

*YMCA Finland Development Cooperation
Programme Results Report 2023*

PROGRAMME FOR YOUTH, PEACE AND LIVELIHOODS



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Cover photo: Amira Alhalmouchi taking part to Midnight Basket event in Lebanon.
Photo Martiina Woodson.

1 Introduction

1.1 Summary of the main results in 2023

A quarter of the world's youth live in countries that have experienced conflict¹, while nearly 90 % of all youth live in developing countries². Young people living in such conditions often find themselves in a vulnerable position where they have to make crucial decisions about their lives. Their options and prospects for the future may be limited by a lack of education or employment opportunities. The struggle for livelihoods and other resources can be a root cause for conflicts. Inequalities within countries can also be stark.

YMCA is demonstrating its 180 years of legacy, global reach and impact in contexts like Ukraine and Palestine. YMCA staff and young people are working on the ground before, during and after the escalations of violence and conflicts. Strongly rooted, established and trusted actors they will build the local civil society for years to come.

YMCA Finland's Development Cooperation Programme aims to address the root causes of conflicts and to reduce the divisions or even confrontations caused by inequality. The programme is dedicated to enhancing the well-being and empowerment of young people in their local contexts, accelerating access to livelihood opportunities, and equipping them with skills to promote peace. A collective **Youth, Peace and Livelihoods programme** is implemented with **local YMCAs in The Gambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Palestine, Lebanon and Finland**. Best practices are replicated through the **Africa Alliance of YMCAs**.

The Programme is guided by the **Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS)** agenda. The 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.

This report analyses how far the programme has progressed towards achieving its intended results. Throughout 2023, the second year of the programme cycle, the primary focus rested on realising results especially at the output and activity levels.

During the year, **a total of 9474 right-holders and duty-bearers participated in the programme's activities**. Approximately 50,3 % of them were young women and 49,7 % young

¹ UNESCO, Thematic Factsheet: Youth empowerment (2023) <https://www.unesco.org/en/youth-and-empowerment>

² 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

men. This means that in the first half of the programme cycle, during 2022-2023, already 58 % of the original target number of right-holders have been reached. It is estimated that more than 25,000 people were also indirectly influenced during the reporting year.

More than 7,600 youths and community members have been reached with peace activities. YMCAs have brought youths from diverse backgrounds to safe spaces, increasing their awareness and skills on peacebuilding. Youths have been empowered through capacity-building on their rights and the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda. Youth-led community initiatives have included advocacy activities towards duty-bearers addressing topics such as the rights of minorities, youth participation, irregular migration and drug abuse. Some partners, such as The Gambia and Kenya, have participated in countrywide processes for developing National Action Plans on the YPS agenda. Institutionalising the YMCA's practical approach to peacebuilding in co-creation process is an important and continuing exercise.

Close to 1,400 youths and community members were equipped with market-relevant vocational and entrepreneurship skills, life skills, and business opportunities. Selected students were provided start-up capital or tools to start micro or small-scale businesses. Mental health and psychosocial support interventions enhanced resilience and improved livelihoods for vulnerable youth. 588 right-holders that were also sensitized on climate change resilience.

These achievements can be considered encouraging since 2023 is the second 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 2023, the total cost of the programme was 1,092,076 €, of which 60 % was for project activities. 24,6 % of the costs were planning, monitoring, evaluation and related personnel costs, 9,9 % administration, and 5,5 % for communications. Comprising 2022 and 2023, 46 % of the total four-year programme budget has been used. A strong progress towards the results during the second year of the programme was observed.

1.2 YMCAs around the world implementing Vision 2030

The global YMCA movement has a jointly designed roadmap for all YMCAs around the world. Vision 2030 contains four areas of action that reflect the shared goals. The four pillars of impact of are strongly interlinked. Community wellbeing, Meaningful Work, Sustainable Planet and Just World are our priorities for action. **Vision 2030 illustrates our commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals more clearly than ever before.**

Different YMCAs have different approaches to working with their communities. Vision 2030 provides a framework for action so that YMCAs, in all their diversity, can be more united and pursue in the same direction in the long term. At the same time, the organisation can better develop policies, share best practices and work more effectively.

Our shared mission is to create opportunities for young people and their communities to build a just, sustainable, equitable and inclusive world where everyone can thrive in body, mind and spirit.

Vision 2030 sets organisation's ambitions boldly high. YMCA carries global responsibility for the well-being of young people. At the same time, each pillar is accompanied by more specific objectives that guide our work in a more practical way.

In 2023, concrete steps forward have been taken. In August, the first Thematic Strategy on Meaningful Work was published. The first working groups on resource mobilization and strategic alignment have started and YMCA Finland is strongly involved. The new global Movement Strengthening Strategy will be adopted in 2024. In the coming years, YMCA Finland will align its national strategy with Vision 2030 too.

YMCA Finland promotes the implementation of Vision 2030 both nationwide and globally and supports local associations and partners in applying it to their respective contexts. The following chapters illustrate Vision 2030 links with the programme's theory of change and expected outcomes. The next programme, in 2026-2029, will be formulated as Vision 2030 its starting point.

2 Progress towards outcomes

This report analyses how far the programme has progressed towards achieving its intended results. Throughout 2023, the second year of the programme cycle, the primary focus rested on realising results especially at the output and activity levels. The steps taken by partners in attaining these results indicate progress towards the expected outcomes. It is noteworthy that these long-term objectives, are anticipated to manifest primarily at the end of the programme and beyond. Therefore, analysis on outputs and activities is included to some extent, as they provide a means of analysing the functioning of the results chain, particularly in this early part of the programme cycle.

The **theory of change (ToC)** sets the base for the programme and different projects. As the implementation of the programme progresses, more opportunities to analyse the accuracy and usability of the theory of change unfold. It can be concluded that during the reporting year the ToC has remained valid. No factors have emerged during the year that would significantly challenge the logic of the results chain itself.

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. This contribution is measured through projects reporting created inclusive livelihoods opportunities, advancing respect and fulfilment of human rights of young people as well as improved capacity to influence development in line with Agenda 2030.

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.

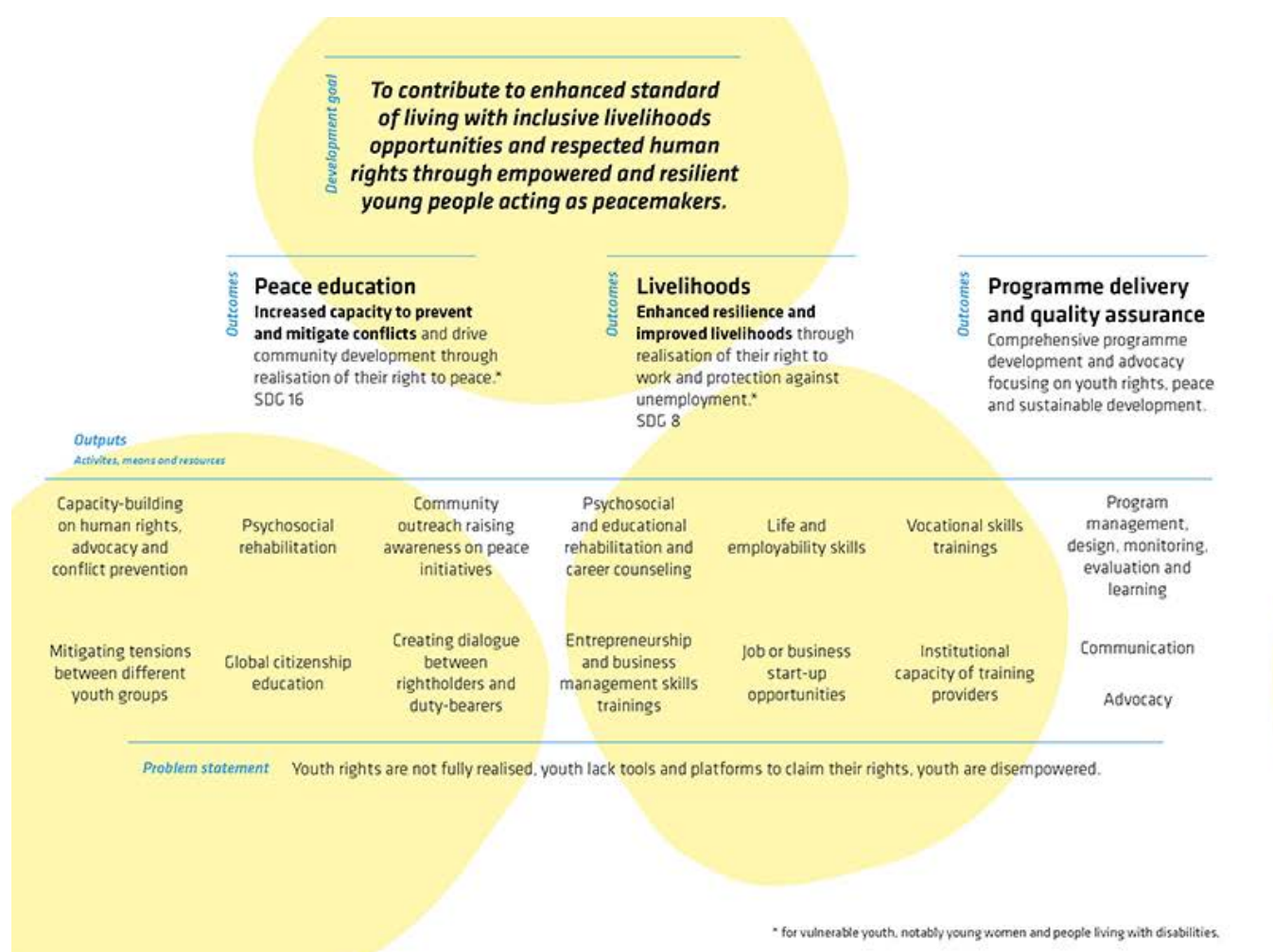
Yet, both individual and community level changes are strongly interconnected. Both areas of life are required for sustainable transformation. YMCA acknowledges that peace cannot last without sustainable livelihoods opportunities – and those opportunities cannot be fully developed in the absence of peace.

The basic **preconditions and assumptions** secure and allow the viability of the theory – the causal link between outputs, outcomes and the impact. Preconditions are factors that must be in place to protect the results chain. Depending on the context, the preconditions include elements such as: accessibility of the activities taking into account the most vulnerable groups, inclusive beneficiary selection, collaboration with duty bearers, youth, employers and other important stakeholders. There must be a conducive environment for entrepreneurs, market demand for the trained skills, and the youth are expected to participate in the trainings and put their new skills in use. Capacity of the partners must be in adequate level or strengthened and the interventions must be continuously monitored, evaluated and learnings documented. Interventions are learning processes. Safety of all stakeholders must be guaranteed even when working with sensitive topics.

Assumptions are circumstances or resources that are needed for the success of the programme. Firstly, sufficient resources in terms of finances, human resources, facilities are always required. There must be a relatively stable political environment to enable local actors to deliver on the results as well as support from the most important stakeholders. Stability also requires the absence

of natural disasters. Initiatives must be well-coordinated and communicated with other actors in the region and sector to maximise the impact and find synergies. The local partner must have broad knowledge of the context and its dynamics, up-to-date needs assessments and baseline information. The interventions shall be designed in the participatory manner to ensure the ownership among the right holders targeted.

The central conditions and assumptions have been well identified at the design stage. For example, delays in projects can often be traced back to situations where these circumstances have not been met. Mainly the challenges in the reporting year are linked to safety, security and instability. Changes in critical circumstances reflect the challenging and volatile environments in which YMCA partners operate. Despite careful planning and foreseeing risk factors, the programme faces some challenges, but so far these have been mitigated and managed quite effectively. Yet, it should be noted that the analysis at this stage of the programme cycle is inevitably relatively preliminary. Moreover, scarcity of human and financial resources and lack of or other challenges in using their facilities are affecting the sustainability of activities in some partner countries. However, these are issues that can be addressed within the programming period.



Theory of change.

2.1 Outcome 1: Peacebuilding programme

Achievements against annual targets in 2023

- **11 community dialogues** on peace and trust-building were supported in Ethiopia, Lebanon and Palestine
- **7,635 right-holders participated** in advocacy or peacebuilding trainings or sessions in all partner countries
- **12 local youth-led YMCA Peacemakers groups** were active in Kenya, Palestine and Finland
- **Youth, Peace and Security agenda was promoted** through:
 - National coalitions and civil society networks in The Gambia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Cameroon and Finland
 - Civil society coordination in Palestine
 - Local advocacy campaigns in Kenya
- **YMCA in Palestine collaborated** with organisations specialised in gender
- **YMCAs in The Gambia, Ethiopia, Palestine and Finland collaborated** with organisations specialised in disability inclusion

2.1.1 Progress against the programme cycle and the Theory of Change

The second year of the Peace Programme was successful in many ways. There has been strong progress against targets and support for the theory of change (ToC). The second year has shown that the programme and its objectives are contributing to the impact of the programme. The outputs are feeding into the outcomes of the Peace Programme. The problem statement of the ToC remains valid and very relevant from peacebuilding perspective. In 2023, young people continued to lack platforms and tools to advocate for their rights.

The annual targets set for 2023 were achieved. Youth, Peace and Security agenda, building on United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250, has remained as the main framework for the peace programme. Some outputs, such as building youth capacity on human rights, peacebuilding, and advocacy, were relevant to all partners and projects. Community outreach was developed from The Gambia to Palestine and took different forms to engage other youth and duty bearers. Global education was the cornerstone of the programme implementation in Finland, which is further elaborated below. The capacity of partners about the Youth Peace and Security agenda has increased considerably. Partners have found it relevant to their contexts and a meaningful framework to advocate for youth participation on peace and security. Some partners, such as The Gambia and Kenya, have participated in their national processes for developing National Action Plans on the YPS agenda. Not all outputs presented in the ToC were equally relevant to all partners, for example, [psychosocial rehabilitation is a speciality of the programme in Palestine](#), where vulnerable young people struggle with their mental health.

During 2023, young people highlighted the link between peacebuilding and sustainable livelihoods. It became even clearer than before that peace and livelihoods are interdependent and, as one rights defender said, "we cannot eat peace".

Advocacy on youth rights, peace and sustainable development remains as important as it was two years ago. Issues such as the climate crisis, lack of access to employment, and need for sustainable peace were topical both in Finland and in all partner countries. The crisis in Gaza and undemocratic developments such as coups have further underlined the need to ensure young people's rights and voices on topics of peace and security. Young people and partners emphasise that there is no possibility of sustainable peace without the empowerment and inclusion of young people. Young people should not be seen as a special interest group, but as the majority of the population in many countries. They must have access to their rights and their voices must be heard in the development of peaceful societies.

2.1.2 YMCA Finland's Peace Programme in 2023

The YMCA 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 2023, the peace programme was implemented in six countries, directly benefiting **7,635** individuals, out of which 53 % are men and 47 % women and approximately 4 % are people living with disabilities. The second year of the programme has seen a steady progress towards the programme's outcomes.

The programme's work for peace is guided by Vision 2030 and in particular by the pillars of **Community Wellbeing** and **Just World**. The Community Wellbeing pillar underpins all of the YMCA's work, both in Finland and globally. The health and well-being of young people and communities are at the heart of the pillar. The Just World pillar is closely linked to peacebuilding as it emphasises YMCAs becoming a global voice in the fight against discrimination, inequity, injustice, and racism in all its forms. Empowering young people's voices is central to promoting a just world.



YMCA Peacecamp in the autumn 2023 in Lebanon. Photo YMCA Lebanon

Each pillar seeks change at three levels. The programme places particular emphasis on working with communities. Under the Community Wellbeing pillar, YMCAs work to strengthen and expand safe and inclusive spaces that build the wellbeing and resilience of young people and their communities. Under the Just World pillar, YMCAs seek to empower young people to become peacebuilders and transformative activists and leaders for justice, inclusion, and social change. All pillars are strongly interlinked with Sustainable Development Goals.

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.).



Inequality and exclusion between communities can lead to polarisation and "us versus them" mentality, exacerbating or even creating conflict. Influenced by various factors, this mindset can create divisions, reinforce hostile identities, and undermine positive relationships. The result can be a decline in shared values, an increase in resentment and mistrust, and a less resilient society that struggles to maintain constructive relationships. A holistic approach, that addresses different realities and needs is needed to provide positive alternatives for young people.

Throughout 2023, the pursuit of peace has faced significant challenges in various regions, notably in Ukraine and Palestine. These areas exemplify the complexities and difficulties inherent in fostering peaceful coexistence amidst ongoing conflict and instability. The foundation for peace is fragile in environments where basic security is frequently under threat, making the task of peacebuilding difficult.

At the same time, especially in times of conflict, it is essential to provide opportunities for young people to engage in peacebuilding efforts. Youth play a crucial role in building peaceful societies; their active participation is essential for ensuring that diverse perspectives are included in the dialogue and actions towards peace. However, the conditions that enable such engagement are often severely restricted. The scope and impact of youth-led peace initiatives are influenced by the unique socio-political contexts of each region.

2.1.3 Developing the YMCA approach to peacebuilding

An important outcome of the Peace Programme will be the development of the YMCA's approach to peacebuilding. The aim of this approach is to ensure the practicality, relevance, and consistency of the YMCA's peacebuilding programme. A conceptual framework will be further developed to guide YMCA's peacebuilding efforts, with the aim of adapting to different contexts and effectively addressing specific needs and challenges. Active conceptualisation is expected to strengthen the identification of the YMCA as a promoter of peace in local contexts.

Identified so far, the key elements of the YMCA's approach to peacebuilding include emphasising the importance of inclusive and safe spaces, providing meaningful activities, and building young people's skills. This approach enables young people to go through a transformative process and become positive peacemakers in their communities. It is based on the YMCA's long-term commitment to supporting young people, especially those in vulnerable situations.

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

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



*Young people attended a peacebuilding course at YMCA Ethiopia in Bahidar.
Photo Daniela Miller.*

The approach is designed as a path or a journey along which each young peacebuilder can find themselves and follow. As the approach is seen as a journey, the results of the programme are cumulative. Of course, there are quantitative results that are more easily followed up. But the most important outcome is seen in the young people themselves – their confidence, their skills, their understanding and their ability to act. This change is not always easy to capture, but it is an essential part of becoming a peacebuilder. This change in a young person can be challenging to observe in terms of indicators. The following chapters will present the results of the 2023 Peace Programme according to the structure of the peacebuilding approach. They will also explain the changes observed in young peacebuilders and how these feed into the programme's results.

Creating safer spaces with meaningful activities

Creating inclusive and safe 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, campsites, and other facilities, and non-physical elements, such as a safe community and different types of platforms. Having a space where young people can meet, socialise, play, or participate in workshops and training is essential. Similarly, a sense of belonging and community is a primary need for young people. YMCAs often have a neutral status and a trustworthy reputation in local societies. At the same time, YMCAs have a role to play in amplifying the voices of young people. These elements are key to creating an inclusive space for all young people.

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

Often, young people first come to 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 young people 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 maintained, including elements such as presence, encounter, interaction, group dynamics, trust, and atmosphere. The journey of a young person to become a peacebuilder is not always linear. It is important to have adults and other young people in a safe space to mentor and provide opportunities for action and support when the young person needs it. At the YMCA, young participants can also grow to become volunteers or trainers and then work with their peers. The Peace Programme has created safe spaces among young people in **The Gambia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Palestine, and Lebanon** through camps, meetings and events designed for and with young people. These spaces and 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, meet other like-minded people, and make their voices heard. In 2023, these spaces were especially created in YMCA Peacemakers groups³. Groups from previous years continued to meet and learn in **The Gambia, Kenya, and Finland**. New members joined the groups and facilitated the sharing of experiences. In **Palestine**, four new groups were formed with active young people from vulnerable backgrounds.

Developing skills and knowledge to empower young peacemakers

³ Indicator 1.4. Number of local youth-led YMCA Peacemakers groups established or sustained

Taking on the role of a peace promoter requires equipping young people with relevant skills and knowledge. These skills can be universal, such as communication, leadership or problem-solving skills. At the same time, the skills required are context specific, such as what it takes for young people to work in their communities or advocate for their rights. By combining skills building with meaningful engagement, the programme empowers young people to take an active role in their communities, influence decision-making, and contribute to positive change. Activities are planned and designed together with young people to ensure they are meaningful. The YMCA's unique approach and rootedness in the needs of young people plays a key role. These activities aim to engage young people in active citizenship and complement the skills development process.

Skills trainings have taken place in **The Gambia, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lebanon, Palestine**, and through global education initiatives in **Finland**⁴. In **Lebanon** four camps provided safe spaces for 152 youth from diverse national and religious backgrounds. The trainings aimed to increase the capacity of vulnerable youth in peacebuilding techniques. In **Palestine**, 30 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 **Kenya**, 153 youths increased their awareness on the Youth Peace and Security 2250 Resolution and how it applies to their context. In **Ethiopia**, 50 young people in Adama participated in Training of Trainers (TOT) course on peacebuilding, learning about inclusivity and local peacebuilding methods. In **The Gambia**, 45 young leaders completed a YMCA Peacemakers training which discussed peace from the Gambian perspective and where participants learned about peace activism and how to become one themselves. In **Cameroon** two workshops were held for young people to learn about using the UN Resolution 2250 to advocate for their rights and participating in decision-making.

YMCA professionals have a responsibility to identify potential future role models among young people and equip them with the necessary skills. With increased skills and confidence, young people have the tools to reach out to their peers and build trust among them⁵. In **The Gambia** YMCA Peacemakers groups organised advocacy events about youth participation, peace building and conflict prevention using a youth-to-youth approach. In **Lebanon**, during a peace camp four young people were selected as leaders of their groups as they oversaw the organisation of community events for children in four locations. The confidence they gained through these events was an important learning that they used in their later work and volunteering.

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. YMCA can support young people in this process, by engaging stakeholders and using their local and national networks. By taking on activities and engagements of this nature, youth can assume leadership roles and become drivers of community development. The opportunities to influence other young people or especially duty-bearers are unique. Not only by offering young people the chance to directly advocate for their rights but also by providing exceptional

⁴Indicator 1.3 Number of young ppl, women and PLWDs who take part in decision-making, advocacy or peacebuilding trainings

⁵ Indicator 1.1 Number of inclusive peace and trust building related processes or dialogues supported (community level)

experiences to make their case to a wider audience. Such events are in important milestones on the path of young peacemakers.



*YMCA Peacemakers Momodou, Fatoumatta and Jerreh are building peace.
Photo Kaisa Strömberg.*

In the programme, young people led essential initiatives, participated in conferences, and engaged in discussions with duty-bearers. In **The Gambia** youth organised 12 different advocacy activities. In the events staff and volunteers were able to create a safe space for sharing experiences and talking with confidentiality about issues like drug abuse, crime and violence, that are affecting the youth. Irregular migration has increased again and integration of returnees into the society has become an important topic for conversations and a challenge for the society. In **Palestine**, YMCA empowered youth to demand their rights through capacity-building trainings and community initiatives. Planning the initiatives was an essential experience for the youth to directly advocate for their rights and share their obstacles with duty-bearers. Due to the escalation in the West Bank, some of the initiatives were pushed to 2024.

In Ethiopia 150 youth who received ToT training on peacebuilding made a significant impact by reaching out to 1225 individuals in their respective cities⁶. These young people have acted as peace promoters, promoting their right to peace and increasing their agency within communities. The grassroots level discussions they have organised touched upon themes of peaceful dialogue, conflict resolution, and the creation of a peaceful environment that enables progress.

⁶ Number of inclusive peace and trust building related processes or dialogues supported



Ethiopian youth after discussions about peace in Adama. Photo Daniela Miller.

Young people were similarly involved in advocating for national action plans as part of their YMCAs in Kenya and The Gambia⁷. In **Kenya**, inspired after an exchange and a highly successful advocacy event on YPS in 2022, young people have remained active in their local communities. Local YMCA branches established Peace Clubs, where youth are actively raising awareness in their communities as well as engaging duty bearers to promote youth rights and participation. Activities were organised in 15 different branches, where young people advocated for peace and young people's role in questions of peace and security. [YMCA Kenya continued their participation in the Kenya Coalition for YPS.](#)

YMCA The Gambia has been actively participating in the meetings of the Technical Working Group that oversees the preparation of the National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 2250 lead by the National Youth Council of The Gambia. YMCA Finland shared information and lessons learnt from the Finnish NAP process to YMCA The Gambia to strengthen their capacity and ability to offer valuable input in the process.

⁷ Indicator 1.2 Number of processes in support of the implementation of YPS agenda (UNSCR 2250) initiated or advocated for (specified by level)

2.1.4 YMCA's Global Citizenship Education in 2023

More and more young people and youth workers in Finland are committed to fostering a sustainable future

YMCA Finland's Global Citizenship Education (GCE) supports children's and young people's growth as active peacebuilders and promoters of sustainable development. YMCA's vision is to reach young people not yet engaged in advancing global sustainable development through school or work.

In 2023, YMCA's GCE reached 2,078 children and young people and 269 youth professionals and volunteers. They participated in more than 400 events and workshops to foster global solidarity, peacebuilding, and sustainable development and spent almost **9,500 hours** together pondering how to create a just future.

Youth workers and youth organizations as change agents

YMCA Finland together with YMCAs in Helsinki, Tampere, Turku, Oulu, Heinola and Vantaa developed their organisational culture and practices that embed sustainability, global solidarity and peacebuilding in all YMCA activities.

YMCA Finland's GCE coordinator coached youth workers to promote GCE in their daily work and their organisation. YMCA Finland led 12 workshops and reached 238 youth professionals.

The YMCA compiled and produced global citizenship education materials for youth work on peacebuilding, a human rights-based approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Gaza war, climate action, and children's rights. YMCA also worked on SDG materials for camps.

At the beginning of 2022, 22 % of YMCA local staff (n 157) experienced that GCE as very present in the work of the YMCA. Two years later this percentage was 43 % of staff (n 136). The keys to success have been committed change agents – staff members responsible for the GCE issue in each organisation and committed management who feel that time can and should be spent on developing methodological skills in global citizenship education.

YMCA Finland and local YMCAs organised in total 36 workshops in which youth workers and volunteers strengthened their knowledge and skills to support young people in building a sustainable future. The feedback was that it is essential to bring together people working in the same field to share and develop best practices.

The building of a just world begins by creating a safe space

Local YMCAs support the knowledge and skills of children and young people to build a just world through afternoon clubs, camps, youth work, basketball, scouting, workshops for NEET young people, and dedicated global citizenship education groups. In 2023, YMCAs organised almost 370 events, reaching more than 2,000 different children and young people.

From Playgrounds to peacebuilding, GCE groups have enabled young people, mainly from Midnight Street Basketball (*Yökoris*) and outreach youth work, to meet weekly, discuss

pressing social issues, and plan how they can make a difference to the issues that matter to them. The groups were renamed *local YMCA Peacemakers* groups to strengthen their link with the national and global YMCA Peacemakers network. In total, 179 young people participated in the groups' activities in about 140 meetings. The regularity of the activities and the long-term contact with the young people involved is what sets the YMCA's global education apart.

Many young people reported that the main reasons for participating in the meetings were friends and a relaxed atmosphere where they could learn about global phenomena without pressure. Trained leaders facilitated the discussions, led by young people, on issues related to promoting a sustainable future. Young people also strengthened their experience as active global citizens by organising events and workshops.

Raising the impact of youth work to build a just world

YMCA Finland wants to be a pioneer in the GCE in youth work. YMCA works to ensure that the youth sector, as an essential educator of global citizenship, receives the attention, recognition, and resources it deserves – aligned with the objectives of Finland's National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security.

YMCA believes that cooperation creates power and has therefore networked and collaborated with actors in the field such as Plan International, STEP, Fingo, Save the Children, and Youth Academy.

During the year, YMCA prepared two GCE panel discussions for the major national NUORI2024 event. Under the auspices of the programmes, YMCA organised informal intergovernmental discussions between officials on the theme. In addition, Fingo and the YMCA produced a YMCA Peace and Sport area for the 2024 World Village Festival. The area was designed and implemented by young people, YMCA Peacemakers.



Global citizenship staff training took place in Harva island of Turku YMCA in the autumn 2023. Photo Kaisa Strömberg.

2.2 Outcome 2: Livelihoods programme

Achievements against annual targets in 2023

- **1,371 right-holders** were trained in vocational, entrepreneurship and employability skills
- On average **90 % of graduates** register better prospects to **access the labour market**
- **588 right-holders** were sensitized on climate change resilience
- **YMCAs in Kenya and Lebanon collaborated** with organisations specialized in gender
- **YMCAs in The Gambia, Lebanon and Palestine collaborated** with organisations specialized in disability inclusion

2.2.1 Progress against the programme cycle and the Theory of Change

YMCA acknowledges the transformative potential of young people in driving positive change and development. Recognising that access to knowledge and opportunities is crucial, YMCA believes in the right of every individual to work and their right to protection against unemployment. Education and employment are the most effective means to lift individuals out of poverty.

The second year of the Livelihoods Programme was successful in many ways. There has been strong progress against targets and support for the theory of change (ToC). The second year has proven that the programme and its objectives are contributing to the impact of the programme. The outputs are feeding into the outcomes of the Livelihoods Programme. The problem statement of the ToC remains valid and very relevant from livelihoods perspective. In 2023, young people's right to education and employment remained unrealised as many lacked opportunities to learn skills, find employment and become financially independent.

The annual targets set for 2023 were successfully achieved. The programme significantly contributed to enhancing resilience and improving livelihoods for vulnerable youth in various ways. YMCA Finland's partner YMCAs provided vocational training, equipping youth with essential skills for employment. This training empowered young individuals to become financially independent and economically empowered. Additionally, comprehensive skills training, including life skills, employability skills, and digital skills, was offered to ensure that youth possess a diverse set of knowledge and tools necessary for the labour market.

YMCA worked diligently to bridge the gap between education and employment by collaborating with employers, government institutions, and other stakeholders. Entrepreneurship training was offered to right-holders in all countries to ensure those interested in becoming self-employed had the necessary knowledge to start and maintain their business. Business start-up kits were provided to right-holders interested in self-employment in The Gambia and Kenya, to further encourage them on their entrepreneurship journey. Providing training and tools about entrepreneurship contributes to protecting young people from unemployment.

At the **Kenya** YMCA College for Agriculture and Technology, climate-smart agriculture methods were expanded, and staff received advanced training to further their expertise. Both right-holders and community members were trained in climate-smart agriculture to enhance their resilience against climate change-related shocks. To ensure the sustainability of the programme, the institutional capacity of training providers was strengthened in both Kenya and The **Gambia**. In **Palestine**, the organisation continues to prioritise psychosocial support, educational rehabilitation, and career counselling to ensure that young Palestinians can realise their right to work.

These comprehensive efforts have not only improved the immediate livelihoods of vulnerable youth but have also laid a solid foundation for their long-term resilience, economic independence and protection from unemployment.

2.2.2 YMCA's Livelihoods Programme in 2023

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 2023, inclusive livelihoods opportunities were created through five projects that targeted directly **1,371 right-holders**⁸ out of which approximately 37 % were men and 63 % women and approximately 4 % people living with disabilities. A solid progress towards the results was perceived.

The employment component of the programme is guided by Vision 2030 and especially the pillars of Meaningful work and Sustainable Planet. The YMCA Movement believes that all young people deserve the right to learn, engage in flexible dignified and meaningful work, and build sustainable livelihoods. In Vision 2030, the organisation commits to creating, expanding and advocating meaningful, just and equitable education, training, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in the transition to the new economies.

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. **Youth unemployment rates are nearly 3.5 times higher than those of adults**. Globally, in 2023, the youth unemployment rate, 13.3 per cent, far exceeded that of adults, 3.9 per cent. Informal employment and working poverty are a reality to many more. Transition from education to decent work is difficult.

Female participation rates have rebounded more quickly than anticipated, yet the gender participation gap remains substantial, particularly in emerging and developing countries. The situation is especially concerning for young people: despite youth labour force participation recovering above trend, many youths who left the labour market are not engaging in any form of training and continue to face significant challenges in returning to work. Many employed individuals face significant barriers to decent work, such as declining real wages, high levels of informal employment, and deteriorating working conditions. Additionally, barriers to labour market participation persist, particularly for women and youth, who experience higher unemployment

⁸ Impact level indicator: Number of projects report created inclusive livelihoods opportunities

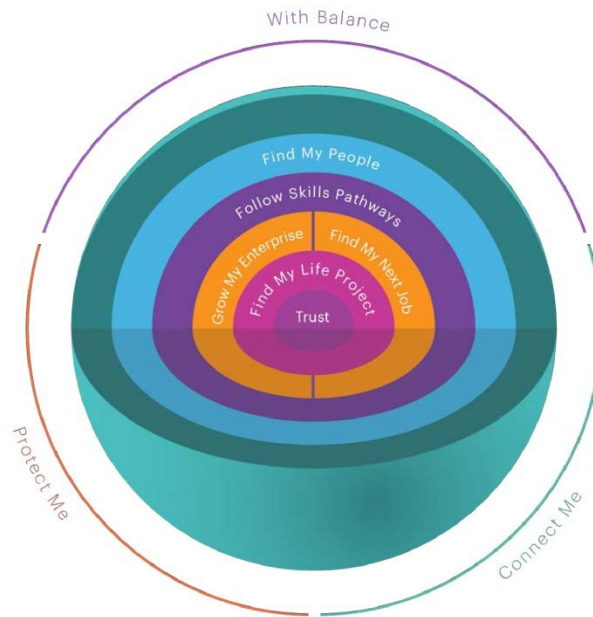
rates. These challenges are hindering long-term progress toward improving decent work and social justice.

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.

2.2.3 YMCA's united vision towards meaningful work

YMCA Finland, in collaboration with its partners, provides vocational and entrepreneurship training for vulnerable youth. By equipping young people with market-relevant skills, life skills, and business opportunities, the initiative aims to empower them to find sustainable income sources. Improving the livelihoods of young people has a ripple effect, positively impacting their families and communities.

In August 2023, The World YMCA published the **Meaningful Work Adaptive Strategy**, that describes the holistic approach that YMCA has to meaningful work. The aim of the strategy is to put YMCA at the forefront of helping young people and their communities participate in truly meaningful work. The strategy introduces a comprehensive approach to individuals' needs, avoiding isolated interventions and instead addressing various interconnected aspects of their lives.



Adaptive Strategy describes the holistic approach that YMCA has to meaningful work.

The first step is **building trust** through activities such as joining clubs or training courses. Once trust is established, individuals can embark on their Meaningful Work journey **by identifying their life project**. This process aims to expand horizons, set goals, and unleash potential. After defining life projects, individuals are encouraged to either **find relevant work opportunities** that match their skills and ambitions, or to **pursue entrepreneurial paths**. The strategy emphasises **lifelong learning**, which includes various upskilling opportunities, from soft-skills training to digital skills pathways. The final stage of the strategy facilitates continuous learning through a **network of mentors and peers**.

Enablers support the whole process. First is **the well-being** of YMCA's staff, volunteers, and the individuals they serve, considering mind, body, and spirit. **Connectedness** is emphasised and the importance of internet access and basic digital skills in an increasingly digital world are recognised. Finally, it is crucial to **safeguard** youth against exploitation and unemployment.

Building trust and creating a safe space

Every individual should have the chance to realise their potential, yet not everyone has equal access to such opportunities. This inequity could stem from limited awareness about available opportunities, an unsupportive environment lacking the necessary encouragement and perseverance, or a lack of guidance essential for crafting a sustainable path toward success. YMCA Finland and its partners are committed to creating a safe and productive space where youth from all backgrounds can thrive and grow. Vulnerable youth such as young women with family obligations, people living with disabilities (PLWDs) and other marginalised 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.



Just graduated Lebanese women. Photo Martiina Woodson.

YMCA Kenya offered partial sponsorship bursary to 75 vulnerable students to contribute to the realisation of their right to education and sustainable livelihoods opportunities. **The 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. Special emphasis is also put on inclusion of returnee migrants, to support their reintegration and livelihoods opportunities. Sustainable income and livelihood opportunities have a crucial role in curbing irregular migration, which is a significant challenge for the Gambian society.

In Palestine these factors have been taken into consideration by **East Jerusalem 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. By addressing the mental health and psychosocial needs of vulnerable youth, coupled with the needed rehabilitative services, especially vocational rehabilitation services, the project has furnished them with essential assistance to mitigate the effects of disability or political incidents and improve their chances of securing employment and improving their overall quality of life.

Market relevant skills training

The YMCA aims to broaden the perspectives of young individuals by providing them with increased exposure to potential pathways in education, employment, or entrepreneurship, thereby expanding their horizons. Right holders will have the opportunity to explore their interests, passions, and strengths, enabling them to identify what truly matters to them and what they excel at.

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 The 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.

In **The Gambia** the skill sets offered are chosen based on the right holders' interest as well as labour market demand and [in Kenya the two YMCA colleges cooperate closely with companies to ensure that youth are equipped with skills that employers are looking for](#). In 2023, **YMCA Lebanon** answered to the needs of the communities by increasing the number of vocational training programmes from three to six. The demand for training was high, with the number of right holders increasing from the targeted 77 to 217.



Kenya YMCA National Training Institute was able to acquire a car that allows motor vehicle mechanics students to practice servicing and repairing. Photo Kaisa Strömberg.



*Both KYCAT students as well as local farmers are taught Climate Smart Agriculture methods.
Photo Kaisa Strömberg.*

Entrepreneurship as a path to sustainable livelihoods

Young people are increasingly turning to entrepreneurship for various reasons, such as seeking greater independence or responding to economic circumstances, especially in regions with underdeveloped formal labour markets. However, despite the appeal of entrepreneurship, several obstacles hinder individuals from transforming promising ideas into successful and sustainable ventures. These barriers encompass the need to cultivate entrepreneurial skills, acquire essential knowledge, and secure funding to initiate business endeavours.

In 2023, **YMCA Ethiopia** offered a three-day training programme, where the right holders were equipped with essential entrepreneurship and life skills, empowering them to establish and manage their own micro or small-scale businesses. The provision of start-up capital further enables them to successfully launch their businesses and generate income. **YMCA Kenya** together with **Africa Alliance of YMCAs (AAYMCA)** provided business support to 6 students. A Business Start-up workshop was held at YMCA Kenya National Training Institute bringing together trainees and alumni who own businesses as well as local youth leaders. The workshop aimed at sharing the findings of the ongoing research being done by AAYMCA to validate the process of delivery of the Business Kits planned in the project.

YMCA The Gambia provided 25 graduates with start-up equipment to start their own business, which enhances the sustainability of their livelihoods and helps better protect them from unemployment. By targeting returnee migrants, the organisation supports their integration back to the society and contributes to the realisation of their right to work. **In Palestine**, three self-employment projects were provided for vulnerable young people to equip them with the needed skills and resources to join the labor market and therefore improve their economic situation.



Start-up kits are awarded to almost half of the graduates in The Gambia, to support their entrepreneurship journey. Photo Kaisa Strömberg.

Bridging the gap between studies and labour market

In a rapidly evolving landscape where the skills required for successful integration into the job market are constantly shifting, both education and employment systems may struggle to adapt quickly enough to support young people in keeping pace with these changes. It will be crucial for individuals to assess their skills profile in the short term and align it with current opportunities, while also focusing on identifying and addressing skill gaps over the long term to advance their careers and enhance their resilience.

YMCA recognises the need to broaden scope of vocational skills training to life skills and future employment skills. In the fast changing and digitalising labour environment skills such as empathy, teamwork, critical thinking and creativity are needed. YMCA Finland partners ensure smoother transition from training to labour market by providing youth with internship opportunities, on-the-job learning and connecting youth with possible employers.

In 2023 **The Gambia YMCA** increased the emphasis of life skills and future employment skills to ensure that the graduates are able to sustain their businesses and recognise their special value and skills as employees. YMCA The Gambia connects youth with different companies for internships and some trainers refer their clients to the graduates, helping them grow their client networks. YMCA Lebanon offers a comprehensive training programme where right holders are equipped with high demanded vocational skills and life skills (including digital skills), to ensure they have a variety of relevant skills when they graduate.

In **Kenya**, both YMCA's National Training Institute (NTI) and Kenya YMCA College of Agriculture and Technology (KYCAT) emphasise connecting youth with local businesses to ensure the smooth transition from studies to labour market, which helps protect the youth from unemployment. On-the-job learning enables students to acquire skills demanded by employers, providing them with a competitive edge in the labour market.

Mentorship, connections and cooperation

In a digitally driven world where remote work and social media are prevalent, feelings of loneliness and isolation have been amplified. Connecting with others to share ideas, building networks and learning are all important aspects in today's labour market. There is a genuine desire for individuals to foster authentic, supportive, and mutually enriching connections with others.

Climate Smart Agriculture has been very well adopted by the **Kenya YMCA College of Agriculture and Technology (KYCAT)** and the College has been building its capacity as the pioneer hub for Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA), with support from the partner organisation Care of Creation in Kijabe, Kenya. At KYCAT the CSA methods are shared to farmers in the community to support their livelihoods opportunities and resilience to the effect of climate change. Climate Smart Agriculture has increased visibility for the institution and as a result, 30 farmers benefitted from CSA training and 60 farmers from different counties visited the CSA demo farm at KYCAT to learn more on sustainable agriculture.

A further opportunity remains in the creation of a value chain, so that young people have a broader understanding of the opportunities that exist in agriculture. In order to develop a synergistic approach towards Climate Smart Agriculture within the **African YMCA Movement**, AAYMCA used the platform of the General Assembly in November 2023 to introduce the concept to the entire YMCA Movement's leaders, a group of 100 leaders drawn from 23 National Movements in Africa, as well as some international partners. These leaders were taken to the KYCAT Climate Smart Agriculture demonstration farm as an exercise in awareness building on Climate Smart practices, as well as an opportunity to engage in the practical management of similar endeavours.

Through the learnings provided by the implementation of the project, various members of staff and leaders of the entire YMCA in the continent (including the participation of several new YMCAs including the YMCAs in Burundi, Benin and Namibia) were able to witness the potential of CSA and were able to engage directly with the successes of the activity when implemented well. Africa Alliance of YMCAs also reached out to the Stockholm Environment Institute in a venture to improve the innovation capacity of the KYCAT, as well as to improve the Climate Smart Agriculture Value chain process in the Movement. The two institutions submitted a joint application to the African Union in this regard and continue to explore further opportunities for partnership.



Crops farmed using Climate Smart Agricultural methods are more resilient to extreme weather conditions. Photo Kaisa Strömberg.

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.).



The trainers play a key role in each partner country in motivating, inspiring and empowering their trainees. Some trainers connect their students with their clients and other business owners to support them in building their networks and clientele. Students are also encouraged to support each other and for example in **The Gambia**, the start-up support recipients are encouraged to employ and work together with their classmates who were not fortunate to receive start-up materials. In all partner countries, the close cooperation with other institutions, the government and other civil society organisations shows that no man is an island, and that cooperation further improves the results of any project or endeavour.

The enablers of meaningful work – Wellbeing, protection and digitalisation

YMCA is committed to improving the mental and physical wellbeing of young people, protecting them from exploitation and fighting against inequality and the growing gap in opportunities between the global north and the global south. Fast growing digitalisation is creating a world where some are left outside due to lack of digital fluency or access to internet connection or the required equipment.

Wellbeing in body, mind and spirit

Even though the awareness and openness about mental health are growing, many people continue to struggle. This struggle is fuelled by various pressures: growing inflation, climate change and its consequences, ongoing wars and global crises, social isolation, and the burden of caring for dependents, among others. These factors contribute to a widespread sense of anxiety. Mental wellbeing and resilience are essential prerequisites for effective study and work. Consequently, the YMCA adopts a holistic approach to youth services, addressing a diverse range of needs to enhance their employment and livelihood opportunities.

In **Palestine**, the results of the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support interventions conducted by East Jerusalem YMCA demonstrate that the project has significantly contributed to the desired programme outcome of enhanced resilience and improved livelihoods for vulnerable youth. By addressing the mental health and psychosocial needs of vulnerable youth, coupled with the needed rehabilitative services, especially vocational rehabilitation services, the project has

furnished them with essential assistance to mitigate the effects of disability or political incidents and improve their chances of securing employment and improving their overall quality of life.

Protection from unemployment and exploitation

Increased market accessibility and a growing desire for flexible, autonomous career paths, some individuals are seizing opportunities in gig employment, while others are launching ventures that offer greater professional control. However, this transition can be daunting. Concerns about exploitation, the unpredictability of securing work, uncertainty about the necessary steps, and a lack of security can leave people feeling anxious and overwhelmed. In many cases, these fears are justified, as these new work dynamics often come with fewer safety nets and a higher risk of exploitation. Youth are especially vulnerable to exploitation and mistreatment, due to their junior position and lack of experience in the labour market.

The YMCA plays a crucial role in educating young people about their rights and assisting them in their pursuit of employment opportunities. Beyond directly engaging with youth, the YMCA movement leverages its platform to influence policymakers and advocate for the implementation of a fairer and more transparent labour system. By offering life skills and entrepreneurship skills training, YMCA supports young people in recognising their rights as business owners as well as employees. All YMCA Finland partners work diligently to establish connections with various employers, assist students in securing internship opportunities, and ensure that they are equipped with market-relevant skills.

Fighting against digital inequality

In a world where leveraging new technologies and rapidly acquiring relevant skills provide significant competitive advantages, it's easy to quickly feel outdated and left behind. The accelerating pace of technological advancements makes it challenging to keep up, particularly for older generations and underserved communities. For those with limited or no internet access, known as 'digital poverty,' the gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' has never been wider.

YMCA Finland partners recognise the importance of digital skills in today's labour market and they have reacted to this by developing their training programmes to include courses on digital literacy, social media and basic IT skills. **YMCA Kenya College for Agriculture and Technology** has updated their teaching equipment to be able to use digital content in teaching the students and **YMCA Lebanon** also offers digital skills training as a part of their curriculum. One of the skills sets available for the youth at **YMCA The Gambia** is Basic IT, which equips the student with skills that allow them to offer different digital services such as printing, photocopying and graphic design.



Digital skills are essential in today's constantly evolving labour market. Photo Kaisa Strömberg.

2.3 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 growth and transition to a new financial instrument, the evolution from projects to programme required further development of different structures and tools.

2.3.1 Progress against the programme cycle and the Theory of Change

2023 was the second year of the programme and allowed for more established practices and stronger programmatic approach. Comprehensive programme development and strong advocacy focusing on the rights of young people are key to the implementation of the programme. The global implementation of Vision 2030 has provided stronger guidance for YMCA's work, supported by, among others, the Meaningful Work Strategy (see also chapter 2.2.3). This strategy has served as a foundational document for employment and livelihood programs and will be further adapted in the coming years.

In 2023, the global activation of the Vision 2030 roadmap was evident. YMCA Finland hosted two workshops and informational sessions for local YMCAs, focusing on two Vision 2030 pillars: Community Wellbeing and Meaningful Work. These workshops aimed to ensure local YMCAs understood and adapted their strategies to align with Vision 2030. The workshops continue in 2024. Vision2030 will also steer YMCA Finland's national strategy development process, set to begin in 2024. A workshop on the movement's values, conducted in 2023, will further guide strategic development.

The theory of change of YMCA Finland's Development Cooperation Programme is already compatible to a very ample Vision 2030 Theory of Change.



To ensure the programme delivery in line with the ToC, the programme is closely monitored and continuously developed based on quality assurance mechanisms. Advocacy is also an integral part of the leverage effect of the programme.

The YMCA has kept track of discussions and debates on youth rights and advocated for their promotion. This has laid the groundwork for advocacy and strengthened the substance and thus the efficiency of the whole programme. The grassroots work of local YMCAs in particular allows advocacy to come from a place of strong understanding of young people's experiences. Young people are at the centre of the advocacy work and the YMCA Peacemakers network remains an essential platform for increasing exchange between young people and adding value to the programme. The organisation of events and the active creation of media content have been essential in attracting audiences and partnerships.

2023 was a successful year for YPS advocacy especially for YMCAs in Kenya and The Gambia who have actively participated in their national networks and working groups. At the same time, it was recognised that there is significant competition around the processes, and they are often politicised. Navigating the complex stakeholder dynamics has been a somewhat unexpected challenge and a learning during the year.

Lastly, there are certain principles that are expected to realise throughout the programme: human rights principles (equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, accountability, transparency), Do no harm standards and Leave no one behind approach.

2.3.2 Programme management and organisational learning

An external review was conducted by KPMG in the spring of 2023. This was a review carried out for all organisations receiving programme support from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. The review was an important exercise and allowed for YMCA to review its documents, guidelines and policies to confirm its strong organisational capacity. YMCA received largely positive feedback from the review and the process was a well-managed learning opportunity.

Based on interviews and material review, KPMG concluded that the governance of YMCA Finland is appropriately arranged, and the oversight of YMCA Finland is led by the Executive Board. The Executive Board participates actively and fulfils its functions efficiently. The Board has a decision-making role over YMCA Finland's national activities and international development cooperation, and is well informed about the progress of the programme implementation. The Board has members with long-term experience of development cooperation activities. Vice Chair is one of the three members in the advisory group for the Development Cooperation Programme. Two members are external experts with extensive experience in the field. The group gives recommends the National General Secretary and Programme Manager.

In 2023 a new streamlined organisational structure was introduced to YMCA Finland's office through a team-based model. This clarified roles and responsibilities and gave more structure to the team working on the development cooperation programme and allowed for clearer communication and division of tasks. Also new substitution arrangements were confirmed in August 2023.

Towards the end of the year, World YMCA embarked on developing a Movement Strengthening Strategy, which integrates national and regional YMCAs to align their work cohesively. For YMCA Finland, this presents an opportunity to synchronize its strategy, directions, and priorities with broader movements, including enhanced cooperation and harmonization with Nordic partners.

In September 2023, the National Board resolved that YMCA Finland should seek humanitarian status through the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) Humanitarian Partnership. The Board initiated a process to lay the groundwork for applying for the European Union ECHO Partnership Certificate. This certification will enable YMCA Finland to access humanitarian funds, broadening the scope of the wider YMCA movement's humanitarian activities.

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.

In 2023, the project plans with The Gambia YMCA were updated, following the expiration of the previous project grant decision in 2022. The revised plans, covering the period from 2023 to 2025, accounted for inflation and other economic developments that have significantly impacted the operating environment in The Gambia.

Further regional cooperation with the African Alliance of YMCAs (AAY) was strengthened, exploring collaboration opportunities with various YMCAs. **YMCA Senegal** emerged as a potential partner,

prompting a visit by the programme manager and the National General Secretary to familiarise themselves with the work being undertaken by the organisation.

The year also marked the formal initiation of the YMCA's approach to peace work. In May, a workshop held in Addis Ababa brought together programme partners from African YMCAs, consultants from peace-related NGOs, and representatives from YMCA Finland. This workshop laid the groundwork for the peace work concept, which was subsequently refined through discussions with local YMCAs in Finland. The initiative progressed with a pilot training conducted in Lebanon as part of [a Peace camp organised together with volunteers from YMCA Helsinki in September](#).

During 2023 the cooperation with the **Ukrainian YMCA** was started. [From 2023 YMCA Finland together with YMCA Europe YMCA supported five Ukrainian YMCAs in their humanitarian work amid the war in the country](#). The humanitarian project supports internally displaced people: more than 6 million Ukrainians have been displaced so far, and about two thirds of those who have left their homes have been children. The project is particularly focused on women and children.

The project supports five local YMCAs, Boyarka, Kremenchuk, Volyn-Lutsk, Zaporizhia and Zdolbuniv. So-called eDu Hubs have been set up in the associations, providing a safe space for internally displaced people (IDPs). For example, they can access mental health services and childcare support while their parents organise family affairs or look for work. More than 11,000 people were supported through mental health services and employability and skills development courses. During 2024, YMCAs will continue to support IDPs and efforts will be made to further develop local cooperation and strengthen the resources of the eDu Hub centres to ensure continuity.

Monitoring and reporting

KPMG review stated that YMCA Finland's capacity and resources for appropriate monitoring of the partners seem adequate and proportionate to the size of the programme. According to the review, the partner monitoring procedures seem robust and indicate appropriate controls over the use of funding and good knowledge of the partners.

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. In 2023 the annual consolidated reporting templates were tested for the first time both with partners and the YMCA Finland team.

Indicators will be assessed and developed throughout the programme cycle. At the end of 2023 there was a workshop to review certain indicators under outcome 2. The team discussed with partners and started preparing more detailed instructions for data collections under there indicators. The process will be finalised in 2024. Furthermore, technical solutions and templates for consolidating results information was developed.

In 2022 the partners reported quarterly with existing templates. In 2023, it has been decided that from 2024 reporting will take place every 4 months with updated templates for narrative and financial reporting. Instructions for monitoring visits were refined and detailed and a new template was developed to ensure monitoring was in compliance and structured. Other essential

tools have been the annual planning documents. Monitoring visits were conducted to all the programme countries during 2023, except to the West Bank, where the escalation after 7th of October prevented the visit. Finland's embassy representatives were met in Senegal, Addis Ababa and Beirut.

KPMG reviewed the reporting templates, all 2022 quarterly financial and narrative reports as well as annual reports of the partners implementing the two sampled projects in Kenya (KYMCA YESTAVE) and Lebanon. In addition, local audit reports of both projects, issued in 2023, were reviewed. KPMG noted that the partner reporting was adequate and that there were no critical findings from the project audits.

The General Secretary oversees the financial management of YMCA Finland and he is supported by the Programme Manager. Together they are responsible for preparing the financial reporting and ensuring adherence to MFA guidelines. The YMCA uses outsourced financial management services (Rantalainen) and electronic financial management software (Heeros). The external accountant is mostly in charge of technical accounting tasks. In 2023 a training session was organised for the programme team focusing on financial management and monitoring. The training encompassed various levels of financial oversight within the programme, addressing common challenges faced in financial management by partner organisations. It also covered the monitoring and review of funds allocated to project sites abroad. Additionally, lessons learned from the audit process of the first programme year were discussed to enhance future financial practices.

Assessments 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.

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.

Towards the end of year, YMCA Finland started planning for a mid-term review of the programme that would be utilised in the design and preparation of the next programme cycle. The Terms of Reference were drafted and discussed with the advisory group. The review will be carried out by an external expert by the end of 2024.

Learning, trainings and professional working groups

At YMCA, a culture of continuous learning and improvement within the organisation is strong. South-south exchange and partners' meetings were continued, and the topics covered peace work approaches and livelihoods and employment support in different context. Also, data collection and indicators were reviewed in the joint meetings. YMCA Senegal visited Kenya to learn and apply Climate-Smart Agriculture. Africa Alliance of YMCAs finalised regional baseline mappings. Local YMCAs in Finland shared best practices on global education in youth work and changing the organisational culture with lens of sustainability and global responsibility.

YMCA Finland team members have participated in external trainings, among others, on decolonisation and localisation, restorative justice and mediation and artificial intelligence. 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 is compiled to perceive all the efforts linked to networking and learning in 2023.

In-house trainings on project management tools such as Microsoft Teams and Planner have been organised. The development of a learning plan was started. A team training on disability inclusion was postponed from December 2023 to January 2024.

The staff team has maintained good practices to ensure flow of information, coordination and mutual learning. These include bi-weekly meetings with programme team, 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.⁹

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** Vision 2030 support functions on Resource Mobilisation and Strategic Alignment and Movement Strengthening. 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.

In addition to this, **Fingo**, umbrella organisation of Finnish civil society organisations working for global development, is an important cooperation agency. During autumn 2023, YMCA Finland co-chaired the network of Finnish NGOs receiving programme-based support and a working group on Quality and Impact together with Finnish Refugee Council. YMCA Finland also participates in Fingo's Global education network.

Youth & Peace working group with **Finn Church Aid**, **Felm** and **CMI** continued regular meetings in 2023. The group works together to operationalise Finland's National Action Plan (NAP) on Youth, Peace and Security. Synergies are sought for example through thematic expertise, operational working areas, partnerships, and networks. The group discussed youth inclusion into peacebuilding on different levels and engaging duty-bearers in different countries about the YPS agenda. The working group continued to sharpen the YPS focus of these organisations. YMCA also continued participation in the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers organised their Advisory Group Meeting in Helsinki in October.

Rebuilding the basis for volunteers' engagement

The engagement of volunteers grew moderately in 2023, with a focus on developing the structure of the volunteer programme. The total number of volunteers involved increased to 40 (25 in

⁹ Indicator 3.4: Fostered organisational learning

2022).¹⁰ The years of Covid 19-pandemic left their mark on volunteer activity, but the numbers are growing slowly. The focus in strengthening the programme has been in sustainability and quality rather than quantity.

Throughout the year, a total of 17 events were organised, 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. In addition to local activities, YMCA Peacemakers gathering was organised in Lebanon in cooperation with YMCA Helsinki Midnight Basket, bringing together youth from different backgrounds to share experiences, build connections, and develop their basic peacebuilding skills. This gathering provided a valuable opportunity for cross-cultural exchange and learning and generate added value for the programme as a whole. YMCA Finland received the Erasmus+ Accreditation, enabling the organisation to further support youth in accessing international learning and networking opportunities.

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.



YMCA Peacemakers climate group. Photo Kaisa Strömberg.

Based on some active volunteers' interest, a plan for the creation of a YMCA Peacemakers climate group was initiated and an open call for applications was organised at the end of the year. The climate group will assist YMCA Finland in the preparation and implementation of the organisation's Climate and Sustainability Programme, as well as in the creation of communication materials, including social media content and articles.

2.3.3 Communications raise youth at the forefront

The communication informs about YMCA Finland's Development Cooperation Programme, its solutions and results. It raises awareness of the global context of youth and their role in addressing global development challenges. It also contributes to the public debate on the principles and ethics

¹⁰ Indicator 3.3: Number of Finnish youth volunteers engaged in the programme

of international cooperation and highlights the values of Finland's foreign and development policy, such as human rights and multilateralism.

Information on the Development Cooperation Programme in numbers

In 2023, 19 news articles on development and peace issues and more than 60 news and current affairs posts on development themes were published on various social media channels, including Instagram, Facebook and X, with slightly less activity on LinkedIn. An English-language summary of the Youth, Peace, and Livelihoods Development Cooperation Programme was also produced, focusing on presenting the key themes of the programme in an accessible and readable way.

YMCA Finland participated in the NUORI2023, YOUTH2023 conference, where the YMCA's global education was presented as part of the youth work of the YMCA's local associations. At the World in the Village Festival in May 2023, the YMCA Finland staff, together with YMCA Peacemakers volunteers, presented the Youth, Peace and Livelihoods Development Cooperation Programme.

Advocating for young people's rights

One key objective of development communication was to ensure that youth rights and empowerment remain part of the development debate. The aim was to bring global challenges affecting young people into the public debate and ensure that young people's voices are heard. Young people working for peace and from different backgrounds were highlighted in communication and public events.

The peace theme also inspired a panel discussion during Youth Peace Week in September 2023. The event, organised in cooperation with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' Centre for Peace Mediation, YMCA Finland and YMCA Peacemakers, resulted in an article and several updates on social media.

In the midst of the year's gloomy news coverage, the bright spot was YMCA's Peacebuilding Camp in Lebanon, and the subsequent video of the week-long training where Lebanese, Syrian, and Finnish participants talked about the challenges and experiences of young people. The video called "Habibis Balling", referring to the game of basketball and its potential as a tool for peace, attracted viewers across all channels, with a growth of around 57 % of new followers on Instagram during the last quarter of the year. At the end of the year, the theme was followed up with a social media campaign where young people who had attended the camp shared their thoughts on peace.

Supporting young people in crisis

The YMCA's key tasks are also highlighted in times of crisis and uncertainty. YMCA's mission is to speak up for the rights of young people, and to create a sense of hope for the future, even in the most difficult of moments.

YMCA Ukraine, operating in the midst of Russia's war of aggression, was supported throughout the year. The content of the communication on Ukraine specifically highlighted the Ukrainian

YMCA's adapted programmes to help refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as informing about YMCA Finland's and YMCA Europe's cooperation in supporting a humanitarian project implemented through five local YMCAs in Ukraine.



Ukrainian YMCA's are helping internally displaced persons. Photo Daniela Miller.

In the last quarter of the year, news of another high-impact conflict was highlighted: three news articles and several social media updates on the Gaza crisis were published by the end of the year. In addition, Maaailma.net, an online news channel focusing on development and human rights issues, published [an interview on the work of East Jerusalem YMCA](#), facilitated by YMCA Finland. The aim of the article was to raise awareness of the impact of the conflict on the lives of Palestinian youth and the capabilities of YMCA East Jerusalem, a partner of YMCA Finland, to support young people in the midst of the crisis.

Development cooperation programme raises YMCA's profile in Finland

The YMCA's brand awareness contributes to development communication objectives, but YMCA Finland's Development Cooperation Programme and development communication have also had a positive impact on the YMCA's brand awareness. The credibility in the sector has been strengthened, and in part thanks to this, YMCA Finland became one of the partners of the World Village Festival 2024. Also, at the NUORI conference in April 2024, YMCA Finland was invited to organise two different panel discussions on the Global Citizenship Education in youth work and youth sector as an effective peace educator. Communication has also been used to help highlight the valuable partnership with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The active engagement in the development cooperation sector and communication bears fruit. While the broader brand awareness of the YMCA's activities grew marginally, with a 1 % increase compared to the previous brand survey (Talouselämä, Brand Survey 2024 vs. 2022), the communication trend has had a strongly positive upward trajectory since 2018.

2.3.4 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 on 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

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, which was presented to the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee in the spring in 2024.¹¹

Established in 2016, **2250 network** consists of Finnish youth organisations and individual young people promoting YPS agenda. During the reporting year YMCA Finland staff have actively participated in the network, in the joint events and advocacy work. At the beginning of 2023 the network together with member of parliament Inka Hopsu formulated a written question to the Government regarding the resources available at the MFA for promoting the monitoring the YPS agenda and National Action Plan. The question bore fruit, as human resources were afterwards added to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs team responsible for YPS monitoring.

Before the parliamentary elections, the 2250 network together with the 1325 (Women, Peace and Security) networks developed common strategic priorities for the new government programme. After the elections, the 2250 network has focused on promoting the YPS agenda especially among new members of parliament to raise awareness about the agenda. YMCA staff joined the network representatives in promoting the agenda in the parliament three times during 2023. Another essential advocacy point has been to update the National Action Plan, as 2024 is the last year of the plan.



¹¹ Indicator 3.2 Finland's NAP on 2250 operationalized both in national and international levels

Meeting of the youth, peace and security network in the parliament. Photo YPS network.

YMCA actively participated in the meetings of the monitoring group of Finland's National Action Plan hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and also contributed to the preparation of guidelines and a checklist on youth participation for the Ministry.

During the *Youth Peace Week* coordinated by UN Youth of Finland, YMCA together with the Peace Mediation Unit from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs organised [an event about the Youth, Peace and Security agenda](#). At the event, YMCA Peacemakers volunteers from Lebanon and Kenya as well as a responsible supervisor of Yökoris/Midnight Street Basketball at Helsinki YMCA shared concrete examples of how they have promoted the agenda in the communities and societies and as part of youth work. Suldaan Said Ahmed, the Ministry's Special Envoy on Peace Mediation in the Horn of Africa shared about YPS related work in foreign policy and diplomacy. The event showcased how YPS is relevant in foreign policy, youth work and development cooperation, both nationally and internationally.



Suldaan Said Ahmed, the Ministry's Special Envoy on Peace Mediation in the Horn of Africa shared about YPS related work in foreign policy and diplomacy. Photo Martiina Woodson.

YMCA contributed to a monitoring report on the implementation of Finland's Strategy for Africa and shared about the YPS related work done with African partners. In February 2023, YMCA Finland staff met with Finland's embassy staff in Dakar and shared about YPS related advocacy and lessons learned with YMCAs in The Gambia and Kenya. During the same month, ECOWAS Chair met with Finnish NGOs, including YMCA, working in the region.

In November 2022 there was an international workshop focusing on the implementation of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda organized in Helsinki, in partnership of **Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Search for Common Ground, United Network of Young Peacebuilders and African Union**. A Community of Practice was created for the participants of the workshop.

This community gathered three times during 2023 and allowed for the YPS related learning and sharing to continue further.

In the fall of 2023 YMCA Finland was one of the chairs to the programme support NGOs network. In November there was a Partnership Forum organised together with the network and the MFA. Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Ville Tavio was present. [YMCA Finland's National General Secretary Juha Virtanen held the speech on behalf of the network](#). This was an essential possibility and channel to highlight young people's agenda as part of development questions globally.

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

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. 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. After holding a first partner meeting in Denmark in 2022, partner meetings have continued online. In March 2023 partners came together to discuss about their approach to peace work and possibilities for advocating for YPS in their country contexts. Partners raised many common topics and needs around the YPS agenda, such as youth unemployment, and the need for communication and leadership skills among young people. The meeting was an important possibility for South-South learning and increased exchange between partners.



YMCA The Gambia is a part of the Technical Working Group that prepares the country's first National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security. Photo: National Youth Council of The Gambia

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. Previous cooperation between the Finnish, Kenyan and Palestinian YMCA Peacemakers groups bore fruit. In **Kenya**, young people have stayed active in promoting the YPS agenda on grassroots level, sensitising young people in different regions to the message of peace. Meanwhile, YMCA Kenya has been

part of the tactical working group. In **The Gambia**, on the other hand, YMCA was invited to take part in the national YSP NAP development process to ensure young people's needs and voices are heard in the process.

Contacts with other Nordic YMCA actors increased in 2023. Colleagues from Sweden and Norway YMCA as well as Y Global participated in a monitoring visit to Ukraine, which allowed for an important exchange regarding partnerships. YMCA Finland staff also met with YMCA Sweden's international programme officers in Stockholm to discuss further coordination and cooperation between the Nordic YMCAs. YPS agenda was one of the main topics around which more cooperation was wished for. Further cooperation was planned for 2024.



Representatives from YMCA Finland, YMCA-YWCA Norway and Sweden meeting with YMCA Lviv staff and volunteers in Ukraine. Photo YMCA Finland.

One of such opportunities for interaction, increased learning and harmonisation of support to the Global South was the establishment of a Strategic Alignment and Movement Strengthening working group and start of a process for developing a movement-wide strategy. The joint strategy will include the World YMCA, Area Alliances of YMCAs and some national movements, such as YMCA Finland, which provide support to other national YMCAs. The purpose of the strategy is to increase the capacity and ensure sustainability of the YMCA movement globally, allowing for further support to empower young people. First in-person meeting was held in January 2024.

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 youth delegation to the United Nations Climate Change Conference, **COP28**. YMCA Finland partner, East Jerusalem YMCA had their representative in the delegation.

During the year, YMCA Finland prepared to launch a **Youth Climate Group**, an initiative for young adults passionate about climate and environmental issues. It aims to alleviate climate crisis anxiety through actionable steps, starting locally. This group invites participants to elevate youth voices in climate discussions. Activities include organising workshops, creating checklists, calculating carbon footprints and planning climate education. There are also plans for sharing with other YMCA groups globally, including in Kenya. The group defines its own activities, giving members a significant role in shaping its direction. Set for 2024, activities start with an introductory meeting in early March, followed by monthly online meetings.



Thirteen delegates from Finland YMCA attended, participating in four days of plenaries, seminars and workshops, all designed to reflect the four main themes of Vision 2030. Photo YMCA Netherlands.

The 50th-anniversary event of YMCA Europe, #Y2gether, held in Berlin in June highlighted the diversity and strengths of the international movement. The programme was centered around the global strategy. The event gathered nearly 400 participants, including representatives from national movements, staff, and especially young volunteers. Thirteen delegates from Finland YMCA attended, participating in four days of plenaries, seminars and workshops, all designed to reflect the four main themes of Vision 2030.

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 2.1.4).

3 Realisation and impact of risks

The risk management has had an important impact on the achievement of the targets within the programme, although certain shortcomings have been identified.

Risk management and tools

YMCA's proactive risk management approach, demonstrated by the annual updating of the risk matrix, effectively identifies and addresses emerging risks. Categorising risks into contextual, programmatic, and institutional categories provides clarity on potential impacts and levels. This breakdown aids in understanding how risks might affect implementation or the organisation. Adjusting likelihood and impact levels based on evolving contexts allows the programme to adapt strategies effectively, mitigating disruptions and ensuring the safety of staff and beneficiaries, especially in conflict-affected areas.

Despite these efforts, the global situation remains volatile, with operational conditions changing rapidly. The updated risk matrix reflects these changes but faces limitations in foreseeing and fully assessing complex risks. Partners encounter varying levels of risk, from armed conflict and state fragility to consistent issues like economic insecurity and youth vulnerability. The *Do no harm* approach necessitates careful assessment of potential unintended consequences alongside risk identification and mitigation.

Collaboration and communication with partners is an essential part of proactive risk management. Working hand-in-hand with partners provides a comprehensive understanding of risk development in different contexts and first-hand knowledge of evolving risks on the ground. A collaborative approach ensures that the programme team understands local dynamics and ensures that interventions are sensitive to community needs and priorities. For programme staff, regular monitoring and keeping abreast of local developments, such as economic conditions or social unrest, enables the programme to respond to changing circumstances.

Updates to risk matrix in 2023

In late 2023, as part of the process of developing annual plans for 2024, the program's risk matrix underwent updates. These revisions involved breaking down certain risks into distinct categories, adjusting likelihood or impact levels, and introducing new risks. The majority of changes were related to contextual risks, reflecting shifts in operating environments across multiple partners.

Throughout 2023, armed conflicts escalated notably in at least three programme countries, namely **Ethiopia, Palestine, and Lebanon**. Consequently, the likelihood of this risk was elevated from medium to high. Conversely, the likelihood of long-term impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic was downgraded to low, with a separate risk added specifically for epidemics or pandemics and their potential consequences.

A risk associated with engaging vulnerable groups in project activities was upgraded to having a medium impact, prompted by reports from partners detailing challenges in reaching the most vulnerable members of certain communities. Although this risk hasn't materialised, the increased level draws attention to preventive measures. Several new risks were introduced, including concerns about the lack of future prospects and growing hopelessness among youth. This emerged during discussions with partners and is seen as interconnected with various other risks such as inflation, armed conflicts, or political unrest.

Additionally, turnover of key staff was identified as a new risk, reflecting the reality faced by many organisations and necessitating adequate preparation and substitution arrangements. Finally, a risk relating to decreased self-financing capacities by YMCA Finland due to changes in revenue was added. While financial markets have been volatile, mitigation strategies include efforts to diversify private funding sources.

Risk materialisation in 2023

In **Palestine** after the war in Gaza started YMCA staff formed an emergency response team and an updated plan on how to respond to the humanitarian crisis while adapting the programme for young people. The YMCA in the West Bank has an excellent capacity to assist on the ground in the event of a potential escalation of the crisis, as well as an extensive network of staff and volunteers. In the West Bank the East Jerusalem YMCA staff identified potential risk situations of violence for staff, volunteers and the young people they support in their situation assessment. Despite the escalation and following increase in certain risks, both the internal and external risks were successfully managed due to the experience of project staff.

Currency fluctuations and cultural challenges, particularly regarding female participation, were addressed effectively. External risks, including staff safety concerns and mobility restrictions due to occupation measures, were mitigated by adapting the project approach. Transitioning to remote work during periods of heightened violence ensured the continuity of support while prioritising safety.

In **Lebanon**, the risks were similarly well managed due to the experienced project staff. Due to the concerns about the war in Gaza escalating, the YMCA Lebanon chose not to schedule any additional activities for the year 2023 and instead focused on continuing the implementation of the food service and food production vocational trainings, situated in Beirut, relatively at a safe proximity till further notice.

In **Ethiopia**, the conflict in the Amhara region posed significant challenges to project implementation, particularly in grassroots peace promotion activities. These conflicts led to security concerns, making it difficult to engage youths effectively. Looking ahead, the situation remains volatile, requiring adaptive planning to ensure project safety and effectiveness.

In **The Gambia**, two Programme Officers were replaced during the reporting period. In one instance, a new officer replaced a previous one who had not been committed, ensuring project continuity. In another case, a Programme Officer resigned to focus on studies, prompting quick replacement to maintain uninterrupted project monitoring and training. Both replacements underwent orientation to understand project expectations.

In **Kenya**, increased commodity prices were addressed by sourcing cheaper quality goods and buying materials in bulk. Anxiety from the political environment was mitigated by promoting peace within and outside institutions, with government urging citizens to avoid inciting language.

Overall, while some risks were realised in these projects, active mitigation measures were implemented, ensuring programme delivery without major interruptions.

4 Locally led development and local ownership

YMCA Finland's partner YMCAs are independent organisations, deeply embedded in their local communities and the civil society, enjoying widespread respect and recognition as advocates for youth empowerment and rights. These partners maintain full ownership of their projects, building on their own strategic priorities, existing strengths, strong track record and shared global vision. YMCA Finland provides essential support and capacity building as needed to grow their operations, scale up and replicate programmes and models that work, enhancing local income-generating opportunities and strengthening their sustainability. This approach promotes open communication and sharing, fostering a more equitable partnership.

Strategic Alignment and Movement Strengthening

In October 2023, YMCA Finland joined one of the four Support Function Teams under the Vision 2030 implementation, focusing on global strategic alignment and Movement Strengthening (MS). The vision of the Support Function is to create an efficient and well-coordinated global MS system that enhances the ability of YMCAs worldwide to empower young people and their communities, advancing the YMCA's Collective Mission. Movement Strengthening is viewed as a continuous process aimed at developing robust and resilient organizations capable of deepening their community impact. This involves improving governance and leadership, fostering a culture of mutual and continuous learning, ensuring financial and operational sustainability, amplifying youth and community voices, and encouraging strategic innovation. The MS strategy aims to address challenges such as bureaucratic burdens on partner YMCAs, overlapping of efforts, global minimum standards for governance and colonial roots of the current systems. It also seeks to improve organisational culture through equitable, participatory, locally-led, transparent, and accountable processes. By clarifying the roles between national, regional, and global bodies, the strategy will outline priorities such as building a coordination and alignment framework, deploying a common set of tools for MS, and ensuring efficient resource allocation and synergies.



YMCA leaders are working to develop global strategic capacity-building plan. Photo Niclas Sannerheim.

YMCA Finland trusts in the proved expertise of its partners in their areas of work. When it comes to decisions related to changes in operational conditions, activities or implementation of the projects, the partner YMCAs are given room to make decisions based on their best knowledge of the context and needs of the right-holders. For example, an addendum to the Memorandum

of Understanding between the Africa Alliance of YMCA's, YMCA Kenya, and YMCA Finland, was created in 2023. Its purpose is to allow YMCA Kenya more flexibility in reallocation of funds between budget lines, ensuring efficient and effective project implementation. Being part of the same global movement, YMCA Finland emphasises equal partnership instead of the outdated concept of donor-recipient, which carries major power imbalances. YMCA Finland works actively to contribute to the decolonisation of the development cooperation sector.

Partnerships with local stakeholders and communities

All YMCA partners cooperate with various other civil society organisations and government institutions to maximise the positive impact of the programme. **The Gambia YMCA** engaged with CSOs and government to collaborate and partner in pressing issues with mutual concerns. This has created room for the sharing of best practices, resources and expertise that has resulted in joint programmes. **YMCA Lebanon** focused on building new connections with local organisations and re-establishing existing ones. YMCA has partnered for example with the Development Indicators Association, which serves persons with disabilities; Life Project for Youth, supporting Syrian marginalized women and girls, and several different municipalities.

Local community involvement is crucial for programme implementation in each partner country. Their participation, engagement, and ownership are essential for the project's sustainability and long-term impact. Local communities contribute valuable insights, knowledge, and resources, enhancing the design, implementation, and evaluation of project activities. Their active involvement ensures that projects are relevant and effective in addressing community needs and aspirations.

As part of the advocacy efforts, community outreach activities are organised in several partner countries. These events provide community members with opportunities to voice their concerns and offer the YMCA valuable insights into the challenges faced by youth and their communities. This participatory approach involves local communities, youth, elders, and persons with disabilities in decision-making processes and programmes. The approach ensures that diverse perspectives and needs are considered, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability. Transparency is maintained through regular information sharing, reporting, and feedback and complaints mechanisms.

Capacity Building and Empowerment

To promote engagement and ownership among right-holders, the programme emphasises capacity building and empowerment. In **Ethiopia**, for example, trainings such as the Training of Trainers (ToT), media literacy training, and capacity-building on the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda equip participants with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary for effective peace-building efforts. ToTs are also used in other partner YMCAs such as **Kenya** and **The Gambia**. In Kenya and The Gambia there are also active YMCA Peacemakers volunteer groups who train other youth and community members about the YPS agenda, peace building and conflict resolution.

In **The Gambia** the team engages relevant stakeholders to ensure successful implementation. Discussions with partners and trainers before and during the training period provided valuable

feedback, helped strategise implementation, and addressed challenges or successes. Right-holders who received startup materials now see themselves as job creators with the tools needed to establish their businesses, whether home-based or in rented spaces.

At the **Kenya YMCA's** National Training Institute, students benefit from class representation platforms that facilitate direct communication with trainers and college management on academic and other concerns. For instance, students and trainers collaborated to design a garage, enhancing ownership and interest in the course.

Withing the **Africa Alliance of YMCA's** partnership, The Senegal YMCA demonstrated local ownership by identifying practical actions for Climate Smart Agriculture following staff training at Care of Creation Kenya and YMCA Kenya College for Agriculture and Technology in April 2023. Increased local board participation and youth involvement will enhance accountability, ensuring the project's benefits are widely shared among participants.

Programme's collaborative and community-focused approach empowers local partners and communities, fostering sustainable development and long-term impact.

5 Contributions to Finland's priorities and country programmes

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 YPS is a central framework for analysing the programme results. Below are a few examples of YMCA programme's activities which are connected to the Finland's **National Action Plan** (NAP) on YPS.

Examples under the priority area of Participation

Measures in the Finland's National Action Plan	Examples from the programme
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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. In 2023 YMCAs in Kenya and The Gambia advanced the YPS agenda and young people's voice in the questions of peace and security by taking part in national NAP processes.
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 2023 young people met and exchanged during a peacebuilding camp in Lebanon, which brought together youth from Finland, Lebanon, and Syria.
Finland pays special attention to the 2250 perspective in development cooperation	All activities of the programme align with and contribute to the objectives outlined in UNSCR 2250. For example, through targeted training initiatives YMCA partners aim to foster greater youth participation while simultaneously addressing issues of conflict prevention and social exclusion. By investing in community development and establishing safe spaces for youth, the programme creates environments conducive to constructive engagement and provides essential support for young people 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

Measures in the Finland's National Action Plan	Examples from the programme
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	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>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>
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Priorities of Finland's development cooperation

Quality inclusive education is one Finland's development policy priorities that aligns closely with YMCA Finland development cooperation programme. The programme prioritises strengthening the capacities of teachers, schools, and education providers to enhance learning and improve learning outcomes. This includes supporting institutions in developing their learning facilities, training teachers, and fostering cooperation to ensure optimal results. A central focus of the livelihoods programme is to support youth in vulnerable positions, including young women and individuals living with disabilities. By targeting these groups specifically, YMCA Finland aims to uphold the right to quality inclusive education for all, ensuring that even the most marginalised groups have access to educational opportunities. YMCA Finland partners offer vocational and entrepreneurship training that is tailored to the needs of the job market. By providing market-relevant skills training, YMCA contributes to the enhancement of youth skills for employment and sustainable livelihoods. This focus on skills development is particularly important for vulnerable youth, as it can significantly improve their resilience and prospects for improved livelihoods.

Sustainable economy and decent work 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 people living 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. See also chapter 2.2.

Peaceful democratic societies are another priority in Finland's development policy is. Peaceful societies also allow for economic development and sustainable livelihoods. YMCA Finland recognises the need among youth and especially those in vulnerable position to prevent and mitigate conflicts and drive development of their communities and societies. The programme supports inclusive peace and trust building processes, where women, youth, and persons with disabilities take part in decision-making and advocate for their human rights. 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.

Finland's country programmes

The programme is similarly contributing to the focus areas of Finland's bilateral country programmes 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 focus to support sustainable peace and security by engaging youths in peacebuilding and improving their access to livelihood opportunities. Special attention is given to fostering equal opportunities for young women and youth with disabilities.

Finland's country programme in Kenya has focused 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, advancing opportunities especially for women and PLWDs. 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. Due to policy adjustments instituted by the current government, the country programme in Kenya will be terminated. Consequently, there will be an increased emphasis on the significance of development cooperation efforts led by civil society organisations.

Finland's 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 supports 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. YMCA works with vulnerable youth in the West Bank, particularly in area C, ensuring their access to education, decent work, and civic participation.



Success story from Palestine

Zakaria Hamad, a 28-year-old resident of Al-Fara'a refugee camp, faced overwhelming challenges following a debilitating injury by the Israeli army while going to work on the family farm. Zakaria used to work on his family's land, and he was the breadwinner of his family. The physical injury caused one leg to become shorter than the other, necessitating extensive medical rehabilitation, including physical therapy and specialized equipment. Environmental obstacles further exacerbated his plight, impeding social interactions and medical follow-ups due to residing on the second floor without accessible ramps or aids.

Professionally, Zakaria grappled with the inability to work, burdened by the responsibility of his family. The psychological impact was obvious, marked by persistent sadness, isolation, and an inability to afford crucial medical treatments. The intervention by the Rehabilitation Program started on January 12, 2023, with a focus on alleviating the psychological burden through therapeutic interventions, enhancing accessibility in his living environment, contributing to medical rehabilitation expenses, and ultimately facilitating vocational rehabilitation.

Therapeutic measures, such as Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy, played a pivotal role in positively shaping Zakaria's self-perception. Also, an adaptation to his house which included building a handrail has been delivered to not only increase his social engagement but also empowered him to independently meet his family's needs, reducing his dependence on others. Moreover, the support for medical rehabilitation positively impacted Zakaria's psychosocial well-being, while the vocational rehabilitation goal aimed to stabilize and secure his future. Through the vocational rehabilitation process which included career guidance and vocational assessment sessions, a poultry farming project was identified as a fitting venture, aligning with Zakaria's skills and capabilities. This intervention brought about profound and positive transformations in Zakaria's life. In Zakaria's own words, "Today, I feel confident and rely on myself to meet my needs in all aspects of my life."

When asked about his aspirations for the future, Zakaria says that he hopes to live in safety and peace and to be able to meet his family's needs. Zakaria, now stands as a beacon of resilience and triumph over adversity, showcasing the impact of compassionate humanitarian efforts.

In the photo Zakarias. Photo EJ YMCA.

