



# NEW PERSPECTIVES

## *HELNETAS' ECONOMIC PORTFOLIO IN EASTERN AND SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE*

### *Capability Statement*

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HELNETAS' Economic Portfolio in Eastern and Southeastern Europe aims to create sustainable systemic change that:

- Increases employability by enhancing vocational skills, career guidance, and labor market intermediation.
- Facilitates job creation through private sector engagement, entrepreneurship, and market systems development (MSD).
- Improves income generation by promoting inclusive economic opportunities for youth, women, rural populations, and marginalized groups.

Our projects support sustainable economic development through tailored approaches that combine technical expertise, capacity building, and local partnerships to ensure meaningful employment and income growth for vulnerable populations.

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## HELNETAS: quick facts

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**Vision:** HELNETAS 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.

Our objective in creating **the New Perspectives** is built on the vision that everyone in society is given the same chances to make the best out of life in a self-determined way, irrespective of gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, religion, ethnicity – or the wealth of one’s parents.



**Mission:** HELNETAS 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, HELNETAS advocates for Swiss policies that address the needs of these regions.

Together with partners, HELNETAS Eastern and Southeastern Europe tackles regional challenges at multiple levels. In 2023, the New Perspectives portfolio maintained a presence in six countries through six large-scale projects and two regional initiatives. Over the past year, these projects supported **around 200 local organizations and directly benefited approximately 60,000 people**, 48% of whom were women and 72% youth, creating new opportunities and perspectives for them.



**Values:** HELNETAS 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

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Partnering with Helvetas means leveraging deep expertise, a commitment to innovation, and a long-term focus on sustainable development. We offer a proven, practical approach that delivers both immediate and lasting impact, particularly in youth employment and inclusive economic opportunities.



**Expertise:** With decades of experience and a team of highly skilled professionals, HELNETAS brings solid knowledge and extensive experience to every project. The 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:** HELNETAS 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.



## Key Strengths and Value Propositions in the New Perspectives portfolio

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The main working fields of the New Perspective portfolio in Eastern Europe are:

**Bridging Skills Gaps for Future Employment:** Helvetas is dedicated to addressing the skills gap in Eastern and Southeastern Europe by enhancing market-relevant vocational education and improving intermediation services for immediate labor market needs. In the short term, we support labor market intermediation, facilitating job placement and improving public-private employment services. In the long term, we focus on sustainable pathways by aligning formal education systems with market demands, integrating career counseling and promoting green skills for future industries.

**Inclusive Market Systems Development:** We transform local economies by fostering inclusive market systems that drive economic growth while providing opportunities for marginalized groups. Our initiatives focus on building systemic change in partnership with private, public, and civil society actors, ensuring that the benefits of growth reach rural populations, youth, and women. This approach creates both immediate job opportunities and long-term economic resilience.

**Sustainable Economic Growth through Green Transition:** Helvetas integrates the green transition into local economies by promoting sustainable practices and circular business models. We work with local actors to ensure that economic growth is environmentally responsible, positioning the region to lead in the green economy. This fosters an ecosystem that supports both social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

**Strengthening Ecosystems for Youth Employment:** Helvetas creates robust ecosystems that support youth employment by aligning education systems with market demands and providing pathways for digital, non-formal, and vocational training. We work with policymakers, educational institutions, and the private sector to upskill youth and ensure their economic participation in industries critical to the region's development.



## Core Competencies in the New Perspectives portfolio

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### Bridging Skills Gaps for Future Employment

- *Intermediation service:* Helvetas enhances labor market dynamics by improving intermediation services, focusing on immediate job placement and matching through partnerships with public employment services and private sector actors.
- *Market-Relevant Vocational Education and Skills Development:* Helvetas collaborates with local governments and private sector actors to align vocational education systems with market needs, ensuring that young people and marginalized groups are equipped with skills in high-demand sectors, including digital and green economies.

- *Career Guidance and Counseling:* Helvetas builds sustainable career guidance systems by providing capacity building for educational institutions and labor market services. We ensure that individuals receive targeted support in making informed career decisions that align with labor market trends.

## Spotlight 1: Improved intermediation service in Kosovo

<i>What is at stake – the challenge:</i>	Kosovo, as the youngest European country, needs to keep up economically with the rest of Europe. This puts pressure on the economy to develop value-added products, improve efficiency, and foster innovation. However, the lack of a robust intermediation system left businesses struggling to find skilled labor. With no effective job-matching services and public institutions facing challenges, the labor market was inefficient, making it difficult for companies to secure the talent needed to drive economic growth.
<i>Our solutions and roles:</i>	The EYE project recognized the need to bring sustainable business models to existing job-matching providers and help them demonstrate their value to both job seekers and employers. In the initial phase, EYE supported Kosovo Jobs in setting up its services, laying the foundation for effective job matching. Over time, we expanded our support, helping Kosovo Jobs and other providers extend their services across the entire territory of Kosovo. In the final phase, our focus shifted towards enhancing the quality of services, enabling providers to evolve beyond basic intermediation and contribute to broader business development and economic growth.
<i>Key achievements</i>	Few believed that Kosovo could establish a modern HR intermediation service when Kosovo Jobs began by cutting job ads from newspapers and pinning them on bulletin boards. Ten years later, Kosovo Jobs is not only the leading job portal but also a pioneer in HR services, organizing a regional conference featuring globally renowned experts. By the second edition, the conference had become fully commercial, generating revenue from ticket sales and private sector sponsorships, independent of donor funding. Meanwhile, job portals have grown from 480 users in 2012 to over 23,000 in 2022, with more than 1 million unique visitors engaging with the platforms, showcasing their significant role in reshaping Kosovo’s labor market.

## Spotlight 2: Carrer counseling in Albania

<i>What is at stake – the challenge:</i>	In a rapidly changing world, many Western Balkan countries, including Albania, struggle with rigid education systems that fail to adapt to evolving market needs. This has created a significant gap between the skills businesses require and those the labor force possesses. With the education system slow to evolve, individuals often make poor career choices, selecting professions with limited prospects or ones that don’t align with their personal strengths and capacities. This mismatch exacerbates the skills gap, hindering Albania’s economic development.
<i>Our solutions and roles:</i>	In 2012, the Risi Albania team recognized this critical gap. There was no career counseling service available, nor was there sufficient capacity to provide or demand such a service. At the same time, a significant percentage of people were making misguided career choices. To tackle this, Risi Albania adopted a holistic approach, working across all necessary functions. This included establishing Albania’s first career guidance service at the University of Durres, developing a master’s curriculum to train career counselors, and creating essential infrastructure, such as information systems, to support the service. Risi not only launched the service and sparked public interest, but also worked closely with service providers to continuously improve the quality of guidance. As awareness grew, the service was successfully transferred to local municipalities, leading to the establishment of Municipal Career Counseling Services and ensuring wider access and sustainability.
<i>Key achievements in 2023:</i>	To date, over 8,000 individuals have benefited from the career counseling service, positively influencing their career decisions. Notably, the service initially launched at the University of Durres has been successfully replicated by three other universities. Additionally, the Municipal Career Counseling Service in Tirana has merged with the National Employment Service, ensuring full sustainability beyond project funding. Four more cities are in the process of establishing similar services based on this model. The

systematic development of guidelines, a curriculum, and an information system has been instrumental in making the service scalable and easy to replicate across Albania.

## Spotlight 3: Developing the market for non-formal education provision in Bosnia & Herzegovina

**What is at stake – the challenge:** In Bosnia & Herzegovina, the formal education system is underperforming, particularly in delivering modern, applicable skills needed by the labor market. The curriculum is outdated, especially in technology and service sectors, resulting in high youth unemployment rates and significant skills mismatches. Businesses report difficulties filling vacancies, and nearly three-quarters of businesses cite the lack of skills as a major issue. The formal education system is not responding quickly enough to meet the demands of modern industries, creating a need for alternative education paths, such as non-formal education.

**Our solutions and roles:** Helvetas, through the MarketMakers project, aimed to address this issue by fostering the development of non-formal education providers in collaboration with the private sector. The project piloted "company academies," where employers set up training and retraining programs to meet industry-specific needs. This approach allowed companies to offer specialized education tailored to the skills they needed, directly linking education with employment opportunities. The pilot phase focused on creating a diverse range of company academies across different sectors and learning from these experiments to refine the approach.

**Key achievements in 2023:**

- Established multiple company academies in partnership with private sector companies across various industries.
- Helped bridge the gap between education and market demands, directly impacting youth employability.
- Over 160 unemployed young people gained employment through these academies, and over 560 others enhanced their employability.
- Expanded the understanding of how private sector-driven education can complement formal education, benefiting not just the companies but the broader labor market.
- Generated positive spillovers, with some company academies becoming sustainable education providers, continuously offering new cycles of courses.



### Inclusive Market system development

- *Comprehensive Market Understanding:* Helvetas conducts in-depth (MSD) market assessments to identify barriers and opportunities, ensuring inclusive access for marginalized groups in market systems.
- *Driving Innovation and Efficiency:* Helvetas promotes and facilitates innovation by introducing new technologies and business models that enhance market efficiency and accessibility.
- *Private Sector Partnerships and Risk Sharing:* Helvetas partners with the private sector, sharing risks through technical assistance and financial support to encourage investment in underserved areas.
- *Building Capacity for Inclusive Growth:* Helvetas strengthens local capacities by providing training and resources to public and private actors, enabling inclusive market development and sustainable economic growth.
- *Promoting Sustainability and Market Ownership:* Helvetas ensures sustainability by fostering local ownership of market solutions, developing exit strategies that empower local actors to maintain market improvements.

## Spotlight 4: Stimulating innovations in Agri production in Moldova

<i>What is at stake – the challenge:</i>	Moldova, one of Europe's poorest nations, relies heavily on agriculture but lags behind in adopting modern production practices. This reliance on outdated methods limits productivity, constrains access to international markets, and prevents the agricultural sector from realizing its full potential.
<i>Our solutions and roles:</i>	The OPTIM project is revolutionizing Moldova's agricultural sector by identifying key areas where innovative technologies can add the most value. By introducing advanced equipment and practices, such as hydro-cooling systems for cherries and greenhouses for vegetable production, we help local producers open new markets. We work closely with the private sector to de-risk investments in these technologies, ensuring that they are accessible and scalable for a wider range of producers.
<i>Key achievements:</i>	Just 18 months into the intervention, OPTIM has seen transformative results. Over 48 companies have increased competitiveness / sell on high end market with 207% increased turnover adopted. Only a handful of companies copied hydro-cooling technology for cherries, enabling Moldovan producers to extend product shelf life and gain access to lucrative EU markets. Meanwhile, vegetable producers have embraced modern greenhouse technology, with many ordering new equipment from Turkey after witnessing its success on local demo plots. These innovations are not only boosting productivity but also positioning Moldova as a competitive player in the European agricultural market.

## Spotlight 5: Access to high end market to Albanian fruits

<i>What is at stake – the challenge:</i>	Albania's agriculture sector, despite employing 40% of the labor force, is one of the least productive in the Balkans. The lack of certification and modern practices prevents local producers from accessing high-value international markets, limiting job opportunities, particularly for young people.
<i>Our solutions and roles:</i>	The intervention focuses on introducing GlobalG.A.P. group certification to enable Albanian agribusinesses to access higher-value international markets. By working closely with exporters, business development services (BDS) providers, and farmers, the project reduces the costs and risks associated with certification. It also builds the capacity of local agronomists and supports exporters in establishing group certification schemes, making certification more accessible and affordable.
<i>Key achievements:</i>	Within two years, the project has increased GlobalG.A.P.-certified land from 40 to 500 hectares. Certified exporters have gained access to lucrative EU markets, leading to export growth and job creation, with partners like Doni Fruits securing 5 new retail buyers and creating 13 full-time and 253 part-time field jobs. By the end of 2022, an additional 5 exporters and 500 farmers are expected to join the GlobalG.A.P. certification, boosting Albania's competitive presence in international markets.



### Sustainable Economic Growth through Green Transition:

- Promoting Circular Business Models: Helvetas drives sustainable economic growth by embedding green transition principles into local economies, championing circular business models that reduce waste and optimize resource use.
- Strategic Partnerships for Green Growth: We collaborate closely with local stakeholders to ensure that economic development is not only profitable but also environmentally responsible, positioning the region as a leader in the green economy.
- Building Inclusive and Sustainable Ecosystems: Our efforts create a thriving ecosystem that balances social inclusion with environmental sustainability, fostering long-term resilience and prosperity for all.

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

*What is at stake – the challenge:*

The waste management and recycling sector in North Macedonia faces significant challenges due to volatile market conditions, especially the fluctuating prices of recyclables like plastic. REDI Recycling, a social enterprise focused on integrating informal waste collectors from the Roma community, was severely impacted when the global price of plastics dropped sharply in 2023, rendering its original business model financially unsustainable and jeopardizing its social mission and workers' livelihoods.

*Our solutions and roles:*

Faced with the plastic price crisis, REDI Recycling, with support from RECONOMY, adopted an adaptive management strategy. This involved a three-month operational pause to reassess its business model and explore new opportunities. The enterprise decided to pivot to the collection of non-hazardous e-waste, a growing and more stable market. This shift was strategically supported through partnerships, enabling REDI Recycling to diversify its revenue streams while staying committed to its social impact goals of supporting marginalized waste collectors.

*Key achievements:*

The pivot to e-waste collection breathed new life into REDI Recycling's operations, opening up a new line of revenue and addressing a critical environmental issue. Through partnerships, the enterprise now plays a key role in e-waste management, positioning itself to target 400 buildings by April 2024 and aiming to reach 1,000 by the end of the year. This expansion not only secures jobs for informal waste collectors but also aligns with the EU Green Agenda, fostering sustainable growth in the region.



### Our Offerings

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

- Design and implement large-scale economic development projects that enhance employability and create inclusive labor markets.
- Promote innovation through market systems development, private sector engagement, and entrepreneurship support.
- Develop and contextualize methodologies for sustainable and inclusive economic growth.
- Strengthen partnerships between education systems, businesses, and labor market institutions to foster long-term job creation.
- Manage knowledge by sharing experiences and insights to ensure effective, scalable, and sustainable solutions.



### 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



Sida



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Liechtenstein

## 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.

## HELVETAS Helvetas Economic projects in Eastern Europe



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