R&R International AISBL
Annual Report 2024

Adopted by the Ordinary General Assembly of 5 July 2025

I. Executive Summary

The year 2024 was a year of war but also a year of liberation. The massive bombing of Lebanon by the Israeli Air Force also affected our operations in the Akkar Governorate, in the northern border area of Lebanon. Despite all hardships, we managed to maintain all our classes and implement emergency aid for internally displaced persons from the South of Lebanon – the Shiite areas that most affected by Israel's war against Hezbollah. As from September, with the intensification of the war, we sheltered 8 families from South Lebanon at our Peace Centre. But the sorrow turned into jubilation when the rebels opposing the Assad regime launched a new offensive and Bashar Al-Assad, like many of his closest associated, fled Syria on 8 December 2024.

For the operations of our organisation in Lebanon and Syria, both events had quite some significance. We maintained our operations at the main Peace Centre in Bkarzla, in the Akkar Governorate of Lebanon, where daily classes have been running without interruption since the establishment in July 2013. Four other learning centres were connected to the main Peace Centre. In 2024, two of them were active throughout the year, in Kousha and Tell Aabbas, whereas the Michmich and Rahbe centres were operational on a seasonal basis, hosted by local NGOs or in family homes. We finished the school year 2023/24 with 495 students enrolled in our daily classes in Akkar. Other children – and their families – were connected to the regular scouting activities not mentioned in the educational statistics. We also continued survival aid in besieged areas of Syria, most notably with the distribution of Ramadan meals in Salqin in the Idlib Governorate, albeit to a lesser degree than after the 2023 earthquake. We maintained contact with the families we had served inside Syria after the fall of Assad and hope to launch larger operations in Syria in the coming year.

In terms of governance, the Board of Directors elected in 2023 continued its service throughout the year 2024 under the chairmanship of Miriam Lexmann MEP, re-elected in 2023 for a 3rd consecutive term of two years, and the operational guidance of our main founder Friedrich Bokern as Secretary General. Mohamad Ghiye continued to serve as Treasurer. Altogether, twelve elected Board Members from Syria, Lebanon, Europe, and the US helped us to fulfil our mission. Three other branches of R&R International maintained their own legal personality: R&R Germany with a national board re-elected in 2024 for another term of 2 years under the chairmanship of Ina Hoppe; R&R France with a national board re-elected in 2023 for a term of 2 years under the chairmanship of Stéphane Lacroix; and R&R Lebanon administered by the Country Director Friedrich Bokern in lack of a national election after the departure of Tansi Abboud from the chairmanship.

II. Activities in 2024

The R&R operations in Lebanon were put at a severe jeopardy because of the intensified war of Israel on Lebanon following the Gaza attacks of 7 October 2023 and the (rather symbolic) participation of the Lebanese Hezbollah in hostilities.

The management team in Akkar decided to restrict the acceptance of new international volunteers in light of the situation and of the travel warnings of most foreign embassies. We started the year with a full team of 4 international volunteers during the Winter Term, but we accepted the admission of only one new volunteer in autumn—who had been living in Lebanon already. The staff development stayed stable despite the departure of Mohamad Ghiye from the management staff after 5 years of service because of personal reasons. Friedrich Bokern continued to assume the position as volunteer Country Director Lebanon throughout the year. He was supported by 2 programme managers, 3 outreach assistants, 20 local teachers, and 2 bus drivers.

In Syria, operations continued to be guided by the volunteer Country Director Ahmad Albayoush who coordinated the distribution of food items in the city of Salqin, in the Idlib Governorate of Syria, from his place of exile. Operations came to a pause after the month of Ramadan.

(a) Peacebuilding Activities

Housing the internally displaced Shiite families from South Lebanon as from September 2024 was certainly the most significant gesture of peacebuilding in the year, especially when considering that most refugees we serve — as well as some of the R&R staff members — have been displaced from the Qusayr area in Syria by Hezbollah, fighting on behalf of the Iranian and Syrian regime. We hosted 8 families for several weeks in the whole upstairs area of the Peace Centre, where usually international volunteers are living, as well as the classrooms downstairs. The start of lessons for the new school year was delayed for a few weeks by their presence.

We maintained individual contact with the members of the Steering Committee for our Peace Centre in Akkar, most notably the Sunni Mufti of Akkar, the Members of the Alawite Council from Akkar, the Maronite Archbishop of Tripoli, and the Greek-Orthodox Metropolitan of Akkar. Following our establishment in 2013, they decided independently of us to meet on a monthly basis in what they call the “Spiritual Committee of Akkar”.

Because of the open war on Lebanon, however, the key events of Spiritual Solidarity throughout the year took place on a smaller scale or were cancelled. The annual **Peace Iftar** took place, for the first time, at the Peace Centre Bkarzla with all youth leaders and teachers, but without the presence of religious authorities. The **Easter Peace March** took place with the volunteer team and teachers only at Minjez, next to the Syrian border. The annual commemoration for our friend and co-founder, **Father Paolo Dall’Oglio**, had to be cancelled on 29 July at the last minute, because the flights of the Country Director from France were grounded.

In Lebanon, resentment against the presence of Syrian refugees increased considerably throughout the year, also connected to the war on Lebanon by Israel. Posters appeared saying “UNdo the damage”, implying that the UN was responsible for the refugees coming. The situation changed dramatically, however, with the fall of the Assad regime on 8 December when thousands of Syrians poured out into the streets, also in Akkar, to unfold the hidden flags of the revolution and celebrate their liberation. These events, both the arrival of Shiite displaced persons from the South and the celebration of the fall of Assad, were not accompanied by any sectarian tensions in the area of our work. Akkar remained one of the most peaceful places of Lebanon.

Despite the year of war, our overall mission of peacebuilding made notable progress, especially through the growing engagement of the interreligious youth movement — the children who have been growing up in our educational centres. Following the completion of the Children’s Rights Charter in the previous year, youth leaders elected a Drafting Committee to start working on the statutes of the movement. The work of the committee intensified after the 2024 Summer Camp with several meetings per month and the submission of a first draft.

The year ended with the liberation of Syria from the Assad regime: a major change we had been waiting for impatiently for 12 years on the other side of the border. Feeling the wind of change, we decided to take action and reduce our costs in Lebanon so as to be ready to enter Syria together with the refugee families we have served. In July, the international Board of Directors gave the green light to move the main Peace Centre from the village of Bkarzla, where it had been established in 2013, to the neighbouring village of Qantara, where the former village school had been abandoned and a house was available for a much cheaper price. On 7 December, after some consultations, we signed the rental agreement of the new Peace Centre Qantara for a period of 10 years for only $150 per month — a fifth of the price that we paid in Bkarzla. Renovations shall start in 2025.

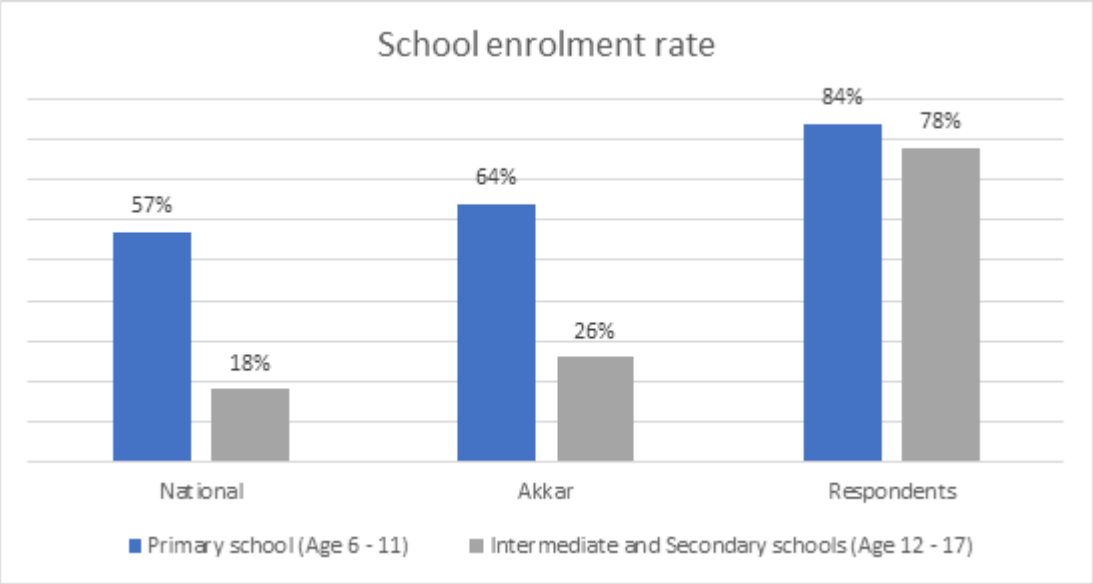
(b) Educational Activities

It was a major challenge to keep all classes running in 2024, but we managed to do so, and education remained the main expenditure of our organisation throughout the year.

The school year 2023/24 ended with 495 children enrolled in our daily classes in four learning centres: the main Peace Centre in Bkarzla, the Camp Schools in Kousha and Tell Aabbas, and the seasonal Learning Centres of Rahbe and Michmich, hosted by local NGOs or families. We also continued the rent of a football pitch near the Kousha centre.

Most children we served were enrolled in **homework help classes**, either in the morning — for those Syrian students attending the afternoon shift in public schools — or in the afternoon for Lebanese and Syrian students attending the regular morning shift. As in previous years, public schools in these crisis-affected areas continue to struggle under the socio-economic shocks and regional conflicts around them. Without our community-based classes, many vulnerable children would risk being left with no education at all.

Basic literacy and numeracy (BLN) classes for children not attending public or private schools were also taught in Bkarzla and again in Kousha and Tell Aabbas. School enrolment remains the central pillar of our local strategy to reach all children with education, and we can report some significant success. According to the annual evaluation report conducted between September and November 2024, school enrolment of Syrian refugees reached 84% in our area of operations, contrary to 64% across Akkar and only 57% at the national level, according to the official UNHCR statistics. The fact that Akkar had the highest school enrolment rate of Syrian refugees in all of Lebanon, despite being the poorest region of the country, is also a direct result of our persistent back-to-school campaigns and BLN classes. No other NGO in this region has constantly offered classes – without interruption – for more than a decade.



Like in the past, we also offered vocational training for older youth aged 15 to 25 in our **Work & Learn Scheme**. The highest requests were related to the field of IT literacy, connected to English classes, but we also continued the tailoring classes at the Kousha Camp School that were mainly attended by women. We could make good use of the 20 laptops donated in kind by our Swiss branch, which were moved between the centres in Bkarzla, Kousha, Michmich, and Rahbe for IT classes, delivered by international volunteers in cooperation with local teachers.

Three Parents' Assemblies were convoked in each of the five learning centres throughout the year. At the first Parents' Assembly of the new school year – in October or November – those attending elected a Parents' Committee in free and secret elections in each location. The Parents' Committees met on average every third week to decide on disciplinary problems, but also on the distribution of emergency aid to particular cases of hardship amongst the families of our students. The Parents' Committee also was invited to visit the Summer Mountain Camp and participate in the back-to-school campaign, which took place despite the war and delay of the school year.

Last but not least, it needs to be mentioned that the psychosocial activities reported in the next chapter play a major role in the success of our educational work. The regular football trainings for both boys and girls, alongside the weekly Friday Fun, contributed largely to the love our students show for their learning centres.

(c) Psychosocial Activities

The highlight of the year for all the children we serve is without any doubt the annual Summer Mountain Camp. This year's camp took place, once again, in the mountain area of Michmich in Akkar, for the first time under the giant cedar trees growing there. Once again, we could mobilise more than 350 children to attend the main camp day. And for the third year in a row, the youth leaders were able to join international volunteers sleeping in giant tents for six camp days.

The main camp was for youth leaders aged 15 to 20 and children aged 10 to 14 from all locations we serve. It took some convincing also for our Alawite friends to join the high-grounds of Michmich, which are Sunni territory with a history of violence. But we are very glad that we could unite, once again, Lebanese and Syrian children from the Sunni, Alawite, Orthodox, and Maronite communities. International visitors and volunteers joined the youth leaders in the preparation of the camp. We included a film session and a longer hike on the last camp day to a natural grotto in the Michmich area, reading from the Surat of the Cave from the Noble Quran, which is identical to the Christian legend of the seven sleepers that is dear to our mentor Paolo Dall'Oglio. With only two international volunteers present during this year's Summer Mountain Camp, the youth leaders mobilised and came up with the story line and the camp preparation for one camp day for younger children, aged 11 to 14. This year's story evolved around a green giant that was disturbed by the environmental destruction of the high mountain site. The children had to solve riddles or tasks during the big cross-country game to appease the giant and save the cedar forest.

Besides the Summer Mountain Camp, youth leaders kept their commitment to take care once a week of younger children during the legendary "Friday Fun" sessions at the main Peace Centre and also at the Kousha Camp School. In the other locations, unfortunately, the Friday Fun did not yet take off. But youth leaders throughout all locations made the effort to provide children a good time during crisis and war at the Eid Children Festival and in a series of iftars during Ramadan. Also, the annual Snow Trip of our youth leaders in February was—as always—a great success.

Our youth leaders also mobilised upon the arrival of internally displaced persons from the South of Lebanon in October and November 2024. Thanks to a special fundraising campaign, we could pay one coordinator, bus transportation, and materials for providing qualified psychosocial support sessions in public schools of Akkar and Tripoli that had been transformed into collective shelters. Altogether, twelve such sessions took place. The Governor of Akkar provided a letter authorising us to access the public schools. The activities were warmly welcomed by the Shiite families residing in the schools and in the villages, including the 8 families sheltered at the Peace Centre Bkarzla.

Because of the war on Lebanon, we only welcomed few international volunteers throughout the year, as mentioned earlier. This affected also the acceptance of short-term project volunteers who avoided Lebanon during the hostilities. However, we were very glad that we could welcome a renowned Syrian artist living in France — where she has been exhibiting twice at the prestigious Palais de Tokyo, the National Gallery for Contemporary Arts — for a workshop combining photography with theatre, implemented at the Camp School Kousha.

Last but not least, we have to mention the psychosocial outreach teams that are regularly visiting the families we serve to maintain relationships and assess any situation of hardship. The outreach teams are always composed of two staff members, ideally one international volunteer and one local outreach assistant. Both volunteers and assistants receive introductory briefings and regular trainings in conflict sensitivity, the do-no-harm approach, and child protection. The outreach teams also play a vital role in the distribution of the Emergency Cash Assistance reported under the following chapter.

One particular point of action was the protection of Syrian minors who were put into Lebanese jails without due process, also because of the rising hostilities against Syrian refugees mentioned earlier. The brother of one of our Syrian staff members was concerned, as well as two former students and other children whose cases were reported to us. We launched a major advocacy campaign, "Children's Rights in Jeopardy", to obtain their release, involving lawyers and other NGOs in Tripoli and Beirut on a voluntary basis. All arrested children could finally be liberated in November, following the publication of some articles in the Lebanese press.

(d) Emergency Aid Activities

We continued to provide regular emergency aid to families in particular hardship in the form of our structured Emergency Cash Assistance of $40/month for a renewable period of three months. Our outreach teams identify such cases of hardship amongst the families of our students or their neighbours. An original assessment puts the level of hardship into an objective score following a number of criteria. However, the final decision on the grant of cash assistance lies within the elected Parents' Committee of each location, where a delegate has to recuse himself/herself in case his/her own family is concerned. We provided regular cash assistance to 9 families throughout the year, mainly related to cases of medical emergencies.

Besides individual cash assistance, we also continued collective distributions of aid materials in vulnerable areas, especially in the case of extraordinary events like the earthquake of 2023 or the war on Lebanon in 2024. Contrary to the previous year 2023, when Emergency Aid activities were mainly taking place inside Syria after the terrible earthquake of February, this year's activities focused more on Lebanon in relation to the new war that Israel and Hezbollah inflicted upon the country. Like in previous years, we organised a winter clothes distribution in the refugee camps we serve in January. We also provided regular warm meals during Ramadan, both in the Idlib Governorate of Syria and in Akkar, Lebanon.

But the main distribution took place in the framework of the Lebanon Emergency Response in November, following the intensification of the bombings and the arrival of internally displaced persons from the South. Thanks to the special fundraiser, and with the support of our youth leaders, we could distribute hundreds of mattresses, fuel, and food boxes to arriving persons in distress, mainly in the areas of the Peace Centre Bkarzla and the Camp School Tell Aabbas.

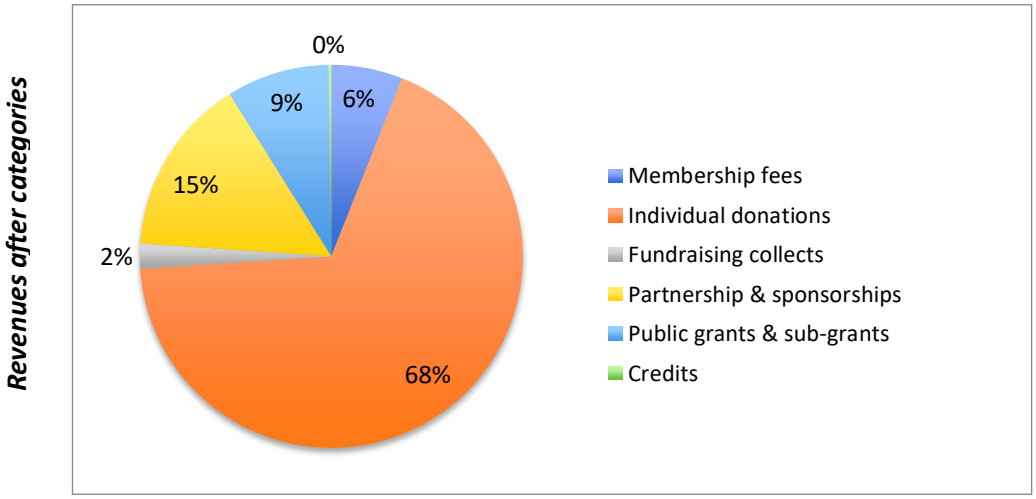
III. Financial Records

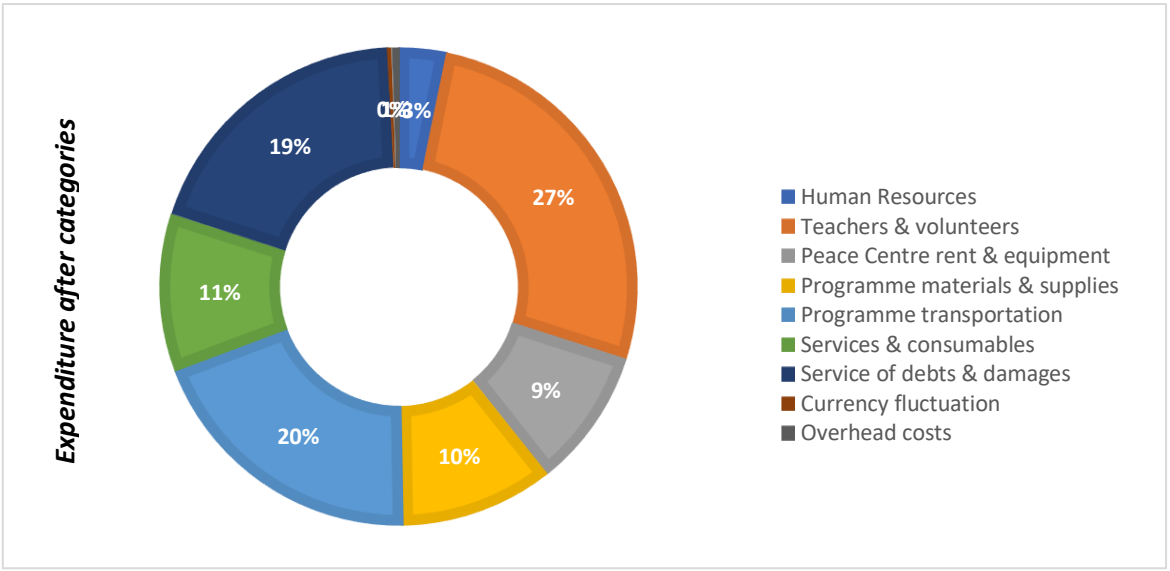
The total expenditure by R&R in 2024 was **€83'885.52**, as detailed in the financial records annexed to this report. The total revenues of R&R in 2024 were **€86'495.27**, leaving the association with a positive balance of **€8'179.31** in liquidities. In the end of 2024, the Association still had **€6'000.00** of debts, exclusively towards the Secretary General. This means that the high level of debts of previous years has been reduced almost to zero.

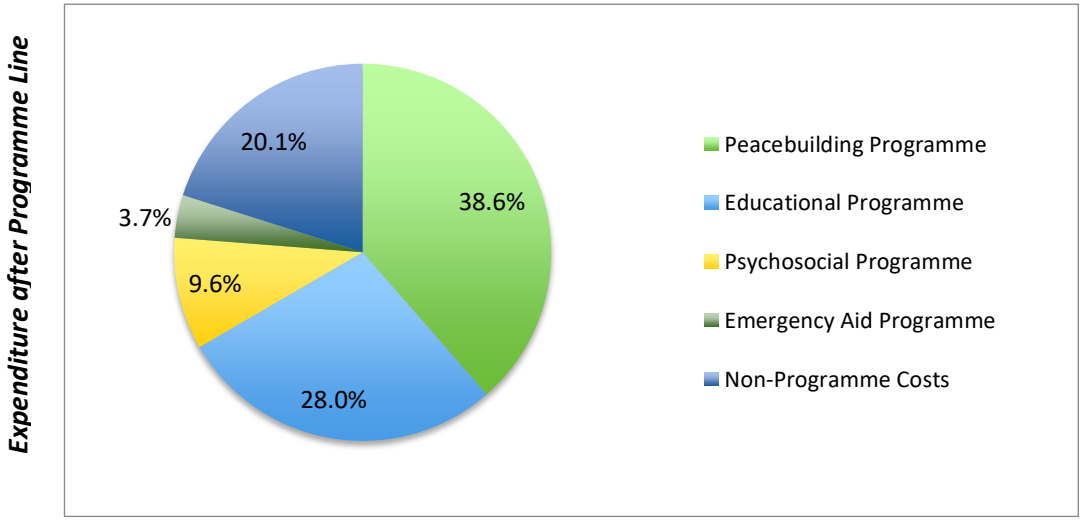
Most donations we received were from members or individual supporters. However, the German association **Aktion Hoffnungsschimmer e.V.** renewed their partnership of the previous year, both supporting our educational and peacebuilding activities. We also received support for the Summer Mountain Camp from **Fundacja im. Jadwigi Seremak-Bulge** in Poland and from **Netzwerk Globale Brücke e.V.** in Germany. The **Ecumenical Community of Taizé**, France, replied to the Lebanon Emergency Call with a generous donation. Last but not least, the **City of Schwäbisch Gmünd** in Germany supported our educational activities with a second grant.

Also in 2024, overhead costs remained below the threshold of 1%, like in all years combined since the very establishment of R&R in 2013. Only €408.80 (0.49%) were spent in overhead costs, defined as all expenditure outside of the two Countries of Operations (Syria and Lebanon). Most of this amount was spent for the hosting service of our website.

Here an overview of all revenues and expenditure in 2024:







Revenues after Categories			
Membership fees	5’204.50 €	in %:	6.02
Individual donations	58’764.95 €	in %:	67.94
Fundraising collects	1’830.06 €	in %:	2.12
Partnerships & sponsorships	13’000.00 €	in %:	15.03
Public grants & sub-grants	7’495.75 €	in %:	8.67
Credits	200.00 €	in %:	0.23
TOTAL REVENUES	**86’495.27 €**		

Expenditure after Categories			
Human resources	2’694.15 €	in %:	3.21
Teachers & volunteers	22’397.02 €	in %:	26.70
Transportation of children	4’405.66 €	in %:	5.25
Food items for those we serve	4’279.93 €	in %:	5.10
Non-Food Items for those we serve	1’329.84 €	in %:	1.59
Peace Centre rent & charges	7’008.79 €	in %:	8.36
Peace Centre furniture & equipment	890.04 €	in %:	1.06
Catering at the Peace Centre	4’121.48 €	in %:	4.91
School equipment	2’221.26 €	in %:	2.65
Teaching materials	880.17 €	in %:	1.05
Communication	750.40 €	in %:	0.89
Office supplies	205.78 €	in %:	0.25
Staff mobility	11’991.98 €	in %:	14.30
Services	2’888.89 €	in %:	3.44
Bank & transaction fees	1’018.91 €	in %:	1.21
Financial liabilities	16’170.00 €	in %:	19.28
Exchange rate fluctuations	222.43 €	in %:	0.27
Overhead costs	408.80 €	in %:	0.49
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	**83’885.52 €**		

Expenditure after R&R Programme Line			
Peacebuilding Programme	32’371.34 €	in %:	38.59
Educational Programme	23’515.23 €	in %:	28.03
Psychosocial Programme	8’062.77 €	in %:	9.61
Emergency Aid Programme	3’080.11 €	in %:	3.67
Non-Programme Costs	16’856.08 €	in %:	20.09