



Youth, Peace and Livelihoods

**YMCA Finland Development Cooperation Programme Results
Report 2024**

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1. Introduction

1.1. Summary of the main results in 2024

Today's youth, particularly those living in conflict-affected or developing countries, face a complex and often discouraging reality. A quarter of the world's youth live in countries that have experienced conflict¹, while nearly 90 % of all youth reside in developing countries². With the global youth population at an all-time high, young people possess immense potential to shape their societies. Yet, one in five youth globally are not in employment, education or training (NEET), with rates rising to 28,7 % in low-income countries. Furthermore, NEET rates are significantly higher for young women – more than double in some regions – and NEET status often persist longer compared to their male counterparts.³

Economic crises, conflicts and political severely limit opportunities for youth, reinforcing cycles of poverty. A critical lack of skills and access to quality education deepens this divide, making it difficult for youth to engage in meaningful employment or contribute to sustainable peace. Many young people are excluded from formal decision-making processes, their voices often unheard in shaping policies that affect their lives. This marginalisation can fuel frustration and alienation, making youth more vulnerable to exploitation, violence, or recruitment by extremist groups.

YMCA is demonstrating its 180 years of legacy, global reach and impact in contexts like Ukraine and Palestine. YMCA staff and youth 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 tackles the root causes of conflicts and inequality, promoting 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. Since 2022, a collective **Youth, Peace and Livelihoods programme** has been implemented with **local YMCAs in The Gambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Palestine, Lebanon and Finland**. In 2024 the work of **YMCA in Ukraine** was added to the programme. Best practices are replicated through the partnership with **Africa Alliance of YMCAs**.

Guided by the **Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS)** agenda, the programme promotes a holistic understanding of peace, challenges stereotypes and elevate youth in public discourse. The agenda has strengthened the recognition of the societal importance of youth work. 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 plays a central role in advancing this agenda. As a civic actor rooted in Finland, YMCA are also strengthening the links between national perspectives and international cooperation.

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

³ ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Youth (GET for Youth)* (2024) https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/GET_2024_EN_web4.pdf

This report analyses the programme's progress in 2024, its third year. The primary focus rested on realising results especially at the output and activity levels. However, the mid-term review (MTR) analysed the relevance, effectiveness and the progress towards sustainable impact. Overall, the MTR found that YMCA Finland's initiatives, together with its partners, including youth empowerment, peacebuilding, and climate-smart agriculture, have been effective and created impact and sustainability. Identified areas for improvement have informed ongoing programme development.

In 2024, **a total of 33,030 right-holders and duty-bearers participated in the programme activities** – approximately 65 % women and 35 % men – more than double the target set for the entire programme period. This is primarily due to the inclusion of Ukraine in the programme in 2024. It is estimated that more than 71,000 people were also indirectly influenced during the reporting year.

Over 7,400 youths and community members engaged in peace activities. YMCAs created safe, inclusive spaces for young people from diverse backgrounds, fostering greater awareness, dialogue and skills in peacebuilding. Targeted capacity-building initiatives empowered youth to advocate for their rights, with a strong focus on the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda, leading to youth-led community initiatives. These included advocacy campaigns directed at duty-bearers on key issues such as minority rights, youth participation, irregular migration, and substance abuse. In The Gambia and Kenya, YMCA partners actively contributed to national-level processes, including the development of National Action Plans on the YPS agenda. Institutionalisation of YMCA's practical, co-creative approach to peacebuilding also remains a key focus.

Close to 12,200 youths and community members were equipped with market-relevant vocational and entrepreneurship skills, life skills, digital skills, career guidance and business opportunities. Selected students were provided start-up capital or tools to start micro or small-scale businesses. Mental health and psychosocial support enhanced resilience for vulnerable youth and community members, improving their ability to engage in studies or livelihood activities. 2536 right-holders were also sensitised on climate change resilience.

These achievements can be considered promising as 2024 marks the third year of a four-year cycle and the targets in terms of people reached have been already exceeded. More detailed information on different indicators measuring the progress can be found from the results matrix (see attachments). The original goal was to reach over 16,000 right-holders between 2022 and 2025, yet over 50 000 direct beneficiaries are now anticipated. Indirectly, it is estimated that even 100,000 beneficiaries will be affected by the programme activities. This is largely due to the expansion of the programme to Ukraine.

In 2024, the total cost of the programme was 1,377,301 €, of which 65 % was for project activities. 21 % of the costs were planning, monitoring, evaluation and related personnel costs, 8 % administration, and 6 % for communications. By the end of 2024, 74 % of the four-year programme budget had been used. The year showed strong progress towards both immediate results and long-term impact.

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 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.

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. From 2026 onwards, YMCA Finland will align its national strategy with Vision 2030 too.

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 2024, further steps forward have been taken. The working groups on different pillars and support functions have been active, with YMCA Finland strongly involved. The new global Movement Strengthening Strategy was adopted in 2024. Year 2024 saw also the conclusion of a 10,000 person survey of young people worldwide on their hopes and fears in the world of work, and the development of 12 Standards for Meaningful Work. Moreover, a global YMCA [Learning, Innovation and Impact taskforce](#) and initial work to develop indicators for measuring progress on Vision 2030 goals were started. [40 external partners took part in the Vision 2030 Accelerator Summit in Mombasa](#). HP, Accenture, Macquarie Group Foundation, Deloitte and Ernst & Young partnered with the global YMCA, providing intellectual, financial and in-kind support.

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.

2. Progress towards outcomes

This report analyses how far the programme has progressed towards achieving its intended results during 2024. As the programme approaches its final year, the results achieved by the partners indicate significant progress towards the expected outcomes. However, these long-term objectives are anticipated to be realised primarily at the end of the programme and beyond and cannot fully be detected earlier. The measurement of outcomes and impacts is also challenging when dealing with intangible results like capacity, youth empowerment and peace. Therefore, analysis on outputs and activities is included to some extent, as they provide a means of analysing the functioning of the results chain.

The theory of change (ToC) forms the foundation for the programme and its various projects. As the programme is implemented, opportunities arise to assess the accuracy and practical applicability of the ToC. It can be concluded that throughout the reporting year, the

ToC has remained valid, with no factors emerging that would significantly challenge the logic of the results chain.

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 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).



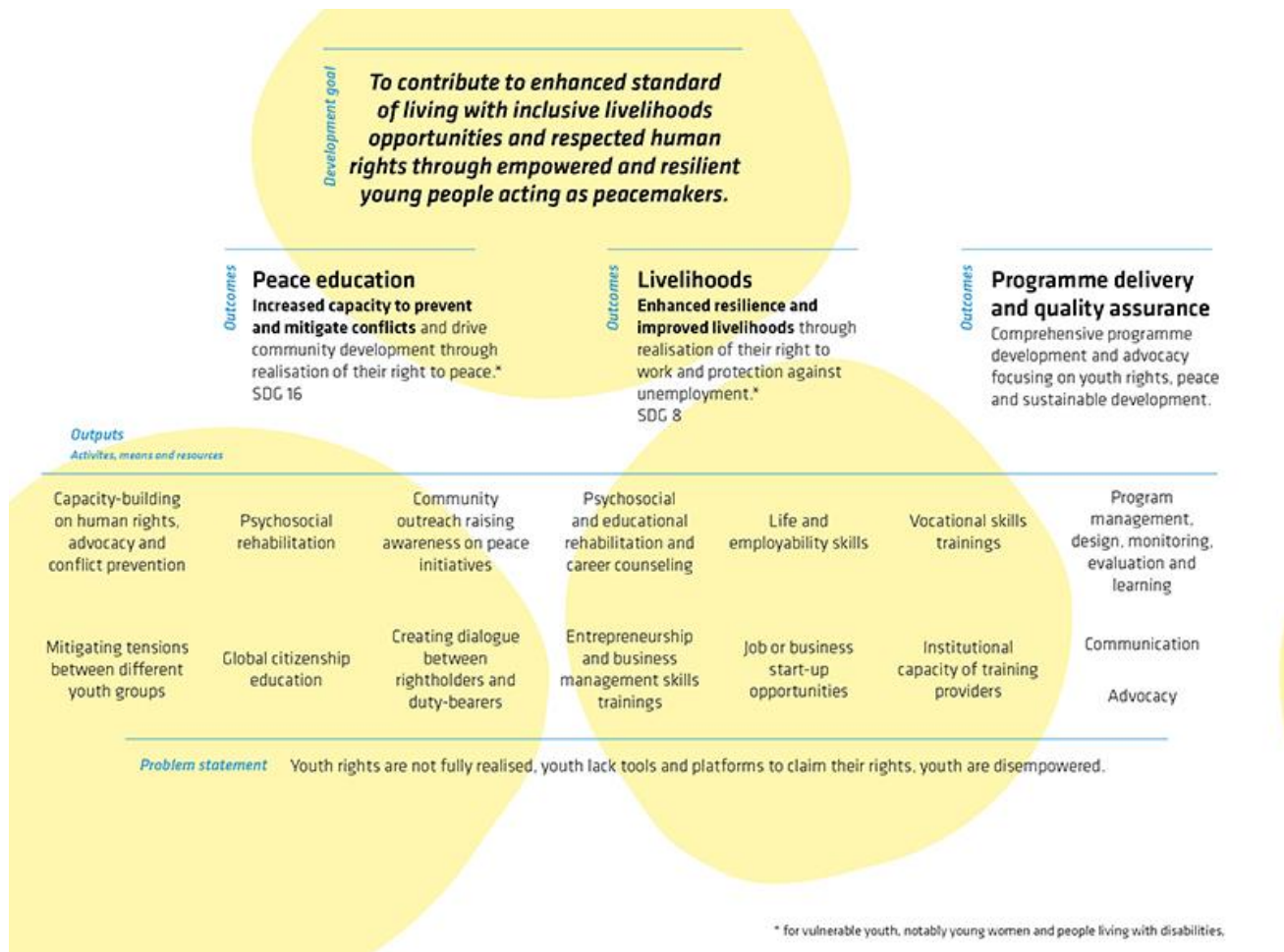
The expected **outcome in the peacebuilding programme** reflects the results chain especially at community level. Effective conflict prevention and mitigation secures spaces for vulnerable young people to claim their rights and engage in decision-making. Community outreach and engagement multiplies the 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 **preconditions and assumptions** have been well identified at the design stage and delays in projects can often be traced back to situations where these circumstances have not been met. The challenges in the reporting year are mostly 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, and they have not significantly influenced the achievement of objectives. For example, in Lebanon, when the conflict intensified, activities were directed towards humanitarian action through a reallocation of funds approved by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA).



Theory of change.

2.1. Outcome 1: Peacebuilding programme

Achievements against annual targets in 2024

- **11 community dialogues** on peace and trust-building were supported in Ethiopia, Kenya and Palestine
- **7,066 right-holders participated** in advocacy or peacebuilding trainings or events in all partner countries
- **24 local youth-led YMCA Peacemakers groups** were active in Kenya, Gambia, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Palestine and Finland
- **Youth, Peace and Security agenda was promoted** through:
 - National coalitions and civil society networks in The Gambia, Kenya, Cameroon and Finland
 - Local advocacy campaigns in Palestine, Kenya and Ethiopia
- **YMCAs in Palestine, Lebanon and Ethiopia collaborated** with organisations specialised in gender
- **YMCAs in Ethiopia, Palestine and Finland collaborated** with organisations specialised in disability inclusion

2.1.1. Progress against the Theory of Change

In its third year, the Peace Programme has made significant progress, demonstrating steady advancement toward its targets and advancing the realisation of its Theory of Change (ToC). The problem statement within the ToC continues to hold true and remains highly relevant from a peacebuilding perspective. This was also confirmed by the external mid-term review, which found that *“The Programme responds well to planned target groups and is relevant to rights holders and other groups. The programme aligns with the generally agreed development trends and priorities of YPS (Youth, Peace and Security).”* The only programme country that has not yet contributed directly to the targets of the Peace Programme is Ukraine, which was added in the programme in 2024. However, it should be recognised that in many ways the mental health and livelihood activities in Ukraine also contributed to psycho-social wellbeing, peaceful coexistence and community cohesion.

Some outputs, such as building youth capacity on human rights, peacebuilding, and advocacy, were realised by all partners and projects involved in the Peace programme. Increased skills of youth enabled them to contribute to the community outreach which took different forms depending on the country, often engaging youth in dialogue with duty bearers. The capacity of many partners on the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda has increased considerably. Some partners, such as The Gambia and Kenya, have continued to participate in the national processes for developing National Action Plans on the YPS agenda, and in The Gambia the process culminated in the official validation of the NAP in 2024. Global citizenship education was the cornerstone of the programme implementation in Finland, which is further elaborated below. 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.

The strong emphasis of the programme on the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda enables the amplification of its impact beyond community level where most project activities take place. As the mid-term review report mentions, it is generally acknowledged that there is no sustainable peace without youth participation. Opportunities such as work, education, and security from arbitrary oppression are required to build and foster peace and civic participation. The link between livelihoods and peace is well recognized and the outcomes of the livelihood programme and peace programme of YMCA Finland are contributing towards the common impact.

Advocacy for youth rights, peace, and sustainable development remains as critical now as it was three years ago when the programme was designed. Issues like the climate crisis, limited access to employment, and the urgent need for sustainable peace continue to be pressing concerns both in Finland and across all partner countries. The ongoing crises in Gaza, Lebanon, and Ukraine, along with the rise of undemocratic developments, have further underscored the necessity of ensuring that young people's rights and voices are central to discussions on peace and security. Both young people and partners stress that achieving lasting peace is impossible without the empowerment and inclusion of youth. Young people should not be viewed as a minority or special interest group, but rather as the majority in many countries. It is vital that they have access to their rights and that their voices are actively heard in the development of peaceful societies.

2.1.2. YMCA's Peace Programme in 2024

The **expected outcome of the Peace Programme is to enhance the capacity of vulnerable youth to prevent and mitigate conflicts while driving community development.** In 2024, the peace programme was implemented in seven countries, directly involving **7435** individuals, out of which 50 % are men and 50 % women and approximately 4% are people living with disabilities. The third year of the programme has seen a steady progress towards the programme's outcomes. Although the capacity is sometimes challenging to measure, the data collected on the programme indicators show that through community dialogues, youth-led groups, advocacy campaigns, and inclusive partnerships focused on gender and disability, the initiative fostered local ownership and promoted the Youth, Peace and Security agenda in both national and grassroots settings.

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.).





Peacemakers youth awareness raising activity in Hebron, West Bank
Photo: East Jerusalem YMCA

Throughout 2024, the pursuit of peace has faced significant challenges in various regions, notably in Ukraine, Lebanon 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. YMCA approach to peacebuilding

An important outcome of the Peace Programme is the development of the YMCA's approach to peacebuilding aiming to ensure the practicality, relevance, and consistency of the YMCA's peacebuilding programme. A conceptual framework has been established during 2023-2024 and will be further developed to guide YMCA's peacebuilding efforts, while adapting to different contexts and effectively addressing specific needs and challenges.

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 role models 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**

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 and can be challenging to report in terms of quantitative indicators. The following chapters will present the results of the 2024 Peace Programme following the peacebuilding approach. The changes observed in young peacebuilders and how these feed into the programme's results is described in qualitative terms.

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. 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.

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. In 2024, 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 many countries the spaces are created through YMCA Peacemakers groups ⁴. 19 groups from previous years continued to meet and learn in **Palestine, Ethiopia, 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, and in **Cameroon** the first Peacemakers group was established.

⁴ Indicator 1.4. Number of local youth-led YMCA Peacemakers groups established or sustained

Developing skills and knowledge to empower young peacemakers

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. These activities aim to engage young people in active citizenship and complement the skills development process. Skills trainings for the youth have taken place in **The Gambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lebanon, Palestine, Burundi, Cameroon** and through global education initiatives in Finland⁵.

In **Lebanon** three workshops in camp format with 70 youth participants (22 male, 48 female) were organised. Two of these workshops were regular peacebuilding workshops, while one was designed as part of the Training of Facilitators program created to allow youth participating in peacebuilding activities to have more advanced technical skills on peacebuilding and provide them with the opportunity to be facilitators working in the programmes.

In **Palestine**, 32 (17 male, 15 female) youth took part in trainings, learning about their rights and the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, as well as receiving training on community initiatives. In **Kenya**, 210 youth were trained on YPS and other topics, increasing their capacity to prevent and mitigate conflicts by providing practical tools and frameworks for conflict resolution and community-driven solutions. In **Ethiopia**, 25 (11 male, 14 female) young people participated in Training of Trainers (TOT) course on peacebuilding, learning about inclusivity and local peacebuilding methods as well as about YPS. In **The Gambia**, 20 young leaders underwent comprehensive training on YPS-related advocacy and peacebuilding. Africa Alliance of YMCA trained **Burundi YMCA** volunteers on YPS agenda and Vision 2030 to strengthen their capacity to advocate for the implementation of YPS. In **Cameroon** a workshop on YPS was organised for university students, and a youth-led peacebuilding platform was initiated.

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 supports young people in this process, by engaging stakeholders and using their local and national networks. Youth can assume leadership roles and become drivers of community development, gaining thus opportunities to influence other young people or especially duty-bearers. Such events are in important milestones on the path of young peacemakers.

In the programme, young people led essential initiatives, participated in conferences, and engaged in discussions with duty-bearers. In **The Gambia** 11 advocacy initiatives were organised by youth peacemakers' groups, reaching 714 individuals directly in various

⁵Indicator 1.3 Number of young ppl, women and PLWDs who take part in decision-making, advocacy or peacebuilding trainings

communities. The community dialogues and events engaged diverse stakeholders and addressed various concerns. The youth demonstrated significant growth throughout these activities, emerging as capable advocates, empathetic listeners, and skilled conflict resolvers with exceptional interpersonal abilities.

In **Palestine**, YMCA supported youth peacemaker groups to design and carry out five community initiatives (one was postponed from 2023 due to the Gaza conflict). The delivery of community initiatives that promoted youth rights and activism demonstrates the practical application of the acquired leadership skills by the participants.

In **Hebron** the peacemakers' group designed and implemented an initiative called *Aware Youth, Safe internet* which tackled the increasing number of problems arising from the misuse of social media platforms. The initiative targeted the youth between 15-25 years old and their caregivers, raising awareness about safe internet usage and educating youth and their families on issues related to cybercrimes while strengthening cooperation with government institutions and the police.

In **Ethiopia** youth and adults who have received ToT training on peacebuilding made a significant impact by reaching out to 2250 individuals in their respective cities⁶. 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 engaged participants in discussions focused on peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and community engagement.



Grass-roots peace promotion session led by YMCA youth peace promoters

Photo: YMCA Ethiopia

Young people were similarly involved in advocating for national Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) action plans as part of their YMCAs in Kenya, Cameroon and The Gambia⁷. **Kenya YMCA** is a member of The Kenya Coalition on YPS. The organisation concentrates in localising the YPS agenda on the grassroots and county level, lobbying for the National Action Plan process. The youth trained on YPS issues have built a youth-led peace network across three key counties fostering cross-community collaboration.

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

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

Through its active role as part of the Technical Working Group on the National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 2250 led by the National Youth Council of The Gambia, **YMCA The Gambia** engaged civil society, government, and youth in promoting the YPS agenda which successfully led to the validation of The Gambia's National Action Plan of Youth Peace and Security.



The Gambia's National Action Plan on Youth, Peace, and Security draft validation. Photo: The Gambia National Youth Council

In **Cameroon**, YMCA has solidified its role as a key stakeholder in national peacebuilding, ensuring that youth voices are included in the NAP development and implementation process. A key milestone was the facilitation of a Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) session where young people were introduced to the National Action Plan (NAP) on YPS, reinforcing the necessity of youth involvement in its implementation. Following, in 2024 Cameroon YMCA was invited to participate in the NAP Technical Committee.

2.1.4. YMCA's Global Citizenship Education in 2024

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 2024, YMCA's GCE reached **2,775** children and young people and **513** youth professionals and volunteers. They participated in more than 400 events and workshops to foster global solidarity, peacebuilding, and sustainable development and spent over **10,500 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 also continued to compile and develop global citizenship education materials for youth work on various related themes.

At the beginning of 2022, 22 % of YMCA local staff (n 157) experienced that GCE as very present in the work of the YMCA. Three years later this percentage was 57 % of staff (n 64). 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 49 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 2024, YMCAs organised almost 550 events, reaching more than 2,700 different children and young people.

Dedicated 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. In total, 194 young people participated in the groups' activities in about 116 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.

In 2024 YMCA held 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 and featured a wide variety of activities for the participants on sustainable development and other global issues.

2.2. Outcome 2: Livelihoods programme

Achievements against annual targets in 2024

- **12,194 right-holders** were trained in vocational, entrepreneurship, employability and life skills
- On average **76 % of graduates** register better prospects to access the labour market
- On average **70% of graduated youth** are in employment, education or training within 1 year after graduation
- **1631 right-holders** were sensitised on climate change resilience
- **YMCAs in Kenya, Gambia, Ethiopia, Ukraine and Lebanon** collaborated with organisations specialised in gender
- **YMCAs in Ethiopia, Ukraine, Lebanon and Palestine** collaborated with organisations specialized in disability inclusion

2.2.1. Progress against the programme cycle and the Theory of Change

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 third 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 third year has demonstrated that the programme and its objectives are contributing to the overall impact of the programme, and 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. Young people's right to education and employment remained unrealised in 2024, as many lacked opportunities to learn skills, find employment and become financially independent.

The annual targets set for 2024 were generally achieved. The programme played a key role in strengthening resilience and enhancing the livelihoods of vulnerable youth through various initiatives. Partner YMCAs provided vocational training, equipping young people with crucial skills for employment. This training supported young people to achieve financial independence and economic self-sufficiency. Furthermore, a broad range of skills development opportunities, such as life skills, employability skills, and digital skills trainings, were provided to ensure that youth are well-prepared for the demands of the labour market.

YMCA actively worked to close the gap between education and employment by partnering with employers, government agencies, and other key stakeholders. In all programme countries, right-holders had access to entrepreneurship training, equipping those interested in self-employment with the knowledge needed to start and sustain their own businesses. Additionally, in The Gambia and Kenya, business start-up kits were distributed to support

aspiring entrepreneurs on their journey. Offering training and resources in entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in safeguarding young people against unemployment.

Increased emphasis has been placed on ensuring the sustainability of right holders' businesses through providing more training on entrepreneurship skills. As recommended in the mid-term review, right holders in many partner countries require longer-term support and mentoring after finishing their vocational training courses. Many graduates already use social media in marketing their businesses, but deepening their knowledge in marketing strategies could also increase the sustainability of their businesses. The recommendations of the mid-term review will be used to further develop the interventions to better answer to the needs of the right holders.

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. 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.

2.2.2. YMCA's Livelihoods Programme in 2024



Kenya YMCA National Training institute offers vocational and entrepreneurship training in Shauri Moyo.
Photo: Kaisa Strömberg

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 2024, inclusive livelihoods opportunities were created through six projects that targeted directly **12 194 right-holders**⁸ out of which approximately 38 % were men and 62 % women and approximately 2 % 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

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

build sustainable livelihoods. Through 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. Informal employment and working poverty are a reality to many more. Transition from education to decent work is difficult.

Even though the youth unemployment rate has recovered since the COVID-19 pandemic and is actually at its lowest level in 15 years, young people continue to face major significant barriers to decent work. These barriers include 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 rates. These challenges are hindering long-term progress toward improving decent work and social justice.

Over the reporting year, training, capacity-building, and entrepreneurship promotion across different country contexts opened new pathways for young people to enhance their livelihoods through education and employment. By facilitating access to decent job opportunities, the programme has strengthened young people's resilience against various economic and social challenges. Acquiring new skills and resources has also empowered youth with greater capacity to contribute to the development of their communities. 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

By equipping young people with market-relevant skills, life skills, and business opportunities, the programme aims to empower youth to find sustainable income sources. Improving the livelihoods of young people has a ripple effect, positively impacting their families and communities.

The World YMCA **Meaningful Work Adaptive Strategy**, published in 2023, describes the organisation's holistic approach 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 addressing various interconnected aspects of their lives. In 2024, World YMCA has published two reports that complement the Strategy: **Crisis of opportunity: Young People navigating the 'New Work Order'** and **Future ready: Reimagining Meaningful Work for Young People**. The first one presents the key findings of the Youth Meaningful Work Survey conducted in 2023–2024 and the second one provides a concise framework, practical examples, and strategic recommendations for stakeholders.

In order to support young people, it is crucial to understand what Meaningful Work means to them. The definition of Meaningful Work draws extensively from insights gathered through the Youth Meaningful Work Survey, deep listening sessions, and existing research, conducted by Deloitte together with World YMCA. It has been crafted to ensure both global relevance and local applicability, addressing shared challenges while considering unique local contexts. The definition is as follows: *Meaningful Work is work that is fair and fulfilling, and which positively influences the growth and wellbeing of young people and their communities.*⁹

The first step of the strategy 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. 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.

YMCA Kenya offered partial sponsorship bursary to 192 vulnerable students to contribute to the realisation of their right to education and sustainable livelihoods opportunities. At the Kenya YMCA College for Agriculture and Technology (KYCAT) 20 women from Ndeiya, Limuru, were trained in Climate Smart Agriculture, promoting women-led sustainable farming initiatives increasing their economic independence and potential for community leadership.

The Gambia YMCA has recognised barriers affecting women's livelihoods, including the responsibilities that they 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. In The Gambia 72% of the young people who received vocational training were women. Emphasis is also put on inclusion of other vulnerable groups, such as returnee migrants, to support their reintegration and livelihoods opportunities. Sustainable

⁹ Deloitte & World YMCA, 2024, Future Ready: Reimagining Meaningful Work for Young People

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 detention and improve their chances of securing employment and improving their overall quality of life.



Life Skills training for youth in Hebron, West Bank
Photo: East Jerusalem YMCA

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. 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 currently 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 vocational training centres 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.

The skill sets offered are chosen based on the right holders' interest as well as labour market demands. YMCAs cooperate closely with companies to ensure that youth are equipped with skills that employers are looking for. In 2024, due to the high demand for vocational skills and reskilling among youth living in the middle of economic turmoil, **YMCA Lebanon** continued to provide vocational training in the uncertain circumstances until the war between Israel and Hezbollah escalated in August.

Entrepreneurship as a path to sustainable livelihoods

An increasing number of young people are pursuing entrepreneurship, driven by factors such as the need to adapt to economic conditions, particularly in areas where formal labour markets are underdeveloped. However, despite its attractiveness, several challenges prevent individuals from turning promising ideas into viable and lasting businesses. These challenges include the need to develop entrepreneurial skills, gain essential knowledge, and access funding to launch their ventures.

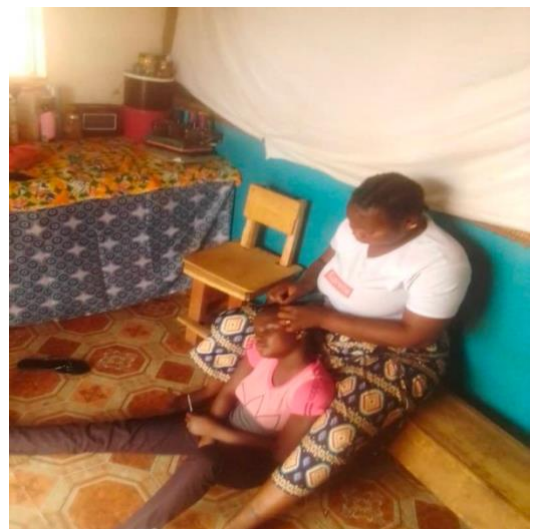
In 2024, **YMCA Ethiopia** offered a three-day training programme for 25 young people, covered topics such as business identification, teamwork, financial management, and marketing strategies. After training, participants submitted their business plans in groups and two promising ones received startup capital, enabling ten youths to launch their micro-enterprises.

YMCA Kenya together with **Africa Alliance of YMCAs (AAYMCA)** provided business support to 6 students, three at National Training Institute (NTI) and three at Kenya YMCA College of Agriculture and Technology (KYCAT). Students at KYCAT received entrepreneurial training that included agribusiness management, value addition and market linkages to enhance youth employability and self-sufficiency. At NTI, aside from technical skills training, students receive training on different employability skills such as life skills, communication skills, entrepreneurship and ICT skills.

At KYCAT, for example, the three students who received business support have all successfully launched and sustained their businesses. One graduate invested in creating a poultry farming business by purchasing chickens. Another graduate used the business support to plant onions, which has shown promising returns. The third graduate acquired a mechanical toolkit and is using it to provide mechanical repair services within the community.

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 young women, the organisation contributes to the realisation of their right to decent work and financial independence. **In Palestine**, three self-employment projects were provided for vulnerable young people to equip them with the needed skills and resources to start small businesses and therefore improve their economic situation.

Haddy Huma received start up support in 2024 and went on to start her hairdressing business right away. She has experienced good sales, especially during holidays like Eid, and continues to provide services like braiding and makeup for events. She is earning enough to support herself and dreams of expanding her business by opening branches of Haddy's Beauty Salon across the country. One significant challenge Haddy faces is the appearance of her salon, which discourages some customers. She is working on improving the space, but it will take time as she has only just started her business.



Bridging the gap between studies and labour market

In a rapidly evolving environment where job market requirements are continuously shifting, education and employment systems may struggle to adapt swiftly enough to help young people stay ahead. 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.



Young women at graduation in The Gambia.
Photo: Kaisa Strömberg

The Gambia YMCA continued emphasising 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. Regardless of the volatile situation in **Lebanon**, the YMCA was able to conduct one Life & Employability skills training and two trainings on digital skills, equipping young people with market relevant skills that enhance their employability.

In **Kenya**, both NTI and 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. 167 students at NTI

received accreditation, which enhanced their employability by providing recognized credentials allowing them to transition into formal employment or entrepreneurship.

Mentorship, connections and cooperation

Despite a digitally driven world where remote work and social media are prevalent, connecting with others to share ideas, building networks and learning are all important aspects in today's labour market.

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. In 2024, 12 instructors, branch staff and volunteers received training in Kijabe to enhance their capacity to deliver high-quality, practical education. 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, 270 children and 10 of their teachers from a local school visited the institution and were trained on climate resilience and responsible agricultural methods, to foster a culture of sustainable practices from an early age.

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.).



KYCAT conducted CSA training for 65 youth group representatives from the informal settlement of Mathare, focusing on climate-smart techniques suitable for urban and peri-urban settings. The Mathare Agri Mtaani program empowers youth from informal settlements to actively engage in sustainable agriculture despite space and resource constraints. Increasing their expertise on CSA allows urban youth to develop innovative urban farming techniques, helping them expand their economic opportunities.

The Climate Smart Agricultural methods have been successfully scaled to other African YMCAs through the partnership with **Africa Alliance of YMCAs**. **YMCA Togo** and **YMCA Senegal** have successfully implemented climate-smart agriculture initiatives to enhance food security, increase productivity, and equip young people with sustainable farming techniques. In 2024, YMCA Togo established a CSA demonstration site at the 60-hectare Rural Entrepreneurship Training Center (CFER) in Avetonou, Agou Prefecture. In Senegal, the YMCA advanced its CSA farm through careful crop maintenance and monitoring as well as training local farmers and youth, equipping them with practical skills in climate-smart farming.

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 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. 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: 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. During 2024, the young people especially in Ukraine, Palestine and Lebanon suffered due to the devastating wars.



Art sessions help youth develop mental resilience in Ukraine
Photo: YMCA Europe

YMCA Ukraine provided 3660 individuals with psycho-social support like group or individual counselling, art therapy and mindfulness practices. 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. In 2024, 86 violence-affected or disabled youth and women received individual psychosocial sessions or group counselling sessions. By supporting the mental health and rehabilitation needs of vulnerable youth, particularly through vocational rehabilitation services, the project has helped them overcome challenges from disability or political incidents, enhancing their employment prospects and quality of life. **The YMCA in Lebanon** shifted quickly to in-kind humanitarian action starting from August and will shift back to development work, while continuing with mental health initiatives under the emergency action until May 2025.

Protection from unemployment and exploitation: Concerns about exploitation, job insecurity, uncertainty about the necessary steps, and a lack of financial stability can leave people feeling anxious and overwhelmed. These concerns are often justified, as these evolving work structures typically provide fewer safety nets and carry a higher risk of exploitation. Young people, in particular, are especially vulnerable due to their limited experience and junior position 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 embracing new technologies and swiftly acquiring relevant skills offer significant competitive advantages, it is easy to feel outdated and left behind. The rapid pace of technological advancement makes it particularly difficult to keep up, especially for older generations and underserved communities. For those with limited or no internet access—often referred to as ‘digital poverty’—the divide between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ has never been greater.

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. Enhanced IT labs and modernised teaching equipment are found both at **Kenya YMCA National Training Institute** as well as **YMCA Kenya College for Agriculture and Technology**. **YMCA Lebanon** offers digital skills training as a part of their curriculum, equipping a total of 25 participants with essential tools in 2024, helping them prepare for future career and entrepreneurial opportunities. 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. In **Ukraine**, five local YMCA’s offered training on digital skills and cyber security to over 4000 participants.



Digital skills training in Zdolbuniv, Ukraine
Photo: YMCA Europe

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 since 2022, and the evolution from projects to programme have driven further development of different structures and tools. Certain principles are emphasized 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.

2.3.1. Progress against the programme cycle and the Theory of Change

During the third year of the programme strengthening of programmatic approach was evident, while development of improved quality management practices continued. The global implementation of Vision 2030 continued providing stronger guidance for YMCA's work, supported by, among others, the Meaningful Work Strategy (see also chapter 2.2.3). In 2024 a survey report on youth views concerning meaningful work was published, together with a framework further clarifying the concept and providing guidance for its implementation. In April 2025 the Strategic Priorities Practical Guide and the Programming Approach, further tools for the improved application of the Meaningful Work strategy were published.

In 2024, the global activation of the Vision 2030 roadmap continued. YMCA Finland continued hosting workshops for local YMCAs, focusing on two Vision 2030 pillars: Sustainable Planet and Just World. These workshops aimed to ensure local YMCAs understood and adapted their strategies to align with Vision 2030. Vision2030 has also steered YMCA Finland's national strategy development process through 2024, set to be finalised in 2025. 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 continuous to be aligned with the Theory of Change (ToC) and with the logical framework targets, it is closely monitored and continuously refined through robust quality assurance mechanisms. Advocacy plays a key role in amplifying the programme's impact. YMCA has consistently tracked discussions and debates around youth rights, using this insight to advocate for their advancement. This approach has laid a solid foundation for programme development and advocacy efforts, enhancing both the substance and efficiency of the entire programme. Local YMCAs, with their deep understanding of young people's experiences, provide invaluable grassroots input that informs the efforts. Young people remain at the heart of this advocacy, with the YMCA Peacemakers network serving as a vital platform for fostering exchange and adding meaningful value to the programme. Additionally, the organisation of events and the creation of engaging media content have been crucial in drawing attention and forging new partnerships.

2024 was a successful year for YPS advocacy especially for YMCAs in Kenya, The Gambia and Cameroon, who have actively participated in their national networks and working groups. In Kenya, the YMCA has been involved in the process since 2022, when different actors were brought together by YMCA Finland, YMCA Kenya and the Finnish Embassy in Nairobi, to a catalyst stakeholder event. The YMCA in Kenya has strengthened its mandate to bring the youth perspective into the process through its broad network of young people involved in peacebuilding and advocacy activities at the local YMCA associations around the country. It has been previously recognised that there is significant competition around the

processes, and they are often politicised. YMCA has adapted its work while navigating the complex stakeholder dynamics. For example, in Kenya the YMCA focuses also on grassroots advocacy on NAP to reach youth in different counties. Meanwhile, they are members in a coalition which is responsible of lobbying at the national level.

A major milestone was reached in The Gambia. As a member of the Technical Working Group on the NAP, YMCA The Gambia engaged civil society, government, and youth in promoting the YPS agenda which successfully led to the validation of The Gambia's first National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security, officially launched in February 2025. The Gambia YMCA is committed to the popularisation of the NAP, that will take place in 2025, together with other civil society organisations and the National Youth Council of The Gambia. The Gambia is the sixth country in the world to develop a National Action Plan on YPS.

2.3.2. Programme management and organisational learning

YMCA Finland continued to cooperate and harmonise approaches with other YMCAs, notably with Nordic partners, in line with the Movement strengthening strategy of YMCA Vision 2030. The development of the new YMCA Finland strategy started, to be finalised in 2025.

In total, approximately 4.4 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff were employed during the past year, representing a decrease of approximately 0.5 FTE compared to 2023. This reduction was due to the organisational changes and short-term staffing gaps. These structural adjustments have led to a more streamlined and focused operational model. Responsibilities have been more clearly defined, communication flows have improved, and the allocation of resources has become more efficient, supporting the overall effectiveness of the team.

As a result of the organisational team structure update and the associated change negotiations, global education responsibilities were transferred from the YMCA Finland international team to the national team, bringing the function closer to local YMCAs in Finland. From a financing and reporting perspective, however, it continues to be considered part of the development cooperation framework. Additionally, the position of Communications Lead was discontinued. The communications function is now handled by a one Communications Specialist.

In 2024 YMCA Finland took important steps to gain a recognised status as humanitarian actor through the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) Humanitarian Partnership. The Board initiated the process already in 2023 to lay the groundwork, and during 2024 major progress was made to ensure that necessary preconditions are in place. The external audit was carried out during the last trimester of the year and the application was submitted to DG ECHO in November. The 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 significant changes to the programme's theory of change, the logic of the results chain or the project cycle thinking. The main change during

2024 was that the cooperation with the **Ukrainian YMCA**, which was in 2023 funded with YMCA private funds, was incorporated in the MFA funded programme framework. The project supports internally displaced people and host community members, particularly focusing on women, youth and children. In 2024 the work concentrated on psycho-social and educational activities under Livelihood Programme, but in 2025 also peace-related activities will be added to enhance social cohesion and citizenship skills.

Regional cooperation with the African Alliance of YMCAs (AAY) was strengthened, expanding collaboration to national movements in Togo, Cameroon and Burundi. These national movements were identified as partners with capacity to implement interventions focusing on Climate-Smart Agriculture or peacebuilding and YPS advocacy. The Programme Manager and the National General Secretary visited Burundi in 2024 to familiarise themselves with the work of the organisation.

Monitoring and reporting

During the two first years of the programme the guidelines for monitoring and reporting were established and developed to provide clear instructions for the programme team. These guidelines have enhanced consistent and standardised practices across the programme, and in 2024 the partners consistently used the planning, monitoring and reporting tools.

Indicators are assessed and developed throughout the programme cycle. Based on the discussions with partners, the programme team of YMCA Finland prepared detailed instructions for data collection for the indicators that has facilitated the reporting of partners. Furthermore, technical solutions and templates for consolidating results information were further developed based on the learnings and feedback from partners.

As the programme approaches its final year, it has been noted that information about the outcome and (especially) impact level changes is quite challenging to gather. On one hand, intangible changes like increased capacity of youth are not easy to capture through quantitative indicators which make up the majority of the indicators defined for the programme. On the other hand, due to the mobility of the youth, changes at individual level like improved livelihood resilience are not always easy to follow up. During 2025, attempts will be made with partners to find enough evidence of the impact for the final reporting. In the new programme to be launched in 2026 more attention will be paid from the beginning in improved indicators and monitoring methods to better capture programme impact.

While in 2022-2023 the partners reported quarterly, from 2024 reporting has taken place every 4 months with updated templates for narrative and financial reporting. Monitoring visits were conducted to **Ethiopia, Kenya, The Gambia and Ukraine**, while the Middle East countries could not be visited due to ongoing insecurity in the region. Finland's Embassy representatives were met in Addis Ababa and Kiev.

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 used outsourced financial management services (Rantalainen) and electronic financial management software (Heeros) until the end of 2024. From 2025 the financial management service provider and software are changed.

Assessments and evaluation plan

The mid-term review (MTR) of the programme was carried out in 2024 by an external evaluator. The review included a desk review of programme documents, interviews with partners and right-holders either in the partner country or through Microsoft Teams, and meetings with key stakeholders. It also utilised case studies and workshops to gather additional insights. Stakeholder engagement was broad within a given time, involving local partners, right-holders and duty-bearers, government representatives, and representatives from World YMCA and other relevant cooperating entities.

While the overall assessment of the programme was positive, there were several useful recommendations produced by the MTR. The results and recommendations have been thoroughly discussed with all partners in person in a workshop during a global YMCA Accelerator Summit that was organized in October 2024. Further discussions have been carried out with each partner individually during online planning meetings. The recommendations have guided the planning of the new programme 2026-2029 and to some extent when adjusting the plans for 2025. The conclusions of the report have been discussed also at the YMCA Finland board and shared with the MFA as annex to this report.

Some of the main recommendations of MTR that are already being implemented or incorporated in future plans include: strengthened humanitarian aid capacity of partners and triple-nexus approach in programming; further improvement of inclusion and participation of rights-holder groups (especially PLWD); enhanced digital capacities of partners and right-holders; more comprehensive baselines and realistic assumptions and indicators that serve the project follow-up better; encourage partners' participation in clusters and other coordination mechanisms and enhance networking in general; strengthened partners' feedback and complaints mechanisms.

Another major assessment that the organization went through in 2024 was **the ex-ante assessment** carried out by the external auditor in accordance with the terms of reference issued by the **Directorate General of European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO)** in view of obtaining an ECHO humanitarian partnership status. The assessment was an excellent opportunity to review thoroughly the financial, administrative, operational and programme management practices and controls, specially from the point of view of readiness for humanitarian funding. Certain policies and guidelines were developed and updated during the year in view of better incorporating the humanitarian aspects, but also to generally improve the relevance, consistency and efficiency or the organisational principles, rules and practices. For example, the policies and guidelines related to organisational risk management, financial and administrative management, safeguarding and programme management were updated. Overall, the audit carried out by KPMG gave a highly positive review of YMCA Finland with an overall score of 9,52/10 and concluded that the organisation has demonstrated that it is suitable to be considered for entry into a Framework Partnership Agreement with DG ECHO. At the time of writing of this report in April 2025, the certification has been received also from DG ECHO that they have reviewed the application positively and thus YMCA Finland becomes the 8th Finnish organisation with ECHO FPA partnership status.

The recommendations received from the ex-ante assessment have been either already put in practice or included in the action plan of 2025. These include alignment of the environmental safeguarding principles with a generally accepted set of principles, better documentation of staff trainings, inclusion of the best value for money principle in the procurement guidelines and improvement of data protection documentation and related staff capacity.

More generally, the main ongoing appraisal methods used by the organisation are partner capacity assessment, tertiary 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.

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 disability inclusion, peace work approaches and livelihoods and employment support in different context. Also, data collection and indicators were reviewed in the joint meetings. The staff team participated also in Mid-term review kick-off, inception report meeting, interviews and feedback sessions.

YMCA Lebanon organised Capacity Development Workshops during 2024, with the aim of enhancing the capacity of workers, managers and volunteers from the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Lebanon. Ten workshops were planned for the year, however only six were able to be executed due to the changes in security situation. The executed workshops hosted 135 participants (44 male, 71 female). In total 42 CSOs were involved in nominating participants for the workshops and following up with their improvement. The workshops covered vital topics such as digital skills, strategic planning, tools for project management, communication with different stakeholders, public speaking, and group dynamics and leadership.

Africa Alliance of YMCAs trained volunteers of YMCA Burundi on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 and the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda to strengthen their capacity to implement advocacy activities and peacebuilding interventions. The aim of the workshop was on raising awareness and building the capacity of youth organisations and civil society, especially YMCAs, to advocate for and implement the principles of UNSCR 2250.

The outcomes, lessons and recommendations of the ECHO ex-ante assessment and mid-term review have been widely discussed among the staff, with partners and with the board of YMCA Finland. Actions have been planned and implemented to ensure that the learning provided by this external analysis is applied to improve the work.



Africa Alliance of YMCAs supports the capacity of the national YMCAs in the continent.
Photo: Africa Alliance of YMCAs

YMCA Finland team members have participated in external trainings, among others, on logical framework approach, adaptive management and cross-cutting themes. 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 2024.

In-house trainings were organised on updated financial reports and on disability inclusion, both for YMCA Finland staff and for partners. Sessions related to planning of the next programme proposal 2026-2029, development of volunteering opportunities as well as organisation's strategic planning were organised. 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.¹⁰ These practices have helped to ensure the continuity and smooth handover when new staff joined the team during the year.

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

¹⁰ Indicator 3.4: Fostered organisational learning

and experiences. YMCA Europe Working Group on Refugees focuses on coordination and sharing best practices of refugee work.

YMCA has actively participated in various events and meetings organised by **Fingo**, the umbrella organisation of Finnish civil society organisations working for development. YMCA Finland also participates in Fingo's Global education network and quality and impact group.

Youth & Peace working group with **Finn Church Aid**, **Felm** and **CMI** continued regular meetings in 2024. 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. Also, security and situational briefings were shared with FCA, especially related to Ukraine and Lebanon. 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.

2.3.3. Communicating young people's stories and realities

Communication is the means of communicating YMCA Finland's Development Cooperation Programme, its solutions and the results achieved. Communication raises awareness of the global context of youth and their key role in addressing global development challenges.

Development communication also contributes to the public debate on the role of youth at home and abroad, and it promotes the values of Finland's foreign and development policy, such as the rules-based world order, multilateralism and human rights. Communication, advocacy, and Global Citizenship Education (GCE) help to highlight issues related to sustainable development and the conditions for secure societies and peace. Communication has also contributed to emphasising the valuable partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Communication on the Development Cooperation Programme

In 2024, 24 online news stories on development and peace issues and over 87 news and current affairs posts on development issues were published on various social media channels, including Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

YMCA Finland participated in several national events on development themes. Two panel discussions on the GCE in youth work and youth as effective peace educators were produced for the biggest event of the youth sector, NUORI2024, YOUTH2024.

For the World Village Festival 2024 in May, a dedicated YMCA Peace and Sports area was built up, where young people engaged in GCE at local YMCAs created a number of activities and games linked to sustainable development throughout the festival weekend. The area also provided information about the Youth, Peace and Livelihoods Development Cooperation Programme and YMCA Finland's Youth Peace Award. YMCA Peace and Sports was a great opening at an event that attracted over 45,000 people and had not previously reached young

audiences. Encouraged by the experience, a longer-term partnership with the festival organisation was agreed upon.

Supporting young people in crisis

The YMCA's main tasks are emphasised in times of crisis and uncertainty. Our aim is to advocate for and protect the rights of young people, while simultaneously fostering confidence in the future during changing circumstances and at the most challenging moments.

In the midst of the war of aggression by Russia, the YMCA in Ukraine continued to be supported intensively. The content of communications on Ukraine highlighted YMCA Ukraine's programmes to help internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other vulnerable groups, as well as YMCA Finland's partnership in supporting YMCA Ukraine.

The World Village Festival provided an opportunity to discuss the East Jerusalem YMCA's work amid the escalated conflict in the West Bank. The second panelist of 'The NGOs in Palestine' interview, part of the Speaker's Stage programme, was YMCA Finland's Programme Manager Milla Nummenmaa, who shed light on the situation of young people in the West Bank and how the ongoing war in Gaza affects their daily lives.

The war in Gaza and its escalation into both the West Bank and Lebanon were also covered during the year through articles and social media updates. The online news channel Maailma.net, World.net, which focused on development and human rights issues, published an interview with the Programme Director of YMCA Lebanon, organised by YMCA Finland. The aim of the article was to raise awareness of the conflict's impact on the lives of the Lebanese, especially young people, and to highlight YMCA Lebanon's ability to adapt its programmes to respond to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the country and support youth amidst loss, insecurity, fear, and frustration.



YMCA Lebanon helped more than 1200 internally displaced families.

Photo: YMCA Lebanon

Highlighting the role of young people as peacemakers

One objective of development communication is to ensure that youth rights and empowerment, livelihoods, and decent work remain integral to the development debate. The aim is to bring global challenges affecting young people into the broader discussion and ensure that their voices are heard.

Young individuals dedicated to peace and hailing from diverse backgrounds were particularly highlighted in the Youth Peace Award campaign. The biennial award showcases the diversity, breadth, and impact of young people's efforts for peace. The 2024 award was presented to a young photographer and artist Karun Verma, who has played a crucial role in amplifying the voice and agency of young men from ethnic minorities through art. The global and local peace work of two other peacebuilders, racism researcher Sonja Sirviö and peace activist Julia Jernvall, who were among the top three nominees, was also featured through a collaborative campaign video, articles, and social media posts.

The Peace Award and its recipient gained commendable public visibility across six different publications, ranging from TV to sustainability magazines and from radio to podcasts. The campaign culminated in a panel discussion during Youth Peace Week in September, where the three shortlisted nominees discussed peace at an event organised in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Peace Mediation Centre at Helsinki City Hall.

2.3.3. Advocacy and cooperation for peace and social justice

YMCA Finland's advocacy work focuses on the global Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda and on Finland's National Action Plan (NAP). 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.

Strengthening the YPS agenda

YMCA Finland contributed actively to the development and advocacy work of the **Finnish Youth, Peace and Security network**, including participation in a delegation to Brussels, where awareness of the YPS agenda was promoted among EU parliamentarians, officials, and civil society organisations. YMCA was actively involved in the National Action Plan Community of Practice facilitated by Search for Common Ground, and YPS expertise was also shared through the participation in the annual conference organized by the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa, titled *"Investing in Dialogues for Peace and Sustainable Development in the MENA Region"*, held in Amman, Jordan. YMCA Finland also met with Swedish YPS network to share lessons learnt over the years.

As Finland's first **National Action Plan on YPS** approached its conclusion at the end of 2024, YMCA Finland was invited together with the YPS network to the [hearing of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Finnish Parliament](#) to discuss the recent national YPS report and the next NAP. Youth consultations were held in the autumn to inform the development of a new action plan. As part of this process, YMCA Finland together with local associations,

organised four consultation events where young people from diverse backgrounds discussed various priorities for the new plan. Nationally, these consultations reached a significant portion of the youth who participated in live consultations.

YMCA continued to convene the **Youth and Peace working group** together with Finn Church Aid, the Felm, and CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation. The group explores and develops ways to promote the objectives of the YPS action plan in international work, helping to sharpen the YPS focus within the participating organizations. YMCA also participated in the activities of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers.

YPS themes were highlighted in various contexts by YMCA Finland. During Youth Peace Week an event related to YPS was organized in collaboration with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' Centre for Peace Mediation. The event also served as the launch for the **Youth Peace Prize**, with the shortlisted nominees Karun Verma, Sonja Sirviö, and Julia Jernvall participating as panelists. In YMCA's Peace and Sports area of the World Village Festival the YPS agenda was visible and¹¹ YMCA also contributed to the event's speaker programme, which focused on NGO work in Palestine.

Capacity-sharing to advocate on Youth Peace and Security agenda with 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 deepened as well.

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. **In Kenya**, YMCA has been promoting YPS ambassadors and champions at the local level, improving the youth's capacity to prevent and mitigate conflicts by equipping them with practical tools and frameworks for conflict analysis and intervention as well as engagements with local authorities. **In The Gambia**, YMCA has been active in the national YPS National Action Plan development process, and the highlight of the year was the successful validation of The Gambia's NAP, demonstrating a strong government commitment to addressing youth-related peace and security issues.

In June, international directors from YMCA movements in Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark met in Helsinki with the Strategic Director of the World YMCA, to discuss the YPS agenda. [The event culminated in a joint meeting with the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs](#), together with representatives from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Nordic Embassies.

Platforms for youth engagement

In 2024 a total of 71 Peacemakers volunteers participated in network events, with 156 recorded instances of engagement. This shows greater engagement of local YMCA

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

Peacemakers groups and continuous increase from past years (25 volunteers in 2022 and 40 in 2023).¹²

Various events organised by volunteers provided them with opportunities to contribute their time, skills, and enthusiasm. These events served as platforms for learning, networking, and advocating for peace and social change. During the year, volunteers participated in two international YMCA events, in addition to several events in Finland. One young person who participated in the Change Agent training programme completed the training in 2024 and took part in the YMCA World Alliance's Accelerator Summit conference held in Mombasa in October, where the official closing ceremony of the training took place. Four young people participated in the annual meeting of YMCA Europe, as part of a six-member delegation.

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.

The first thematic group of the Peacemakers initiative began its activities in 2024. [The Climate Group](#) held its kick-off weekend in March and then met monthly. It planned and implemented various campaigns and produced communication content for the YMCA social media channels and website. In 2024, eight volunteers participated actively in the group.

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, **COP29**. Members of YMCA Finland's Climate Group participated in COP29 with remote participation badges.

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.

Risk management approaches and tools

YMCA's proactive risk management approach effectively identifies and addresses emerging risks. Categorising risks into contextual, programmatic, and institutional categories provides clarity on potential impacts and levels. This breakdown helps to understand how risks might affect the organisation or implementation of the programme. Regular updates of the matrix including adjusting of likelihood and impact levels based on evolving contexts allows the

¹² Indicator 3.3: Number of Finnish youth volunteers engaged in the programme

programme to adapt strategies effectively, mitigate disruptions and ensure the safety of staff and beneficiaries, especially in conflict-affected areas.

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 requires careful assessment of potential unintended consequences alongside risk identification and mitigation.

Collaboration and communication with partners are 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.

Updates to risk matrix in 2024

In late 2024 the programme's risk matrix underwent updates, first related to the inclusion of Ukraine project into the programme. The specific risks related to working in a context of armed conflict were added to the matrix. The second set of updates were made when preparing the annual plans, when the matrix was adjusted to take better into account the humanitarian and nexus approaches following the recommendations of the ex-ante audit for the ECHO humanitarian partnership.

Throughout 2024, armed conflicts continued or escalated notably in at least three programme countries, namely **Ukraine, Palestine, and Lebanon**. Consequently, five risks related to specific potential causes of the conflict situation were added to the matrix. Three of them are directly related to project partners and their ability to carry out the programme safely in the context of war, and two related to the risks for YMCA Finland when carrying out monitoring visits to the countries in the situation of armed conflict. Additionally, a risk related to the departure of young (especially male) staff in a war context due to recruitment by the armed forces or avoidance of that was added to the matrix, especially Ukrainian context in mind.

During the annual planning 2025 two further risks were added to the matrix, one related to the potential restrictions that authorities might pose on the operations or property of partners in contexts where governments tend to control civil society actors sometimes with arbitrary measures, and another related to the compliance of partners with the humanitarian principles. While both new risks concern the space of the civil society and humanitarian actors in particular, YMCA Finland has much more possibilities to mitigate the latter risk through capacity development, open discussion and building mutual trust.

Risk materialisation in 2024

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. Despite the escalation of the situation throughout 2024 and following increase in certain risks, they were successfully managed, largely due to the

experience of project staff. Staff safety and mobility/access restrictions emerged as major challenges due to occupation-related measures, particularly in remote and marginalised areas where programme interventions were conducted.¹³

In response, the YMCA's Rehabilitation Programme adapted its approach to reaching participants, ensuring that essential support continued despite the heightened risks. Transitioning to remote work during periods of heightened violence and conducting activities close to the participants' residences ensured the continuity of support while prioritising safety. It is worth mentioning that the EJMCA is currently working on developing an Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan (EPRP) to establish a structured approach for managing future risks more effectively.

Other materialised risks like currency fluctuations and cultural challenges regarding female participation due to strict tribal norms were also successfully managed, for example by assigning male and female counsellors to facilitate interventions.

In **Lebanon**, a major risk materialised as the conflict along Lebanon's southern border that started in 2023 consistently escalated into a full-scale war in September 2024, leading to widespread displacement and infrastructure damage. In addition, attacks in the Red Sea caused major shipping delays, leading to soaring freight costs and increased insurance rates. This drove up inflation and made essential goods more expensive and harder to access in Lebanon.¹⁴

Despite having a risk management strategy in place, the rapid escalation of conflict and the severity of supply chain issues went beyond what could be fully mitigated. Certain development cooperation activities were cancelled and instead the YMCA Lebanon was able to reallocate funds to provide emergency aid, including medicines, clean water, food, hygiene kits, and shelter materials for displaced people.

In **Ethiopia**, the political instability and conflict in the Amhara region continued posing challenges to project implementation, particularly in grassroots peace promotion activities. The activities were therefore mostly postponed in Amhara region, except some events organised for small groups. The rapid rise in inflation and currency devaluation were anticipated risks, but they were realised on a scale that was not expected. Resulting economic pressures affected participants' ability to engage fully, as their focus shifted to immediate survival needs rather than long-term peacebuilding efforts. Additional outreach efforts were made to motivate people to participate.

In **The Gambia**, institutional risks were identified during autumn 2024, relating to the partner organisation's internal controls and organisational and administrative capacity. These issues were disclosed through YMCA Finland's active project monitoring, triggered by delays and gaps in internal reporting and documentation. In accordance with established procedures, the next funding instalment was postponed until adequate reporting, despite some delays in implementation.

¹³ <https://ymca.fi/the-first-anniversary-of-the-gaza-war-reminds-ous-of-the-human-cost-of-the-war/>

¹⁴ <https://ymca.fi/the-middle-east-crisis-is-pushing-also-lebanon-to-the-brink-of-the-abyss/>

Further assessment revealed weaknesses in financial management, internal communication, leadership arrangements, and the board's oversight role, partly due to a leadership transition. These challenges were also examined in the mid-term review, which included on-site interviews by an external evaluator in October 2024. YMCA Finland's leadership also held a dialogue with the partner's vice-chairperson during the Accelerator Summit that same month.

As a result, certain activities were delayed – such as start-up kit distribution, advocacy efforts, and training centre expansion. In response, YMCA Finland prioritised organisational support to strengthen governance and sustainability, including support for the new chairperson and partially renewed board. Enhanced monitoring and communication measures are in place for 2025 to ensure transparency and mitigate future risks.

In **Kenya**, continued increase of commodity prices was addressed by sourcing cheaper yet good quality commodities and buying materials in bulk. Anxiety brought about by the challenging political environment was tackled by promoting peace and advocating for dialogue between the government and the protesting youth. Turnover of staff was a challenge for the continuity of some activities and transfer of knowledge, and therefore in the continuation YMCA Kenya strives to review the remuneration and working environment to retain key staff.

In **Ukraine** the main materialised risks were anticipated effects that the ongoing war had on the activities: air alarms and power outages forced the local YMCAs involved in the project to postpone and reschedule activities several times. By remaining flexible and adaptive the project managed to mitigate the risks and achieve the targets.

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

4. Locally led development and local ownership

YMCA Finland works with independent partner YMCAs that are deeply rooted in their local communities and respected advocates for youth rights. These partners maintain full ownership of their projects based on local priorities, strengths, and a shared global vision. YMCA Finland supports them with capacity building and strategic scaling, helping expand successful programmes and improve financial sustainability.

Trusting their proven local expertise, YMCA Finland supports partners' autonomy to adapt projects according to the needs and realities of their context. Rather than a traditional donor-recipient dynamic, the relationship is built on mutual respect and equal partnership as part of the global YMCA movement.

Strategic Alignment and Movement Strengthening

In 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). Movement Strengthening is viewed as a continuous process aimed at developing robust and resilient organisations 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.

During 2024 the team conducted a Movement-wide consultation and created a 7-year YMCA Strategic Alignment and Movement Strengthening Global Strategy and started drafting an action plan for 2025-2026. The 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 outlines the following priorities: 1) Build a coordination and alignment framework between all stakeholders engaged in Movement Strengthening work in the YMCA; 2) Agree and deploy a common set of core Movement Strengthening tools; 3) Ensure an efficient resource allocation, management and synergies for Movement Strengthening global work; 4) Support National YMCAs on the strategic alignment process with YMCA Vision 2030. A Joint Health Assessment was concluded will be piloted throughout 2025.

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 Climate Smart Agriculture project of **YMCA Kenya** has collaborated with various stakeholders like government extension staff, Kenya Plant Health Inspection Services (KEPHIS), and local farmers. Cooperation with Helsinki University research on climate adaptation and resilience is also on course. Two Kenyan universities with Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO) have been carrying out research at Kenya YMCA College of Agriculture and Technology (KYCAT). Directorate of Veterinary Services and Ministry of Agriculture has offered the livestock production students from KYCAT opportunities for internship and field attachment.

YMCA The Gambia relied on various partners such as The Gambia Police Force, Red Cross, Peace Hub, Ruel Foundation, Peace Ambassadors The Gambia, Peace Hub and the University of The Gambia that contributed by providing expert knowledge and valuable support during advocacy activities related to Youth, Peace, and Security. The Government of The Gambia, National Youth Council, UNFPA, and UNDP were key partners in the Technical Working Group of the YPS National Action Plan process.

In Palestine, East Jerusalem YMCA (EJYMCA) is a key member of the UN protection cluster and leads Mental Health and Psycho-Social Support (MHPSS) working groups in 4 districts. EJYMCA staff attends regular meetings to stay updated on coordination of the protection and MHPSS action with other local and international organisations.

Local community engagement is vital for the successful implementation of the programme in each partner country. Their involvement, commitment, and sense of ownership are key to the project's long-term sustainability and impact. Local communities bring valuable perspectives, knowledge, and resources that improve the design, execution, and assessment of project activities. Their active participation ensures that projects remain relevant and effective in meeting the needs and aspirations of the community.

As part of the advocacy efforts, community outreach activities are organised in several partner countries. These events give community members a platform to express their concerns and provide the YMCA with important insights into the challenges faced by youth and their communities. This inclusive approach engages local communities, youth, elders, and people with disabilities in decision-making and programme development. It ensures that a wide range of perspectives and needs are considered, fostering ownership and accountability. Transparency is upheld through consistent information sharing, reporting, and mechanisms for feedback and complaints.

Capacity building and empowerment

Programme's collaborative and community-focused approach empowers local partners and communities, fostering sustainable development and long-term impact. 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) 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 **Ethiopia**, the youth who gained skills in peace building and advocacy participated successfully in the advocacy workshops, demonstrating the importance of creating platforms for right-holders to use their skills and voice their concerns to influence policy. The commitment shown by government officials to review policies based on youth feedback affirmed that empowering right-holders to engage in dialogue with policymakers is essential for ensuring that their needs and perspectives are considered in decision-making processes.

YMCA Lebanon has been able to foster greater engagement from youth participants. Many programme participants have since expressed interest in joining future YMCA initiatives, demonstrating the project's success in building leadership pathways for young people.

At the YMCA Kenya KYCAT training centre the youth provided valuable insights and feedback during consultations with stakeholders by identifying the key challenges and needs within their communities regarding soil and water management, helping to shape the direction of the proposed training manual. They also actively participated in identifying potential resources and partners for developing the curriculum in a cost-effective manner. This has improved their skills and empowered the youth showing them that they can meaningfully contribute to issues affecting them.

YMCA partners demonstrate improved capacity and increased participation in civil society networks. As result of capacity building measures, **Kenya YMCA** staff members were equipped to integrate peacebuilding strategies across other thematic areas like climate action and community development. In **Kenya, Gambia, Cameroon and Burundi**, engagement in the National Action Plan (NAP) on YPS has positioned YMCA as a recognised stakeholder in national peace and security policies. Active participation in Technical Committees has enhanced the organisation's ability to influence youth policies and integrate peacebuilding into national frameworks.

YMCAs in the Gambia, Ethiopia and Palestine reported reinforced ability to engage diverse groups, including marginalised youth, women, and rural communities. This inclusivity strengthened the grassroots impact and boosted the position of YMCAs in the community as the entity that reaches out to marginalised groups through networking with community-based and civil society organizations.

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. YPS is also 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.

Measures in the Finland's National Action Plan under the priority area of Participation	Examples from the programme
Finland raises awareness of the positive influence of youth participation in peace and security matters	YMCA Peacemakers groups in six countries. In the groups young people learn about their rights and possibilities to build peace in their community and society. In 2024 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. In Cameroon the process was initiated with YMCA involvement.
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 2024 there were no exchange meetings due to the security challenges in partner countries, but one is planned for 2025.
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 returning refugees 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.

Measures in the Finland's National Action Plan under the priority area of Prevention	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, Ukraine, Palestine and Lebanon.

Measures in the Finland's National Action Plan under the priority area of Partnerships	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. A highlight of the year was the successful validation of The Gambia's NAP, YMCA's active involvement in the national YPS National Action Plan development process.

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 are 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, which have all ended in 2024.

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 also promotes youth participation in peacebuilding efforts and advocacy related to the Youth, Peace and Security agenda.

Finland's country programme for Palestinian territories focuses on education, inclusive society, and resilience. In Palestine, the YMCA project emphasises 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 or vocational education. 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: Henok and Tolera

Henok and Tolera are two youths from Adama city, Ethiopia, who faced unemployment and limited opportunities. Initially, they visited YMCA Adama seeking services but struggled to find stable employment. In 2022, they seized the opportunity to enrol in a five-day training session aimed at developing youth peace ambassadors for grassroots peace promotion.

Throughout the training, both demonstrated remarkable dedication and enthusiasm. After completing the programme, they became active youth peace ambassadors, facilitating over 100 grassroots sessions in Adama. Their efforts not only contributed to promoting peace but also helped build a sense of community and connection among residents.

Inspired by their experience and newfound skills, Henok and Tolera decided to pursue further opportunities. They applied for business skills training and successfully completed a three-day course. Recognizing the potential for entrepreneurship, they teamed up with three other youths to create a comprehensive business plan. Their hard work paid off when their plan was selected for startup funding.

With the financial support, Henok and Tolera launched a water-selling business, which has now become a source of income for them. Their journey showcases the transformative impact of training and support in empowering youth, fostering economic independence, and promoting peace within their community. Henok and Tolera's story serves as an inspiring example of how targeted interventions can lead to meaningful change in the lives of young people.

