



Helvetas Eastern Europe Annual Report 2025

Navigating Change Through Partnership and Purpose

Matthias Herr, Regional Director Eastern Europe



Working across Eastern Europe today often feels less like following a fixed roadmap and more like navigating a river with shifting currents. The direction is clear, but the conditions are constantly changing, requiring judgement, adaptability, and strong partnerships to move forward. In 2025, this was the environment in which our teams and partners operated: shaped by political uncertainty, economic pressure, and evolving development priorities.

Against this backdrop, Helvetas Eastern Europe remained focused on what we believe creates lasting impact—supporting systemic change. Rather than addressing symptoms, our programmes work to strengthen the underlying systems that shape opportunities and outcomes: markets that create jobs, institutions that provide reliable services, and frameworks that enable inclusive and sustainable development. This report illustrates how this approach translates into tangible results across the region, from more resilient local economies to strengthened governance and emerging pathways for green and digital transformation.

At the same time, these achievements are not the result of Helvetas acting alone. They are driven by the dedication, expertise, and commitment of our teams across the region, who turn complex strategies into practical action every day. Their ability to work in challenging contexts, stay focused on impact, and continuously adapt is at the core of what we have achieved in 2025.

Equally important are our partners—public institutions, civil society organisations, and private sector actors—who lead and sustain the change processes we support. Their ownership is what makes change durable and relevant. Strengthening these partnerships is not only a principle, but a deliberate commitment to localisation that shapes how we design and implement our programmes.

We are also deeply grateful to our donors, whose trust and long-term engagement make this work possible. In a context of increasing uncertainty and shifting priorities, their support provides the foundation that allows us and our partners to pursue meaningful, systemic change.

In a year marked by uncertainty, 2025 has shown that steady, system-oriented work—grounded in strong partnerships—can deliver meaningful and lasting results. This report is both an account of that progress and a reflection of the collective effort behind it.

Contents

03 Eastern Europe: Context and Key Dynamics

03 Where We Work

04 Our projects



05 Key Achievements and Outcomes

06 Results and Impact in 2025

06 Sustainable Economy

10 Good Governance

15 RECONOMY

21 Development Nexus in Ukraine

25 Partnerships & Networks

28 Financial Overview

29 Our People: Enabling Impact Across the Region

30 Looking Ahead – Priorities for Next Year



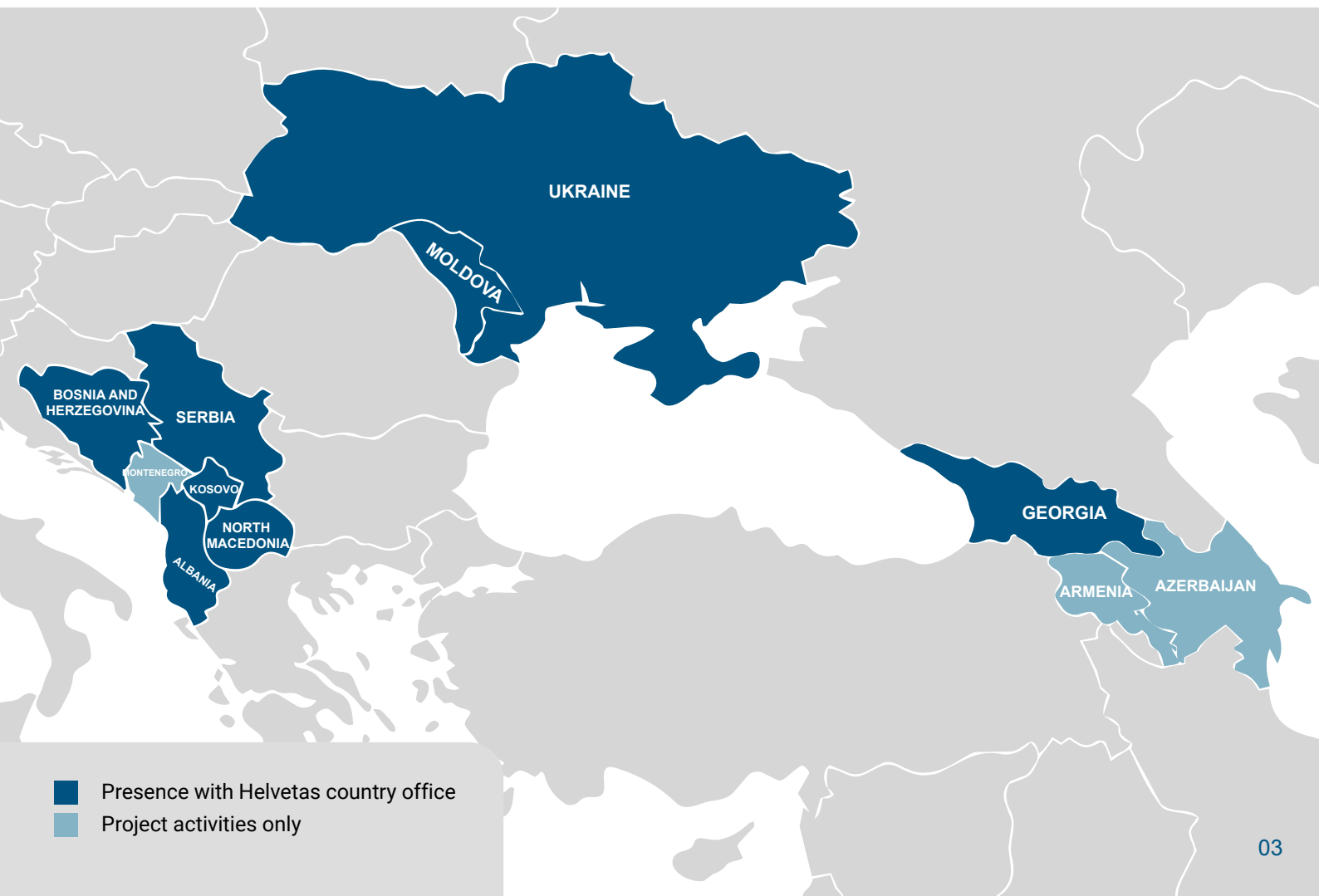
Eastern Europe: Context and Key Dynamics

In 2025, countries across Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans continued to operate under sustained political and economic pressure. Ongoing geopolitical tensions, including the continued war in Ukraine, influenced regional stability, public decision-making, and development cooperation across neighbouring countries.

Governance and civic space remained under strain in several contexts, where political polarisation and institutional uncertainty affected reform processes and citizen participation. At the same time, economic conditions were shaped by high energy costs, inflation, and limited fiscal space, while longer-term challenges such as labour shortages, skills mismatches, and outward migration persisted.

Alongside these pressures, green and digital transitions increasingly influenced markets, labour demand, and institutional priorities across the region. Together, these dynamics underscored the importance of approaches that strengthen systems, support local actors, and enable adaptation over time.

Where We Work



Our Projects

RECONOMY

an inclusive and green economic development program is implemented in 11 countries in the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkan.

Albania

- Bashki te Forta
- Risi Albania
- Bio-Waste Innovation Challenge
- Matra G2G Project

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- PRAGG
- Urban Transformation Project in Sarajevo

Georgia

- Local Economic Development

Kosovo

- DEMOS
- Greening Private Enterprises in Kosovo

Moldova

- OPTIM
- Humanitarian Response

North Macedonia

- Education for Employment
- Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience Programme (Inception Phase)
- Culture for Development

Serbia

- Municipal Economic Development
- ACT Project

Ukraine

- Economic Resilience Program
- Resilience Reconstruction
- Stiykist
- Sylna Hromada
- Economic Development
- OBF

Key Achievements and Outcomes

2025 in numbers:



2+ million
people reached



28,700+
newly supported
organizations



59% Women
39% Youth



CHF 32+
million additional
income

Results and Impact in 2025

Sustainable Economy

From project-driven delivery to market-led systems

In 2025, the Sustainable Economy portfolio contributed to improved employment, income, and market access across the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership. Beyond direct job creation and income effects, several interventions reached a level of maturity where market actors increasingly adopted and scaled inclusive business practices independently. This shift from project-driven delivery toward market-led systems is particularly evident in labour markets, skills development, and business services, especially for young people and women.

Results at a Glance



155,000 people reached through private-sector and market-systems interventions



12,000+ people secured new or additional wage employment



19,000+ people increased their income by more than **10%**



Strong participation of youth and women across all major interventions

How the System Changed

The portfolio shows clear systemic shifts in how labour markets and business support systems function:

- Market actors increasingly sustain and scale services initially introduced by projects, including training, advisory, and certification models
- Employers shifted from passive beneficiaries to active co-investors and co-designers of workforce development and skills systems
- Career guidance and intermediation services became embedded within public employment and education systems, moving beyond fragmented provision
- Private investment in skills and business services increased, with firms and providers expanding commercially viable models independently

These changes indicate that key functions are becoming embedded in market incentives and institutional arrangements, reducing reliance on direct project facilitation.

System Change in Action

Albania

Public employment services and schools delivering structured career guidance, with trained counsellors, standardised tools, and regular employer engagement integrated into education pathways.

Moldova

Producers and SMEs purchasing fee-based services such as GlobalG.A.P. group certification, export promotion, and retail-ready packaging, while service providers expand commercially and firms adopt technologies such as IPM advisory and anti-frost systems.

North Macedonia

Companies co-financing dual VET and work-based learning placements, partnering with vocational schools and providers, while firms (e.g. Makstil, Zegin) and private providers (e.g. M6) invest in and expand structured upskilling programmes.

Georgia

Tea producers jointly investing in harvesting equipment through associations, wine producers coordinating branding and market access via wine unions, and municipalities aligning tourism planning and infrastructure through the Kolkheti National Park coordination platform

Stories of Change

Keeping Moldova's Vineyards Alive Through Frost: How Innovation and Partnership Are Strengthening a Sector

Moldova's agriculture is increasingly affected by climate change, as weather patterns become less predictable and extreme events more frequent. Sudden frosts, droughts, heatwaves and hail are putting production, quality and farmers' incomes under growing pressure. Table grapes are a clear example of this challenge, showing how climate shocks can quickly translate into major economic losses and reduced competitiveness.

Against this backdrop, Helvetas Moldova, through its Swiss-funded OPTIM Project, has been supporting agriculture through innovation, with a particular focus on addressing risks that undermine productivity and competitiveness. Early spring frost was identified as one of the most serious and recurring threats, prompting Helvetas and Frudova to join efforts in exploring practical and innovative solutions. Through research, analysis and a shared interest in testing new approaches, the partnership identified an infrared tube heating system as a promising option for protecting vineyards during the highly vulnerable bud break stage

"In recent years, spring frost has become one of the most serious risks for our vineyards," says Veaceslav Vedraşco, founder of the Frudova Cooperative. "At bud-break, even -2 to -4°C can destroy young shoots. In the worst cases, farms lose 70–100% of their potential harvest. By that moment, most expenses have already been made—pruning, treatments, labour. One cold night can turn an entire season into a loss and jeopardize our ability to meet contracts."



Vlad Vedraşco (right), co-founder of Frudova, and Alexandr Perjan (left) of EuroAlun inspect the electric anti-frost system during winter conditions.

When freezing temperatures hit in spring 2025, the system proved its value immediately. In the protected plot, the vines came through the frost with zero losses, while nearby unprotected areas recorded up to 20% damage to buds and future inflorescences. But the benefits did not stop there. The protected vines developed more evenly and ripened earlier, allowing Frudova to bring its harvest to market 10–12 days sooner, when prices were at their highest. This translated into 15–20% higher income per hectare. With stable yields and better returns, Frudova increased its turnover by about 20% in 2025, creating room to raise wages, hire additional seasonal workers, and extend the benefits of the activity to more producers.

The pilot quickly turned into a learning platform for the wider sector. Through field days and events, around 600 producers were able to see the system in operation and assess its potential under real Moldovan conditions. This created a credible local reference case, with implications reaching beyond table grapes. The experience is also relevant for the much larger wine sector, where stable grape supply underpins an industry exporting more than EUR 140 million annually.

The initiative also attracted significant international interest. Producers from several countries, including Romania, Italy and France, reached out to Frudova to learn more about the system and hear first-hand about the experience of testing it under Moldovan conditions. Interest also came from the development community: representatives of GIZ from five Eastern Partnership countries visited the pilot to explore how such technology could help address climate risks in their own horticulture sectors. Together, these exchanges underlined the wider relevance of the pilot and positioned Moldova as a practical source of learning on climate adaptation in agriculture.

For Helvetas, the role of the OPTIM Project was clear: to catalyze innovation where the market alone was unlikely to take the first step. By reducing the risks of early adoption and generating concrete evidence, the project is helping Moldovan producers invest more confidently in climate-resilient production and strengthen their position in international markets.

This progress has been made possible thanks to the support of Switzerland and the Swiss Cooperation Office in Moldova, whose commitment to innovation and resilience is helping producers respond to a changing climate with practical solutions. In doing so, Swiss support is contributing to a stronger, more competitive and more future-ready Moldovan agriculture.



Brothers Vlad and Veaceslav (right), connect the tech system to the mobile phone.

Good Governance

From fragmented engagement towards institutionalised accountability and participation

In 2025, the Good Governance portfolio strengthened institutional performance, civic engagement, and public-service delivery in complex political environments. Progress was most visible where governance tools became embedded as permanent systems, such as performance management, fiscal accountability, and participatory planning. In parallel, civic-space interventions like ACT in Serbia reinforced civil society as a structured, credible governance actor, ensuring that citizen participation and advocacy remain functional even in contexts of political pressure.

Results at a Glance



577,887
people reached



53% women
30% youth



600+
partner organisations across public
institutions, civil society, and the
private sector



72
new partnerships
established during the year

Governance Systems Strengthened

- Performance Management Systems used nationwide (Albania, Kosovo)
- Training Academy for Local Governance (TALGA) registered as a permanent professional training institution (Albania)
- Municipal revenue systems sustained post-project, strengthening fiscal accountability (Serbia)
- Civil society strengthened as a structured governance actor, supporting participation and advocacy (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Participatory urban planning institutionalised, embedding citizen engagement in decision-making (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

System Change in Action

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Scaling up coalition-led policy influence towards entity governments; operationalization of the roadmap for enabling environment for civil society; strengthening partnerships to protect civic space, including through EU and Civil Society Council-led dialogue; intensifying CSO resilience support amid instability.

Kosovo

Relevant Government actors will consolidate systemic changes for implementation of the Performance Management System and Municipal Performance Grants, address structural and fiscal bottlenecks affecting local finance autonomy, and capitalize on achievements.

Albania

Government actors will advance local governance reforms, notably the Performance Management System and the Local Government Academy, aligned with Territorial Administration Reform; while capitalizing and disseminating lessons from waste management, preschool decentralization, and municipal councils

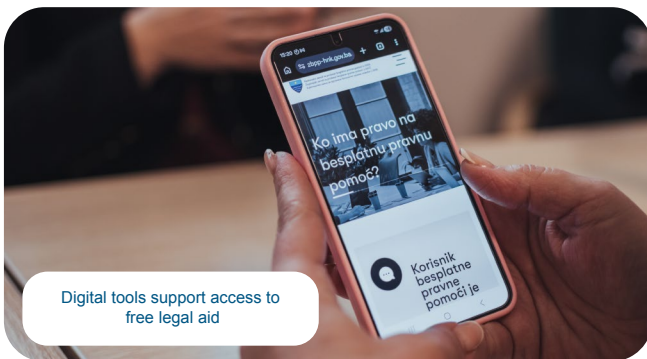
Serbia

Partner civil society organizations will strengthen their constituencies, improve communication, and diversify funding sources; advocacy efforts will intensify through CSO networks and informal civic initiatives, as well as through multi-sector initiatives, keeping the focus on collaboration between the civil society and private sector actors.

Stories of Change

A Right That Took a Decade: When Citizens' Voices Turn Rights on Paper Into Rights in Practice

For over a decade, residents of the Herzegovina–Neretva Canton lived with a paradox: the right to free legal aid formally existed, but the Institute responsible for providing it never truly functioned. For many, especially women, victims of domestic violence, single parents, and citizens who could not afford a lawyer, this meant navigating crises alone. The gap between law and reality remained wide, until citizens decided to voice this problem publicly.



This began to change when local organizations Dignitet and the Nansen Dialogue Center (NDC) Mostar approached Helvetas, through the PRAGG project, asking for support to launch the public campaign “Right to Legal Mostar”, aimed at ensuring the Institute finally becomes operational and accessible to the public.

The campaign was grounded in a simple, human-centered- idea: citizens must be heard, and institutions must respond in ways that restore trust and dignity.

A Survivor’s Voice: “I Am Not Alone”

After a 9 months-long advocacy campaign, the issue gained tremendous public support. In addition, it was recognized by both local authorities and international partners. As a result, the Institute finally began to work, and one of the first client was a woman survivor of domestic violence.

Her testimony became the strongest proof of why this reform mattered:

“I think that anyone who comes here will feel relieved, will know where to turn and what to do. I am not alone.”

Her words show the human impact behind policy change - a moment where fear and uncertainty were replaced with guidance and dignity.

Georgette Bruchez Brugger, Head of Cooperation at the Embassy of Switzerland, underscored the importance of placing people at the center: “We believe it is crucial to place the voice of citizens at the center of this process.” She highlighted that Switzerland’s support stems from its commitment to strengthening direct democratic participation and ensuring that governance systems respond to real needs.



Edisa Demić, Director of Dignitet and representative of the initiative, highlighted the long-term value of the change: “Even if our organization were to close tomorrow, this Institute would remain as a permanent public good.”

Beyond its immediate objectives, the campaign also yielded an important and unplanned outcome: it brought together the local imam, Catholic priest, and Orthodox priest, who publicly and jointly supported the initiative. Their united stance sent a powerful message of solidarity across Mostar – a rare and inspiring example of interfaith cooperation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. What began as an effort to ensure access to legal aid grew into an instance of authentic bridgebuilding, demonstrating how citizen-led initiatives can encourage behavioral change and strengthen social cohesion.

A Model of Good Governance in Practice

Through the PRAGG project, Helvetas supported citizens and civil society to advocate, engage authorities, and unblock a public institution that had remained inactive for more than a decade. This included strengthening the advocacy capacities of Dignitet and NDC Mostar, fostering constructive dialogue with institutions, and ensuring that citizens’ demands were taken seriously – ultimately enabling the Institute for Free Legal Aid to begin providing services to those who need them the most.

The Mostar experience demonstrates the practical conditions under which good governance functions effectively: informed citizen participation, capable civil society leadership, and accountable institutional response. It confirms that governance reform becomes meaningful not through policies alone, but when a woman in crisis can finally access legal protection, and when a public service long out of reach becomes a reality. Thanks to the determination of local actors and the support provided by PRAGG project, Mostar now has a functioning Institute for Free Legal Aid – a lasting public good that strengthens justice and protection for its most vulnerable residents.

Stories of Change

Strengthening Public Participation in Sarajevo's Urban Planning



Christopher Sonderegger, Deputy Head of Infrastructure Financing (SECO) addressing participants at the Sarajevo Urban Talk, October 2025

The Urban Transformation Project Sarajevo (UTPS), funded by SECO, worked closely with the Canton of Sarajevo and local partners to make urban planning more open, accessible, and responsive to residents. Through improved facilitation at public hearings, new communication formats, and innovative outreach tools, such as the online platform [participacija.ba](#) and the mobile laboratory Studio Mobil, the project helped bring planning processes closer to Sarajevo's communities. These efforts strengthened dialogue between institutions and citizens during the development of the Draft Master Urban Plan (2025–2040) and laid the foundations for more inclusive planning practices in the long term.

Speaking on behalf of the Institute for Development Planning of Sarajevo Canton, Assistant Director for Detailed Planning Documentation and Technical Preparation, Dr. Natasa Tabori, highlights: “The most significant improvement that UTPS brought to public participation is how we engage with Sarajevo's residents—from strengthening facilitation techniques during public hearings, launching social media campaigns, to initiating our mobile van, ‘StudioMobil’, that was able to bring the Urban Plan ‘on the spot’ to different neighbourhoods of the city.”

To sustain the progress achieved, she stresses the importance of embedding UTPS innovations directly into Sarajevo's planning system:

“The Digital Twin developed by ETH needs to be fully integrated into planning processes, and the online participation toolkit [participacija.ba](#) should become a routine part of how different planning scenarios are communicated and tested with residents.”



Dr. Natasa Tabori, Institute for Development Planning of Sarajevo Canton

RECONOMY

From pilots to scale: inclusive market systems gaining momentum

In 2025, RECONOMY consolidated its focus on market systems with the strongest potential for inclusive and green growth across the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership. Several mature interventions moved beyond pilot stages and began generating scale as market actors increasingly adopted, financed, and expanded new practices. Strategic private-sector partnerships, most notably with VOLVO, alongside DCED-certified results systems strengthened both the sustainability and the credibility of RECONOMY's impact.

Results at a Glance



6,600+

women and youth in the Eastern Partnership accessed improved income or employment opportunities



10,000+

women and youth in the Western Balkans accessed improved income or employment opportunities



CHF 32+ million
in additional income generated



CHF 36+ million
in investment mobilized by market actors

How the System are changing

In 2025, RECONOMY continued to advance systemic change by strengthening the market functions, relationships, and incentives that shape how inclusive economic development takes place. Across the portfolio, this was reflected in several recurring shifts:

- Businesses and training providers worked more closely to improve the relevance of skills development and workforce preparation
- Market actors increasingly tested and adopted solutions that responded to real business needs
- Partnerships in areas such as digitalisation, green transition, and workforce development showed stronger potential to continue through the incentives and capacities of the actors involved.

A notable feature of RECONOMY's work in 2025 was the continued growth of private-sector engagement across multiple interventions. Businesses contributed not only as participants, but increasingly through expertise, equipment, training capacity, market access, and longer-term commitment to sector development. This strengthened the commercial relevance of interventions and helped anchor results more firmly in the incentives and capabilities of market actors themselves. Partnerships such as the Helvetas–VOLVO collaboration illustrate this well, demonstrating how private-sector actors can play an important role in workforce development and in supporting wider improvements in market system performance.

Credibility and Results Integrity



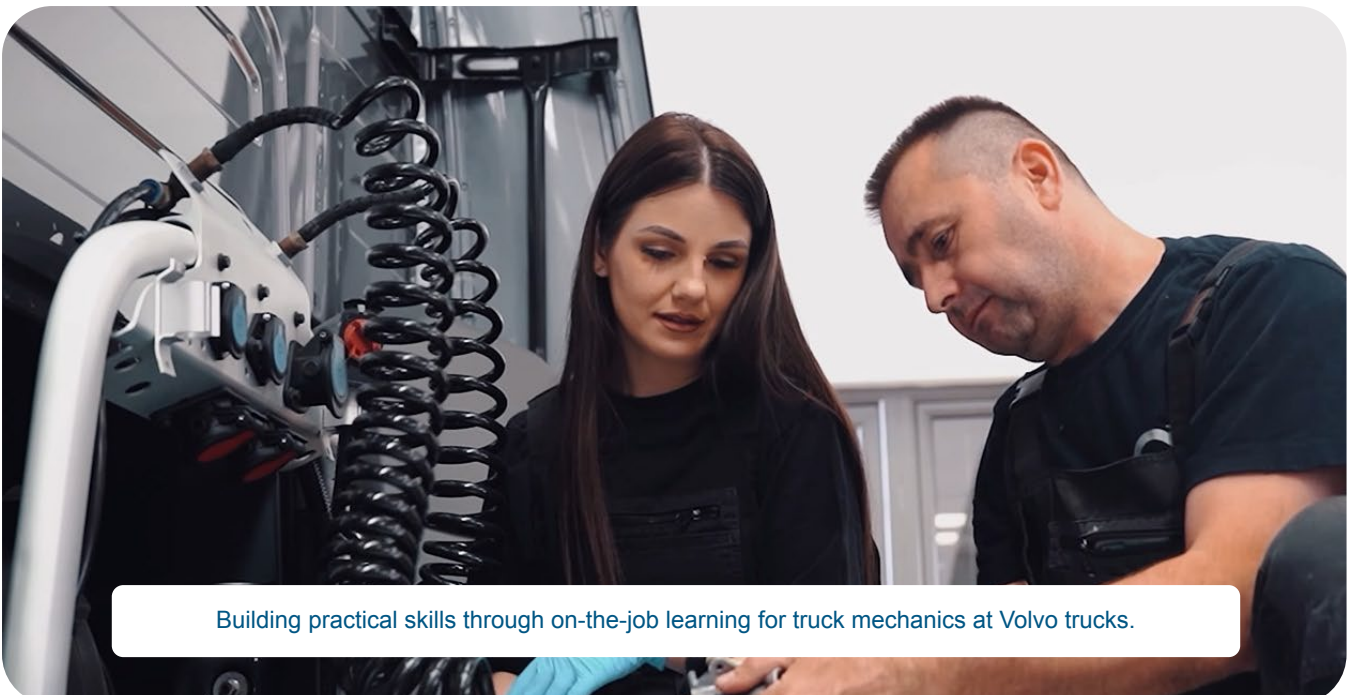
DCED Standard Certified (2025)

Independent confirmation that RECONOMY's results measurement meets international standards for systemic market interventions.

This certification marks a major milestone, validating RECONOMY's mentoring systems, evidence base, and adaptive management practices

Market Systems in Action

- Skills development with industry leadership, including employer-driven vocational training models (e.g. VOLVO partnership)
- Green transition in construction and mobility, supported by private-sector uptake of sustainable practices
- Youth employment through private-sector alliances, enabling scale beyond project timelines



Building practical skills through on-the-job learning for truck mechanics at Volvo trucks.

Stories of Change

When a Cycling Route Becomes a Livelihood: How Trans Dinarica Turned Regional Tourism into Real Income

High above Zlatibor, in the village of Ljubiš in Serbia, where spruce trees scent the air and mornings are quiet, the ethno bungalows Boškova Voda once welcomed mostly weekend hikers. The family-run accommodation followed a familiar rural rhythm — busy summer weekends, quieter weekdays, and an uncertain shoulder season.

Then, a colored line appeared on a digital map.



Cyclists ride along the Trans Dinarica route near Ljubiš, connecting rural areas to regional tourism markets.

The Trans Dinarica Cycling Route, a 5,500-kilometer cross-border trail connecting the Western Balkans into one continuous cycling experience, began running directly past the family's gate. Suddenly, Boškova Voda was no longer just a destination — it was part of a regional journey.

“The route didn't change us,” says Uroš Dacović, who runs the business with his family. “It just connected us to the world — and showed us that our future can stay right here, at home.”

From passing guests to predictable demand

Before Trans Dinarica, visibility was the biggest challenge. Tourists came sporadically, mostly in peak season. Planning investments felt risky. Weekdays were often empty.

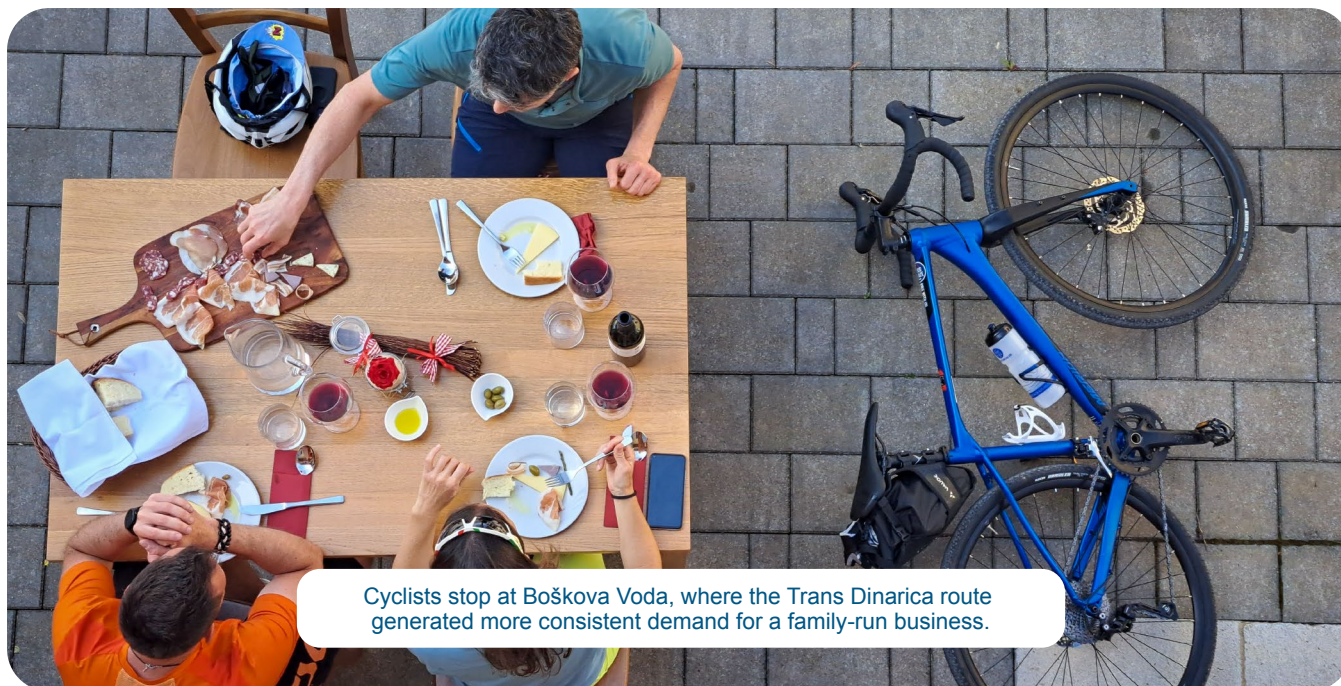
That changed when cyclists started arriving — regularly, not randomly.

Most came in small groups of two to four, typically in spring and summer, often stopping for dinner, an overnight stay, and breakfast before continuing their journey. August quickly became the busiest month, but importantly, cyclists also filled weekdays, smoothing demand beyond weekends.

Today, around 20% of Boškova Voda's guests are cyclists, many using the Trans Dinarica app to plan their routes.

"They are reliable guests," Uroš explains. "They plan ahead, they arrive tired, and they value good food, rest, and hospitality."

What cyclists look for is exactly what Boškova Voda already offered: home-cooked food, traditional accommodation, nature, warmth, and trust.



Cyclists stop at Boškova Voda, where the Trans Dinarica route generated more consistent demand for a family-run business.

Because of that, Uroš didn't need to reinvent the business — just adapt how it presents itself. The family refreshed their website and social media with photos from the route, highlighted cyclist-friendly meals, and made it easier to be found online.

The accommodation is now listed and promoted through the Trans Dinarica platform.



Higher
turnover



More consistent
bookings



For the first time,
fully booked weekdays

The family hires additional local workers — mostly women — during peak cyclist periods. Two women under 35 are already part of the core team, and part-time work during the season provides additional income for women in the village.

"We didn't raise prices," Uroš says. "We didn't change the menu. We just had more guests, and more confidence."

Part of something bigger than one household

Boškova Voda is not an isolated success.

Uroš is one of hundreds of small rural entrepreneurs benefiting from Trans Dinarica - a regional cycling product developed as a commercially viable route, not a donor-dependent campaign.

In the first half of 2025 alone, more than 6,800 cyclists rode sections of the route, generating over CHF 2.5 million in direct income for local economies – guesthouses, cafés, guides, repair shops, and transport providers.

Behind this growth is a different development approach.

Through Sweden’s RECONOMY program, Helvetas acted as a facilitator supporting Goodplace, the creator of Trans Dinarica, to work across borders and turn a shared idea into a market-ready product. Private tour operators now integrate the route independently, investing their own resources into promotion, partnerships, and sales.

The result is a system that continues without donor funding – driven by demand, cooperation, and local ownership.

Staying because the future is here

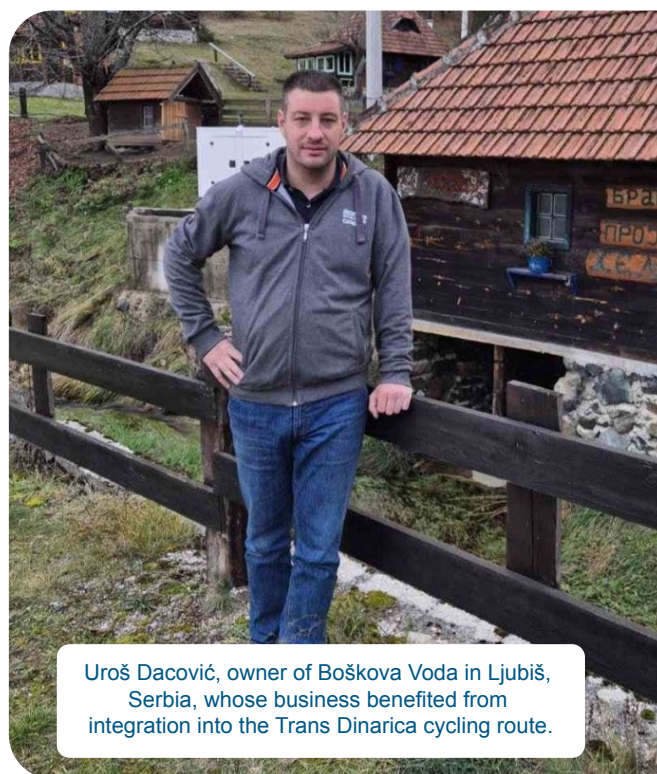
Back in Ljubiš, cyclists often stop at Boškova Voda right after a long downhill stretch. They wash their bikes using water from the family’s natural spring, eat homemade meals, and sometimes buy flour, jams, or preserve some produced by the family, others sourced from nearby local producers.

Uroš is already planning next steps: secure bike storage, e-bike chargers, and better signage. Not because a project requires it, but because demand makes it worthwhile.

“Now I plan,” he says. “Before, I waited.”

For Boškova Voda, Trans Dinarica didn’t bring mass tourism. It brought something more valuable: predictability, dignity, and the confidence to invest.

And for Uroš, it confirmed a simple but powerful truth: Staying in a small village doesn’t mean being left behind if the world knows how to find you.



Uroš Dacović, owner of Boškova Voda in Ljubiš, Serbia, whose business benefited from integration into the Trans Dinarica cycling route.

Development Nexus in Ukraine

From emergency response to recovery with resilience

In 2025, Helvetas advanced a humanitarian–development nexus that addressed urgent needs while reinforcing long-term recovery in Ukraine. By deliberately linking shelter repairs, economic recovery, skills development, and policy reform, interventions supported communities to stabilise and rebuild while strengthening systems essential for reconstruction. This approach positioned humanitarian action as a foundation for sustainable recovery, rather than a temporary response to crisis.

Results at a Glance



10
regions covered across
Ukraine



Led the third wave of the national labor market study, engaging 61,000 enterprises employing 4.4 million people and delivering data-driven insights to inform policy planning



6
vocational education and
training (VET) institutions supported



300+
learners from vulnerable groups gained
skills aligned with labour-market demand



6
companies joined an internship
program enabling workforce
integration for vulnerable groups

Economic Recovery and Development

In 2025, Helvetas supported Ukraine's economic recovery through coordinated interventions that linked emergency assistance with longer-term livelihood restoration.



158 microgrants supported SMEs to recover, restart, or expand economic activity



2,300+ business consultations delivered through Kharkiv Business Hub and local business associations



Integrated advisory models piloted and scaled with local authorities



70,000+ individuals contributed data to the registered unemployment study, enabling a comprehensive assessment of both demand- and supply-side needs

Recovery through a Nexus Approach

Helvetas combined urgent repairs with investments in resilient infrastructure and local capacity, ensuring that humanitarian action contributed directly to long-term recovery.

Key highlights:



89,551 people in conflict-affected cities regained access to safe drinking water through 15 nationwide WASH infrastructure projects



20 grants supported local civil society organisations to lead recovery initiatives



60 CSOs received capacity strengthening support



6,856 people received assistance from Repair Hub and Repair Ambulance

Success Story

Building an Inclusive Business During War

Anastasiia Klymenko, an entrepreneur with a disability, produces adaptive clothing focused on comfort, functionality, and inclusion under her own brand, Zhaga, in the Kyiv region. With a microgrant provided by Helvetas under the project “Stiykist: Building a Sustainable and Inclusive Ukrainian Labour Market” funded by Sida, and complemented by her own investment, she purchased new equipment that enabled her to expand her product range and strengthen her business. The increased production capacity will also benefit the local community: Anastasiia plans to create at least two additional jobs in the near future.



Beyond financial support, she completed specialised textile industry training delivered through the RECONOMY programme implemented by Helvetas. She also joined a group of entrepreneurs selected for a study visit to Sweden to explore best practices in circular production in the light industry and to learn from Swedish experience in adaptive clothing design.

Today, Anastasiia integrates environmentally responsible solutions into her business. Fabric leftovers are sent for recycling to Irpin town (Kyiv region), where they are transformed into new textile material. From this recycled fabric, the Zhaga team produces branded packaging covers used to ship products to customers. Her transformer clothing concept – such as trousers that convert into shorts – reflects the principles of conscious consumption: one high-quality item replaces several garments and serves for years.

For Anastasiia, developing her brand is not only a business venture but also a contribution to building a barrier-free society where every person can feel dignity regardless of physical circumstances. Supporting businesses like Zhaga fosters not only enterprise growth but also a new culture of production – one that is inclusive, responsible, and economically sustainable.

Success Story

Keeping Water Flowing for a Community

The city of Ukrainka in Kyiv region, like many Ukrainian communities, has suffered significant infrastructure damage due to repeated attacks. More than 20,000 residents currently live in the city.

The municipal water utility faced a serious challenge when two sludge pumps at the internal wastewater pumping station failed simultaneously. As a result, the utility could not properly remove sludge from settling tanks or pump it to sludge drying beds. To maintain wastewater treatment, the utility had to rent a pump, which was only a temporary and costly solution, amounting to UAH 60,000 per month.

Helvetas, together with its partner NGO DESPRO, responded to the request, verified the issue, selected appropriate equipment, and procured two new sludge pumps. These pumps are essential for the stable operation of the treatment facilities and for ensuring proper wastewater treatment before discharge into the Dnipro River, which is critical for environmental safety.

“We requested assistance and received two new pumps that fully restored the normal operation of our internal wastewater pumping station. The pumps are working perfectly and meet the required hydraulic specifications,” said Oleh Maksymenko, Head of the Ukrainka Water Utility.



Oleh Maksymenko, Head of the Ukrainka Water Utility at the wastewater treatment facility

Partnerships & Networks

Strengthening systems through collaboration and local leadership

Helvetas Eastern Europe's work is grounded in partnership. In 2025, collaboration with local and international actors remained the primary mechanism for achieving systemic, sustainable change. Partnerships enabled learning, visibility, and influence beyond individual projects by strengthening local capacities, aligning incentives, and supporting actors to take on lasting roles within their systems.

Across the region, engagement went beyond implementation. Public institutions, civil society, and the private sector worked together as interconnected ecosystems, an approach that is particularly important in a context of declining donor funding and increasing emphasis on locally led development.

Strategic Partnerships in 2025

In 2025, Helvetas continued shifting toward deeper strategic partnerships that directly contribute to systemic change, co-investment, and long-term positioning.

A flagship example is the partnership with VOLVO Group, which evolved from skills development into a model of joint investment and system shaping. VOLVO contributes industry expertise, standards, and networks, while Helvetas facilitates inclusive market development and institutional linkages. This collaboration demonstrates a new form of private-sector engagement, where companies act as co-investors and system actors, generating learning that extends well beyond a single sector or project.

Alongside this, Helvetas maintained strong consortium and strategic partnerships with international and local organisations across the region.

Alliances and Regional Networks

As a regional programme, Helvetas actively engaged in alliances that expand learning and influence across borders. RECONOMY served as an important regional platform for convening market actors and scaling inclusive and green growth models. The Regional Advocacy Network provided space for exchange on civic engagement and shrinking civic space, while collaboration with intergovernmental bodies such as Regional Cooperation Council and Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative strengthened access to regional policy dialogue and EU accession-related processes.

Within the Helvetas network, closer collaboration with Helvetas Germany and Helvetas USA supported funding diversification and access to new donors, contributing to new mandates and future positioning.



Partner Perspectives



With the launch of the Greening Private Enterprises in Kosovo (GPEK) project, Switzerland reaffirms its commitment to Kosovo's green and inclusive economic transition. We have entrusted Helvetas with this mandate based on its strong expertise in market systems development and sustainable private sector engagement. We expect this collaboration to deliver measurable results – enabling SMEs to innovate, adopt greener practices, and enhance their competitiveness in line with European standards. Our partnership is rooted in shared values of sustainability, accountability, and measurable impact.

Jean Christophe Favre, Swiss Cooperation Office in Kosovo



Strong local government is built through consistent effort and partnerships that strengthen institutions and the people who serve them. In this context, our cooperation with Helvetas Albania through the Bashki të Forta project has been pivotal in advancing Albania's local governance reforms over the past year, notably through the establishment of the Local Governance Academy (TALGA) as a sustainable training system for all 61 municipalities, the introduction of a Performance-Based Grant linking public funding to measurable results, and the use of data-driven instruments such as the Local Government Performance Report. Together, these efforts are helping municipalities move beyond compliance towards performance, accountability, and more democratic local governance.

Ervin Demo, Minister of State for Local Government in Albania



SDA's long-standing cooperation with Helvetas is based on trust, long-standing cooperation and institutional strength. Through RECONOMY, this partnership has reinforced SDA's capacity for regional engagement beyond Armenia, amongst other priorities, demonstrating Helvetas' commitment to investing in resilient local partner institutions and assuring lasting impact.

Mkrtych Ayzvazyan, Chairperson of Strategic Development Agency Armenia

Financial Overview

In 2025, Helvetas Eastern Europe managed a regional program volume of approximately CHF 27 million, supporting development, governance, and resilience initiatives across the region. Financial resources were primarily invested in program implementation, ensuring that the majority of funds directly supported people, institutions, and systems at country and regional level.

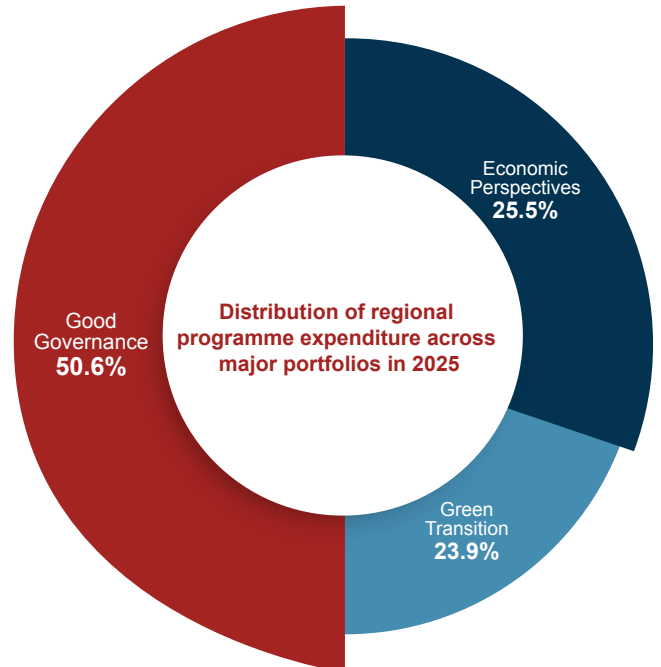
Where the Funding Comes From

The regional program is financed primarily through long-term strategic partnerships with bilateral development agencies, foundations, and institutional donors. Key funding partners include organizations such as SDC, Sida, the European Union, and other international cooperation agencies, such as GIZ, The Hague Academy, reflecting strong confidence in Helvetas' systems-oriented and locally led approach.

Ensuring Accountability and Value

Helvetas Eastern Europe applies robust financial management, internal controls, and compliance systems across all operations. In 2025, all audits were completed without major findings, confirming the effective and transparent use of funds. Continuous investment in financial systems and staff capacity supports responsible stewardship and value for money across the regional portfolio.

How Resources Were Used



Our People: Enabling Impact Across the Region

In 2025, Helvetas Eastern Europe was supported by a diverse and experienced team working across stable development contexts and crisis-affected environments. At year-end, the regional programme was implemented by 186 staff members, including teams supporting recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine.

The organisation maintained a female-majority workforce while continuing to advance its commitment to achieving sustainable gender balance and inclusion. Across core country programmes, teams combined long-standing experience with new expertise, enabling continuity while adapting to evolving regional needs.

Helvetas invests consistently in its people. In 2025, this included continued focus on leadership development, learning, and strengthening management practices to support staff well-being and performance in demanding operational contexts. This investment is essential to sustaining quality delivery, partnerships, and impact across the region.



Total staff:
186



Female workforce:
64.5%



Average tenure:
~5 years



**Regional teams operating
across 11 countries**

Looking Ahead – Priorities for Next Year

Looking to 2026, Helvetas Eastern Europe will continue to build on the results, partnerships, and learning established in 2025, operating in a regional context that remains dynamic and uncertain. The programme will maintain a strong focus on quality, collaboration, and adaptability, ensuring that ongoing and future initiatives respond effectively to evolving needs across countries and thematic areas.

Across the region, Helvetas will continue to work closely with local institutions, civil society, and private-sector partners, strengthening systems and capacities that support sustainable, locally driven change. Building on existing collaborations, the region will further deepen engagement with strategic private-sector partners - including continued cooperation with companies such as Volvo and the expansion of collaboration with IKEA - to support inclusive economic recovery, skills development, and market-based solutions.

Ongoing investment in organisational learning, partnerships, and sound management practices will support effective programme delivery and help sustain impact over time. Drawing on experience gained in recent years, Helvetas Eastern Europe enters 2026 well positioned to continue contributing to inclusive development, resilient institutions, and regional cooperation.

Made Possible By Our Team and Partners

We acknowledge the dedication of our staff, the commitment of our partners, and the continued support of our donors, whose collective contributions made the achievements of 2025 possible.





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