vela
Foundation
Poland

annual report



Vela Foundation

FUNDACJA VELA, ORGANIZACJA HUMANITARNA NA RZECZ OCHRONY I EDUKACJI

2025



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message from the president of the Council

As we reflect on the past year, 2025 stands out as a testament to resilience, compassion, and the power of community. While 2025 is a year marked by growing uncertainty and shrinking global funding for humanitarian efforts, Vela has continued to hold a strong and trusted position within the communities we serve but also with our donors. Despite increased geopolitical pressures and a more constrained funding landscape, our presence remained steady and deeply rooted- proof of both the relevance of our work and the trust we've build over time. At Fundacja VELA, our commitment to supporting refugees and migrants has remained steadfast in the face of continued challenges. A critical anchor for thousands of refugees and migrants navigating the challenges of displacement, offering not just services, but stability, dignity and hope.

The Aurora Community Center served as the heart of our response—providing a safe, inclusive space where individuals and families accessed vital support, meaningful connection, and opportunities for growth. With a strong focus on inclusion, well-being, and empowerment, our Aurora Community prioritizes the needs of vulnerable groups, especially children and women.

The expanded operation of the Nook Kitchen, transformed into a vibrant hub of cultural exchange and learning, highlighted how food can bring people together, foster learning, and create a sense of belonging. Culinary workshops and events became a pathway for building skills, relationships, and community resilience.

Our Starlight mobile outreach programme and preventative efforts expanded our ability to reach those most at risk, ensuring no one was left behind. Our anti-trafficking outreach with "Safe Borders" extended our reach even further, ensuring children were not left behind—especially those facing isolation or at risk of exploitation.

As we move forward into 2026, we are proud to share that VELA will soon open its own dedicated space for operations—a permanent home that will allow us to further deepen our impact, expand our programming, and continue serving communities with consistency, care, and purpose.

None of this would have been possible without the unwavering dedication of our team, the support of our partners and our donors, and the strength of the communities we serve.

Marilena Ioannidou

VELA across borders

The constellation of VELA organisations continues to grow across borders, forming a dynamic and collaborative network grounded in shared values and a community-based approach. VELA now operates in Poland, Greece, and Cyprus, adapting its work to the diverse needs of vulnerable populations in each national context.

In Poland, VELA delivers structured education programming and integration support with additional ad hoc activities implemented in response to emerging needs. Our interdisciplinary teams provide integrated support focused on social inclusion, psychosocial well-being, and community engagement, with a strong emphasis on vulnerable groups such as women and children.

In Greece, VELA focuses on supporting unaccompanied children in safe zones and safe areas, working in close partnership with national authorities and international organisations. As an accommodation partner of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), VELA Greece plays a key role in providing protection and daily support to children who are otherwise at high risk of exploitation and marginalisation. Plans are underway to expand programming in 2026 to additional regions across the mainland.

In Cyprus, VELA provides structured educational activities and recreational programming for children living in refugee camps and in our dedicated education centre in Nicosia city. These efforts aim to reduce social exclusion, promote psychosocial well-being, and restore a sense of normalcy and stability for displaced children.

Together, the VELA network forms a flexible, values-driven alliance—responsive to changing needs, committed to community-led solutions, and united by a shared mission to support people on the move and others at risk of marginalisation, wherever they may be.



how we work

At Vela, putting people first is our top priority. We are dedicated to serving our target communities to the best of our abilities, and constantly enhancing the skills of our team. By implementing effective systems, we support our staff to achieve their best performance, and excel in challenging scenarios. Our focus is on nurturing professionals who can thrive in intricate situations, providing them with opportunities to demonstrate their potential as we progress. Clinical supervision, staff care, training, and support are embedded in our programming cycle, and our daily routine.

We constantly measure the impact of our work on our target communities, striving to engage them in constructive dialogue. Feedback and accountability is essential to our work, as we leverage community input, to push for change in how we work alongside them and for them.

We constantly challenge our operation modalities to ensure we are at the top of our game, and we make efficient and effective use of our resources, while maintaining our flexibility to respond to emergencies and changing situations swiftly.

We work side by side with our donors, striving to maintain a "partner-on-the-ground' role in our cooperation, providing expertise, and insight into the evolving challenges of target communities, that helps shaping strategy, and focus on what is important to fund. We analyse the general environment where we work, and make valid predictions on government, and other institutional policy makers, that will shape the operational context where we work.

Vela mission

we empower the journey



leadership and culture

At Vela, we address the most acute problems of people in need, while maintaining professional standards, robust policies, and efficient procedures. We strive to maintain quality standards, to inspire trust and confidence for our partners, donors, staff, and contractors.

We are known for creating opportunities to expose our people to new experiences and develop them in new fields, learn new skills, and advance their knowledge. We have circular staff progression modalities including expert training, on-going support and supervision that enable our people to diffuse their mental workload and build close-knit teams that address issues and challenges as a whole.

We focus on flexibility to respond to crises and emergencies swiftly, while maintaining our operational standards. Our aim is, to be a professional, agile and responsive organisation, that addresses the challenges of our target communities at the core, and provides durable solutions, that can be scaled, and replicated for maximum impact.

For our donors, we focus on being a long-term, valuable partner, by providing current, evidence-based analysis, and insight into unfolding situations, as well as leveraging our knowledge and expertise in updating their funding strategies. We value our relationship with our donors, both public and private, and strive for continuously exploring other forms of cooperation with them other than funding.

For our partners on the ground we aim to be a trusted and reliable partner who can leverage our shared potential for maximum impact for our target communities. In the process we strive to share our knowledge, insight and expertise and create sustainable synergies that have meaningful impact on the lives of the people we serve.

aurora

strengthening communities

Picture a safety net during tough times, and a powerhouse of resilience and teamwork, that's our community building approach! Our Aurora Community Center was a core pillar of our community-based response, providing continuous social, educational and psychosocial support to refugees and migrants throughout the year.

Aurora functioned as a safe, multi-purpose space, where individuals and families could access structured activities, individual support services and child-focused interventions. Through regular programming, our teams strengthened social inclusion, promoted well-being and supported integration into Polish society.

Activities were implemented consistently throughout the year combining group-based educational and psychosocial sessions with individualized social support. The Center placed particular emphasis on supporting children, women and other vulnerable individuals, ensuring access to safe spaces, creative expression, and tailored assistance.

Our service mix includes psychosocial support, referrals, support with registration to public benefits and school enrolment, group sessions, education, language learning including Polish and English, legal support, arts and crafts, sports and wellness, discussion groups, child occupation, Nook community kitchen and ad hoc activities organised with our target communities.



aurora

our shared stories







aurora

our impact

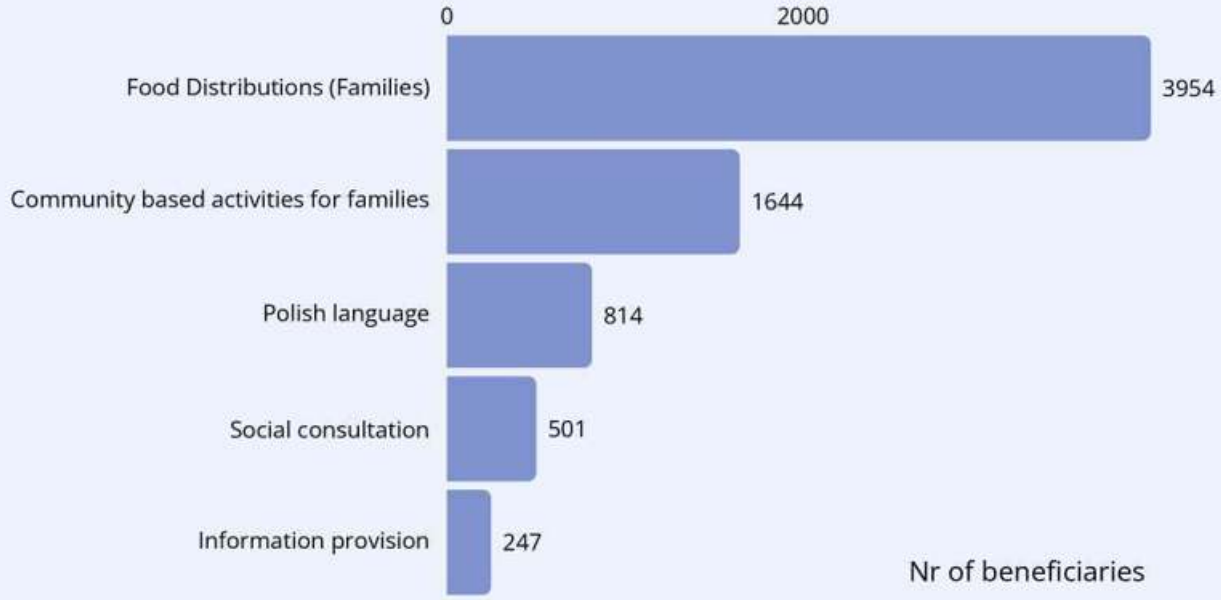
- **Polish language classes:** Regular language learning sessions supporting communication skills and integration, complemented by group-based conversational activities aimed at improving spoken Polish and fostering peer interaction.

- **Individual social consultations:** One-to-one support sessions providing social guidance, referrals and personalized assistance, implemented primarily during the first half of the year and continued as needed.

- **Community-based group activities for children and adults:** Additional group sessions, focused on artistic workshops, literature events etc., supporting social cohesion and community engagement within the Center.

- **Food and non-food items distributions:** We partnered with businesses and the UN to distribute tons of food items, household items, and personal hygiene items at times where people most needed them

- **InfoPoint:** Information provision through walk ins, telephone, social media about our activities, booking appointments and general support in the AURORA Community Center



starlight

uplifting spirits during challenging times

Originating as an immediate response to individuals facing distress, whether in transit or situated in emergency facilities like reception sites and shelters, Starlight mitigates the impact of trauma and distress resulting from displacement, loss of familial ties, and disruptions to one's accustomed way of life.

Since VELA's inception, the Starlight programme has been implemented continuously through the first quarter of 2025 across three voivodeships: Małopolskie (Lesser Poland Voivodeship), Mazowieckie (Masovian Voivodeship), and Dolnośląskie (Lower Silesian Voivodeship). Throughout this period, VELA Poland served as UNICEF's child protection partner on the ground, delivering mobile and community-based psychosocial support to refugees and migrants in vulnerable situations.

In March 2025, the partnership was unexpectedly suspended following a USAID funding freeze, which had broader repercussions on UN operations globally. Despite this abrupt disruption, Starlight had ensured the continued delivery of critical child protection and psychosocial services across all three regions.

Starlight p focused on protection-oriented, psychosocial, educational, and outreach interventions, reaching some of the most vulnerable refugees and migrants across its areas of operation.

At the core of this response was a commitment to alleviating the emotional and psychological impact of displacement, including the loss of home, family networks, and livelihoods as well as protection from risk of exploitation. Through a mobile, outreach-based approach, teams of psychologists and social workers visited shelters, accommodation facilities, reception sites, and other community locations to ensure timely and accessible support.

Services provided included psychological first aid and emotional support, facilitation of access to essential services, coordination with public institutions, assistance with school enrolment, and support in identifying long-term housing solutions, among other forms of individualized case management. This flexible model enabled VELA to reach individuals who faced barriers to accessing fixed-location services and to respond effectively to complex and evolving needs.

starlight

Organization of individual and group psychosocial support sessions.

Referrals of children to schools and education programs, and of caregivers to training and employability opportunities.

Distribution of hygiene kits and WASH supplies to improve shelter living conditions.

Mobile MHPSS teams to shelters and communit centers, providing regula presence and accessible services.

mobile MHPSS teams to shelters and community centers

Provision of gender-based violence risk mitigation and response services

Training and clinical supervision for staff, ensuring UN & IASC standards on safeguarding and protection

Child protection case management

our impact



nook

where food builds community

Our Nook Kitchen, located in the Aurora Community Center in Kraków has been a powerful tool for both skill-building and social connection. With the generous support of our donors, we established a professional-grade kitchen to support livelihoods and food security for our communities. The Nook is available daily for anyone wishing to prepare healthy, quality meals for themselves and their loved ones—ensuring that daily nutrition is not a barrier to dignity or stability.

In 2025, culinary workshops remained the core activity of the Nook Kitchen, combining practical cooking skills with opportunities for social interaction, teamwork, and informal learning. Participants were actively involved in all stages of food preparation, fostering a sense of ownership, cooperation, and collective responsibility. Culinary workshops combined practical cooking skills with opportunities for social interaction, teamwork and informal learning. The workshops also functioned as a community engagement mechanism, encouraging regular attendance and peer support – with overall reach of 143 participants.





nook

The Nook also served as a vibrant community hub—hosting cooking events, soup kitchens, and training sessions that promoted sustainable livelihoods and strengthened social ties. These activities functioned as both livelihood support and community engagement tools, encouraging regular participation and peer-to-peer support for 300 people.

The Nook stands as a symbol of what integration can look like in practice: shared spaces, shared skills, and shared meals—all contributing to a deeper sense of belonging and empowerment.



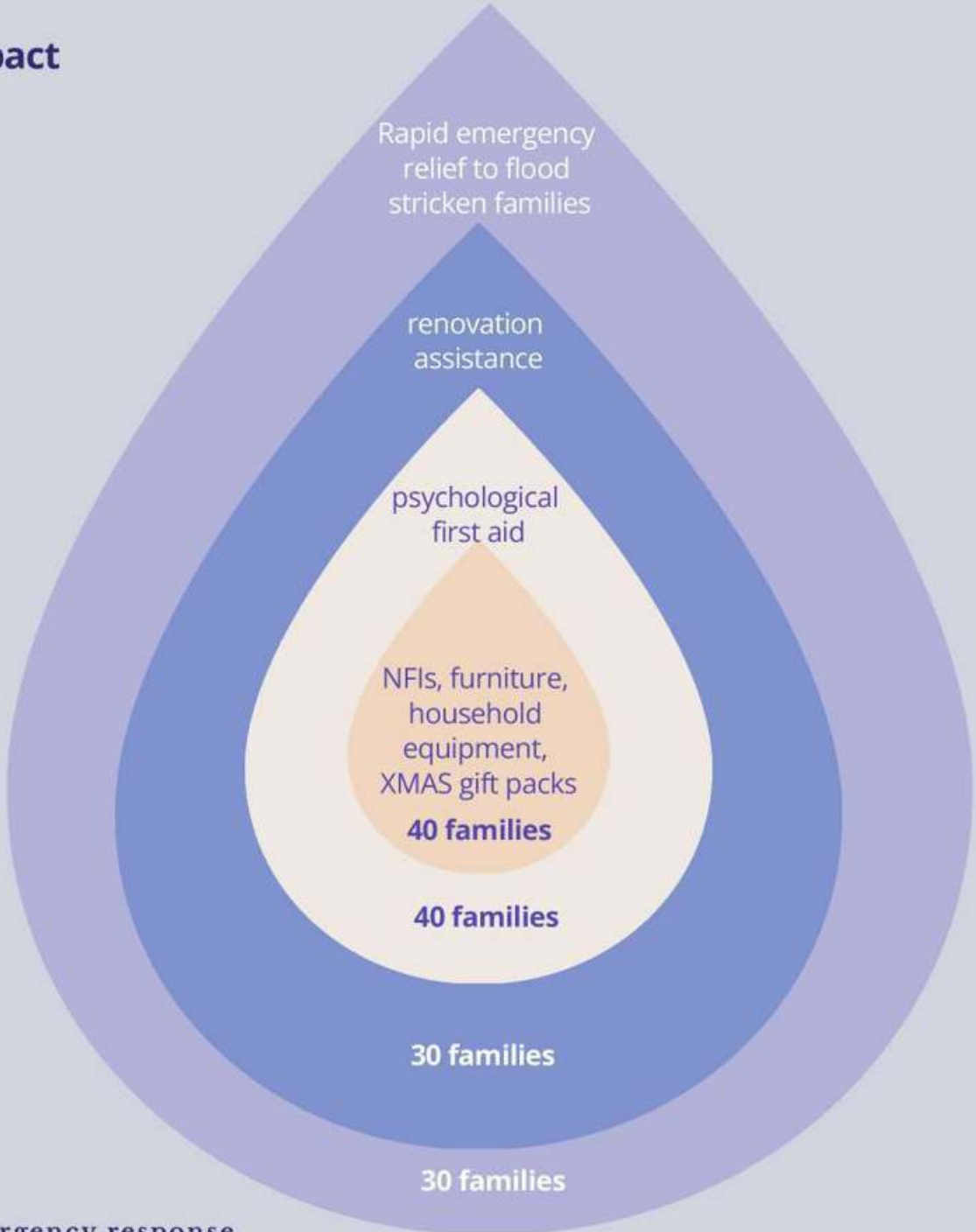


emergency response

In November 2024, severe flooding struck parts of southern Poland, particularly in the Dolnośląskie (Lower Silesian) region around Kłodzko. Entire neighborhoods were submerged, households lost basic possessions and vulnerable families were left without safe shelter or essential supplies.

Recognizing the urgent needs, VELA Poland mobilized quickly with the support of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The flood response was designed as a targeted, emergency intervention to stabilize affected families, provide material relief and contribute to safe and dignified living conditions in the aftermath of the disaster.

our impact



Countering Child Trafficking

SafeBorders: A European Response to Child Trafficking

In 2025, VELA Poland took a significant step forward in its commitment to combat child trafficking by launching the Safe Borders Programme, an EU-funded initiative in partnership with organisations from Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Portugal, Italy, Finland, and Belgium. This collaborative effort reflects a shared goal: to enhance protection mechanisms for children at risk of trafficking, both within national borders and across the European Union.

As part of this multi-country consortium, VELA Poland is contributing to a comprehensive response focused on early identification, capacity building, and cross-border cooperation. The programme specifically targets the improvement of systems supporting prosecutors, law enforcement, and frontline professionals, who play a critical role in identifying and addressing trafficking cases. A key innovation in this effort is the introduction of a new AI-supported platform, designed to detect trends, analyse data, and strengthen collaboration across EU member states.

During the programme's first year, VELA Poland reached approximately 100 professionals in the field including the border guard, the police, judges, prosecutors, NGOs, academia, experts and other professionals working in the field. These activities directly informed the development of a series of capacity building tools at cross border level, marking a transition from foundational research and design to active implementation. VELA plays a critical role in the success of the project through the development of artificial intelligence tools designed to support law enforcement and judicial authorities across participating countries in the fight against child trafficking.

Through the Safe Borders Programme, VELA Poland reinforces its role as a key actor in the European response to child trafficking, advocating for a system that protects children, empowers professionals, and enhances cooperation across borders.



our donors

At VELA, we take great pride in fostering strong and lasting relationships with our donors—relationships built on transparency, collaboration, and shared purpose. We actively involve our supporters in our work, creating meaningful opportunities for them to engage with our activities, see the challenges firsthand, and witness the impact their contributions make in the lives of vulnerable individuals and communities.

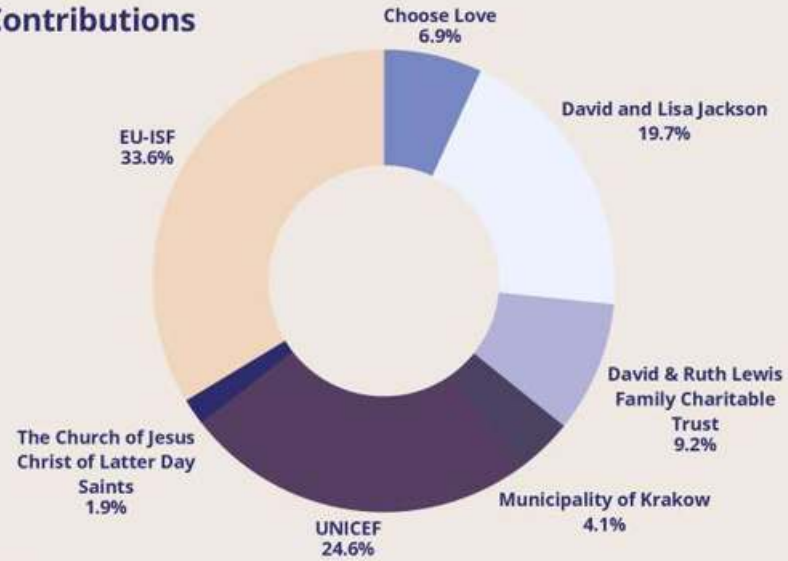
The year 2025 marked a significant affirmation of these relationships. We strengthened our collaboration with long-standing donors, many of whom have been with us since VELA's inception and continue to stand by us today. We were also honoured to welcome new donors who joined our mission along the way, and we are deeply grateful for the trust they have placed in us to deliver the change they want to see in the world.

Our partnerships are rooted in shared values, a common understanding of the challenges faced by displaced and vulnerable populations, and a mutual commitment to providing meaningful, dignified support. This collective dedication brought us even closer together in 2025, as we worked hand in hand to improve people's lives—whether through long-term programming or rapid emergency responses.

We are especially grateful for the swift and unwavering support many of our donors provided during urgent response operations. Their responsiveness reflects a shared mission: to be present, adaptable, and compassionate—supporting people when and where it matters most.

To all our donors: thank you. Your generosity fuels our work, and your partnership inspires us to continue with diligence and integrity. We remain committed to ensuring your contributions have the greatest possible impact on the communities we serve.

Our Donors' Contributions



our donors

Choose Love

Contributed to the operation of Aurora

UNICEF

Funded Starlight child protection mobile psychosocial support

David and Lisa Jackson

Continued the operation of Aurora in times of crisis

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Funded Nook kitchen operation and Polish language classes at Aurora

David & Ruth Lewis Family Charitable Trust

Contributed to the operation of Aurora

Kraków Municipality of Krakow

Funded community building activities through the Nook kitchen

Internal Security Fund - EU

Funded the SafeBorders project

our partners

The Flying Seagull - Vela hosted The Flying Seagull for performances dedicated to children at our AURORA Community Center

Project Hope - Hosted psychological support of Project Hope for our beneficiaries at our AURORA Community Center

Zustricz Foundation, IB Polska, Haliny Nieć Foundation,Widowisk Masowych Foundation- partners in Muncipality of Krakow project "Adaptive and information support for people with migration and refugee background

Freedom Space Foundation - Vela shared community center facilities, developed the capacity of Freedom Space Foundation, and provided funding to Freedom Space Foundation to support their activtiies



looking ahead - strategy 2026 - 2027

As we look ahead, VELA enters a critical phase of evolution—both in its geographic reach and strategic direction. The shifting geopolitical landscape of 2025, marked by continued instability in the region and tightening funding streams, has underscored the importance of adaptability, collaboration, and long-term vision in humanitarian response.

In 2026, VELA will expand its operational footprint with expanded partnerships in Ukraine. Building on our experience in Poland, this expansion reflects both the urgent needs inside the country and our commitment to supporting displaced and vulnerable populations wherever they are. Our approach will remain rooted in local engagement, with a focus on protection, psychosocial well-being, and inclusion.

At the same time, we will deepen and diversify our international partnerships—working with international donors, UN agencies, and civil society actors to secure sustainable, flexible support that allows us to respond swiftly to evolving community needs. We see 2026–2027 as a period of intentional growth, not only in terms of where we work but how we work —with an emphasis on locally led solutions, cross-border collaboration, and knowledge sharing.

VELA's sister organizations in Greece and Cyprus will remain central to this vision. Together, we are shaping a more cohesive and dynamic VELA network—one that is agile, grounded in community realities, and united by a shared purpose. This regional cooperation strengthens our ability to exchange expertise, mobilize joint responses, and amplify community voices across borders.

In 2026, the opening of our own dedicated space in Poland marks a turning point. It will serve as both a hub for local service delivery and a platform for regional coordination and innovation. As we scale our operations and move toward becoming a truly international organization, our priority remains the same: to stay responsive, inclusive, and accountable to the people we serve.

We recognize that the years ahead will bring continued uncertainty—but also new opportunities to lead with compassion, act with integrity, and build solidarity across borders.