

STRATEGY 2018-22



Big changes start small.



Publishing information

Overall responsibility:
Swiss Church Aid (HEKS/EPER)
Board of Trustees

Editing:
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Pre-press and printing:
Kyburz AG

French translation:
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English translation:
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Number of copies:
2400 D / 800 F / 200 E

Cover photo:
Christian Bobst

Photo credits:
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Big changes start small

HEKS/EPER strives for a more humane and just world. HEKS/EPER counters resignation with hope and translates Christian love into practical works. The commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation is central to the work of HEKS/EPER, whose aim is to ensure that all people can lead a life of dignity, with social, economic and political security.

The work of HEKS/EPER is based on profound respect for people of all cultures and religions. HEKS/EPER therefore supports people in need irrespective of their religious persuasion or ethnicity. This aid includes securing livelihoods on the basis of human rights (e.g. the right to food). Furthermore, it aims to achieve a degree of self-determination, whereby people are able to take the most crucial decisions in their lives for themselves.

The entire thrust of HEKS/EPER endeavours is towards helping to realize this goal. In practical terms it means that all activities must be assessed to ascertain whether and how much they positively impact the beneficiaries of HEKS/EPER projects. The work of HEKS/EPER supports the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Land. Life. Prospects.

In its international cooperation activities, HEKS/EPER is committed to securing livelihoods, alleviating poverty and promoting self-determination. The organization possesses in-depth expertise on issues of land law and the struggle for land. There will be a stronger focus on this field of work. HEKS/EPER maintains partnership-based cooperation with beneficiary communities, which is conducive to firmly anchoring its work locally. HEKS/EPER conducts international projects in the fields of international cooperation, humanitarian aid and church cooperation.

Refuge. Justice. Prospects.

In Switzerland, HEKS/EPER champions the cause of socially disadvantaged people. HEKS/EPER stands up for equal rights and opportunities and thus firmly rejects all forms of discrimination. In concrete terms, its work is oriented so that all people can avail themselves of their legitimate rights and participate in Switzerland's economic, social, cultural and political life. Through its projects in Switzerland, HEKS/EPER is leading the way in matters of integration of and advocacy for socially disadvantaged people.

Naturally, HEKS/EPER cannot solve all the world's problems. But HEKS/EPER contributes effectively to securing a life in dignity for countless disadvantaged persons in Switzerland and abroad. Through the promotion of self-aid, big things are being achieved from small beginnings.

Effective, transparent and close to people

HEKS/EPER is the relief agency of the Swiss Protestant Churches. They founded the organization and determine its mandates. HEKS/EPER maintains continuous dialogue with churches and church parishes.

The work of HEKS/EPER is based on fundamental Christian values such as justice, self-determination, respect, solidarity, responsibility, and participation. HEKS/EPER is as mindful of the Christian roots of its commitments, as it is of the existence of further value systems and fundamental convictions to which human well-being is central. They must be respected. It is possible while holding different philosophical and religious persuasions to champion these causes and work in partnership.

Respect for human dignity is also mentioned in the universal human rights. In its practical work in Switzerland and abroad, HEKS/EPER is therefore guided by the international covenants on economic, social and cultural as well as political and civil rights.

The individual is invariably central to the work of HEKS/EPER. HEKS/EPER exemplifies closeness to its staff, its beneficiaries and supporters of its work. The organization maintains dialogue with its stakeholder groups based on openness and partnership. HEKS/EPER communicates in a sincere, understandable and practical manner. Its style of communication is objective and solution-oriented it aims at delivering positive and realistic messages.

HEKS/EPER contributes to perceptibly improving the living conditions of socially disadvantaged people and shows how long-lasting changes can be achieved with the resources entrusted to it. HEKS/EPER uses appropriate methods to verify this impact. The reporting on the progress of projects and the use of funds is transparent.

HEKS/EPER is aware that, along with project work in Switzerland and abroad, lasting change presupposes structural improvements to the overall conditions in which people live. This is why HEKS/EPER supplements and underpins its domestic and international project work in favor of the socially disadvantaged with targeted and well-founded awareness-raising as well as advocacy work on socio-political and development policy issues.





Priority area

«Access to land»

Our challenges:

- Over 75 per cent of all people affected by poverty worldwide are rural dwellers and live from agriculture. More than 70 per cent of them are small farmers working less than two hectares of land. For these people, access to a plot of land, more specifically collectively farmed land, is a basic prerequisite for securing their subsistence. But access to land for them is becoming ever more difficult if not impossible – owing to inadequate legal frameworks, land speculation, government expropriation or land grabbing by domestic or foreign investors. The consequences are poverty and a growing rural exodus. People lose their homelands, their cultural roots, and prospects.
- There is a persistently widening gap between the wealth of industrialized countries and the poverty in developing and emerging countries. Poverty, injustice, environmental degradation, climate change, unemployment, political instability, violence and conflict – also over access to natural resources – remain major challenges.

Our fields of action:

- HEKS/EPER supports rural communities in claiming their rights of ownership and use of the land that they inhabit and work. Small farming families and local communities are supported in building up and practising environment-friendly and profitable agriculture. HEKS/EPER helps improve their knowledge of the market and advocates for fair marketing systems.
- Co-determination, freedom of opinion as well as legal certainty are of central importance to a life of autonomy and dignity. HEKS/EPER and its local partners inform people about their rights and promote dialogue between population, government and private sector with a view to the enforcement of the mentioned rights.

- Natural disasters and environmental pollution are on the rise worldwide. To secure people's livelihoods, HEKS/EPER works with local populations to devise strategies for minimizing risk and enhancing the resilience of local communities.
- Peace and stability are prerequisites for development and well-being. Values, interests and prospects that are shared by conflicting parties lead to better mutual understanding as well as to recognition, respect and cohesion. HEKS/EPER supports individuals and groups that work to bring about peaceful co-existence.

Our 2018–2022 focus:

- HEKS/EPER is substantially broadening its activities and competence regarding the «Access to land», and does this also through new, internationally announced mandates.
- The impact and relevance of HEKS/EPER's project work in connection with «Access to land» are screened and confirmed through evaluations. HEKS/EPER will help organize and mount local and international events on the theme of «Access to land and resources».
- HEKS/EPER supports people and communities in working their land in a more diversified, productive and profitable manner. To that end, it imparts knowledge, provides means of production, services and funding and also helps to shape more participative economic and power systems.
- HEKS/EPER protects and strengthens civil society, thereby enabling it to defend its interests through dialogue with authorities and economic agents.

Priority area «Humanitarian aid»

Our challenges:

- The danger of widespread natural disasters is increasing – not least of all – owing to climate change. The over-exploitation of agricultural land, of waters and forests is leading to so-called permanent disasters such as water shortage, desertification or erosion. The consequences of these developments are disastrous mainly for rural dwellers in developing countries. Poverty and hunger, as well as notorious political instability, and – a frequent consequence thereof – armed conflict are fuelling migration.

Our fields of action:

- When natural disasters occur, during as well as after armed conflicts worldwide, HEKS/EPER provides needs-based emergency aid so as to quickly improve living conditions for the civilian population and provide them with vital supplies.
- People whose lives have already been severely threatened by poverty and hunger are hit especially hard by the consequences of natural disasters and armed conflict. HEKS/EPER supports them in restoring their livelihoods and rebuilding essential infrastructure.
- To better prepare communities against future disasters, HEKS/EPER provides these people, as well as local and national authorities, with logistical and financial assistance and transfers knowledge to them for the purposes of disaster preparedness planning and implementation. The long-term goal is to boost the social and economic resilience of civilians vis-a-vis destructive natural events or armed conflict. This creates linkages with long-term development work.

Our 2018–2022 focus:

- HEKS/EPER is stepping up its capacity and human resources for responding rapidly with needs-based emergency aid in cases of natural disasters and armed conflict.
- Local organizations are important implementation partners in the humanitarian work of HEKS/EPER. The organization invests in joint capacity building for the provision of needs-based emergency aid, in disaster preparedness on the part of partner organizations, as well as in prevention projects and regular risk assessments.
- Under HEKS/EPER's humanitarian aid and longer-term programme work, priority will be given to the disaster preparedness and resilience of vulnerable communities in fragile contexts.



HEKS & act alliance

Task Force Mapped Against the MMR Disaster Response Program

PACKAGE RE-DISTRIBUTION

APRIL 28, 2013



Priority area «Church cooperation»

Our challenges:

- As societies become more secular, HEKS/EPER partner churches in Eastern Europe too must grapple with substantially dwindling membership as well as financial resources. At the same time, given the absence or the neglected state of public infrastructure especially in health and social services, the churches continue to shoulder just as heavy a social responsibility. In order to enable a continued support in these areas, it is indispensable for church parishes to be vibrant and attractive to members.
- Christians in the Middle East are often minorities threatened with marginalization, discrimination and persecution. At the same time, they symbolize a pluralistic society and are therefore an important factor for peaceful coexistence among the different religious communities.

Our fields of action:

- HEKS/EPER supports, advises, promotes and accompanies the Reformed Churches in the countries of Eastern Europe, in Italy and the Middle East in their diaconal work.
- HEKS/EPER fosters the building of vibrant church parishes. In so doing, it supports the social activities organized by church parishes, especially those for children and young people. Besides, by providing financial and logistical help for the renovation of important church buildings, HEKS/EPER ensures the continued existence of active church parishes.

- HEKS/EPER promotes and supports its partner churches in Eastern Europe and the Middle East in establishing open and impartial dialogue with other religious communities and government bodies in their respective countries.
- Through exchange programmes and events, HEKS/EPER promotes solidarity and dialogue between Reformed Church congregations in Switzerland and partner churches abroad.

Our 2018–2022 focus:

- The aimed-for synergies resulting from cooperation with partners, within projects in international cooperation and humanitarian aid are verifiable and are showing positive outcomes.
- The relevance and impact of pilot programmes in church cooperation in the Middle East are evaluated and internally assessed. Their continuation is assured, in accordance with the mandate from the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches as well as the HEKS/EPER strategy and international programme.

Priority area «Asylum»

Our challenges:

- The coming years will see a further increase in the number of people fleeing violent conflicts stemming from political, ethnic or religious factors, as well as natural disasters and the lack of basis for a livelihood. Global migration trends indicate that we may expect a marked increase in asylum requests in the years ahead. Many refugees will not be able to return to their country of origin over the medium-to-long term. They must therefore be granted a secure residence status and integrated into our society as quickly as possible.
- In the growing debate on asylum seekers, undocumented people and refugees, the large number of volunteers working on behalf of refugees is generally ignored. Their voices are drowned out or are not heard.

Our fields of action:

- At the political and social levels, HEKS/EPER strives to ensure that people facing existential danger continue to find refuge and support in Switzerland – irrespective of ethnic background and political or religious persuasion.
- HEKS/EPER undertakes and supports actions and projects conducive to the smooth, rapid and sustainable integration of refugees into Swiss civil society.
- HEKS/EPER promotes and supports the involvement of civil society on behalf of refugees, for example through the online platform «engagiert.jetzt». The platform is designed to facilitate various kinds of encounters between refugees and the Swiss population.

Our 2018–2022 focus:

- HEKS/EPER gives a voice to the committed civilian population. HEKS/EPER is a coordination centre, a hub for volunteers in refugee matters thanks to its projects, campaigns, the volunteer platform «engagiert.jetzt» and its political commitment. HEKS/EPER sets an example that is clearly perceptible in the wider population, one of solidarity with people on the run, and of willingness to integrate them into our civil society.





Priority area «Integration»

Our challenges:

- The acceleration of the asylum procedure is increasing the demand for qualified intercultural interpreters specialized in asylum law.
- The coming years will see an increase in the number of temporarily admitted and recognized refugees. Their social and professional integration in Switzerland must therefore be given high priority.
- Digital knowledge will become an ever more decisive criterion for employability in the future. Low-skill workers, being one of the target groups for HEKS/EPER integration projects, are often those most acutely lacking in digital knowledge, and this undermines their chances of finding a job.
- The requirements and expectations posed on the private sector as well as on the education and health systems regarding the need for specialized knowledge in the fields of migration and integration are steadily increasing. Consequently, alongside its direct work with and for beneficiaries, HEKS/EPER will, in future, have to position itself more strongly as a reference organization and competence centre for these topics.

Our fields of action:

- HEKS/EPER conducts social integration projects in the spheres of job market integration, structuring of daily routines and encounters, assisted living, language, intercultural interpreting and intermediation, child and parent education, and age and migration.
- In representing the interests of socially disadvantaged people, HEKS/EPER uses its expertise to engage actively in the fields of education and health as well as with companies and authorities. HEKS/EPER ensures that their measures of integration are actually in line with the needs of disadvantaged people and their quality is assured.

Our 2018–2022 focus:

- HEKS/EPER continues to expand its asylum-related interpreting services in both German- and French-speaking Switzerland. This is intended to meet the growing demand for intercultural mediation.
- HEKS/EPER is expanding its integration programmes for temporarily admitted persons and refugees.
- New programmes in the field of knowledge transfer and more specifically, in the use of digital information and communication technologies are being assessed and introduced.
- Migration and integration-related counselling and knowledge transfer to, as well as cooperation with various players in already existing, ordinary facilities is being strengthened and conceptionally firmly anchored.

Priority area «Advocacy»

Our challenges:

- The reorganization of the asylum procedure also signifies a paradigm shift. Because all asylum seekers will in future be entitled to legal counselling and/or representation, the roles and tasks of the cantonal HEKS/EPER legal counselling offices need to be redefined.
- In the light of the ever more complex legal situation as pertains to migration and social matters, people affected by poverty (Swiss citizens, migrants, undocumented people [sans-papiers]) need easy access to legal counselling and representation.

Our fields of action:

- With the financial support of the cantonal Reformed and Catholic Churches, HEKS/EPER operates seven legal counselling offices for asylum seekers and refugees.
- HEKS/EPER assists socially disadvantaged people with legal counselling, mainly with respect to legislation on social insurance, social welfare, children and guardianship, migration law as well as discrimination.

Our 2018–2022 focus:

- HEKS/EPER will continue its commitment to safeguard the human rights of asylum seekers.
- HEKS/EPER is positioning itself as Switzerland's leading competence centre in the field of legal protection.
- HEKS/EPER is aligning its existing cantonal and/or regional legal counselling offices with the new guidelines and framework conditions for asylum-related matters.





Social and development policy commitment

Our challenges in Switzerland:

- In the public debate on migration and social assistance, insufficient weight is given to compliance with national and international human rights standards and the betterment of the overall conditions for integration. HEKS/EPER builds awareness among politicians and the general public concerning the rights and concerns of socially disadvantaged people.
- For years now, politicians and economic players have been warning of an impending skills shortage in Switzerland. Meanwhile, there are as many as 50,000 professionally well-qualified migrants living in Switzerland, but who in many cases are affected by de-skilling and joblessness, among other reasons, owing to the lack of recognition of their professional qualifications. This potential still receives far too little political recognition.

Our international challenges:

- Civil society is coming under pressure throughout the world. In many countries, governments are deliberately curtailing the activities of civil society. Moreover, civil society players are exposed to defamation, threats and violence.

Our fields of action in Switzerland:

- HEKS/EPER keenly follows trends in the areas of asylum, migration, integration and social policy as well as in protection from discrimination. Where the interests of socially disadvantaged people are affected, HEKS/EPER takes a public stand.
- HEKS/EPER advises and accompanies well-qualified migrants in the processes of validating their educational achievements and work experience and in obtaining recognition of their qualifications.

Our international fields of action:

- Advocacy is an important and integral component of the development work of HEKS/EPER. In cooperation with its local partner organizations, HEKS/EPER supports disadvantaged people in organizing themselves and standing up for their legitimate rights.

Our 2018–2022 focus in Switzerland:

- Our work to promote equal opportunity is intended to raise awareness of and sensitivity to the issues being faced by well-qualified migrants.

Our 2018–2022 international focus:

- Cases of advocacy centred on «Access to land» and the «Right to food» are being taken forward nationally and regionally. More particularly, cases with a European or Swiss dimension are being followed up.
- Human rights violations by repressive governments and the curtailment of civil society activities are receiving much greater attention. Advocacy work is used to inform people about their rights and foster dialogue between population, government and economic players with a view to the enforcement of those rights.

How we work

Worldwide commitment

HEKS/EPER develops and implements projects in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. Its priority activities are international cooperation, humanitarian aid and church cooperation. HEKS/EPER combats the structural causes of hunger, poverty and injustice with a focus on access to land. It promotes peace in situations of extreme tension, provides emergency assistance after natural disasters or during armed conflicts and supports the diaconal work of the Reformed Churches in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. In so doing, HEKS/EPER takes a programme approach that interlinks a country's or a region's projects, thereby creating added value. HEKS/EPER is active in over 30 countries around the world. HEKS/EPER runs its own Coordination Offices in 16 priority countries. Working in international networks and cooperation programmes is paramount.

In Switzerland, HEKS/EPER works through its five Regional Offices and the Secrétariat Romand to achieve social inclusion for the socially disadvantaged and to promote equal opportunity. Besides, HEKS/EPER comes to the aid of asylum seekers, recognized refugees and other target groups by offering them legal counselling. Considering the strategic importance of firmly anchoring its projects throughout Switzerland, HEKS/EPER attaches great importance to consolidating the Secrétariat Romand and hence the growth of the institution as a whole.

Closeness to people

The work of HEKS/EPER is guided by the principle of promoting self-aid. HEKS/EPER gears its support to the resources and needs of the affected people and implements projects jointly with them. HEKS/EPER knows the living conditions of disadvantaged people and champions their causes in a direct and targeted manner. HEKS/EPER staff maintain constant dialogue with beneficiaries, partner organizations, sponsoring institutions, donors and cantonal Reformed Churches. Internationally, HEKS/EPER works with local partner organizations that are close to beneficiaries and make efficient use of the resources entrusted to them. HEKS/EPER employs mainly local staff in its Coordination Offices.

Efficiency – Sustainability – Transparency

Through its projects HEKS/EPER strives for the best possible impact on the well-being of beneficiaries. The impact and sustainability of all projects are systematically reviewed and optimized where necessary. HEKS/EPER always reports transparently to all stakeholders on its work and structures, as well as on the origin, use and impact of the resources used. As a learning organization, HEKS/EPER utilizes and builds up the expertise of its personnel, is open to criticism and changes, and faces up to challenges. HEKS/EPER and its staff are careful to ensure that all work processes and operating procedures are efficiently designed, and are underpinned by technologically modern infrastructure.





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