STRATEGY 2025–28



Fair opportunities worldwide



Our vision is a just world in which all women and men determine the course of their lives in dignity and security, using environmental resources in a sustainable manner.

Tak'en Weldegebriel (left) and Alem Gebremichael are able to continue working in their fields in the arid climate of northern Ethiopia, thanks to a rainwater-fed irrigation pond, which will sustain their crop throughout the dry season. © Christian Bobst

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Fabiola Llanquipacha from Bolivia, a country with high unemployment among young people, has set up her own business as a solar panel installer, thanks to start-up advice and improved conditions for young female entrepreneurs. © Mauricio Panozo



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Example: Vegetable cultivation in Tanzania is a dynamic, rapidly growing sector with significant potential, especially for young people. To strengthen the local economy, Helvetas is supporting producers and processors along the entire value chain. Farmers not only learn new cultivation techniques, but also how to make products with their harvest to generate more income. With cold storage, solar dryers, warehouses, and access to financial resources to make investments, Helvetas is also strengthening supplier and processing segments. This creates jobs and improves food security.

Peanuts become peanut butter. Processing agricultural products increases their value-added. © Yusuf Msafiri

Why we are here

Despite significant progress in recent decades towards a life in dignity for all, poverty, inequality, and exclusion remain pervasive and are being exacerbated by new challenges associated with climate change and geopolitical conflicts.

Who we are

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to alleviating poverty, advancing human rights, and creating fair opportunities worldwide.

What we do

We support under-served and marginalized people to improve their lives. Together, we work to create new perspectives, enhance basic rights, and strengthen good governance.

How we do it

We promote inclusive systemic change by implementing development and humanitarian response projects, providing thematic advice, and speaking out in policy debates. We work with local partners to ensure local ownership and sustainability.

PEOPLE ARE AT THE CENTER OF OUR WORK

For over 70 years, Helvetas has been working to alleviate poverty and to promote equity and justice. We are committed to creating fair and inclusive opportunities worldwide by combining development support and humanitarian response to address systemic constraints and structural injustices.

> Albertine Soamanjara is a vanilla farmer in northern Madagascar. he has increased her production by working with Helvetas. To avoid over-reliance on global market prices, she also runs a small restaurant. © Patrick Rohr

WHO WE ARE

Helvetas Madagasc

Helvetas is a non-profit organization, with a strong member base in Switzerland and sister organizations in the United States and Germany. We are part of Alliance 2015, a strategic network of European non-governmental organizations. Helvetas is denominationally neutral and politically independent.





We advocate for and safeguard political, social, economic, environmental, and cultural rights.

HELVETAS

Our engagement is based on solidarity and equitable partnerships.







Equity and Inclusion

We are committed to social equity and strive for fair opportunities for all people, regardless of age, origin, language, religion, culture, ethnicity, political convictions, or gender identity.



Self-Determination We uphold the principle of participatory and self-determined development and humanitarian action.

Abdias Bio Sika, Helvetas Benin

WHAT INFLUENCES OUR WORK

Over recent decades, there has been a welcome downward trend in global poverty, with significant advances in democracy, primary education, technology, environmental awareness, and life expectancy. However, this trend has slowed and in some parts of the world even reversed. The number of people living in extreme poverty increased in 2020 for the first time in a gener-

ation. Many of the targets set in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seem increasingly unattainable, especially regarding poverty, hunger, climate, and gender. Today, 1.1 billion people experience acute multidimensional poverty, predominantly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Even in middle-income countries, a significant proportion of people live on less than USD 2.15 per day. Fragile states host the majority of internally displaced persons and refugees, which intensifies pressure on scarce resources. The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have proven to be significant setbacks in global development, affecting the global economy and widening inequalities. Climate change is an ongoing and increasing threat, with extreme weather events, rising temperatures, and disrupted water availability all negatively impacting livelihoods and food security. The natural resources on which we all ultimately depend are being used up. New or long-simmering conflicts, poor governance, economic instability, and environmental degradation are driving mobility, migration, and displacement. Political viewpoints are increasingly polarized, with democracy in question and authoritarian governments on the rise. In all these negative processes, women and vulnerable populations, including indigenous peoples, have been disproportionately affected.

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for sustainable development and the fulfillment of basic human rights. The steady increase in literacy rates worldwide empowers individuals to make informed decisions and fosters the critical thinking needed to address complex societal issues. The large numbers of young people in many low- and middle-income countries represent major potential for economic growth and social development. Technological advancements continue to revolutionize ways of working and communicating. Urban centers bring together diverse people and can become hubs of innovation. Investments in gender equality not only advance women's rights, but also widen the pool of human resources. This brings new perspectives to address global challenges. By harnessing opportunities such as these, leveraging our expertise and partnerships, Helvetas can play a meaningful role in fostering inclusive and sustainable development.

Borana, in southern Ethiopia, saw five rainy seasons fail in a row. Helvetas has supported people in need with goats, among other things. © Franz Thiel

> SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GALS



WHAT WE EMPHASIZE IN THIS STRATEGY

We are paying particular attention to five strategic topics:

Climate Change

Global heating profoundly impacts up to 3.6 billion vulnerable people and is a key factor in many areas in which we work. Accordingly, by 2028, at least 40% of our development and humanitarian actions will be specifically guided by an understanding of climate risks and will contribute to building climate resilience.

Fit for Fragility

We recognize the complexity and risks of working in fragile contexts. We strive to be context-responsive, conflict-sensitive, and innovative in our partnerships – ensuring that our actions address humanitarian needs, contribute to development, and foster peace.

Partnership and Localization

We advance local ownership of all development and humanitarian interventions in which we are involved by promoting and investing in strategic partnerships, and by acting increasingly as a knowledge broker, convener, advisor, facilitator, and advocate.

Urban Engagement

With urbanization on the rise, we are accentuating our urban focus through an Integrated Urban Development approach that promotes more inclusive, safer, and greener cities. We concentrate on emerging towns and secondary cities, while also engaging in larger cities.

Digital Transformation

The rapid global pace of digitalization holds huge potential for equitable development, but also considerable risks of exploitation or exclusion. We are accelerating our own digital transformation to enhance efficiency and impact. In our partner countries, we will foster socially inclusive digital innovations.

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Digital tools help young people to further their education and learn wherever they are. They are especially advantageous to young women who have many family commitments. © KM Asad





Helvetas combines three mutually reinforcing intervention mechanisms: we implement projects together with our partners; we provide technical advice and strengthen thematic competencies; and we engage in awareness-raising, policy dialogue, and advocacy together with our partners. This is how we contribute to sustainable systemic change that improves lives in the short and long term at scale, strengthens our partners, and fosters conducive frame conditions.



Example: Torrential rivers and deep gorges make the journey to school, a health center, a government office, or the market particularly long and hazardous. Over the past 60 years, Helvetas has collaborated with the SDC and the Nepalese government to build more than 10,000 suspension bridges and train Nepalese professionals in the process. These Nepalese professionals are now passing on their knowledge of suspension bridge construction in numerous countries across the Global South, including Ethiopia, where local professionals have built more than 150 new such bridges.



WE ARE CONVINCED THAT EFFECTIVE CHANGE ...

... must include the most disadvantaged and marginalized people.

This is why we uphold the "leave no one behind" principle and why gender equality and social equity are core pillars of all our internal and external activities and partnerships.

... requires regular learning, adaptation, and innovation.

This is why we strive to continuously learn from our own and others' experiences through a collaborative culture, systematically apply lessons learned and adapt our work, and consciously foster innovation.

... requires strong local ownership and leadership.

This is why we aim for equal, strategic, and lasting partnerships, supported by conducive frame conditions at the national and regional level. We support drivers of change, engage in multi-stakeholder initiatives, and participate in networks and alliances.

... is not about quick wins, but inclusive change at the system level.

This is why we focus on root causes and constraints, build ownership and capacities of system actors, and emphasize sustainability and scale to ensure that achievements continue beyond Helvetas' engagement.

... can only be achieved if we anticipate and mitigate unintended, negative consequences of our actions.

This is why we are engaged in managing all our interventions in a context- and conflict-sensitive manner. This helps us to avoid harm and to increase social cohesion.

... requires addressing unfulfilled rights.

This is why human rights are at the core of our work. We apply a people-centered, human-rights based approach in our promotion of political, social, economic, environmental, and cultural rights.

With her wheelchair and a course in animal husbandry, Kolpona (middle) is able to manage a herd of cows, goats, and chickens on her own. © Franca Roiatti

WHAT ARE OUR GOALS AND AREAS OF WORK



There are three thrusts to all our development and humanitarian response activities: ensuring basic rights, creating new perspectives, and strengthening good governance. We translate these thrusts into three thematic working areas: Water, Food and Climate; Skills, Jobs and Income; and Voice, Inclusion and Cohesion

thereby contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
We seek to maximize synergies between these different thematic specializations, all of which are guided by our transversal themes of Gender and Social Equity, Learning and Innovation, and Advocacy.



Example: Sucre, the constitutional capital of Bolivia, is highly dependent on its groundwater reserves. Increased urbanization means more construction, and this is compacting the soil. As a result, there is less absorption of rainwater, which instead runs off, unused. Due to climate change, it is raining less frequently and more concentratedly, which is exacerbating the problem. Helvetas is supporting Sucre to identify nature-based solutions to make the city more climate-resilient. The local population is extensively involved in the search for these solutions to ensure that they will support the ensuing changes. In this way, unused green spaces have become community gardens, and students are collecting data to improve the city's urban planning. These are all pieces of a puzzle to help create a climate-resilient, water-secure future for Sucre.

Carla Jaliri (left) is a Professor at the University of San Francisco Xavier in Sucre, Bolivia. Together with student Sarah Nava, she discusses data collection for urban planning purposes. © Mauricio Panozo

EMU

WORKING AREA

WATER, FOOD & CLIMATE

Ensuring

Basic Rights

Ana Maria Santos (left), Zenobia Yucra, and Cirilo Cruz (right) in their community garden in Sucre, Bolivia, which helps create food security and increase the rainwater absorption of an otherwise highly compacted soil. © Mauricio Panozo

OUR GOAL

People have greater water and food security, have built resilience to climate change and disasters, and are managing natural resources and landscapes in a sustainable manner.

WORKING AREA

WATER, FOOD & CLIMATE

Clean water and sanitation, along with the absence of hunger, are basic human rights. Yet nearly 2 billion people lack reliable drinking water, which leads to waterborne diseases and preventable deaths. Even more people, 3.6 billion, lack adeguate sanitation, which both compromises human dignity and facilitates the spread of diseases. Food insecurity is affecting both rural and urban populations; today more than 735 million people face hunger. Extreme weather events and more insidious changes in seasonal rainfall and temperatures caused by global heating are disrupting agricultural production and water availability. The overexploitation

of natural resources and an ongoing, devastating loss of biodiversity represent further threats.

Helvetas addresses these challenges by working with local communities and wider stakeholders to promote technical and institutional solutions and build knowledge and skills that result in safe water, sanitation, food security, climate and disaster resilience, as well as improved access to markets and services. We are paving the way for a more sustainable, equitable, and resilient future that bridges the gap between rural and urban areas.





OBJECTIVES

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) & Water Governance

People have access to sustainable and equitable domestic and irrigation water, sanitation, and hygiene, even in humanitarian contexts, and their voices on these topics are strengthened.

Food & Nutrition

People have year-round access to sustainable and healthy food as part of sustainably managed, biodiverse, low-carbon landscapes, and food systems. They are supported by technical, financial, and market services.

Climate & Disaster Resilience

People enhance their resilience to climate and disaster risks through local actions, improved competencies, and accountable public, civic, and private actors. Global cooperation based on climate justice increases.

Bridges & Roads

People have increased access to markets, schools, and health centers thanks to newly built and well-maintained trail bridges, rural roads, and tracks.

OUR MILESTONE FOR 2025-28:

Over 18 million people

benefit from sustainable access to water, sanitation and hygiene, increased agricultural productivity, improved dietary diversity, and enhanced climate resilience, as well as improved access to markets, schools, and health centers.

Creating New Perspectives A job fair to promote a green economy in Helvetas North Macedonia. Helvetas has worked with young people to establish the idea of sustainability in business and society, which is paving the way for all sorts of innovative initiatives. © Helvetas North Macedonia

OUR GOAL

People as well as micro, small, and medium enterprises benefit from better education and market systems that lead to enhanced access to decent employment and income opportunities. This contributes to a greener economy and to sustainable development.

WORKING AREA

SKILLS, JOBS & INCOME

The intersection of skills, jobs, and income is a crucial driver of individual well-being and societal prosperity in both rural and urban areas. Basic education and vocational skills serve as foundations for fostering employment opportunities and active participation in society. Meanwhile, the private sector plays a pivotal role in creating employment. Global crises such as pandemics, climate change, and armed conflicts exacerbate existing skill mismatches, negatively impact micro, small, and medium enterprises and entrepreneurs, and amplify income inequalities. This particularly affects vulnerable individuals such as women and young people. More than 60 million children of

primary school age are currently deprived of schooling worldwide, and one young person in five is not in employment, education, or training. About 600 million new jobs need to be created by 2030, just to keep pace with demographic growth.

Helvetas adopts a holistic approach across the continuum of basic education, vocational skills training, and private sector development – seeing micro, small, and medium enterprises as drivers of job creation and economic growth. Helvetas works for a green and just economic transition to ensure that development is inclusive and environmentally sustainable.



OBJECTIVES

Basic Education

Children, young people and adults have access to quality, flexible formal and non-formal basic education, including life skills training and digital learning. Gender disparities in education are reduced.

Vocational Skills Development

Young people and adults have strengthened their market-oriented vocational and social competencies, are in (self-)employment, and are gaining income. Vocational education and training systems are improved.

Private Sector Development

Micro, small, and medium enterprises and entrepreneurs contribute to sustainable and green economic growth and create new or better jobs for young, disadvantaged, and marginalized people.

OUR MILESTONE FOR 2025-28:

Over 3 million people

are empowered through basic education, have strengthened their vocational and social competencies, and have increased employment and income. 60,000 micro, small, and medium enterprises and entrepreneurs contribute to sustainable, green economic growth, and create new and better job opportunities.

VOICE, INCLUSION & COHESION

A minister visits farmers in Kyrgyzstan who are advocating at the political level for better, publicly supported irrigation infrastructure. © Erkin Abakirov

Strengthening Good Governance

OUR GOAL

People, including those left behind or living in fragility, contribute to and benefit from more equitable, cohesive, inclusive, and just societies.

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OBJECTIVES

People exercise their civic rights and benefit from

social or economic services provided by more

WORKING AREA

VOICE, INCLUSION & COHESION

Global challenges can only be addressed systemically and sustainably if people can make their voices heard and societal cohesion is encouraged. In the absence of good governance fostering such social inclusion, discriminatory laws are enacted, and beneficial laws fail to be implemented. Human rights are not guaranteed, and people's access to justice is denied. The growing trend of polarization between people of different religions, ethnicity, nationality, and political opinion is undermining attempts towards greater equality, equity, and human solidarity. Worryingly, in many parts of the world, access to services is becoming more elusive and benefits more exclusive. Cohesion and peace are at risk, and protection is unattainable in an increasing number of places.

In partnership with local actors, Helvetas works with and for under-served and marginalized communities, especially women, young people, migrants, and refugees, to ensure that they benefit from appropriate services. We do this in development and humanitarian contexts, working in partnership with public, private, and civil society actors to provide inclusive and responsive services in rural and urban areas. We aim to create opportunities and spaces for civil society and the public and private sectors to engage with each other meaningfully and agree on joint solutions that reduce inequalities, respect human rights, enhance social cohesion, and ensure safe and productive migration.



OUR MILESTONES FOR 2025-28:

Over 13 million people are supported to access and

benefit from more responsive social, economic, and protection services.

Over 3 million people

are supported to claim and exercise their rights, and to contribute to, and benefit from, more socially inclusive policies.

responsive public, private, and civil society actors.

Governance & Civic Space

People, especially those living with inequality, work together with public, private, and civil society actors to prevent and reduce conflict. They also benefit from related initiatives, policies, and services.

Migration

People, especially migrants and forcibly displaced people, benefit from social, economic, and protection policies and services.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Enabling

Resilient

Recovery

OUR GOAL

People affected by acute disasters and prolonged crises can effectively cope with their immediate and long-term effects through humanitarian response. They are thus able to gradually rebuild their lives in a manner that helps them become more resilient to recurrent crises.

After the earthquake in Nepal, Mitra Tamang (right) went through a Helvetas training program to learn how to build earthquake-proof housing. In the wake of such extreme events, Helvetas works with state and local experts to

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Between 2018 and 2021, global humanitarian needs surged dramatically, with a 70% increase in people requiring assistance. The COVID-19 pandemic was a key factor in this period. Persistent and complex crises have become the norm, with conflict, climate change, and socioeconomic instability as primary drivers. Climate-related disasters exacerbate conflict and fragility, erode resilience, hinder recovery efforts, and perpetuate vulnerability. Concurrently, there is a growing food crisis that disproportionately affects women and a consistent increase in forced displacement.

Helvetas integrates development and humanitarian projects, partnering with local organizations to provide targeted assistance while upholding humanitarian principles and Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS). As a signatory of the Code of Conduct for the International

Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief, Helvetas is committed to ensuring that its humanitarian action is impartial, neutral, and independent of political, economic, or other objectives. In acute emergencies, Helvetas addresses essential needs and facilitates early recovery towards sustainable solutions. During recovery, Helvetas supports communities in restoring their livelihoods, essential services, and infrastructure. In protracted crises, Helvetas employs market-based approaches to strengthen self-reliance and promote inclusive access to basic services for both displaced individuals and host communities. Throughout our work, we promote social cohesion and inclusivity for women, young people, and marginalized groups and follow a "do no harm" approach to remain sensitive to the risk of potential conflicts.



OBJECTIVES

Disaster and conflict-affected people ...

... have timely access to drinking water, sanitation services, food, and shelter.

... have restored their capacity to live independently and benefit from essential services and infrastructure in ways that improve their resilience to future crises.

Displaced persons ...

... gain economic self-reliance through opportunities for skills development, income generation, and employment. Their children have access to quality education.

... are supported in their integration into their host communities and their access to information, legal assistance, psychosocial support, and other essential services.

WHERE WE WORK

Helvetas supports people facing poverty, inequality, vulnerability, and marginalization. These challenges exist in low- and middle-income countries, in stable and fragile contexts, and in rural and urban areas. To achieve a high impact, we concentrate our engagement in nine priority regions. As sustainable development requires time, we engage in long-term programming in our partner countries. When responding to humanitarian crises or providing technical advice, we also commit beyond our priority countries on a short-term basis. In Switzerland and at the global level, we raise awareness about development challenges, and we advocate for human rights, solidarity, and policy coherence. We build our knowledge and expertise through regular exchanges within and across our regions.





HOW WE ENSURE QUALITY

Results-based management

Helvetas applies a systematic and institutionalized approach to managing projects and evaluating their outcomes. We adopt standardized indicators, disaggregated for gender, age, and social status, to facilitate data integration at the project, country, and organizational level. Through the systematic use of digital tools and systems, we increase the availability of real-time information on our outreach, results, and committed resources. This approach promotes evidence-based decision-making, learning, steering, and accountability at all levels.

Financial management and controlling

Helvetas ensures stringent financial management by applying financial policies, procedures, and controls that comply with donor regulations, legal requirements, and financial standards. Strict measures are in place to prevent fraud and corruption, ensuring that resources are used effectively and efficiently. Independent external auditors annually assess Helvetas' financial reporting. We regularly update financial procedures and consistently implement controls to strengthen compliance.

Upward, downward, and mutual accountability

Helvetas is committed to the principle of accountability and transparency in relations with its partners and stakeholders. We encourage open communication and ensure that the funds entrusted to us are utilized for their intended purpose. This includes fostering inclusive decision making, providing safe feedback mechanisms, and conducting public reviews and audits. We publish financial statements on our website and in our annual reports, providing transparency to donors and the public about the allocation of funds and results achieved.

Safety, security, and ethical behavior

Activities in fragile and conflict-affected contexts or in emergencies are particularly prone to safety and security risks. Helvetas implements targeted measures to mitigate these risks and enhance the preparedness of our staff. Moreover, Helvetas maintains a zero-tolerance policy regarding illegal and unethical behavior. We are committed to safeguarding employees from harm, abuse of power, and any form of misconduct. We hold ourselves to the highest standards of integrity and ethical behavior, internally and externally.

Leadership excellence and development

Helvetas invests in systematically developing the skills of employees to build a sound understanding of leadership and technical competencies for their professional role. Helvetas promotes agile working, equipping our leaders to adapt swiftly to changing conditions and guide their teams effectively in a dynamic environment. This helps our staff in all their diversity to pool their collective intelligence and deliver excellent services. In Mozambique, Helvetas is helping the government to develop and plan water and sanitation services carefully, together with the local authorities and population. © Helvetas Mozambique



HOW WE PROGRESS

Digital transformation

Helvetas continues to evolve our key organizational processes and services to increase efficiency and impact. We are accelerating our digital transformation to connect people, processes, and technology better. This includes the purposeful use of innovative applications, platforms, and data. We are committed to adopting new technologies and trends in a responsible, sustainable, and inclusive manner while building an organizational culture of digital competence.

People and culture

With approximately 1,500 staff working on five continents, Helvetas represents an extraordinary wealth of professional, cultural, and linguistic diversity. We continuously invest in the competencies and skills of our employees, offering them targeted learning opportunities to promote their personal development and professional careers. We encourage staff mobility and retention by harmonizing job roles with global best practices and actively valuing the diverse expertise of our staff. With dedicated initiatives such as staff surveys, joint learning, mentoring, and safeguarding training, we aim to create an attractive, inclusive, safe and stimulating work environment which promotes diversity, gender equality, and social equity.

Financial sustainability and resilience

Helvetas' work is funded by a variety of public and private donors, with an annual turnover of approximately EUR 150 million. In addition to our broad base of individual supporters, key donors include the Swiss and Liechtenstein governments, the European Commission, various European and American governments, the World Bank, various UN agencies, and major foundations in Switzerland, Europe, and the USA. Collaborating with these diverse funding partners increases Helvetas' financial stability and supports change processes in the long term in a programmatic combination of our own initiatives and mandated projects.

Responsible communication

Helvetas strives to convey an authentic and truthful image of the global South and East, of our partners, and of our own work to avoid the perpetuation of stereotypes. We provide background information on the contexts in which we operate and highlight the structural causes of inequality and exclusion. We show respect for the dignity and the universal rights of all people through our communication. At every opportunity, people in the South and East take the lead and speak for themselves as active partners who determine the course of their lives.

WHAT IS YOUR NEXT STEP TO CONTRIBUTE TO FAIR OPPORTUNITIES WORLDWIDE?

Anny Vargas (left), Director of Sucre's Department of Urban and Spatial Planning, regularly discusses options for making the city more climate-resilient with Beatriz Lizarazu of Helvetas Bolivia. © Mauricio Panozo

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After the civil war in Sri Lanka, Helvetas brought young people from different ethnic groups and regions together to strengthen the reconciliation process. These young people, including Hirantha Dissanayake, have since formed cooperatives to create economic opportunities. © Patrick Rohr



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HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation

