



# CAPABILITY STATEMENT

## Driving EU Integration Through Inclusive Governance

Countries across Eastern Europe are preparing for EU integration by strengthening democratic institutions, improving public services, and aligning with European standards. Helvetas supports this transformation through inclusive governance programs, capacity building, and regional collaboration. By empowering municipalities, civil society, and public administrations, we help accelerate reforms in transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. Our work contributes directly to EU accession priorities, fostering resilient systems and sustainable development across the region.

## About Helvetas

Helvetas is a Swiss-based independent development organization active since 1955 that nowadays works in 35 countries across Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America.

We work in Eastern Europe countries since the early 1990s. We aim to contribute to a just and sustainable world in which all women and men determine the course of their lives in dignity and security, using environmental resources in a sustainable manner and support empowerment of disadvantaged communities to sustainably improve their living conditions.



## Legal Status and Structure

Helvetas is registered in eight countries<sup>1</sup>: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Ukraine. We are also active in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Montenegro, where we work through partner organizations. Regionality is a value addition that the organization considers critical to its performance and outreach.

Our structure differentiates between three levels: the head office in Switzerland, the regional team, and teams in the countries (who lead on projects and initiatives). The regional team together with the country teams constitutes the 'Helvetas Eastern Europe regional program'.

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<sup>1</sup> Registered as Representative offices.

**Country  
branches**

The activities in different countries in the region lie at the core of our vision and objectives. They consist of projects and initiatives of different sizes and scope, which constitute the organizational framework within which 180 people are employed (65% female and 35% male).

**Regional  
team**

The regional program structure consists of a networked team dispersed across the region, with a hub in Belgrade. It provides projects and initiatives in countries with necessary management, technical and administrative support, as well as assuring overall quality and compliance with Helvetas systems and processes.

**Head  
office**

The head office represents the Helvetas global network, sets and maintains organizational policies, standards, and guidelines, and provides countries in its network with support.

## People are at the core of what we do

We achieve our vision by continuing our efforts in strengthening good governance and creating new economic perspectives that benefit particularly women, youth, minorities and other disadvantaged groups and communities – placing a strong emphasis on green transition. Our actions are focused on building conducive eco-systems that bring about truly transformational change in capacities and incentives of system actors.

Our work in promoting good governance, for example, has led to improved public services such as waste management and circular economy initiatives, more efficient property tax collection, and enhanced accountability of public servants. We have also strengthened cooperation with elected representatives to foster inclusive decision-making, transparent resource management, and citizen participation. Through our support to public administration reform and capacity building at both local and national levels, we help institutions deliver more effective and responsive services. This has contributed to more accessible administrative services, expanded preschool education, and greater social inclusion - especially for women, youth, and marginalized groups. Equally, many young people have found employment and income opportunities through labour market reforms and innovative business models introduced by HELVETAS projects.

A better future for all – that is what we believe in. We make it possible through actions which are driven by our values: putting human rights at the center, committed to social equity and inclusion, upholding the principle of self-determined development, and engaging with others in solidarity and partnership.

### We provide expertise and innovation

We contribute to an open and democratic society by strengthening voice and participation of civil society, enhancing good governance principles and improving public services.

## Community of Practice on Good Governance (GG CoP)

As a part of our ongoing commitment to strengthening governance systems across Eastern Europe, the Community of Practice on Good Governance (GG CoP), established in March 2025, supports the effective implementation of the HSI Eastern Europe Good Governance Portfolio Strategy. The GG CoP brings together Helvetas staff working in governance-focused initiatives, providing a dynamic platform for peer learning, knowledge exchange, and joint problem-solving on governance challenges in diverse country contexts.

Through this community, we contribute to and benefit from collective reflection and innovation, testing and refining context-sensitive approaches that improve accountability, transparency, and citizen engagement. The GG CoP also serves as a platform for business development and collaboration, enabling members to jointly identify emerging governance trends, conceptualize new project ideas, and explore regional and country-specific funding opportunities, including those within EU frameworks. Our engagement in the GG CoP reinforces our capacity to lead and implement complex, multi-country governance initiatives grounded in evidence, shared learning, and cross-regional expertise.



## Regional Advocacy Network (RAN)

Established by Helvetas in 2020, the [Regional Advocacy Network \(RAN\)](#) serves as a strategic hub for policy dialogue, learning, and collaboration across Eastern Europe. Through regular webinars and annual regional meetings, the Network connects project teams and partners to exchange experiences, present advocacy cases, and distill lessons learned. The RAN works closely with civil society organizations, public institutions, and media actors to promote evidence-based advocacy and strengthen the enabling environment for accountability and citizen participation. By fostering cross-country learning and joint action, the Network directly complements the good governance domain, enhancing the effectiveness and reach of governance and advocacy initiatives across the region and beyond.



## Alignment with EU Priorities

Although a Swiss-based organization, work of Helvetas is aligned with EU strategic priorities and relevant policy areas in the region:



IPA III



European  
Green Deal



Reform & Growth Facility for  
the Western Balkans (2024-2027)



Horizon  
Europe

We provide a wide range of services inspired by our commitment to transfer knowledge into country systems, such as:

- **Project management:** Managing projects from inception to completion, including planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation
- **Performance management:** Design of systems for regular measurement of local governments' performance, and technical assistance for data analysis
- **Public finance management:** Analyses of local government finance systems, design of strategies for maximization of local revenues, ensuring transparent finance management
- **Public services & infrastructure:** Technical assistance for improved communal and social services; Digitalization of services; management of grants for community projects.
- **Grant management:** Robust financial systems for budgeting, cost tracking, and reporting; Managing grant agreements, amendments, and consortium agreements; Strong communication and dissemination; Compliance and documentation
- **Multi-sector networks & partnerships:** Facilitation of dialogue and networking between actors from the public institutions, private actors, civil society organizations, media, and academia.
- **Technical support:** Strategic and expert advice for reform design and implementation; Studies and analyses to support evidence-based policymaking; Training and capacity building for public administration staff; co-design and piloting practical solutions to complex development challenges.
- **Sustainable and inclusive urbanization :** Technical and expert support to towns to improve living conditions, food systems, access to education & jobs, capitalizing on the rural-urban linkages; Design of participatory processes; facilitation of transparent and inclusive public engagement in creation of urban policies
- **Capacity building:**
  - Institutional strengthening of civil society organizations (CSO): Need assessments, design and implementation of capacity building activities, monitoring CSOs' organizational development
  - Support to informal groups & movements: Tailor-made approaches for empowerment of informal groups for fostering democratic, inclusive and environmentally sustainable actions
  - Strengthen capabilities of local governments, and private sector actors to engage effectively in advocacy, campaigning, and policy influence.



# Innovation and Impact:

## Driving systemic change in fragile contexts

With decades of experience and a team of highly skilled professionals, Helvetas brings a wealth of knowledge and extensive experience to every project. Together with more than 1 500 partner organizations across the region, Helvetas tackles regional challenges at various levels and reaches every year over 500 000 people. Average financial volume of our multi-year projects in the region is around 5 mil EUR.

We offer a proven, forward-thinking approach that makes us the ideal choice for advancing inclusive and sustainability goals.



In **ALBANIA**, Helvetas implements a multi-annual program for support to local governance called Bashki të Forta (“Strong Municipalities”). The program is financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Government of Sweden and implemented in close partnership with the Ministry of State for Local Government and other national institutions. With a total budget volume of approximately 10 million EUR in its current phase (2022 – 2026), Bashki të Forta aims to strengthen democratic local governance, enhance municipal performance, and improve the delivery of waste management and pre-school services to the citizens of the 61 municipalities of Albania. Central to the project is a performance management system that rewards municipalities for measurable results in service delivery, good governance and financial management.

Bashki të Forta contributes to Albania’s EU integration process by:

- **Strengthening local democracy** - Through targeted coaching, institutional development, and civic engagement initiatives, Bashki të Forta helps Municipal Councils become proactive actors in oversight and policy monitoring. Initiatives such as public consultations, live streaming of meetings, and anti-corruption roundtables reinforce transparency and citizen participation. These activities advance Chapter 10 - Information Society and Media, Chapter 22 - Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments, Chapter 23 - Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, and support the functioning of democratic institutions which is part of Cluster 1 – Fundamentals.
- **Supporting municipalities to modernize waste management and introduce circular economy** - Bashki të Forta supports Albanian municipalities in adopting and implementing the EU Waste Framework Directive and the Landfill Directive. This includes developing compliant local waste management plans, mainstreaming circular economy principles, and improving service delivery and performance monitoring. These efforts directly contribute to Chapter 27 - Environment

and Climate Change and support Chapter 22 - Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments and Chapter 18 - Statistics through improved data collection and reporting.

- **Decentralizing and strengthening pre-school services** - The project strengthens local capacity to deliver high-quality, inclusive preschool services, aligning with EU standards for decentralisation, inclusiveness, and evidence-based governance. This work addresses Chapter 26 - Education and Culture, Chapter 19 - Social Policy and Employment and Chapter 22 - Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments.
- **The establishment of a performance-based grant system** - contributes to Chapter 18 - Statistics by improving municipal data and indirectly to the chapter on Fundamentals because it contributes to fact-based decision making.
- **Strengthening public administration** - The project builds the professional and institutional capacity of local government staff and elected representatives, including the establishment of an Albanian Academy for Local Government. These efforts are crucial for meeting EU standards in strategic planning, service delivery, and financial management, and directly contribute to the fundamentals of public administration reform and indirectly to Chapter 22
- **Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments** - since its inception in 2016, the program has evolved into one of Albania's flagship initiatives for local governance reform, promoting transparency, accountability, and sustainable municipal development across the country.

**MATRA G2G 2025–2028** is an initiative funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, aiming to strengthen democratic local governance in Albania through bilateral cooperation with the Netherlands. The project is implemented by a consortium led by The Hague Academy for Local Governance, in partnership with Helvetas Albania and VNG International, and in close collaboration with the Agency for Support of Local Self-Government (AMVV). It focuses on enhancing the capacities of local institutions to deliver public services in a transparent, inclusive, and gender-sensitive manner, including mentorship from Dutch municipalities and the development of the Albanian Training Academy for Local Governance (TALGA).

TALGA is being equipped with state-of-the-art tools, models, and training methodologies, enabling it to become a sustainable national resource for capacity building in local governance. The project also promotes peer exchange and partnership mechanisms across four thematic areas:

- digital governance
- local economic development
- integrity and anti-corruption, and
- gender equality and inclusive services.

These themes are supported through structured collaboration between Albanian and Dutch municipalities, fostering mutual learning and innovation in service delivery.

Through this approach, Helvetas contributes directly to Albania's Public Administration Reform, which is a cornerstone of the EU accession process, particularly under Cluster 1 – Fundamentals, including chapters on Public Administration, Rule of Law, and Financial Control.





**Biogenic Waste Circular Innovation Challenges (BWIC)** is funded by GIZ through EU for Circular Economy and Livable Cities (EU4CELC) project, co-financed by the EU and BMZ. The BWIC program addresses the growing issue of biodegradable waste in Albania by promoting practical and scalable Circular Economy solutions. It supports businesses and projects in developing effective biowaste management systems that contribute to cleaner and greener urban environments. Participants benefit from technical guidance and may receive direct financial support.

Within the project framework Helvetas provides:

- Technical assistance and grant management of up to EUR 50,000 per team
- Capacity building for grantees
- Monitoring and evaluation through a standardized MEL system
- Knowledge management and policy engagement to promote circular models and green entrepreneurship.

This initiative directly contributes to Albania's alignment with EU Chapter 27 (Environment), the European Green Deal, and the Circular Economy Action Plan, addressing systemic barriers such as low recycling rates, lack of composting infrastructure, and limited municipal capacity. By mobilizing innovation and strengthening local ecosystems, Helvetas plays a strategic role in accelerating Albania's transition to a circular economy and supporting its EU integration path.

In **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**, Helvetas leads the multi-annual programme PRAGG – Civil Society Support in BiH, funded by the Swiss Government with a total volume of CHF 5.6 million (2022–2027). The programme enhances the role of civil society as a key actor in democratic governance through a comprehensive approach that includes financial support for advocacy initiatives, targeted capacity development and mentoring, alliance-building, and efforts to improve the enabling environment for civil society action.



PRAGG prioritises the meaningful participation of women, young people, and socially excluded groups, applying Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) as a cross-cutting priority across all interventions. GESI is fully embedded in the programme's logic, aligned with SDG 5 and SDG 10, and monitored through disaggregated and responsive indicators.

PRAGG contributes to Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU accession process by:

- **Fostering civic participation** – The programme empowers CSOs and informal groups to engage citizens in identifying local priorities, co-creating solutions, and exercising democratic rights, with a particular focus on marginalised communities and underrepresented territories.
- **Enhancing institutional accountability** – PRAGG enables civil society to make systematic use of participatory mechanisms and public consultations, while also strengthening their role in monitoring public institutions and demanding transparency and responsiveness.
- **Influencing policy through structured cooperation** – Supported CSOs establish formal and informal coalitions to lead joint advocacy efforts across levels of governance, contributing to policy dialogue and evidence-based decision-making in key reform areas.



- **Strengthening organisational resilience** – Through tailored mentoring and institutional support, PRAGG reinforces the strategic, operational, and adaptive capacities of CSOs to function independently and sustainably, even in restrictive or volatile contexts.
- **Protecting civic space** – PRAGG addresses both external risks and internal standards affecting civil society. It applies conflict-sensitive approaches to prevent harm, promotes ethical and transparent CSO governance, and integrates rights-based principles. Environmental risks are assessed using the CEDRIG methodology to ensure that civic action aligns with the EU's Green Agenda and “do no harm” principles.
- **Ensuring complementarity with EU support** – PRAGG is closely aligned with the priorities of the EU Civil Society Facility and contributes to the realisation of accession-related reforms by promoting an inclusive, rights-based, and results-oriented civil society ecosystem.

With its countrywide outreach, strategic coherence, and embedded local partnerships, PRAGG is one of the most comprehensive and relevant civil society support programmes currently implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina.





In **KOSOVO**, Helvetas implements the multi-annual program for support to local governance called DEMOS (Decentralisation and Municipal Support). The project is co-funded by the European Union, Switzerland, and Sweden, with a budget volume of 22.5 mil EUR in Phase III (2022 – 2025) and implemented in close partnership with the Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLGA) who has ensured an additional co-funding of 15 million EUR for the grant scheme, underlining national ownership and sustainability. DEMOS engages all 38 municipalities of Kosovo with the aim of strengthening democratic local governance, improving public service delivery, and advancing municipal financial autonomy. A key feature of the project is its performance-based grant scheme, which rewards municipalities for tangible results in good governance, financial management, and citizen-oriented service delivery. Alongside financial incentives, DEMOS provides tailored technical assistance and capacity development to municipalities and central institutions. Since its launch in 2014, DEMOS has grown into one of Kosovo's flagship governance programs, driving forward decentralization and inclusive municipal development.

DEMOS contributes to Kosovo's EU integration process by:

- **Strengthening Local Democracy and Governance** – DEMOS supports municipalities in implementing transparent, accountable, and participatory governance practices. This directly aligns with EU requirements under the acquis for democracy, rule of law, and good governance at the local level. This also contributes to political criteria for accession (rule of law, democracy, institutions), strengthens public administration reform (PAR), and supports the Growth Plan's emphasis on institutional quality and democratic oversight as a foundation for sustainable development.
- **Improving Municipal Finances and Autonomy** – Through performance-based grants and technical support, municipalities increase their own-source revenues and improve expenditure management. Stronger fiscal autonomy makes local governments less dependent on central transfers, a key principle of the EU Charter of Local Self-Government. This activity enhances



economic governance and fiscal sustainability, a key priority in the Economic Reform Programme (ERP)

- **Enhancing Citizen Participation and Accountability** – DEMOS promotes participatory budgeting, citizen consultations, and social accountability mechanisms such as social audits, ensuring that municipal policies reflect citizens' needs. The project emphasizes engagement with civil society and marginalised groups, fortifying the democratic fundamentals emphasized in Kosovo's Reform Agenda and the Growth Plan's pillar on human capital and democratic oversight.
- **Service Delivery and Infrastructure Development** – Municipalities supported by DEMOS have expanded access to quality local services (e.g. waste management, urban mobility, parks and recreational areas) and implemented local infrastructure projects that foster socio-economic development in line with EU cohesion policies. It also strengthens the Growth Plan's pillar on sustainable economic growth, connectivity, and competitiveness, improving quality of life and regional integration.
- Importantly, DEMOS also encourages municipalities to **integrate environmental considerations** into infrastructure planning. This approach supports the EU Growth Plan's focus on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, climate resilience, and sustainable connectivity, while aligning with the European Green Deal objectives.
- **Alignment with EU Local Governance Frameworks** – DEMOS' approach complements the EU's support to local governance and public administration reform in Kosovo, ensuring coherence and reinforcing the country's path towards EU accession.
- Beyond local governance, DEMOS also supports the central government with **policy analysis and legal reforms** to create a conducive environment for decentralized governance, reinforcing national reform agendas. This supports the Growth Plan's pillar on stronger institutions and policy alignment, ensuring that central and local reforms advance together towards EU standards.

#### Past EU Funding:

DEMOS Project was among the first large-scale projects of Helvetas to have the European Union as its main donor. Within the framework of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III), the EU contributed, jointly with the Norwegian Embassy and the Swedish Embassy 14.6 mil EUR to the third phase of DEMOS (2022–2025). In this context, the role of HELVETAS has been to support municipalities in advancing good governance, fiscal autonomy, and improved service delivery. Through the active involvement, Helvetas has contributed to strengthening municipal capacities, ensuring transparent financial management, and fostering citizen participation in local decision-making.



In **SERBIA**, Helvetas leads the multi-annual program for support to civil society organizations (CSOs) across Serbia called ACT (For and Active Civil Society Together). It is SDC funded project with 5.9 mil CHF volume in Phase II (2023 – 2027). Program provides financial grant support to small and medium size CSOs and informal groups and networks at the local level in Serbia through tailored grant schemes with a strong focus on constituency building and citizens' mobilization and engagement as part of their overarching advocacy initiatives. Additionally, the Program provides focused support through a tailor-made capacity building programme (CBP) as a complementary support intervention. In past years, the Program worked with over 200 CSOs across Serbia, thus making it one of the largest programs for support to civil society in Serbia.

ACT contributes to Serbia's accession to the EU by:

- **Strengthening civil society** – support to CSOs in Serbia to become resilient, accountable, and adaptable, enables them to represent citizens more effectively and advocate for their needs. This aligns with EU expectations for participatory democracy and active civic engagement.
- **Promoting public dialogue and policy influence** - Through ACT, CSOs have influenced over 40 legal and policy documents at both local and national levels. This demonstrates the project's role in policy reform and democratic governance, which are core EU accession criteria.
- **Empowering citizens and youth** - ACT fosters grassroots activism, especially among youth and informal civic movements. It encourages public participation in decision-making, which is vital for building a democratic society aligned with EU standards.
- **Capacity building and sustainability** - ACT provides tailored training and mentoring to CSOs, helping them improve organizational development, financial sustainability, and community engagement. These capacities are essential for long-term democratic consolidation.

- [Resilience in challenging context](#) - In the face of increasing socio-political pressure and shrinking civic space, ACT helps CSOs resist authoritarian tendencies and maintain their advocacy work. This is crucial for upholding freedom of speech, assembly, and association, all of which are monitored during the EU accession process.
- [Alignment with EU Civil Society Facility](#) - ACT complements the EU Civil Society Facility for Serbia, which aims to strengthen participatory democracy and support the EU integration process through civil society engagement.

The Municipal Economic Development project (MED) supports local governments in own source revenue generation, making them less dependent on the central government. MED is SDC funded initiative, launched in 2013. Third phase (2021 – 2025) has a budget of 5.2 mil CHF. Through project 44 municipalities in Serbia have generated more than 30 mil EUR in additional source revenues, which contribute to the development of local communities. The digitalization of local tax administration has enabled faster, more transparent and simpler access to information 24/7, as well as services such as electronic filing of tax returns, online payment of tax obligations and downloading of tax decisions in the e-Administration e-Mailbox for 3 million taxpayers.

MED contributes to Serbia's accession to the EU by:

- [Strengthening Local Self-Governments](#) - project enhanced the capacity of municipalities to deliver public services efficiently and sustainably. These improvements align with [Chapter 22](#) of the EU acquis, which focuses on regional policy and coordination of structural instruments.
- [Enhancing transparency and citizen participation](#) - project promotes accountable local finances and citizen engagement in budgeting and development planning. This fosters democratic governance and aligns with EU principles of transparency, rule of law, and civic inclusion.
- [Reducing Regional Disparities](#) - By targeting underdeveloped and lagging regions, MED projects helped reduce socio-economic inequalities—an essential goal of EU cohesion policy. This supports Serbia's efforts to meet EU standards for inclusive growth.

#### MORE INFORMATION:

Learn more about our work in Eastern Europe:

- [Good Governance](#)
- [Economic Perspectives](#)
- [Green Transition](#)

## CORE EXPERTS

Our core team consists of highly professional, committed and multilingual advisors with many years of experience working in international cooperation across the globe. Beyond the core team, our governance portfolio is supported by a wider pool of regional experts with diverse experience. For further information on the full range of expertise available, our core experts serve as the primary points of contact.

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