



# STRATEGIC PLAN

2023-2025



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>VISION AND MISSION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY</b>	<b>5</b>
Objective 1: Use music to build peace and achieve social change in communities and countries affected by conflict	5
Objective 2: Grow knowledge, expertise, and the global recognition of music's potential for peacebuilding and social change	7
Objective 3: Build the capacity and quality-assurance systems needed to function as a stable, values-led organization in the field of music and peacebuilding	9
<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>11</b>
Music leadership	11
Band coaching	11
Music therapy	11
Cross-cutting themes	12
Intersectionality	12
Climate emergency	12
Distribution of wealth	12
<b>RISK ASSESSMENT</b>	<b>13</b>

## FOREWORD

### Strategic Planning for Uncertain Times

Working in current and recent conflict regions, Musicians Without Borders is always operating in a climate of crisis. We are used to navigating the space between long-term planning and quick adaptation to emergency situations. At MWB, a balance of skill and creativity is not only the realm of musicians, artists and educators, but essential for every function within the organization, and key to our ability to adapt, change and grow.

MWB's previous strategic plan helped us to weather the storms of 2020-2022: a pandemic, a global economic crisis, a new war in Europe— while our team's dedication, flexibility and creativity helped us adapt to the realities of global crisis and brought new tools and new insights for our organizational future.

The main theme of this new plan is consolidation. For our programs and projects around the world, this means defining growth within the parameters of our current regional presence and experience. To grow our global impact, we aim to strengthen and expand networks and partnerships, sharing vision and expertise through enhanced advocacy. Our training courses are now fully aligned with programs and advocacy: no longer a separate pillar of MWB, but demand-driven in our project regions and a strong tool for the promotion of our work and vision with current and future network partners.

While moving toward consolidation of all parts of our organization, our 2023-2025 Strategic Plan pays specific attention to the basis on which all else depends: the organizational infrastructure. Within our projects and programs, we choose durable growth by strengthening existing infrastructure and regional networks, while our training and advocacy serve our project partners and expand our network for collaboration and knowledge exchange. To

achieve these goals, we aim to increase our capacity to match the increased program outreach, while serving the practical needs of a professional organization functioning in the context of local, regional and global crises.

We understand that all our talents for adaptation may well be called upon in the coming three years. We also know that, in a period of crisis, a solid plan is the most trustworthy basis for flexibility and adaptation.



Laura Hassler  
Director



# VISION AND MISSION

Music, like language, is a universal human capacity that can strengthen empathy, heal, connect, encourage, empower, and bring joy: all essential to building just and peaceful societies. From rock 'n' roll to classical, from rap to jazz to body percussion, Musicians Without Borders works through the power of music for peacebuilding and social change.

Our **vision** is a world where music has a central role in peacebuilding.

Our **mission** is to use the power of music to bridge divides, connect communities, and heal the wounds of war.

Our **guiding principles** reflect our core beliefs and values and serve as the basis to ground our practices. We refer to:

- The power of music
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- The principles of Active Nonviolence



## OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

To serve our mission and vision, we will pursue the following three three-year strategic objectives:

### OBJECTIVE 1:

**Use music to build peace and achieve social change in communities and countries affected by conflict**

#### Background

Musicians Without Borders originated in 1999 as a project organization, working with musicians and NGOs in (post-)conflict regions to develop music projects that achieve social change. Several of these projects grew into long-term programs, which continue to form the core of our operations.

Our music programs achieve direct positive impact for beneficiaries living with the aftermath of war and armed conflict, and inform our training activities as well as our advocacy (Objective 2). We develop and sustain music programs where we can have the most impact, based on an understanding of the opportunities, risks and resources available.

Over the past five years, our programs in the Middle East, the Western Balkans, Central America, and Central East Africa were expanded regionally, while our European refugee project followed migration streams and responded to opportunities as they arose. Over the coming three years, we aim to consolidate the growth in the Middle East, Central East Africa and the Western Balkans, stabilize our refugee program in Europe, and develop a new strategy for our presence in Central America, where our main program has reached its final stage.

Anticipating that the present crisis in Europe around the treatment of people in forced migration will continue to be of major concern, we will also work to strengthen and expand this area of focus.

### Strategy to achieve objective 1

To achieve objective 1, we will develop and implement music programs in conflict regions, post-conflict regions, and with people directly affected by conflict, expanding on successful programs developed previously and using them as a model for new initiatives. During the period 2023-2025, our focus will be on consolidating and stabilizing our current programs. Growth of programs should be organic and gradual and should be accompanied by proportionate growth to our team and resources

### Approach to achieve objective 1

Our approach to achieve objective 1 is framed around equity, empowerment and collaboration. We will ensure that program development and program activities are



demand-driven, i.e. responding to real needs of beneficiaries, and we will build and sustain strong partnerships with local organizations, building on their expertise and capacity. Through training and employment and partnership opportunities, our programs will empower local musicians, activists and organizations to apply peacebuilding methodologies in their daily work.

A collaborative learning approach will build the capacity of beneficiaries and contribute to the knowledge and understanding of trainers and other experts, ensuring mutual benefit and equality in the exchange of knowledge.

Reflecting the dynamics of social change within communities, our programs will be designed in line with our Theory of Change, with consideration of change at three levels: individual, community, and infrastructure.

### **Actions to achieve objective 1**

In order to achieve objective 1, we will take the following actions:

- Strengthen and stabilize current projects and programs,
- Where possible and appropriate, expand programs regionally by building regional networks and collaborations,
- Develop strategy for continued MWB presence in Central America,
- Provide music-based training and other capacity building,
- Develop, apply and evaluate training and teaching methodologies based on local needs and capacities,
- Expand MEL capacity and evaluate programs according to Theory of Change, zooming in on the different levels at which change takes place - individual, community, and infrastructure - to achieve impact on the situation.



## **OBJECTIVE 2:**

**Grow knowledge, expertise, and the global recognition of music's potential for peacebuilding and social change**

### **Background**

Musicians Without Borders is a pioneer in the field of music and peacebuilding. Through advocacy, training and online engagement with our audiences, we share methodologies and best practices developed through our work in (post-)conflict regions.

Music is an essential part of the social fabric of well-functioning communities, and has been used both to divide and connect people at times of conflict. When informed by human rights and nonviolent values and approaches, music can bring respite, healing and hope. Musicians Without Borders advocates for the recognition of the power of music in peacebuilding processes.

Over the coming three years, we seek to reposition our training program as a vehicle for disseminating best practices among strategic allies in the field of music and peacebuilding; grow our network of academic, international and cultural organizations; shape a strategy for research collaborations; and ensure that our values of equity, diversity, inclusion and dignity are reflected in our communications.

### **Strategy to achieve objective 2**

To achieve objective 2, Musicians Without Borders will promote its programs, mission and approaches through various channels, including the development and dissemination of videos, photos and blogs in (social) media; conferences, panels and keynote addresses; and through networking in the academic, cultural and non-profit sectors. We will facilitate and promote knowledge generation, exchange and transfer together with implementing partners in diverse contexts, to build the evidence base for music in peacebuilding. We will advocate for the place of music in peacebuilding through the dissemination of best practices as well as through practical training.

### **Approach to achieve objective 2**

Our approach for achieving objective 2 focuses on inclusive and values-led messaging: safeguarding (the dignity) of beneficiaries in our communications, ensuring the inclusion of beneficiaries in the creation of content, and identifying the appropriate register, tone and choice of platforms to maximize our impact.

We will build momentum around the use of music in peacebuilding through networking activities and engaging with academic partners and leaders in the nonprofit sector, building strategic allegiances to support holistic approaches to peacebuilding and building the evidence base for advocacy in this unique field. Our Research Committee will help us evaluate collaboration requests, assessing relevance, proportionality and risks, to ensure that academic collaborations serve our mission and this objective.

And we will take a more targeted approach to training and advocacy, identifying strategic audiences and stakeholders for the dissemination of best practices.

## Actions to achieve objective 2

- Showcase programs and methodology across MWB platforms (social media, newsletters, website),
- Pursue and accept engagements in the Netherlands and internationally to engage in knowledge exchange and to present MWB, our work, and our methodologies at public events, conferences and other events,
- Engage in academic partnerships in order to build the evidence base for music and peacebuilding, and disseminate research and evaluation of MWB's work,
- Deliver trainings in our practically based music leadership methodology, contracted by allied organizations,
- Organize training and advocacy events for knowledge generation, exchange and transfer in order to share experience, expertise, and practical methodologies, and to build networks.





## **OBJECTIVE 3:**

**Build the capacity and quality-assurance systems needed to function as a stable, values-led organization in the field of music and peacebuilding**

### **Background**

Over the past seven years, Musicians Without Borders has worked to professionalize its operations and increase accountability towards its stakeholders. This process included the ongoing development of and training in integrity policies; transitioning to a full annual organizational audit; and seeking CBF (Netherlands Fundraising Regulator) certification.

In 2022, our program portfolio grew while the work to professionalize our organization continued, but this growth was not matched by proportionate growth in our team. During the next three-year period, we aim to build on these achievements and consolidate our organization to sustain our growth in impact and professionalization.

### **Strategy to achieve objective 3**

In order to achieve objective 3, we will use the 2023-2025 period to consolidate organizationally, in terms of strategy as well as human and financial resources, to ensure durable long-term infrastructure. This will include filling two positions which were left vacant during the COVID-19 pandemic: fundraiser and operations manager. The recruitment of a fundraiser is vital to our ability to sustain our organization and grow our organizational capacity. The operations manager will monitor the quality assurance systems currently controlled largely by our finance team. The operations manager will likewise be responsible for policy development and implementation, as well as for human resource management.

### **Approach to achieve objective 3**

Our approach in achieving objective 3 is to ensure that decision making processes - regarding new development of projects, training, policy development, and staffing - are informed by our mission and vision, as well as by a sound understanding of opportunities and risks.

To maintain and grow Musicians Without Borders' good reputation and sustain donor trust, we will prioritize transparency and accountability in our management and administration, through financial audits, organizational audits (CBF), as well as through internal and external evaluations of impact.

To ensure that we live by our values, we will take an objective-driven, flexible approach with our team, and prioritize our duty of care and the wellbeing of staff and beneficiaries.

### **Actions to achieve objective 3**

In order to achieve objective 3, we will take the following actions:

- Increase income to stabilize programs and organization in accordance with three-year funding strategy,
  - Engage additional fundraising and operational support to stabilize capacity,

- Conduct communications campaigns to grow institutional and private donor base.
- Manage and evaluate staff based on performance of role and achievement of objectives, with flexibility in working hours and appropriate autonomy in implementation of role,
- Conduct annual external and internal audits, maintain CBF certification, and expand Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning strategy to include the impacts of our organization (in addition to the impacts of projects and programs),
- Systematize monitoring of policies and good practice,
- Monitor and review implementation of existing policies, develop and roll out new policies (EDI, climate).



## METHODOLOGY

Musicians Without Borders tailors its application of the power of music for social change to the context and needs of its beneficiaries. We pool the expertise of partners, music leaders, performing musicians, bands, ensembles, and educational institutions to develop methodologies that meet those needs.

Over the years, we have developed and applied the following three primary methodologies in our programs.

### **Music leadership**

Our music leadership methodology provides the basis for music leaders to engage safely and effectively with communities affected by violence and conflict. The approach can be applied when working with individuals or with large groups, and can adapt across musical activities such as singing, songwriting, drum circles, dance, musical games, and instrumental groups.

At a theoretical level, the methodology incorporates aspects of nonviolent leadership, and makes connections between the biological, social and psychological effects of music. In places where children and communities live in fear, distrust, and isolation, the methodology is designed to offer experiences of safety, inclusion, creativity, equality, and high quality music making.

We have developed our music leadership methodology through 20 years of program experience. The approach is central to the design of our programs in Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Palestine, Jordan, El Salvador, and across Europe.

### **Band coaching**

Making music together is not just about playing instruments at the same time. A major part of being in a band, especially if the band writes original songs, is collaboration and co-creation. Making this process work takes interpersonal and communicative skills. Band members bring in their own ideas and listen to others' input, negotiate which parts end up in the song and how they should sound, and give each other feedback and compliments on their ideas and performance. Band coaching thus teaches life skills that can be used to bridge differences and find common ground inside and outside of the classroom.

The band coaching methodology is shared and taught by experienced rock music educators from [Fontys Rockacademie](#) in the Netherlands, our partner in the Rock School program since 2008. Within the Rock School program, the methodology was adapted to the local context of the Western Balkans, becoming a successful approach to inter-ethnic cooperation through music making.

### **Music therapy**

Musicians Without Borders has directly incorporated music therapy approaches into our program in Rwanda, and has partnered with Music as Therapy International to provide

training courses in Palestine and Jordan. Qualified music therapists have delivered sessions with program participants, provided training in therapeutic uses of music, and offered coaching to local music leaders.

Music therapy has to be responsive to the ways in which people understand music, their culture, and their needs. This means the therapist must begin by listening. In our programs we work with people who are marginalized and silenced by social injustice, prejudice, and isolation. Music therapy has been defined as attending to those unheard voices. When people's opportunities are reduced by oppression, poverty, or conflict, music therapy can be used to increase possibilities for action.

## **Cross-cutting themes**

### **Intersectionality**

In all our projects, programs, training and other activities, Musicians Without Borders recognizes intersectionality in the impact of conflict: the ways in which race or ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, and health status impact individual and group experiences of conflict. We work with partners to design activities that recognize this disproportionate impact and promote equity among beneficiary communities. Our programs are designed to empower local community leaders and promote freedom of expression and identity.

### **Climate emergency**

We recognize the impact of the global climate emergency on social and economic inequality, and increasingly as a cause for conflict and mass displacement. During 2023, Musicians Without Borders will develop a working policy, which considers the impacts of the climate crisis in program regions, as well as the environmental footprint of our work.

### **Distribution of wealth**

We recognize the unfair distribution of global wealth as a driver of conflict and as a deciding factor in North-South dynamics, particularly in the fields of development and peacebuilding. Musicians Without Borders supports fair salaries at partner organizations, sources instruments, equipment and expertise locally where possible, and incorporates capacity building and vocational training in nearly all its programs.



# RISK ASSESSMENT

Risk	Description	Probability	Severity	Risk assessment	Mitigation measures
1. STRATEGIC					
Deviation from mission	Growth choices made based on opportunities rather than organizational mission/strategy	Medium	Low	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New opportunities/development of new activities are assessed for relevance to mission and are not pursued if not found sufficiently relevant and proportionate (input vs. output and relevance).</li> </ul>
Program growth and/or recruitment challenges overextend staff capacity	Growth at programs and development of new programs puts additional pressure on existing team	High	Medium	Medium-High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment and budgeting (where possible) of program staffing needs to enable growth of team as needed.</li> <li>Defer or suspend development of new programs if staffing conditions do not allow for growth.</li> <li>Coordination team spreads management over five key staff members, ensuring continuity in management.</li> <li>Prioritize recruitment for key vacancies to relieve pressure on core team.</li> </ul>
Organizational dependance on key donor	Dependance on key donor for organizational costs threatens organizational continuity	Medium	High	Medium-High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic alliance with key donor on issues secures long-term partnership.</li> <li>Professionalization measures - organizational audit, CBF certification, policy development - and advocacy, dissemination and other outreach position MWB as an attractive partner for other major donors.</li> <li>Growth of unallocated crowdfunding additionally mitigates this risk.</li> <li>Recruitment of fundraiser with a view to growing network of major, long-term donors.</li> </ul>

Risk	Description	Probability	Severity	Risk assessment	Mitigation measures
<b>2. OPERATIONAL</b>					
Brain drain at projects	Loss of key staff at local partners including possible loss of capacity building	Medium-High	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing training of young talent, capacity building at local partners</li> </ul>
Safeguarding risks	The occurrence of one or more incidents as described in MWB's Safeguarding and/or Bullying & Harassment Policies	Medium	High	Medium-High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Severity of the risk depends on the severity of the incident. Mitigation measures are in place to prevent and react: Policies, Code of Conduct, training, supervision, windowed doors, no one-on-one situations where possible to avoid, reporting systems</li> </ul>
Integrity risks	Corruption, fraud, or other favors sought by MWB staff, freelancers, or partners, bringing harm to MWB reputation	Medium	High	Medium-High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Severity of the risk depends on the severity of the incident. Mitigation measures are in place to prevent and react: Policies, Code of Conduct, supervision, internal audits</li> </ul>
Problems at/with partner organizations	In most programs, we depend on collaboration with local partners for the implementation of the program activities. Problems might include integrity issues, financial problems/organizational stability, communication and/or capacity issues	Medium-High	Low-Medium	Low-Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Screening, monitoring visits, communication with stakeholders usually bring problems to light in time to react</li> </ul>

Risk	Description	Probability	Severity	Risk assessment	Mitigation measures
<b>3. FINANCIAL</b>					
Lose financial support from contributors/ credit risk	Significant reduction in donations from one or more sources of income reduces MWB income. Withdrawal of funds previously awarded due to circumstances at the donor.	Low-Medium	Medium-High	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spread out fundraising strategy over multiple funding sources: institutional, large private, small private, crowdfunding, income generation, events.</li> <li>Reconsider fundraising strategy and where necessary invest in new forms of fundraising. Maintain the continuity reserve so that a sudden loss can be temporary absorbed</li> </ul>
Bank default	One or more banks with which MWB keeps its funds defaults	Low	Medium	Low-Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MWB has accounts with several banks, funds are distributed over accounts with several banks</li> </ul>
Ineligible grant expenses	Unavoidable project expenses are incurred but cannot be charged to the project due to the provisions of the grant agreement.	Low-Medium	Medium	Low-Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reporting tools and guidelines in place. Financial provisions made for unavoidable costs outside the project budget.</li> </ul>
Liquidity risk	MWB to advance a percentage at the end of major grants before final project closing	Low-Medium	Medium-High	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build and maintain continuity/general reserves in proportion to the organizational/operational scope.</li> <li>Work with cash forecast tool to anticipate risks.</li> </ul>
Foreign exchange rate risk	Grants in foreign currencies result in a downwards adjustment of the total grant in EUR, causing a lack of project funding	Low-Medium	Low-Medium	Low-Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Risk is diverted to and managed with the partner organization through ongoing adjustment of the project budget.</li> </ul>

Risk	Description	Probability	Severity	Risk assessment	Mitigation measures
4. EXTERNAL					
Epidemics, pandemics and other health crises	Global, regional or national health crisis impacts our ability to implement programs and other activities	High	Medium-High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Travel insurance, strong partnerships, agility/flexibility in activity planning, development and use of digital infrastructure</li> </ul>
Safety & security at programs	Risk of security incidents in program countries, community backlash against program participants, risk of incidents incurred by international staff	Medium-High	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Close communication with local organizations, temporary suspension of activities or changing nature or location of activities, Safety &amp; Security Policy, incident reporting template, risk assessments for projects, travel insurance</li> </ul>
Anti-NGO legislation	Program countries introduce anti-NGO legislation putting pressure on local partners and/or making it difficult to transfer funds to target countries	Low	Medium-High	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge of the region and political context, communication with and screening of local partners. Non-political perception/image of programs helps programs to fly below radar.</li> </ul>