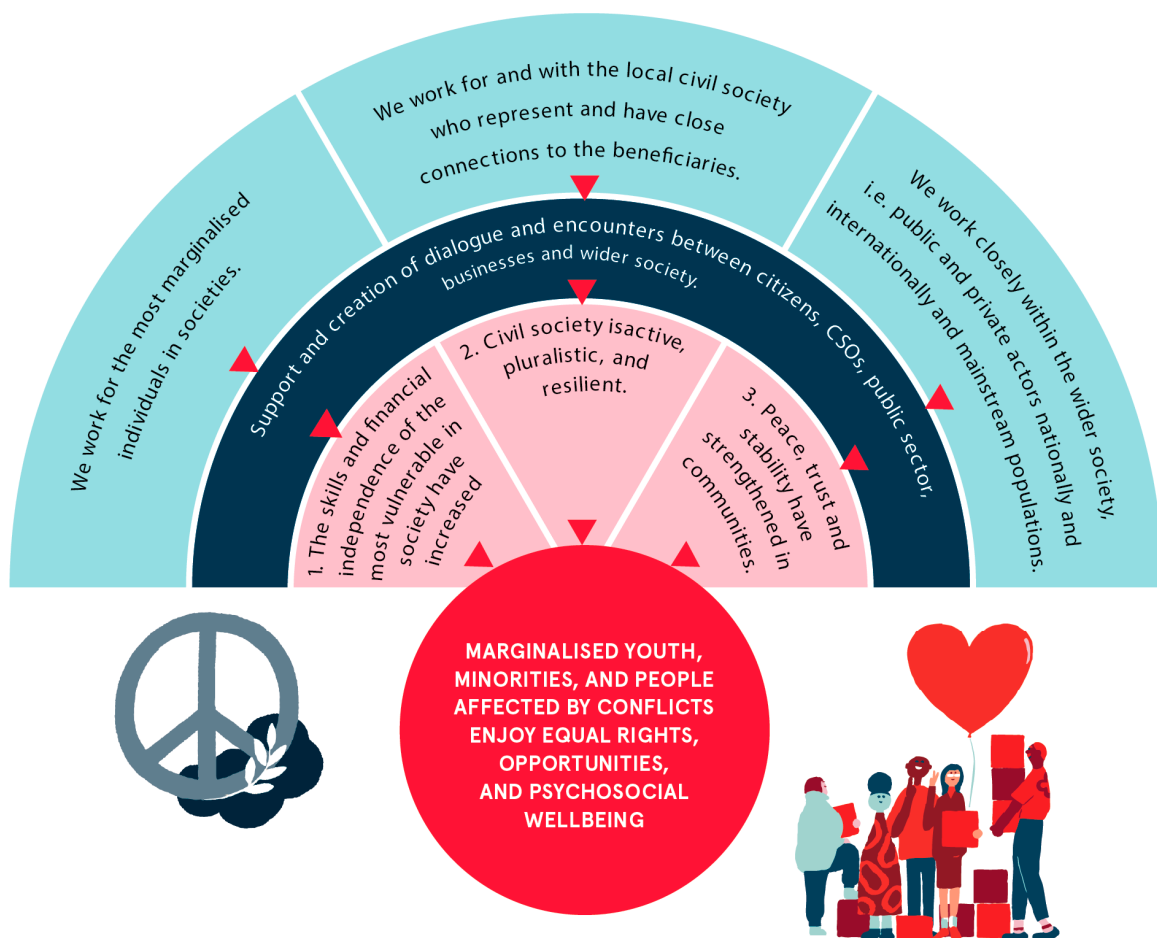
The Deaconess Foundation's programme work, partly leaning on results achieved earlier by projects that started before the programme period, has already achieved the following:

1. The programme has contributed to improving livelihoods among 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, 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 influence employer attitudes and commitments. As a result, local businesses have become more involved in employing young people in marginalised positions and minorities (outcome 2). Improved access to decent livelihoods was also supported by strengthening the knowledge and skills of local employment authorities and service providers. This included providing capacity support in inclusion, disability rights, minority issues, and gaining understanding of the employment challenges faced by marginalised communities (outcome 3). Since 2022, close to 1,300 programme participants have found jobs, started businesses, or developed other decent livelihoods.

2. The participation of rights-holders in communities and society continued to grow, particularly through community engagement and employment. Efforts to raise awareness of civic participation helped increase engagement, giving individuals

#### Simplified theory of change of the programme





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, ensuring more equal access to adequate services and more inclusive representation in policy reforms (outcomes 1, 3, and 5). Public services became more responsive to rights-holders, especially in Ukraine and Kosovo (outcomes 1 and 3). Programme partners also became more visible, expanded their networks and knowledge, and strengthened their ability to influence policy, particularly on gender equality and gender-based violence. Their support to 40 smaller CSOs and activists helped build skills and awareness around policy work, further strengthening civil society. The impact of the work of partner CSOs was amplified through numerous partnerships. By 2024, half had joined global and European networks, with several gaining access to new working groups, networks, and funding opportunities (outcome 1).

3. The Deaconess Foundation’s programme contributed to the sustainable re/integration of repatriated and refugee women and girls by equipping municipal officers with the skills to take a trauma-informed approach. This resulted in improved service provision for the target group (outcomes 4 and 5). The programme promoted peace and reconciliation by strengthening the leadership and wellbeing of insider reconcilers, who play a pivotal role in resolving conflicts in the Horn of Africa, while ensuring the inclusion of women and young people in reconciliation processes. The insider reconcilers provided support to internally displaced people, returnees and refugees, and facilitated community-level reconciliation efforts that helped to prevent retaliatory violence and rebuild trust among conflicting groups. The programme also supported the development of mechanisms and networks that link local peace-building and reconciliation initiatives with broader peace processes. Together with our partners, insider reconcilers promoted the integration of mental health and psychosocial support into national frameworks in Kenya and Somalia (outcome 4).

### 3.2 Impact

The programme’s targeted impact is for marginalised young people, minorities and people affected by conflicts to enjoy equal rights, opportunities and psychosocial wellbeing in communities and societies.

#### 3.2.1 Programme’s impact on participants’ wellbeing

##### Improved wellbeing among minorities, Roma and persons with disabilities

After three years of programme implementation, impact-level data was collected from three projects that had completed their final phase in 2024. However, these projects had already started prior to the programme, meaning that the long-term results had developed over a longer period. The results for the impact indicator “Improved wellbeing of youth, minorities, and people affected by conflicts” were gathered through questionnaires completed by project participants to assess the long-term impact on their lives as perceived by the participants themselves. According to the collected data, wellbeing had improved for nearly every respondent, mostly in the area of livelihood. Stable livelihoods and financial security are crucial for wellbeing, as they provide the resources needed to improve other aspects of life and to plan for the future.

The results show positive changes in the rights-holders’ lives in many ways, but the most frequently reported change was related to economic wellbeing, reported by 67% of respondents (Ukraine: 70%, Tanzania: 87.5%, Kosovo: 47%). When asked about improved wellbeing in general, nearly all respondents from three different countries reported an improvement (Kosovo: 86.4%, Tanzania: 100%, Ukraine: 100%), resulting in an overall average of 95.5%.

INDICATOR	BASELINE	RESULTS 2022	RESULTS 2023	RESULTS 2024	TARGET
Percentage of targeted young people, minorities and people affected by conflicts whose wellbeing is improved	N/A	N/A	87%	95.5%	80%

Improvements in economic wellbeing or employment were the most commonly reported changes in wellbeing. The next most common positive changes included starting or returning to studies, participating more in communities and feeling accepted, and engaging in volunteering or mentoring others. Across all projects, the most reported changes in psychosocial wellbeing were an improved belief in the future and opportunities in life, better self-esteem and self-perception, better understanding one's rights, and the ability to express opinions in front of others.

### Challenges in data collection

The collection of the impact-level indicator data built on an improved version of the previous year's pilot questionnaire. However, the sample sizes varied between projects, making overall programme-level analysis and assessment of project-level percentages more difficult, thereby affecting the comparability of results at the programme level. The questions were formulated in such a way that made it difficult to calculate an overall percentage for wellbeing.

Due to this, two separate percentages showing two types of wellbeing were used for the analysis. The first one represents the percentage of respondents whose overall wellbeing improved (95.5%), and the second reflects improved economic wellbeing (67%).

### Lessons learned and plans for the next data collection

The 2024 questionnaire provided useful lessons on how to collect impact-level data. The results will be assessed, and an updated questionnaire will be prepared for 2025. A key lesson learned from this year's process was the importance of providing project staff with clear instructions to ensure smooth data collection and analysis. The updated questionnaire will be tested with the partners in advance of data collection to allow time for improvements.

## 3.2.2 Other signs of impact

### Strengthened inclusion

In Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, the successful efforts of the programme partners to influence institutional reforms, such as anti-discrimination laws, employment quotas, and decentralisation, have enabled more equitable access to services and jobs for minorities, young people, internally displaced people, and returnees. Policy work also contributes to consolidating the rule of law by promoting anti-discrimination and equality legislation, and by facilitating dialogue between policy makers and citizens facing marginalisation. Targeted initiatives and collaboration with municipal institutions in Kosovo have improved access to and the quality of support for repatriated and refugee women and girls, particularly through

trauma-informed services and employment pathways.

The representation of groups in marginalised positions in governance, such as Roma women in Eastern Europe and women in traditionally male-dominated structures in Kenya, has challenged exclusionary norms and advanced equal rights. In parallel, the programme has raised institutional awareness of disability inclusion. In 2024, partners increased their knowledge of, and practices related to, disability rights, safeguarding, and inclusive programming. This has led to greater participation of persons with disabilities in activities involving religious leaders and Roma minorities.

**"I feel like I can defend myself now. Often police or authorities were just humiliating us, treating us like we are not humans. I thought that it is how things are supposed to be, so I just tried to survive. Now I know I can stand for myself. I have a right to it. If something, I know where to go, to whom I should ring. We can solve problems. I can defend myself and my family legally."**

In the Horn of Africa, advocacy efforts paved the way for collaboration with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, advancing the role of religious leaders in regional peace processes. In parallel, the Women of Faith and Interfaith Youth Networks in South Sudan were integrated into their regional counterpart. In Kenya, the programme supported the development of a national framework that integrates mental health and peacebuilding. These achievements are expected to enhance the recognition and inclusion of insider reconcilers, including religious leaders, women and young people in peacebuilding efforts.

### Expanded economic opportunities and education

Increased employment and entrepreneurship among young people and women in marginalised position has led to greater financial independence and reduced poverty. Re-engagement in formal and non-formal

education has opened new pathways for long-term inclusion in the labour market and wider society.

In Tanzania, skills and entrepreneurship training and psychosocial support has played a crucial role in creating sustainable livelihood opportunities and increasing the income of young people in vulnerable situations. The programme successfully enhanced their quality of life.

In Kosovo, the Ministry of Public Administration introduced a new employment category to improve access to jobs for individuals with secondary education, as a result of the programme's efforts to promote workforce inclusion and equal employment opportunities. This has created new opportunities for individuals who previously struggled to meet the requirements for higher-level positions. This initiative addresses a key employment barrier for people in marginalised position, reducing unemployment by opening new pathways to public sector jobs.

**"I started to participate more in a community, to help the others. I realised that working together to demand our rights can actually affect our lives. I became more active with the community outside of my commune."**

An unintended impact in Ethiopia has been the success of the vocational training programmes at Jijiga and Gode Polytechnique Colleges, which has generated greater interest among other young people and local communities, leading to increased demand for similar skills training. This has encouraged vocational training institutions to consider expanding their capacity. Furthermore, additional private sector actors have expressed interest in hiring vocational training graduates, demonstrating growing confidence in the programme's ability to produce skilled workers. These developments have expanded employment opportunities beyond the initial targets.

#### **Improved psychosocial wellbeing and community healing**

In South Sudan, insider reconcilers have become trusted agents of peace and healing. They lead community-based reconciliation efforts, resolve conflicts and support trauma recovery. They have played a critical role in providing much-needed support to communities affected by violence and displacement, including psychosocial support and mediation between displaced populations. This has directly contributed to improved psychosocial wellbeing, community healing and social cohesion.

Historically, Somalia has faced challenges in mental healthcare due to limited access to trained professionals and services, especially following conflict and displacement. The launch of the first psychology programme at the Simad University represents a significant breakthrough. In the long run, it will support national development by strengthening human capital and prioritising mental health as a critical component of public health and social welfare. It lays the groundwork for improved wellbeing at both the individual and societal levels.

In livelihood and socio-economic integration projects, the programme has ensured that participants are equipped not only with technical skills but also receive the psychosocial support and life skills training needed to navigate challenges. This comprehensive approach has enhanced participants' self-confidence, motivation, and sense of belonging, enabling them to contribute to and engage meaningfully with their communities and societies.

## **3.3 Outcome level results**

### **OUTCOME 1**

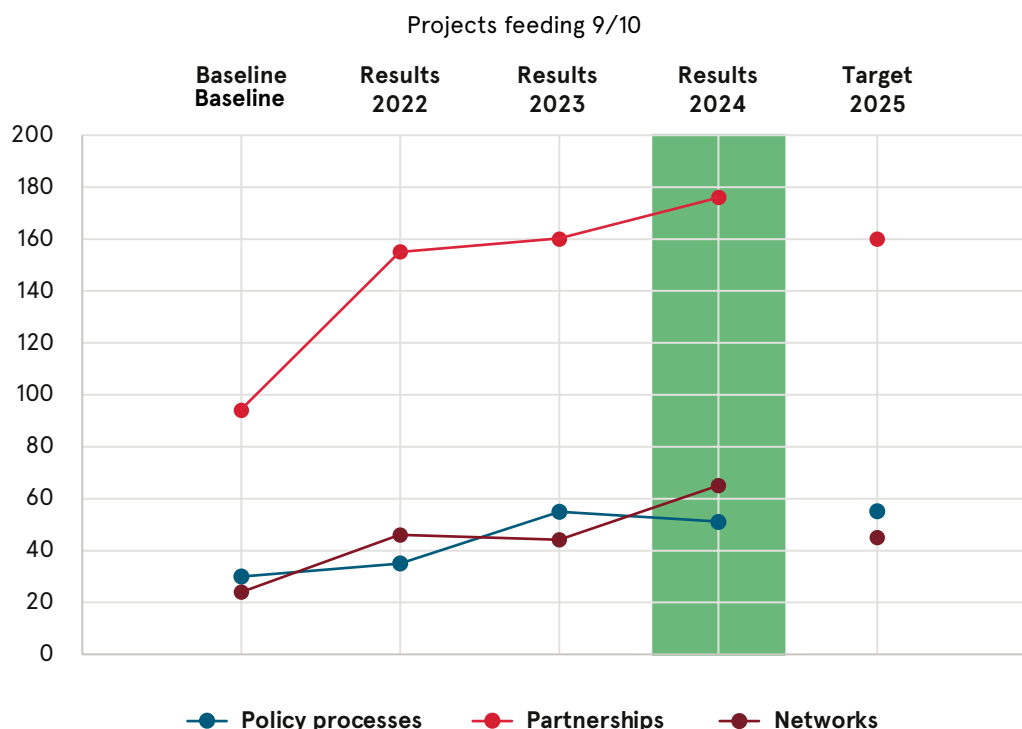
The capacity of the project partners and other targeted civil society actors has been strengthened.



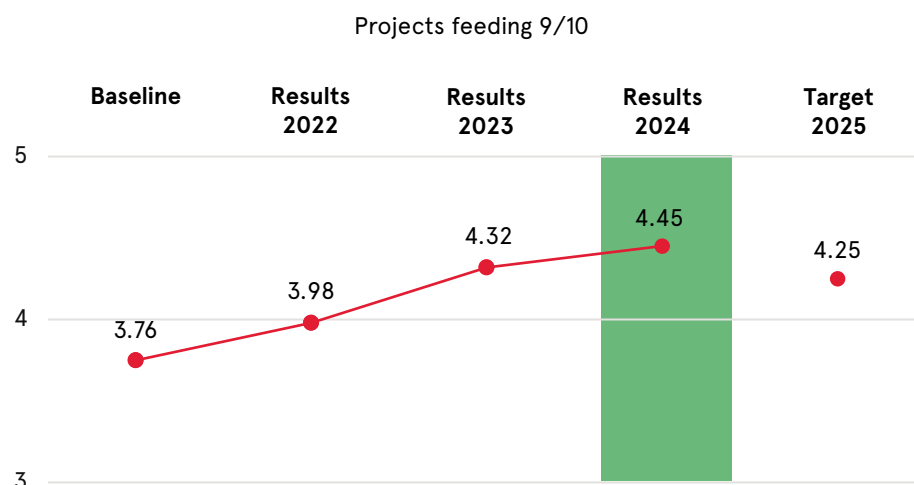
**2024 saw significant collaboration and influence from project partners on legislation related to anti-discrimination, returnees, and internally displaced people in Kosovo and Ukraine, as well as youth and peace and reconciliation policy processes in East Africa. By engaging in 51 policy processes and 65 networks, the partners became more visible, increased their contacts and knowledge, and thereby enhanced their ability to be part of and influence policy processes. Programme partners supported 40 smaller CSOs and activists, strengthening their skills and awareness of policy work. This can further impact the programme-level outcomes. They also increased their organisational capacity, especially in the areas of disability inclusion and safeguarding.**



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



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



**The programme partners influenced policy processes and supported smaller CSOs**

Twelve programme partners in 12 countries monitored, influenced and contributed to 51 policy processes. They did this by representing the needs of the programme's rights-holders in public consultations, publishing briefs and studies, writing statements, and supporting officials in drafting policies and legislation. This policy work took place at the national, local, regional, and international levels. Compared to previous years, there has been an

increased engagement in gender equality and gender-based violence processes. The 12 partners helped about 40 smaller CSOs to learn about influencing policies. Consequently, around 80% of these CSOs now have a better understanding of policy work and are likely to engage in advocacy in the future.

Significant progress was achieved in influencing anti-discrimination legislation, and policies relating to young people and returnees. For example, the newly amended Law on Protection from Discrimination contains 80% of

the recommendations made by the partners in Kosovo. This new legislation provides a much more robust and holistic legal framework to prevent and protect against discrimination and has the potential to better protect the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and other citizens at risk of discrimination. In Ukraine, significant results were achieved in 2024 when the government approved the National Action Plan for Roma, thanks to the advocacy and knowledge support provided to institutions since the beginning of the programme. The next step will be to develop Local Action Plans to ensure implementation at the community level.

Significant progress was also made in contributing to policy development for internally displaced people, including Roma, and highlighting their specific needs among institutions, international organisations and donors.

The programme also advocated for the involvement of religious leaders in policy processes in South Sudan, Ethiopia, and at the regional level. A notable achievement was a policy engagement initiative led by the African Council for Religious Leaders (ACRL), which laid the groundwork for a partnership between the ACRL and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

In Kenya, the programme continued to support the development of the National Framework for the Integration of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and Peacebuilding, which is expected to be adopted in 2025 by several government departments involved in peace and reconciliation. This framework is expected to significantly enhance the recognition and inclusion of insider reconcilers in peacebuilding efforts – an essential programme objective.

### **Increased impact and tackled risks through partnerships**

In 2024, programme partners engaged in a total of 176 partnerships and participated in 65 networks. They collaborated with national and local duty-bearers, CSOs, and the private sector. All partners reported that these partnerships enhanced the quality, influence, and impact of their work. Notably, half of the programme partners joined global or international networks during the year, thereby increasing their visibility and capacity.

Key networks that were essential to the programme's work were continued, strengthened, or established for the first time in 2024. Several partnerships, particularly those with universities, resulted in the publication of studies and policy briefs. In some countries, these have already contributed to enhancing duty-bearers' understanding of the issues addressed. For three partners, long-standing partnerships developed in recent years led to new funding and project opportunities in 2024. Many other partners also identified their current collaborations as potential sources of future funding. Through partnerships with international and humanitarian organisations, several partners were able to facilitate emergency support for the rights-holders they work with. This support was crucial, as it enabled

some participants to access other programme activities that would otherwise have been inaccessible due to urgent needs.

### **Awareness about disability inclusion and safeguarding has increased**

The results of the measurement of the capacities of programme partners have been collected through quarterly and annual reports, as well as an annual questionnaire. The scale ranges from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good). All the partners completed the questionnaire. The average score increased from 4.32 in 2023 to 4.45 in 2024, surpassing the 2025 target of 4.25.

In 2024, the programme focused on increasing the knowledge of programme partners' staff members on disability inclusion and continued efforts to improve safeguarding, programme data collection and reporting, and financial reporting.

Many of the partners shared the knowledge gained from disability inclusion training with staff members and, in some cases, with CSO networks. Consequently, there was an increase in the participation of persons with disabilities in activities involving religious leaders and Roma minorities. Programme-level understanding of psychosocial disabilities improved, as did the identification and inclusion of individuals with such disabilities in data collection, particularly among repatriated women in Kosovo. Additionally, most partners became more aware of organisations of persons with disabilities operating in their regions, and some began to contact them and to explore collaboration opportunities.

Many programme partners started to revise or develop their safeguarding policies and processes, and awareness on the topic among staff members increased. They also shared information about whistleblowing with participants more systematically. One notable success occurred in Tanzania, where members of the Village Child Protection Committees from sixteen villages received training on safeguarding.

Partners in Ethiopia and Somaliland believe that their expertise in youth empowerment, substance abuse, and vocational training has increased through the training of trainers programme delivered by Deaconess Foundation experts from Vamos and through the study visit to Finland organised in 2024. The partners have already started adapting and piloting some of what they learnt in their programme work.

### **Main successes**

- Voice of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian supported nine local Kosovar Roma CSOs through peer learning, a study visit to Serbia, and by connecting them with key institutions. As a result, most of them began monitoring the local implementation of the Roma National Strategy.
- With the programme's active support, the Women of Faith and Interfaith Youth Networks in South Sudan



At the beginning of 2024, the Deaconess Foundation organised a two-day safeguarding training course for Y-Peer staff members in Somaliland. Led by safeguarding specialist Richard Powell, the training aimed to support Y-Peer in developing and implementing safeguarding policies and processes. It also focused on strengthening the organisation's capacity through self-assessment processes.

During the training, Y-Peer developed a safeguarding work plan to guide effective safeguarding practices. This plan emphasised the prevention of sexual abuse, exploitation, and harassment through strict adherence to safeguarding policies. By investing in this training and implementing the safeguarding work plan, Y-Peer aims to ensure the wellbeing and safety of all individuals involved in its programmes and activities. Following the training, the Y-Peer updated its safeguarding policy and the cooperation between Y-Peer's safeguarding focal point and Richard Powell continued.

joined the Africa Women of Faith Network and the Africa Interfaith Youth Network. These memberships will further enhance learning, exchange, and, ultimately, the sustainability of the networks.

- The Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims signed memoranda of understanding with nine Social Welfare Centres and is finalising nine more. These partnerships will enable continued training and collaboration beyond the programme.
- The Roma Women Fund Chiricli joined the Ukraine-EU Policy Dialogue Working Group. This will enhance their understanding of EU policies and standards, and increase opportunities to highlight Roma issues at both the EU and Ukrainian parliamentary levels.

## Challenges

In order to represent the programme's rights-holders, the programme partners had to cover many areas of policy

and legislation. To do so, they needed time and human resources and the opportunity to acquire knowledge in new areas. The volume of work was high, partly because public institutions often had limited knowledge and the partners had to contribute to actually drafting documents. The partners did not have the resources to cover all processes with the same intensity as they would have liked. They addressed this by prioritising engagements based on their potential impact and necessity.

The successes achieved in 2024 regarding the women reconcilers and Roma women entrepreneurs' networks remain fragile, as the women have little experience of such initiatives and are also affected by gender-based inequalities and sometimes violence. A women's leadership programme was identified in Eastern Europe as a suitable action to strengthen the networks. Regarding reconcilers, their knowledge of policy work and advocacy must be strengthened further.



## Lessons learned

The advocacy work of the programme partners has been strong and distinctive, particularly when they organised monitoring visits, dialogues and meetings between the programme participants and the duty-bearers. On such occasions, the relevant duty-bearers heard first-hand about the concrete human rights challenges faced by people in marginalised positions. These meetings also increased the credibility and influence of the partners, as the officials recognised their trusted and good connection to rights-holders.

## OUTCOME 2

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



The programme increased local business participation in employing young people facing marginalisation and minorities in Kosovo, Ethiopia, and Tanzania. In 2024, the target in East Africa was surpassed and progress in Eastern Europe was positive. Partners created successful connections with businesses, leading to more employment opportunities than expected, notably in Tanzania. However, despite efforts to encourage it, the employment of persons with disabilities remained modest as companies are still hesitant to hire them.

### Inclusive labour market achievements in youth and women's employment

A total of 61 private, public and third sector employers

hired 175 young people and minority women. Of these, 72 were women and 103 were young men, including six persons with disabilities. Of the 61 employers, 27 businesses offered apprenticeships for young people and then hired them after the training period. The sectors included tailoring, tourism, tea production, mechanics and auto mechanics, secretarial science, plumbing, carpentry, catering and beautification among others. Some of the businesses and institutions were the same as in previous years.

In 2024, employers hired between one and more than ten young people and/or women per company. In Tanzania, two Chinese marine board processing companies hired over 20 young people. The contracts signed vary depending on the context: In Tanzania, contracts are mostly signed for one year at a time, while in Ethiopia they are permanent. In Kosovo, most women have fixed-term contracts.

In addition to direct employment, in Kosovo, seven new memoranda of understanding have been established with professional course providers and other potential employers from catering and beautification. In Ethiopia, 55 young people (19 young women and 36 young men) who had completed vocational, entrepreneurship or Vamos life-skills training but had not been hired by employers founded their own businesses, cooperatives or found another way to secure a decent livelihood. In Tanzania, the number of employing companies has decreased since 2023, as many young people who previously worked in local companies established their own businesses after saving capital from their salaries. The rest, like the majority of young people in Ethiopia, are still employed by the businesses that hired them in 2022 or 2023.

This progress indicates a positive shift in employer attitudes and commitments, marking a substantial step toward fostering an inclusive and sustainable labour market. Unemployment among young people and minority women is extremely severe in Ethiopia, Kosovo and Tanzania. Thus, the programme used various measures to increase the employability of these groups, including skills training, the creation of active

INDICATOR	BASELINE	RESULTS 2022	RESULTS 2023	RESULTS 2024	TARGET 2025
1. Number of employers who have employed marginalised young people and minorities. Projects feeding: 3/10	East Africa: 0	22	101	57	200*
	Kosovo: 0	0	2	4	10

\*Revised in 2025



In June 2024, one of the Kosovar programme partners, the Jesuit Refugee Service, brought together successful businesswomen from beautification, pastry making and tailoring sectors from Ferizaj. The entrepreneurs were brought together to discuss the best ways to create new opportunities and pathways for repatriated and refugee women seeking to rebuild their lives. A representative from the Department of Reintegration of Repatriated Persons and Integration of Foreigners of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kosovo also attended the gathering.

After the meeting, two memoranda of understanding were signed with beauty sector businesses and three more are being prepared with businesses in pastry making, retail trade and tailoring. Through initiatives such as this, the programme aims to establish a Kosovo-wide network of businesses offering skills training, mentoring and employment opportunities, and to provide a safe space for women in vulnerable positions.

market-linkage, organising multi-stakeholder events, and psychosocial and life-skills coaching. In Tanzania, most of the young people in employment managed to secure it by themselves after receiving coaching in job hunting and motivation.

### Main successes

- Mapping relevant sectors and engaging with potential employers was successful and led to increased employment of minority women and young people from marginalised positions, both in Eastern Europe and East Africa
- At the beginning of the programme, reaching employers from various sectors was challenging, but the partners' persistent efforts are now paying off, with more employers hiring project participants. Increased awareness of inclusion has been a key factor.
- Psychosocial support, including Vamos coaching and peer support, has significantly contributed to the good results, as they have prepared the participants for goal setting and increased their motivation.

### Lessons learned

To increase the overall knowledge and appreciation of inclusivity, especially with regard to persons with disabilities, continuous advocacy efforts are needed in all operating regions. In the Horn of Africa in particular, advocacy is also needed to change the young people's perception of the benefits of vocational education regarding possibilities for employment. In Ethiopia, the programme's efforts to bring the vocational education and training institutions and the private sector closer together have proven to be a successful strategy to

enhance market linkages. In addition, in Ethiopia, the commitment of public sector institutions to hire young people from vulnerable positions has had a positive, unexpected result. In Kosovo, a holistic strategy combining vocational training, mentorship, and community support has been shown to promote long-term socio-economic empowerment.

In each operating context, the project team follows or is aware of the needs and situation of the employed participants and can therefore provide support and enhance the long-term commitment to the employment. Youth and women may face challenges relating to family obligations or other commitments. For example, women who receive encouragement from their families are more likely to succeed professionally.

### Challenges

In all countries of operation, unemployment rates are extremely high, and competition for jobs and markets is intense. In addition, nepotism is particularly prevalent, especially in the Horn of Africa, and the few jobs that are available are mostly offered to relatives or other people from the employer's immediate networks. High unemployment is also causing desperation, and projects sometimes struggle to meet the participants' expectations, which may be unrealistic in terms of the chances of getting or remuneration. In addition, despite efforts to encourage them, companies remain reluctant to hire individuals with disabilities.

The activities of the Deaconess Foundation are organised into three categories: non-profit activities, social and healthcare business operations, and education services. Together, these constitute the non-profit Foundation Group, for which profitable business is primarily a means to build a more just society. All the Group's profits – €5.5 million in 2024 – are used to benefit people in vulnerable positions in Finland and around the world.

The social and health care business is produced by Rinnekodit Oy, which is fully owned by the Deaconess Foundation. Rinnekodit is the largest private social enterprise producing social and health care services in Finland, serving nearly 5,000 customers. It is one of the leading actors in Finland in advancing self-determination and participation of persons with disabilities, older people, young people and people with substance abuse issues. This unique position has also enabled the Deaconess Foundation's development cooperation work to utilise expertise from the corporate side.

### OUTCOME 3

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



**The results have been excellent, meeting the expected outcomes for both indicators. Local officials and service providers rated services as high quality. Advocacy efforts led to the revision of five policy documents and the development of research papers. The targets were achieved, and, in the case of policy documents and research papers, was revised due to significantly exceeding the original target. Data was collected in Belarus, Kosovo, Moldova, Ukraine, Somaliland, and Tanzania.**

#### **Strengthening more inclusive services through policy changes and capacity building of authorities**

There has been progress in making services in the employment, education and healthcare sectors more accessible to people facing marginalisation, such as Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (RAE), persons with disabilities, and young people in vulnerable positions. The results show that the local officials, authorities, and service providers have improved their knowledge and skills concerning inclusion, disability rights and minority issues, and they are more engaged in promoting the rights of people facing marginalisation. The results have been collected only from the service providers and officials, not from the end-users, in order to make the analysis smoother. The officials represent different

bodies, such as Employment Agencies, local government officials, the Transcarpathia Regional Department on National Minorities, the Village Child Protection Committee, and the Research Institute of Labour under the Ministry of Labour.

New regulations and decentralisation policies have supported the positive institutional changes and the long-term inclusion of people facing marginalisation in public services. Cooperation between CSOs, stakeholders, officials, and communities has also been strengthened in order to work together, and structures, such as roundtables and child protection committees, have become more effective.

Through various training courses and roundtable discussions, local authorities in Kosovo and Tanzania have become more aware of the current situation and needs of RAE communities, young people facing marginalisation and children and young persons with disabilities. The awareness of employment challenges RAE communities are facing, and the existing mechanisms to support the public institutions in recruiting minorities have improved. Service providers have also gained a better understanding of the situation of children and young persons with disabilities and how to support them. They are also more aware of community issues such as child abuse and reproductive health.

Decentralisation policies have enabled local authorities to provide more accessible healthcare and primary education services to young people from minority groups. The new institutional policy changes in Kosovo and Somaliland have paved the way for further institutional changes. In Kosovo, the 10% employment quota has improved the opportunities for RAE communities to access the governmental and public sector jobs. In Somaliland, the control of public services has been moved from the central government to the local authorities in three regions.

In Tanzania, the cooperation between the Village Child Protection Committees, the partner CSO and the village government has improved officials' ability to identify and



INDICATOR	BASELINE	RESULTS 2022	RESULTS 2023	RESULTS 2024	TARGET 2025
1. Improved quality, inclusiveness and functionality of services provided by local authorities and other service providers to marginalised young people and minorities Projects feeding: 5/10	Average rating of services in Eastern Europe: 3.4 / 5.0	N/A	4.05	4.15	4.2
	Average rating of services in East Africa:				
	Tanzania 2.56 / 5.0	2.89	4.0	4.0	4.0
	Somaliland N/A	N/A	N/A	3.95	4.1
2. The number of documents that include specific needs of marginalised young people and minorities are developed or revised by local authorities and other service providers Projects feeding: 2/10	0	2	7	5	17*

\*Revised in 2025

address the needs of young people and children with disabilities. The relationship between local authorities and the community has been strengthened.

Integrating minority rights and needs in local and national policies in Eastern Europe

During 2024, efforts to address the needs and rights of minorities in accessing services and in the employment sector have been successful. Policy influence and institutional engagement have been strengthened, with advocacy work, community empowerment and data collection being key elements for the long-term change.

In Kosovo, a new initiative called "Professional 3" has been introduced to public institutions to facilitate the hiring of people from RAE communities, who have only completed high school. This ensures better access to employment and promotes workforce inclusion. The authorities have gained a better understanding of the barriers that the RAE communities face in recruitment processes. Additionally, a database has been developed to support and monitor the employment of RAE communities in the public sector, and has been introduced to human resource personnel at both central and local level public institutions. This database enables institutions to track the employment status of people facing marginalisation, identify gaps in meeting established quotas, and take necessary measures to ensure compliance.

The report "Women with Disabilities in Moldova: Invisible Victims for Law and Society" was the first report in Moldova to provide in-depth and disaggregated data

on the situation, needs, and rights of women with disabilities. It was used to initiate critical conversations with national and local stakeholders, including members of Parliament, ministries, local authorities, and civil society organisations. It offered the first evidence-based analysis of the unique barriers faced by this group, including lack of access to justice services and limited social services. One of the most alarming findings of the report was the high exposure of women with disabilities to domestic violence. As a result, the report raised awareness on the intersectional discrimination experienced by women with disabilities; gave inclusive recommendations to the 2024–2025 National Human Rights Action Plan, and initiated dialogue with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection on improving institutional responses to violence and accessibility of support services.

### Main successes

- A total of 594 local-level officials have improved their knowledge and skills in areas such as inclusion, disability rights, and minority issues, and are now more aware and actively engaged in promoting the rights of minorities.
- The programme's advocacy efforts to promote the human rights of the Roma have reached 230 duty-bearers.
- New regulations and decentralisation policy have supported the positive institutional change, and

long-term inclusion of people facing marginalisation in public services.

- Cooperation between CSOs, stakeholders, officials, and communities has strengthened.

### Challenges

The main challenges facing all projects are still existing institutional barriers, accessibility gaps affecting persons with disabilities and minorities, different cultural stigmas, taboos, and lack of knowledge on social services and supporting mechanisms. Roma women with disabilities often face intersectional discrimination, placing them in a vulnerable position due to the lack of inclusive access to services and specialised support.

In the programme's operating environments, cultural norms often prevent cases of violence from being reported, especially among women and children with disabilities. Efforts toward making services more accessible and inclusive can be hindered by funding cuts or insufficient resources of authorities. Access to public services is especially weak in conflict zones and among displaced people, particularly within minority

communities.

### Lessons learned

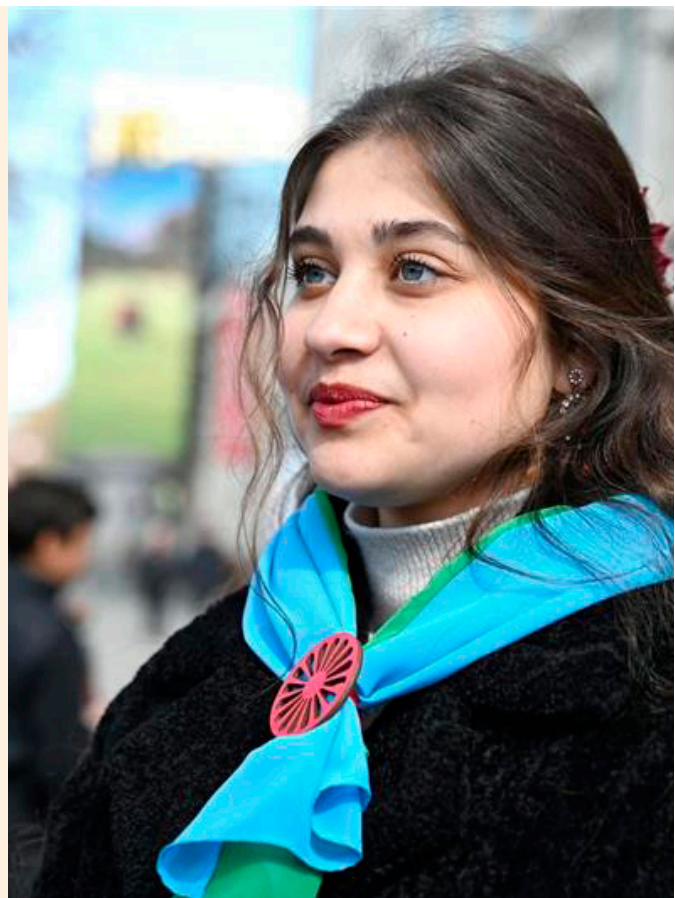
There is still a need for more inclusive and accessible services for persons with disabilities and minorities. It is necessary to monitor the fulfilment of the rights of people facing marginalisation and the availability of services. The disaggregated data about Roma persons with disabilities, as well as the kind of barriers the RAE communities face, and the employment patterns and skill gaps, are needed to inform the design of future projects. Research based on specific and disaggregated data and analyses will improve the initiatives towards the authorities and help in the design of more tailored interventions to address the specific needs of people facing marginalisation. Market research is also needed to compare labour market demands with the existing skills of job seekers. Strengthening job matching mechanisms can improve recruitment and ensure that interventions align with market needs.

Photo: Moldsolidaritate

In 2024, in the Drochia district in northern Moldova, a young Roma mediator Romanita Radita, who had been trained and supported by the programme, was appointed as a permanent member of the local advisory council. Shortly after joining the council, she began raising the voices of Roma mothers and young people, who previously had little to no interaction with the municipality.

Thanks to Radita's advocacy and persistence, the local kindergarten in the Roma neighbourhood extended its schedule to better serve children of single mothers who work long hours or informally. For the first time, Roma children were explicitly included in the priority list for preschool enrolment, and the staff received basic training on working in intercultural environments. Also, the district's family doctor agreed to begin monthly visits to the Roma community—providing check-ups and consultations for women with disabilities, elderly persons, and mothers with infants.

This example demonstrates how the increased participation of minorities in decision-making can lead to meaningful changes towards more inclusive and functional services. In this case, the change went even deeper by restoring trust between families and local authorities. Community members reported feeling "finally seen and listened to".



## OUTCOME 4

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



**2024 was significant in terms of equipping insider reconcilers and officials with practical and applicable knowledge and skills in peace and reconciliation processes, psychosocial support, trauma awareness and healing, as well as specialised services for refugees and repatriated people. A total of 495 insider reconcilers and officials were trained in the Horn of Africa region and Kosovo in three projects. On average, 77% of the people trained were able to assimilate what they had learnt into their work within the same year. As many as 344 insider reconcilers participated in 83 peace and reconciliation processes in total. Data for this outcome was collected in Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Kosovo.**

### Insider reconcilers utilised their new skills and knowledge in reconciliation and trauma healing

In 2024, 77% of the trained insider reconcilers and officials applied their new skills and knowledge in their work. The number of trained people nearly doubled from previous years, largely due to Kosovo's contribution of 187 participants. In the Horn of Africa, insider reconcilers applied their new skills to develop healing-centred methodologies for reconciliation activities, to facilitate healing circles and to teach others about trauma, mental health and psychosocial support and provided support to over 2,600 rights-holders. In South Sudan, insider reconcilers, who are mainly religious leaders and women or youth leaders, integrated trauma healing techniques into their sermons and outreach activities. They also played pivotal roles in community reconciliations and assisted internally displaced people, returnees and refugees.

In Kosovo, the training programme on the trauma-informed approach demonstrated remarkable success, with 96.9% of participants (181 out of 187) reporting that they have effectively applied the skills and knowledge gained in their daily work with repatriated people and refugees. The participants, mainly social workers, provided psychological first aid, employed trauma-sensitive approaches, offered psychosocial support and/or effectively used the referral system.

INDICATOR	BASELINE	RESULTS 2022	RESULTS 2023	RESULTS 2024	TARGET 2025
1. Number and percentage of insider reconcilers and officials who, after the training, use new skills and knowledge in reconciliation work and specialised services for refugees or repatriated. Projects feeding: 3/10	0	145 (57%)	140 (78%)	443 (76%)	1000* (80%) (cumulative)
2. Number of insider reconcilers participating in peace and reconciliation processes. Number and types of processes. Projects feeding: 2/10	65 9 processes	266 9	205 48	344 83	900 70 processes annually*

\*Revised in 2025



## Increased participation of insider reconcilers in peace and reconciliation processes

The programme encourages insider reconcilers to participate in various peace and reconciliation processes within their communities. In 2024, a total of 344 insider reconcilers participated in 83 peace and reconciliation processes in total, including the International Day of Peace celebrations, community reconciliation programmes, post-cattle theft return reconciliations, the National Healing and Reconciliation Programme, early warning and early response programmes, national reconciliation processes and commissions, and local processes such as healing circles.

For example, in South Sudan, insider reconcilers have been instrumental in community-based reconciliation initiatives and post-cattle theft return mediation efforts. In Warrap State, insider reconcilers—among them religious leaders, women of faith, young people, and traditional chiefs—worked together to mediate disputes arising from cattle raids. These efforts have helped to reach agreements for the return of stolen livestock and compensation for affected communities, helping to prevent retaliatory violence and rebuild trust among conflicting groups.

In Somalia, the number of young insider reconcilers participating in peace and reconciliation processes has increased. One of the main success factors behind this positive development is the Student Peace Initiative launched in 2023 at Simad University in Mogadishu.

### Main successes

- MHPSS was included in the National Reconciliation Framework Strategic Plan in Somalia. This five-year plan focuses on grassroots engagement and capacity building to address mental health challenges and promote sustainable peace and unity in Somalia.
- Simad University in Mogadishu has launched a psychology programme in collaboration with the programme partner Maandeeq Mental Health. This programme supports national development by strengthening mental health and education and prioritising mental health as a critical component of public health.
- The Interreligious Council of South Sudan has used its growing institutional capacity to initiate partnership discussions with UNICEF South Sudan, including preparing a proposal for funding support.
- The training programme in Kosovo has not only improved the way social workers engage with repatriated and refugee women and girls, but the skills are also widely applied to support other groups in vulnerable position.

### Challenges

The main challenge for the regional Peace & Trust project remains that engagement tends to come mainly from CSOs and less from government duty-bearers.

However, progress has already been made since previous years, especially in Somalia and Kenya. In South Sudan, ongoing political unrest and sporadic violence continue to pose challenges for the safe implementation of reconciliation initiatives and engagement with communities, particularly in regions experiencing active conflict. Furthermore, poor road infrastructure and heavy rainfall frequently hindered the mobility and effectiveness of insider reconcilers in reaching and supporting communities in the rural areas.

In Kosovo, the postponement of planned trainings by state institutions demonstrated the need for stronger collaboration and shared decision-making between them and civil society organisations. This would help to align decisions with both procedural requirements and needs of the training participants, state officials supporting vulnerable populations, especially repatriated people and refugees, including trauma survivors.

### Lessons Learned

For both projects in the Horn of Africa region, continuous training and support are essential for equipping insider reconcilers with the skills necessary to navigate complex reconciliation landscapes effectively. Sustainable peace is more achievable when reconciliation efforts are inclusive, involving all community groups, especially those facing marginalisation. A flexible approach allows for adjustments in response to evolving political and social dynamics, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of peace initiatives. By integrating self-care, the training programme in Kosovo addressed issues like secondary trauma and burnout, boosting participants' confidence and resilience.

Insider reconcilers are individuals who belong to a group or community currently experiencing violent conflict and actively working to reconcile this conflict. They can be community leaders, faith leaders, women leaders, youth leaders or minority leaders.

Photo: Maandeeq Mental Health



The Student Peace Initiative (SPI) is a student-led initiative in Somalia that addresses the urgent need for social wellbeing and healing within communities affected by conflict and war. SPI members are emerging insider reconcilers who are being mentored by more experienced insider reconcilers, ensuring continuity of reconciliation leadership from within affected communities.

SPI members engage in grassroots activities that contribute to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and peacebuilding, including advocacy, awareness-raising, and community engagement initiatives aimed at fostering dialogue, understanding, and social cohesion. They also facilitate psychoeducation sessions for secondary and post-secondary students, equipping them with the knowledge and coping tools to support their mental health. SPI members also play a leading role in the Neighbourhood Peace Partnership, contributing to localised peace efforts through structured community collaboration.

The SPI is set to expand in the coming years, both within Somalia and in the neighbouring countries, further amplifying the role of young people as agents of social healing and transformation in the region.

## OUTCOME 5

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



Overall progress in outcome 5 is well on track. Participation in communities and societies has significantly increased in East Africa compared to previous years, in particular through employment and community participation. This change has benefited young people in marginalised position, including those from minorities, those who are internally displaced, young persons with disabilities and single mothers. In Eastern Europe, participation levels of young Roma, women and men, as well as repatriated and refugee women and girls, have remained at a high level, despite a very slight decrease. The results for this outcome were collected in Belarus, Kosovo, Moldova, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Somaliland, South Sudan, and Tanzania.

## Greater participation in local communities and societies achieved

The community involvement targets for 2025 have already been achieved in both Eastern Europe and East Africa. In Eastern Europe, we are close to meeting the employment participation target, whereas in East Africa this target has already been met. Participation through education, specifically activities outside our programme that are supported by it, is progressing more slowly, with a slight decline compared to 2023. Clearly, achieving the set targets in this area will require additional efforts in both regions.

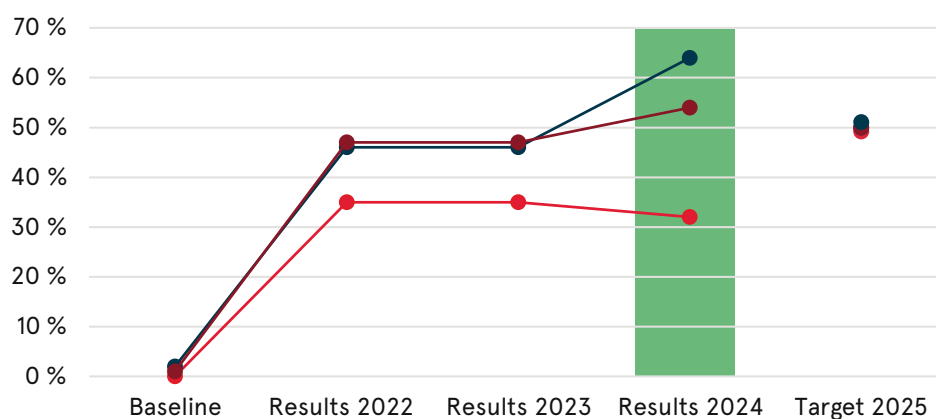
The programme has successfully facilitated the creation of community engagement, educational opportunities, and business and employment prospects for its participants. It has increased the level of vocational education, digital literacy, employment, and development of business competencies among, Roma and repatriated women as well young people from vulnerable backgrounds (including single parents, minorities, persons with disabilities, and internally displaced people). This has contributed to greater financial independence and improved wellbeing of young people and women in marginalised positions, and has reduced poverty levels.

Thanks to psychosocial support, educational assistance, and re-engagement programmes, 30% of programme participants attended education. A high number of young people in marginalised position are

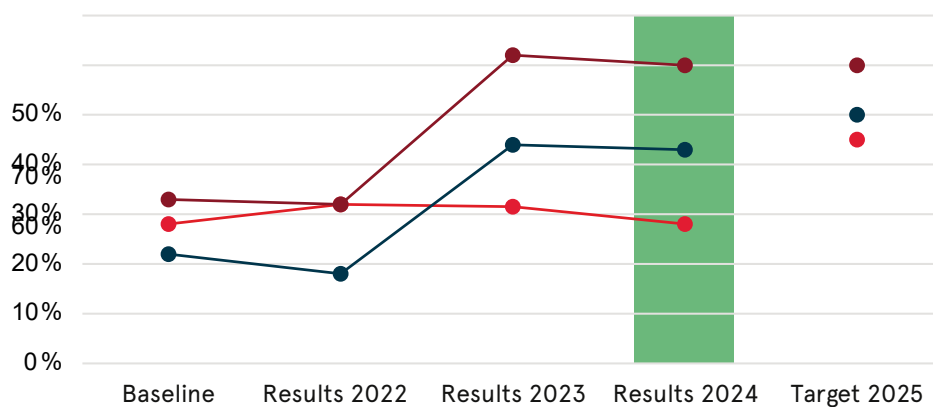
**Indicator 1. Increased participation of minorities, marginalised young people and people affected by conflicts in local communities and societies.**

Projects feeding 7/10

**Eastern Europe**



**East Africa**



- Attend education
- Are employed or selfemployed
- Participate in local communities and societies

INDICATOR	BASELINE	RESULTS 2022	RESULTS 2023	RESULTS 2024	TARGET 2025
2. Number of civic actions, initiatives, campaigns and policy dialogues implemented by minorities, marginalised young people and people affected by conflicts and partners. Projects feeding: 4/10	Eastern Europe: 0	N/A	99	25	150
	East Africa: 0	N/A	N/A	4	4
3. Percentage of minorities, marginalised young people or people affected by conflicts who are employed, have established their own business, or have developed other decent livelihood after the trainings. Projects feeding: 7/10	Eastern Europe: 0	18%	53%	57%	60%
	East Africa: 0	42%	46%	59%	

Photo: Organization for Welfare and Development in Action



Hilaal Mataan Bashir lives in Gode City, Ethiopia. Due to her family's financial difficulties, she had to leave school to contribute to her family's income. The many challenges they faced left her feeling hopeless about her future.

With the support of the programme, Hilaal received a short training at Gode Polytechnic college, where she learned hairdressing and beauty care. She also attended entrepreneurship training and was provided with basic equipment for a beauty salon and a small amount of start-up capital.

Hilaal now runs her own beauty salon and sells women's clothing, which provides her stable income. She is also using her salon as a teaching and learning centre, charging 300 Ethiopian birr for a one-month training program for each trainee. Currently, she has 12 girls enrolled in her vocational training, and 19 graduates have successfully started their own businesses. Her monthly income has risen to 15,000 Ethiopian birr after covering her expenses, allowing her to support her family and save money for the future.



now enrolled in secondary school, vocational school or university in East Africa. In Ethiopia, activities focused on youth education were successful, with 47% of young people in education following the Vamos training. Additionally, an increased number of women in vulnerable positions are now pursuing non-formal education, such as short-term courses like language classes or vocational training in Eastern Europe. Overall, the programme has contributed to equipping participants with the necessary skills and qualifications for future employment.

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. Currently 57% of programme participants engaged in communities and society. The spectrum of engagement is broad, and ranges from interacting with neighbours as a first step for the ones in most vulnerable position, to memberships in associations and organisations, policy dialogues, representation in youth committees and parents' committees, or engagement in women's and youth groups.

In Eastern Europe, community involvement expanded to include 60 Roma women engaged in local governance, advocating for access to essential services and policy reforms. In East Africa, strong focus on groups facing marginalisation, minority youth, young people with disabilities and internally displaced youths have ensured broader representation, inclusion and engagement in communities. Youth have gained self-confidence and the ability to see opportunities around them and seize them. In Ethiopia, connecting young people with local organisations, advocacy groups, and professional networks has facilitated sustained participation. This highlights the programme's effectiveness in promoting active citizenship, strengthening leadership skills, and encouraging the greater participation of our target groups in social and political spheres.

Significant progress in participation has also been achieved through increased employment. Across the programme, 54% of programme participants got employed or self-employed. In Eastern Europe, supporting digital and professional training for women, developing business competencies and supporting start-ups has brought good results. In-depth needs mapping and identification of local women leaders allowed financial resources to be directed toward women-led initiatives that truly made a difference for Roma communities.

In Kosovo, 70% of the young people who took part in the My First Job programme obtained jobs through it in food chains, shopping centres, hairdressing and makeup businesses. In East Africa, advancing employment and self-employment of minority and economically vulnerable young people has been achieved through targeted initiatives such as Vamos training, technical and vocational education and training, entrepreneurship training, on-the-job training and

start-up grants. In Somaliland, youth unemployment significantly decreased, with 31% more young people working permanently, occasionally or running their own business compared to baseline.

### **Civic actions and campaigns promoted gender equality, cultural diversity, and Roma women's inclusion**

Rights-holders participated in 29 civic actions, informational campaigns, events and policy dialogues led by the programme partners, contributing significantly to the progress towards the 2025 target. Those various initiatives emphasised the importance of supporting persons with disabilities, women and girls, particularly Roma women, in various aspects of society, including representation in policy making. By promoting tolerance and understanding amongst the wider population, campaigns and public events have helped break down barriers to participation.

In Eastern Europe, campaigns organised as part of the International Days of the Girl Child or the International Romani day highlighted issues of critical importance to communities facing marginalisation, bringing them to the attention of the general public and policymakers. In Kosovo, 1,000 people from different communities were united for the time of the 6th Multicultural Festival, to celebrate cultural diversity, and community building. By reinforcing the cultural heritage of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, this event also strengthens inclusion in Kosovar society. Dialogues and national and international events related to Ukraine focused on engaging policymakers to address gaps in inclusion, advocate for Roma women's rights, and ensure their perspectives are represented in recovery and reconstruction plans.

In addition, the Inter-Religious Council of South Sudan, in collaboration with the Law Union, held an advocacy meeting with the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defence. The meeting aimed to advocate for the rights of persons living with disabilities and their inclusion in security sector reforms.

### **Significant progress on the employment path of young people facing marginalisation and minorities**

In 2024, around 850 (59%) of repatriated women, young people and Roma women in marginalised position found jobs, started their own businesses, or developed other decent livelihoods with the support of the programme. This adds to the 613 individuals who did the same during 2022–2023. The 2025 target for this indicator is 60%. By the end of 2024, we had already reached 98% of it. The majority of participants sought employment over setting up a business.

Employment has been fostered by a successful combination of mentoring and career guidance, soft skills, leadership, entrepreneurship, vocational skills training, provision of start-up kits and increased private sector engagement. Participants reported that the

programme was highly beneficial, particularly in boosting self-confidence, acquiring new skills and qualifications, and encouraging them to seek employment. The transformative impact of soft skills such as life management skills and goal-setting is underscored, fostering positive behavioural changes.

In Eastern Europe, participants have found full- or part-time employment in sectors such as beautification, CSOs and maintenance. They have also established businesses in tailoring, digital entrepreneurship, beauty services or decorative item production. In Kosovo, 37% of participants applied for jobs after training and strong employer partnerships increased job placements for trained young people. Over 70 cooperation agreements were signed with companies. Notably this year, 14 of these companies also provided financial contributions to support participant salaries, reflecting increased private sector's engagement.

In East Africa, the vocational skills training programmes have helped young people, including those with disabilities, to establish businesses in sectors such as tailoring, plumbing, beautification, multimedia or graphic design. Additionally, the programme assisted young entrepreneurs by providing grants to groups, enabling them to start businesses in beautification and other vocational fields. In the Somali region of Ethiopia, collaboration with Jijiga and Gode Polytechnique Colleges to train young people has led to employment opportunities with local employers in transport and logistics and the Water and Sewage Authorities of Jijiga and Gode. In Tanzania, government officials have commended the programme for its contribution to reducing incidents of gender-based violence through the economic inclusion of women.

### Main successes

- In Kosovo, psychosocial support groups have provided repatriated women with spaces to share experiences, build inner strength, and find motivation to seek new opportunities in life. Holding meetings in municipal institutions has helped rebuild trust in public services.
- In Ethiopia, 100% of young people who received vocational and entrepreneurship training were employed. This success was due to the excellent work done in creating market linkages to employers.
- Roma women's business networks have been key in disseminating business skills and fostering entrepreneurship among Roma. Training courses with business experts and access to an online business hub have helped Roma women integrate in national entrepreneurship networks.
- In Tanzania, over 70% of young people participating in the programme have found employment, become self-employed, or developed other sustainable livelihoods, giving them more possibilities to influence their lives.

### Challenges

Traditional norms, cultural barriers and illiteracy significantly hinder the participation of groups in vulnerable positions in leadership roles and employment in both regions of the programme. In Eastern Europe, for instance, these factors prevent girls from choosing professions related to technology and science. The perception of women in Roma families as domestic workers limits their professional careers and is compounded by prevalent domestic violence.

In Kosovo, inflation has reduced the value of wages, impacting financial stability and leading many to rely on social assistance. Additionally, visa liberalisation has prompted young people to travel to Europe, affecting local job markets and educational sectors, resulting in lower employment retention and a decline in university enrolments for the 2024/25 academic year.

In Somaliland and Ethiopia, persistent job market inequality and inadequate support from financial institutions restrict young people facing marginalisation from accessing stable employment and securing funding for entrepreneurial ventures. In South Sudan, young people facing marginalisation and returnees face a lack of economic empowerment opportunities, making sustained civic engagement a problem.

### Lessons learnt

To effectively address domestic violence within Roma families, it is necessary to consistently implement prevention measures such as family role-playing games, group discussions, legal consultations for women, and training sessions for Roma judges and activists.

To improve engagement in East Africa, the programme should integrate counselling and raise awareness of its benefits, creating a supportive, confidential, and accessible environment that encourages young people, especially girls, to participate. Providing mentorship and pathways into leadership roles can sustain engagement. In Somaliland, expanding VAMOS training sessions to more centres for internally displaced people in Hargeisa would enable the programme to reach a broader youth audience and enhance their life management and entrepreneurial skills.

Systematic policy engagement and community education programmes are essential to reducing stigma and improving the participation of groups in vulnerable positions in governance and peace processes.

## OUTCOME 6

Awareness in Finland has increased regarding development cooperation, the issues of marginalised youth and minorities, reconciliation, and the business potential in Africa.



**Good progress has been made towards the targets for the programme period. Communication activities reached more than 450,000 Finnish people in 2024, and some of the targets revised last year have already been surpassed.**

In addition to its communication and advocacy efforts in the programme countries, the Deaconess Foundation's programme includes communications and advocacy in Finland, as well as activities to promote decolonisation among Finnish development cooperation CSOs, to encourage Finnish companies to do business in African countries, and to diversify Finnish people's views on Africa.

In 2024, the Deaconess Foundation published programme-related content on its website, social media, and other channels. The Foundation also organised events and reached out to the media to spark interest in the themes related to the programme work.

The main communication topics of the programme are 1) bringing forth the voices and perspectives of the rights-holders the programme supports, 2) disseminating information about the results and challenges of the

Deaconess Foundation's development cooperation, and 3) highlighting the importance and the ways of respecting and protecting human dignity and human rights.

### Finnish people's views on Africa have diversified

The indicators measuring the number of people reached with programme communication are back on track, following a slight decline in 2023.

At output level, the number of publications has increased significantly, with a 52% increase from 2023. There were a particularly large number of posts under output 6.3, communicating the importance and ways of respecting and protecting human dignity and human rights and combating discrimination. The target for the entire programme period for this output has already been surpassed, despite target revisions made in 2024.

On the outcome level, the newly revised targets for the programme period were also exceeded with regard to the reach of social media posts, articles and blogs as well as event participants. Thus, the two cumulative targets were again amended.

The significant reach and the number of social media posts in 2024 was mainly due to two major campaigns: one promoting the EU's role in advancing human rights and peace before European parliamentary elections targeting Finnish voters and decision makers; and the Partnering for Change project campaign, which aimed to diversify Finnish people's views on Africa. Both campaigns featured good-quality video content, which was advertised to reach more people.

Articles published in relation to the Partnering for Change project were also very popular, particularly those related to the above-mentioned campaign and to the Nigeria forum, which was organised in May.

East Africa Youth Peace Network brings diaspora young people in Finland together to promote peace

INDICATOR	BASELINE	RESULTS 2022	RESULTS 2023	RESULTS 2024	TARGET 2025
Number of people reached through webpages of international cooperation	2,018	3,404	2,944	3,390	4,000
Number of views of social media posts	48,798	150,180	111,970	456,853	850,000*
Number of people who attended events	219	250	620	1,718	2,800*
Number of individual views of articles and blogs	1,577	2,789	2,167	4,247	8,000

\*Revised in 2025

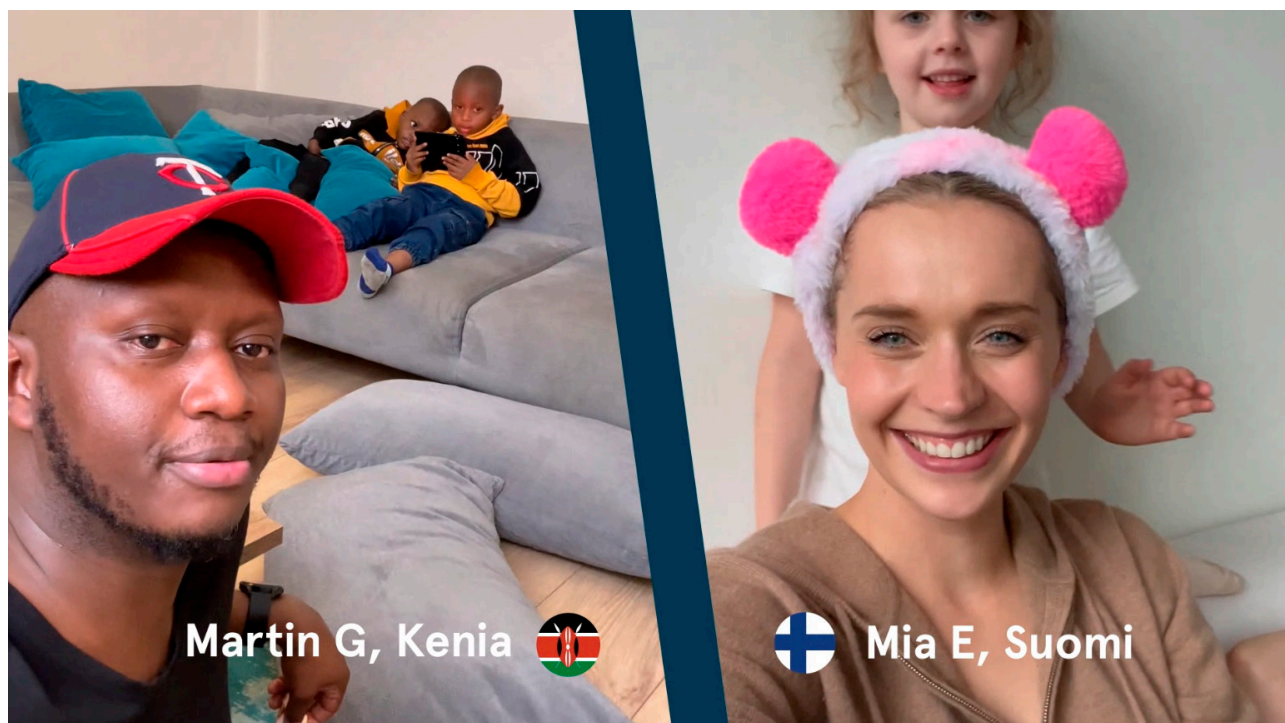
In terms of events, the Partnering for Change project's exhibition, *Nigeria Re-envisioned*, was estimated to have attracted around 1,000 visitors. At the World Village Festival, the programme activities were presented in a keynote speech by Yulian Kondur, representing the Ukrainian Roma Women Fund Chiricli and at the Deaconess Foundation tent that displayed photos of Roma women from Eastern Europe. Other popular events included the Nigeria Forum aimed at Finnish small and medium-sized businesses, and the *Näe minut* exhibition at Emmaus Vallila.

The programme themes gained visibility also in the media, with three opinion pieces published in Helsingin Sanomat during the year, one article published by the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle), and another by Maailman Kuvailehti. The Finnish Somali Media Network, which is aimed at people from the Somali diaspora

living in Finland, also published articles and posts about the programme's work.

An important, albeit unexpected, outcome of the programme was the establishment of the East Africa Youth Peace Network at the Deaconess Foundation in May 2024. Following the popularity of the "Youth as Peace and Reconciliation Builders in Somalia" workshop organised in autumn 2023, and the young participants' expressed commitment and eagerness to further engage with the theme, young people representing diaspora from different East African countries were invited to come to discuss the issues further. They then decided to establish the Network. During its first year the network was active in planning activities, receiving training and networking with other peace and reconciliation actors.

Photo: Deaconess Foundation



In Finland, the Deaconess Foundation aims to set ground for a broader image of African countries, introducing positive and relatable information about Africa. This is important for many reasons. Negative stereotypes cost Africa more than 3.5 billion euros annually in inflated interest payments on sovereign debt alone, not to mention the lost business opportunities.

Therefore, in 2024, the Deaconess Foundation and Filantropia ry launched a campaign to highlight the similarities between the everyday life of people in Finland and in African countries to counter the news flow on Africa that often only focuses on crises and poverty. The campaign was implemented in cooperation with influencers from Finland and three African countries, and it targeted Finnish people aged 35 or over living in or around larger cities. The idea was to create a sense of relatability and spark interest in finding out more about the different realities of African countries.

The campaign videos were shared on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, reaching over 1 million Finnish people with around 120,000 ThruPlays. The campaign received very positive feedback.



## Main successes

- The reach of programme publications and event attendance have significantly exceeded initial expectations, with all communications reaching more than 450,000 Finnish people in 2024.
- "Afrikka on uutisia enemmän" campaign reached almost 130,000 Finnish people with its videos aimed at diversifying the views people have about Africa.
- The East Africa Youth Peace Network was established at the Deaconess Foundation through the initiative of young people with diaspora backgrounds living in Finland.

## Challenges

As before, the main challenge in 2024 was finding ways to make the programme participants' voices heard through the programme communications. The number of publications for output 6.1, facilitating the voices and views of the programme participants to be communicated and heard in Finland, was low compared to other output figures. More effort will be made in 2025 to devise new ways to promote communications initiated by the programme partners and participants.

## 3.4 Results in advocacy

The programme aims to create structural change through advocacy in Finland, programme countries, the EU level and internationally to promote social and economic inclusion and equality. While most of the partners' advocacy efforts fall directly under programme outcomes, the work mainly carried out by the Deaconess Foundation is listed here.

To promote the rights of the Roma at a European level, the Deaconess Foundation participated in the Permanent Anti-Racism Civil Society Forum of the European Commission, the Worlds' Democracy Forum of the Council of Europe, presented its work with Roma migrants at the European Social Work Conference organised by the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU, and collaborated with Eurodiaconia on the assessment of the implementation of the National Roma Strategic Frameworks.

The Deaconess Foundation provided input to the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner's Special Rapporteur on how legislation and practices can strengthen the rights and participation of national minorities.

Prior to the EU parliamentary elections, the Deaconess Foundation launched a social media campaign, challenging Finnish candidates to answer questions relating to the EU's role in promoting human rights and peace globally and encouraging decision-makers to strengthen the EU's human rights and peace work.

In Finland, the Deaconess Foundation made statements on the democracy programme, the reform of the Aliens

Act, the reform of residence permit regulations, the fight against racism and the promotion of equality, and on the proposed amendments to laws concerning the assistance of victims of human trafficking.

The Deaconess Foundation also hosted the current Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Michael O'Flaherty, during his visit to Finland and facilitated his meeting with Roma women from Eastern Europe to discuss their experiences of discrimination.

The Deaconess Foundation aims to build a more just society. The objectives of its advocacy work stem from the experience and insight gained from working with people in vulnerable positions. The Foundation aims to reduce inequalities and ensure that everyone has a life with dignity.

In 2024, the Deaconess Foundation issued 40 statements and held over 200 meetings with decision-makers. Main themes of advocacy work were immigration, youth wellbeing, homelessness and substance abuse.

## 3.5 Sustainability and localisation

### Enabling sustainable change

The programme's multifaceted sustainability approach emphasises local capacity strengthening, community ownership, policy development, economic inclusion, and strategic partnerships. This comprehensive framework ensures the programme's impact is both lasting and transformative.

**Capacity support to local organisations and institutions** is key to the programme's sustainability. The launch of the first psychology programme in Somalia, a collaboration between Simad University and Maandeeq Mental Health, marks a significant milestone for mental health and education in the country. This initiative will ensure that future generations have access to locally trained mental health professionals who understand Somali society, leading to a more comprehensive mental health infrastructure, reduced stigma and increased accessibility. In Kosovo, employment officers received training to enhance their understanding of minority employability and gender inclusivity. The institutionalisation of gender-sensitive hiring policies in the public sector reinforces sustainable employment pathways for groups in marginalised positions.

**Community ownership and inclusive participation** ensure that initiatives are locally driven and culturally appropriate. In South Sudan, our programme has supported the peacebuilding efforts and leadership of local reconcilers, including women, young people, persons with disabilities, and traditional leaders, ensuring reconciliation processes are rooted in the community. In Ethiopia, young participants have formed informal mentorship networks and engaged in intergenerational dialogue with elders and religious leaders, fostering a culture of knowledge-sharing and long-term community engagement.

**Through policy dialogues and advocacy**, our programme partners have also contributed to the development of national policies and advocacy frameworks. In Kenya, our programme has supported the National Cohesion and Integration Commission in developing the National Healing Framework. This integrates healing and reconciliation into government policy to help bridge historical divisions and foster understanding and national solidarity. In Ukraine, our programme has increased the visibility of Roma issues at local, national, and international levels, influencing policy updates and minority rights positions at institutional levels as well as the implementation of local Roma policies.

**Measures of economic inclusion** are essential for enabling individuals and communities to become self-sufficient. By equipping participants with the necessary skills, resources, and confidence to generate income, the programme reduces dependency and builds

resilience. In Tanzania, the programme helped young people establish sustainable livelihoods by providing vocational training and revolving funds, while also equipping them with the confidence and skills to adapt to future employment challenges. In Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus, investment in education, skills training, and leadership has remained a powerful tool for achieving economic independence and social participation. Roma women supported by the programme have started small businesses and can now support their families.

**Finally, strategic partnerships and integration into broader networks** play a vital role in sustaining outcomes. By collaborating with public institutions, private sector actors, and regional platforms and networks, the programme's values and practices are reinforced and scaled. The involvement of the Youth and Sports Bureau, job and skills creation bureau, Jijiga and Gode Polytechniques, the youth council, disability federation, the Somali Region Islamic Supreme Council, and traditional elders created a strong institutional framework to support future initiatives. Youth participants are now taking leadership roles in advocacy, peacebuilding, and social cohesion efforts, thereby reinforcing long-term engagement. The South Sudan Women of Faith and Interfaith Youth Networks are now part of ACRL's regional interfaith networks, enabling sustained collaboration and advocacy.

**Contributions to the Finnish development cooperation agenda and country programmes.** In 2024, the programme contributed to the Finnish development cooperation agenda and aligned well with the bilateral country programmes in respective countries. The Deaconess Foundation in particular supported Finland's aims to enhance human rights, well-functioning civil society and to strengthen the position of women's, girls', persons with disabilities and other people in vulnerable positions. The programme also supports duty-bearers' capacities to promote the realisation of the rights of people in vulnerable positions. In addition, the programme contributed to increasing education, especially through focusing on vocational and entrepreneurial skills to increase employment.

The Deaconess Foundation also advanced fostering economic development in programme countries by supporting the establishment of private businesses led by women and young people facing marginalisation. As some programme countries, such as Ethiopia and Moldova, suffer from significant outmigration, these measures also contributed to reducing the pressure to leave. In addition, the activities have largely greatly contributed to increasing comprehensive security in all programme countries and peacebuilding in the Horn of Africa and Kosovo through sustainable integration, social healing, inclusive participation in reconciliation and integration of mental health and psychosocial support to these processes.

In Ethiopia, the programme's initiatives aimed at enhancing vocational skills for young people and young women in marginalised positions contributed to the

Finnish country programme's focus on education. In Somalia/Somaliland, the programme work complemented Finland's aims to strengthen gender equality and the inclusion of women in the economic sector through skills and entrepreneurship training and support. The programme also supported Finland's objective in peacebuilding by advancing peace and reconciliation initiatives in Somalia.

In Tanzania, the programme advanced Finland's targets regarding gender equality, promotion of livelihoods and employment creation by supporting the employment and entrepreneurship of young women in vulnerable positions. In addition, the programme contributed to promoting human rights through enhancing local authorities' abilities to support persons with disabilities. In Ukraine, the programme improved living conditions of people in vulnerable conditions by assisting minorities in obtaining identity documents and accessing various services, thus contributing to the country programme's target on enhancing good governance and the rule of law.

### **Localisation**

In 2024, the skilled partner organisations were integral to successful programme implementation. However, their role was not limited to implementation, which they led, with support from the Deaconess Foundation, through making day-to-day decisions about the project work. The partners also played an active role in the programme-level strategic planning and development, for example, in creating and refining the theory of change and the results framework for a new programme application. They also participated in the programme evaluation process. In addition, the Deaconess Foundation facilitated multiple possibilities for peer learning between partner organisations, which were highly valued. The partner organisations met each other online and in person and exchanged learnings and ideas, for instance, on how to succeed in life-skills management, job creation, disability inclusion and peacebuilding.

A feedback questionnaire was sent to the partners to gauge their views on localisation and decolonisation. According to the feedback, most of the programme partners viewed the Deaconess Foundation more as a partner than a mere donor. They valued the collaboration, mutual learning and the possibilities to develop their work that the cooperation provides. Based on this feedback, the Deaconess Foundation planned a discussion event on localisation for 2025. The Deaconess Foundation also actively participated in Fingo's working group on shifting the power and exchanged valuable ideas on concrete steps to enhance localisation within Finnish programme support organisations.

# 4. Changes and materialised risks in operating environment

## 4.1 East Africa

Throughout 2024, the Horn of Africa was affected by various tensions due to increased armed conflicts, political instability, heightened constraints on civil society operations, and economic difficulties. These tensions have posed various risks to the programme.

**The ongoing war in Sudan and other regional conflicts have created significant challenges**, including the management of displaced populations and the spread of violence. The influx of Sudanese refugees and South Sudanese returnees strained resources, creating new conflicts in South Sudan's host communities. Intercommunal violence and armed clashes displaced thousands, creating a precarious security environment and restricting access to communities in need. In these circumstances, local reconciliation efforts aimed at reducing tensions were undertaken by insider reconcilers, who encountered increased security threats and intimidation. In this volatile context, our partner strengthened risk assessments prior to community engagement and coordination with local authorities for protection purposes.

**The instability in Somalia required the project partner to dedicate more time and resources**, which affected the implementation of activities. The annual co-creation workshop, originally planned for Somalia in 2024, was relocated to Kenya to ensure the participants' safety. The event organisers took advantage of security briefings provided by Finn Church Aid's Kenya Country Office.

**Mitigating political risks remained a key concern** for the Deaconess Foundation and its partners, particularly in South Sudan and Somaliland. The South Sudanese government's failure to meet the conditions for holding elections has resulted in the polls being postponed until 2026, extending the transitional period and fuelling political uncertainty. This delay has set back democratic progress, hindered national peacebuilding processes and exacerbated tensions in local communities. The National Security Service expanded its powers under the amended 2014 Security Act, leading to **increased repression of activists, journalists, and political opponents**. However, religious leaders and the Interreligious Council of South Sudan have maintained good rapport with the government, allowing them to operate freely in close cooperation with relevant agencies.

The November 2024 elections in Somaliland significantly engaged young people, who were the primary target groups of the project. Their active participation in campaigns delayed VAMOS training applications. The project team adapted by rescheduling training dates to ensure participation. The elections also impacted graduates of entrepreneurship and skills training, creating challenges such as securing rental spaces and increased costs due to market instability. Following the elections, conditions stabilised, enabling businesses to secure affordable locations and resume operations.

**Constraints on civic space and freedom of expression increased**, especially in South Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia. Civil society actors, including human rights defenders and journalists, were subject to arbitrary arrests, intimidation, and censorship under the expanded powers of the National Security Service, which continues to restrict freedom of expression and association in South Sudan. Despite this fragilisation, civil society remained resilient. The Interreligious Council of South Sudan participated in the Tumaini Peace Initiative and in faith-based mediation efforts to push for national reconciliation, despite facing resistance from political figures. **Strong networks with faith leaders, religious actors, and grassroots communities have helped overcome these challenges** and ensure continued engagement in peacebuilding efforts.

In Somalia, rising tensions between Somalia and Ethiopia over Somalia's relations with Egypt and Turkey, the memorandum of understanding signed between Ethiopia and Somaliland, as well as conflicts in the Jubaland region, have created a challenging environment for civil society, in terms of mobilisation and community engagement.

**The programme engaged in various initiatives aimed at promoting peace, reconciliation, and community development and adapted its approach by focusing on capacity development, strategic planning, and supporting local initiatives**. For example, the programme supported the Somali Student Peace Initiative in organising youth leadership training and virtual events on peacebuilding principles. It also facilitated networking and cooperation between civil society actors through online Community of Practice meetings.

The Ethiopian Authority for Civil Society Organizations dissolved over 1,500 CSOs for non-compliance and suspended three prominent human rights organisations, citing political bias. These actions have raised concerns



about the shrinking civic space and increased government control. **CSOs in the Somali Region face additional constraints** due to ongoing conflict and heightened scrutiny, which has led to self-censorship. Despite reduced collaboration opportunities, the programme work remained unaffected, as the partner was able to operate effectively through other networks.

**Economic challenges have particularly affected programme implementation in South Sudan and Ethiopia.**

In South Sudan, the economic crisis, exacerbated by a collapsing currency, soaring inflation and halted oil exports, further strained civil society operations. Many faith leaders struggled to sustain their peace efforts due to economic hardship. To address these issues, the programme supported the capacities of the Interreligious Council of South Sudan, the Women of Faith, and the Interfaith Youth Networks, to ensure the continued work of insider reconcilers.

Inflation, the rising cost of living, and internally displaced people entering the local labour market have **intensified competition for job opportunities**, making it harder for young participants to secure stable jobs in Ethiopia. The devaluation of the Ethiopian birr reduced the purchasing power of young participants, making it harder for them to cover basic needs and invest in self-employment. In response, they received financial literacy training and were encouraged to engage in income diversification activities such as part-time work.

## 4.2 East Europe and the Western Balkans

The programme operates in Belarus, Kosovo, Moldova, and Ukraine. The region is currently experiencing significant shifts in security dynamics, due to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. This has led to an **increased political and institutional focus on defence, rising inflation, a shrinking civil society space and population movements**. On the other hand, the parliaments of Kosovo, Moldova and Ukraine have shown a strong commitment to the EU integration process and to implementing the institutional fundamental and human rights reforms required by the European Commission.

However, the programme partners sometimes had to contend with a **lack of political will**, as well as limited capacity and resources among national and, especially, local institutions during the implementation of the programme. In some cases, institutions were slow to respond to the requests of the programme partners. A recurring issue was also the institutions' lack of knowledge of themes relevant to the programme, and their shortage of resources. For example, in Kosovo in 2024, the Employment Agency faced significant budget constraints after all funds allocated for the affirmative measures programme were redirected to the Super Puna programme, implemented by the Ministry of Finance under a decision by the Prime Minister. As a result, the number of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian beneficiaries was

severely limited. This decision curtailed employment opportunities for communities facing marginalisation and had broader societal implications, diminishing the overall impact of inclusive labour market initiatives.

Another challenge was the **difficulty that both local and central governments faced in interpreting legislation**, particularly in the areas of internally displaced persons' rights and property rights. This made it difficult to register people and houses. Divergent legal interpretations created uncertainty among local authorities and CSOs and slowed down progress. In Kosovo, the 2024 training programme for municipal-level officials on a trauma-informed approach was interrupted by a unilateral state decision and rescheduled for 2025. The training is part of a 4-year capacity development programme created by the General Council for Welfare and Families. One of the bottlenecks was the dissolution of the Council following a new law, requiring the establishment of a new Council before the training could resume.

To mitigate these risks, the **partners maintained persistent communication with the relevant duty-bearers**. They also collaborated creatively with institutions, pooling resources to sustain measures and services that support the realisation of the rights of programme rights-holders. In Kosovo and Ukraine, especially, long-standing partnerships with relevant institutions enabled ongoing dialogue on how to combine resources to maximise results. The partners also continued to bring the know-how gained from international cooperation and trained and worked with authorities to develop policies, measures and services.

Regarding the legal challenges related to internally displaced people and property rights, the partners engaged with rights-holders directly to ensure that needs on the ground were clearly presented and advocated for legislation to be interpreted based on the data collected from the rights-holders.

**Population movements have continued**, affecting both the rights-holders targeted by the programme and the professionals and activists involved in its implementation. These movements were driven by the security situation in Ukraine and the fear of mobilisation among men, as well as by rising inflation, increasing poverty, and a general sense of insecurity among citizens in Kosovo and Moldova.

In Kosovo, Moldova and Ukraine, **programme partners had to manage several staff changes** and replace participants who had migrated. In Ukraine, this led to some delays in reporting. The support and the work of the programme staff in Helsinki were crucial to achieving the reporting targets. The partners in all countries had to provide support to new participants returning from European countries, which required additional time and expert resources. In some cases, they also had to acquire new expertise to address specific needs.

**Poverty and a lack of access to a decent income** affect the everyday lives of programme participants and their families. It is hard to find the motivation to participate

and invest in long-term personal development when basic daily needs are so pressing. Women are also impacted by patriarchal attitudes, which further limit their opportunities.

Despite these persistent challenges, the programme partners have succeeded in engaging rights-holders in their work. Their recognition and trust within the communities have been crucial to this success. In all countries, the ability to respond to urgent cases, even when the type of support fell outside the programme's formal activities, was essential. The unallocated budget supported reacting to urgent needs.

The programme's work on supporting income generation and employment is central to implementing other areas of work. This work has sometimes been hindered by **persistent racism against Roma and returnees**, particularly in relation to the labour market. In Kosovo, Moldova, and Belarus, connecting programme participants with existing business networks and entrepreneurs has been a positive strategy towards tackling stigma.

Another challenge is motivating participants to accept low-paid or temporary jobs, especially when social welfare schemes appear more secure in the context of precarious work. **For women, staying at home to manage the household is often the norm.** To address this, partners rely on their professional staff to share success stories and demonstrate pathways to sustainable employment. In each country, they also implement activities aimed at changing attitudes towards women's roles in society.

**Staff and participant safety remained a concern in Ukraine.** Team members also experienced sleepless nights and emotional distress. Whenever necessary, face-to-face events and meetings were moved online, and staff closely monitored daily security updates from the authorities. The team in Helsinki stepped in to take over programme tasks whenever the team in Kyiv was unable to carry them out. Options for psychosocial support were discussed with team members to help them cope with the ongoing stress.

### 4.3. Risk management plan and risk management capacity

The risk management plan of the Deaconess Foundation's development cooperation programme is built on project, programme and organisational level risk management.

At the project level, risk analyses are carried out, and project-specific risks are assessed and continuously monitored with the partners. Information on recurrent anticipated risks in different projects and geographical areas directly feeds into and supports the more in-depth analysis and update of the programme level matrix. This update is performed annually during the planning for the following year, ensuring synchronisation between the two levels. The programme-level risk matrix has been an effective tool for supporting risk

management and mitigation. No major updates were made to the programme-level risk matrix in 2024, as no new risks emerged and the existing mitigation plans were sufficient to respond to realised risks.

At the organisational level, a tool called Granite is used. This constitutes a platform for more efficient risk management, including in the programme. During 2024, risks identified as part of development cooperation work were incorporated into the Granite system. These risks can now be escalated to the Deaconess Foundation leadership. This allows for appropriate action to be taken when needed. In addition, the HaiPro system serves for better management of risks for the programme staff in Helsinki. Besides, the travel safety of the team is carefully taken into consideration. Both training and procedures focusing on travel safety are in place.

A capacity-sharing plan was developed and implemented in 2024 based on capacity-related risks previously identified for the partners, and is monitored yearly. Capacity-sharing activities included support in the areas of safeguarding, disability inclusion, and humanitarian work, the "Do No Harm" principle, and security issues in the context of Ukraine and Belarus.

# 5. Learning and programme development

A series of three workshops was organised and facilitated by Abilis on disability inclusion for the programme partners and the Deaconess Foundation staff. The fact that each workshop focused on a different strategic priority of the programme allowed for fruitful exchanges amongst smaller groups of partners working on similar issues and facing comparable challenges.

Regarding safeguarding, targeted support was provided to three partners to help them develop their own policies and mechanisms to strengthen the safety of both participants and employees. In addition, Somaliland Y-Peer underwent an in-depth three-day training on safeguarding and started a process to update their safeguarding policy, while the Foxes Community and Wildlife Conservation Trust in Tanzania continued the training policy-updating process started in 2023. Both organisations also appointed a safeguarding focal point. During the year, an external consultant provided continuous support to the Deaconess Foundation on advancing safeguarding issues within the organisation and partners.

In Ukraine, partners collaborated with international organisations, institutions, and civil society organisations specialising in humanitarian work to strengthen their capacity to deliver emergency support. Challenges related to security and the “Do No Harm” principle were regularly discussed and addressed during monthly coordination meetings.

## 5.1. Results-management system development

The Deaconess Foundation believes that it is essential to regularly consult with the programme partners on the processes, tools and formats developed for serve results-based management. Efforts have been made to simplify reporting templates and further develop reporting processes based on their feedback. In 2024, the formats of the annual and quarterly reports were streamlined and the human rights and disability check-lists were updated to support future project planning.

In three projects nearing completion, in Kosovo, Ukraine and Tanzania, impact-level data collection was expanded to focus on the indicator *Percentage of targeted young people, minorities, and people affected by conflicts whose wellbeing is improved*. Data collection used a qualitative methodology called “most significant change” conducted through a questionnaire with programme participants. This provided valuable information and lessons learned on how to further

improve it and better capture the long-term changes in the next round of data collection. The plan is to revise and update the questionnaire for the programme’s final year data collection, as it will be expanded to all projects. Regarding outcome-level data collection, one change was made to outcome 3 based on the previous data collection round. It was decided that the analysis would be based on the questionnaire collected from the service providers, rather than from both the service providers and end-users. The reason for this was that the data was more comparable at the programme level, and the analysis was smoother. Also, the main focus has been on analysing improvements in service providers’ knowledge and skills to provide services, which has progressed along the programme phase. One challenge in interviewing end users has been the variation in interviewees in some projects, making it difficult to establish a clear baseline and to assess improvements. However, it would be valuable to collect data from end-users at the end of the programme to review their assessment of the services after the programme implementation.

The targets were revised at the outcome level based on the great results from the 2023 annual reporting, acknowledging that 2025 will be the final year of the programme. The revisions have already been taken into account in the writing of the 2024 annual report. At the output level, the target revision will be considered in the autumn.

## 5.2. Learning, evaluations, accountability and transparency

In 2024, the Deaconess Foundation conducted its first full programme evaluation since receiving programme-based funding in 2022. The purpose of the evaluation was to specifically identify lessons learned and best practices and to make recommendations for the remaining programme period and the planning phase of the new programme for 2026–2029. The evaluation’s findings also provided guidelines on designing the new projects under the new programme phase, helping the Deaconess Foundation to crystallise the added value in its operational sectors.

Key findings of the evaluation included notable progress in advancing the rights of groups facing marginalisation through employment, policy advocacy, and psychosocial support; and more generally in the high-quality implementation of the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA). It was also acknowledged that the Deaconess Foundation has been effective in promoting part-

ner-led ownership in both the design and implementation of the current programme.

The focus of the evaluation was on learning, and several recommendations were applied during the initial preparation of the new programme. The recommendation to strengthen the HRBA by integrating human rights data and analysis, and by deepening engagement with local rights-holder organisations were already addressed by deciding to conduct the human-rights analyses with the focus on gender equality and disability inclusion in all projects, and by strengthening collaboration with organisations of persons with disabilities by applying joint projects. The HRBA, Gender, and Disability Checklists will support programme staff in systematically planning, monitoring, and evaluating the cross-cutting objectives.

The evaluation also highlighted the need for clear and actionable climate resilience and low-emission objectives, as well as for guidance and expertise within the programme. A screening of the programme's environmental impacts was conducted by an external consultant at the end of 2024. The recommendations from the assessment were used to design the upcoming programme. Additional recommendations will be considered in the programme's final year, with the management response outlining agreed actions. As part of the evaluation process, two mutual learning events were conducted to deepen the participatory approach. The first involved the Deaconess Foundation team at the beginning of the programme, and the second event included all partners to co-create and validate the evaluation's tentative findings and recommendations.

In addition to the programme evaluation, four ending projects were evaluated at the end of 2024. These projects were *Empowerment and social justice for Roma women in Kosovo*, *Youth agency in Mufindi, Tanzania*, and *Strengthening the Roma participation in Ukraine*, and they were evaluated by an external consultant. The *Partnering for Change* project, which was implemented in Finland, underwent self-assessment facilitated by an external consultant.

In 2024, the programme further advanced accountability, particularly through outcome 1, by supporting the capacity of partners and the Foundation in monitoring and evaluation to support results-based management and transparency. Together with partners, the Deaconess Foundation ensured accountability and transparency in the programme toward key stakeholders, including authorities, the private sector, communities, and participants. The programme also engaged new stakeholders, including religious leaders and elders in Ethiopia's Somali Region, who began collaborating with young people to strengthen peacebuilding and mediation skills.

Accountability to participants is crucial, given the programme's focus on people in highly vulnerable positions. This is why strengthening safeguarding was prioritised, with four partners improving their safeguarding capacities and members of the Village Child Protection Committees from 16 villages receiving training in

Tanzania. The Foundation also further promoted its complaints mechanism to partners and participants and offered training to all partners on enhancing accountability for participants with disabilities.

Regional and cross-project learning took place between the Ethiopian and Somaliland partners in the area of youth work. As part of a study visit, delegations from both countries met in Finland in October 2024. In addition, the regional peace healing circle themed co-creation workshop organised in Kenya in November was attended by staff from our partners in Ethiopia for the first time.

One of the lessons learnt is that direct engagement between rights-holders and duty-bearers increases partner credibility and awareness of human rights issues. Another insight is the need for further disaggregated data on Roma minorities (e.g., on Roma with disabilities, skill gaps, and employment patterns) to better inform targeted interventions. Furthermore, in East Africa, expanding psychosocial support, mentorship, and leadership pathways, especially for girls, can deepen inclusion and participation.

### 5.3. Capacity building of the Deaconess Foundation staff

In addition to attending the knowledge-sharing events described earlier in the report under risk management capacity with the partners, the Deaconess Foundation team also participated in a series of sessions and workshops independently.

Building on the knowledge gained in 2023 regarding the triple nexus, the programme team further developed its approach during a workshop facilitated by an external consultant. This session enabled the team to reflect on and consolidate the existing triple nexus elements within the programme and develop a clearer and more cohesive strategy.

Thanks to a workshop facilitated by a gender expert from the Roma Women's Association E-Romnja, the International Affairs team deepened its understanding of the intersectional and multiple forms of discrimination and poverty faced by Roma women and girls. The workshop introduced community-based practices specifically designed to engage Roma women and girls and to support their local mobilisation and participation. Based on this knowledge, the programme coordinators gained new ideas on how to strengthen gender equality and non-discrimination efforts within their projects.

The programme team also participated in several internal sessions and workshops, for instance on social innovations and social entrepreneurship and how the Community Action Based Learning for Empowerment approach has been piloted in the programme.



# 6. Management

The Deaconess Foundation is a social enterprise. Together with the Rinnekodit services operator, it provides social welfare and health services. The Foundation's operations are divided into for-profit and non-profit activities. The International Affairs Unit, which coordinates the development cooperation programme, belongs to the non-profit operations. The International Affairs Unit had 14 employees in 2024. The team members are professionals with solid expertise in programme and project management, and the thematic programme areas. The team comes from various educational, professional, and cultural backgrounds. 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.

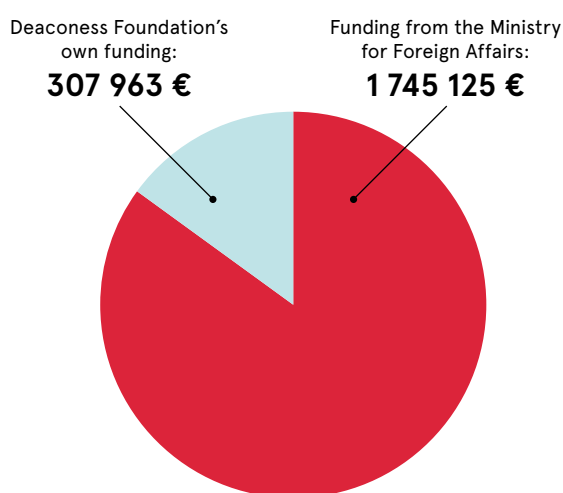
Programme management, coordination and results-related issues were regularly communicated and reported to the various levels of management within the Deaconess Foundation. Visits from the programme partners and other stakeholders were welcomed in the organisation. To strengthen management, communication and networking linked to the programme, 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. The Foundation management staff and the programme team held several meetings in 2024 with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, partners, internal and external experts, and other stakeholders.

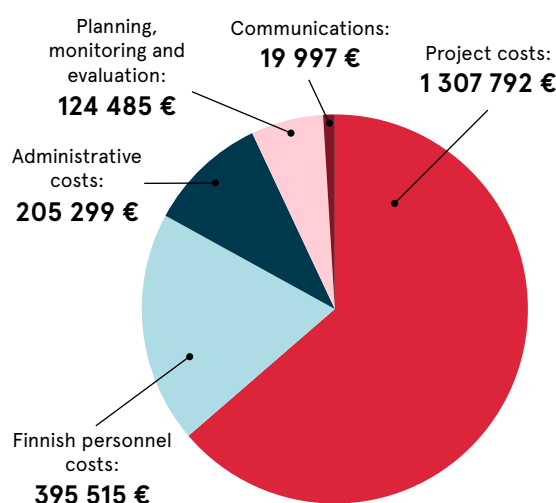
The programme budget was used cost-effectively, with the aim of achieving high effectiveness. Over the four-year programme, the budget structure allocates 65% of funds to programme countries, with the remaining 35% covering costs in Finland. The partnerships-based approach promotes localisation without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

**Funding:**



**Distribution of costs:**





Deaconess  
Foundation