



*YMCA Finland Development Cooperation  
Programme Results Report 2022*

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# **PROGRAMME FOR YOUTH, PEACE AND LIVELIHOODS**

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# 1 Introduction: Youth empowerment for good

As 2022 marks a significant transition being the first year YMCA Finland became a partner organisation of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, the first chapter aims to describe the organisation's exceptional growth and the drivers behind it. The second chapter summarises the main results for year 2022, the first of four-year programme period.

## 1.1 Journey of growth

YMCA is one of the oldest and largest movements for youth in the world. Founded in 1844, it responded to unhealthy social and economic conditions arising among transitioning youth communities in the big cities at the end of the Industrial Revolution. Today, YMCA operates in 120 countries, reaching over 60 million people, bringing social justice and peace to young people and their communities, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, state of health, sexual orientation, or socio-economic background. Throughout its history, the YMCA has been a pioneer in urban youth work. A local, authentic, and historical presence brings along a deep and holistic understanding of the situation of young people.

As truly global movement with an international headquarters was established in 1855, international collaboration has been ingrained in the core of the YMCA movement. Partly due to this character, YMCA started to strongly involve in humanitarian, refugee and rehabilitation work since early years. As early as in 1907, the World Alliance was able to coordinate assistance to Jews migrating to Western world, because of its ability to connect the needs to aid through an established structure. Furthermore, the World Alliance coordinated the post-1918 migration work throughout Europe and the countries of reception in North and South America, Australia and New Zealand. During the World Wars, YMCA's presence was significant, both on the frontline and at home, offering material, educational and spiritual support. In fact, YMCA was one of the largest providers of civilian support to soldiers, munitions workers and families during the First World War. In-between an after the wars, YMCA worked with prisoners of war and in refugee camps, providing necessities and educational, cultural and recreational activities. Over the years, similar work was extended in the Middle East and several African countries. This history reflects the institutional memory, legitimacy, knowledge and experience among the YMCA movements working with those in most need.

YMCA Finland was founded in 1889 and began its international social work by helping refugees after World War II. The global network of YMCAs and long-term commitment to work with most vulnerable groups creates a solid structure and base for strong international partnerships. In 1979, the still ongoing collaboration began in The Gambia which marked the start of development cooperation within YMCA Finland. The Nordic countries, Kosovo and Hungary have also been long-term partners.

The potential of the YMCA is significant, and the groundwork has been built over a long period of time. In 2015, a new page was turned when the expansion of development cooperation accelerated. The work began with an assessment of potential YMCA partners in the Middle East and Africa. A new partnership was launched in **Lebanon** in 2016 and the cooperation in the **Gambia** was expanded in 2018. During the years, projects in **Kenya** and **Palestine** were also prepared and were funded from 2021 onwards. Since the beginning of this growth phase,

the entirety of projects has been designed thematically coherent and the approach programmatic. Conscious and noticeable efforts were made to pave the way towards programme-support funding, which was then received in 2022, after a thorough assessment and application period between 2020-2021.

The programme funding enabled extending the cooperation with the **Africa Alliance of YMCAs** and launching new partnership with **YMCA Ethiopia**. Notably, YMCA Finland is now also able to empower more young people with diverse backgrounds through its **global education** programme that serves as a binding element between the development cooperation and youth empowerment in Finland. In addition, there is a readiness for cooperation in **Ukraine** as the work of local YMCA partner has been closely followed, their needs recorded, and coordination and activities planned.

In recent years, resources and professional capacities have grown rapidly and the YMCA's vast potential has been harnessed more effectively. We draw on not only our international network but also on a broad and diverse national network of professionals and young people. Today, YMCA Finland operates as a national central organisation for 30 local YMCA associations in Finland. After several years of steady growth, altogether, the YMCA movement in Finland has more than 400 employees, almost 2000 volunteers and an annual turnover of more than 30 million euros. The consolidated balance sheet is more than 100 million euros. In 2022, 29 300 young people regularly participated in YMCA activities in Finland and more than 24 000 events and meetings were organised. At the same time, the staff of the YMCA Finland national office increased to 11 people. The total expenditure of the national office amounted to close to two million euros and the expenditure on the development cooperation programme accounted for 907 730 euros in 2022.

Equipped with these networks, strong leadership, a diverse range of professionals, YMCA Finland has been bringing forth the idea of youth, peace and security in its domestic and international cooperation for years. At Finland's initiative, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on **Youth, Peace and Security** (YPS) has been brought to the heart of the YMCA work worldwide. The World YMCA has recognised YMCA Finland's role and mandate within the movement by offering the substance knowledge on YPS and supporting the world's largest youth movement in leveraging this niche.

The YPS agenda has strengthened the recognition of the societal importance of youth work. It has provided a framework for a holistic understanding of peace, helped to break down stereotypes about young people and raise the role of youth into the public debate. The YMCA has been able to use the agenda to amplify its message and strengthen its position and influence. As a global youth organisation, the YMCA is a key player in promoting this agenda, which is also important for Finland. As a civic actor rooted in Finland, we are also strengthening the links between national perspectives and international cooperation. In this role, we influence attitudes, educate global citizens and promote solidarity across borders.

One of the long-awaited milestones of YMCA movement in 2022 was also the 20th World Council in Aarhus, Denmark, which adopted movement's first ever globally shared vision, **Vision 2030**. Vision 2030 is crystallised in a collective goal: **One Movement**. One movement, with one collective vision, applies many approaches but is united in diversity. In the coming years, YMCAs will work closely together to promote the four pillars of Community Wellbeing, Meaningful Work, Sustainable Planet and Just World.

The vision is comprehensive and reflects well YMCA's activities and those of the local associations in Finland as well as partner YMCAs around the world. The well-being of children and young people has always been at the heart of the YMCA. With a coherent strategy, environmental and justice issues will become an increasingly central part of the work. Vision 2030 will progressively link YMCAs' efforts also to the **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs), while helping to coordinate the work and increase its impact.

***Vision 2030: The YMCA's mission is to empower young people and communities worldwide to build a just, sustainable, equitable and inclusive world, where every person can thrive in body, mind and spirit.***

## 1.2 Summary of the main results in 2022

Promoting peace and sustainable development are the most important tasks of our time. Large-scale change is slow, and the impact chains are long and complex. Yet young people around the world are building a better tomorrow through everyday actions. The meaningful and positive role of youth is at the heart of YMCA's development cooperation and advocacy.

In the first year of the programme cycle, both successes and challenges were encountered as YMCA's efforts unfolded across the six programme partner countries. Despite the global challenges, stemming from the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, and price hikes, YMCA continued its historical role of addressing young people's needs within their communities. In the beginning of 2022, the previously separate projects were merged into a collective **Youth, Peace and Livelihoods programme implemented with local YMCAs in The Gambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Palestine, Lebanon and Finland**. The programme dedicated to supporting young people, their well-being and empowerment within their local settings, through accelerating access to livelihoods opportunities and offering tools to advocate for peace.

As the year 2022 marked the programme's inception, the focus was on learning and establishing of the programme. Throughout the first year, the primary focus rested on realising results especially at the output and activity levels. The steps taken by partners in attaining these results indicate emerging progress towards the aggregated outcomes. It is noteworthy that the expected outcomes, constituting long-term objectives, are anticipated to manifest primarily at the end of the programme and beyond.

YMCA believes empowered young people are change agents and human rights champions who can strengthen their local civil societies. The change YMCA aspires to see is that youth improve the standard of living of their communities while transforming the society into a more just, peaceful and sustainable one. With the right tools and platforms, young people can contribute to the respect of human rights and creation of equal and sustainable livelihoods. Ultimately, the change increases both individual and community resilience and boosts the local civil society.



Young people continue to experience exclusion from decision-making processes that affect them and a lack of equitable opportunities and perceive an apparent inability – and a related lack of accountability – of older generations to address critical issues such as climate change, inequalities, injustices, corruption, and conflicts. Many young activists face additional burdens in the form of threats and harassment and a shrinking civic space, both online and offline. Addressing these challenges across humanitarian, development and peace interventions is key to renewing the social contract and achieving sustainable peace and development.

*The second report of the Secretary-General on youth, peace and security (S/2022/220)*

One of the important processes within the programme is the further conceptualisation of the YMCA's peace work approach. When working with vulnerable youth, it is crucial to offer them a safe environment, connection with their peers and a community to foster their sense of belonging. Through engaging activities, young people can acquire new skills and forge relationships that develop a sense of purpose and direction. This, in turn, enhances their independence, courage, and capacity to channel their potential into constructive endeavours, potentially breaking the cycle of negativity in their lives. By reaching out to other young individuals and cultivating trust among those facing vulnerability, youth can effectively prevent and mitigate local conflicts, assuming the role of peacemakers. They actively participate in their communities, seeking opportunities to make a difference. In 2022, the **peacebuilding programme was implemented in five countries, directly benefiting 2261 individuals, and advancing their right to peace.**

Similarly, YMCA Finland and its partners work with youth in vulnerable positions to improve their livelihoods opportunities and increase their resilience and capacity to lift themselves out of poverty. YMCA offers life skills, vocational and entrepreneurship training which equips youth with relevant skills so that they can reach their full potential, become active members of the society and take care of themselves and their families. Ultimately change for young people is created through supporting them in developing their own skills and capabilities. Educated and skilled youth are able to influence the social, economic, environmental and institutional conditions that affect them. **Inclusive livelihoods opportunities were created through four projects that targeted 1384 right-holders.**

Throughout its operations, in Finland and in international forums, YMCA Finland aims to keep the global youth and their rights and circumstances on top of the agenda. Through the important work at the grassroots level implemented by the partners in the project countries, YMCA Finland has the substance and the mandate to influence the narrative about youth, peace and development. Through communications, different networks and working groups, professionals, decision-makers, policy processes and the wider public are influenced. Moreover, an international youth organisation provides a platform for young people to make their own voices heard - as demonstrated by the YMCA's delegation at the climate conference, COP27. In the partner countries, the greatest progress in Youth, Peace and Security advocacy was made in **Kenya** in terms of preparing the ground for National Action Plan process, and in **Palestine** through localising and operationalising the agenda in very demanding context. Advocacy and communications are also intertwined with global education. In 2022, a total of 313 youth workers strengthened their understanding of global education and how to implement it in their work in **Finland**. They also

paved the way for a long-term culture-building to mainstream the promotion of sustainable development and global solidarity in all activities. 965 children and young people increased their knowledge and skills on promotion of peace and sustainable development through 171 events, sessions or trainings. Altogether these activities resulted in more than 7000 global education hours.

During the year, **a total of 3789 right-holders and duty-bearers participated in the programme's activities**. Approximately 48 % of them were young women and 52 % young men. More than 8500 people were also indirectly influenced. These achievements can be considered good since 2022 is the first year of a four-year programme period. More detailed information on different indicators measuring the progress can be found from the results matrix (see attachments). Between 2022 and 2025, the programme aims to reach more than 16 000 right-holders. Indirectly, it is estimated that even 100 000 beneficiaries will be affected by the programme's activities.

In conclusion, the programme's implementation rate was approximately 22 % in the reporting year 2022, reflecting the budget and reach of right-holders. The total cost of the programme was 907 730 €, of which 59,4 % was for project activities. This share will increase as partners accelerate implementation of the activities after the inception phase. 28,4 % of the costs were planning, monitoring, evaluation and related personnel costs, 6,9 % administration, and 5,3 % for communications. Despite facing some challenges, a steady progress towards the results during the first year of the programme was observed.



*Picture 1 Kenyan students in Catering class at Kenya YMCA National Training Institute. Nairobi, Kenya.*

## 2 Where we work: changes in the operating environments

### Agile partners in fragile contexts

As the program operates in several fragile contexts, the operating environment can be challenging and prone to changes even on short notice. Each project context is unique. Youth Peace and Livelihoods programme is implemented in five countries, out of which two, **Gambia** and **Ethiopia** are listed among the least developed countries (LDC). According to the Fragile states index<sup>1</sup>, the most fragile contexts for our partners are in Ethiopia, ranked as the 11<sup>th</sup> fragile out of 179 countries, where the situation has worsened since 2020, after period of stabilizing in 2018–2019. **Lebanon** is ranked as 25<sup>th</sup> out of 179 where the situation has worsened since 2019. **Palestine** is ranked as 34<sup>th</sup> and **Kenya** as 35<sup>th</sup> out of 179 countries.

Complex and changing environments require a comprehensive and fitting approach to empower young people, by offering them opportunities and platforms to make their voices heard. In especially fragile contexts the minimum standard in programme implementation is conflict sensitive. This requires local ownership, profound understanding on the operating environment, on the actors involved and the dependencies between them. During planning and implementation, it is essential to consider how the possible conflicts in the country might impact the project, and on the other hand, how the project could impact the area in which it operates.

Our partner YMCAs have operated for decades in their contexts – these non-governmental



organisations (NGOs) are agile social actors, experienced and able to respond and adapt to changing situations and needs. For example, the situation developed more difficult in **Palestine** in 2021 and 2022 as conflict and political turmoil erupted, influencing cities in the West Bank and Israel. During the year, several rapid and contextual changes in the service delivery were monitored closely by East Jerusalem YMCA (EJ YMCA). For instance, in Jenin, there was an increase in incidents of political violence, and it was noted that Jenin had the highest disability rates in the West Bank. Based on the discussions with the partner and feedback from the right-holders and their counsellors, EJ YMCA proposed a change of one of the target districts from Bethlehem to Jenin, which was acted upon from February 2022 onwards.

<sup>1</sup> Fragile States Index, <https://fragilestatesindex.org/global-data/> Retrieved on 15.6.2023



Together with our partners, we have assessed each working environment carefully, conducted a risk analysis, prepared a risk matrix and established proper mitigation strategies. Moreover, we consult other community-based organisations, other YMCAs and Finland's embassies to recognise multiple perspectives and gain comprehensive knowledge of the circumstances. The programme is monitored by programme staff in Finland who stay in close touch with colleagues in the partner organisations. Monthly interactions with colleagues in the partner organisations and yearly field visits keep the program team updated on the environment.

## **Economic downturn affected young people and cooperation**

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic scientists and politicians are considering the far-reaching effects of the crisis. Globally, one billion children lost a year of schooling due to school closures, and 700 million lost up to 1.5 years. The World Bank predicts that this will have long-lasting effects not only on human capital, but also on employment opportunities and income levels for young people;<sup>2</sup> and not to mention about the impact on mental health<sup>3</sup>. The World Bank is calling for further education, job intermediation, entrepreneurship programs and work support initiatives to alleviate the situation. The economic hardship intensified in 2022, which worsened the situation in the recovering societies.

Consequently, the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) has risen, being globally 23,5 % of young people aged 15–24 in 2022, according to ILO projections. Two out of three of NEET were young women.<sup>4</sup> In low and lower middle-income countries the share of youth who were NEET was 28 %. Furthermore, the link between youth unemployment, poverty and increased crime is a major topic of discussion in many of our partner countries.

During 2022 one of the most significant changes in the operating environment globally was the increased level of inflation, due in large part to by Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, which has created challenges in the distribution and availability of products, including energy and food. Inflation hit while the countries are still recovering from the consequences of the pandemic. Central banks have responded to accelerating inflation by raising interest rates, which in turn reduces consumption and investment, and heightens costs. Simultaneously the economic growth rate has decreased, or in some cases, economies have even shrunk in 2022. For indebted households and governments, this has, in turn, created challenges for acting towards long-term poverty reduction.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the average inflation rate was approximately 14,5 % in 2022 compared to the previous year; in our partners' countries, in **Kenya**, 7,65 %; in **The Gambia**, 11,51 %<sup>5</sup>; and in **Ethiopia**, even estimated at 34 %. In **Lebanon**, inflation soared above 170 % in 2022<sup>6</sup>. While writing the report, the monetary situation in Lebanon has worsened further, the inflation rate rose

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<sup>2</sup> The World Bank, 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/02/16/covid-19-s-impact-on-young-people-risks-a-lost-generation> Retrieved on 1.6.2023

<sup>3</sup> WHO, 2022, <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide> Retrieved on 15.6.2023

<sup>4</sup> ILO, 2023, [https://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/WCMS\\_885192/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Publications/WCMS_885192/lang--en/index.htm) Retrieved on 14.6.2023

<sup>5</sup> Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1220801/inflation-rate-in-africa-by-country/> Retrieved on 16.6.2023

<sup>6</sup> The World Bank, 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/05/16/lebanon-normalization-of-crisis-is-no-road-to-stabilization> Retrieved on 16.6.2023

near 270 % in April 2023<sup>7</sup>. Palestine faced the lowest inflation of the partners, 3,4 %, although highest in a decade.

The inflation forced the budget and some of the activities of the programme to be adapted. E.g., in The **Gambia**, the volume of entrepreneurial kick-off support has been reduced. In **Lebanon**, increasing living costs and continuously increasing prices of fuel caused constant rises on transportation fees and restricted the community's mobility. Priorities among target groups changed. This inhibited some interested young people from participating in the organised trainings and some events were postponed. In **Ethiopia**, the budget for the new project was reviewed and adjusted in larger scale. In **Kenya**, the costs of the renovation of the vocational institute's infrastructure rose, and previous year's surplus budget was invested to complete the overrun in the construction budget.

Perhaps the most difficult circumstances economically have been in **Lebanon**. Lebanon has experienced several crises since 2019, including political, social, monetary, financial, and economic. The continuously downgrading situation required the YMCA to revise its financial procedures and to include mechanisms that cater for the burdens and banking restrictions imposed by the crisis. Partial collapse of the banking sector, inflation, and the plunge in the value of the currency have been tackled through the cash policy adopted in 2021. This has allowed the YMCA to continue operating through 2022 despite the country's downward spiral.

### **Opportunities and challenges for civil society actors**

In **Ethiopia**, a significant peace treaty was signed in November 2022, effectively ending a two-year armed conflict between the Ethiopian federal government and the Tigray armed forces (TPLF). This marked a crucial step towards resolving hostilities between the conflicting parties. Nevertheless, the conflict's impact extended beyond these main players, as armed groups from regions like Amhara and Oromia also emerged. The scale of displacement was immense, with a peak of 4.2 million internally displaced individuals reported in Ethiopia during 2022, according to UNHCR<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, Ethiopia hosts more than 800 000 refugees who fled from the conflicts and wars in the neighbouring countries. The humanitarian crisis has been severe, as hundreds of thousands are at risk of starvation. Both sides of the conflict have reported human rights abuses.

The challenges facing Ethiopia in 2022 extended beyond the armed conflict. The country grappled with serious drought, compounded by global events such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This resulted in food shortages and an alarming food crisis, further exacerbated by soaring inflation rates that drove food prices to their highest levels in a decade. Other essential commodities also experienced significant price hikes. Given the high rates of youth unemployment in Ethiopia, comprehensive support for this vulnerable demographic became increasingly imperative.

However, this complex environment also posed challenges for civil society. The ongoing conflict led to a blockade of the northern part of the country, effectively rendering it inaccessible to various actors, including civil society organizations like the YMCA. Additionally, societal polarization constrained the activities of civil society, necessitating a narrowing of focus.

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<sup>7</sup> Trading economics, <https://tradingeconomics.com/lebanon/inflation-cpi> Retrieved on 16.6.2023

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR Global Focus, Ethiopia, 2022

<https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/operations/ethiopia#:~:text=Internal%20displacement%20has%20grown%20dramatically,of%20Amhara%2C%20Afar%20and%20Tigray> Retrieved on 29.8.2023

Amid these circumstances, the peace treaty signed in November 2022, offers hope for reconciliation and the possibility of humanitarian relief reaching the beleaguered northern region. In early 2022, a comprehensive assessment of the operating environment in Ethiopia was conducted collaboratively with YMCA Ethiopia, NGOs, and Finland's embassy. Following these analyses, and with adjustments to project plans, it was determined that sufficient conditions for the programme's operation in Ethiopia were in place.

**In Palestine** 2022 witnessed deterioration in the political and security situation and a rise in tension with the Israeli forces. Incursions and arrest operations against Palestinians were intensified all over the West Bank. Military campaigns and raids were launched in increased numbers against Palestinians. This has led to the injuring and killing of an unprecedented number of Palestinians which caused boiling tension all over the West Bank, especially in Jenin and Nablus, which were most brutally targeted. The violations committed against Palestinians this year regarding recorded fatalities, detained people, demolished structures, forced evictions, displacements, and settler violence were of genuine concern. According to the UN, 2022 was the deadliest year for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank since 2005<sup>9</sup>. This resulted in additional protection risks that needed to be urgently addressed to avoid the development of adverse psychological impacts.

The space for civil society is narrowing down further, as Israel raided and closed down several Palestinian human rights organisations. Similarly, the settlement building in the areas of East Jerusalem and the West Bank continued. Although the Palestinian economy has been gradually recovering from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the economic situation remains difficult for Palestinians due to high public spending and very low aid.

**In Lebanon** the security situation deteriorated in 2022 due to protests in certain areas, especially in Beirut. Activities, such as trainings, were postponed and scheduled during periods of stability ensuring safe accessibility for participants as well as staff members. Also, the elections in May 2022 caused delays in implementation of the project due to instability in the country. Also, the occurrence of floods during winter 2022, as well as the high costs of fuel during the cold winter storms, led to postponing the activities' implementation until the spring and summer seasons in Bekaa. However, YMCA Lebanon has a long history of working in the country during different crises and can adapt to the situation while closely monitoring opportunities for implementation of project activities.

**In Kenya**, the presidential elections held in August 2022 significantly affected the socio-political situation. Some of the activities were on hold while the country was preparing for the elections and waiting for the results. The peace work focused on the activities promoting peaceful and democratic campaigning and elections. Eventually, the elections were peaceful, which was positive news given that the country's history of elections have been marked by violence. The winner was the opposition presidential candidate, William Ruto, who had also served as vice president in the previous term. The difference in votes between Ruto and his predecessor was less than 1 % of the votes. The former president, Raila Odinga, challenged the election result. The results were scrutinized, and the investigation concluded that the elections were not fraudulent, and the

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<sup>9</sup> United Nations, 2022 <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/2022-among-deadliest-years-for-palestinians-in-west-bank-middle-east-peace-process-coordinator-tells-security-council-press-release-sc-15086/> Retrieved on 16.6.2023

result was confirmed. However, Odinga, who remained in opposition, was unsatisfied with the election result and called on opposition supporters to protest the increased cost of living and the election result during spring 2023. The following months and year will reveal the effects of the election result on the freedom of civil society and ethnic relations.

In the **Gambia**, spring 2022 was also marked by elections. Ahead of the Parliamentary elections held in April 2022 there was some fear of conflict and violence which led to active campaigning for peace among political parties and the communities. Electoral stakeholders were urged to avoid fanning hate speeches and promote tolerance and respect for choices.

High inflation and rise in poverty rate to 53,4 %<sup>10</sup> is affecting individuals and communities in the country. The Gambia is highly dependent on tourism and agriculture, which are both affected by Covid-19 and climate change. Increase in commodity prices and living expenses affect also the staff working in or partnering the NGOs. Pressures for higher pay are evident.

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<sup>10</sup> The World Bank, 2022 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/11/09/covid-19-elevated-poverty-in-the-gambia>  
Retrieved on 16.6.2023

### 3 Progress towards outcomes

During the reporting year, the **theory of change** setting the base for the programme and different projects has remained valid. The problem YMCA continues to address with its interventions is that youth rights are not fully realised. Especially vulnerable young people in fragile contexts, such as young women, unemployed or school dropouts, minorities or youth living with disabilities, are not participating in the development of their societies with their full capacity. The root cause behind this is that many injustices disproportionately affect young people. They are lacking sustainable resources and tools, accessible and equal opportunities, and inclusive platforms to influence their communities and their future.

The expected **impact** of YMCA Finland development cooperation is the contribution to enhanced standard of living with inclusive livelihoods opportunities and respected human rights as empowered and resilient young people act as peacemakers.

Besides the impact on young people's human rights, the development cooperation promotes holistically sustainable development, aligned with Agenda 2030's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Thematically, the YMCA Finland's cooperation focuses on quality education (4), decent work (8), and inclusive societies building peace (16).

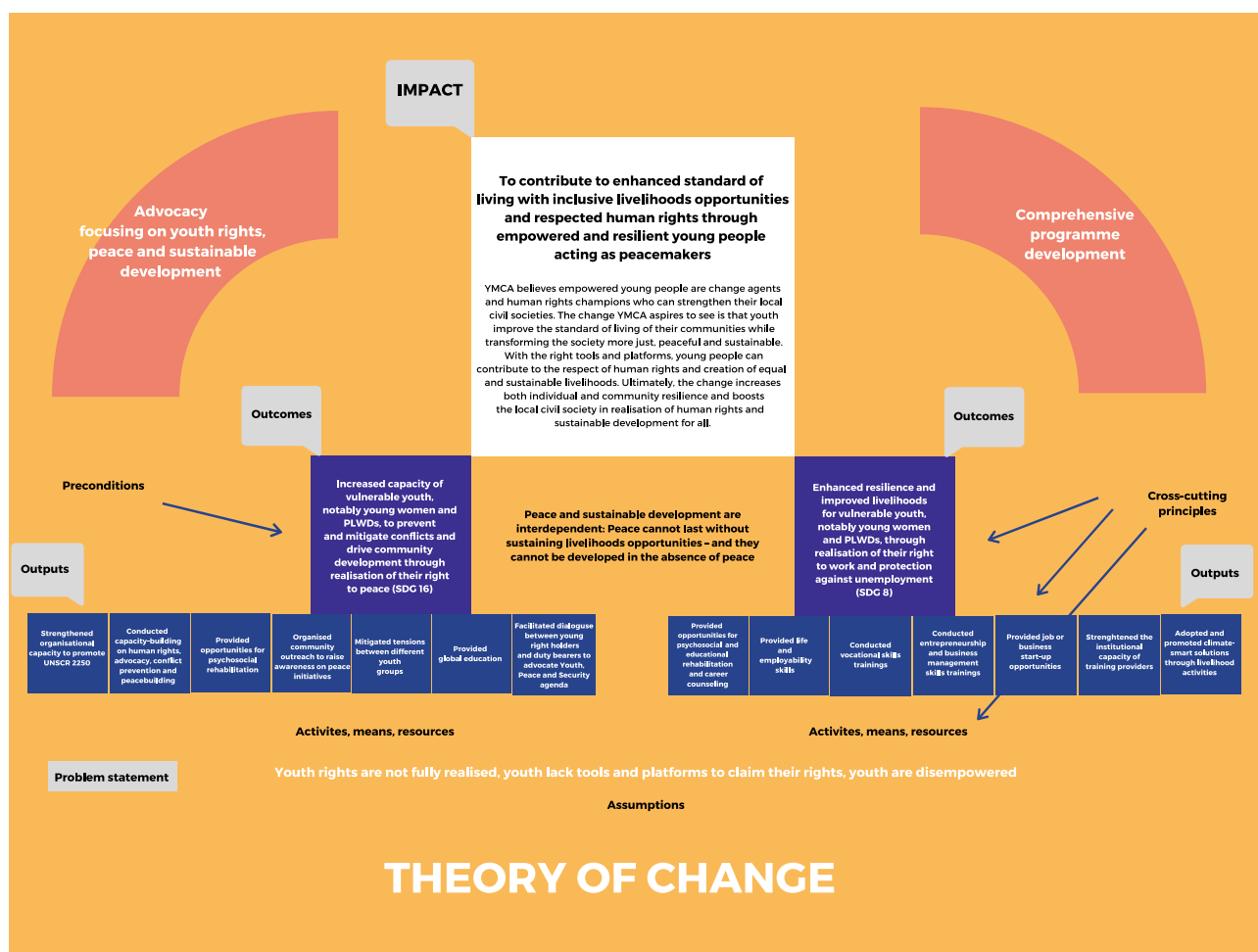


The expected **outcome in the peacebuilding programme** reflects the results chain especially at community level. Effective conflict prevention and mitigation secures spaces for vulnerable young people to claim their rights and engage in decision-making. Community outreach and engagement multiplies the results. After traumatic experiences, psychosocial support can help young people become advocates for peacebuilding in their communities, which will promote positive change in the society.

The expected **outcome in the livelihoods programme**, reflects the results chain especially at micro or individual level. Trainings, capacity building and promotion of entrepreneurship create new ways for young people to improve their livelihoods. Decent jobs create resources and therefore increase young people's resilience to shocks and helps lift youth and their families out of poverty. New resources create access to new opportunities. This enables young people to contribute to the development of their environments.

Yet, both individual and community level changes are strongly interconnected. Both areas of life are required for sustainable transformation. YMCA acknowledges that peace cannot last without sustainable livelihoods opportunities – and those opportunities cannot be fully developed in the absence of peace. The following chapters present the progress within these outcome areas.





### 3.1 Outcome 1: Peacebuilding programme

YMCA's peace programme is guided by the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda. Its **expected outcome is to enhance the capacity of vulnerable youth to prevent and mitigate conflicts while driving community development**. In 2022, the programme was implemented in six countries, directly benefiting **2261** individuals, and advancing their right to peace. Despite facing some challenges, a steady progress towards the results during the first year of the programme was observed.

The Peacebuilding programme has promoted just, inclusive and peaceful societies (SDG 16). Primarily, YMCAs have worked to reduce all forms of violence (SDG 16.1.); to promote effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels (SDG 16.6), and to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels and target by lobbying Youth, Peace and Security agenda.

YMCAs have offered platforms for young people to train themselves on peacebuilding, share knowledge, and plan for grassroots peace work and structural advocacy. The logic has been to contribute that all young people acquire the knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development, including peace (SDG 4.7.).



The programme aims to address the root causes of conflicts and dismantle the divisions or even confrontations created by inequality. One-fourth of the world's youth resides in countries that have experienced conflict<sup>11</sup>, while nearly 90 % of all youth live in developing countries<sup>12</sup>. Young people living in such conditions often find themselves in a vulnerable position where they must make crucial decisions about their lives. Their options and outlook for the future may be limited due to a lack of education or employment opportunities. The struggle over livelihoods and other resources can serve as root causes for conflicts. Inequalities within countries can also be stark.

Inequalities and exclusion between communities can lead to "us versus them" mentality, exacerbating or even creating conflicts. Influenced by various factors, this mindset can create divisions, reinforce hostile identities, and undermine positive relationships. The consequence can be a decrease in shared values, an increase in resentment, mistrust, and a less resilient society that struggles to sustain constructive relationships. A comprehensive approach, where the different realities and needs are met is required to provide young people with positive alternatives.

### **The YMCA approach to peacebuilding**

As part of the peace programme, an important outcome will be the development of YMCA's approach to peacebuilding. The objective of this approach is to guarantee the practicality, relevance, and consistent structure of YMCA's peacebuilding programme. A conceptual framework will be created to guide YMCA's peacebuilding efforts, with the aim of adapting to different contexts and effectively addressing specific needs and challenges. Active conceptualization is expected to reinforce the YMCA's identification as peace promoter within local contexts.

The key elements of YMCA's approach to peacebuilding include emphasising the importance of inclusive and safe spaces, providing meaningful activities, and building the skills of young people. This approach enables youth to undergo a transformative process, becoming positive peacemakers within their communities. It is grounded in YMCA's long-term commitment to supporting youth, particularly those facing vulnerable circumstances.

YMCA's practical approach to peacebuilding consists of three essential building blocks:

- 1) YMCA as a safe space with attracting activities
- 2) Empowering youth through skill-building and knowledge development
- 3) Youth acting as peacemakers in their community

The chapters below introduce the structure of the approach while introducing the results of the peace programme in 2022.

### **Creating safer spaces with meaningful activities**

Creating inclusive and safer spaces is a fundamental element and a prerequisite for YMCA's peacebuilding initiatives. The concept of space encompasses both physical aspects, such as YMCA premises, camping sites, and other facilities, as well as non-physical elements like a safe community and different kinds of platforms. Having a space where youth can gather, socialise,

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<sup>11</sup> UNESCO, Thematic Factsheet: Youth empowerment (2023) <https://www.unesco.org/en/youth-and-empowerment>

<sup>12</sup> Report of the Secretary-General on Youth and peace and security (S/2020/167): [https://youth4peace.info/system/files/2020-03/S\\_2020\\_167\\_E.pdf](https://youth4peace.info/system/files/2020-03/S_2020_167_E.pdf)

play, or engage in workshops and training is vital. Likewise, sense of belonging and community are primary needs for youth. YMCA's often hold a neutral status and a trustworthy reputation in local societies. Simultaneously, YMCA's mission is to amplify youth voices. These elements are key to creating an inclusive space for all young people.

To effectively engage with youth, it is essential to provide positive and motivating experiences relevant to the context. YMCA partners are attuned to the needs of young people in their countries. YMCA approach recognises the importance of offering both attractive basic activities, such as sports, to connect with youth and create a sense of enjoyment, as well as advanced activities that young individuals can engage with after receiving skills training.

Often, at first instance, young people learn about the YMCA through leisure activities and thus find their way to the safe space and a community that the YMCA offers. The approach focuses on activities that resonate with young people, allowing for peer identification and equal participation. Activities are designed to meet youth where they are, bridging the gap between their interests and the skills building process.

YMCA professionals play a crucial role in understanding how the space works and how it is created and sustained, including elements such as presence, encounter, interaction, group dynamics, trust, and atmosphere. At YMCA, young participants can also grow to become volunteers or instructors and then work with their peers. In the peace programme safe spaces were created among youth in **The Gambia, Kenya, Palestine, and Lebanon** as well as **Finland** through the formation of YMCA Peacemakers groups<sup>13</sup>. These groups provided platforms for discussion and learning about peace work in their communities and societies.

In safe spaces, young people can discover their strengths and rights, can meet other like-minded individuals, and have their voices heard. In 2022 YMCA Peacemakers came together for an international exchange, first in **Palestine** and then in **Kenya**. These spaces were inclusive for youth from various backgrounds, fostering learning and the sharing of experiences.

### **Developing skills and knowledge to empower young peacemakers**

Adopting the role of a peace promoter requires equipping youth with relevant skills and knowledge. These skills can be universal, such as communication, leadership or problem-solving skills. At the same time the required skills are context specific, for example what is required for youth to work in their communities or advocate for their rights. By combining skills building with meaningful engagements, the programme empowers youth to take an active role in their communities, influence decision-making, and contribute to positive change. Activities are planned and designed in collaboration with youth to ensure their meaningfulness. These activities aim to engage youth in active citizenship and complement the skills-building process.

In the programme skills trainings were conducted in **The Gambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lebanon, Palestine**, and through [global education initiatives in Finland](#)<sup>14</sup>. Peace camps were organized in two countries, in [Lebanon](#) and Kenya. In **Lebanon** four camps provided safe spaces for 140 youth from diverse national and religious backgrounds. The trainings aimed to increase the capacity of

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<sup>13</sup> Indicator 1.4 Number of local youth-led YMCA Peacemakers groups established or sustained

<sup>14</sup> Indicator 1.3 Number of young ppl, women and PLWDs who take part in decision-making, advocacy or peacebuilding trainings

vulnerable youth in peacebuilding techniques bridge-building. In **Kenya**, YMCA trained 25 Subject to Citizen Ambassadors to become trainers for peace advocacy. In **Palestine**, youth took part in capacity building trainings, including learning about their rights and the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, as well as receiving training on community initiatives. In **Ethiopia**, peacebuilding Training of Trainers (TOTs) increased young people's knowledge about the rule of law, inclusivity, and peacebuilding methods. In The **Gambia**, YMCA Peacemakers participated in a workshop on peace, conflict, and violence, discussing practical examples and activities.



*Picture 2 Finnish and Kenyan YMCA Peacemakers volunteers at Peace Camp in Naivasha, Kenya.*

YMCA professionals have the responsibility to identify potential future role models among the youth and provide them with the necessary skills. With increased skills and self-confidence, young people have the tools to reach their peers and build trust among them<sup>15</sup>. YMCA Peacemakers groups organised advocacy events about youth participation, peace building and conflict prevention with a youth-to-youth approach in The **Gambia**.

Through global citizenship education, YMCAs in **Finland** have worked on empowering and motivating children and young people in their leisure time to promote sustainable development, a prerequisite for peace. YMCA trained 313 youth workers to reflect on their daily work through the lenses of global citizenship education – how a youth worker could tweak their everyday work with a perspective of promoting worldwide peace and solidarity. Youth workers encouraged 996 children and young people to reflect on promoting peace and sustainable development – in an age-appropriate way through play, discussions and activism. Additionally, YMCAs in the biggest cities in Finland have piloted a flag-ship program called "From the Game Courts to Peacebuilders" to

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<sup>15</sup> Indicator 1.1 Number of inclusive peace and trust building related processes or dialogues supported (community level)



offer a safe space for young people, who are not yet actively involved in societal debates, to gather weekly and bring societal topics relevant to them into the discussion. Youth workers guide the discussions toward action: "What could we do to change the society?"

### **Youth acting as peacemakers in their communities**

As youth acquire skills and knowledge about their rights and ways to advocate for them, they gain a better understanding of their possibilities to engage with the community and decision-makers. This process is essential for influencing local duty-bearers and decision-makers and promoting peace. By taking on activities and engagements of this nature, youth can assume leadership roles and become drivers of community development.

In the programme, youth led essential initiatives, participated in conferences, and engaged in discussions with duty-bearers. In **The Gambia**, four different national and community level dialogue processes were supported, bringing stakeholders and youth together to discuss conflict prevention, violence reduction, and peace promotion in the society. In **Palestine**, YMCA empowered youth to demand their rights through capacity-building trainings and community initiatives. Through the initiatives, youth had the opportunity to directly engage in discussions with duty-bearers and share the obstacles they face in securing their rights.

#### **Jerreh Cham's story**

Jerreh Cham, a 28-year-old Gambian returnee migrant, exemplifies how access to education, information, and support can transform a young person's life. In 2016, Jerreh embarked on a perilous journey through Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger to reach Libya, with the goal of crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. His decision was driven by the responsibility he felt towards his family, who had been supporting his education. Recognizing that his family couldn't afford to pay his university studies, he saw the backway to Europe as a solution.

Jerreh endured over a year of hardships, including abuse, two failed attempts at crossing the sea, and months of imprisonment in Libya. Eventually, he had the opportunity to return to The Gambia through the Government Assisted Repatriation Programme by IOM in 2017. Back in his home country, Jerreh was determined to pursue education, becoming a role model for Gambian youth. He engaged in IOM sensitisation work, shared his experiences, and independently studied to prepare for university.

Through EU's Youth Empowerment Project, Jerreh received training in satellite installation and electronic repairs, enabling him to start his own business. Afterwards, Jerreh became a trainer at YMCA Gambia, providing on-the-job training for other young people. He also contributes to the YMCA Peacemakers group, advocating for peace and youth rights. Through YMCA Peacemakers activities he also shares his story with his peers, aiming to prevent irregular migration and inspire them. Currently, he is studying Business Administration at university and self-funding his tuition fees. Jerreh serves as an inspiration and proof that with access to the right tools and knowledge, young people can thrive.

In **Kenya**, YMCAs organized a North-South exchange for six Finnish and twelve Kenyan YMCA Peacemakers. During the peace camp, young people deepened and shared their skills and knowledge on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) advocacy and activities. The exchange culminated in a Youth, Peace and Security networking event in Nairobi, organized by YMCA Kenya, YMCA Finland and the Embassy of Finland in Nairobi. The event was the first stakeholder meeting in



the process of launching the development of Kenya's National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security.<sup>16</sup>

In late 2022, **Africa Alliance of YMCAs** started a mapping exercise to assess the perspectives and experiences of other YMCAs and young individuals in the region regarding the YPS agenda. The aim was to gather valuable insights into their engagement with the theme. The mapping was to be finalised during spring 2023. At the time of writing this report, some activation around the YPS agenda has been observed also in **Ethiopian** and the **Gambian** civil societies.

### 3.2 Outcome 2: Livelihoods programme

The YMCA's livelihoods programme focuses on youth's life and employability skills, vocational training and entrepreneurship opportunities. Programme's expected outcome is **realization of youths' right to work and protection against unemployment through improved livelihoods and enhanced resilience for vulnerable youth**. In 2022, inclusive livelihoods opportunities were created through four projects that targeted directly 4403 right-holders.<sup>17</sup> A solid progress towards the results was perceived.

The programme aims to address high youth unemployment and poor education opportunities as they are directly reflected into young people's well-being and the whole of society. Regardless of increasing school enrolment globally, in 2022 almost 23,5 % of young people were outside of employment, education or training.<sup>18</sup> Informal employment and working poverty are a reality to many more. Transition from education to decent work is difficult.

Between 2019 and 2020 the youth employment rate decreased by 34 million globally. In 2021 around 75 million young people were unemployed. The Covid-19 pandemic had an enormous impact on both young people's employment as well as their education and training opportunities. According to ILO experts, the recovery of youth employment is significantly slower than that of adults, which increases young people's risk of facing serious disadvantages in the labour market in the future. The Covid-19 crisis widened the already existing gap between youth and labour market and disrupted education creating learning losses and increasing inequalities.<sup>19</sup> During the reporting year, trainings, capacity building and promotion of entrepreneurship in the different country contexts created new ways for young people to keep improving their livelihoods through education and employment. By supporting the opportunity for youth to gain decent jobs, it has increased young people's resilience to different economic and social shocks. By gaining new skills and resources youth have better capabilities to contribute to the development of their environments. The result of this outcome is closely intertwined with the possibility for youth to contribute to peaceful development on local and national levels (i.e., to outcome 1). Economically empowered youth can act as agents of positive change by securing their and at times their family's livelihoods.

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<sup>16</sup> Indicator 1.2: Number of processes in support of the implementation of YPS agenda (UNSCR 2250) initiated or advocated for

<sup>17</sup> Impact level indicator: Number of projects report created inclusive livelihoods opportunities

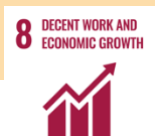
<sup>18</sup> United Nations, 2023. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special edition <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> ILO, 2022. [https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_853321/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_853321/lang--en/index.htm)

YMCA's focus on youth's livelihoods and employment is guided by *Our Approach: Jobs, Youth Enterprise and Employability* (Y Care International). Key elements of change in this approach are 1) improving young person's skills, assets and networks; 2) strengthening their resilience and promoting their voice and leadership; and 3) an enabling environment responsive to young people's needs. The focus of the approach is on vulnerable young people.

The Livelihoods programme has promoted inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work aligned with the Agenda 2030's Goal 8. Specifically, YMCAs have worked to enable the achievement of full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value (SDG 8.5), and substantial reduction of the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training (SDG 8.6).

YMCAs have cooperated towards ensuring quality education for all (4), especially by promoting equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education (4.3.); increasing the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (4.4); and eliminating gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities.



### External conditions required for improved opportunities

Cooperation and action on different levels of society are required to assure sustainable employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for young people. On the local level, families and communities play a crucial role in supporting young people to attend their education and training, motivating them to develop their skills rather than participate in short-term labour that offers quick financial gains. Investing in education and training contributes to longer term success for youth and their families. Communities and local authorities also need to make space and encourage youth to become involved in community activities and decision-making processes that affect youths' lives. Youth participation in decision making processes is advocated for in each of our partners' activities.

Educational institutions need to ensure that the services they offer adequately equip youth with the essential skills they need. The skills should be determined based on demand and the interests of the youth. Non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors have an important role in filling the voids left by government initiatives when it comes to assisting youth in preparing for employment and entrepreneurship. YMCA Finland partners are one of many YMCAs worldwide that have taken on answering to the need of vocational skills training for youth. YMCA **Kenya** has five colleges in total and the YMCA Finland programme is implemented in two of them. YMCA **Gambia** has a Skills Training Centre, which will be further expanded in the coming years to allow for more students to enrol. YMCA **Ethiopia** also has a vocational training centre in Addis Ababa. YMCA **Lebanon** and **East Jerusalem YMCA** offer vocational training in their premises and cooperate with other institutions in providing training for young people.

Vulnerable youth such as young women with family obligations, people living with disabilities (PLWDs) and other marginalized communities often require specific support to enable their participation. This can be modified training schedules, provision of food, childcare assistance,

transportation allowances, and other forms of financial support. In **Palestine**, for example, these factors have been taken into consideration by EJ YMCA by hiring female counsellors to ensure that female right holders have an equal possibility to receive counselling regardless of potential cultural or religious restrictions. **Gambia** YMCA has recognised the responsibilities that especially women bear for childcare and household chores. Women attending training are offered more flexibility to ensure they can attend and for example taking children to classes can be allowed.

## Developing skills and gaining assets for working life

In 2022 YMCA **Gambia** offered vocational training in 13 different skill sets for 100 right holders. The two **Kenya** YMCA vocational institutes, Kenya YMCA College for Agriculture and Technology (KYCAT) and National Training Institute (NTI) enrolled a total of 799 students. In **Lebanon** 64 participants were trained in three vocational training programmes; 27 participated in the food production vocational training programme, 11 in the food service training programme and 26 in the nurse aid assistance training programme. EJ YMCA in **Palestine** offered 48 youths TVET education, entrepreneurship, employability and life skills trainings.<sup>20</sup>

Each YMCA Finland partner emphasizes the importance of market relevant skills. For example, YMCA **Lebanon** is very careful to provide youth with the relevant skills that will allow them to immediately gain access to the market. The decisions behind the selected vocational training programmes are based on market analysis. According to YMCA Lebanon's own survey, the most influential factor in the recruitment and attraction of talents was "fundamental skills" that have been covered on the life and employability trainings. Also in The **Gambia**, skill sets to be trained are chosen based on market demand and interests of the right holders, to make sure commitment during trainings and successful transfer into the labour market after graduation.

Two YMCA **Kenya** vocational institutes renovated and modernized their facilities to be able to offer quality, up-to-date professional training for their students. At the National Training Institute (NTI) in Nairobi, the catering education facilities, simulation classroom, and garage were all completed. Kenya YMCA College for Agriculture and Technology (KYCAT) in Limuru built a greenhouse, and the expansion of the community hall was almost completed, a generator was repaired, and computers and projectors, and lecture chairs and tables for students were purchased.

The vocational training courses offered by all YMCA Finland's partners are recognized by the official national authorities, for example the National Training Authority in The Gambia (NTA) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA) in Kenya. Vocational training that is recognized by the adequate national authorities strengthens the YMCAs' legitimacy as educational institutions and increases youths' possibilities to find work after graduation.

Vocational training, however, is not the only tool that young people need to find employment and become financially independent. Training on life skills is crucial in helping youth build their confidence and become active members of society. Through training and awareness raising on youths' rights and responsibilities their capacity to function as full members of the society is strengthened.

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<sup>20</sup> Indicator 2.1: Number of young ppl, women and PLWDs trained in TVET education, entrepreneurship, employability and life skills, Indicator 2.2: % increase in income among the TVET trainees and employment or start-up support recipients

Entrepreneurship and employability skills training gives youth the adequate tools to start their own business and sustain it.<sup>21</sup> In The **Gambia** 50 % of the right holders were given a start-up kit with tools and equipment that allow them to become entrepreneurs and start building their own business. In **Kenya** some of the right holders are also supported financially and 50 students received direct support for their school fees in 2022. YMCA **Lebanon** reached a 36 % progress in training youths on highly demanded vocations and life and employability skills. 76 youth were trained on life and employability skills in both camp context and regular workshops.

### **Vocational training supports students to tackle climate change through regenerative agriculture**

The changing climate will affect future skills requirements, especially for agriculture and food production. The **Kenya** YMCA College of Agriculture and Technology (KYCAT) addresses this challenge by adopting and teaching regenerative agriculture methods and creating related teaching materials. Regenerative agriculture is food production that improves the land's growing condition and the environment's well-being. Revitalising the ecosystem helps increase the carbon stock in the soil. A well-maintained arable land also produces more reliable crops and thus increases society's security of supply.

The College has set up experimental plots, and the teachers, all 306 students and 69 farmers in the surrounding area have been taught the basics of regenerative agriculture. The **African Alliance of YMCAs** aims to scale up the best practices developed in Kenya to other African YMCAs.

The strength in tackling global, shared challenges lies in cooperation. Thus, YMCA Finland supports the YMCA Kenya and the African Alliance of YMCAs to network with regenerative agriculture experts in Finland and Kenya so that the partners have the best expertise at their disposal. For example, YMCA Finland was a bridge for [the connection between YMCA Kenya and the Academy of Finland-funded research project Renewable and Climate Smart Agricultural Systems with an Agroecological Gradient in East Africa \(REACT\)](#). REACT set up a weather observation station on the college lands, and the collected data will benefit climate research.

Through regenerative farming practices, YMCAs take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts by improving education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, and impact reduction (SDG 13.3). Besides, the Livelihoods programme's regenerative farming contributes also to the zero-hunger goal by ensuring sustainable food production systems and implementing resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, help maintain ecosystems, and strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality (SDG 2.4.).



<sup>21</sup> Indicator 2.3: % of livelihoods trainees or start-up support recipients register better prospects to access employment markets or become entrepreneurs

## **Bridging the gap between training and employment through networks**

In order to narrow the gap between youth and the labour market it is essential that the educational institutions support their students in building their networks and engaging with the job markets. Internships and on-site trainings are some of the ways to help connect youth with potential future employers.<sup>22</sup> Each partner YMCA is well recognised and connected with other civil society actors and youth organisations. Building strong networks with other civil society actors opens avenues to contribute to the realisation of young people's right to work through cooperation.

At YMCA **Gambia**, the trainers help their students build their networks and connect them with possible customers and employers. Some trainers take students with them when they are hired for jobs or refer their customers to their current and/or former students so they can become hired. Youth are also encouraged to participate in relevant market fairs and competitions to strengthen their networks. YMCA Gambia cooperates with other youth organisations as well as organisations working with PLWDs.

In **Lebanon** YMCA works with the university students to increase their entrepreneurship skills. They are also supported in creating networks and collaboration between each other. EJ YMCA in **Palestine** supports youth to find jobs or paid training opportunities. EJ YMCA's Rehabilitation Programme is a member of the Palestinian Coalition for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities. This coalition supports employment, job creation, and entrepreneurship for people with disabilities, especially in the areas of rehabilitation, empowerment, and employment.<sup>23</sup>

The YMCA **Kenya** National Training Institute's (NTI) teachers have developed techniques for practical on-the-job learning and skill assessment among youth and created a manual outlining their approach. In 2022, during a pilot phase, the skills of 160 students working in construction were evaluated and additional training was provided alongside their work. The objective is to equip young people with comprehensive industry-specific knowledge and skills, thereby enhancing their employability and helping them secure jobs matching their abilities, backed by professional certification.

## **Strengthening youths' resilience, voice and leadership**

So called soft skills training in addition to the vocational skills training supports youths' resilience and ability to adapt and bounce back from shocks. For example, in **Palestine** psycho-social support and trauma counselling are an important part of the project in a context where youth have experienced a variety of traumatic events. At KYCAT in **Kenya** young people's resilience is related to climate change adaptation and strengthening their ability to provide for themselves in a time where the climate is becoming more and more unpredictable.<sup>24</sup>

By addressing the mental health and psychosocial needs of vulnerable youth in addition to offering the needed rehabilitative services, EJ YMCA has provided them with the necessary support to overcome the impacts of disability or political incidents and improve their chances of securing employment and improving their overall quality of life. The high results of the psychosocial support

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<sup>22</sup> Indicator 2.4: % of graduated youth (self-)employed or proceeded with studies within a 1yr of graduation

<sup>23</sup> Indicator 2.5: Number of cooperations with organisations specialized in gender and/or disability in order to enhance PLWD inclusion and gender equality in education and employment

<sup>24</sup> Indicator 2.6: Number of right holders have increased their awareness/skills on climate resilience



and the vocational assessment and training, such as 89,5 % of beneficiaries register better prospects to access employment markets or become entrepreneurs, indicate that the activities are contributing to realizing marginalized youth's right to work.

Awareness-raising on youths' rights to education, decent work and livelihoods strengthens their position in the labour market. Being aware of one's rights and responsibilities as an employee or an employer lowers the risk of being taken advantage of. In The **Gambia**, vocational and



Picture 3 Jerreh Cham with his students at YMCA The Gambia. Serrekunda, The Gambia.

entrepreneurship training is one of the most important ways to curb irregular migration. Financially independent youth become more confident and engaged. When young people participate in decision making, they have a chance to voice their opinion and be a part of building a future that they want. Skilled, employed and engaged youth are more likely to see a brighter future for themselves and their families, which lowers the risk of irregular migration.

Entrepreneurship training and support encourages young people to find solutions and become more innovative in finding different sources of income. Combined with training on leadership skills and confidence building, young people also become more self-reliant and creative. YMCA works globally to empower young people and promote their inclusion in decision making in all levels of society. Building young people's confidence, leadership skills and awareness of their rights are all strongly connected with youth employability and livelihood opportunities.

### 3.3 Outcome 3: Comprehensive programme delivery and quality assurance

In addition to the thematic sub-programmes, the comprehensive implementation and effectiveness of the programme is supported by high-quality project management, versatile communication, and advocacy work. The transition to a new financial instrument, programme-based support, and the transition from projects to programme required the development of different structures and tools.

### 3.3.1 Programme management and organisational learning

In 2022, the focus of programme management in Finland was on organising the programme team, revising the roles and job descriptions as well as recruiting a new programme planner experienced in global education and communications lead to support the work. The programme team adopted a more collaborative and integrated approach, moving away from separate projects. During the year, the team model was strengthened, and the team organisation was prepared to be formally introduced in YMCA Finland from the beginning of 2023. In this context, the division of tasks, roles, internal communication, and teamwork practices have been refined. This shift has enhanced coordination, synergies, and effectiveness among different components of the programme.

In order to launch the new collaborations, partnership meetings were held with YMCA Ethiopia and Africa Alliance of YMCAs. These meetings strengthened a common understanding of goals, roles, and responsibilities. Capacity assessments were finalised. As a result, Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) were signed, outlining the terms of partnership. Moreover, all the partners were brought together to explore the joint programme during the YMCA World Council held in Aarhus, Denmark, in July 2022.

#### Design and planning

During the reporting year there have been no changes to the programme's theory of change, the logic of the results chain or the project cycle thinking. However, at the beginning of the year, the programme was heavily adjusted in line with the grant decision. The programme document and the annual plan 2022 were adapted, taking into account the statements and assessments received from the application phase. Staff workshops were organised in January and February. Plans were revised especially concerning the cooperation in **Ethiopia** and with **Africa Alliance of YMCAs**.

\*Due to the fragile situation in Ethiopia, the Finnish Embassy, other Finnish NGOs as well as the World YMCA and Africa Alliance of YMCAs were consulted on the prospects of programme implementation. Also, the risk matrix was revised based on the feedback received. Annual discussions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took place in March.

Significant attention was devoted to the groundwork for the **global education** programme.

\*This encompassed further design of the component and related activities, the formulation of a comprehensive structure for financing local YMCAs, planning of implementation, and systems for monitoring and reporting.

Moreover, cooperation with the **Ukrainian YMCA** was planned and a project concept aligned with the programme was prepared with a view to possible additional funding. In addition to the concept with Ukraine YMCA, potential for integrating psychosocial support (PSS) even more strongly was explored, recognizing it as an area for future development in the programme.

#### Monitoring and reporting

Updating the guidelines for monitoring and reporting to provide clear instructions for the programme team started in 2022 and continued in 2023. These guidelines enhance consistent and standardised

practices across the programme. Additionally, programme conditions and policies were introduced to partners, outlining expectations, quality standards, and guidelines for implementation.<sup>25</sup>

The programme's monitoring framework was complemented through establishing the baseline and target levels within its result chain. This involved updating the indicators to ensure measurement of both qualitative and quantitative data. Additionally, the selection of means of verification was streamlined to ensure the appropriateness of the system. However, indicators will be assessed and developed throughout the programme cycle.

It was decided that year 2022 will be continued with quarterly reporting and with existing templates for narrative and financial reporting. In 2023, it has been decided that from 2024 reporting will take place every 4 months with updated templates.

The YMCA uses outsourced financial management services (Rantalainen) and electronic financial management software (Heeros). At the beginning of the year, the accounting was reorganised in line with the reporting logic of the new funding instrument, with separate cost centres for partners' field budgets and global education, and other programme support functions were merged into a single cost centre. During the transition, both auditors and officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were consulted. At the same time, responsibilities for financial monitoring were clarified in line with the new team structure.

Financial reporting was improved, in particular with the **Kenya YMCA**, by opening up reporting levels to better reflect financial flows and expenditure between the regional and national headquarters and the implementing school institutions. Special attention was also paid to partners' working time recording during the 2022 monitoring visits. Guidelines were created to support financial spot checks during the monitoring visits and training was provided to strengthen the financial monitoring capacity of the Finnish YMCA team. Travel plans were introduced to support annual planning and staff management. Monitoring visits were conducted to all the programme countries during 2022. Finland's embassy representatives were met in Addis Ababa, Nairobi and Beirut.

### **Assessments methods and evaluation plan**

The main appraisal methods used by the organisation are partner capacity assessment, quarterly reporting, self-assessment, focus group interviews, and pre- and post-activity surveys. During the reporting year, capacity assessments were carried out with the newest partners, the **YMCA of Ethiopia** and **Africa Alliance of YMCAs**. A facilitated mid-term self-assessment was conducted with the YMCA of The Gambia. It reviewed the results of the four-year project period and was carried out, among others, through focus group discussions.

In all partner countries, information is regularly collected from both right-holders and stakeholders, both verbally and in writing. The information collected is used to steer and implement activities to best meet the needs of rights-holders. The impact of the training on the lives and skills of participants is measured through a follow-up surveys in all partner countries.

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<sup>25</sup> Indicator 3.1: Harmonized quality in implementation of all projects, following programme policies and guidelines

Towards the end of year 2024, YMCA Finland is planning for a mid-term assessment that would be utilised in the design and preparation of the next programme cycle.

### **Learning practices, trainings and professional working groups**

At YMCA, a culture of continuous learning and improvement within the organisation is strong. However, more time and effort are needed to turn the culture into practice, especially regarding learning together with the partners. South-south exchange and partners' meetings are planned around themes such as disability inclusion and using sports as a tool for social inclusion.

YMCA Finland team members have participated in external trainings, among others, on antiracism and evaluation practices. Events such as country forums and thematic sessions organised by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Embassies have been participated to. A list of trainings and related events attended by team members was compiled to perceive all the efforts linked to networking and learning in 2022. In-house trainings have been organised on internal communications and different project management tools such as Teams, Planner and Miro. The need for a learning plan was discussed, and further development was scheduled for 2023.

Constant learning is promoted also through participation in different working groups and coordination platforms. For example, team members are a part of **World YMCA's** Community of Impact group on Refugees and Migration. These Communities are being reorganized in accordance with the Vision 2030 implementation plan. Through **YMCA Europe**, YMCAs in donor positions exchange information and experiences. YMCA Europe Working Group on Refugees focuses on coordination and sharing best practices of refugee work. YMCA Europe Staff Conference in May 2022 provided a platform for education and inspiration through the focus on the importance of sustainability and resilience on both organisational and personal levels. In addition to this, **Fingo**, umbrella organisation of Finnish civil society organisations working for global development, is an important cooperation agency. YMCA Finland participates in Fingo's Global education network, network of Finnish NGOs receiving programme-based support and a working group on Quality and Impact.

*Youth & Peace* working group with **Finn Church Aid**, **Felm** and **CMI** kicked-off in 2021 and was further established with regular meetings in 2022. The group works together to operationalise the National Action Plan (NAP) on Youth, Peace and Security, especially the measures where responsibility has been assigned to civil society organisations, often together with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Synergies are sought for example through thematic expertise, operational working areas, partnerships, and networks. The group produced a shared document for the monitoring group of the YPS NAP that outlines examples of work relevant to the implementation of the Action Plan already being done, what kind of new measures are being planned, and what kind of funding has been allocated or is being sought for the implementation.

The staff team has developed practices to enhance flow of information, coordination and mutual learning. These include bi-weekly meetings with programme team, bi-weekly meetings with communications, quarterly one-to-ones between programme manager and planners, team leaders' meetings approximately every two or three months, season-closing twice a year to analyse lessons learnt, thematic workshops and workshops related to annual planning and reporting.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Indicator 3.4: Fostered organisational learning

## Rebuilding the basis for volunteers' engagement

The engagement of volunteers grew moderately in 2022, with a focus on developing the structure of the volunteer programme. The total number of volunteers involved increased to 25.<sup>27</sup> The years of Covid 19-pandemic left their mark on volunteer activity and reaching and activating new participants was challenging. However, the gradual return to meetings during 2022 has helped to re-build the basis for volunteering. The focus in strengthening the programme has been in sustainability and quality rather than quantity.

Throughout the year, a total of 16 events were organized, providing opportunities for volunteers to contribute their time, skills, and enthusiasm. These events served as platforms for learning, networking, and advocating for peace and social change. Notably, the first local youth-led YMCA Peacemakers activities were carried out in **Helsinki** and **Turku**, empowering young people to take the lead in the activities.

In addition to local activities, YMCA Peacemakers gatherings were organised in Palestine and Kenya, bringing together youth from different backgrounds to share experiences, build connections, and develop their basic peacebuilding skills. These gatherings provided a valuable opportunity for cross-cultural exchange and learning and generate added value for the programme as a whole.

Regular communication with volunteers was facilitated through a newsletter and a dedicated WhatsApp group. These channels provided updates on upcoming events, opportunities for involvement, and resources for personal and professional development. They also served as spaces for volunteers to connect, share insights, and collaborate. To ensure a positive volunteer experience, guidelines for participants were developed. These guidelines outlined the expectations and responsibilities for volunteers, fostering a supportive and respectful environment. To enhance the outreach, the YMCA Peacemakers social media account on Instagram was set up.

### 3.3.2 Communications raise youth at the forefront

Highlighting the global circumstances of youth is the most important mission of YMCA Finland's communications. The role of communications is also to narrate on the Development Cooperation Programme, its solutions and results. Communications contribute to the public debate on principles and ethics regarding international cooperation and emphasise the values of Finnish foreign and development policy, such as human rights and multilateralism. Through communications, advocacy and global education, issues of social justice and sustainable development are conveyed to diverse audiences.

The preparation of YMCA Finland's Communications and Advocacy Plan started in 2022, along with the preparation of the English summary of the Development Cooperation Programme. From autumn 2022 onwards, the communications team was staffed by a communications lead and a communications specialist.

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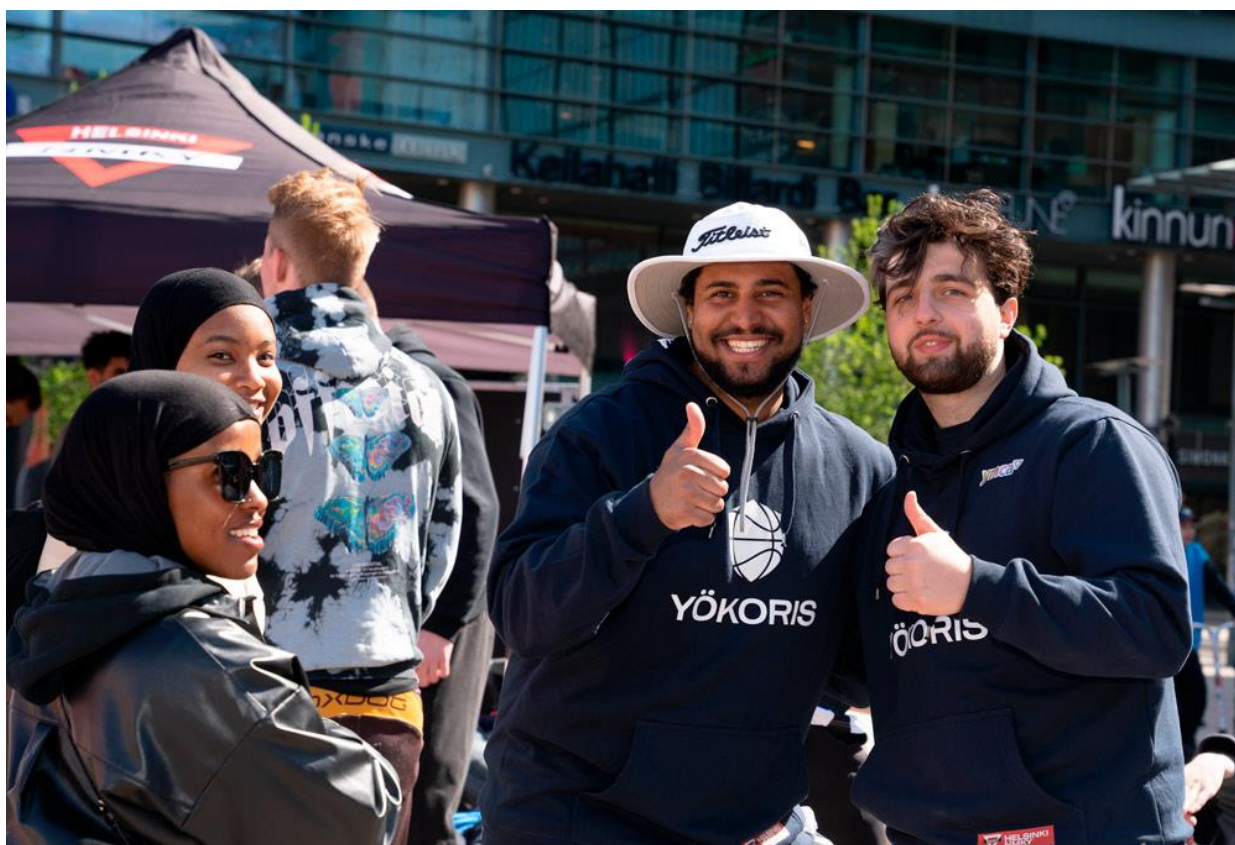
<sup>27</sup> Indicator 3.3: Number of Finnish youth volunteers engaged in the programme



## Informativeness

YMCA Finland's communications brought attention to the programme and its results and raised awareness of the positive role of youth in addressing global development challenges. A new structure was created on the website for the pages presenting partner countries. In 2022, the website published a total of 14 news items on development and peace issues, as well as development related news and current affairs posts on social media channels. In particular, the Youth Peace Prize campaign videos attracted viewers on all channels as monthly traffic increased more than 200 %.

YMCA Finland participated in NUORI2022, YOUTH2022, event, which presented YMCA's global education integrated with the youth work and carried out by the YMCA local associations in Finland. At Namika goes Narinkkatori event, YMCA Peacemakers volunteers communicated about the programme and international opportunities.



Picture 4 People attending to the Namika goes Narinkkatori -event.

Global education content focused strongly on development issues. 313 employees and trustees were informed about YMCA Finland's programme. A video was produced on the global education pilot project, *From Sports Fields to Peacebuilders*", and shown on social media channels.

A video of the European Staff Conference, published in May 2022, presented the European YMCA cooperation and the international network of professionals it hosts in order to share experiences and best practices.

Communication about Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine continued throughout the year. YMCA Finland's website and social media channels were used to inform about the international YMCA movement's support for Ukraine and the efforts of Ukrainian YMCAs to provide help for refugees and internally displaced people in the midst of war. YMCA Finland raised funds both for the humanitarian aid provided by the international YMCA in Ukraine and for the work of local associations with Ukrainian refugees in Finland.

### **Speaking up for youth rights**

One of the key objectives of development communications was to ensure that youth rights and empowerment, livelihoods and decent work are at the forefront of the development debate. The aim was to bring into the public debate the global challenges that affect young people particularly and to ensure that the voice of young people is heard. Young people from different backgrounds working for peace were highlighted in communications and public events.

**The Youth Peace Prize campaign** culminated in the Peace Prize in February 2022. The work of five young peacebuilders was showcased through articles and videos on YMCA Finland's communication channels. [Camilla Ojala, the Peace Prize winner](#) was interviewed on the radio and in three local and national newspapers.

**The United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP27**, held in November 2022, provided also an opportunity to communicate the peace and sustainable development efforts of young people when Tuulia Toivanen, deputy member of the YMCA Finland Board, joined her colleagues from around the world at the COP27 meeting as part a of the YMCA delegation.

### **Communicating opportunities for volunteers**

Communications about the opportunities for participation was designed to meet the needs of volunteers and engage them with the YMCA's work and the themes of the programme. During the YMCA Peacemakers exchange in Palestine and Kenya, youth volunteers produced communications content for YMCA Finland's social media channels. One of the volunteers who participated in the exchange in Palestine wrote an opinion piece for Finland's National Youth Council's, Allianssi's publication *No Peace without Youth*. The opportunity to communicate about their experiences strengthened young volunteers' commitment to the themes of global solidarity and contributed to highlighting how youth work is peace work amidst conflict.

[Read more about YMCAs work in Finland from our annual report.](#)

### **3.3.3 Advocacy and cooperation for peace and social justice**

YMCA Finland's advocacy work focuses on the global Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda and in particular to the national action plan. The expertise accumulated over several years and active involvement in the subject has not only contributed to the implementation and visibility of the agenda itself but has also strengthened the YMCA's position and recognition as an influential actor and discussant in societal issues.

### **Youth, Peace and Security discussant operationalising Finland's National Action Plan**

The thematic priorities in YMCA Finland's advocacy work are youth's active and meaningful role as peacebuilders, challenges of youth employment, the root causes of conflict and global solidarity. YMCA highlights how questions of peace and security are inextricably linked to the questions of basic human needs such as livelihoods. These focus areas and coordinated advocacy work is reinforced by the global and shared **Vision 2030**, adopted in July 2022, which emphasises the themes of *Community Well-being*, *Meaningful Work*, *a Sustainable Planet*, and *a Just World*. Linking YPS agenda and YMCA's peace work approach with the Vision2030 is a priority for the coming years. Discussion on the alignment of YMCA Finland strategy has started and the official process will start in 2023-2024.

Finland's **National Action Plan** on Youth, Peace and Security is operationalised in YMCA Finland's, local associations and partners work in many ways. This was well reflected in the **mid-term reporting of the NAP** in May 2023, expected to be presented to the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee in autumn 2023.<sup>28</sup> However, indicators for the NAP have not been created so the planned matrix for its follow-up has been postponed. Mid-term reporting of the NAP in 2023 will be utilised for this purpose (see also chapter 5.2).

Established in 2016, **2250 network** consists of Finnish youth organisations and individual youth. During the reporting year YMCA Finland staff and one nominated volunteer have actively participated in the development of the network, such as updated ground rules and operational plan of the network, joint events and advocacy work to promote the YPS agenda. The coordination committee of the network was re-elected in March. YMCA Finland represented the 2250 network and civil society perspectives at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' information session in March as well as in the side event of AU-EU Summit in February. YMCA also participated in the meetings of peace mediation coordination group of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and contributed to the monitoring group of Finland's National Action Plan

In November, an international 4-day workshop focusing on the implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda was organized in Helsinki, in partnership of **Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Search for Common Ground, United Network of Young Peacebuilders and African Union**. YMCA's Programme Manager participated to the workshop as part of the Finnish delegation. A Community of Practice was created for the participants of the workshop. The workshop provided an opportunity to learn about the YPS strategies in other countries, share the experience from the Finnish process and NAP. The workshop also presented several useful tools that can be used in YMCA Finland's programme work in the future.

The *Youth & Peace* working group, together with the Finn Church Aid, the Felm and CMI, continued to meet to identify and develop ways to promote the objectives of the National Action Plan in their international work. The working group has sharpened the YPS focus of these organisations. YMCA also continued participation in the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

### **Capacity-sharing to advocate on Youth Peace and Security agenda with YMCA partners**

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<sup>28</sup> Indicator 3.2 Finland's NAP on 2250 operationalized both in national and international levels

YMCA Finland's substantial experience in participating in the world's first National Action Plan (NAP) process on Youth, Peace and Security is shared with youth and local partner YMCAs in programme countries. Through continuous DMEL activities, interaction, information sharing and capacity building partners' knowledge of the YPS agenda and capacity to contextualise it is increased. In this exchange, YMCA Finland's understanding of local conditions and processes for creating YPS strategies and locally relevant approaches for civil society advocacy is improved too.

Alongside, the lessons learnt from Finland's process and the advocacy work that led to it were shared in the international YMCA network. The World Council held in Aarhus, Denmark, gave a unique opportunity to hold a meeting with all partners and discuss the programme approach and specifically the YPS agenda together. This partnership meeting discussed how the country-specific approaches align with the programme approach.

Furthermore, the motion regarding the YPS agenda by the Swedish YMCA–YWCA was approved at the World Council. This represented a continued commitment of the global YMCA movement to promote the Youth, Peace and Security agenda. The original initiative was made by YMCA Finland in the previous World Council in 2018. Contacts with other Nordic YMCA actors continued to be close in 2022. Colleagues from Norway's Y Global met to coordinate development cooperation plans and YMCA Peacemakers volunteer network. There was a dialogue with Swedish YMCA colleagues, especially on the promotion of the YPS agenda both in the Nordic context and in the partner countries of the Global South.



*Picture 5 In Kenya, a catalysing Youth, Peace and Security networking event was organised by YMCA volunteers.*



Opportunities for mutual, cross-cultural learning and networking are valuable elements that YMCA can offer to its youth and partners on local, national and global levels. Cooperation between the Finnish, Kenyan and Palestinian YMCA Peacemakers groups bore fruit. In **Kenya**, [a catalysing YPS networking event](#) was organised by YMCA volunteers after their peace camp in partnership with the Finnish Embassy in Nairobi. According to the National Youth Council, the event served as the first stakeholder meeting of Kenya's National Action Plan process. In **Palestine**, on the other hand, the YPS agenda was operationalised in a challenging environment into concrete youth-led activities in local communities as room for formal political lobbying is virtually non-existent. In the four cities of West Bank, the youths advocated for their rights to education and employment, promoted accessibility of restaurants for the visually impaired and mediated the conflict between village's families.<sup>29</sup>

## Platform for youth activism

As an international youth organisation working in local, national and global arenas YMCA serves as a platform, facilitator and loudspeaker for young people's own advocacy efforts. For example, [World YMCA was able to send a 14-person youth delegation to the United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP27](#). One young YMCA Peacemaker from Finland, Tuulia Toivanen, currently also a deputy member in the national board, was elected to the delegation.

For the first time in COP negotiations, young activists had a dedicated space within the inner, UN-managed space at the conference. The Children and Youth Pavilion gave young people the space and platform to hold discussions, meetings and policy briefings. The YMCA delegation highlighted the consequences of the crisis that younger generations have to endure within their lifetime and the importance of the third pillar, Sustainable Planet, of the recently adopted YMCA's Vision 2030. As Tuulia writes: *"We, as the largest youth organisation worldwide, must be on the right side of history and do our very best to win the fight against climate change. The time is now, our future literally depends on it, and the current and future generations are going to be our judges."*

The European YMCA has also invested in its advocacy work, which was enhanced by the move of the umbrella organisation to Brussels. The integration of the YES group for young people into the Youth Policy Group contributed to the advocacy opportunities of young people during the year.

At the same time, **global education** carried out through the local YMCAs in Finland reaches out to many young people who would otherwise be excluded from the discussions concerning their future and development issues. Through global education activities, young people have a safe space to learn and discuss on pressing social issues, closer to their everyday life (see also chapter 3.2).

## Tools and target groups

In addition to the youth groups, YMCA Finland's advocacy also influences other professionals, partners, decision-makers, policy processes and the wider public through communications, trainings, events, networks and working groups. The preparation of a communication and advocacy plan generated important internal discussion on the organisation's policy positions. A communication and events calendar supports the advocacy work. YPS themes were presented

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<sup>29</sup> Indicator 3.2: Finland's NAP on 2250 operationalized both in national and international levels

at events such as Youth Peace Week, Namika Goes Narinkkatori and the YMCA Peacemakers network (see also chapter 3.3.2). Cooperation and advocacy messages were coordinated also through Fingo's working groups and the network of partnership organisations receiving programme-based support from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

## 4 Twin-track approach in advancing sustainable development and cross-cutting objectives

The Youth, Peace and Livelihoods Development Cooperation Programme promotes sustainable development holistically. **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) are embedded in the programme's strategic priorities and the cooperation focuses on quality education (4), decent work (8), and inclusive societies building peace (16), and besides, they crosscut the entire programme. Commitment to SDGs is further underlined in and coordinated through YMCA's global Vision 2030.

In addition to sustainable development and programmatic themes, YMCA promotes the role of civil society, human rights, gender equality, rights of people living with disabilities, and climate resilience in a cross-cutting way. The programme applies **twin-track approach** to these cross-cutting objectives, meaning promoting them at two levels. The cross-cutting objectives are mainstreamed in the programme's approach, and on the other hand, the implementation includes targeted actions advancing these goals.

Minimum standard for all projects and implementation of cross-cutting objectives is **do no harm**. This is always considered in the planning phase together with the partner and throughout project implementation. In especially fragile contexts the minimum level translates into **conflict sensitive approach**. As one size does not fit all, tools for ensuring this are close partnership and communication with the partners. YMCA partners are known local civil society actors who have been working in the local context for decades and are familiar with different realities. Local ownership of the projects thus ensures that the programme is conflict sensitive while contributing to positive developments. Besides its partners, YMCA Finland consults other NGOs, YMCA network and embassies and conducts regular field visits to maintain an up to date and comprehensive awareness of the limitations and possibilities of the operational contexts.

### 4.1 Strengthening the local civil society



The programme focuses on strengthening and enabling young people's livelihood and civic participation skills as a critical starting point for strengthening local civil society. YMCA Finland supports the capacity of its partner organisations to act effectively in civic spaces. On the other

hand, the active citizenship and advocacy skills of the youth reached through the programme are strengthened through education and trainings.

In 2022, the partner organisations strengthened their capacity to act in civil society through, for example, infrastructure development, training of staff and board members, and strengthening of the YMCA's internal network. Partnerships and cooperation with other NGOs, policy makers and other duty bearers are part of the implementation of the programme. Through various events and conferences, partner organisations brought together actors ranging from politicians and police to youth activists reinforcing the role of YMCAs as a major actor in promoting the well-being of young



people. The cooperation strengthened the partners' knowledge of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda, which supported them in promoting youth inclusion.

For example, YMCA **Lebanon** is involved in the CCOBS (non-governmental, indigenous, and international) consortium, participating in its meetings and sharing good practices. The **Gambian** YMCA brought together various civil society actors at the annual Youth, Peace and Security conference to discuss inclusivity as a component of peace work and reaching sustainable peace. The **Kenyan** YMCA participates actively in the national Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) process with other actors from civil society, public administration and policymaking.

YMCAs provide tools and platforms for youth to engage, learn and network, and organise workshops and conferences to strengthen young people's knowledge and skills on social empowerment, their rights, and their role as active members of society. Young people were encouraged to become active citizens, e.g., by volunteering through the YMCA Peacemakers groups. Empowering vulnerable young people to act is a key objective of the programme.

Vulnerable young people in **Palestine** participated in Peacemakers' activities, where they learned about their rights and planned community initiatives. In **Kenya**, Finnish and Kenyan volunteers organised a YPS networking event that brought together representatives from youth organisations, government, and politics. In **Finland**, group-based global education activities have been targeted at young people who are not exposed to the themes of building a fairer world at school or in working life.

## 4.2 Progressive human rights based approach at the core

Human rights based approach (HRBA) is at the core of the programme's theory of change. Promoting human rights is an integral part of the planning, expected programme outcomes as well as the methods of delivery. Human rights are both objectives and guiding principles in the implementation. The level of human rights based approach at YMCA's development cooperation is progressive with some transformative elements. The programme focus is on the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, often in fragile societies.

The programme aims to build the resilience and readiness of youth through skills development and fundamental knowledge of their rights. Universal human rights are linked to the programme's two main themes: 1) right to work, right to education, and dignified living, 2) right to peace and freedom of thought. The first theme promotes economic empowerment of the youth and enhanced standard of living. The second theme raises youth's awareness on their rights. Youth's capacity to claim their rights, acknowledge different narratives, change attitudes and motivations, and mitigate the tensions is enhanced. The youth are gaining knowledge and tools for peaceful dialogue. This enhances their feeling of a hopeful, shared future.

The programme furthers the respect, protection, and fulfilment of human rights on different levels. HRBA is part of each YMCA partner's work, and their capacity is built to operate on two layers: firstly, to advance the human rights commitments at the national level as an active player of the local civil society, secondly, at the individual and community level by securing the human rights of the young individuals and to train them to further protect and advance the rights of their peers. For example, in **Lebanon** and **Gambia** the youth have enhanced their understanding of the

freedom of speech. The leadership and communication skills the youth in Lebanon gained during the peacebuilding training improve their active participation in the society.

In **Ethiopia**, human rights and securing them was at the core of the planning of the peacebuilding manual that is to be used in all peacebuilding trainings. The manual is human rights sensitive and politically and ethnically independent. This ensures that the trainings are based on universally recognised human rights while remaining contextually relevant.

In **Palestine**, empowering the right-holders has been the basis of the work to enhance their psychological well-being and to secure their human rights. A bottom-up approach is part of planning the activities to ensure that the right-holders have the capacity to create positive and sustainable change both on community level and nationally.

### 4.3 Gender equality



In designing the programme's activities, the human rights situation in the country, including the realisation of gender equality and its key obstacles, has been assessed together with the partner. Activities have considered how all can benefit equally from the results obtained, and how they can improve the situation of women.

Gender equality and women's empowerment is also integral to the advocacy on YPS in which the partners are supported. We also monitor the data of participants disaggregated by gender, disability, and age. The data is analysed and used to develop our approach.

In all programme activities, at least half of the rights-holders are women or girls. In several activities, we aim for 60 % share. Women have made up a high percentage of the livelihoods programme, for example, in **Lebanon**, 70% of the participants in the vocational training were women. In the **Gambia**, women's employment and livelihoods have been supported through vocational training and entrepreneurship courses, considering cultural expectations and responsibilities of women such as childcare and domestic work. In **Palestine**, women with disabilities, whose situation is especially vulnerable because of their gender and disability, have also been reached. The recruitment of female psychosocial counsellors has addressed cultural barriers to women's participation in Palestine.

Women's participation in peacebuilding and advocacy empowers women to be active citizens and to promote the message of peace in their communities. In this way, women and girls learn more about their rights, learn how to claim them and thus improve their status in society. Of the 298 right-holders reached at **Gambian** advocacy events and conferences promoting women's participation in social debate and peace work, 160 were women. In **Palestine**, the programme has improved women's access to services and opportunities and enhanced their capacity to claim their rights and participate in decision-making processes. In **Ethiopia**, 25 women participated in the first peace training.

In **Finland**, through global education, binary gender labelling was abandoned in the toilets of the local YMCA association. A *Global17* girls' group was also set up, serving as a safe space for girls from different cultural backgrounds. In this group, gender equality was selected for discussion topic in several meetings, focusing on growing up as a woman in different cultures globally and in one's own locality, sex education and gender diversity.



Picture 6 Lebanese youth graduated from Nurse Aid Assistance training in Lebanon.

#### 4.4 Non-discrimination and advancement of the rights of disabled people



In the programme, specific attention is paid to combatting the discrimination based on age, gender, ability, and socio-economic background. The global YMCA movement has agreed on a Value Statement on Inclusion, which commits to inclusiveness and human-rights-based work against all forms of discrimination and human rights violations. The partners are part of the same global youth movement and committed to the same principles. Furthermore, YMCA's Ethical Guidelines for Development Cooperation and concrete ways to reduce inequalities at the programme level are discussed with partners.

In line with the Youth, Peace and Security agenda and adapted to each context, YMCAs strengthen youth participation and social empowerment. YMCAs trained youth to become active citizens and offered them platforms for peer training and lobbying for youth inclusion on the political forums. YMCAs were active in local and national networks in promotion of youth inclusion.

The programme reduces economic inequality and poverty by supporting vocational schools and providing educational opportunities. Vulnerable youths, such as migrant, refugee and returnee youths, victims of political violence and economically disadvantaged youth receive vocational training and improved access to livelihoods opportunities. Integration of stigmatized and traumatized young people into the society is supported. Also, teachers updated their knowledge and skills on student-centred methods to provide quality training for all.

YMCAs promoted disability inclusion in different ways. Disability inclusion and people living with disabilities (PLWDs) were supported by training and strengthening the capacity of both people living with disabilities and the local partners, experts and authorities. YMCAs also worked for the better accessibility of their activities. For example, in The **Gambia**, YMCA advocated for breaking the stereotypes and stigma related to disability. In **Kenya**, the focus was on accessibility: the schools were made more accessible by building ramps. Also, the staff members studied sign language, and the events had an interpreter to sign language. In **Palestine**, people living with disabilities were supported through accessible house adaptations and medical devices. One community initiative focused on the rights of the PLWDs. People with disabilities also gained psycho-social support to improve their well-being and coping strategies. In **Lebanon**, the mobile learning unit provided training opportunities for youth with learning difficulties. In 2022 the peacebuilding camp had a participant living with hearing disability. This gave an incentive for the trainers to plan how to improve the accessibility and inclusiveness in the camp.

The global citizenship education implemented in **Finland** has offered advocacy skills also for the youth who have neuropsychiatric challenges. Through the training the youth have gained skills to be active members of the local civil society. Creating a safe space has been at the core of the global citizenship education. The open discussion has helped to take the different needs of the participants into consideration.

Thus, the number of PLWDs participating in the activities varied in different partner countries. In some of the projects there were only individual persons with disabilities who participated in the activities whereas in Palestine, for instance, 53 % of the participants were living with disabilities.

## 4.5 Increasing the skills to adapt to and mitigate climate change



In addition to mainstreaming *do no harm* approach, internal, national, and international documents and commitments guide our climate work. A fundamental guideline is global YMCA's Vision 2030, which aligns the Agenda 2030 goals with youth work. One of the Vision's four pillars is a Sustainable Planet, which, alongside the SDGs' climate goals, is based on the Paris Climate Agreement targets and COP updates. The strategic objectives related to a sustainable planet include working towards carbon neutrality; integrating climate education into all activities and; advocacy for a just green transition locally and globally.

In line with its own environmental programme, YMCA Finland considers and minimises the climate impact of all its activities, including development cooperation, for example, by minimising flying. YMCA will update the environmental programme in 2023, when the ambition, concreteness, and monitoring practices of climate actions, including climate work in the development cooperation programme, will be developed.

As a targeted action, [as part of the program for Livelihoods](#), YMCAs promote climate change adaptation in **Kenya**, where the agricultural college is supported to adopt and teach regenerative agriculture methods and create related teaching materials in cooperation with other professionals in the field.



Additionally, climate education is vital to global citizenship education in **Finland**. YMCA Finland trained youth workers on how to support children and young people to act climate-wisely, and staff have been planning how to develop a climate-smart organisation, targeting youth professionals, children, and young people, and developing climate wisdom in the culture of their organisations. In the YMCA Peacemakers network, the young Finnish and Kenyan activists shared lessons learned on SDGs promotion and climate work in their contexts.



*Picture 7 Kenyan student at Kenya YMCA College of Agriculture and Technology. Limuru, Kenya.*

## 5 Conclusions

### 5.1 Successes, challenges and lessons learnt in the programme level

In the start of the programme cycle, both successes and challenges were encountered as YMCA's efforts unfolded across the six program countries. Despite 2022's global challenges, stemming from the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, and price hikes, YMCA continued its historical role of addressing young people's needs within their communities. The programme dedicated to supporting young people within their local settings, through accelerating access to livelihoods and offering tools to advocate for peace.

The year 2022 marked the program's inception, a year which focused on learning and development of the programme. Throughout the first year, the primary focus rested on realizing results at the output and activity levels. The progress made by partners in attaining these outputs signify progress toward the broader outcomes. The output level results of each partner are found in the results matrix attachment. The progress towards outcomes has been shared in chapters 3.1 3.2 and 3.3. It is noteworthy that outcomes, constituting long-term objectives, are projected to manifest primarily during the program's final two years.

There were some differences between the results achieved among the partners. With some partners, notably The **Gambia, Kenya and Palestine** the results have been steady during the past years, as the partners has been able to operate steadily, despite their challenging environments and the partnerships have been well established. For these partners, output level results were mainly achieved as planned during 2022. **Lebanon** has been continuing to struggle with a volatile operating environment, in which predictability is difficult and adjustments are a constant requirement. This has resulted in a slower progress towards the outputs during 2022.

One of the challenges and areas of learning both in Lebanon and in most of the partner countries is disability inclusion. For YMCA Lebanon, for instance, the priority focus is on inclusion, especially on people living with disabilities (PLWDs), but realising this proved to be very challenging, partly because of the cascading crisis faced in Lebanon. The crisis had its impact on the whole social spectrum, felt more by the most vulnerable. To address this, YMCA Lebanon is working closely with a local civil society organisation co-founded and led by persons with disabilities. Building new connections and collaborations will promote achieving the targets.

New partnerships with **Ethiopia** and the **Africa Alliance of YMCAs** concentrated on groundwork and the establishment of new initiatives during the initial year. However, meticulous planning will pave the way for clear and targeted programme activities in the forthcoming years. Similarly, the Global Education in Finland focused mainly on building the foundation and training YMCA employees and volunteers to ensure a fruitful base for activities in the upcoming years of the programme.

One of the successes of the first year was building new partnerships and strengthening more established ones. Strong partnerships, deeply rooted in the commitment to programme themes, have been instrumental cornerstones to the success of the programme. During 2022 partners learned more about one another, there was an increase in communications and exchange among partners. This cultivated a more unified programmatic approach, aligning projects toward common



objectives. The dedication to World YMCA's **Vision 2030** facilitated a streamlined strategy across the YMCA's work, even within the programme. These elements ensured a coherent and innovative approach in the programme, where mutual learning and exchange of best practices allow for more impactful results.

Another success was the commitment to the **Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda** throughout the programme. All partners promoted the themes and pillars of the agenda in their contexts. By providing young individuals with spaces for interaction and equipping them with the essential tools and skills, YMCA empowered them to contribute to peace within their communities. Listening to and understanding the needs of young people has been strongly on the agenda of the YMCAs throughout the history of the movement and the YPS agenda has only strengthened this fundamental approach.

2022 marked a successful and intriguing initiation of the four-year program. The programmatic approach developed in collaboration with partners and within the YMCA Finland team, has strengthened the foundation of the programme. YMCA coordinators, both in Finland and partner countries, will continue to support the most vulnerable youth globally. YMCA's will continue to provide essential support and platforms to young people globally, while connecting youth leaders across countries and cultures to better promote peace.

YPS agenda will continue to guide the way towards a future, where young people are empowered to be peacebuilders on both a local and global level. This work is not done in isolation but requires strong partnerships and cooperation with stakeholders. YMCA will continue its advocacy and networking with donors, other youth actors and CSOs to ensure that youth's voices are heard.

### **Peacebuilding and psychosocial support in the West Bank**

The context in the West Bank is increasingly difficult and the youth are facing challenges on a daily level. Especially when working with vulnerable youth, it is extremely difficult to have youth engaged in optimistic and future-oriented activity. In this challenging context it has been a real success to engage young people to learn about their rights and build their capacity to understand their strengths and gain life skills. Community initiatives were a culmination of the progress youth experienced in the YMCA Peacemakers' activity. The fact that young people were able to engage with the duty-bearers in their localities showed significant courage and inspiration that they felt.

[Read more in YMCA Finland websites](#)

## **5.2 Linkages to Finland's political agenda and other development cooperation**

YMCA Finland's development cooperation programme is aligned with and advances several priorities of Finland's foreign and development policy.

### **Youth, Peace and Security**

Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda is the key framework for YMCA Finland's development cooperation programme. The programme is centrally guided by the YPS perspective. All activities

of the programme contribute to and are in line with the pillars of the resolution. The programme contributes especially to the pillars of Participation, Prevention and Partnerships.

Conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding are long-term priorities of **Finland's foreign policy** and YMCA's development cooperation programme supports Finland's commitment to advocating for the YPS agenda both nationally and internationally. Building sustainable peace requires many efforts on different levels, and addressing the political, economic and social problems underlying conflicts. YMCA is an expert when it comes to understanding and meeting the needs of youth and thus YPS is a central framework for analysing the programme results.

The indicators for the **National Action Plan** (NAP) are still under review but below are a few examples of YMCA programme's activities which are connected to the NAP.

#### *Examples under the priority area of Participation*

| <b>Measures in the Finland's National Action Plan</b>   | <b>Examples from the programme</b>   |
|---|--|
| Finland raises awareness of the positive influence of youth participation in peace and security matters | YMCA Peacemakers groups in four partner countries. In the groups young people learn about their rights and possibilities to build peace in their community and society. The programme supports YMCA partners in advancing the YPS agenda both on grassroot level and with local duty-bearers and decision-makers.  |
| Finland promotes young peacebuilders' mutual dialogue and sharing of experiences                        | The YMCA Peacemakers network gives young people the opportunity to network and meet each other. In 2022, during YMCA Peacemakers exchange to Palestine and Kenya, Finnish and local youth met, shared their experiences of peace-building and engaged in a dialogue about sharing best practices.  |
| Finland pays special attention to the 2250 perspective in development cooperation                       | All activities of the programme contribute to and are in line with the pillars of the UNSCR 2250. For example, YMCA partners increase youth participation by training young people to participate in peacebuilding and decision-making. The programme's activities prevent conflict and social exclusion by investing in communities and safe spaces where young people can participate constructively and receive support in their daily lives. Some activities will reach the most vulnerable groups of young people, such as returnees and young people who have experienced political violence. YMCAs also support young people's social integration by improving their employability, providing vocational training and entrepreneurship education. YMCAs promote peace and well-being in partnership with young people, their families, other organisations and local decision-makers. |

#### *Examples under the priority area of Prevention*

| <b>Measures in the Finland's National Action Plan</b>   | <b>Examples from the programme</b>   |
|---|--|
| Finland raises awareness and communicates about the role of high-quality education in the prevention of marginalisation, violence and conflicts | The programme has a holistic approach, with strong links between peace and education and livelihood development. In Palestine, for example, young people who have experienced political violence are supported to return to school or to start vocational training. Education plays an important role in helping |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | young people to cope with everyday life and not to become marginalised and thus potentially fall into a path of violence or conflict.   |
| Finland supports young people's vocational education, employment opportunities and entrepreneurship by strengthening workplace skills across different educational tiers | The programme supports young people's livelihoods and employment opportunities through vocational training, life and employability skills, and by supporting youth entrepreneurship according to local needs in The Gambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Palestine and Lebanon. |

### *Examples under the priority area of Partnerships*

| Measures in the Finland's National Action Plan  | Examples from the programme  |
|---|--|
| Finland promotes intergenerational and intersectoral mentoring and sharing of information and experiences about peace and security topics | <p>YMCA Finland convenes the Youth and Peace Working Group about three times a year. The working group includes CMI, Finn Church Aid and Felm. The group shares best practices and exchanges information between peace and youth organisations in the areas of development cooperation and peace work.</p> <p>A highlight among the YMCA partners is Kenya YMCA's activity in promoting the YPS nationally and locally. The Kenya YMCA works closely with the Kenya National Youth Council, which is responsible for driving the Kenya NAP process. The Kenya YMCA is also part of the National NAP Coalition of NGOs.</p> |

## **Priorities of Finland's development cooperation and country programmes**

**Strengthening the economic base of developing countries and creating jobs** is one of Finland's priorities in development policy and development cooperation. A sustainable economic base where all people have access to livelihoods and decent income is fundamental for eradicating poverty and inequality within and between countries. One of the two strategic priorities in YMCA Finland's programme is livelihoods and supporting especially the most vulnerable groups, such as women, youth and persons with disabilities with education and training linked to the local job markets and entrepreneurship opportunities. Similarly, the programme increases the resources and capacities of teachers and schools by developing their professional skills and learning environments. These activities are also closely linked to Finland's updated policy priority of **quality inclusive education**. See also chapter 3.1.

Another priority in Finland's development policy is **peaceful democratic societies**. In its programme YMCA Finland seeks to increase the capacity of vulnerable youth to prevent and mitigate conflicts and drive community development through realisation of their right to peace. This is achieved by supporting inclusive peace and trust building processes, increasing the number of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in decision-making and supporting human rights advocates. Inclusion and wellbeing of youth and minority groups contribute to the social stability in countries recovering or prone to conflicts. Strong and active civil society players, such as local partner NGOs, are key players fostering these processes.

The programme is similarly aligned with **Finland's country programmes**. Out of Finland's bilateral partner countries, YMCA Finland works with YMCAs in Ethiopia, Kenya and Palestine.

**Finland's country programme in Ethiopia** focuses on enhancing access to essential services and livelihoods through rural economic development, water, sanitation, and hygiene, and education. Sustainable development in Ethiopia is crucial for achieving lasting peace in the country and ensuring stability in the Horn of Africa. YMCA Finland's efforts in Ethiopia aim to contribute to sustainable peace and security by promoting youth involvement in peacebuilding and improving access to livelihood opportunities for vulnerable young people, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected areas. Special attention is given to fostering equal opportunities for young women and youth with disabilities.

**Finland's country program in Kenya** focuses on supporting good governance and inclusive democratic processes, the empowerment of girls, women and youth, and building climate change resilience. Together with YMCA Kenya and the African Alliance of YMCAs, YMCA Finland contributes to improving youth livelihoods and promoting peace in Kenya. YMCA Finland's efforts focus on youth livelihoods, peace and advancing opportunities especially for women and PLWD's. The programme improves youth employability through vocational, entrepreneurship, and life skills training. The goal is to bridge the gap between youth and the job market and build the resilience of young people against the shocks created by climate change. YMCA Finland also promotes youth participation in peacebuilding efforts and advocacy related to the Youth, Peace and Security agenda.

**The country programme for Palestinian territories** focuses on education, inclusive society, and resilience. In Palestine, the YMCA project emphasizes human rights, improved resilience, and livelihood promotion, particularly for young women and individuals with disabilities in the West Bank. In education, YMCA Finland supported vulnerable youth by providing psychosocial support and remedial classes to reintegrate them into school. To support inclusive state-building and a strong civil society, YMCA Finland promotes the active engagement of youth, young women, and individuals with disabilities through capacity building, trainings, and the design of community initiatives for peaceful development. Additionally, YMCA Finland works with vulnerable youth in the West Bank, particularly in area C, ensuring their access to education, decent work, and civic participation.

