



VOICE, INCLUSION, COHESION

HELVETAS' GOVERNANCE PORTFOLIO IN EASTERN AND SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

Capability Statement

HELVETAS supports local actors in achieving sustainable systemic change that

- amplifies the **voices** of vulnerable communities, migrants and refugees
- enhances the space for civil society and the private sector to meaningfully participate in **inclusive** decision making
- strengthens the capacities of public institutions to deliver gender and youth responsive services and to articulate transformative policies for a **cohesive** society

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HELVETAS: quick facts



Vision: HELVETAS is a Swiss-based independent development organization dedicated to a just world where everyone can live with dignity and security while using resources sustainably. It supports disadvantaged communities in nearly 40 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe.



Mission: HELVETAS facilitates the empowerment of disadvantaged communities in developing and transitional countries to sustainably improve their living conditions. It promotes equitable access to essential resources, upholds social and economic rights, and supports long-term partnerships. Additionally, HELVETAS advocates for Swiss policies that address the needs of these regions.

Together with partners, HELVETAS Eastern and Southeastern Europe tackles regional challenges at various levels. In 2023, the **Voice, Inclusion, Cohesion (VIC) portfolio** maintained a presence in four countries with six large-scale projects. We collaborated with **497** organizations – institutional partners from the public and civic sectors, as well as with **1,712 persons, 52% of whom were women and 20% youth**, to empower them to claim their rights to basic public services or to transform local conflicts.



Values: HELVETAS is committed to solidarity, human rights, and self-determined development. It promotes social equity and equal opportunities for all, respecting cultural values in partnerships. The organization advocates for development that balances social, economic, and environmental benefits.

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Our Edge

Partnering with HELVETAS means leveraging the **unique combination of expertise, innovation, and commitment**. We offer a proven, forward-thinking approach that makes us the ideal choice for advancing inclusive and sustainability goals.



Expertise: With decades of experience and a team of highly skilled professionals, HELVETAS brings solid knowledge and extensive experience to every project. The VIC team consists of gender-balanced, highly professional, committed, and multilingual advisors with solid experience working in international development cooperation across the globe.

[Meet our advisors](#)



Innovation: We are at the forefront of inclusive and sustainable development with cutting-edge approaches and methodologies. Our innovative methods and development approaches are designed to address contemporary democratic challenges and drive institutional change, setting new standards for sustainability and efficiency.



Commitment: HELVETAS nourishes long-term partnerships with development actors, which builds a strong track record in the on-system work, inclusion and sustainability. We are dedicated to equitable and impactful initiatives that benefit both people and their livelihoods.

03 Key Strengths and Value Propositions in Voice, Inclusion, Cohesion

The main working fields of the Voice, Inclusion, and Cohesion in Eastern Europe are:

Governance & Civic Space: Our aim is to ensure that communities and civil society can claim their rights and meaningfully engage in development and policy processes. To achieve this, we develop the capacity of civil society to wield influence, and for local governments to manage resources and efficiently and transparently deliver public services.

Urban engagement: We encourage urbanization that is sustainable and inclusive by advancing the capacities of public institutions and facilitating citizen engagement in urban planning.

We also work in the fields of:

- **Conflict transformation:** We build cohesive societies where people can live in dignity by fostering peaceful relationships and creating spaces to exchange ideas, prevent radicalization of youth, and constructively resolve conflicts by tackling their root causes and potential drivers.
- **Migration:** We maximize the development benefits of migration and protect the rights of migrant workers and their families by strengthening institutions that work at the interface between governments, migrants, and migrant organizations in the places of origin and destination.

04 Core Competencies in Voice, Inclusion, Cohesion



Strengthening governmental institutions for improved public service provision

- *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.

Spotlight 1: Improved service provision synced with national Government agenda in Albania

What is at stake – the challenge: Recent economic and social developments as well as decentralization of functions placed significant pressure on Albanian municipalities to enhance service provision. The Government of Albania prioritized establishment of the national performance management system and the reform of the capacity building system for local governments in the national

Our solutions and roles:

Key achievements in 2023:

agenda. Particular focus is placed on enhancing waste management services and preschool education, both of which remain underfunded and face challenges in expanding coverage. In the [Bashki të Forta project](#), HELVETAS Albania work with all 61 local governments in the country on improving administration performance, strengthening municipal councils, and developing service standards for waste management and preschool services. A hallmark of the 2023 efforts is the establishment of the performance-based system and the training academy for local governments in line with the Governmental agenda. Capacity-building activities involved 1,000 persons (42% women; 20% young people), while 65 civil society actors were supported in advocacy efforts. More than 90,000 citizens got better access to public services. The satisfaction level of citizens with waste management services increased from 49% in 2021 to 63% in 2023. These accomplishments set a promising foundation for further excellence in the year ahead.

Spotlight 2: Greater citizen satisfaction with municipal services in Kosovo

What is at stake – the challenge:

Our solutions and roles:

Key achievements in 2023:

Kosovo operates under a decentralized governance system where municipalities wield significant authority, in line with the European Charter on Local Self-Government. However, the absence of a clear demarcation of responsibilities results in overlapping jurisdictions and a lack of effective oversight. Citizen engagement in decision-making processes is weak, with complex procedures deterring those who attempt to participate. In 2023, HELVETAS Kosovo – [Decentralisation and Municipal Support Project](#) (DEMOS) collaborated with 34 municipalities and 13 CSOs to enhance citizen satisfaction with public services. 131 persons (50% women) participated in capacity-building programs on the Municipal Performance Management System which monitors 119 performance indicators. The Municipal Performance Grant incentivizes municipalities to make strides in good governance and financial management by providing grants to the best-performing municipalities for public infrastructure projects. Over the past two years, there has been a noticeable increase in municipal performance: 46,476 citizens have improved access to public services in 2023. Concurrently, the Government will bolster the financial sustainability of the grant scheme, as stipulated in the newly enacted Law on the Performance Management System.

Spotlight 3: Taxpayers go digital via property tax platform in Serbia

What is at stake – the challenge:

Our solutions and roles:

Key achievements in 2023:

In 2006, property tax administration and collection were transferred from the National Tax Authority to local governments. Since then, local authorities have had a high interest in improving the efficiency of the property tax collection. The [Municipal Economic Development project](#) (MED) supports local governments in own source revenue generation, making them less dependent on the central government. Improved services and more financial resources for investments in socio-economic infrastructure have contributed to a better quality of life at the local level. In Serbia, 2,142,285 citizens are registered users of the digital platform "Unified Tax Information System of Local Self-Government Units", developed with the technical assistance of HELVETAS. These citizens pay property tax and, therefore, have access to the ICT-supported platform which enables them to access their tax balance and pay property taxes online without the need for face-to-face contacts at the Local Tax Administration or post office.



Empowerment of civil society organizations – addressing the challenges of shrinking civic space

- *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.
- *Multi-sector networks*: Facilitation of dialogue and networking between actors from the public institutions, private actors, civil society organizations, media, and academia.

Spotlight 4: Citizen-led advocacy for enhanced public services in Serbia

What is at stake – the challenge: The state of civil society in Serbia continues to face serious challenges as pressure on CSOs, independent media, and local activists keep growing. Citizen engagement remains very low, with only one in five citizens participating in local community problem-solving initiatives. Public consultations held by state entities on issue of public concern continue to be organised as a mere formality and hardly ever allow for meaningful participation of interested citizens.

Our solutions and roles: In light of the deteriorating democratic governance in Serbia, HELVETAS tackles the obstacles confronting civil society activism. In 2023, through [ACT - For an Active Civil Society Together](#) project, HELVETAS worked in partnership with 147 civil society organizations all over the country to advance their institutional sustainability and the effects of advocacy efforts. The partner CSOs started 134 advocacy initiatives at the local level (93 initiatives) and national level (41 initiatives).

Key achievements: As a result of these initiatives, 34 policy documents were adopted at the local level, and 11 at the national level, which brought improvements in the areas of rule of law, human rights, social inclusion, citizen participation, and environmental protection. Almost 90,000 citizens (55% women) benefited from the activities of CSO partners.

Spotlight 5: Empowering Community Voices in Bosnia and Herzegovina

What is at stake – the challenge: Citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina are rather free to disseminate a wide range of information through different channels, including media. Yet, authorities and other powerful actors occasionally undermine this freedom by tightening policies and practices.

Our solutions and roles: HELVETAS implements [PRAGG – Proactive citizens](#) project that aim at more active participation of citizens, especially the socially excluded, in the advocacy and creation of public policies through engagement in civil society organizations. During 2023, we worked with 15 civil society organizations to develop advocacy campaigns; 12 local advocacy plans were created to raise awareness, influence public opinion, and advocate for positive change in the municipalities.

Key achievements: The advocacy campaigns mobilized 1,193 citizens who have an interest in improving the situation for youth, people living with disabilities, and women victims of violence. One community-level campaign, that succeeded in the massive mobilization of citizens, aims at [building a playground with equipment for children in Trebinje](#). This is an excellent example of how joint efforts can shape a better future for the youngest!



Sustainable and inclusive urban engagement

- *Encouraging sustainable and inclusive urbanization:* Empowering towns to improve living conditions, food systems, access to education & jobs, capitalizing on the rural-urban linkages.
- *Focus on small- and medium-sized towns:* Realigning the uneven development of urban and rural areas; strategies for curbing rural poverty and exodus.
- *Citizen engagement in urban planning:* Design of participatory processes; facilitation of transparent and inclusive public engagement in creation of urban policies.

Spotlight 6: Improved public engagement in urban planning in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

What is at stake – the challenge:

The baseline analysis of the Sarajevo’s urban planning system outlined the need to improve public participation, with focus on three areas: (i) institutional capacities for public engagement, (ii) communication & accessibility, and (iii) accountability & transparency.

Our solutions and roles:

Within the Sarajevo Urban Transformation Project (UTPS), HELNETAS designed and implemented activities for improving and institutionalising participatory urban planning mechanisms, including compilation of the best practice publication, capacity building and technical assistance for cantonal and municipal institutions.

Key achievements:

In spring 2023, HELNETAS provided assistance for organization of public discussions on the Draft Urban Plans in the Sarajevo Canton. There were 10 public hearings and 5 smaller-scale dialogue events with the participation of cca 800 citizens, experts, students, business people, and civil society organizations. The key messages from all discussions will be analyzed by the urban planners and incorporated into the final Urban Plans.



Our Offerings

Partner with HELNETAS to drive impactful projects, promote innovation, and build a reliable sustainability network through:

- Supporting the design, implementation, adaptation and reviews of projects;
- Promotion of innovations through applied research and sourcing of good international practices;
- Developing and contextualizing methodologies, tools and approaches such as Conflict Sensitivity; Political Economy & Power Analysis, Socially Inclusive and Gender Responsive Budgeting, Social Dialogue & Audits, Experiential Peace Education and Arts & Culture for Social Cohesion;
- Conducting DAC evaluations, feasibility analyses, and capacity development;
- Managing knowledge, capitalizing and sharing of project experiences;
- Concluding partnerships in consortia, and joint project implementation.



Project management and impact evaluations

We apply advanced tools and methodologies for managing governance projects and evaluating their impact. Our dedicated approach and expertise in managing institutional change ensure efficient project implementation and accurate measurement and analysis of outcomes, driving continuous improvement and success.

Clients/donors & partners



SDC, SECO



Sida



EU



Norway



Netherlands



Advocacy – our topic for knowledge sharing and networking

The [Regional Advocacy Network](#), established in 2018, is a product of the knowledge and experience in advocacy we have accumulated over the years. **Advocacy** is a key aspect of all our interventions, including those addressing social inclusion, sustainability, good governance, and creating new perspectives.

Our partners

This network brings together like-minded individuals from diverse sectors - national and local governments, academia, civil society, private sector, educators, and interest groups. Through regular virtual and in-person exchanges, participants discuss successful solutions applied by various HELVETAS projects and partners. The network fosters consistent knowledge sharing, allowing participants to their country and the broader region.

If interested in learning from best practices and tackling challenges in your project or region, [become a member of HELVETAS Regional Advocacy Network!](#)

HELVETAS Governance projects in Eastern Europe



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:



Snežana Mišić Mihajlović
Regional Governance Portfolio Manager
snezana.misic@helvetas.org