



**HEKS
EPER**
Bread for all.

Annual Activity Report

HEKS/EPER Romania

2024



About HEKS/EPER Romania

Ever since its foundation in December 2015, the HEKS/EPER Romania Foundation has had as its mission to provide support to individuals and communities experiencing economic and social challenges. Founded by Swiss Church Aid HEKS/EPER (Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen Schweiz), HEKS/EPER Romania caters to marginalized and vulnerable groups both within Romanian society and in the international community.

HEKS/EPER Romania's projects have reached 4,2 million people in Romania, Ukraine, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to date.

Background

HEKS/EPER Switzerland has been present in Romania since 1977, when it undertook a series of humanitarian actions in support of the earthquake victims. Since 1989, HEKS/EPER has maintained its operational presence by providing ongoing support to communities within our borders. In its early stages, the HEKS/EPER program in Romania focused on humanitarian aid (1990-1991), then rural development (1992-2007), and the development of social services (1990-present). The opening of a Country Office in Romania, Cluj-Napoca, marked a new stage and confirmed the commitment of HEKS/EPER in Romania.

Milestones

HEKS/EPER Romania has been operational in the field of **Development Cooperation** since **2016**. In **2018**, the organization was accredited as a **provider of information, counseling**, and

mediation services, and in **2019**, implemented its first project funded by the European Union. Between 2020 and 2021, HEKS/EPER Romania further expanded its Development Cooperation activities through two projects funded by Norway Grants and one by EU funds for Romania, leading to an increase in team capacity. In **2024**, the organization was accredited as a **training provider for career counseling**, further strengthening its support services for vulnerable groups.

From **2021 to 2022**, it expanded its operations to include the **Humanitarian Aid (HA)** field, which marked the establishment of the HA department. A key milestone in the development of the Humanitarian Aid Department was the establishment of the **Ukraine Response** sub-department in **2022**, following the large-scale invasion of Ukraine. This allowed HEKS/EPER Romania to support both refugees in Romania and internally displaced persons in Ukraine, marking a strategic expansion of its humanitarian operations and cross-border response capacity.

Aiming to expand and enhance its potential as a humanitarian actor, HEKS/EPER Romania obtained the **DG ECHO** (Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations) **certification** and became the **first Romanian NGO in the 2021-2027 FPA** (Framework Partnership Agreement). This partnership certifies that the organization based in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, is in line with EU and international standards for implementing humanitarian aid projects. It also confirms that the organization is eligible to apply for and receive funding during the 2021-2027 programming period.

Vision

Our guiding vision is that of a just and peaceful world, where every individual's dignity, as well as the natural resources from which people earn their livelihoods, are respected.

Values

Universal human rights and Christian values are central to our activities.

- **Respect:** We respect both people and the environment and we take responsibility for our actions, so that future generations can also live with dignity.
- **Love your neighbor:** We work closely with people and are committed to helping those in need, regardless of their background, their religion or gender.
- **Inclusion:** We are committed to ensuring that people are aware of their rights, can assert them, and can actively take part in decisions that affect them and their implementation.
- **Transparency:** We communicate sincerely, transparently, and clearly about our activities and how we use the funds made available to us.
- **Impact:** We help to improve individual living conditions and carefully monitor the impact of our work.

These values form the basis of, and justify, our commitment.

Areas of Activity

HEKS/EPER Romania implements **development cooperation projects** that combat poverty and injustice, advocating for a life of dignity for all people. Specifically, our projects have addressed the fields of education, employment, and soil testing.

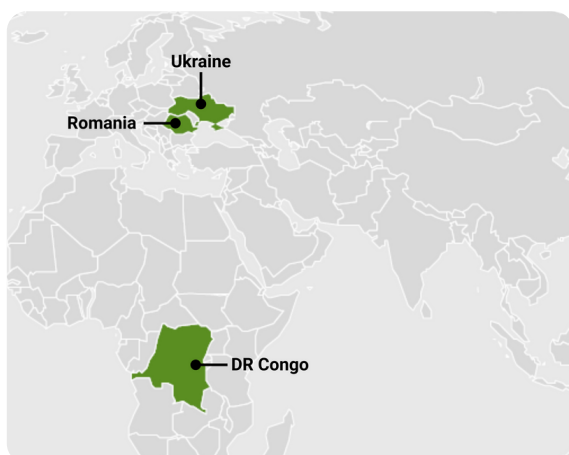
HEKS/EPER Romania strives for **systemic change** through its **advocacy** work, by developing targeted studies and organizing strategic local and national working groups involving local, regional and national stakeholders. A special focus of our advocacy work was the career counselling and orientation system in Romania and the professional and technological education, impacting the quality of education for disadvantaged communities, such as the Roma community in Romania and vulnerable youth.

HEKS/EPER Romania provides humanitarian assistance to victims of armed conflict-related disasters, such as the war in **Ukraine** and the civil conflict in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**. In Ukraine, our response includes cash and voucher distribution, shelter support, provision of basic food and non-food items, information and referral to local services, as well as educational and psychosocial support activities, and labor market mediation. A key element of our approach is the use of the survivor and community-led response (sclr) methodology to strengthen local ownership and community resilience. In the DRC, interventions have focused on multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA), Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), and facilitating humanitarian access through road rehabilitation and infrastructure support in remote or conflict-affected areas.

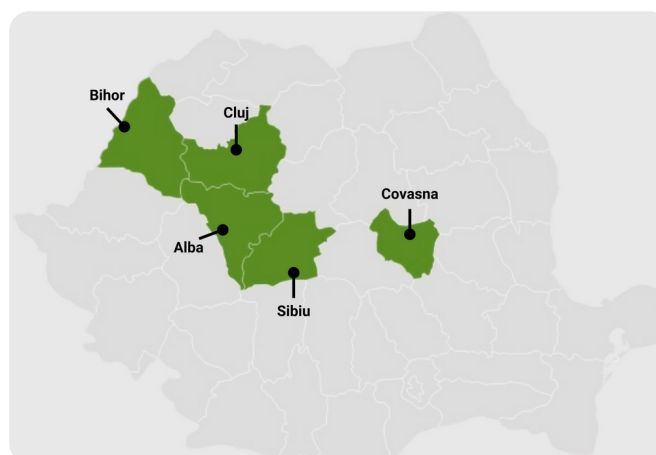
HEKS/EPER Romania Summary for 2024:

- **Nine projects** implemented by HEKS/EPER Romania: **4** in development cooperation, **5** in humanitarian aid (3 – Ukraine Response; 2 – Democratic Republic of the Congo).
- **131 sclr** (survivor- and community-led responses) initiatives financed in Romania (Cluj-Napoca - **19**) and Ukraine (Chernivtsi – **77**; Zakarpattia - **35**).
- Number of **beneficiaries**: **1,329,109** (DRR), **273,294** (MPCA), **129,288** (WASH), **18,000** (humanitarian access), **9,529** (sclr beneficiaries), **324** (employment services for Ukrainians) **3,025** (career counselling), **1,003** (remedial activities), **868** (family counselling), **838** (company visits), **424** (counselling support for vulnerable students, grades 4-6), **363** (career counselling day camps), **158** (teacher and school staff training), **115** (employment support).
- **Eight position papers** published (career counselling, professional and technological education, refugee employment inclusion).
- **Two national roundtables** organized with over 80 stakeholders.
- **Seven new community organizations** were formally established through sclr.
- Contribution to a **national advocacy plan** on refugee labor market inclusion (Romania).

Project Region: Countries



Project Region: Counties in Romania



HEKS/EPER Romania Projects in 2024

1. Project 942.403 – Labor-Market Inclusion for Disadvantaged Young Adults in Romania (Phase 2)

Project Period: 01.01.2023 - 31.12.2025

Budget: CHF 1,019,413

Donor: HEKS/EPER Switzerland, Medicor

Partners: Diakonia Christian Foundation - St. Gheorghe Branch, Alba Iulia Orthodox Philanthropy Association

Location: Covasna and Alba counties, Romania

Launched in January 2023, the second phase of the “Labour-market inclusion for disadvantaged young adults in Romania” project continues to improve access to vocational education and employment opportunities for socially disadvantaged youth, particularly those from Roma communities. The project addresses two key areas: supporting the transition from 8th grade to professional education, and strengthening collaboration between employers, job seekers, school authorities, and vocational schools to improve training quality and employment outcomes.

In 2024, **739 secondary school students** received career counselling and orientation support, and the **transition rate from 8th to 9th grade reached 95%**. Beneficiaries rated the counselling services highly, with an average satisfaction score of **9 out of 10**. In addition, **204 parents** received counselling to support their children’s educational path. To complement these efforts, **363 eighth-grade students** participated in company visits to explore future career opportunities.

The project also organized **career counselling day camps for 250 students** in May and June and provided **tutoring support** in Romanian, mathematics, and Hungarian **to 546 eighth-grade students** (106 from Alba and 440 from Covasna) in preparation for national exams.

At the vocational education level, **495 students** from professional schools participated in counselling and information sessions.



113 eleventh-grade students took part in a dedicated career counselling camp.

In terms of employment, over **280 vocational school students** received counselling. By the end of the school year, **74 graduates** from the 2023–2024 cohort and **6 graduates** from the 2022–2023 cohort secured employment. The **three-month retention rate** among those employed was **74.3%**, demonstrating a positive level of integration into the workforce.

At the policy level, advocacy efforts conducted in partnership with the Romanian Center for European Policies (CRPE) resulted in the publication of **four position papers** and the organization of a **roundtable event attended by over 40 stakeholders**, including representatives of the Ministry of Education. These actions contributed to the national dialogue on improving career counselling and orientation systems in Romania.

2. Project 942.406 – From Education to Decent Work – Sibiu County, Romania

Project Period: 01.07.2021 – 31.07.2024

Budget: CHF 1,369,846

Donor: HEKS/EPER Switzerland, Zindel-Hilti

Partners: Open Fields Foundation, Sibiu Orthodox Philanthropy Association

Location: Sibiu County, Romania

In 2024, the “From Education to Decent Work” project continued to support socially disadvantaged youth, including many from Roma communities in Sibiu County, in transitioning from school to vocational training and decent employment. The project addressed multiple risk factors for school dropout and labor market exclusion, placing a strong emphasis on career counselling, tutoring, gender-specific support, and employer engagement.

Between January and July 2024, **500 secondary school students** benefited from **counselling services**, of whom **445** (89%) participated in **individual sessions**. A total of **249 students visited local companies**, and **271 families received counselling** to support their children’s educational choices. Satisfaction with career counselling remained high, with an average score of 9.31 out of 10.

Remedial activities were provided to **196 eighth-grade students**, 43% of whom improved their general school average, and 37% improved their Romanian and/or Mathematics average. Dedicated **support** was provided to **209 socially disadvantaged girls** from 4th and 5th grades, with 88 receiving individual counselling and the **families of 105 girls being counselled**. Similar educational and counselling activities were also conducted with **211 boys** during the same school year.

At the vocational training level, **296 professional school students** were **informed and counselled**, **24 recent graduates** were supported through **job mediation**, and **15 secured employments**. Job mediation and employments continued also for graduates from previous promotions, the number of employed graduates of 2022-2023 promotion increased from 41 to 61 during the reporting period.



Workshops on retaining vulnerable employees’ were attended by **19 staff members** from 12 collaborating companies. Meanwhile **101 teachers** joined **workshops** on topics such as: the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, social vulnerability and coping strategies, classroom management, communication and cooperation, personal development in teachers’ activity, etc.

At the systems level, the project contributed to policy dialogue. In May 2024, a **national roundtable on career counselling**, co-organized with CRPE, brought together over 40 stakeholders, including representatives from the Ministry of Education. **Four position documents** were published on the HEKS Romania and CRPE websites and social media, regarding career counselling. **An open letter** with recommendations was submitted to the Ministry of Education as part of a public consultation process, and was signed by 8 private and public entities.

Two backstopping missions were carried out to review and improve the quality of career counselling, both of which concluded with positive evaluations of the teams’ professionalism and collaboration with schools.

3. Project 942.424 – From Education to Decent Work – Sibiu County (Phase 2)

Project Period: 01.08.2024 – 31.07.2027

Budget: CHF 1,545,288

Donor: HEKS/EPER Switzerland, Zindel-Hilti

Partners: Open Fields Foundation, Sibiu Orthodox Philanthropy Association

Location: Sibiu County, Romania

In August 2024, the second phase of the “From Education to Decent Work” project was launched in Sibiu County, Romania. The phase continues efforts to improve access to decent work for young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, including those from Roma communities. Building on the foundations of the first phase (2021–2024), the new phase has two main objectives: facilitating the transition from 8th grade to vocational education, and strengthening collaboration between employers, job seekers, the County School Inspectorate, and vocational schools to improve the quality of training and increase the employment perspectives for young professional schools graduates.

Between August and December 2024, the project provided **career counselling and orientation to 510 students** from 13 secondary schools across Sibiu County through group sessions. Additionally, **277 students** received **individual counselling**, while the **families of 219 students** received **counseling as well**. A total of **226 students** participated in **company visits**, exposing them to different career paths and professional environments. In parallel, **261 8th grade students** took part in **remedial activities** for Romanian and Mathematics.

The project continued to provide targeted support for younger students from vulnerable groups. A total of **203 girls and 221 boys in grades from 4 to 6** benefited from **counselling and educational activities**. **Individual counselling** was provided for **20 girls and 15 boys**, and the **families of 90 girls and 83 boys** received **counseling as well**.



In professional education, **485 students** from 13 vocational schools received **career orientation and counselling services**. Capacity-building efforts extended to the teaching personnel as well: **57 school staff members**, including teachers, directors, and counsellors, participated in online and in-person **workshops** covering topics such as student motivation, personal development, and strategies for engaging and supporting vulnerable learners.

In November 2024, a **local working group** meeting was organized, bringing together representatives from the School Inspectorate, partner schools, employers, and the implementing NGOs. The discussions focused on the newly introduced methodology for dual education, laying the foundation for stronger collaboration between educational institutions and the private sector.

4. Project 942.425 – Competitive Farmers in GAL Crișul Negru Territory

Project Period: 20.11.2024 – 20.06.2025

Donor: Agency for Financing Rural Investments (AFIR)

Budget: EUR 28,887

Location: Bihor County, Romania



In late 2024, HEKS/EPER Romania launched the “Competitive Farmers in GAL Crișul Negru Territory” project, aiming to **strengthen the competitiveness of local farmers in Bihor County** through support for **agricultural cooperation** and participation in **quality certification programs**. The project seeks to improve the organization of the agri-food supply chain and market access in rural communities, and promote sustainable practices.

Given the project’s start date in November 2024, only preliminary activities were carried out during the reporting period. An **initial outreach visit** was organized in **Holod**, serving as an introductory step to engage local stakeholders and present the project’s objectives.

The main implementation phase, which includes awareness campaigns, training sessions, study visits, and heritage mapping, is

scheduled for 2025 and will be reported in detail in the next annual report.



5. Project 788.397 – Multi-Sectoral Emergency Response for the Most Vulnerable Populations Affected by Conflict and Outbreaks in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

Project Period: 01.06.2022 – 31.05.2024

Donors: DG ECHO, HEKS/EPER Switzerland

Budget: EUR 9,060,651

Location: North Kivu, South Kivu, and Maniema Provinces, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Partner: MEDAIR e.V.



In 2024, HEKS/EPER Romania continued its contribution to a large-scale humanitarian response in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, in partnership with MEDAIR e.V. The initiative targeted conflict-affected and outbreak-prone regions in the provinces of **North Kivu, South Kivu, and Maniema**, focusing on life-saving interventions and building community resilience in highly volatile and underserved areas.

The project's final implementation year emphasized three core sectors: **Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)**, **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)**, and **Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA)**.

DRR activities aimed to strengthen community resilience through early warning systems that included risk awareness, hazard monitoring and forecasting, dissemination of alerts, and local response capacity. These interventions were designed to reach an estimated **1,329,109** individuals.

WASH efforts provided access to safe water, improved sanitation, and hygiene promotion, targeting **129,288** people in vulnerable areas.

Through **MPCA**, approximately **133,294** individuals received flexible financial assistance to help cover their basic needs with dignity.

The response was grounded in a community-based approach that integrated protection considerations for vulnerable groups, including women, children, and persons with disabilities. Delegations from HEKS/EPER Romania and MEDAIR e.V. coordinated closely with local authorities, the Ministry of Health, and other humanitarian actors to ensure a rapid, efficient, and complementary response.

The project highlighted the added value of HEKS/EPER through its ability to rapidly respond in hard-to-reach areas of Eastern DRC, made possible by cross-country collaboration and the combination of local presence with international support.

6. Project 788.411 – Multi-Sectoral Emergency Assistance for the Most Vulnerable Conflict-affected Populations in Hard-to-Reach Regions in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

Project Period: 01.06.2024 – 31.07.2025

Donors: DG ECHO, HEKS/EPER Switzerland

Budget: EUR 10,383,531

Location: North Kivu, South Kivu, and Maniema Provinces, Democratic Republic of the Congo

In June 2024, HEKS/EPER launched its first emergency response project in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo directly financed by DG ECHO via HEKS/EPER Romania. The large-scale response aimed to address the acute needs of vulnerable populations affected by renewed conflict, particularly the resurgence of M23 hostilities and mass displacement. The project focused on two key components: **multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA)** and support for **humanitarian access operations**, in hard-to-reach areas where aid delivery was severely hindered.

From June to December 2024, the project provided unconditional **cash transfers** to **140,000 individuals** in North Kivu, South Kivu, and Maniema provinces. These transfers supported households in meeting their immediate needs, such as food, health care, shelter, and hygiene. The project prioritized



socially vulnerable households: female-headed households, the elderly, people with disabilities or chronic illnesses, and families relying on survival strategies.

Simultaneously, the project improved humanitarian access in key, conflict-affected territories of North Kivu by **road rehabilitation through emergency infrastructure support**, facilitating the safe and timely delivery of aid by humanitarian partners. These efforts directly benefited an estimated **18,000 individuals** by enabling humanitarian organizations to reach previously inaccessible populations. In addition, a reforestation component using native species was implemented to mitigate the environmental impact and restore degraded areas along rehabilitated routes.



7. Project 951.349 – Support to the Most Vulnerable Conflict-affected IDPs and Host Communities Through Integrated sclr – Chernivtsi, Ukraine

Project Period: 01.01.2024 – 31.01.2025

Budget: CHF 645,824

Partner: AREAC

Donor: Swiss Solidarity and ACT Alliance

Location: Chernivtsi Oblast, Ukraine

In 2024, HEKS/EPER Romania, together with local partner Chernivtsi Regional Association for Social Development (AREAC), provided support to conflict-affected internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities in Chernivtsi Oblast, western Ukraine, through a survivor- and community-led response (sclr) approach. The project responded to the growing needs of IDPs displaced by escalating hostilities in eastern Ukraine, who were facing increasingly limited humanitarian assistance and integration support.

Using a bottom-up methodology, the project implemented **77 microgrant initiatives** (up to CHF 5,000 each), empowering formal and informal groups to identify and address local priorities in their communities. These initiatives **reached 6,093 people** and covered a wide range of needs, including **children's education, psychological support, vocational training, and small-scale infrastructure**, such as playgrounds, youth centers, and community shelter repairs.



All microgrants were accompanied by **capacity-building activities**, including training, project design feedback, procurement support, and networking with public institutions. This proved especially relevant for informal groups considering formalization. As a result, seven initiatives successfully transitioned into registered organizations, highlighting the importance of structured support in empowering community members to continue their work beyond the project. The project also contributed to improved **social cohesion** and a sense of **belonging**, particularly through community spaces and recurring sclr leaders' meetings, which facilitated experience-sharing and collaboration across initiatives.



8. Project 951.350 – Support to the Most Vulnerable Conflict-affected IDPs and Host Communities Through Integrated sclr – Zakarpattia, Ukraine

Project Period: 01.01.2024 – 31.12.2024

Budget: CHF 163,800

Donor: ACT Alliance, HEKS/EPER
Switzerland

Partner: Reformed Church of Transcarpathia (RCT)

Location: Zakarpattia Oblast, Ukraine

From September to December 2024, HEKS/EPER Romania partnered with the Reformed Church of Transcarpathia (RCT) to implement an impactful sclr intervention in Zakarpattia Oblast. The project aimed to strengthen community resilience and address the urgent needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and vulnerable host populations through community-driven action.

Through two rounds of microgrants, the project supported **35 sclr initiatives**, each with a maximum value of CHF 3,000, reaching a total of **2,503 unique beneficiaries**. Beneficiaries included IDPs (43%), people with disabilities (21%), and other vulnerable groups such as families of deceased soldiers, widows, orphans, and children without parental care.

The funded initiatives addressed a wide variety of needs, including food and hygiene distribution, firewood provision, shelter renovation, community kitchens, mental health support, educational and spiritual programs, and economic recovery activities. Several



initiatives also used media tools, such as community podcasts and radio broadcasts – to share experiences and foster cohesion. Many exceeded their original targets, reflecting high levels of engagement and community ownership.

In addition to providing direct support, the project helped build long-term capacity and dignity at the grassroots level. Through the sclr methodology, affected individuals were empowered to lead change and implement projects based on their own realities and priorities.

A **learning event** organized in November in Zakarpattia brought together local leaders, project stakeholders, and community members to reflect on achievements, challenges, and the potential for scaling up. The event highlighted the success of the approach in promoting self-reliance, solidarity, and local leadership in challenging circumstances.



9. Project 942.423 – Increasing Resilience of the Ukrainian Refugee Community in Cluj County, Romania

Project Period: 01.01.2024 – 31.12.2024

Donor: ACT Alliance, HEKS/EPER Switzerland

Budget: CHF 157,300

Location: Cluj County, Romania

In response to the ongoing humanitarian crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine, HEKS/EPER Romania implemented a locally anchored intervention in Cluj County, where many displaced Ukrainians have settled. The project focused on enhancing the economic resilience and labor market integration of refugees, especially working-age adults, while also empowering the refugee community itself through sclr initiatives that addressed their identified needs.

A total of **324 Ukrainian refugees** directly benefited from **employment-related activities**, including **individual career counselling, CV reviews, job matching, and professional development workshops** on local labor law, employee rights, and workplace culture. Partnerships with local employers and the County Employment Agency (AJOFM) facilitated direct recruitment support. Additionally, employment kits were provided to enable beneficiaries to begin work immediately after being hired.



The project also funded **19 sclr microgrant initiatives** (up to CHF 3,000 each), implemented by community groups. These initiatives focused on economic inclusion, through activities such as Romanian language courses, early childhood support, and skill-building. These initiatives reached an additional **933 beneficiaries**, promoting grassroots resilience, social inclusion, and autonomy. By addressing these barriers, sclr efforts complemented job-readiness and placement components, enabling more individuals to actively pursue employment opportunities.

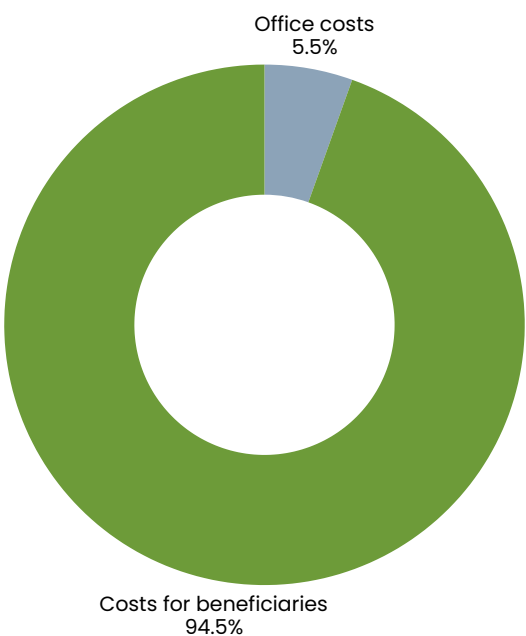
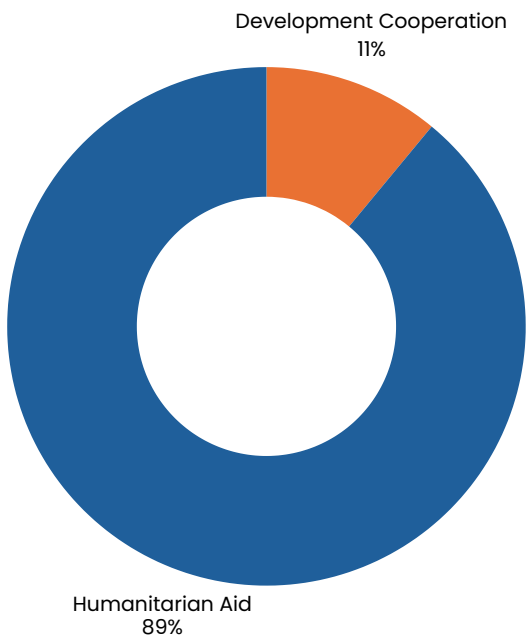
The project maintained strong coordination with relevant stakeholders through regular participation in the Labor and Economic Inclusion Working Group, as well as collaboration with AJOFM Cluj and the Migration Institute. In 2024, HEKS/EPER Romania contributed to launching a national advocacy plan to improve refugee access to decent work and inclusion pathways.



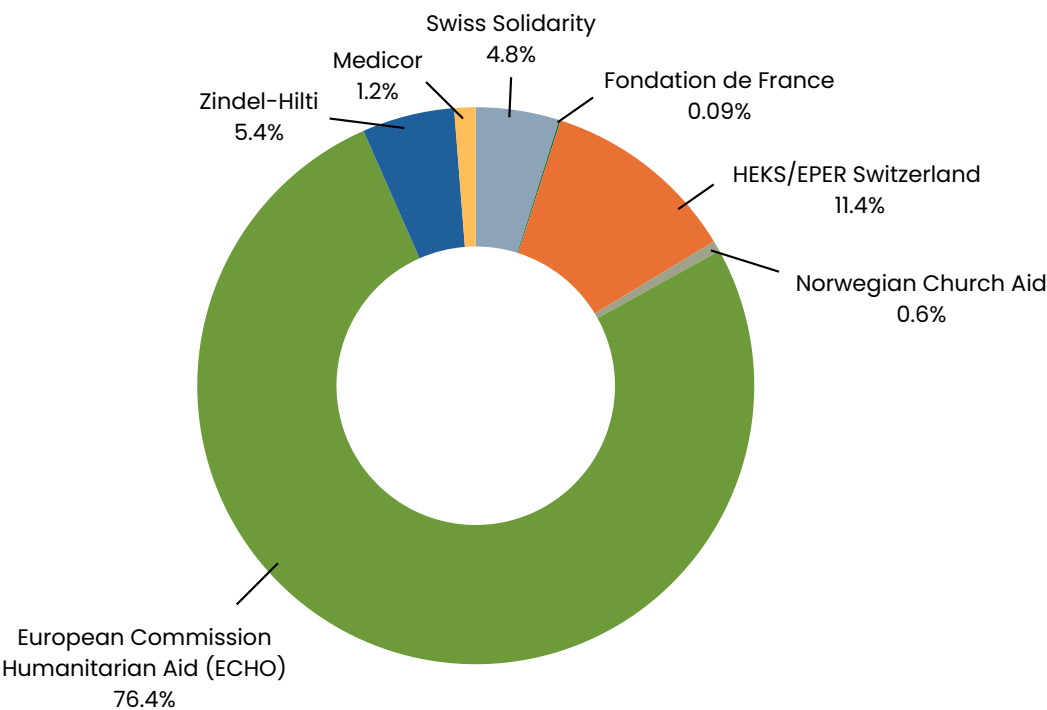
Income and Expense 2024

Total Income: CHF 10,670,043

Total Expenditure: CHF 8,403,009



Donor Overview for 2024



2024

Annual Activity Report

HEKS/EPER Romania



Thank you!

We warmly thank all of our donors, whether they have given large or small contributions, for their involvement and their trust. We use donations conscientiously and effectively to create a more just and a more humane world.



How You Can Help

You can contribute to our project implementation by donating to one of the accounts below, or by completing and submitting Form 230.

Account in LEI: RO53BTRLRONCRT0318297801

Account in EUR: RO03BTRLEURCRT0318297801

HEKS/EPER Romania Foundation

CIF: 35496510

Get in Touch

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