



Second Swiss Contribution  
**Estonia**

# Annual Cooperation Programme Report

---

Reporting Period – 01.01.2025 - 31.12.2025

---

Report Number - 3

---

Report Submission Date

30.04.2026

---

# Table of contents

1.	Executive Summary	4
2.	Cooperation Programme progress	5
2.1	Achievement of objectives of the Cooperation Programme	5
2.2	Status of implementation	6
2.2.1	Support Measure “Supporting Social Inclusion”	7
2.2.1.1	Programme component 1 “Cultural and linguistic integration”	7
2.2.1.2	Programme component 2 “Strengthening the social-and child protection services”	10
2.2.1.3	Programme component 3 “Increasing multicultural competence in the education sector”	11
2.2.1.4	Programme component 4 “Strengthening civil society through social innovation”	13
2.2.2	Support Measure “Biodiversity Programme”	15
2.2.2.1	Programme component 1 “Development of innovative monitoring technologies/solutions and improvement of Environmental databases and systems”	15
2.2.2.2	Programme component 2 “Implementation of a systematic assessment of the social and conservation outcomes of protected areas”	17
2.2.3	Swiss partners	20
2.3	Work plan and financial planning	21
3.	Cooperation Programme Management	22
3.1	Management and control systems	22
3.2	Audits	22
3.3	Irregularities	23
3.4	Monitoring and evaluation	23
4.	Communication activities	24
5.	Risk management at the level of the Cooperation Programme	28
	Annex 1: Reporting according to Swiss core indicators at Cooperation Programme level	31
	Annex 2: Status of implementation	32
	Annex 3: Financial status	33
	Annex 4: Work plan for the coming year	34
	Annex 5: Financial planning (ongoing Support Measures)	35
	Annex 6: Irregularities	36
	Annex 7: Monitoring and evaluation plan for the coming years	37
	Annex 8: Overview of communication measures at country level during the reporting period	38
	Annex 9: Overview of risk assessment on Support Measure Level	39

## List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CHF	Swiss Franc
EELIS	A state information system database for the collection, management, and use of nature data
eDNA	environmental DNA
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
GPS	Global Positioning System
IT	Information Technology
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
REM	Random Encounter Method
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SCO	Swiss Contribution Office
SFOS	Structural Funds Operating System
SM	Support Measure
SSIP	Supporting Social Inclusion Programme

# 1. Executive Summary

The Annual Cooperation Programme Report covers the period from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025.

## Progress and Achievements

In 2025, the Swiss–Estonian Cooperation Programme moved from a largely preparatory phase towards active implementation. Both support measures made progress in launching activities, continuing the implementation of activities initiated earlier, and contributing to the achievement of programme indicators. Under the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”, achievements included preparatory work for the digital transformation of integration services, development of volunteer engagement models, piloting of counselling services, cultural activities for non-native speakers, media literacy activities, development of social sector competence and training systems, education-sector trainings, parent support activities, and the first social innovation activities. Under the SM “Biodiversity Programme”, progress was made in procuring and testing innovative monitoring technologies, developing biodiversity monitoring methods, launching voluntary monitoring campaigns, carrying out eDNA testing, assessing protected areas, updating management planning guidelines, and preparing species action plans.

## Implementation Status

Both support measures were still affected by preparatory activities in 2025, especially the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”, where the legal framework, annual budgets, and activity plans continued to be prepared and approved during the first half of the year. Nevertheless, substantive activities were implemented under both support measures. By the end of 2025, 19 projects were registered in SFOS (Structural Funds Operating System), and expenditure under 17 projects was verified, and reimbursed. The timelines of the support measures were not formally amended, and implementation was considered to be proceeding according to the general schedule, although some activities shifted into 2026.

## Challenges

The main challenges in 2025 were linked to the longer-than-expected preparatory period, delays in establishing the legal framework, procurement-related difficulties, and limited time for implementation. In the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”, some activities started later than planned, which affected participant numbers and indicator achievement in 2025. For example, cultural activities were delayed due to an unsuccessful procurement, and education-sector trainings started later than expected because of the timing of the ministerial decree approval. In the SM “Biodiversity Programme”, the main challenge relates to the timing of IT developments. Given these delays and the relatively tight remaining implementation period, it may be necessary to extend the support measures to ensure the full implementation of activities, full use of funds, and achievement of indicators.

## Financial Overview

Financial implementation remained relatively slow in 2025, mainly due to the long preparation period and the fact that several activities only began during the reporting year. At the end of 2025, expenditure accounted for 7,51% of the total programme budget, based on the reimbursement requests submitted in March 2026. In September 2025, the first reimbursement requests for the support measures were submitted, and further reimbursement requests were submitted in March 2026. Although spending has been slower than expected, this is explained by the preparatory nature of the early implementation phase rather than by major implementation failures.

## Risk Management

Risk management was carried out within the framework of the annual risk assessment conducted by the NCU. The assessment covered management and control system risks as well as fraud risks, and mitigation measures were planned for significant risks. The overall risk level of both support measures was assessed as medium-low. For the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”, the most significant risks concerned the implementation timeframe, management staff capacity, and procurement complexity. For the SM “Biodiversity Programme”, the only medium-high risk concerned the possibility that IT developments may take longer than planned. No risks were assessed as high, and no programme components were identified as high risk.

## **Audit**

The second Annual Audit Report of the Swiss–Estonian Cooperation Programme covered the period from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025. The Audit Authority issued an unqualified opinion and concluded that the accounts were complete, accurate, and truthful, that the expenditure declared for reimbursement was legal and regular, and that the management and control system functioned properly. The overall level of assurance was assessed as high. No findings were identified in relation to the audits of accounts or expenditure, no errors were detected, the total and residual error rates were 0%, and no financial corrections were required. Two significant system audit findings were identified, but they were not considered systemic or a significant risk to the functioning of the management and control system.

## **Monitoring**

Monitoring was carried out through SFOS, risk assessments, structured reporting, Steering Committee and Task Force meetings, regular coordination meetings and monitoring visits. A risk assessment was carried out for each project registered in SFOS, and the results were used to determine the scope of expenditure verification and the need for on-the-spot controls. In 2025, the NCU checked two events: the opening event of social innovation activities in Viljandi and the Media Literacy Conference in Rakvere. No shortcomings were identified. No other on-the-spot controls were carried out, as no need was identified through risk assessment or expenditure verification. Evaluations of the support measures are planned for 2028.

## **Communication**

Communication and visibility activities were implemented at programme, support measure, and component level. Activities included public events, campaigns, websites, newsletters, podcasts, social media outreach, media articles, videos, and targeted stakeholder communication.

At programme level, visibility was strengthened through participation in Europe Day in Tallinn, where the programme was presented to the general public, and through the production of six public information videos. The NCU also maintained a central SharePoint overview of communication activities, including press releases, social media posts, events, photos, and videos. Regular Teams meetings with POs, PCOs, implementers, and partners supported coordinated communication and consistent presentation of the programme.

# **2. Cooperation Programme progress**

## **2.1 Achievement of objectives of the Cooperation Programme**

In 2025, the Cooperation Programme moved from a mainly preparatory phase towards active implementation. Although the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion” was still affected by preparatory activities, especially during the first half of the year, substantial progress was made in launching new activities, continuing activities initiated earlier, developing systems, piloting services and contributing to programme indicators. The necessary directives for the implementation of programme components were established, and both support measures started to generate the first measurable results.

In the **SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”**, the 2025 results show that the support measure progressed from preparatory work to the first visible outputs across all programme components. While many mid-term and long-term outcomes cannot yet be fully measured due to the early stage of implementation, qualitative evidence, including participant feedback and stakeholder engagement, indicates that the activities are relevant and well aligned with target group needs. Quantitatively, 701 migrants and forcibly displaced persons participated in new or expanded integration measures, 38% of service development processes were completed, 15% of services were created and made available to the target group, participant satisfaction and knowledge gain reached 80%, and 74% of trained professionals reported that they had acquired the competences needed to work effectively in multicultural contexts. The activities also strengthened cooperation between ministries, implementing agencies and the Swiss partner, creating a strong basis for scaling up implementation in 2026–2028.

The **SM “Biodiversity Programme”** also provides clear quantitative evidence of progress under the objective of protecting the environment and the climate. In 2025, the programme achieved initial

progress in improving the efficiency and reliability of biodiversity monitoring, while the effectiveness of management planning of protected areas, protected species and habitats reached 90% of the planned target. New monitoring technologies and solutions were developed, tested or prepared for implementation, including the Random Encounter Method, eDNA sampling, AI-based species detection, drones, bat detectors and other field equipment, while the procurement of four mobile 3D bird radars was completed. In addition, 97 protected areas were assessed, three protected area management plans were approved, twelve draft plans were prepared, and the categories of nine protected species groups covering 238 protected species were reviewed. The programme also strengthened civic engagement through ten voluntary monitoring campaigns, with 846 volunteers benefiting from training or web-based instructions. These results demonstrate that the support measure contributes both to evidence-based nature conservation and to broader public participation in biodiversity protection.

## **2.2 Status of implementation**

Both support measures were still affected by preparatory activities in 2025. This was particularly the case for the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”, where the preparation and establishment of directives for the implementation of programme components, as well as the preparation and approval of annual budgets and activity plans, continued during the first half of 2025. Nevertheless, various activities were implemented under both support measures, contributing to the achievement of the indicators.

### Legal framework

In 2025, the preparation and establishment of agreements and directives for the implementation of programme components, which had begun in 2024, continued. In 2024, only one agreement between the Ministry of the Interior and the National Foundation of Civil Society for the implementation of Component 4 “Strengthening Civil Society through Social Innovation” under the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion” was signed.

In the first half of 2025, the following directives for the implementation of programme components were signed:

- On 28 February 2025, a directive was signed establishing the conditions for the implementation of activities under the programme components of the Support Measure “Biodiversity Programme”.
- On 24 March 2025, a directive was signed establishing the conditions for the implementation of activities under Programme Component 2 of the Ministry of Social Affairs, “Strengthening social and child protection services”.
- On 15 May 2025, a directive was signed establishing the conditions for the implementation of activities under Programme Component 1 of the Ministry of Culture, “Cultural and linguistic integration”.
- On 3 July 2025, a directive was signed establishing the conditions for the implementation of activities under Programme Component 3 of the Ministry of Education and Research, “Increasing multicultural competence in the education sector”.

### Annual Cooperation Programme Report, Communication Concept and Annual Meeting of the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme

The NCU submitted the second Annual Cooperation Programme Report and updated Communication Concept to the SCO on 30 April 2025. The second annual meeting took place in Tallinn on 18 June 2025.

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 the Technical Support for 2026 to the SCO on 31 October 2025. Both documents were approved by the SCO on 08 December 2025.

The Annual Plan outlines the activities of the NCU, the Paying Authority and the Audit Authority, while the annual budget includes the costs related to those activities.

### Reimbursement Requests

- In **March 2025**, the Paying Authority submitted the Reimbursement Request No. 2 for the Technical Assistance Fund in the amount of CHF 13 583,51.
- In **September 2025**, the Paying Authority submitted the **first reimbursement requests** for the **support measures**.
  - ✓ SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”, in the amount of CHF 169 049,02.
  - ✓ SM “Biodiversity Programme”, in the amount of CHF 532 031,61.
  - ✓ Also, Reimbursement Request No. 3 for the Technical Assistance Fund in the amount of CHF 15 709,49 was submitted.
- In **March 2026** the Paying Authority submitted the following reimbursement requests.
  - ✓ SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”, in the amount of CHF 623 825,33.
  - ✓ SM “Biodiversity Programme”, in the amount of CHF 447 103,76.
  - ✓ Technical Assistance Fund, in the amount of CHF 17 287,48.

### Meetings of the Steering Committees

In 2025, two meetings of the Steering Committee of the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion” were held, on 17 February in Viljandi and on 11 November in Tartu.

The Steering Committee of the SM “Biodiversity Programme” also convened twice in 2025, from 14 to 16 April in Saaremaa and from 6 to 7 October in Ida-Virumaa.

## Activities within the components of the Support Measures

### 2.2.1 Support Measure “Supporting Social Inclusion”

#### 2.2.1.1 Programme component 1 “Cultural and linguistic integration”

Key achievements in **Component 1** during 2025 included laying the groundwork for a **comprehensive digital transformation of integration services**, initiating the development of a **sustainable and more inclusive volunteering system**, piloting **counselling services that support independent language learning**, expanding **opportunities to engage with Estonia’s cultural space**, and launching a **multilingual media literacy programme** that builds critical thinking and digital skills.

Across all five activities, the component focused on **reducing barriers** for people with **diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds**, thereby contributing directly to **Estonia’s national integration strategies** and Estonia’s efforts to address EU-identified priorities in digital inclusion, social cohesion, and the strengthening of societal resilience. These efforts collectively established strong foundations for integration pathways that will continue scaling in 2026 and beyond.

#### Activity 1 “Preparation of digital transformation in the field of integration”

During 2025, **Activity 1** focused on laying the **groundwork for a well-informed and needs-based digital transformation in the field of integration**. To achieve this, a public tender was announced, and a service provider ASKEND OÜ was contracted in October 2025 to conduct an **in-depth analysis of existing digital platforms** supporting integration. This analysis, which will continue until spring 2026, **aims** to identify areas for improvement, propose optimization scenarios, and explore possibilities such as creating new systems or consolidating existing ones under a single access point.

In parallel, a **“Digital Solutions for Integration”** working group was established, bringing together experts in migration and integration from across Estonia. The working group held two meetings in 2025 to gather diverse input for the potential development of digital tools. To ensure that proposed solutions reflect actual user needs, the **ideas generated were validated** through online questionnaires and focus group interviews conducted in English and Russian with the target audience. **Feedback** from participants of the working group as well as the focus groups was highly **positive**, particularly regarding the inclusive approach taken by the Integration Foundation.

#### Activity 2 “Inclusion of volunteers in the integration activities”

In 2025, a partner conducted a **comparative research “[Practices for engaging volunteers](#)” on volunteer engagement in Estonia and five European countries**, and the results were discussed

with key stakeholders. The findings are being used to develop a **volunteer engagement model** for the Integration Foundation, including impact assessment, training, and support mechanisms.

At the same time, a partner was selected to develop a mandatory **six-hour online foundational course for volunteers**, to be hosted on the Digital State Academy, the central state e-learning platform in Estonia. The course consists of three modules focusing on an introduction to integration and the role of the Integration Foundation, cultural sensitivity and communication, and the role of the volunteer and self-care. It is expected to be finalised in **2026**.

At the end of 2025, a partner was involved to develop **volunteer engagement model**, which is developed based on research, earlier analyses, discussions with managers and partners, volunteer feedback, and the project manager's experience. The model is expected to be completed in **2026**. Volunteers who had previously contributed to the Foundation's activities were actively involved in the development process. Their expectations and needs were gathered through meetings, visual exercises, group work, and discussions. An autumn **seminar-training** was organised to strengthen engagement and provide intercultural training focused on volunteers' roles, adaptation experiences, and reflection on their volunteer journey. **14 volunteers<sup>1</sup> attended the training**, of whom 8 people gave feedback that they want to volunteer at Integration Foundation (Core indicator CIV\_CI\_3: Number of trained volunteers).

Throughout the year volunteers, colleagues, and partners were actively involved in mapping needs and expectations, reviewing good practices, and preparing online solutions.

### **Activity 3: "Development and implementation of a counselling and information system"**

In 2025, the focus was on **prototyping and testing independent language learning counselling and peer counselling services** to better understand their value from the customer perspective and ensure their relevance and quality. Counselling sessions were recorded with consent to support reflection and team-based quality development, and counsellors worked in regular groups to share experiences and improve services. This collaborative approach strengthened team ownership and service quality.

**Counselling services** were launched in **September 2025** and delivered over four months, resulting in **64 individual one-hour sessions** and **one group counselling session** on independent language learning, reaching 74 migrants and forcibly displaced persons<sup>2</sup> and demonstrating strong initial engagement with the services (OCIN 1.2 Core Indicator MIGR\_CI\_1). Although the initial target of 300 sessions was not reached, the year prioritized establishing a strong foundation through counsellor onboarding, service familiarization, and the development of a flexible counselling framework. This framework was continuously refined based on real user and counsellor feedback.

**Professional development of counsellors** was further supported through a **coaching-focused training session** held in December 2025, attended by **17 counsellors<sup>3</sup>** (Core Indicator CC\_CI\_1 Counsellors receive regular training). Valuable lessons were learned regarding timing, and future training sessions will be scheduled earlier in the year to maximize participation and impact.

**Services are currently available** via a self-service portal, with sessions offered both onsite and online via Zoom. As the services are still in an active prototyping phase, full public descriptions will be published in 2026.

---

<sup>1</sup> People who participated in the trainings, as well as those interested in volunteering at the Integration Foundation, were born in Estonia and are native Estonian speakers. Eight participants gave positive feedback and expressed willingness to continue. Five respondents were female and three were male. In future activities, greater focus will be placed on volunteers with a migrant or refugee background.

<sup>2</sup> Of all 74 individuals who received counselling, 62 were female and 31 were male; 36 were newcomers, 11 were refugees from Ukraine, and 43 were people whose mother tongue is not Estonian and whose country of origin is not Estonia. The mother languages spoken by individuals who received counselling included Russian, Ukrainian, English, Turkish, Punjabi, and other languages; and the countries of origin included Russia, Ukraine, India, Turkey, Belarus, and others.

<sup>3</sup> All participants were female.

The first phase of **service development** focused on understanding user needs in close cooperation with partners and the target group. Although the user research was not fully completed in 2025, important groundwork was laid. The comparison of service offers was finalized in October 2025, after which the partner Brand Manual OÜ began conducting the research. The remaining research activities will be completed in **2026**, providing valuable insights for the next stages of service development.

Looking ahead, the team is actively exploring opportunities to reach more people through expanded group counselling formats.

#### **Activity 4: “Activities Introducing the Estonian Cultural Space”**

In 2025, the goal was to increase cultural awareness among non-native speakers and promote social cohesion by introducing the Estonian cultural environment.

During the reporting period, the **film programme**<sup>4</sup> was prepared and **successfully implemented in Ida-Viru County** from August to December 2025. Watching films and discussing them provided a simple and engaging way to experience the language. This helped locals overcome the language barrier and learn more about Estonian culture and customs.

A public procurement was prepared and conducted to provide activities introducing the Estonian cultural space. The first procurement, launched in July, failed because no bids were submitted, but a second procurement, launched in the autumn, was successful and resulted in the selection of two contractual partners. The procurement covers the **provision of cultural programmes** - a systematic series of activities designed to support both the **discovery of the Estonian cultural space** and the strengthening of ties with it, while also offering opportunities for **Estonian language practice**. The activities were launched in December 2025 and will continue **throughout 2026**.

In addition, collaborative activities with cultural institutions were also made available to the target group. In the fourth quarter of 2025, **two seminars on cultural sensitivity** were held for cultural institutions, including museums, libraries, and community centres. The aim was to raise awareness of organisations providing services to people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds about adaptation, integration and cultural diversity. Feedback from the target group was positive, and in 2026 there are plans to continue mapping the needs of the target group and providing collaborative activities and training.

A public procurement for **structured cultural programmes** combining cultural activities with opportunities for informal Estonian language practice was launched in December 2025.

All planned activities were launched, although later than scheduled due to the unsuccessful procurement. As a result, the number of target group participations in 2025 remained below the planned target of 800. This shortfall is expected to be compensated for in 2026 as activities scale up.

#### **Activity 5: Provision of media literacy training**

By the end of 2025, the media literacy programme had moved from preparation to active implementation and produced a solid foundation for long-term services that support the digital and media skills of people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The planned **learning materials were completed**, including the media literacy **trainer’s guide**, “[How to Navigate an Information-Rich Environment](#)” and the **handbook** “[Digital Skills Guidebook](#)” in Estonian and Russian. In addition, an online **educational game** on [conspiracy theories](#) was developed in both languages. A multilingual website, [MeediaRadar](#), was created and will provide structured access to all programme materials from early 2026.

A **network** of 40 media experts and journalists was **established** to support programme delivery. With their involvement, several events were organised for the target group, using different methods such

---

<sup>4</sup> Overall participation number was 905.

as media walks, workshops and public discussions. Altogether, these activities reached **143**<sup>5</sup>participants from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

**Activities for libraries and community centres** strengthened the capacity of local trainers to work with multilingual audiences. Regional seminars were held, helping practitioners better understand the needs of the target group, test new event formats and build stronger partnerships. Interviews and focus groups confirmed the need for culturally sensitive and practical learning formats, as well as additional psychological and communication skills. In response, preparatory work began for a psychology and adult-learning training course for library staff.

### **2.2.1.2 Programme component 2 "Strengthening the social-and child protection services"**

In 2025, the component was launched in full and focused on building the foundation for a complementary education and training system for child protection and social sector workers. Key preparatory steps included establishing cooperation between the Ministry of Social Affairs, Social Insurance Board, and Estonian Social Work Association, approving the ministerial decree outlining the conditions and procedures for implementing the programme component activities, and conducting study visits to Switzerland, Ireland, and Finland.

Overall, the year was dedicated to mapping national and international practices and aligning social service quality requirements with professional roles, qualifications, and education needs.

#### **Activity 1: curricula and professional qualification modification**

**A social sector competence profile framework** was developed under the coordination of Estonian Social Work Association, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Research, and the Estonian Qualifications Authority. This framework is a major milestone, as it creates a unified basis for developing competence profiles and supports future curriculum development.

Preparations were also made for updating professional qualification principles in the social sector. **Tender documentation** was compiled so that profession-specific proposals for revising qualification requirements can be developed in 2026, including for professions where such requirements have not previously existed.

To involve educational institutions in updating the curricula, **conditions** for engaging higher education institutions and vocational schools as project partners were prepared. This was supported by a **research-based analysis of curriculum development needs**, a survey completed by nine institutions, and a cooperation meeting with 11 educational institutions. **Schools are expected to join** the activities in the first half of 2026.

In addition, Estonian Social Work Association piloted a **digital professional qualification examination** for care workers at levels 3 and 4. 27 participants took part, achieving an average score of 83 out of 96. Preparations also continued for designing a workforce inclusion programme for people from different language and cultural backgrounds to enter the social sector.

Regarding the **public awareness campaign** on new opportunities and positive changes in social care and child protection studies and work, initial preparations were made. However, it was decided not to implement the campaign on the originally planned large scale. The further approach will be decided in the first half of 2026, with preparation expected in the second half of 2026 and campaign activities starting in 2027.

---

<sup>5</sup> Under indicator OCIN 1.2 Core Indicator MIGR\_CI\_1 137 attendances were registered during the period among migrants and forcibly displaced persons. Of these, 110 were women and 27 were men; 16 were international or temporary protection beneficiaries; 19 were Ukrainian refugees; and 56 had lived in Estonia for less than five years.

## **Activity 2: training and counselling system**

In 2025, important steps were taken to **strengthen the training and support system** for social sector specialists. Since the Social Insurance Board is the national provider of further training in the social field, it carried out an internal mapping of its training activities, while a nationwide continuing education study is planned for 2026–2027. The **Social Insurance Board** also **developed and tested a prototype feedback and evaluation system for trainings**, using pre- and post-training questionnaires and follow-up surveys six months later to assess both the acquisition of skills and application of skills in the work environment.

At the same time, the Estonian Social Work Association and the Social Insurance Board developed and launched **five new training programmes**: difficult conversations, introduction to adult education, an adult educator basic knowledge e-course, ethics and self-care for care workers, and intercultural communication with digital skills, including AI. **Altogether, 197 participants took part, including 144 specialists working with adults and 53 working with children** (Core indicator CC\_CI\_1 Professionals trained). Among those who responded to the feedback questionnaire, more than half stated that they were willing to apply their newly acquired skills when working with clients from different cultural backgrounds.

In addition, several activities supported the **development of counselling and support systems for social sector workers**. Estonian Social Work Association began developing a “[Tips Corner](#)” section on its website to provide practical tools and self-development resources, organised **Master Workshops** to share best practices, supported the creation of a **video-based financial literacy tool** for social workers in the minuraha.ee environment, and published two **expert podcasts**. Together, these activities helped create practical support elements for professionals in the social sector.

### **2.2.1.3 Programme component 3 “Increasing multicultural competence in the education sector”**

#### **Activity 1: In-service training for professionals of the education sector**

In 2025, a solid and systematic foundation was created for the delivery of high-quality in-service training for professionals in the education sector. Although the year’s results remained below the originally planned volume, the activities carried out established the necessary basis for achieving the relevant indicators in the coming years.

The **in-service training courses** delivered by **Tallinn University** began in September 2025, later than expected. Because of this delay, not all planned activities could be completed within the year, and part of the implementation was postponed to 2026. In total, **three in-service training programmes** were completed during 2025. The delay was mainly caused by the longer-than-anticipated approval process for the decree setting out the conditions and procedures for implementing the programme component activities, which meant that training marketing partly coincided with the holiday period. This negatively affected enrolment and led to the postponement of several training start dates. As a result, indicator achievement in 2025 was only partial in quantitative terms, though fulfilment in 2026 appears highly probable.

Despite the delayed start, the programme produced meaningful results. In the first half of 2025, **54 professionals in the education sector** acquired knowledge and skills needed to work in multicultural environments (Core indicator CC\_CI\_1 Professionals trained). A total of 64 participants registered, and 54 completed the training, giving a completion rate of about 84%. Most participants were **teachers from early childhood and general education**, since most training activities were specifically designed for teachers. One course with a broader target group also included a small number of school leaders, support specialists, a youth sector representative, and a higher education lecturer.

Immediate participant feedback was very positive. Based on feedback from two trainings available at the reporting stage, **94% of participants** stated that they had acquired the necessary knowledge and skills for working in multicultural environments and were ready to apply them in practice.

In parallel with the training activities, Tallinn University also prepared and carried out several development activities, including preparing new study modules, mapping and developing training

content, and planning academic staff training for 2026. The course “**Multicultural and Multilingual Learning Environment**,” which is part of all degree programmes of the School of Educational Sciences, is scheduled to be updated in 2026. These changes are based on feedback from the Swiss partner following participation in the course in spring 2026. **A preparatory study** programme was developed jointly with the University of Tartu and has entered implementation. **In-service training and micro-credential modules were aligned** with programme objectives, particularly focusing on multiculturalism and multilingualism.

The in-service training programmes directly support the transition to Estonian-language instruction, addressing identified gaps in learning materials and methodological preparation in schools previously operating in Russian-language instruction. As a result, the programme’s direct effect can be seen in **increased competence among education professionals**, while its indirect effect is expected to appear in better **support for children and young people in multicultural learning environments**.

At the same time, several challenges emerged in 2025. One of the most notable was the very low participation of men, with only one male participant per training group. Another major challenge was the delay in implementation, which reduced the size of training groups and lowered the overall number of participants. These issues partly limited the achievement of the planned results during the reporting year.

To address these shortcomings, several improvements are planned for 2026. Greater attention will be given to increasing completion rates and reducing drop-out by offering participants additional support, such as extra consultations and more flexible deadlines. More effort will also be made to attract male participants through targeted communication and more gender-balanced outreach. In addition, communication and dissemination activities will be launched earlier and implemented more systematically in cooperation with educational institutions and local authorities. Another important priority will be the assessment of long-term impact through follow-up evaluations carried out six months after training completion.

## **Activity 2: Informing, consulting, and supporting parents, including those from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds**

### **Mapping of multiculturalism-related topics**

In November 2025, a focus group interview was carried out to explore the experiences and expectations of Estonian-speaking parents whose children study in multicultural classrooms. Based on the findings, an **analytical report**, [\*\*“Supporting Social Inclusion in a Multicultural Classroom”\*\*](#), was prepared.

The report shows that parents generally view multicultural classrooms positively, recognising their role in broadening children’s perspectives and fostering tolerance and cooperation. At the same time, it identifies several challenges, including language adaptation difficulties for newly arrived children, insufficient information for parents, and limited interaction between families from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Overall, the report concludes that a successful multicultural learning environment depends on openness, cooperation, and trust-based communication among all stakeholders. Its findings can also support the planning of future parent conferences by highlighting the areas in which parents need more knowledge and support.

### **Development of multicultural awareness-raising activity programs**

During the reporting period, **four training programmes** were delivered, **comprising 12 seminars** in total. Each programme included three face-to-face sessions for parents and focused on strengthening parenting competences, supporting children’s development, and improving cooperation between schools and families in multicultural and multilingual environments.

A total of **106 parents**<sup>6</sup> took part in the trainings. Most participants were women, which is common in parental education programmes. The trainings were intentionally organised in small groups in order to encourage active participation, experience-sharing, individual feedback, and practical guidance in a safe and supportive environment.

In addition to face-to-face trainings **8 video lectures** were developed to provide parents with flexible and accessible support in guiding their child's development in a multilingual and multicultural environment. This format was designed to reach parents who are unable or unwilling to attend in-person trainings and to help them apply new knowledge in everyday life.

The video lectures address important topics ranging from children's emotional well-being to the role of parents in supporting children through changes, such as adapting to a new environment or coping with traumatic experiences. One new video is published each month.

During the reporting period, **three video lectures were published:**

1. October 2025: "[Trauma and Child Development – How to Be an Aware and Supportive Parent](#)"
2. November 2025: "[Parents' Expectations and Reality: A Child's Adjustment to a New Environment](#)"
3. December 2025: "[Children's Mental Health and Emotional Well-being](#)"

The viewing figures indicate that the video lectures are effectively reaching the target audience and that digital-format materials can serve as an important complement to traditional in-person trainings. In the next reporting period, the program's communication partner will take a more active role in supporting the dissemination of the video lectures to ensure they reach the target audiences through appropriate channels and engage an even larger number of parents.

#### **2.2.1.4 Programme component 4 "Strengthening civil society through social innovation"**

##### **Activity: Building civil society competence, raising public awareness and disseminating information on social innovation**

In 2025, the implementation of the activity focused both on launching the first substantive actions and on preparing the remaining interventions for delivery in 2026 and 2027. The overall implementation was guided by an **action plan** for civil society competence-building activities, including target group mapping, competence needs, planned activities, expected results, and links to the overall outputs and outcomes of the component. The plan was developed through team capacity-building, stakeholder meetings and dialogues, analysis of target group needs, and consideration of the Estonian Social Innovation Ecosystem mapping prepared by Tallinn University in 2023. The action plan is updated regularly in line with the implementation timeline.

The activity under this component includes five interventions:

- **Advising on the development, renewal, scaling or continuation of innovative products and services with social impact**

This intervention includes the creation and delivery of **incubation programmes** and **social hackathons** aimed at developing solutions to social inclusion challenges, particularly those related to migrants and refugees.

By the end of the year, the procurement process for the service provider responsible for delivering the two hackathons and two incubation programmes planned for 2026 and 2027 had reached its final stage, and the contract was expected to be signed at the beginning of 2026.

- **Providing workshops and trainings to target groups to increase knowledge on social innovation**

This intervention includes workshops on **international best practices**, **tailor-made training programmes** for consultants and advisers, an **online course**, and **study visits** within Europe.

---

<sup>6</sup> The participant profile shows that the activities successfully reached the intended target group. 19 participants were new immigrants who had lived in Estonia for less than five years, and three were Ukrainian war refugees. Most participants were Russian-speaking, while a small number had Estonian, Ukrainian, or other mother tongues. Overall, the statistics indicate that the training programmes contributed to improving families' awareness, coping capacity, and inclusion in the Estonian education system.

Further activities under this intervention were prepared in 2025 but were not yet delivered. **Two tailor-made training programmes** for consultants and advisers are planned for 2026 and 2027. The procurement documents for these programmes have already been prepared on the basis of mapped needs and target group competences, and the call for tender is scheduled for early 2026.

Similarly, **two workshops** on best practices from the Nordic countries on the inclusion of new immigrants through social innovation and social entrepreneurship were originally foreseen, but the 2025 workshop was rescheduled to 2026 in order to ensure stronger participation and greater impact once more activities are operational. Preparatory work for these workshops already took place in 2025 through networking, information gathering, and cooperation discussions.

- **Disseminating information to raise public awareness on social innovation**

Several activities were carried out in 2025 to raise awareness of social innovation among wider audiences.

To promote awareness of social innovation a **podcast concept** was developed, and **two podcast episodes** were released under the name “[Mõjulood](#)” (**Stories of Impact**), which was chosen through a public naming competition.

Preparatory work was also carried out for the planned **broadcast series**. The procurement documents were prepared in 2025, while filming, recording, and production are scheduled for 2026

In addition, **13 newsletters** were published between 28 February and 17 December 2025, with a high **average opening rate of 58.82%**. The newsletters shared information on research opportunities, webinars, trainings, inspirational stories, podcasts, videos, thematic materials, programme activities, and partner initiatives. Satisfaction with these materials was strong: **80% of newsletter subscribers who viewed or listened to the materials reported being satisfied**.

- **Supporting the emergence and development of social innovation networks to promote cooperation between target groups**

The main activity implemented in 2025 under this intervention was the first **study visit in South Estonia** on 28–29 October 2025. It brought together 22 participants and 2 organisers from the Estonian public and private sectors to learn about social innovation methods, explore Estonian social initiatives, and exchange practical experience.

The participant feedback was very positive. After the event, 15 participants submitted feedback, and all respondents stated that they had gained new knowledge on how to implement social innovation methods. Participants highlighted that they received valuable information on social innovation, relevant materials, existing initiatives, and professionals working in the field whom they could contact in the future. Feedback also indicated that the study visit was inspiring, practically useful, and beneficial for learning from other communities and organisations.

**Network-building** was an important outcome of the first study visit. The event helped participants create and strengthen connections within the field of social innovation. Interest in the activity was almost three times higher than the number of available places, showing strong demand. Participants were highly motivated to remain in contact after the event, and therefore a private **Facebook group** was created for participants of this and future study visits to support continued networking and collaboration.

All feedback and experience gathered from it are being used as input for the preparation of similar study visits in 2026.

**3 additional study visits** in Estonia are going to be organised in 2026 and 2027. Preparation for the second one started at the beginning 2026, considering the experiences and the participants' feedback from the first study visit. **2 study visits** to countries within Europe are going to be delivered in 2026 and 2027. First preparations were made in 2025, including learning about different countries' practices by attending international online and physical events, conversing about possible visits and reaching out to specialists for more information.

- **Collecting, systematising, and disseminating social innovation know-how and best practices**

In 2025, progress was made in preparing both of the key outputs under this intervention. The preparation of a **handbook** on social innovation advanced to the stage where the initial analysis of existing materials was completed and an action plan for compiling and disseminating the handbook was prepared. Before drafting the final handbook, an external expert will be involved to assess the concept and suggest improvements where necessary. The handbook is expected to be published by the end of 2026.

At the same time, work progressed on the **systematised collection of social innovation examples** in Estonia. A prototype solution for the best practices database was prepared and is currently in the testing phase. Additional examples are being added in line with the concept, and the structure of the database is being developed further so that input from different sectors can be incorporated. After further testing and expert feedback, the collection will be released. Best practices will continue to be gathered on a regular basis.

## 2.2.2 Support Measure “Biodiversity Programme”

### 2.2.2.1 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

##### Acquisition of four mobile 3D bird radars

The Terms of Reference (technical specifications) and other documents for the international procurement of the radars were prepared during the first quarter of 2025. The international procurement was conducted from 19 May to 26 June 2025. Only **one offer**, submitted by **Swiss Birdradar Solution AG** in the amount of EUR 675,400.00, was received. The **contract was signed** on 15 September 2025, and the delivery deadline for all four mobile 3D bird radars is **15 June 2026**.

##### Acquisition and testing of new technologies for wildlife biodiversity monitoring

The first procurement was prepared by the end of 2024. In 2025, new technological equipment for wildlife biodiversity monitoring was procured and received for testing. The equipment is being tested in various national and voluntary monitoring activities, including bird, bat, seal, insect and other wildlife monitoring, with the aim of assessing its suitability for wider use in biodiversity monitoring methods.

The equipment tested in 2025 proved suitable for use in several biodiversity monitoring projects. Based on these positive results, a new procurement was prepared and launched at the end of the year to acquire additional equipment and support its wider integration into national and voluntary monitoring methods. Fully automated insect monitoring devices will be tested further before any additional units are procured, as their data management and adaptation for use in Estonia require more time.

#### Wider deployment of Random Encounter Methodology (REM) and training of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The Random Encounter Method was under **practical testing** in 2025, and software development to incorporate AI was also in the testing phase.

- **REM testing** during the spring period (May–June) of 2025 was conducted in **41 monitoring areas**. In each area, 25–26 trail cameras were installed for at least 35 days. From all photo series, all positive image cases (including the start and end time of each series), the species present, and the number of animals in each series were recorded.
- From the spring 2024 photos, 9,289 cases of different animals were detected: 7,533 mammals, 1,464 birds, 110 insects, and 9 reptiles (lizards).
- From the spring 2025 photos, 11,218 cases were detected: 9,967 mammals, 1,200 birds, and 62 insects. The most frequently detected species were roe deer, wild boar, and badger.
- In addition, **fieldwork** using 19 trail cameras was carried out in spring on Muhu Island.
- Software development for using AI in species detection from trail camera photos is still in the testing phase.

#### Environmental DNA (eDNA) testing

Testing of eDNA use in biodiversity monitoring methods has been divided into two parts.

- First testing phase (aquatic environment):

The **first phase** began in the second half of 2024 and it includes testing eDNA usability and method cost-effectiveness in **aquatic environment** (rivers) with focus on species identification (crayfish, mussels, dragonflies, diving beetles) and the detection of species distribution (Habitats Directive fish species).

For this purpose, a separate procurement was successfully prepared, and the Estonian University of Life Sciences was contracted. In total, **193 eDNA samples were collected** from 14 rivers and one lake (96 sampling sites) in June, with repeated sampling conducted in August. Preliminary results indicate that the eDNA analysis has been very successful. However, as the final report is still under revision, the results will be presented in the next annual report.

- **Second testing phase (terrestrial environment):**

The second phase will focus on testing the usability and cost-effectiveness of eDNA methods in terrestrial environments. The emphasis will be on bar-coding applications, such as analysing animal dispersal within the same species (e.g. flying squirrel), and comparing current capture-and-release methods with eDNA usage, which do not disturb the animals. This phase is planned for implementation in 2026.

### **Promoting citizen science and creating a network of volunteers**

The year **2025** was the first full year with a complete set of voluntary monitoring campaigns. In total, **ten campaigns** were carried out.

Main activities:

- Moose – Animal of the Year 2025  
A year-round social-media-based campaign was conducted in cooperation with the Estonian Theriological Society and other third sector associations. More than **500 observations** were collected.
- Bats – two separate campaigns:
  - wintering campaign in social media group (1 February–5 March 2025): a total of **104 observations**, recording **175 bats**.
  - simple mobile-based sound recorders usage in summer count (17 June–10 July 2025): **31 transects** were completed in Tallinn and **12 transects** across the rest of Estonia.
- Geese monitoring at migration roosts (1 March–31 May 2025).
- Amphibian monitoring (campaign from 28 March to 30 June 2025):  
A total of **594 observations** were made by **332 volunteers**.
- Reptile monitoring (campaign in 1 January–31 December 2025).
- Globeflower (*Trollius europaeus*) monitoring (campaign in 1 May–31 October 2025):  
More than **500 observations** were collected.
- Diving beetles monitoring (15 April–30 September 2025):  
Carried out using a simple “catch–photo–release” method.  
Observations were made in **more than 120 waterbodies**.  
Two Habitats Directive species were detected in **12 waterbodies**.

The planned voluntary monitoring networks to be tested and launched with **campaigns** in **2026** are as follows:

- Hedgehog – animal of the Year 2026, in cooperation with the Estonian Theriological Society and other third sector associations.
- Bats – two campaigns: wintering campaign in a social media group and simple mobile based sound recorders usage in summer count.
- Geese – monitoring at migration roosts.
- Crows and magpies, slow worm; amphibians; diving beetles; pollinators; moths; swifts and swallows; cranes.

The results of these campaigns will be **presented publicly** during the **volunteer gathering** in December 2026.

### **Development of IT systems**

In 2025, work on developing the IT systems (including establishing interfaces between KESE and EELIS; establishing an interface between EELIS and eBiodiversity (PlutoF); developing the

management plans assessment tool; and developing the fieldwork tool) focused mainly on preparatory decisions and the signing of cooperation agreements.

Key steps completed in 2025:

- **Framework contract**

In September 2024, the IT Centre of the Ministry of the Environment signed a framework contract with the IT developer Inversion Software OÜ, which won the framework procurement for implementing the IT developments for the next four years (2025–2028).

- **Cooperation agreement**

In June 2025, the Estonian Environment Agency and the IT Centre of the Ministry of the Environment signed a cooperation contract establishing the framework for all four developments listed above.

- **Testing of EELIS2**

EELIS2 (the new version of the IT system) has been tested by the Chief Specialist (IT system specialist) at the Environmental Agency, who is responsible for providing input to the IT developments and conducting testing activities.

The specialist participated in weekly development meetings for EELIS2 and in meetings related to EELIS1 (the old system), as well as in various workshops providing feedback to the developer on topics such as massive data import, data handling, protected areas and objects, data forms, object migration, and more.

- **Data transfer and interface preparation:**

A data manager at the Environmental Agency manually transferred data from KESE to EELIS, while simultaneously testing details relevant to the future interface development. The data manager also carried out testing of Tableau analytics and open data functionalities.

All four developments/interfaces will be implemented during the upcoming periods of the programme.

### **2.2.2.2 Programme component 2 “Implementation of a systematic assessment of the social and conservation outcomes of protected areas”**

#### **Activity 1. Conservation Management Effectiveness Assessment**

The year 2024 served as the preparatory phase for the management effectiveness assessment, and the actual assessment work began in 2025.

Four assessors were hired on **1 January 2025**. During 2025, a total of **97 protected areas** were assessed using an adapted methodology.

A **detailed manual for assessors** was prepared to support consistent interpretation and application of the assessment framework. The **assessment questionnaire** was further developed to enable responsive data entry and to enable the automated generation of reports with normalised scores. All assessment reports were uploaded to the public document management system.

In addition, **supporting data tools and analytical workflows** were developed to identify indicator species, interpret results through a traffic-light system, and carry out data analysis. These improvements enhanced the consistency, comparability, and practical usability of assessment results across different types of protected areas.

Furthermore, on 16 September 2025, an **online seminar** was organised on the conservation management assessment for the conservation management planning department.

#### **Activity 2. Conservation Management Planning**

**The guidelines for protected area management plans were finalised** and are now ready for use. They include all compulsory (legally required) chapters, and several sections were refined based on the testing process. During the testing phase, specialists prepared protected area management plans and provided feedback for improving or amending the guidelines. This feedback was incorporated, resulting in further refinement of the guidelines.

In addition, the **guidelines** were expanded with **technical solutions**, including:

- visitor management online maps,
- the Environmental Portal webpage, and
- full translations of the lists of pressures, threats, and conservation measures.

Under the new guidelines, **3 management plans** ([Anne Ioodusala](#), [Kaasiku Ioodusala](#), [Andresaare Ioodusala](#)) were approved and **twelve draft plans** have been prepared and are awaiting approval.

Visitor management infrastructure is planned using a **web tool (virtual office)** that was developed in cooperation with the Land and Spatial Development Board.

**In 2025, management plans were linked to the following web pages:**

- **Data sheet about protected areas**

The data sheet about protected areas was completed in 2025. It is built using the Tableau data analytics tool, and the information is displayed on the [Environmental Portal](#) (Keskkonnaportaal). All data originate from the Estonian Nature Information System (EELIS).

The page has been publicly available since **November 2025**.

As this web page consolidates all essential information related to protected areas in one place, there is no longer a need to provide detailed descriptions or create separate maps when presenting the area and its values in management plans.

- **Web map for inventories**

In cooperation with the Land and Spatial Development Board, [a web map for inventories](#) was developed and made publicly accessible.

The map provides:

- an overview of all inventories carried out in Estonia,
- information for landowners on which inventories are conducted on their land, and
- access for other institutions (e.g., the Environmental Agency, Forest Management Centre), who can also upload inventory data directly to the site.

### **Action Plans for Habitats**

- **Lakes and springs**

The draft version of the action plan for lakes and springs is under revision at the Environmental Board and the Estonian University of Life Sciences. It will be presented to stakeholders in **2026**.

The new [guidelines for inventories of lakes](#) were completed, along with additional materials such as [guidelines for mapping plants](#) and a [methodology for estimating representativeness](#). Inventories were carried out for and completed on **64 small lakes** and **62 coastal lagoons**.

- **Forest habitats**

An action plan outlining and planning administrative measures for the protection of forest habitats is under revision and will be introduced to stakeholders once the review is completed.

- **Bogs, mires and fens**

The updated action plan for bogs, mires, and fens is under revision and will be presented to stakeholders after the review process.

- **Rivers and streams**

An action plan for rivers and streams is under preparation. A new expert was hired at the beginning of February 2026 to lead this work.

Inventories of rivers and streams are ongoing and are being carried out in accordance with the newly developed guidelines.

By the end of 2025, all **14 assignments** commissioned in 2024 were completed. These included nine inventory-related assignments and seven expert opinions or expert assessments, with some assignments combining both inventory work and expert analysis.

In **2025**, a total of **64** assignments were ordered. These included 59 inventory-related assignments and 6 expert opinions, with one assignment combining both inventory work and an expert opinion. **20** inventory-related assignments were completed in 2025.

Under this activity, **two seminars** were organised. On 30 January 2025, an **online seminar** was held via MS Teams to introduce the new guidelines for lake habitat inventories. The seminar was organised by the Environmental Board in cooperation with experts from the Estonian University of Life Sciences and was attended by 185 participants.

On 12 June 2025, the seminar "**Water Crossroads in Nature**" took place at the University of Tartu. It was jointly organised by the Institute of Ecology and Earth Sciences of the University of Tartu, the Environmental Board, and the Estonian Nature Fund, and brought together 117 participants (CC\_Cl\_1 Number of people benefiting from training). The presentations were recorded and are uploaded [HERE](#)

### **Activity 3. Species Protection**

#### **Updating the Guidelines for Species Action Plans**

The [guidelines of species' action plans](#) were updated, and a separate guideline was developed for the short-format species action plan. The same principles as those applied in the management plan guidelines were followed, including the introduction of a new system for assessing pressures, threats, and protection measures. New topics were also incorporated, such as the conditions for archiving or deleting species habitats. In addition, data from previous action plans and draft versions were gathered. In cooperation with the Ministry of Climate, discussions were held to identify the species for which action plans are required and to streamline the preparation process. As a result, species were categorised, and it was agreed that certain groups may be covered by joint action plans, while others may be addressed through short-format plans. The preparation of these plans is ongoing.

The project team updated **two species action plans** - *Hammarbya paludosa* and *Cerastium alpinum*. These plans have been approved by the Environmental Board and published on its website for public access. Additional action plans have been updated and submitted for public consultation; constructive feedback from this process will be incorporated before the plans are forwarded for approval. The project team is working on updating 7 more action plans. In total, 10 action plans are being updated by project staff.

Procurement procedures were completed, and contracts were signed for the preparation of an additional **ten action plans**. All contracted plans are either group plans or plans that cover at least two species. Several plans have been commissioned together with field inventories to ensure that up-to-date data are used in the planning of conservation measures and actions within species conservation action plans.

**2 inventories and 2 expert opinions** were ordered in 2024 and **completed** in 2024 or 2025.

In 2025, a total of **14 assignments** were ordered to support species protection and the preparation or updating of species action plans. These included **nine inventory-related assignments** and **two expert opinions**, while the remaining assignments concerned the preparation of action plans. By the end of the reporting period, **two inventory-related assignments** and **one expert opinion** were completed.

#### **Changing the Categories of Protected Species**

Data on all protected species has been collected and analysed. The principles for assessing species categories were developed and discussed with the Ministry of Climate.

On 22 January 2025, the project team organised for experts a kick-off seminar entitled “**Changing the Categories of Protected Species**” at the **University of Tartu**. A total of **119 participants** attended the event in Tartu, and more than **140** people followed the seminar **online**. (CC\_CI\_1 Number of people benefiting from training) Presentations were delivered by representatives of the **Environmental Board**, the **Ministry of Climate**, and the **University of Tartu**. A Latvian expert was invited to present Latvia’s approach to updating its lists of protected species. The seminar also provided an overview of the project team’s work in 2024, including data collection, principles of assessing the categories, and updates to the guidelines for management plans, habitat and species’ action plans. The seminar programme, presentations, videos, and photos were made available on the website of [the Environmental Board](#).

In 2025 (March, April and June), **8 expert group meetings** were held. During these meetings, the categories of nine species groups—mammals, fish, amphibians, reptiles, molluscs, insects, lichens, mosses and fungi—were reviewed, covering a total of 238 protected species. A total of 39 experts participated in these discussions.

In addition, three follow-up meetings with the Ministry of Climate took place in August and September. Based on all discussions, the proposal to change the categories of the species’ groups has been compiled.

### 2.2.3 Swiss partners

#### SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”

The partnership with **Bern University of Applied Sciences** aims to enhance cooperation and bilateral relations between partners through workshops, study trips, and other joint activities.

Kick-off meetings for joint planning and development took place in all components in 2024. Specific activities were planned and tailored to each component. In almost all components, it was decided to start with online workshops. This format enabled broad participation at lower cost and facilitated initial exchange, providing a solid basis for more targeted study visits or expert exchanges in the following years.

The activities were designed to promote open communication and exchange rather than one-way delivery, allowing participants to learn from one another. It is also worth noting that the partnership already extends beyond the SSIP, as the partners exchange information on publications and events outside the scope of the programme.

The activities carried out in the components in 2025 varied in intensity due to the different stages of implementation of the SSIP programme.

Within the **first component**, several online **workshops** took place, alongside the participation of a Swiss expert in the [RARA conference](#) in Estonia. At the conference, the expert delivered a presentation on digital content moderation, highlighting the mental health challenges, low wages, and high pressure faced by online content moderators. The session raised important questions about responsibility for moderators' well-being and the role of media literacy in protecting both users and moderators. The Swiss expert also took part in a panel discussion on disinformation and political manipulation, joining other experts to explore how such strategies undermine trust and create divisions in society.

In the **second component**, activities focused on the **study trip to Switzerland**, which provided a very enriching exchange for everyone. The study trip included the organization of practical training in both formal and complementary education, as well as labour programmes and best practices for integrating individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds into the care sector. The participants exchanged best practices of different state agencies, educational institutions, and social sector professional organisations.

In the **third component**, online **workshops** were also held on various topics. The workshops provided a comprehensive understanding of how multiculturalism and diversity are addressed across different educational levels in Switzerland. Feedback from the workshops highlighted the need to distinguish between the concepts of multiculturalism and multilingualism and to understand them within different national and regional contexts. A public workshop on this topic is planned for 2026.

In the **fourth component**, a few **workshops** were held in line with the needs arising from the implementation of the component's activities. These workshops laid a solid foundation for a shared understanding of social innovation, which will be further developed in 2026 through a study trip and visits to relevant projects.

Altogether there were **13 thematic online workshops**. They were structured to ensure a balanced combination of input, reflection, and interactive exchange. Each session began with a presentation by the Estonian team, providing insights into specific themes, current developments, and related challenges. The core of the workshop consisted of a thematic input by Swiss experts, followed by discussion and exchange among participants. At the end of each workshop, padlet was used to summarise key lessons learned, address open questions, and generate ideas for further collaboration and future exchange.

During the implemented activities, it became apparent how different the social and education systems in Estonia and Switzerland are, making it necessary to clarify basic principles and terminology in order to learn from one another. Getting to know each other personally through face-to-face meetings, such as study visits, also facilitates exchange and mutual understanding.

The year 2025 concluded with workshops for planning the 2026 Action Plan.

## **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. Study visits to Switzerland are also organised to establish new contacts and exchange experiences.

**The Environmental Board** organised a **study trip to Switzerland** from 22 to 26 September 2025. The group of ten participants visited the Swiss National Park, Jurapark Aargau, the Canton of Zurich, and the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research. The project activities were introduced during the visit. The Swiss National Park, Jurapark Aargau, and the Canton of Zurich presented how conservation areas and protected species are managed in Switzerland, how visitor management and nature education are organised, and what conservation activities are carried out. The institute organised lectures to present its latest research projects.

### **Products and services supplied by Swiss contractors**

#### **Procurement for the acquisition of four mobile 3D bird radars**

The terms of reference (technical specifications) and other necessary documents for the international procurement of the radars were prepared during the first quarter of 2025 and coordinated within the Estonian Environment Agency and with the State Shared Service Centre. The international procurement procedure was carried out in June 2025. Only one offer was received and passed the evaluation. This offer was submitted by **Swiss Birdradar Solutions AG** in the amount of EUR 675,400. The contract was signed on 15 September 2025. The delay was caused by the holiday period and the need to conclude the contract on paper; however, this does not affect the implementation of the project. The delivery deadline for all four mobile 3D bird radars is **15 June 2026**.

## **2.3 Work plan and financial planning**

### **Financial planning**

By the end of 2025, 19 projects were registered in SFOS. By the end of the year expenditure under 17 of these projects was submitted, verified and reimbursed. Only the expenditure of two projects under Component 3 of the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”, implemented by the Ministry of Education and Research and the Education and Youth Board, was verified and approved in early 2026 and is therefore not reflected in the reimbursement request submitted in March 2026.

At the end of 2025, expenditure accounted for 7.51% of the total programme budget and 7.51% of the Swiss contribution, based on the reimbursement requests submitted in March 2026. The rate of budget implementation has been relatively slow, mainly due to a longer-than-expected preparation period. Although the support measures were launched in summer 2024, activities in 2024 were largely preparatory. In the case of the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”, the development and approval of the legal framework also continued during the first half of 2025.

A tight implementation timeline had already been identified as a risk during the preparation of the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”, and it is highly likely that an extension of the support measures will be required to ensure the full use of the planned funds, the implementation of the planned activities, and the achievement of the planned indicators. In the case of the SM “Biodiversity Programme”, an extension may also be needed to allow sufficient time for the IT developments planned under Component 1. However, no clear indication has yet been received from the partner responsible for the activity as to whether such an extension will be necessary. This matter will be analysed in greater detail in the second half of 2026.

Information on financial planning is included in Annex 5.

### **Work plan**

The timeline of neither support measure has been amended and, as the timeline is relatively general, the implementation of the support measures is proceeding according to schedule.

There can be 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.

## Key activities in 2026

### Meetings

- On 15 January 2026 **Task Force** meeting/quarterly meeting of the SM “Biodiversity Programme” on Teams.
- On 03 June 2026 **Task Force** meeting/quarterly meeting of the SM “Biodiversity Programme” on Teams.
- On 03 February 2026 **Task Force** meeting of the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion” on Teams.
- On 25 May 2026 hybrid **Task Force** meeting of the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion” on Teams.
- On 5 March 2026, the **Steering Committee** meeting of the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion” in Pärnu.
- On 27 to 28 April the **Steering Committee** meeting of the SM “Biodiversity Programme” and a monitoring visit in Tartumaa.
- On 01 June 2026 the **Annual Meeting** of the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme.
- In September 2026, a meeting of the Baltic NCUs.
- In September 2026 the **Steering Committee** meeting of the SM “Biodiversity Programme”
- In October 2026 the **Steering Committee** meeting of the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”.

### Reports

- 31 March 2026 - the deadline for submitting the Annual Support Measure Reports, the Reimbursement Requests and the Annual Audit Report to the SCO.
- 30 April 2026 - the deadline for submitting the Annual Cooperation Programme Report to the SCO.
- 30 September 2026 - the deadline for submitting the Reimbursement Requests to the SCO.
- 30 October 2026 – the deadline for submitting the annual plan and budget for the Technical Support to the SCO.
- 31 December 2026 - the deadline for submitting the updated audit strategy to the SCO.

Information regarding the work plan is provided in Annex 4.

## **3. Cooperation Programme Management**

### **3.1 Management and control systems**

In 2025, there were no changes to the structure of the NCU, the Paying Authority, or the Audit Authority. In 2025, one change took place in the staffing of the NCU. Following the departure of Ege Ello at the end of 2024, Anu-Maaja Pallok took up the position of Head of the Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes Management Division in May 2025.

### **3.2 Audits**

The second Annual Audit Report of the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme, covering the period from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, was prepared by the Financial Control Department of the Ministry of Finance of Estonia, acting as the Audit Authority.

Based on the audit work performed, the Audit Authority issued an unqualified opinion. It concluded that the accounts present complete, accurate and truthful information, that the expenditure declared for reimbursement is legal and regular, and that the management and control system functions properly. The overall level of assurance was assessed as high.

No findings were identified in relation to the **audits of accounts or the audits of expenditure**. The total audit population amounted to EUR 956,320.07 and included expenditure under Technical

Assistance, the SM “Biodiversity Programme”, and the SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”. No errors were detected in the audited expenditure, the total and residual error rates were both 0%, and no financial corrections were required.

The **system audit** identified two significant findings. First, the conditions of the Swiss–Estonian Cooperation Programme were not fully reflected in the payment checklist. Second, certain provisions in the Support Measure Agreement were found to be inconsistent with the Framework Agreement and the Swiss Regulation. Nevertheless, these issues were not considered systemic in nature and were not assessed as posing significant risks to the functioning of the management and control system as a whole. One finding has already been closed, while the other remains under monitoring in accordance with the agreed timetable.

The report further confirms that no fraud or suspicions of fraud were detected during the audit work, no relevant subsequent events occurred after the submission of the accounts, and no additional mitigating or corrective measures are currently considered necessary. Overall, the report provides a positive assessment of the financial management, legality and regularity of expenditure, and the functioning of the programme’s management and control systems during the reporting period.

### 3.3 Irregularities

In 2025, no complaints were received and no irregularities were detected.

### 3.4 Monitoring and evaluation

Once the agreements were signed or the directives for the implementation of the programme components were established, the annual budgets and activity plans of the implementers were approved, separate projects were opened in SFOS for each PO, PCO, implementer and for the Technical Assistance. SFOS is an information system used for submitting grant applications, processing project applications and monitoring implementation. By the end of 2025, a total of **19** projects under the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme had been registered in SFOS.

A **risk assessment** was carried out for each project registered in SFOS. Based on this assessment, the scope of expenditure verification and the need for **on-the-spot controls** were determined. Project risks are generally assessed once a year; however, depending on the risk level of the project, assessment may also be carried out less or more frequently.

The NCU may also carry out **additional** on-the-spot controls where the need for such checks does not arise from the risk assessment. This may be the case, for example, where expenditure verification gives rise to suspicion of non-compliance and such suspicion cannot be verified by desk-based methods (i.e. on the basis of documents), or where the NCU receives information indicating that significant problems have arisen in the implementation of project activities and these cannot be verified without an on-the-spot check.

In accordance with the NCU’s working procedures, **checks of events** may also be carried out by the programme expert. Such checks may include verifying whether the content of the event is consistent with the activities of the programme component, whether it corresponds to the agenda, whether the participants correspond to the target group, whether the communication requirements have been fulfilled, and, where necessary, other relevant aspects.

In 2025 the programme expert checked **two events**. The first was the opening event of the social innovation activities, organised by the National Foundation of Civil Society in Viljandi on 18 February 2025. The second was the Media Literacy Conference, organised by the National Library in Rakvere on 23 October 2025. No shortcomings were identified in either check.

In 2025, the NCU did not carry out any other on-the-spot controls. No such need was identified in the risk assessment of any project, nor were any issues detected during expenditure verification.

**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 approximately 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 implementers, 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.

Where feasible, **monitoring visits** are organised alongside the Steering Committee and the Annual Meetings in order to gain a better understanding of the activities planned within the framework of the Support Measures. These visits provide an opportunity to examine more closely the activities of the PCOs, implementers and partners.

In 2025, monitoring visits were carried out alongside the **Steering Committee** meetings of the SM "Biodiversity Programme" in **April in Saaremaa** and in **October in Ida-Virumaa**.

Monitoring visits were also conducted alongside the **Steering Committee** meetings of the SM "Supporting Social Inclusion". In **February**, the monitoring visit to **Viljandi** provided an opportunity to examine the activities of the National Foundation of Civil Society more closely, while the monitoring visit to **Tartu in October** focused on the activities of the Ministry of Education and Research and the Education and Youth Board. In June, following the **Annual Meeting**, the **National Library** presented its activities and introduced its newly renovated building.

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

## 4. Communication activities

In 2025, communication and visibility activities were implemented across the cooperation programme, at the support measure level and within individual programme components, to ensure consistent visibility, promote the programme's objectives and results, and raise awareness among stakeholders, target groups, and the wider public.

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.

At the programme level, visibility was strengthened through participation in major public events such as **Europe Day** in Tallinn, the production of six public information **videos**, and the continued publication of information on the websites of the NCU, Programme Operators, Programme Component Operators, implementers and partners. Across both support measures, communication activities included public events, campaigns, websites, newsletters, podcasts, social media outreach, media articles, and targeted stakeholder communication, helping to raise awareness of the programme, its objectives, and its results among target groups, experts, and the wider public.

Regular **coordination meetings** involving the NCU, POs, PCOs, implementers, and partners were held on Teams throughout the year to review completed activities, plan upcoming communication, address emerging questions, and exchange experience on how to present the programme most effectively to the public.

In addition, the NCU maintained a **central overview** in SharePoint of communication activities carried out across the programme, including published press releases, social media posts, organised and planned events, as well as **photos and videos** from activities and events. All institutions and partners responsible for implementing communication activities regularly uploaded information to SharePoint, ensuring a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of both completed and planned activities.

## **Key events and activities in 2025 at the level of the cooperation programme**

### **Europe Day**

On 9 May 2025, the Swiss–Estonian Cooperation Programme was presented at the Europe Day event held at Freedom Square in Tallinn. The purpose of participating in the event was to introduce the cooperation programme to the general public and raise awareness of the issues it addresses. Representatives of the NCU, the Ministry of Culture, and the SCO took part in the event.

The cooperation programme stand attracted considerable attention and welcomed a steady flow of visitors throughout the day. A quiz featuring questions about Switzerland, Estonia, and the cooperation programme proved especially popular and could be completed both on paper and online. Visitors also had the opportunity to take home fact sheets about the cooperation programme, as well as materials provided by the programme component operators and partners, offering further information about their activities.

The event also demonstrated strong public interest in Switzerland and highlighted Europe Day as a valuable opportunity to present Switzerland more broadly, including its tourism opportunities, which could be further utilised in the coming years. The number of on-site participants in Tallinn was estimated at 10,000, and the event received wide media coverage across all major television and radio channels.

### **Videos about the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme**

The NCU commissioned videos to inform the public about the Swiss–Estonian Cooperation Programme and implemented activities. By the end of 2025, **six videos were completed**. One of them is more general and provides an overview of the entire cooperation programme and both support measures. The other five videos focus on specific activities, introducing training courses for parents, the night cinema initiative in Ida-Viru County, eDNA sampling, and the monitoring of bats and diving beetles.

The videos are publicly available on YouTube and on the NCU website. They will be **promoted in spring 2026** through paid YouTube posts.

### **Information on webpages**

General information about the Swiss-Estonian Cooperation Programme is published on the separate webpage of the website of the State Shared Service Centre, 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.

### **SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”**

The Programme Operator, together with the National Coordination Unit, participated in the **Europe Day** event held on **9 May 2025** at Vabaduse Väljak, where the Cooperation Programme was introduced to the wider public.

The Ministry of Culture also took part in the **Opinion Festival**, held in Paide in August 2025, where it organised the cultural diversity area. Among other topics, a discussion related to activities implemented by the **National Library** under Component 1 was held, focusing on critical thinking, media consumption, and trust in information among people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. To support visibility, the Ministry of Culture published overview articles on its website both before and after the event, complemented by social media posts.

### **Programme Component 1: Cultural and Linguistic Integration**

Communication activities varied by activity.

**Activity 1** - no major public communication actions were undertaken in 2025, as key outputs had not yet been finalised. However, the Working Group on Digital Solutions for Integration also served as a

visibility measure by raising awareness among experts about the role of digitalisation in the integration field.

**Activity 2** - the Integration Foundation used its social media channels to acknowledge volunteers on Volunteer Day, share the results of the volunteer engagement survey, and encourage dialogue within the volunteer community.

**Activity 3** - preparations were made for the updated counselling information phone line, including new visuals for social media and the website, as well as automated voice messages.

**Activity 4** - information about the cultural activities was published on the Integration Foundation's website. Before the start of the Ida-Viru Night Cinema programme, information was shared on social media channels, including Facebook, in Estonian, Russian, and English. The partners of activities also supported dissemination through their own communication channels and newsletters.

**Activity 5** - communication activities combined public events, social media outreach, and targeted communication to reach multilingual target groups and professional partners. The project was presented at major events in Tallinn and Narva, where interactive formats were used to introduce the initiative, gather feedback, and share practical media and digital literacy advice. Participation in national Museum Night and the organisation of "media-savvy city walks" further increased the project's visibility.

Communication with libraries and community centres was supported through direct contact, as well as through the National Library's social media channels and newsletters for sector experts. A closed Facebook group and mailing list were established for trainers who completed the MeediaRadar course and a Russian-language podcast episode on disinformation in the European Union was produced and published on Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

In addition, a dedicated **MeediaRadar** <https://meediaradar.ee/> website was developed in 2025 to improve access to information and materials. The platform is expected to become fully operational in Estonian, English, and Russian in 2026. In the second half of the year, media literacy topics also received additional visibility through articles published in Estonian Public Broadcasting media channels.

## **Programme Component 2: Strengthening Social and Child Protection Services**

Public communication by the Ministry of Social Affairs remained limited in 2025, as the main focus was on preparatory work and stakeholder engagement. Nevertheless, relevant stakeholders were involved through discussions and consultations to support implementation. More visible communication activities were carried out by the **Estonian Social Work Association**, which regularly shared information about component activities through its website [ESTA - Eesti Sotsiaaltöö Assotsiatsioon](#) and [Facebook page](#), including posts about meetings, trainings, workshops, and study visit. The **Social Insurance Board** also carried out communication activities to recruit participants to trainings.

## **Programme Component 3: Increasing Multicultural Competence in the Education Sector**

**Activity 2** - communication activities in 2025 focused on preparing and launching the campaign "Let's Learn Together" ("Õpime koos") aimed at parents. A **communication agency** was engaged to support implementation, and a communication strategy and detailed action plan for the period from October 2025 to January 2027 were developed to increase the visibility of the activity, raise awareness among target groups, and support participation.

During the reporting period, the campaign's visual concept was developed, and communication materials were prepared for both digital and print dissemination, including use on the website, social media platforms and in the e-school environment.

Work also continued on the development of the "**Learning Together**" website in cooperation with the Education and Youth Board. The website was supplemented with a digital map for parents, multilingual content, experience stories, articles, and podcasts to support children's acquisition of the Estonian language and the transition to Estonian-language education. Feedback from target groups was collected to further improve the content. In addition, **informative video clips** for Estonian Public Broadcasting media channels were prepared to support the campaign's visibility and dissemination of key messages. The website is expected to become publicly available in the first half of 2026.

## **Programme Component 4: Strengthening Civil Society through Social Innovation**

A wide range of channels were actively used to disseminate information on social innovation. Communication activities aimed to raise awareness of social innovation, share thematic content, and engage both professional audiences and the wider public.

Social innovation-related content was actively disseminated through Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, newsletters, websites, articles, podcasts, and events. During 2025, numerous articles and newsletters were published, and the website content was significantly expanded, including an English-language section, a news area, frequently asked questions, project background information, and useful materials.

A **Wikipedia page** on social innovation was also created.

To further promote awareness, a **podcast concept** was developed and two episodes of the **podcast *Mõjulood*** (“Stories of Impact”) were released, accompanied by a series of short videos shared mainly on Facebook and Instagram.

Communication also covered cooperation network development, international study visits, and the sharing of Estonian good practices at both physical and virtual events.

### **SM “Biodiversity Programme”**

## **Programme Component 1: Development of Innovative Monitoring Technologies/Solutions and Improvement of Environmental Databases and Systems**

In 2025, communication and outreach activities under Programme Component 1 focused primarily on raising awareness of biodiversity monitoring and engaging volunteers in citizen science activities. A series of public webinars, study tours, seminars were organised and presentations were delivered throughout the year to introduce voluntary monitoring methods, share project progress, and present planned activities under the “Biodiversity Programme”.

Particular emphasis was placed on **voluntary observation campaigns** for different species and habitats, including wintering bats, amphibians, bats in summer feeding areas, geese, reptiles, globeflowers, moose, and swan migration. These activities were supported by training events held in different regions of Estonia, as well as by presentations delivered to professional audiences, including the Estonian Naturalists’ Society, the Estonian Environment Agency, and biodiversity experts within the administrative area of the Ministry of Climate.

Visibility activities were further supported through social media and web communication. Numerous posts were published throughout the year to launch and promote voluntary observation campaigns, invite participation, share monitoring methods, and present results. These communication activities helped to increase public awareness of biodiversity monitoring and encouraged participants to enter the observations into one of the two open online databases for citizen science in Estonia

In addition, project-related activities and newly acquired innovative monitoring devices were presented at several seminars and professional events in the second half of the year.

Overall, communication activities in 2025 contributed to the visibility of Programme Component 1, supported volunteer engagement, and strengthened awareness of innovative biodiversity monitoring methods among both the general public and expert audiences.

## **Programme Component 2 “Implementation of a systematic assessment of the social and conservation outcomes of protected areas”**

In 2025, a broad range of meetings, workshops, seminars, and public discussions were organised, and press releases and social media posts were published to support the implementation of the programme component and raise awareness of its activities and objectives. A major focus during the year was the updating of the categories of protected species. This process began with a **kick-off seminar “Changing the Categories of Protected Species”** on 22 January 2025, which attracted strong participation both on site and online. There were **119 participants** (50 men and 69 women) in Tartu and more than 140 online. It was followed by a series of expert commission meetings throughout the year covering mammals, fish, amphibians and reptiles, molluscs, insects, mosses, lichens, and

fungi. These activities supported evidence-based revision of species protection categories and promoted cooperation among experts and institutions.

Further progress was made in the development and dissemination of conservation methodologies and management approaches. An **online seminar** introducing the new guidelines for lake habitat inventories was organised in January, and in June a joint seminar, “**Water Crossroads in Nature**”, brought together stakeholders to discuss water-related issues in nature conservation. In September, an **online seminar** on the assessment of conservation management was held for the conservation management planning department. The component also supported practical conservation planning through meetings with local authorities and the State Forest Management Centre, public discussions on Natura 2000 forest habitat and species protection measures, and discussions on specific management plans, including for Anne and Vinni-Pajusti Special Areas of Conservation. In addition, regular meetings were held with the Eagle Club of Estonia to support the preparation of action plans for eagles.

International cooperation and knowledge exchange formed an important part of implementation. Representatives of the Environmental Board participated in the monitoring visits in Saaremaa and Ida-Viru County, while a study trip to Switzerland in September enabled participants to gain insight into conservation management practices in Zurich Canton, the Swiss National Park, and Jurapark Aargau. Lessons learned from the visit were later shared within the Environmental Board through an internal seminar. The component was also presented at meetings and workshops, including a management planning workshop at the nature conservation conference in Saaremaa in October 2025.

Communication and outreach activities supported the visibility of the component throughout the year. Information was disseminated through the project web page, press releases, articles, and social media posts. Particular attention was given to communicating the process of updating the protected species lists, promoting key seminars, and sharing project results, including the results of the conservation management assessment carried out by the Environmental Board project team. Overall, the activities implemented in 2025 created a strong basis for more systematic assessment and improved management of protected areas, while strengthening expert cooperation, stakeholder engagement, and public awareness.

The updated Communication Concept is provided in a separate document.

## **5. Risk management at the level of the Cooperation Programme**

The State Shared Service Centre, which serves as the main managing, paying, and coordinating authority for most funds implemented in Estonia, conducts an annual risk assessment covering the majority of these funds and involving the main stakeholders. The assessment addresses both management and control system risks as well as fraud risks. Based on its results, mitigation measures are introduced, where possible, for significant risks to reduce the likelihood of their occurrence. For risks assessed as critical or high, mitigation measures are planned and corresponding deadlines and responsibilities are agreed. These measures are linked to institutional work plans and are therefore integrated into day-to-day management. The NCU, together with those responsible for the mitigation measures, monitors their implementation. Where mitigation activities have not been carried out as planned, additional information is requested from the responsible parties and any necessary follow-up actions are decided.

The risks related to the implementation of the cooperation programme were assessed as part of the annual risk assessment, which also formed the basis for the risk analysis presented in the Annual Support Measure Reports. Based on those reports, the current risk assessment indicates that the overall risk level of both support measures can be classified as **medium-low**.

### **SM “Supporting Social Inclusion”**

The risks related to the implementation of the support measure were reviewed as part of the annual risk assessment mentioned above and also during the Task Force meeting held on 3 February 2026, and the assessment presented in the previous annual report was updated accordingly. The

reassessment indicated a **lower likelihood that the activities would fail to meet the needs** of the target groups, as considerable work was carried out in 2024–2025 to identify existing studies and assess current needs.

At the same time, the likelihood of risks related to **target group engagement, the implementation time-frame, and management staff capacity increased**, reflecting external pressures, the implementation delays, and staff changes in several organisations. The security risk was broadened to include the wider global trend of increasing autocratisation, while procurement risk was reassessed as having a greater potential impact on implementation timelines, although its likelihood was considered somewhat lower based on experience so far. By contrast, the **likelihood of operational risks was reduced** due to effective cooperation, communication, and coordination among the parties involved.

Based on the risk assessment provided in the SM Annual Report, the overall risk level of the support measure is **medium-low**. Nine out of twelve risks are assessed as either low or low-medium, while the highest-rated risks relate to the **implementation timeframe, management staff and procurement**. The report also notes that the support measure is complex, as it involves several ministries and partners, but that this **complexity is mitigated** by close cooperation and good communication.

No risks were assessed as “high”. The highest category used in the assessment is medium-high. No programme components were rated as high risk.

The individual risks rated medium-high are the following:

1. **Challenging time-frame** of the support measure

This is one of the most significant risks identified in the assessment. It suggests that delays in implementation could affect the timely delivery of activities and results. The planned mitigation measures include consistent time management, strong commitment from the support measure project team, and regular monitoring through the Task Force, Steering Committee, and regular meetings. The report also refers to the possible extension of the support measure, if needed, in order to ensure timely completion. In addition, there is an intention to ensure that project teams have sufficient resources.

2. **Management staff risk** (not enough personnel, staff changes, or overload with other tasks)

This risk reflects the possibility that implementation could be weakened by insufficient staffing capacity, personnel turnover, or excessive workload. The mitigation approach is quite broad and focuses on organisational resilience. Measures include honest communication with donors, quick response to emerging needs, and optimal planning of staff resources. Institutions are expected to have procedures to monitor workloads, introduce flexibility in resource allocation to prevent overloading, and ensure the smooth transfer of tasks. The proper storage of documents is also highlighted as a way to preserve institutional memory. In addition, cooperation days can be organised to support knowledge sharing and team continuity.

3. **Complexity of procurement process** (donor involvement, donor approval process, procurement irregularities, or failed procurements)

This risk is particularly important because procurement difficulties can directly delay implementation and may also influence the timeframe risk. The mitigation measures are detailed and practical. They include swift and good cooperation with the donor, rapid translation and submission of procurement materials, and consultations with procurement experts of the State Shared Service Centre. The report also foresees market research before launching procurement, informing potential bidders in advance, proactive planning and timely preparation of procurement procedures, including careful scheduling to avoid holiday periods. Further measures include strengthening information sharing with potential bidders during the procurement process and broadening the pool of potential suppliers.

Taken together, these three medium-high risks indicate that the main vulnerabilities of the support measure are not strategic or political in nature, but rather operational and implementation-related. The assessment suggests that the support measure is generally under control, but that timely delivery depends on adequate staffing, effective procurement planning, and strong coordination mechanisms.

## **SM “Biodiversity Programme”**

Based on the risk assessment presented in the SM Annual Report, the overall risk level of the Support Measure was assessed as **medium-low**. Compared with the risk assessment in the previous annual report, the risk levels of all identified risks remained unchanged. Six of the seven identified risks were rated either low or low-medium. No risks were rated high, and only one risk was assessed as medium-high. This indicates that, overall, the Support Measure is not considered to face any critical implementation risks, although certain areas still require continued monitoring.

The only risk rated **medium-high** concerned the possibility that **IT developments might take longer than planned**. To mitigate this risk, procurement documentation was prepared in advance in order to save time and enable implementation to begin as soon as possible.

All other risks listed in the table were assessed as either low or low-medium, including institutional reforms, changes in legislation, increases in the prices of services and equipment, a limited number of service providers, low service quality, and possible difficulties in recruiting personnel. No high-risk Programme Components with specific risks and mitigation measures were identified.

## 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 <i>SM "Supporting Social Inclusion"</i>	<u>OCIN 1.2</u> Core Indicator <u>MIGR_CI_1</u> : 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	701 participations <sup>7</sup>	701	3,5%
Cross-cutting <i>SM "Supporting Social Inclusion"</i>	<u>OPI 1.8 / Core Indicator</u> <u>CC CI 1</u> Counsellors receive regular training	0	30 trained counsellors	17 <sup>8</sup>	17	57%
Cross-cutting <i>SM "Supporting Social Inclusion"</i>	<u>OPI 2.12 / Core Indicator</u> <u>CC CI 1</u> Professionals trained	0	5 500	251 <sup>9</sup>	251	4,56%
Promoting civic engagement and transparency <i>SM "Supporting Social Inclusion"</i>	<u>OPI 3.8: / Core indicator</u> <u>CIV CI 3</u> : Number of trained volunteers	0	3000	14	14	0,47%

<sup>7</sup> Component 1: Activity 2 – 0 participations; Activity 3 – 74 participations; Activity 4 – 490 participations; Activity 5 – 137 participations.

- 444 female, 170 male, 87 undefined;
- 155 newly (< 5 years) arrived migrants;
- 43 refugees from Ukraine;
- The mother languages spoken by individuals included Russian, Ukrainian, English, Turkish, Punjabi, and other languages;
- The countries of origin included Russia, Ukraine, India, Turkey, Belarus, Sweden, Finland, Latvia, Norway, Georgia, Lithuania, Kazakhstan, Mordovia, and others.

<sup>8</sup> Component 1 Activity 3

<sup>9</sup> The achievement is presented as the total of all Components contributing to this indicator. The breakdown by Components is as follows: Component 2 – 197 social sector professionals (144 work with adults, 53 work with children), Component 3 – 54 professionals in the education sector.

Promoting civic engagement and transparency <i>SM "Supporting Social Inclusion"</i>	OPI 3.9: / Core indicator CIV CI 3: Number of trained volunteer leaders	0	100	0	0	0
Cross-cutting <i>SM "Biodiversity Programme"</i>	CC_CI_1 Number of people benefiting from training to improve institutional and professional capacity (disaggregated by gender)	0	350	236 people have benefitted from trainings (89 men and 147 women) <sup>10</sup>	236 people have benefitted from trainings (89 men and 147 women)	67%

## 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	21.02.2023	03.12.2029	21.02.2023	on track	on track

<sup>10</sup> In addition 846 volunteers benefitted from trainings (352 men and 494 women)

### Annex 3: Financial status<sup>11</sup>

<b>SM name including Swiss and Partner State SM codes</b>	<b>Swiss contribution to the SM [CHF]</b>	<b>Total reimbursements received from CH [CHF]</b>	<b>% of Swiss contribution to the SM received from CH</b>
SM "Biodiversity Programme" 7F-10768.01	6 930 000	979 135,37	14,13%
SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" 7F-10699.01	18 600 000	792 874,35	4,26%
Technical Assistance Fund 7F-10899.01	390 000	77 863,62	19,97%
Support Measure Preparation Fund	80 0000	62 583,93	78,23%
<b>Total</b>	<b>26 000 000</b>	<b>1 912 457,27</b>	<b>7,36%</b>

<sup>11</sup> The information is based on the reimbursement requests submitted in March 2026.

## 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			SC, MV		TFM			SC			
			ASMR, RR						RR	COM		
	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM	COM		COM	COM
SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" 7F-10699.01	TFM		SC		TFM				TFM	SC		
			ASMR, RR						RR			
	COM	COM	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)

<b>SM name including Swiss and Partner State SM codes</b>	<b>Swiss contribution to the SM [CHF]</b>	<b>2024-2025</b>	<b>2026</b>	<b>2027</b>	<b>2028</b>	<b>2029</b>
SM "Biodiversity Programme" 7F-10768.01	6 930 000,00	979 135,37	1 963 280,00	2 196 560,00	1 791 024,26	
SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" 7F-10699.01	18 600 000,00	792 874,35	1 636 663,00	7 188 849,00	8 981 613,65	
SM "Technical Assistance Fund" 7F-10899.01	390 000,00	77 863,62	19 000,00	66 000,00	69 000,00	158 136,38
Support Measure Preparation Fund	80 000,00	62 583,93				
<b>Total</b>	<b>26 000 000,00</b>	<b>1 912 457,27</b>	<b>3 618 943,00</b>	<b>9 451 409,00</b>	<b>10 841 637,91</b>	<b>158 136,38</b>

## Annex 6: Irregularities

No irregularities were detected.

<b>SM name including Swiss and Partner State SM codes</b>	<b>Irregularity reference number</b>	<b>Swiss contribution to the SM in CHF</b>	<b>Nature of actual or suspected irregularity</b>	<b>Estimation of total financial damage in CHF (if any)</b>	<b>Proposed financial correction in case of financial damage</b>	<b>Status</b>
			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	2026				2027				2028				2029			
	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4
SM "Biodiversity Programme" 7F-10768.01		MV	MV			MV					MV					
SM "Supporting Social Inclusion" 7F-10699.01				MV				MV					E	E	E	
Cooperation Programme																

Monitoring visit: MV

Evaluation: E

Please see also Excel table Annex 7A

### B Additional information on the strategic planning of evaluations

Information is provided in Excel table Annex 7B

## 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.)
<b>Regular meetings with representatives of both support measures</b>	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.
<b>Choosing an appropriate communication channel for the target audience</b>	<p>When publishing information, the target audience is taken into account, and the communication channel that best ensures reaching that audience is chosen.</p> <p>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.</p>	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	The overall risk level of the SM was assessed as low-medium. In general, the overall risk exposure was considered low, although several individual risks were identified at low-medium level. No risks were assessed as high. The only risk rated medium-high concerned the possibility that IT developments may take longer than planned. To mitigate this risk, procurement documentation was prepared in advance in order to save time and enable implementation to begin as soon possible. The remaining identified risks, including changes in legislation, increases in the prices of services and equipment, the limited number of potential service providers, and the quality of services, were assessed at either low or low-medium level and were accompanied by appropriate mitigation measures. Based on the information provided in the SM Annual Report, no Programme Components were identified as high risk, and no component-specific high risks requiring separate mitigation measures were reported.
SM “Supporting Social Inclusion” 7F-10699.01	Low-Medium	The overall risk level of the support measure was assessed as low-medium, as nine of the twelve identified risks were rated either low or low-medium. No risks were assessed as high. The most significant risks remained those rated medium-high, namely the challenging timeframe for implementation, management staff risk, and procurement process complexity. The timeframe risk was addressed through consistent time management, regular monitoring by the Task Force and Steering Committee, and consideration of an extension of the support measure, if necessary, to ensure timely completion. Management staff risk was mitigated through careful resource planning, workload monitoring, flexible allocation of responsibilities, measures to ensure continuity and institutional memory, and activities supporting knowledge sharing within teams. Procurement-related risk was mitigated through close cooperation with donors, timely preparation and translation of procurement materials, consultation with procurement experts, advance market research, early communication with potential bidders, and efforts to broaden the pool of suppliers. Overall, the assessment indicates that the support measure is complex and involves several ministries and partners, but that the risks remain manageable due to close cooperation, regular coordination, and good communication. Based on the information provided, no specific Programme Components were identified as high risk.