



2026 ANNUAL PLAN

Musicians Without Borders

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FOREWORD

Music building Radical Empathy: plans for 2026

2026 is the first of three years envisioned in Musicians Without Borders' current long-term Strategic Plan. In this Annual Plan 2026, we lay out our specific plans for the first of three years, to achieve the following objectives:

1. Contribute to just, inclusive, peaceful societies: strengthening our long-term programs around the world, building alternatives to war and exclusion with musicians and partner organizations;
2. Build networks of changemakers: expanding our connections, creating new alliances within both the arts and peace and social change sectors;
3. Change the narrative: pushing back, with alternatives to racist, exclusionary, war-mongering rhetoric, telling the stories of how the arts build community and lead to nonviolent social change;
4. Build a movement of solidarity: expanding our base, including new musicians, activists, and supporters, understanding that so many people around the world are looking for reasons to hope and places to act.

Behind these plans is our shared determination to survive and even to grow—whether or not in size or budget, certainly in presence, in clarity of voice, and in effectively playing our part in resisting violence, domination and war. We base our practical planning on our understanding of music's power to build radical empathy and our years of experience in translating this power into positive, long-term social change for real people.

If our programs cannot stop war, for participants, they *are* life-changing. And when lives change, communities change, societies change. We build radical empathy through collaborations that transcend borders and defy dehumanization through the shared human language of music.

Laura Hassler



Laura J. Hassler

MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

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 is a powerful force for peace, bringing people together across differences and divisions and empowering people to resist injustice.

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

Values and culture

Guiding principles

The principles guiding our organization are the principles of active nonviolence.

- Do no harm,
- Treat all with respect,
- Oppose unjust behavior, not people,
- Means and ends must be consistent,
- Justice is at the heart of true peace,
- Zero tolerance to discrimination,
- Support those who speak out and encourage ongoing dialogues.



Demand-driven approach

Across all our programs, we follow a demand-driven approach that ensures our work is shaped by the priorities, experiences, and aspirations of the communities we serve. This means we:

- Start new projects only when explicitly invited by partners who identify a specific need that our expertise can address,
- Co-create every project with partners in program countries, grounding our work in the real needs and visions expressed by communities themselves,
- Promote equal cooperation and two-way knowledge exchange with professionals in program regions, reinforcing mutual respect and cultural understanding,
- Build inclusive, welcoming, and safe environments where all participants feel valued, regardless of background or identity,
- Strengthen partner capacities in areas such as management and fundraising to ensure community ownership and autonomy,
- Commit to long-term, sustainable engagement that supports lasting transformation.



OUR OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE 1: Contribute to just, inclusive, peaceful societies

Use music to bridge divides, connect communities, and heal the wounds of war

In 2026, in the face of worsening conflict, division and genocide, we will continue to bring musicians and community partners together in fearless, creative collaborations. Collaborations that contribute directly to just, inclusive and peaceful societies. To maximize our impact and support our partners in program regions, we will focus our organizational expertise across three strategic aims.

- **Sustain the impact of successful practices**
 - Evaluate activities across programs, and identify the practices that create the greatest impacts,
 - Prioritize the elements of each program that sustain these practices.
- **Respond to emerging conflicts and needs**
 - Develop flexibility in our relationships with key donors for each program, to allow adaptability and responsiveness,
 - Establish an emergency response fund, that allows us to respond to emergencies in programs and also in new regions,
 - Develop light-touch, low-resource interventions to support musicians and community organizations in emergency situations.
- **Ensure relevance of project portfolio**
 - Re-focus our criteria to assess the relevance of our program portfolio in relation to our mission.

These three strategic aims overarch our program activities, which are designed to respond directly to each program context and partnership.



JORDAN: AL-MUSIQA TAJM'ANA

Why we work here

Known for its hospitality, Jordan has accepted refugees from conflicts in neighboring countries suffering since 1948, resulting in a mosaic of different cultures. The country hosts the largest number of Palestinian refugees in the world. Most of the 2.3 million living there have been granted citizenship ([Guardian 2025](#)). In 2025, the country had over 440,000 registered refugees, most of whom came from Syria ([UNHCR 2026](#)), plus an untold number of unregistered refugees. This has the inevitable effect of destabilizing the country at social and political levels.

What we do

Al-Musiqa Tajm'ana (Music Brings Us Together) trains musicians to use music as a tool for social inclusion, stimulating creative development, and bringing hope and joy to children in underserved refugee and host communities. 2026 will be the sixth year of the collaboration between Musicians Without Borders and Soka Gakkai. The program includes Music Leadership training focusing on group work with vulnerable children, trauma awareness and self-care, nonviolent communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution. Musicians gain techniques to create spaces of safety, connection, and creativity.

The trained music leaders work with vulnerable young people, including orphaned children, youth in prison, and children who fled from other countries. In 2024, we implemented Manjali, a project in cooperation with our partner Tajalla, based in Amman. Tajalla develops dynamic relationships across all segments of society through culture and arts by creating platforms for artistic expression. We built on Tajalla's successful music heritage project, and provided 20 children in Al Karak with free music lessons and ensemble playing. The children focus on songs from their own rich cultural heritage.

In 2025, we added a children's choir, Ana Sowti. The music ensembles and choir are learning folklore repertoire, exploring their heritage and developing their music, social and emotional skills. Hoping for more stability in the region in 2026, we plan to let the groups perform for their communities and participate in an online exchange program with our program in Palestine and our partners' program in Japan.

Continuing a successful partnership with Music as Therapy (United Kingdom), we will explore how to continue offering Music as Therapy related activities, such as training practitioners working with children with special needs and offering online support and learning.

Who we reach

- Musicians and care practitioners gain training and skills,
- Vulnerable young people, including orphaned children, youth in prison, and children who fled from other countries,
- Family and community members, through concerts and events,
- The general public in Jordan and worldwide through online communications.

Our plan for 2026

We aim to

- Strengthen and expand the project's infrastructure of trained music leaders, equipped to support vulnerable and under-served children through music,
- Enhance the teaching, communication, and leadership skills of musicians involved in social programs,
- Support an impactful program of music lessons and activities that reaches vulnerable and under-served children,
- Expand and empower the present team of Jordan-based trainers capable of training others in the region, thereby increasing impact and ensuring scalability,
- Support and develop the children's ensemble and choir in al-Karak, helping to preserve musical traditions and link generations.

Actions

- Train at least 15 music teachers in music leadership skills,
- Provide weekly instrument and ensemble lessons, and choir rehearsals for 50 children in Al Karak,
- Provide monthly social participation workshops as well as educational trips,
- Organize two performances for Manjali and Ana Sowti, and exchange activities with our program in Palestine and Soka Gakkai's youth choir,
- Offer Music as Therapy activities.



PALESTINE: BARA'EM GHIRASS

Why we work here

The urgent need for life-affirming, creative children's music programs in Palestine must be understood in the context of ongoing systematic oppression and violence towards the Palestinian people during more than 75 years of occupation. For most Palestinians, poverty, state and interpersonal violence, and the absence of infrastructure and services define daily life.

The marginalization of vulnerable groups of women, children, and refugees have rendered them isolated. There are few resources available to support the educational and social development of children and youth. Parents face unemployment and lack of perspective, influencing their relationship with their children, sometimes leading to conflict and violence in the family.

The genocide in Gaza and the increase in occupation-related violence on the West Bank have made life much more difficult and dangerous for all in the region. While the situation is unstable, we are determined to continue our music program, organizing activities for children and their mothers, and working with partners from Ghirass Cultural Center to keep life-affirming programs running.

What we do

Musicians Without Borders works in partnership with Ghirass Cultural Center, where we contribute a music component to Ghirass' educational and cultural program. This program serves vulnerable children and youth in the Bethlehem region.

Children from villages and refugee camps in the Bethlehem district learn to play instruments and make music and sing together. We incorporate sessions with a social worker, for children and their mothers. This provides children with emotional, social and developmental support, and increases mothers' awareness of the benefits of music making and reduces stress. A new collaboration with music non-profit Al-Kamandjati allows our program participants to join students from the Hebron and Bethlehem area for monthly rehearsals and performances.

In 2026, we will create two original performances: an educational show about musical heritage implemented by Bara'em Ghirass' teachers and advanced students, and joint performance with artists, to be held in isolated communities.

Who we reach

- Children from isolated villages, kindergartens and refugee camps in the Bethlehem area,
- Children with disabilities,
- Vulnerable mothers dealing with a variety of social challenges,
- Families of participating children and women,
- The general public in Palestine and worldwide through social media, the press, and newsletters.

Our plan for 2026

We aim to

- Use music to strengthen the social and emotional skills of vulnerable and under-served youth, children, and mothers in villages and refugee camps in the Bethlehem district,
- Offer children a safe space to be open-minded, and to respect different cultures, religions, and opinions,
- Create new performances and reach a wider audience,
- Advocate and attract local musicians to engage as agents for social change,
- Share a different voice from Palestine with an international audience.

Actions

- Implement a program of music education activities for 50 children (ages 6-16),
- Implement a program with social work and music sessions for at least ten mothers,
- Implement monthly rehearsals and performances with 90 children from the Hebron and Bethlehem area in cooperation with al-Kamandjati,
- Create two new performances with Palestinian musicians, our advanced students and a fire artist, and implement 15 performances for at least 1,500 children,
- Organize exchange activities with our program in Jordan and Soka Gakkai's youth choir.



RWANDA YOUTH MUSIC

Why we work here

Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and Democratic Republic of the Congo suffered brutal violence and conflicts in the 1990s. Although Rwanda has maintained peace, the ongoing effects of violence, fighting, and instability continue in the region today – fueled by a history of colonial oppression based on war, profit, and division.

One consequence of the conflict in the Great Lakes region of Africa was the rapid spread of HIV. During the hundred-day genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994, an estimated 150,000 people contracted HIV.

What we do

Rwanda Youth Music began in 2012 in response to the legacy of genocide in Rwanda. WE-ACTx for Hope invited Musicians Without Borders to develop a music program supporting the wellbeing of children and youth living with HIV. The program has grown to reach over 20,000 children and young people in Kigali, throughout Rwanda, and across the region.

Since 2024, we have augmented the expertise of the Rwanda Youth Music team by providing training in approaches from the field of music therapy targeted towards the care of young people facing the physical and social challenges of HIV and disability. Trained music leaders deliver regular sessions using music as therapy at clinical and educational centers in Kigali, and the Eastern Province of Rwanda.

Who we reach

- Children, youth, and young adults living with HIV or with physical and mental disabilities,
- Young community leaders,
- The general public in Rwanda and worldwide through social media and the press.



Our plan for 2026

We aim to

- Maintain direct care for young people living with disabilities or with HIV,
- Strengthen Rwanda Youth Music as a regional hub of expertise in the innovative use of music for the therapeutic support of children living with physical and developmental challenges,
- Build networks and partnerships towards program sustainability.

Actions

- Maintain musical support program for 170 young people living with HIV and 1,000 children living with disabilities, at seventeen community-based organizations in Kigali, and in Eastern Province,
- Provide training to 15 young music leaders in the therapeutic use of music with children and youth living with physical and developmental challenges,
- Embed the program in formal and informal infrastructures for disability support in Rwanda by joining networks and building partnerships.



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO: KIVU YOUTH MUSIC

Why we work here

The humanitarian crisis in North Kivu has sharply escalated in 2025, with renewed front-line fighting, mass displacements, and a deepening protection crisis for children. Since January, M23 forces have seized control of key towns and territory, including the regional capital of Goma. Escalating clashes, particularly between the Congolese army (FARDC) and armed groups like the M23, and attacks by Islamic State-linked Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), continue to fuel widespread insecurity, arbitrary arrests, forced recruitment, and displacement (UNHCR, 2025).

In this volatile context, children are exposed not only to immediate physical harm, but also to the psychosocial trauma of repeated uprooting, loss of education, and shattered family networks.

North Kivu's crisis is deeply intertwined with the broader systemic issues of conflict, climate pressures, resource exploitation, and global inequality. M23's offensive has targeted mineral-rich zones, notably tin and gold in Walikale ([Reuters 2025](#)), reinforcing how resource competition is fueling the war. Meanwhile, climate stress and poverty drive further displacement, creating a vicious cycle where resource extraction, environmental degradation, and armed violence reinforce one another, putting the region's children and their futures at grave risk.

What we do

We collaborate with partners to provide access for vulnerable children to mental health and psychosocial support through music. Trained community music leaders provide series of music workshops for children living in orphanages in Goma. Their skills and knowledge are strengthened through training sessions with Musicians Without Borders trainers, who include trauma, music therapy, and self-care specialists.

In response to the impacts of climate injustice on global conflict, we collaborate with IUCN NL and Congolese musicians to engage young people as environmental leaders. By centralizing culturally embedded knowledge, Kivu Youth Music recasts young people's cultural connections to nature, and strengthens their climate resilience.

Who we reach

- Children, youth, and young adults in Internally Displaced People camps, orphanages, and conflict-affected communities,
- Young community leaders,
- The general public in DRC and worldwide through social media and the press.

Our plan for 2026

We aim to

- Provide mental health, and psychosocial support through music for children who are directly affected by war,
- Strengthen Kivu Youth Music as a hub of expertise in the innovative use of music for the mental health and psychosocial support of children in a conflict zone,
- Build climate resilience in young people in rural communities.

Actions

- Run weekly music activities reaching 500 children living in orphanages in Goma.
- Facilitate monthly training sessions for 15 young music leaders.
- Roll out our methodology for building climate resilience through music leadership in the community forests of South Kivu.



WESTERN BALKANS: MUSIC CONNECTS

Why we work here

The Yugoslav wars of the 1990s left the Western Balkans deeply divided along ethnic lines. Nowhere more so than in Mitrovica, an ethnically divided town in northern Kosovo, where Serbs live north of the river that divides the town, and Albanians in the south. Ethnic prejudice is rife, and the threat of a return to violence looms continually. Over the past three years, tensions have again increased, giving rise to concern about the future of minorities in the region.

In neighboring North Macedonia, the Roma population is the region's most discriminated and marginalized ethnic group. There is structural discrimination against the Roma community in the job market, in education, in access to housing and water, and in the justice system ([Council of Europe 2025](#)). This marginalization extends into the field of culture: while widely celebrated for their strong musical culture, only a very small number of Roma musicians complete higher music education and Roma influence on cultural policy is negligible.

What we do

In Kosovo, Mitrovica Rock School connects young Serb, Albanian, and other musicians through daily band sessions and lessons in rock music instruments and vocals. It is one of the city's most active organizations, and Mitrovica's only NGO whose leadership, staff, and student body are composed equally of members of both communities.

In North Macedonia, Roma Rock School follows a similar model for music education, promoting the inclusion of, and breaking down stereotypes against, Roma youth. Like its Mitrovica counterpart, the program combines music education with music creation and production and uses public-facing events to promote its musicians.

2026 is our final year of Music Connects, a four-year Creative Europe project with six organizations in five countries. In 2026, our focus will be on completing the Creative Europe project successfully, and creating the circumstances needed to sustain the project's results.



Civil society in Kosovo and North Macedonia has suffered enormously under the 2025 cuts in international aid. Meanwhile politicians under pressure from their electorate fuel ethnic tensions to fire up their base. Initiatives that bridge divides between communities are more needed than ever. We will dedicate 2026 to finding long-term support for Mitrovica Rock School and Roma Rock School, so that they can continue their important work.

Who we reach

- Youth from Mitrovica and Skopje, who come together across ethnic divisions through music lessons and a program for ethnically mixed bands,
- Dutch, German, and Belgian partners, who apply their music and cultural organization skills to affect social change,
- Communities brought together across ethnic lines through concerts and events organized by young musicians,
- The general public in the Western Balkans and the European Union, through social media and the press, who learn of inspiring ways to use music to affect social change.

Our plan for 2026

We aim to

- Promote social resilience and enhance inclusion of ethnically divided and marginalized communities in the Western Balkans,
- Support continuous learning of young musicians and music education organizations in the Western Balkans,
- Facilitate transnational co-creation between musicians from the Western Balkans and northern Europe,
- Disseminate best practices.

Actions

- Organize daily music education programs in Kosovo and North Macedonia, offering 100 youth 2,000 music classes, band sessions, workshops, and other music activities,
- Collaborate with Fontys Rockacademie to train 13 teacher-student trainees in band coaching, songwriting, curriculum development, and sound engineering.
- Organize three international exchanges: teacher training in Tilburg, an exchange in Berlin, and third a residency and performance in the EU.
- Publish and disseminate the research report compiled by external evaluator, Professor Dr Angela Impey, of SOAS University of London.

EUROPE: WELCOME NOTES NETHERLANDS

Why we work here

Migration, and the reception of people seeking asylum, is at the center of political debate in the Netherlands. In 2025, we saw the rise of the first extreme right-winged government, driven largely by a strong anti-migration narrative. Support for more restrictive policies for asylum seekers is contributing to an increasingly hostile society and leading to worrying incidents of violence.

Stigmatization of people fleeing war and persecution, the dehumanization of asylum seekers, and growing xenophobia continue to inflame public sentiment. Even though asylum applications in the Netherlands have decreased in recent years, the number of people living in shelters has increased due to excessively long procedures and lack of funding ([NOS 2026](#)). Deteriorating living conditions and constant relocations have a serious impact on mental health and wellbeing.

In this hostile climate, solidarity with people in forced migration is essential. Welcome Notes Netherlands supports young people's psychosocial and mental health through music programs in reception centers, and shifts negative narratives about refugees.

What we do

Welcome Notes Netherlands offers music workshops for children, youth, and families living in emergency reception centers across the Netherlands. Since 2022, trained music leaders have helped create moments of relief and a sense of community for people facing difficult living conditions, building connections through shared musical experiences. Collaborating with local musicians, including those with lived migration experience, and with other organizations in the sector, Welcome Notes strengthens community ties and brings moments of joy to people navigating the asylum process.

Who we reach

- Children, youth, and families residing in reception centers in the Netherlands,
- The general public in the Netherlands and worldwide through social media and the press.

Our plan for 2026

We aim to

- Provide hope, joy, relief and connection through music to people in the asylum process in the Netherlands,
- Increase geographical scope throughout the country and establish regular interventions in the most underserved reception centers,
- Strengthen collaborations with other relevant institutions in the Netherlands, from the education and social sectors.

Actions

- Deliver 70 music workshops for 1,300 children, youth, and families living in reception centers, including crisis and emergency centers,
- Deliver 2 rap workshop projects with unaccompanied minors in reception centers in the Netherlands,
- Increase the presence of workshop leaders and musicians with a refugee background in the MWB team,
- Engage with Dutch society through awareness raising actions, countering dehumanizing messaging in politics and in the media.



EUROPE: WELCOME NOTES BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Why we work here

Located along the Balkan route, Bosnia and Herzegovina has become a critical stage for people seeking safety from war and persecution, hoping to reach asylum within the European Union. Still healing from its own history of conflict, division, and displacement, the country faces mounting challenges in supporting people fleeing war and persecution.

As funding for infrastructure decreases, conditions in Temporary Reception Centers (TRCs) and safe houses in cities such as Sarajevo and Bihać have deteriorated. Some centers have closed their doors, reports of violence inside facilities are increasing, and safety is diminishing—especially for children, unaccompanied minors, and other at-risk groups. Stricter border controls and illegal pushbacks have forced many to choose more dangerous routes, heightening the risks they face.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is not exempt from the rise in anti-migration narratives spreading across Europe and amplified by media discourse. Still, people on the move continue to resist the harsh conditions imposed upon them, striving to maintain dignity, agency, and hope. We stand with them in their resistance, and provide support in their perilous journey.

We work in collaboration with Caritas Bosnia and Herzegovina to bring music programs into reception centers and community spaces. These activities offer moments of welcome, creativity, and human connection. Building on a long tradition of collaborative music initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we support children, youth, and adults in finding solace, expression, and a sense of belonging. Through shared musical experiences, these programs foster resilience, understanding, and community for people moving through an increasingly hostile landscape.

What we do

We support people in forced migration through music workshops, working in key locations, including Sarajevo, Tuzla, and Bihać, where people in forced migration find temporary shelter. We offer tailored sessions for diverse groups, from unaccompanied minors to young men often overlooked by support services. These sessions and workshops provide opportunities for community building and expression for people navigating uncertain futures on the Balkan route.

Who we reach

- Children, youth, and families, and single men residing in reception centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- The general public in Bosnia and Herzegovina and worldwide through social media and the press.

Our plan for 2026

We aim to

- Provide hope, joy, respite, and opportunities for expression through music to people fleeing war and persecution and other vulnerable communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Actions

- Deliver 195 music workshops for over 2,800 children, youth, families, and young single men primarily from refugee and migrant backgrounds, in three locations (Sarajevo, Tuzla and Bihać) in Bosnia and Herzegovina,
- Support stability of teams of workshop leaders who will deliver workshops across different locations in Bosnia and Herzegovina,
- Build a team in Bosnia and Herzegovina who will replicate the model of rap workshops for unaccompanied minors, with external coaching and support from two Musicians Without Borders trainers.



EUROPE: WELCOME NOTES LOUDER

Why we work here

Europe was once seen as a tolerant, inclusive, welcoming place. A region that stood for peace, for human rights, for the calm and steady building of just societies. In the Netherlands, there was even a government-appointed committee that identified victims of political persecution in other countries and invited them to settle in the Netherlands, and contribute to Dutch society.

No more.

We live in a time in which refugees and migrants are blamed for all of society's ills: the housing shortage, decreasing employment opportunities, the decline of social services, a perceived increase in street violence. Those who understand how the system functions know that refugees are not the cause of our society's problems. Those who understand the history of scapegoating—pointing blame at the most vulnerable—know that people in forced migration are just the lowest tier in a system that turns vulnerable people against each other and diverts attention from the real causes of suffering.

Through the power of music, we raise the voices of those who have lost everything and need our solidarity, as we also raise our own voices with theirs for the sake of our shared humanity – we raise them LOUDER.

What we do

Welcome Notes LOUDER harnesses the transformative power of music to amplify the voices of displaced children and youth in Europe, and drown out hate. Building on 27 years of experience working with vulnerable, at-risk populations, we will launch this new program in 2026 to provide urgent support to young people in refugee settings and to enact “artist” campaigns that celebrate the beauty and creativity of young people in migration, and bring people together in our shared humanity.

We will engage children and youth living in refugee reception centres in the Netherlands and in Bosnia and Herzegovina in hands-on creative song-writing workshops. The workshops will be facilitated by music leaders trained by Musicians Without Borders to provide mental health and psychosocial support through music, and to make the young people's lives a little more beautiful, safer, healthier and happier.

We will then collaborate with international artists, producers, and venues to amplify the young people’s songs as loudly as possible. Audiences will be moved on an emotional level, with the potential to inspire real shifts in mindset.

Welcome Notes LOUDER is more than a music program. It's a megaphone for the voices of young people on the fringes of Europe. It's a bridge between worlds. A plea for solidarity in a time when divisions are growing. Together we're building a Europe where human rights are celebrated again – carried by music, shared by young people, and heard by millions.

Who we reach

- Children, youth, and unaccompanied minors, living in reception centers and refugee settings, in the Netherlands and Bosnia and Herzegovina,
- The general public in the Netherlands, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and internationally.

Our plan for 2026

We aim to

- Provide direct mental health and psychosocial support through music for hundreds of displaced people on both sides of the EU border line, especially children and youth,
- Enact activist campaigns that celebrate beauty and humanity, to evoke the just, open-hearted, and humane reception of refugees in Europe.

Actions

- Facilitate creative songwriting and rap workshops with 250 children, young people, and unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands and Bosnia and Herzegovina,
- Collaborate with artists and producers to create six songs and accompanying videos ,
- Reach 1,000,000 people through performances, promotion and media campaigns.



EUROPE: WELCOME NOTES TRAINING

Our Welcome Notes training program trains musicians and music teachers in MWB's Music Leadership methodology to strengthen their work with people in forced migration in Europe. Our music leadership methodology was developed through MWB's 27 years of experience developing music initiatives with people affected by conflict.

What we do

We share our expertise in music leadership through training courses for individuals and organizations who work through music to contribute to the Welcome Notes goal of strengthening the social inclusion of people in forced migration in Europe.

Who we reach

- Music practitioners, educators, and students who work, or wish to work, to strengthen the social inclusion of people who have migrated to Europe,
- Universities and organizations that partner with MWB to deliver training to music practitioners, educators, and students.

Our plan for 2026

We aim to

- Strengthen the skills of musicians in Europe and the United Kingdom to run music workshops with people in forced migration.

Actions

- Partner with allied academic and implementing organizations to deliver Welcome Notes training courses in countries including Germany and the United Kingdom.



OBJECTIVE 2: Build networks of changemakers

Develop bold, creative collaborations with musicians, peacebuilding organizations, and cultural institutions

At a time of growing polarization and shrinking space for community-based initiatives, the need for collective action is urgent. Our work is rooted in the belief that lasting social change is based on collaboration and shared values and resulting collective action. As funding declines and pressures on progressive movements intensify, working in isolation is no longer sustainable. This objective outlines how we will strengthen our impact by building meaningful partnerships that amplify our voice and advance justice, peace, and human rights.

Strategic partnerships to increase impact and grow support

By collaborating with cultural, human rights, and social change actors, we aim to amplify our collective voice, strengthen public engagement, and increase the sustainability and impact of our work. Music, art, advocacy and community organizing are central to advancing inclusion and justice.

- Identify 30 aligned cultural organizations and non-profits in the Netherlands and the EU, with a focus on peacebuilding, opposition to war, and inclusion of people in forced migration,
- Develop at least two new partnerships, including one EU-level consortium proposal, with peacebuilding or cultural actors,
- Connect with NGOs, NGO hubs, activists, and cultural and educational institutions to monitor trends, share knowledge, and strengthen our understanding of developments in our sector,
- Expand our network by engaging with foundations and other grantmakers through in-person meetings, conferences, gatherings, and sector events.



Combine platforms to grow voice and reach new audiences

Responding to the increased pressure on human rights, increased vulnerability of non-governmental organizations, and the need for a coordinated effort to push back against polarization, we will build alliances with cultural, activist, human rights, and peacebuilding organizations with whom we will collaborate on today's pressing issues.

- Join and support five collective actions for justice and peace, including campaigns, protests, and petitions,
- Co-design and deliver at least two joint public events using music and art to amplify messages of peace, social justice, and inclusion,
- Collaborate with at least six well-known musicians and ensembles, lifting the voices of children and youth in migration,
- Strengthen relationships and explore collaborations with at least two other Netherlands-based organizations working through the arts with people forced to flee their countries of origin and now based in the Netherlands,
- Strengthen relationships with other organizations working in Bosnia and Herzegovina on behalf of displaced people based, or on the move, in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Grow capacity among musicians in Europe for working with people in forced migration

Recognising the urgency felt by many to be changemakers in their societies, we aim to provide them with agency to do so through training, workshops, and tasters.

- Deliver at least two training courses, for musicians, music educators, and community leaders, focusing on working with vulnerable communities, with particular attention to people in migration,
- Collaborate with two music conservatories and universities to strengthen our program activities and provide learning opportunities for young professionals, jointly developing course materials, systems for onboarding students, and shared evaluation and learning tools.



OBJECTIVE 3: Change the narrative

Promote empathy and build support for human rights by sharing music and stories from people with lived experience of war and forced migration

We live in times where dehumanizing language has been normalized, and the language of solidarity and resistance is considered naive or unrealistic. We recognise our role in shifting narratives and building support for unity. In 2026, we will lay the foundations of building a brand that reflects the radical nature of our work, and create a standardised message and tone to use across all of our communications.

Reflect the relevance and urgency of our work in our presentation and language

Coming together, making music, and bringing change in places of extreme hardship takes bravery, energy, and vision. Throughout history, musicians have stood firmly with those struggling for human rights and in solidarity with victims of violence and inequality. In 2026, we will update our language and presentation to better reflect the urgency of our work and the power of music in places where people are being silenced, cornered, and driven apart.

- Develop a fresh visual identity and messaging framework that clearly communicates our mission, and conveys a bold new brand identity,
- Roll out the new brand across all platforms - our newsletter, social media, website, and other communication channels - creating a cohesive, defiant presence.

Change the narrative in program contexts

Our programs have a profound, life-changing impact on the people directly involved. Sharing their music and stories with their communities and throughout the region can expand this impact to a much wider audience and contribute to a narrative of hope, resistance to injustice and a vision of a shared future.

- Create a storybank for each program to reinforce the new organizational messaging,
- Work with partners in each program region to develop community activities that contribute to narrative shifting,
- Deliver structured support (such as content guidelines, storytelling templates, and coaching sessions) to help partner organizations create and share stories that reflect program activities,
- Develop and share a series of narrative-shifting materials - blog, articles, videos, social media posts

- that contrast narratives of war and division with real examples from our programs showing inclusion, community-building, and mutual respect.

Change the narrative in the Global North

Over the past years, we have seen a shift to the political right in many parts of the Global North. We have also seen a defunding of international aid and cooperation, growing calls for militarization, and growing suspicion and scapegoating of refugees and migrants. To re-center the conversation towards human rights, equity, and solidarity, we need reminders of our shared humanity and of the beauty that arises when we work together to create new realities.

- Design and roll out an ambassador program, including recruitment criteria, onboarding materials, defined roles, and yearly initiatives to mobilize allies who can amplify our mission,
- Develop five new collaborations with influencers, musicians, and social-change platforms, co-creating content campaigns and issuing joint messages that broaden our reach and visibility,
- Publish timely statements, opinion pieces, and campaigns that address urgent or overlooked social injustices, anchored in our expertise from working in post-conflict regions,
- Lead or have a visible presence at five advocacy initiatives—petitions, protests, panel discussions, public campaigns—on current topics that intersect with our mission, such as the right to protest, human rights, and climate justice.

Advocate for the place of art in peacebuilding

Our vision is a world where music is a powerful force for peace. War doesn't just destroy lives, buildings, and infrastructure. It destroys the social fabric of a society: the interactions, culture, and social infrastructure that make people feel safe, able to develop, and have confidence in themselves, each other, and the future. Music, and culture more broadly, are not a standalone solution for a peaceful society, but an essential part of reconstruction after a conflict has torn a country apart and a tool for inspiring and supporting social change in every society.

Where a conflict still rages, holding on to one's culture is also holding on to one's humanity. And in regions that profit from war and armed conflict, music can be a voice of opposition and resistance. During 2026, we will advocate for the place of arts and culture in the process of peacebuilding.

By participating in conferences, giving keynote presentations, and seeking opportunities to engage with decision-makers in the grantmaking landscape:

- Compile learnings and insights from our programs and distribute them strategically through briefs, training, and presentations to influence funders and sector peers toward including music in community-centered solutions and increase funding for culture initiatives.

OBJECTIVE 4: Grow a movement of solidarity

Diversify support base and build new communities of supporters

In times of growing urgency around human rights, conflict, and inequality, people of all ages and backgrounds feel compelled to contribute. Musicians Without Borders makes a difference in the lives of people living under some of the most difficult circumstances. These are real, tangible actions that people can support to improve quality of life.

In 2026, we want to bridge the gap between people looking for a way to contribute, and the children, youth, and vulnerable people who participate in our programs.

To reach new audiences and encourage people to actively contribute to our programs, we will link stories from the program countries to targeted donation campaigns. We also want to enable people to donate to a specific Musicians Without Borders program.

Many people feel connected to a particular region, music genre, or target group. We want to meet people where they are and respect and facilitate this connection. By enabling targeted donations to specific programs, we connect followers with initiatives they strongly believe in and create communities of supporters.

Diversify support base

In order to reach new audiences, we will modernize our brand and messaging, offer real-world experiences, and partner with allies in the music industry.

- Identify new audiences using social media advertising tools,
- Enhance our donor relations and stewardship channels by communicating to people more specifically about programs that interest them,
- Upgrade our current email marketing system to allow for more targeted messages to reach our different audiences about the things they want to hear about the most,
- Attend three funder- or philanthropy-focused convenings: conferences, networking events, grantmaker roundtables.

Build communities of supporters

Recognizing the importance of community in bringing about change, we want to bring people together around the work they feel connected to.

- Activate Musicians Without Borders' presence at three large-scale music events, reaching music fans in musical environments,
- Collaborate with musicians and the music industry to directly reach their audiences with our message,
- Curate and publicise stories told by musicians and activists, that resonate directly with our brand identity.

Interrelation between objectives

- Stronger, more dynamic programs directly contribute to a more peaceful society and reduce polarization and extremism. The programs also generate more insights and stories, through information gathering (learning and evaluation).
- Programs are further strengthened by collaborations with educational institutions, charities, and cultural organizations. These exchanges also lead to new insights and stories.
- Sharing these stories increases the impact of the programs: in the region, to combat prejudice and promote inclusion and understanding, and in the Global North, giving a face and voice to real people living in conflict situations.
- With a larger, more engaged following, we can expand our donor base. This leads to more structural support for our work in conflict regions.



OUR FOUNDATION

People

People remain at the heart of our organization. Over the coming year, we will strengthen our stable and committed core team by providing conditions where people thrive and feel empowered to contribute to our mission.

Our annual priorities are to retain, and support staff while maintaining a safe, welcoming, and stimulating work environment for everyone involved in the organization, including board members, employees, freelancers, volunteers, and funding and program partners.

During 2026, we will maintain our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion by identifying and addressing structural barriers that may lead to exclusion.

Team growth will be managed carefully and responsibly throughout the year, ensuring that any expansion is aligned with organizational needs and resources.

Financial strategy and management

Our fundraising strategy

Over the past year, the nonprofit and international cooperation sector has come under growing pressure. Many governments in the Global North have reduced their Official Development Aid (ODA) budgets ([OECD 2025](#)), in favor of increased military spending ([UNDP 2025](#)).

For Musicians Without Borders, this has meant the loss of a number of funding partners who saw their budgets slashed, while remaining grant opportunities became increasingly competitive. For instance, the number of Creative Europe cooperation project applications submitted in 2025 was approximately 70% higher than in 2024, with the same budget amount available.

We closed 2025 with a positive result thanks to a long-term strategy to maintain a diverse funding base. Since our very beginning, we have nurtured relationships with musicians, music lovers, small foundations, and other private givers, alongside our relationship with institutional funding partners. A legacy gift from a long-term friend of the organization made us significantly more resilient in a challenging funding landscape.

Challenge

In 2026, we start the year with the loss of a key funding partner that has provided core support to our organization since 2017. This loss results from shifting priorities at the funding partner, away from community arts and peacebuilding and towards climate change. Additionally, our EU-funded project Music Connects will end in June 2026.

Strategy

For 2026, we have a four-pronged fundraising strategy. This strategy builds on our loyal existing base of givers and funding partners, and the credibility we have garnered from 27 years' of program experience.

- We will seek alliances with large private foundations whose mission is aligned with ours,
- We will invest in new EU project initiatives, building and joining consortia that complement our regional presence, our mission, and our expertise,
- We will grow our base of individual givers, through campaigns, outreach activities, and by creating pathways for dedicated support to specific programs,
- We will grow our base of large private givers and private foundations through advocacy and networking activities.

Our development of new funding strands is constrained by the small size of our team, responsible for both our program operations and fundraising. We will overcome this constraint by allocating different team members' hours to different strands of fundraising. For growth requiring outside expertise, for instance in the field of communications, we are working with volunteering professionals.

Due to the loss of the major funding partner and the end of the EU project, 38% of our 2026 budget is still to be raised at the start of the year. While this is higher than other years, we have always had to raise our annual budget through continuous actions throughout the year. We will manage this risk through conservative budgeting (our 2026 budget is 6% lower than our 2025 income), and through careful monitoring of expenditure.

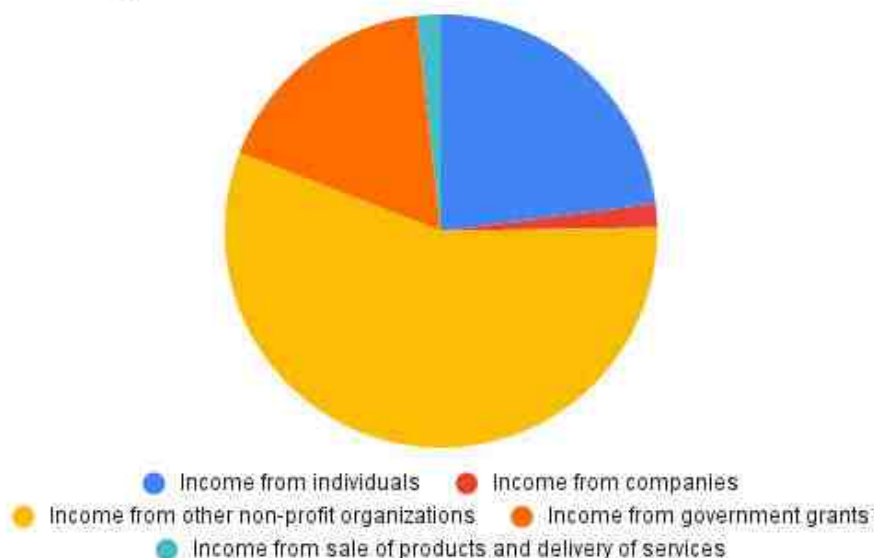
Reserves and Funds

Based on the preliminary financial figures for 2025, total reserves and funds have most likely increased slightly to approximately EUR 180,000. This represents a modest improvement compared to the previous year and provides a limited degree of financial flexibility. However, the overall level of reserves remains relatively constrained and does not allow for significant additional structural commitments without careful consideration.

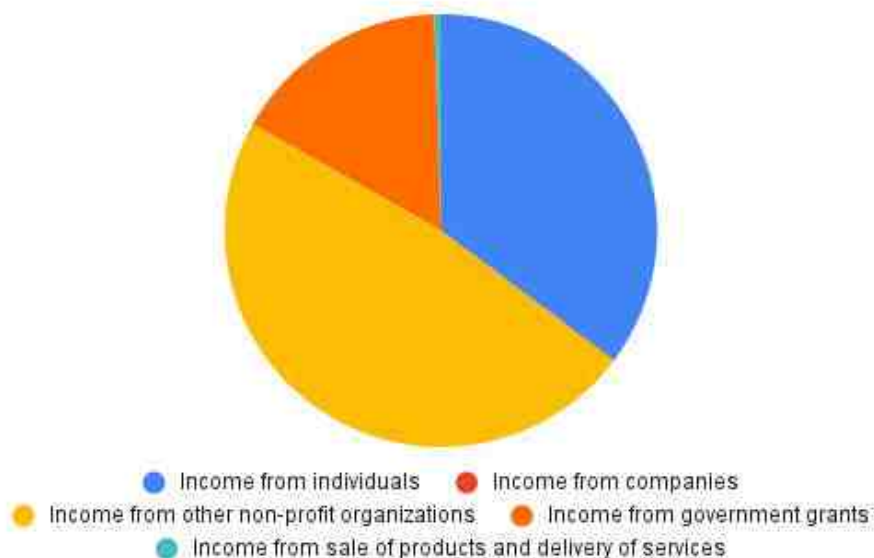
2026 funding compared to 2025

In 2026, we see a 38% decrease in income from individuals, compensated by increases in income from other nonprofit foundations (11%) and income from companies and delivery of services. This brings our 2026 income closer in line with 2024, as we cannot project another legacy gift as received in 2025.

2026 Funding Plan



2025 Income



Our asset management

Musicians Without Borders manages its assets prudently and in accordance with Dutch legislation, RJ650 guidelines, CBF requirements, and ANBI regulations. The organization does not hold investments or engage in speculative financial activities. Available funds are maintained in cash and bank accounts and are used to support the continuity of operations and the implementation of our mission.

Since the majority of our income is of a one-off nature which requires careful liquidity planning and active monitoring of cash flow, liquidity is reviewed regularly by management and the Supervisory Board. Strengthening and gradually rebuilding the Continuity Reserve remains a priority, particularly in light of the financial loss incurred in 2023 and the volatile funding landscape described above.

Our allocation of resources

Funds received for specific purposes are recorded as Earmarked Funds and are spent strictly in accordance with donor agreements. General income is used to support core operations, governance, safeguarding, monitoring and evaluation, and organizational development. All essential to delivering high-quality, safe, and accountable programs.

In line with ANBI requirements, MWB ensures that its assets are used solely to further its statutory objectives, that no profit motive exists, and that policy, governance, and financial reporting are transparent and publicly accessible. Resource allocation decisions are made with careful consideration of strategic priorities, risk management, and long-term sustainability.

Policy framework

A strong and value-driven policy framework is the foundation of safe and effective operations for all the people we work with. In recent years, we have built this foundation through robust policies, targeted training, and a commitment to uphold the highest standards of quality. In 2026, we will:

- Review and update our policies to ensure relevance, applicability, and impact,
- Provide safeguarding training across the organization to strengthen awareness, prevention, and response, ensuring all staff, volunteers, and partners understand their roles and responsibilities,
- Develop and roll out a Social Responsibility Policy, embedding environmental responsibility and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion principles across all programs and the organization,
- Finalize and adopt a Volunteer Policy, clarifying expectations, roles, and safeguarding requirements.

Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning

Our monitoring and evaluation systems will evolve in line with renewed organizational messaging and positioning, while continuing to provide crucial accountability and learning for our programs.

At program level, we will continue to thoroughly monitor and evaluate the scope and impact of activities, in order to provide accountability to participants and program and funding partners. All programs are founded in logical frameworks that consider context, resources, and impact. Intelligent systems for monitoring, evaluating, and learning are established for each program, in line with its individual goals, its context, and the resources available.

At the organizational level, quantitative and qualitative data from programs will play a crucial role in advocating for our future, and telling the story of Musicians Without Borders. As we focus on impactful collaborations with passionate musicians, we will evaluate their impact and collect stories that highlight the significant changes that are created in individuals and communities. We will monitor the people reached, the songs written, the transformative interactions facilitated. We will capture the stories of memorable moments and the acts of creativity that are at the heart of what we do.

Action

- Develop and roll out new Theory of Change that reflects intended improvement, context analysis, and logic,
- Evolve MEAL tools to support and challenge the assumptions of the Theory of Change,
- Embed MEAL data into organizational advocacy and communication actions.

Quality, accountability, and governance

We remain committed to upholding the highest standards of quality, transparency, and accountability. Accurate and reliable financial management is essential for maintaining trust with program and funding partners and the public. We conduct annual external audits and maintain certification from Dutch charity regulator CBF. This certification tells our funding partners that our organization has been independently assessed and meets high standards for good governance, responsible fundraising, financial accountability, and proven impact. We aim to preserve these qualifications and will continue to identify and join relevant networks and associations to expand our reach, increase visibility, and strengthen our strategic positioning.

