Annual Cooperation Programme Report

Reporting Period – 01.01.2024 - 31.12.2024	
Report Number - 2	
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List of abbreviations

CH   Switzerland

CHF   Swiss Franc

EELIS   A state information system database for the collection, management, and use of nature data

KESE   A state information system database for the collection, storage, and publication of environmental monitoring data

NCU   National Coordination Unit

PCO   Programme Component Operator

PlutoF   A platform designed for storing and managing biodiversity data over the web

PO   Programme Operator

SCO   Swiss Contribution Office

SM   Support Measure

TAIEX   Technical Assistance and Information Exchange

TSI   Technical Support Instrument

1. Executive Summary

The Annual Cooperation Programme Report covers the period from 1 January 2024, to 31 December 2024.

Progress and Achievements
In 2024, the cooperation programme primarily focused on preparatory activities for the implementation of two support measures: SM „Biodiversity Programme" and SM „Supporting Social Inclusion". Key milestones included the approval and signing of second-stage proposals and agreements, establishment of steering structures (Steering Committees and Task Forces), launch events for both support measures, and development of detailed work and financial plans for 2025. While implementation of activities was initiated, measurable outcomes and outputs are not yet reported due to the early stage of execution.

Implementation Status
Both support measures are officially in implementation. Key achievements include:
- recruitment of personnel and preparation of legal and financial frameworks;
- execution of initial activities within support measure components;
- establishment and functioning of monitoring and steering structures.

Challenges
Despite successful initiation, several challenges were identified:
- Tight timelines
- Procurement-related complexities, including administrative procedures and donor coordination.
- Operational complexity in the SM „Supporting Social Inclusion" due to involvement of multiple ministries. These were mitigated through active collaboration, early procurement planning, and strengthened inter-agency communication.

Financial Overview
Total Swiss contribution stands at CHF 26 million, with only a small portion (0.36%) disbursed by the end of 2024 due to the preparatory nature of activities. Specific figures:
- CHF 62,583.93 spent from the Support Measure Preparation Fund;
- CHF 31,283.14 from the Technical Assistance Fund.

Risk Management
The overall risk level for both support measures is assessed as low-medium. Adjustments were made to the risk assessments of a few specific areas (e.g., communication reach, personnel recruitment).
- For the SM „Biodiversity Programme", the primary risk involves potential IT development delays, mitigated by early procurement planning.
- For the SM „Supporting Social Inclusion", key risks include time pressures and procurement process complexities. Mitigation strategies such as early procurement document preparation and enhanced inter-agency communication have been effectively applied.

Audit
The first Annual Audit Report (covering period 21.02.2023–30.06.2024) confirmed the sound management of funds:
- No deficiencies, irregularities, or fraud detected.
- 128 cost items were included in audit population, 35 of which were sampled and reviewed in detail.
- Expenditures and control systems were deemed accurate and compliant, although according to prior agreement, no systems audits were yet carried out.
- The audit provided a high level of assurance regarding financial integrity.

Monitoring
Monitoring was carried out through monthly online meetings, structured reporting, and steering committee oversight. No on-the-spot checks were carried out in 2024, but they may be introduced if risks emerge. Evaluations of support measures are scheduled for 2028.

Communication

In 2024, communication focused on raising awareness through coordinated online content, press coverage, and public events. Key messages were shared via institutional websites and social meedia. Regular coordination meetings ensured consistent messaging, and preparations began for broader outreach activities, including a promotional video and participation in Europe Day 2025.

2. Cooperation Programme progress

2.1 Achievement of objectives of the Cooperation Programme

In 2024, the primary focus was on preparatory activities for the implementation of the support measures. The second-stage proposals for both support measures were approved, the Support Measure Agreements and Support Measure Implementation Agreements were signed, and the Government of the Republic of Estonia adopted the Regulation on the conditions and procedures for the use of funding under the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme. Contracts and orders necessary for the implementation of the programme components were prepared, the compilation of procurement documents was initiated, and personnel responsible for carrying out the activities were recruited. Furthermore, steering and monitoring structures, such as Steering Committees and Task Forces, were established. As the main implementation activities have not yet commenced, it is not yet possible to report on the achievement of outcomes and outputs of the cooperation programme.

2.2 Status of implementation

In 2024, the focus was primarily on various preparatory activities, which laid the foundation for the implementation of the main activities of the support measures.

Second stage Support Measure Proposals
At the beginning of 2024, the preparation of the second stage proposals continued. The NCU submitted the second stage proposal for the SM «Biodiversity Programme» to the SCO on 9 February 2024, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation approved the proposal on 7 March, 2024. The NCU presented the second stage proposal for the SM «Supporting Social Inclusion» to the SCO on 26 February 2024, and this proposal received approval from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation on 21 March 2024.

Signature of the Support Measure Agreements
Following the approval of the second stage proposals, the SM Agreements were signed. The SM Agreement for the SM «Biodiversity Programme» was signed by the State Shared Service Centre and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation on 30 April 2024, and the SM Agreement for the SM «Supporting Social Inclusion» was signed on 31 May 2024.

Opening events of the Support Measures
Once the SM Agreements were signed, the launching events for the support measures were organized. The launching event of the SM „Biodiversity Programme" took place on 30 May 2024 at Palmse Manor.
The opening event of the SM „Supporting Social Inclusion" took place on 17 October 2024 in Narva Town Hall.
Both launching events were very well organized, with interesting content, and provided participants with a good overview of the planned activities, objectives, and challenges.

Establishment of the Steering Committees, Task Forces and their first meetings
The POs established the Steering Committees, which include representatives from the SCO, NCU, POs and PCOs. The role of the Steering Committee is to monitor the progress of the support measure implementation, discuss challenges and potential solutions, and approve necessary modifications.

The Steering Committee for the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" was established on 10 October 2024, and the first meeting took place on 16 October 2024, in Narva. The key focus of the meeting was to decide on the minimum set of basic characteristics to be collected and the disaggregation to

be done in the indicators. The PO and PCOs provided an overview of the planned activities, their current status, and the next steps.

The first meeting of the Steering Committee for the SM "Biodiversity Programme" was held on 15 October 2024, via Microsoft Teams, and the Steering Committee was officially established on 31 October 2024. During the first meeting, the participants agreed on the rules of procedure and the PO together with the PCOs provided an overview of the planned activities and the current status.

Ongoing monitoring and internal steering of the support measures is carried out through Task Forces. The Task Force for the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" was formed on 27 November 2024. It consists of the representatives from the NCU, PO, PCOs and implementers. In 2024 a written procedure was conducted to formally approve the Swiss partner's action plan.

The informal Task Force of the SM "Biodiversity Programme" includes representatives from the NCU, PO, and PCOs, and meets quarterly to discuss the progress of activities and current issues.

Legal framework
As indicated above, the SM Agreements were signed in April and May 2024. The Government of the Republic of Estonia adopted the «Regulation on the conditions and procedures for the use of funding under the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme» which entered into force on 6 August 2024. The regulation was prepared in cooperation between the NCU, POs, PCOs, implementers, and the Ministry of Finance.

The NCU and the POs signed the SM Implementation Agreements. The SM Implementation Agreement for the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" was concluded between the NCU and the Ministry of Culture on 19 November 2024. The SM Implementation Agreement for the SM "Biodiversity Programme" was concluded between the NCU and the Ministry of Climate on 19 December 19 2024.

The preparation of agreements and directives for the implementation of programme components was initiated. All such documents are prepared in cooperation with the NCU, the respective PO of the SM, and the PCO. Furthermore, all agreements and directives must be coordinated with the NCU, the PO, and the Ministry of Finance prior to their issuance or signing. In 2024, the first agreement for the implementation of the programme component was signed. The Ministry of the Interior and the National Foundation of Civil Society signed an agreement on 9 December 2024 for the implementation of Component 4 "Strengthening Civil Society through Social Innovation" under the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion".

Annual Cooperation Programme Report, Communication Concept and Annual Meeting of the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme
The NCU prepared the Annual Cooperation Programme Report and Communication Concept and submitted them to the SCO on 30 April 2024.
The NCU organised the first annual meeting of the cooperation programme on 30 May 2024, at Palmse Manor. The Annual Cooperation Programme Report for the previous year was discussed and approved during the meeting.

Annual plan and budget
The NCU submitted the annual plan and budget for 2025 to the SCO on 31 October 2024. Both documents were approved by the SCO on 25 November 2024.

Reimbursement Requests
The Paying Authority submitted Reimbursement Request No. 1 for the Technical Assistance Fund in amount 31 283,14 CHF and Reimbursement Requests No. 1 for the Support Measure Preparation Fund in amount 62 583,93 CHF, covering the period from 21 February 2023 to 30 June 2024, on 24 October 2024. The reimbursement in the amount of 93 867,07 was received in December 2024.

Activities within the components of the Support Measures
SM «Supporting Social Inclusion»

In 2024 the focus of all four components was on the recruitment of personnel, establishing implementation conditions, and developing a detailed action plan and budget for 2025.

Programme component 1 "Cultural and linguistic integration"
Within the media literacy activity, key tasks included analysing the target audience, conducting interviews with librarians and experts, observing the audience at public events in Narva, forming partnerships, designing a librarian training programme, mapping literature and experts, and creating services and visual materials for project communication.
In activities related to digital transformation, volunteer involvement, and the introduction of Estonian cultural space, interviews and meetings with stakeholders were held to assess needs, set priorities, and prevent overlapping activities.

Programme component 2 "Strengthening the social-and child protection services"
Initial contacts with component partners were established, and discussions began on creating a unified qualification system. Meetings with organizations working on migrant integration were held to assess the needs for developing a programme to support migrants entering the social sector workforce.

Programme component 3 "Increasing multicultural competence in the education sector"
An opening seminar was held on 10 September 2024, bringing together key educational institutions to discuss culturally sensitive and language-aware teaching principles with the aim of establishing a unified approach.
To support parents, including those from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, a mapping of previous activities and studies was initiated. Stakeholder meetings identified main integration barriers, such as the linguistic gap between children and parents and challenges arising from the influx of Ukrainian refugees. Emphasis was placed on providing parents with comprehensive information to better support their children's education.
By December 2024, the report "Adaptation of Non-Native Language Children to Estonian Schools" was completed. Based on a qualitative focus group study, it identified parents' concerns, challenges, and needs, providing a foundation for designing a more targeted and effective support programme for parents.

Programme component 4 "Strengthening civil society through social innovation"
Detailed processes of activities were prepared, relevant parties were mapped, and the preparatory phase for service procurements was started. Project personnel participated in national and international social innovation events. Action plans for civil society competence building activities and for the preparation of training and information materials were compiled, reflecting initial target group mappings and development needs. Both plans will be continuously updated with further details.

SM "Biodiversity Programme"
Programme component 1 "Development of innovative monitoring technologies/solutions and improvement of Environmental databases and systems"
Development and implementation of the new methods, technology and approaches
• From 27 to 29 October 2024, a study trip was organized to Zurich, Switzerland, to visit the factory of Swiss Birdradar Solution AG. The objective was to obtain updated information on radar systems specifically designed for detecting birds and other flying organisms, and to gain a better understanding of the technical capabilities and available products for biodiversity monitoring. Following the study trip, draft terms of reference and other procurement documents were prepared. The procurement process is planned to be completed in the following reporting period.
• By the end of 2024, the first procurement for acquiring and testing new technologies for wildlife biodiversity monitoring was completed. Devices received include rugged tablets for fieldwork software testing (QField), mobile phone-attached bat detectors, bird sound recorders with GPS, GPS devices compatible with existing recorders, a drone with a thermal camera, binoculars with distance meters and altimeters, binoculars with a thermal camera, and fully automated insect monitoring devices. These will be tested in national and voluntary biodiversity monitoring programmes starting in 2025.
• A study trip from 16 September to 2 October 2024 enabled Estonia's leading wolf expert to gain

valuable, practical experience in wolf monitoring methods in the USA (Idaho, Montana, Washington). This knowledge will help to improve the cost-effectiveness and reduce the human resource demands of Estonia's national wolf monitoring.

Wider deployment of Random Encounter Methodology (REM) and training of Artificial Intelligence
In 2024, the Random Encounter Method (REM) and AI-based species detection software were under practical testing. During spring, 25–26 trail cameras were installed in each of 39 monitoring areas for at least 35 days. Additional fieldwork was conducted in autumn in four areas on Hiiumaa and Saaremaa Islands. Trail camera photos from the spring period were still under manual review by the end of the year, and the analysis of files collected in autumn will begin once the spring data review is completed.

Environmental DNA (eDNA) testing
Testing of eDNA methods was initiated. The first phase, focusing on aquatic environments (rivers) for species identification and distribution detection, began in the second half of 2024. A separate procurement process for this was started and will be finalized in the next period. The second phase, testing eDNA applications for terrestrial species (e.g., Flying squirrel, European mink) to replace traditional methods, is planned for 2025–2026.

Promoting citizen science and creating network of volunteers
In 2024, activities focused on preparation and planning for promoting citizen science and establishing volunteer monitoring networks. Four voluntary monitoring methods were tested: otter monitoring using QField, diving beetle surveys with a catch-photo-release approach, bat wintering campaigns through social media and preparation for mobile-based sound recorder use, and amphibian monitoring via social media campaigns.

Development of IT systems
In 2024, preparatory activities were conducted for several IT system developments: establishing interfaces between KESE and EELIS, between EELIS and eBiodiversity (PlutoF), developing a management plans assessment tool, and a fieldwork tool. A framework contract for these developments was signed in September 2024.
Preparations for a cooperation contract between the Estonian Environment Agency and the IT Centre were initiated. EELIS2, the new version of the environmental data system, was tested. Concurrently, data was manually transferred from KESE to EELIS, details for interface development, Tableau analytics and open data were tested. All four developments/interfaces will be performed during next periods of the programme.

Programme component 2 "Implementation of a systematic assessment of the social and conservation outcomes of protected areas"
Activity 1. Conservation Management Effectiveness Assessment
In 2024, preparatory work for the management effectiveness assessment was carried out. The completed TAIEX TSI project provided the assessment methodology. An internal order was prepared, outlining the assessment procedures and defining the roles of various departments in the assessment process. A list of areas to be assessed in 2025 was compiled, and cooperation with the Environmental Agency and the Forest Management Centre was established to plan data collection. Initial discussions regarding the development of an IT tool to support the assessment also took place.

Activity 2. Conservation Management Planning
• In 2024, the guidelines for compiling management plans were updated to include all compulsory (legally required) topics, with optional topics to be added progressively. Testing of the updated guidelines has begun through the drafting of new management plans, with minor adjustments made as needed to improve efficiency.
The updated approach replaces lengthy descriptions with structured tables outlining habitats and species, their protection objectives, current status, pressures and threats, and required conservation measures. Management plans will link directly to web-based information hosted on the Environmental Portal (keskkonnaportaal.ee), utilizing data from the Estonian Nature Information System (EELIS). This web page will be available to the public by March 2025.

Furthermore, the updated system aligns with the Natura 2000 methodology, using standardized lists of pressures, threats, and conservation measures to simplify management plans and enable efficient data analysis.

- Preparation of habitat action plans was initiated, starting with rivers, streams, and lakes. Data gathering and planning for inventories are underway, with fieldwork beginning in 2025. A new inventory guideline for lakes is being developed.
- In cooperation with the Estonian Land Board, a public web map of inventories has been created, allowing landowners and institutions such as the Environmental Agency and Forest Management Centre to view and upload information. The map will be available to the public in February 2025.
- 14 inventories and expert opinions were ordered in 2024.

Activity 3. Species Protection

- In 2024, the guidelines for species' action plans were updated, and a new guideline for a short version of species action plans was introduced. The updated guidelines apply the same principles as those used for management plans, including the adoption of a new standardized system for identifying pressures, threats, and protection measures. New topics, such as the archiving or deletion of species' habitats, have also been incorporated.

All data from previous action plans and draft versions were collected, and discussions were held with the Ministry of Climate on which species require action plans and how to streamline the preparation process. Species were grouped, and it was decided that some groups would have joint action plans, while others would have shorter, individual plans. Compilation of the updated action plans is currently underway.

- 4 inventories and expert opinions were ordered in 2024.
- In 2024, data on all protected species was collected and analysed, and principles for assessing species' protection categories were developed and discussed with the Ministry of Climate. To launch the next phase, a kick-off seminar was organized on 22 January 2025 in Tartu, with participation from 119 attendees onsite and over 140 online. The seminar presented the work completed in 2024, including data collection, development of assessment principles, and updates to the guidelines for management plans and species' action plans.

Swiss partners

SM «Supporting Social Inclusion»

It is certainly important to highlight that one partner from Switzerland also contributes to the successful implementation of the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme. The PO of the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" – the Ministry of Culture – and the Bern University of Applied Sciences signed a Partnership Agreement on 24 September 2024. The agreement aims to strengthen cooperation and bilateral relations between the PO, PCOs, implementers, and their partners through workshops, study visits, and other joint activities.

For 2025, a comprehensive action plan has been agreed upon. In relation to Component 2, a study visit of Estonian experts to Switzerland has been scheduled. Additionally, more than 12 online workshops are planned across the three other components in 2025, each tailored to specific themes aligned with the objectives of the support measure.

It is worth mentioning that the partnership already extends beyond the support measure, as partners actively exchange information on publications and events taking place outside the scope of the programme (for example https://www.ifsw.org/book-launch-social-work-as-a-global-profession-online/, https://integrationconference.ee/en/).

SM «Biodiversity Programme»

There are no Swiss partners involved in the implementation of the support measure "Biodiversity Programme", but, if necessary and feasible, contact is maintained with various Swiss companies to procure the best possible equipment. Also study visits to Switzerland are also organised to establish new contacts and exchange experiences.

The first study visit took place during the preparation of the support measure proposal in 2023, when representatives of the PO and PCOs visited Switzerland. During the study visit, participants became acquainted with Switzerland's approaches to biodiversity conservation, monitoring, and sustainable tourism management. The programme included several field visits, among them a visit to a national park. In addition, participants learned about support measures being implemented in other countries

(Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia) within the framework of the Swiss Cooperation Programme.

On 27–29 October 2024, the Estonian Environment Agency visited Swiss Birdradar Solution AG in Zurich to gain insights into radar technologies for monitoring birds and other flying organisms. The trip provided valuable knowledge on available radar systems, their technical capabilities, and suitability for biodiversity monitoring, significantly enhancing the agency's procurement readiness.
In parallel, the agency has consulted with I.V.A. Leon, the Estonian representative of Leica and distributor of Safran Vectronix AG, regarding the purchase of advanced optical equipment.

The Estonian Environment Agency would like to organise a study trip to Switzerland in 2026 or 2027 to exchange experience on the use of trail camera networks and volunteer-based biodiversity monitoring.There might also rise a need for one more study visit to Swizerland to share experiences on biodiversity monitoring through networking of volunteers.
The Environmental Board plans to organise study trip to Switzerland in the second half of 2025.

Conditions set for the second stage Stage SM Proposals
Most of the conditions set for the second-stage proposal of the SM "Biodiversity Programme" have been fulfilled. The condition requiring coordination of study visits with the SCO—when such visits take place outside the EU-13 countries—will remain in effect until the end of the support measure.

Most of the conditions set for the second-stage proposal of the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" will continue to be observed until the end of the support measure. The agreement with the Swiss partner has been signed, and the related condition can be considered fulfilled.

2.3 Work plan and financial planning

Financial planning
Since in 2024 the activities were still mainly preparatory and a significant amount of time was spent on developing the legal framework, expenditures were lower than planned. 24 October 2024, the Paying Authority submitted three Reimbursement Requests to the SCO. Two of the Reimbursement Requests were for the reimbursement of costs from the Support Measure Preparation Fund, and one was for the Technical Assistance Fund. Until the signing of the SM Agreements, the POs and PCOs used funds from the Support Measure Preparation Fund, from which a total of 62,583.93 CHF was spent. From the Technical Assistance Fund an amount of 31 283,14 CHF of Swiss support was spent.

After the signature of the SM Agreements, funds were used either from the Estonian state budget or from own resources. Expenditures can be submitted to the NCU for verification and reimbursement once the contracts or decrees for the implementation of the respective programme component have entered into force. Partners may submit their expenditures for reimbursement after signing contracts with the implementers. As the SM Implementation Agreements were signed rather late in the year 2024, the NCU was able to verify and reimburse only the expenses of the Ministry of Culture by the end of the year, which will be submitted to the SCO for reimbursement in 2025.

Information on financial planning is included in Annex 5.

Work plan
There were minor, non-significant changes in the implementation schedule of the SM «Biodiversity Programme». In 2024, the SM Implementation Agreement was signed, and the directive of the Minister of Climate for the implementation of programme components was established later than initially planned according to the implementation schedule. Since the Support Measure Agreement was signed and the costs of the activities were deemed eligible, this delay did not affect the implementation of the activities.
There were minor shifts in the timing of the Steering Committee and Task Force meetings; however, this does not constitute a significant change, as the meetings are arranged on an ongoing basis in agreement with the meeting participants, taking into account whether the meeting will be held electronically or in person, and whether it can be coordinated with the monitoring of component activities.

There were no changes in the implementation schedule of the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion".

Key activities in 2025
- On 8 January 2025 Task Force meeting of the SM "Biodiversity Programme" in the Ministry of Climate.
- On 31 January 2025 Task Force meeting of the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" on Teams.
- On 17 February 2025, the Steering Committee meeting of the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion".
- From 24 to 28 March 2025, the NCU seminar in Switzerland.
- 30 March 2025 - the deadline for submitting the Annual Support Measure Reports, the Reimbursement Requests and the Annual Audit Report to the SCO.
- From 14 to 16 April 2025, the Steering Committee meeting of the SM "Biodiversity Programme" and a monitoring visit in Saaremaa.
- 30 April 2025 - the deadline for submitting the Annual Cooperation Programme Report to the SCO.
- 9 May 2025, the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme will be presented during Europe Day celebrations held at Vabaduse Square in Tallinn.
- 18 June 2025, the Annual Meeting of the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme.
- 30 September 2025 the deadline for submitting the Reimbursement Requests to the SCO.
- October/November 2025 meetings of the SM Steering Committees.

Information regarding the work plan is provided in Annex 4.

3. Cooperation Programme Management

3.1   Management and control systems

In 2024, there were no changes in the setup or staffing of the NCU, the Paying Authority, or the Audit Authority. However, 31 December 2024 was the last working day at the NCU for Ege Ello, the Head of the Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes Management Division. Until a new head is appointed, she is being replaced in 2025 by Kristi Sell, the Head of the Grants Development Department.

3.2   Audits

The first Annual Audit Report of the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme, covering the period from 21 February 2023 to 30 June 2024, was prepared by the Financial Control Department of the Ministry of Finance of Estonia, acting as the Audit Authority. The audit focused on verifying the legality and regularity of expenditures, the accuracy of accounts, and the effective functioning of the management and control systems.

The total audited expenditure amounted to EUR 146,439.75, which included the Technical Assistance Fund and the Support Measure Preparation Fund allocated to POs and PCOs. Audit covered 128 cost items, of which 35, with a total amount of 72 900,19 euros, were examined through a combination of statistical and non-statistical sampling methods. These methods were aligned with the audit strategy and applied appropriately based on the population size and characteristics. There were no findings resulting from the audits of expenditures. No deficiencies or irregularities were detected, no financial corrections were made and no follow-up was necessary. In addition, the Audit Authority informed that there has been no reported fraud or suspicions of fraud detected.

Although no system audits were conducted during the reporting period, the Audit Authority considered the results of the expenditure audits sufficient to conclude that the management and control systems functioned at least at an average level. System audits are scheduled to begin in 2025.

The audit strategy was updated in March 2025 in line with the recommendations received previously, but these updates had no effect to the audit work or results.

In summary, the audit results provide a sound level of assurance regarding the proper management and use of funds under the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme.

3.3   Irregularities

In 2024, no complaints were received and no irregularities were detected.

3.4   Monitoring and evaluation

After the agreements are signed or the directives for the implementation of programme components are established, and the necessary preconditions are fulfilled, a separate project is opened in the Structural Funds Operating System (SFOS) for each PO, PCO, implementer, and for Technical Assistance. SFOS is an information system used for processing projects and making payments.

At the time of submitting the Annual Cooperation Programme Report, projects from the POs, Environmental Agency, Environmental Board, Ministry of the Interior, National Foundation of Civil Society, and the Technical Assistance are registered in SFOS.
A risk assessment is carried out for each project, based on which the need for on-the-spot controls is determined. For the year 2025, no on-the-spot controls are planned in the monitoring plan based on the risk analysis of projects already registered in SFOS. Project risks will be reassessed in 2026, and the scope of expenditure verification and the need for on-the-spot controls will be determined accordingly.

On-the-spot controls may be carried out to verify public events organised within the components - for example, to check whether the event agenda corresponds to the SM proposal, whether the topics are in line with the agenda, whether the participants match the target group, and whether communication requirements have been met. As a rule, the documents are digital and can be verified without the need for an on-site visit; however, if necessary, verification of relevant documentation may also be carried out on site.
The selection of events to be checked will be discussed in advance with the PO and/or the PCO. As information about whether such events will take place and when they will occur is not yet available at the time of submitting the Annual Report, the timing of on-the-spot controls cannot be included in the monitoring plan.

Monitoring missions, as described in the Regulations for monitoring progress towards outputs and outcomes according to agreed indicators, baselines, and targets, are not planned. Progress can be monitored through Annual Support Measure Reports, Reimbursement Requests, and meetings of the Support Measure Steering Committee and Task Force. In addition, the NCU meets ca once a month via Teams with the representatives of each component of the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion". The meetings are attended by the PO, PCO, and implementer(s), and are used to discuss the status of activities, problems, and other relevant topics. As the "Biodiversity Programme" includes only two PCOs and a PO, separate meetings by component are not held; instead, a single meeting is organised covering the entire support measure. In 2024, broader meetings took place approximately once a month, involving POs, PCOs, and implementers, as there were many shared topics and the number of participants was smaller. However, as the number of participants has increased and the topics have become more component-specific, it was agreed that in 2025, meetings will be held separately by component.

Joint meetings and visits involving the NCU and SCO, together with the PO, PCO, implementers, partners, held alongside the SC and/or Annual Meetings, may conditionally be referred to as monitoring visits. These meetings and visits provide an opportunity to examine more closely the activities of the PCO, implementer or partner within the programme component.

Evaluations of the support measures are planned to be carried out in 2028.

4. Communication activities

When publishing information, the target audience is taken into account, and the communication channel that best ensures reaching that audience is chosen. Information about events and activities is shared through websites, press releases, social media channels (such as Facebook and LinkedIn), and newsletters. In addition, activities are presented, where possible, at various events related to the respective field.

Once a quarter, the NCU, POs, PCOs, implementers, and partners meet via Teams to discuss communication-related topics concerning the programme. During these meetings, participants review what has been done so far, discuss future plans, seek answers to emerging questions, and exchange experiences. The possibilities for the most effective ways to present the cooperation programme to the public are also discussed.

The NCU collects information in OneDrive from the POs, PCOs, implementers, and partners about all types of communication activities. This includes, for example, published press releases, social media posts, organised and planned events, and more. It provides a good overview of what has taken place and what is planned.

Information on webpages
A separate webpage was created of the website of the State Shared Service Centre, where general information about the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation is published in Estonian https://rtk.ee/toetused-ja-taotlemine/toetusfondid-ja-programmid/sveitsi-eesti-koostooprogramm and in English https://rtk.ee/en/Swiss-Estonian-cooperation-programme
General information about the support measures is published on the webpages of the POs, while the websites of the PCOs contain general information about the components. More detailed information about component activities is available on the webpages of the implementers. The Integration Foundation and the National Library plan to create separate webpages for publishing information about the activities under the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme during the course of 2025. Until then, they continue to publish information about their activities and events on their respective websites.

Information about the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme is published on following webpages:

SM "Supporting Social Inclusion"	
Ministry of Culture	https://www.kul.ee/kultuuriline-mitmekesisus-ja-loimumine/loimumine/sveitsi-eesti-koostooprogramm
Ministry of Social Affairs	Šveitsi-Eesti koostööprogramm | Sotsiaalministeerium
Ministry of Education and Research	https://www.hm.ee/ministeerium-uudised-ja-kontakt/euroopa-liit-ja-rahvusvaheline-koostoo/regionaalne-koostoo
Ministry of the Interior	https://www.siseministeerium.ee/sveitsi-eesti-koostooprogramm-sotsiaalse-kaasatuse-toetamine
Education and Youth Board	https://harno.ee/stipendiumid-ja-toetused/muud-toetusmeetmed/mitmekultuurilises-klassiruumis-opetamine-ja-oppimine
National Foundation of Civil Society	https://kysk.ee/taotlejale/vabauhenduste-arendamine/sveitsi-eesti-kysk/

National Library	https://www.rara.ee/raamatukogudele/meedia-ja-digipadevuse-arendamine/
SM "Biodiversity Programme"	
Ministry of Climate	https://kliimaministeerium.ee/eesti-sveitsi-koostooprogramm
Environment Agency	https://keskkonnaagentuur.ee/šveitsi-eesti-koostooprogrammi-elurikkuse-programm
Environmental Board	https://keskkonnaamet.ee/šveitsi-eesti-koostooprogrammi-elurikkuse-programm

Key Events in 2024

Signing ceremony of the SM Agreement
On 31 May 2024, a festive signing ceremony for the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" Agreement took place at Tallinn Town Hall. The event was attended by guests from Switzerland, as well as representatives of the SCO, PO, PCOs, implementers, the State Shared Service Centre, the Ministry of Finance, and other institutions. Press-release oft he event https://www.kul.ee/uudised/loimumisvaldkond-saab-sveitsi-riigi-toel-lisatuge-0 and photo gallery https://www.flickr.com/photos/kultuuriministeerium/albums/72177720317473584/

Launching events of support measures
In cooperation with the PCOs, the POs organised launching events for the support measures.
The launching event of the SM "Biodiversity Programme" with 68 participants titled "Swiss Wind Beneath the Wings of Estonian Nature Conservation" took place at Palmse Manor on 30 May 2024. The opening remarks were delivered by representatives from Switzerland, the Ministry of Climate, and the Environmental Agency. Representatives of the PCOs provided an overview of both components, followed by several presentations on biodiversity in Estonia. The event also featured a panel discussion titled "Nature Conservation Is Not Rocket Science." In the second half of the day, participants had the opportunity to take part in practical outdoor activities, such as volunteer monitoring using a smartphone application, a demonstration of trail camera installation, and other hands-on experiences. The event was filmed
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XWunsiWXOA&t=441s and the press-release was published
https://kliimaministeerium.ee/uudised/sveits-panustab-eesti-looduskaitse-innovatsiooni

The launching event for the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion," titled "Cohesive Estonian Society – How Do We Create It Together?" took place on 17 October 2024 at Narva Town Hall. The event brought together 75 participants from various organisations, including ministries, academia, foundations and associations, as well as local governments. During the event, participants discussed the challenges and opportunities in the field of integration, shared experiences from Estonia and Switzerland, and presented inspiring stories. Dr. Eveline Ammann Dula, a representative of the Bern University of Applied Sciences, presented the Swiss experience and challenges in the field of social inclusion. The event was filmed https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OohK9aHPGsg&t=6246s and a photo gallery produced https://flickr.com/photos/kultuuriministeerium/albums/72177720321280347/. Before and after the event, press releases were issued to the main media outlets and social media channels.

Other relevant information
The article introducing the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" was published on the blog of the Ministry of Culture called "Kuva" (https://kul.ee/uudised/sveitsi-eesti-koostooprogramm-koos-sidusama-uhiskonna-poole). The blog is publicly available on the Ministry's website, and the article was also sent to the press list and blog subscribers.

Key events and activities in 2025 at the level of the cooperation programme
Europe Day

On 9 May 2025, the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme will be presented at the Europe Day, taking place at Freedom Square in Tallinn. The aim is to promote the cooperation programme to the general public and to draw attention to the issues it addresses.

Event participants will have the opportunity to answer quiz questions related to Switzerland, Estonia, and the cooperation programme. They will also be able to take home fact sheets about the cooperation programme, as well as materials from the PCOs and partners, which provide further details about their various activities.

Video about the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme
The NCU is commissioning a video to introduce the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme, which can be shared on social media. The aim is to film a variety of events under both support measures, capturing key aspects along with the broader purpose and impact of the cooperation programme.

Updated Communication Concept is provided in a separate document.

5. Risk management at the level of the Cooperation Programme

The State Shared Service Centre, that is the main managing, paying and coordinating authority for the most funds implemented in Estonia, conducts an annual risk assessment, which integrates most funds and involves all stakeholders. The risk assessment covers both management and control system risks as well as fraud risks. Based on the results of the risk assessment, additional mitigation measures are introduced for significant risks where possible, aiming to reduce the likelihood of their occurrence. These mitigation measures are linked to institutional work plans, making them a part of daily management. Twice a year, the institutions involved in the risk assessment provide the State Shared Service Centre with an update on the implementation of their mitigation measures, enabling timely responses and adjustments through additional actions.

The risks related to the implementation of the cooperation programme have been assessed within the framework of the annual risk assessment, and this assessment has served as the basis for evaluating risks reflected in the Annual Support Measure Reports.

The risk assessment of the cooperation programme is based on the Annual Support Measure Reports and it indicates that the overall risk level of both support measures can be categorized as low-medium.

No new risks have emerged compared to the SM Proposals, but the assessment of three risks has slightly changed. For the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion», the impact of the risk "Risk that information about the SSIP activities does not reach intended target groups" was rated one point higher, while the impact of the risk "Political risks" was rated one point lower. For the SM "Biodiversity Programme," the likelihood of the risk "Being unable to hire personnel for the programme" was rated one point lower. None of these risks is considered high, and therefore they are not discussed in further detail.

The SM Annual Report for the SM "Biodiversity Programme" indicates that no programme components were rated as high risk. The sole elevated risk identified pertains to a potential delay in IT development, assessed as medium-high. All remaining risks are categorised as low or low-medium, resulting in an overall risk level of low-medium for the programme. To mitigate the IT-related risk, procurement documentation was prepared ahead of schedule to enable early tendering and immediate commencement of activities once a contract is signed with the selected bidder.

Regarding the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion", the report similarly indicates that most risks are assessed as low or low-medium, with an overall risk classification of low-medium. No specific component is considered high risk. However, the programme's implementation across four ministries adds complexity and introduces operational and coordination challenges. These are being effectively managed through close cooperation and communication among the involved entities.

The two most significant risks for this programme are time constraints and procurement-related issues, both rated as medium-high. The tight timeframe demands consistent time management and dedication from the project team. In response, all stakeholders worked collaboratively in 2024 to

ensure the prompt launch and implementation of thematic activities. The procurement risk encompasses several aspects, including donor involvement, approval processes, procedural irregularities, and the potential for failed tenders. Mitigation measures include maintaining timely and effective communication with donors, translating and submitting necessary documents swiftly, consulting procurement experts, conducting market research, and informing potential bidders in advance to facilitate a more efficient procurement process.

Annex 1: Reporting according to Swiss core indicators at Cooperation Programme level

Objectives of the Swiss Contribution	Core Indicators (CI code)	Baseline	Target	Achieved this period	Cumulatively achieved	Cumulatively achieved as % of target
Managing migration and supporting integration. Increasing public safety and security *SM "Supporting Social Inclusion"*	OCIN 1.2 Core Indicator MIGR_CI_1: Number of migrants and forcibly displaced persons participating in new or expanded measures for social and economic integration (disaggregated by gender and background (Estonian, migrant))	0	20000	0	0	0
Cross-cutting *SM "Supporting Social Inclusion"*	OPI 1.8 / Core Indicator CC_CI_1 Counsellors receive regular training	0	30 trained counsellors	0	0	0
Cross-cutting *SM "Supporting Social Inclusion"*	OPI 2.12 / Core Indicator: CC_CI_1 Professionals trained	0	10 000	0	0	0
Promoting civic engagement and transparency *SM "Supporting Social Inclusion"*	OPI 3.8: / Core indicator CIV_CI_3: Number of trained volunteers	0	3000	0	0	0
Promoting civic engagement and transparency *SM "Supporting Social Inclusion"*	OPI 3.9: / Core indicator CIV_CI_3: Number of trained volunteer leaders	0	100	0	0	0
Cross-cutting *SM "Biodiversity Programme"*	CC_CI_1 Number of people benefiting from training to improve institutional and professional capacity (disaggregated by gender)	0	350	0	0	0

Annex 2: Status of implementation

SM name including Swiss and Partner State SM codes	Status	Swiss contribution to the SM in CHF	Start date	End date	SM Agreement and Amendments (dates of entry into force)	Reporting status	Assessment of progress by NCU
SM "Biodiversity Programme" 7F-10768.01	In implementation	6 930 000	01.05.2024	31.08.2028	01.05.2024	on track	on track
SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" 7F-10699.01	In implementation	18 600 000	01.06.2024	31.08.2028	01.06.2024	on track	on track
Technical Assistance 7F-10899.01	In implementation	390 000	22.02.2023	03.12.2029	22.02.2023	on track	on track

Annex 3: Financial status

SM name including Swiss and Partner State SM codes	Swiss contribution to the SM [CHF]	Total reimbursements received from CH [CHF]	% of Swiss contribution to the SM received from CH
SM "Biodiversity Programme" 7F-10768.01	6 930 000	0	0
SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" 7F-10699.01	18 600 000	0	0
Technical Assistance Fund 7F-10899.01	390 000	31 283,14	8,02%
Support Measure Preparation Fund	80 0000	62 583,93	78,23%
Total	26 000 000	93 867,07	0,36%

Annex 4: Work plan for the coming year

SM name including Swiss and Partner State SM codes	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
SM "Biodiversity Programme" 7F-10768.01	TFM		ASMR	SC		TFM			RR	SC		
				MV								
	COM	COM	COM		COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM
SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" 7F-10699.01	TFM	SC	ASMR		TFM				TFM		SC	
		MV				MV			RR			
	COM		COM		COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM
Cooperation Programme level Technical Assistance 7F-10899.01			RR	ACPR		AM			RR			
	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM

Abbreviations:
Annual Meeting	AM
Annual Cooperation Programme Report	ACPR
Annual Support Measure Report	ASMR
Communication activity	COM
Task Force Meeting	TFM
Monitoring visit	MV
Reimbursement Request	RR
Steering Committee Meeting	SC

Annex 5: Financial planning (ongoing Support Measures)

SM name including Swiss and Partner State SM codes	Swiss contribution to the SM [CHF]	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
SM "Biodiversity Programme" 7F-10768.01	6 930 000	0	1 243 911	2 500 101	2450200	735 788	
SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" 7F-10699.01	18 600 000	0	790 000	4 505 000	7 000 000	6 305 000	
SM "Technical Assistance Fund" 7F-10899.01	390 000	31 283,14	28 600	48 000	50 000	65 100	135 733,72
Support Measure Preparation Fund	80 000	62 583,93					

Annex 6: Irregularities

No irregularities were detected.

SM name including Swiss and Partner State SM codes	Irregularity reference number	Swiss contribution to the SM in CHF	Nature of actual or suspected irregularity	Estimation of total financial damage in CHF (if any)	Proposed financial correction in case of financial damage	Status
			Choose an element.			
			Choose an element.			
			Choose an element.			
			Choose an element.			

Annex 7: Monitoring and evaluation plan for the coming years

A Overview

SM name including Swiss and Partner State SM codes	2025				2026				2027				2028				2029			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
SM "Biodiversity Programme" 7F-10768.01		MV				MV				MV			E	MV E	E					
SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" 7F-10699.01	MV	MV			MV				MV				MV E	E	E					
Cooperation Programme																				

Monitoring visit: MV
Evaluation: E

Please see also Excel table Annex 7A-1

B Additional information on the strategic planning of evaluations

Information is provided in Excel table Annex 7B-1

Annex 8: Overview of communication measures at country level during the reporting period

Communication measure	Positive results in terms of visibility and awareness of the Cooperation Programme and CH's image (media response, feedbacks etc.)	Lessons learnt (e.g. related to (timing, place, adjustment to target groups, use of logo etc.)
Regular meetings with representatives of both support measures	Information and experiences are shared between both support measures and across all levels. All parties are included in the same information space, providing them with a clearer overview of activities, future plans, and related developments. Scheduled meetings facilitate discussions on progress, allow for addressing any arising issues, and enable planning of future actions.	Scheduled exchanges of information facilitate the alignment of communication with the needs of target audiences while promoting the coherent and proper application of the programme's visual identity across all measures and levels.
Choosing an appropriate communication channel for the target audience	When publishing information, the target audience is taken into account, and the communication channel that best ensures reaching that audience is chosen. Information about events and activities is shared through websites, press releases, social media channels (such as Facebook and LinkedIn), and newsletters. In addition, activities are presented, where possible, at various events related to the respective field.	Considering the target audience when selecting communication channels significantly improves outreach. Using a combination of websites, press releases, social media, newsletters, and sector-specific events ensures broader visibility. Timely publication and appropriate channel selection are key to effective communication.

Annex 9: Overview of risk assessment on Support Measure Level

SM name including Swiss and Partner State SM codes	Overall risk	Assessment and comments by the NCU
SM "Biodiversity Programme" 7F-10768.01	Low-Medium	No programme components were rated as high risk in the SM Annual Report. The only elevated risk identified was a delay in IT development, which was assessed as medium-high. All other risks were classified as low or low-medium, and the overall programme risk level was described as low-medium. The greatest identified risk is that IT developments may take longer than planned. To mitigate this risk, the preparation of procurement documents was initiated early, allowing tenders to be conducted at the earliest opportunity and activities to commence immediately upon the conclusion of a contract with the successful bidder.
SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" 7F-10699.01	Low-Medium	In the SM Annual Report, most risks are assessed as either low or low-medium, and the overall risk level of the SM is categorised as low-medium. The report does not indicate that any individual programme component has been rated as high risk. However, it notes that the SSIP is complex and implemented across four ministries, which naturally introduces operational and coordination risks. Nevertheless, close cooperation and effective communication among the involved parties help to manage these challenges and mitigate associated risks. The highest-rated risks relate to time-frame constraints and procurement processes, with two risks assessed as medium-high. The first concerns the challenging time frame for SM implementation, which necessitates consistent time management and strong commitment from the support measure project team. In 2024, all participating stakeholders contributed actively to ensure the timely initiation and implementation of thematic activities. The second risk involves the complexity of the procurement process, including donor involvement, the donor approval process, irregularities in procurement procedures, and the potential failure of procurements. To address this risk, swift and effective cooperation with donors is essential. This includes translating and delivering necessary materials to them as promptly as possible, as well as consulting with procurement experts from the State Shared Service Centre. In addition, conducting market research prior to issuing procurement notices and informing potential bidders in advance of upcoming procurements are critical measures to ensure a smooth process.