

SALAR International 

A part of the Swedish Association
of Local Authorities and Regions

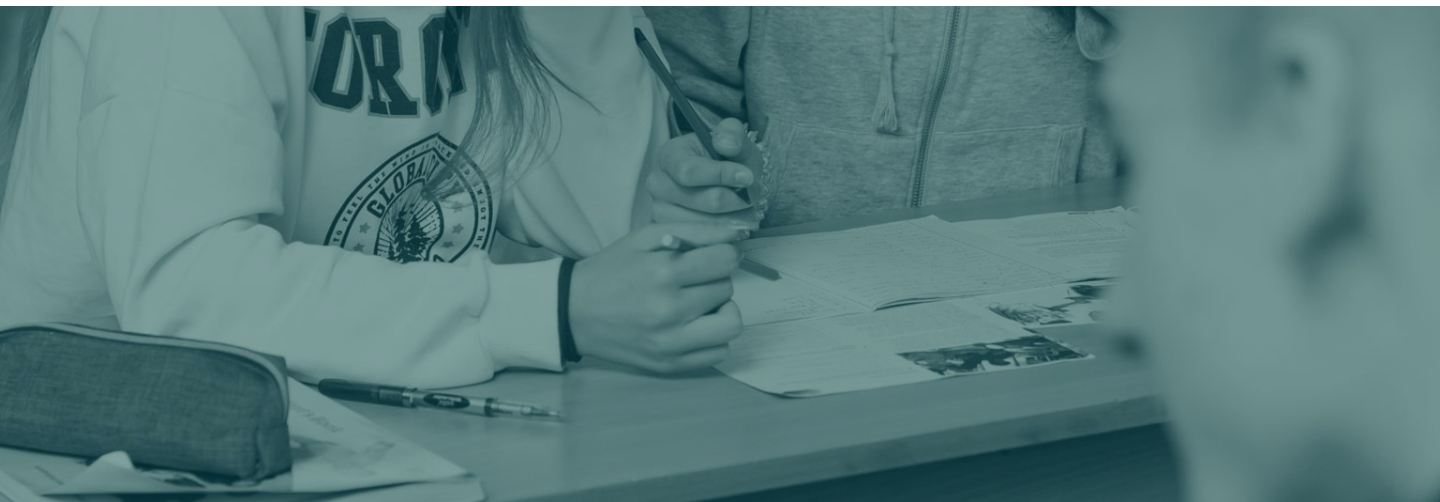


2024

Annual Results Report

Contents

Abbreviations	1
We advance local democracy and good governance globally	2
A word from our Chairperson	4
Good local governance; a necessity in an uncertain world	5
Our Global Strategy; the benchmark that guides our work	6
Results harvesting	6
Our project portfolio	7
2024 - month by month	8
Reported results in 2024	
Support to democratic, accountable, and socially responsible multilevel governance systems	11
Building sustainable, inclusive, and resilient cities and communities	17
Supporting peaceful, inclusive, participatory, and more equitable local democracies	22
Influencing global responses to support local governments	25
Leveraging Swedish and International Experience	28
Conclusion – SALAR International’s contribution	31
Administration Report	32



Abbreviations

AATC	Association of Amalgamated Territorial Communities
AGIR	Support for Inclusive and Accountable Governance project in DRC
AMC	Association of Municipalities and Cities
ASC	Administrative Service Centre
AUDI	Arab Urban Development Institute
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
C4D	Cooperation for Development Project in Georgia
DeLoG	Decentralisation and Local Governance network
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
Foincide	Strengthening decentralisation and local self-governance in Colombia project
FBA	Folke Bernadotte Academy
HCCP	Higher Commission for the Coordination among Provinces
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
INLOG	Inclusive Local Governance Programme
LGAs	Local Government Associations
LAPs	Local Action Plans
LED	Local Economic Development
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MoESCS	The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports
Nefco	Nordic Green Bank
Prosto	Support to Services Accessibility in Ukraine Project
Reslog	The Resilience in Local Governance Project
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UMT	Union of Municipalities of Türkiye
SALAR	Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions
SCTM	Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SUMP	Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan
WM4U	Waste Management for Ukraine

We advance local democracy and good governance globally

Being a fully-owned subsidiary of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), SALAR International has its roots firmly in the Swedish system, with its long tradition of local and regional self-governance and advances in terms of service provision, social welfare and quality of life for communities across the country. SALAR has a unique organisational profile as one of the strongest and oldest local government associations (LGAs) in the world; it is active domestically and internationally.

From this extensive tradition of working at the local, regional, national and international level, SALAR created SALAR International to be a **conduit for supporting sustainable local development and local democracy internationally**. Citing the interconnectedness and influence of major global changes on SALAR's members, SALAR's Strategy for Engagement and Participation within the EU and Internationally states that: *"The Swedish model of multi-level governance and constitutionally protected municipal and regional self-governance is a well-established system that promotes efficiency and innovation while contributing to public welfare. Promoting local and regional democracy and strengthening self-governance beyond Sweden and the EU supports a socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable world in line with Agenda 2030. It also strengthens the position of Swedish municipalities and regions while serving as inspiration and support for advocates of democracy and self-governance in other countries. SALAR has a unique role as a representative of the local and regional levels and as a knowledge bearer in these areas. This is reflected in its international work, both through direct representation in relevant organisations and by integrating these perspectives across all SALAR assignments, including the international commitments of its affiliated entities."* This strategic direction is further echoed in our Owner Directive 2023 - 24, which states that SALAR International should *"at the international level, contribute to the development of municipal and regional self-governance as well as local and regional democracy."* It is based on this that we operate.

As an organisation, we are committed to facilitating positive change and fostering inclusive governance. This is achieved through collaboration with national, regional and local governments and their communities, in the countries where we operate.

Together, we strive to build resilient, democratic systems that empower individuals to shape their own futures.

SALAR International's uniqueness lies in our approach—adapting to context, building strong local teams, and fostering long-term capacity that endures beyond the life of any single project. Our work is rooted in co-creation, with local teams collaborating closely with our Stockholm office and partners in-country, to ensure solutions are tailored and impactful. We combine strategic partnerships, technical support, capacity building, and targeted interventions to strengthen local governance and local public service delivery. By working locally and advocating nationally, we bridge gaps between communities and decision-makers, ensuring that local voices are heard at the highest levels of government.

For over 25 years, SALAR International has implemented international development cooperation projects that span a wide range of activities. These include system-level initiatives, such as support to decentralisation processes, municipal legislation, and intergovernmental fiscal relations, as well as local-level interventions, including sustainable local development and equitable service delivery and resilient recovery in response to various shocks. We don't just influence policies and organisational frameworks—we support state- and peace-building, while empowering individuals, communities and their representative organisations to advance democratic and sustainable societies.

SALAR International invests in communities through the development of new projects, tools, and methodologies. Our different approaches ensures that the capacity we build remains long after our projects conclude. We also contribute to the global knowledge base, sharing best practices and insights, to inspire others. Furthermore, our mission and goals align with those of international partner organisations and networks such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and the Decentralisation and Local Governance (DeLoG) network. Through these collaborations, we actively contribute to global advocacy efforts, using these platforms as key channels to promote local democracy and strengthen conditions for local self-governance.



Our vision is simple yet profound:

“For all people to have the power to shape their own lives in inclusive local democracies and resilient communities.”

This remains the **driving force** behind everything we do.



A word from our Chairperson

It is with great pride and gratitude that I present SALAR International's Annual Report for 2024. Over the past year, we have made significant strides in implementing our Global Strategy 2024-2028, further strengthening our commitment to building resilient and democratic local and regional governance systems worldwide. This summary report captures some of our progress, made possible by the dedication and collaboration of our teams, partners, donors, and the communities we serve.

Twenty-five years ago, following a dialogue between SALAR and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), SALAR International was created with the specific objective to strengthen local and regional democracy in different parts of the world. What makes us unique is not only our ability to draw from the best parts of the Swedish local governance system, but that we have been able to adjust and contextualise these experiences to realities in other parts of the world. This is a form of aid effectiveness that has been achieved through trustful and long-term partnerships, resulting in systems change and capacity development, ultimately leading to more accountable local governance, local public service delivery and local sustainable development. Our work contributes to stronger and more positive perceptions of Sweden in other countries, whilst also creating opportunities for the mobilisation of the wider Swedish resource base.

2024 has been characterised by positive internal changes that have strengthened our ability and capacity to deliver impactful support to partners in other countries. We have welcomed new and former colleagues, and said goodbye to others, who have all contributed to the development of our programmes. I am very glad that we continue to attract such high caliber team members.

In 2023, we developed and adopted our Global Strategy 2024-2028, which has guided our work towards our vision "a world where all people have the power to shape their own lives in inclusive local democracies and sustainable communities". In September, we conducted a Global Strategy Results Harvesting workshop with over 45 team members, from different countries. We reflected on the results of our collective efforts and evaluated how project-specific outcomes contributed to our overarching strategic objectives. The event served as a powerful reminder of the transformative impact of our work, as well as the importance of learning and self-reflection in driving continuous improvements. Through strategic partnerships, tailored advice and targeted support, we have fostered positive change at individual, organisational, national and even regional levels.

Another significant milestone this year was an assessment of internal management and control, commissioned by Sida at the end of 2024. This included a comprehensive review of 11 variables including organisational governance, financial flows, accounting policies and procedures, risk management, reporting, monitoring and oversight, and procedures for anti-corruption, restrictive measures and procurement. The assessment offered a valuable external perspective on our internal systems and processes, with an action plan finalised to respond to a limited number of identified risks. .

I invite you to explore this report to learn more about how SALAR International continues to advance decentralisation processes and create meaningful, lasting change in a wide range of different contexts. The results we have achieved are a reflection of the passion and dedication of our teams, our partners, and our donors. I am deeply grateful for their contributions and look forward to building on this success in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Ewa-May Karlsson | Chair of the Board, SALAR International
Regional Councillor in the region of Västerbotten, Centre Party.



Good local governance; a necessity in an uncertain world

Looking back at 2024, it is obvious that we are witnessing the convergence of a number of profound challenges. Conflict, climate change and displacement are putting increasing pressure on societies in different parts of the world. At the same time, democratic backslide, geopolitical tensions, rising income inequality and rapid unplanned urban growth add layers of complexity to these crises. Local governments are often on the frontline responding to these challenges, even if they are not formally mandated, or resourced, to do so.

As political landscapes shift and as communities face increasingly complex challenges, the need for effective, accountable and resilient local governments has never been more apparent. Local governments can – and should- play a decisive role in new infrastructure investments in low- and middle-income countries, as envisaged by the EU’s Global Gateway. Put simply, local governments are best placed to understand the needs of their communities, and together with the private sector and other stakeholders develop solutions that are most suited to their specific contexts, to ensure sustainability of public and private investments. This is ultimately the “raison d’être” for decentralisation.

Our approach is founded on genuine partnerships that identify context-specific, long-term solutions, through flexible, adaptive and agile ways of working. We tailor solutions, drawing from Swedish experiences, methods and approaches, with the potential to mobilize the wider Swedish resource base. In supporting partners to pursue multilevel governance reforms, provide services, stimulate local development, respond to the impacts of climate change and lead recovery efforts in response to manmade or natural disasters, we aim to demonstrate a proof of concept that caters for new partnerships between a range of actors, including the private sector.

During 2024, we launched two major programmes in Ukraine, following 10 years of successful work in support of Ukraine’s decentralisation reform. Polaris is part of Sweden’s Strategy for reconstruction and reform cooperation with Ukraine 2023–2027. Symbolically named after the North Star, which historically guided travelers, it aims to be a steadfast and reliable guide to Ukraine’s continued decentralisation reform, particularly in times of crisis and uncertainty. Waste Management for Ukraine (WM4U), which we are implementing together with Swedish Waste Management (Avfall Sverige), focuses on transforming waste management systems. Both projects include a focus on Ukraine’s EU accession process and both mobilise competences directly from SALAR’s members. Our work on locally-led recovery presents opportunities to mobilise the wider Swedish resource base. Together with other Swedish actors, we are part of Team Sweden Ukraine.

As you will see in this report, our work during 2024 has been impactful in a wide range of contexts. In North Macedonia, we contributed to the development of local action plans for sustainable waste management. In Armenia, we helped partners to advance discussions on decentralisation and supported local governments to take up newly-assigned competences. In Iraq, partner governorates pioneered budget reallocation practices that led to national dialogue on expanding fiscal flexibility, ensuring that municipalities can better tailor public services to the needs of their communities. In Lebanon, we supported municipalities to enhance their crisis management capabilities, ensuring a coordinated response to the influx of IDPs during 2024. In Türkiye, we supported 11 municipalities to elaborate evidence-based, participatory recovery roadmaps in response to the devastating earthquakes of February 2023. In Syria, Libya and Algeria, participants of our Inclusive Local Governance (INLOG) project have begun to articulate arguments for decentralisation as we witness a gradual resurgence in calls for democratic change that came with the popular uprisings in the region 15 years ago.

None of the above would be possible without the support, flexibility and partnership of Sida, and our other donors, to whom we are extremely grateful.

As the global aid systems experiences a pivotal shift and a period of profound transformation, we will continue to engage in policy dialogue to ensure that new private sector-led solutions are complemented by policies and programming targeting the ‘enabling environment’ for sustainable local development and local democracy, through a European ‘value-based offer’. In this regard, we look forward to engaging in new constellations of partnerships, programmes and projects in 2025 and beyond.

Sincerely,

Ryan Knox | Managing Director, SALAR International

Our Global Strategy: the benchmark that guides our work

Our Global Strategy sets out the organisation's strategic direction based on our Core Mission to strengthen democracy and good governance at the local level. To achieve this, we seek to address changes in three broad areas reflecting our core values:

1 More democratic, accountable, and socially responsible multi-level governance systems.

2 Sustainable, inclusive, and more resilient cities and communities

3 Peaceful, inclusive, participatory and more equitable local democracies.

Efforts across those areas are complemented through a fourth domain 'Global response to local challenges' that aims to create synergies across our programme areas and engage in global knowledge generation and advocacy in support of the role that local and regional governments play in responding to challenges that play out at the local level.

Results Harvesting

Our work is underpinned by evidenced-based approaches that draw extensively from credible data and analysis. We recurrently assess our contribution in different contexts and pursue methodologies that are responsive to a wide range of different challenges. One part of this self-assessment was our global results harvesting exercise, which took place in Stockholm in August 2024. This provided us with the opportunity to identify the impact of our work, review methodologies, make necessary adaptations, and generate to programme learning within and across projects.

Aligned with our Global Strategy, we summarise our work around Four Domains of Change. This report highlights progress and challenges we have identified in our support to inclusive multilevel governance, local public service delivery and local sustainable development, including capacity development of individuals, communities and institutions. This can be seen at an individual,

Through strategic partnerships, technical support, peer-to-peer learning, capacity building, and impactful local interventions, we have contributed to positive change.

organisational, institutional and even systems level, ensuring that policies, practices, and attitudes evolve in support of local self-governance.

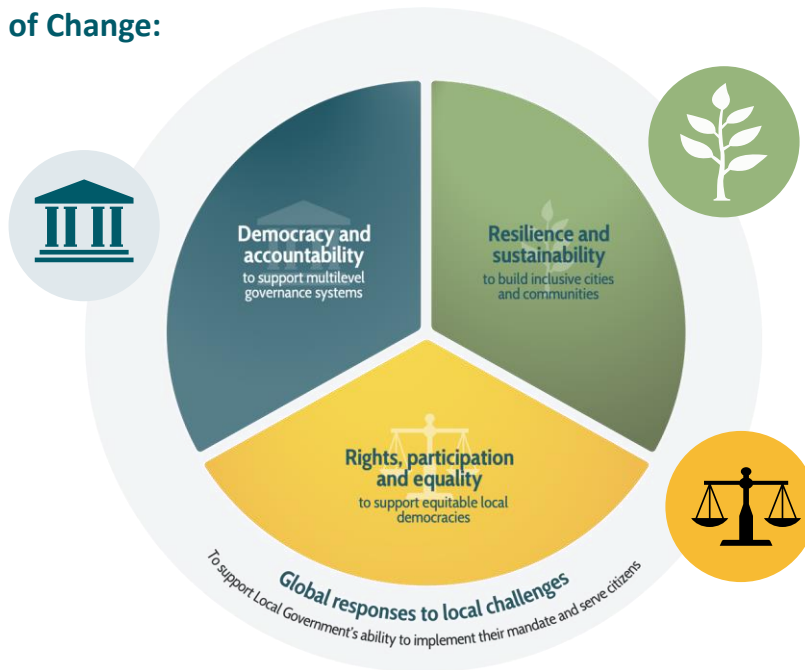
This report includes a synthesis of results for the reporting period 2024, highlighting where and how we work, and drawing conclusions that can support positive change in increasingly challenging global and local contexts.

The work of SALAR International in 2024 has shown results across multiple areas. Through an often interconnected approach to the Domains of Change, the organisation has effectively supported systems change at the national level in various countries, whilst also empowering local governments to become more resilient, responsive, inclusive, and capable of addressing complex societal challenges.

Measuring Results

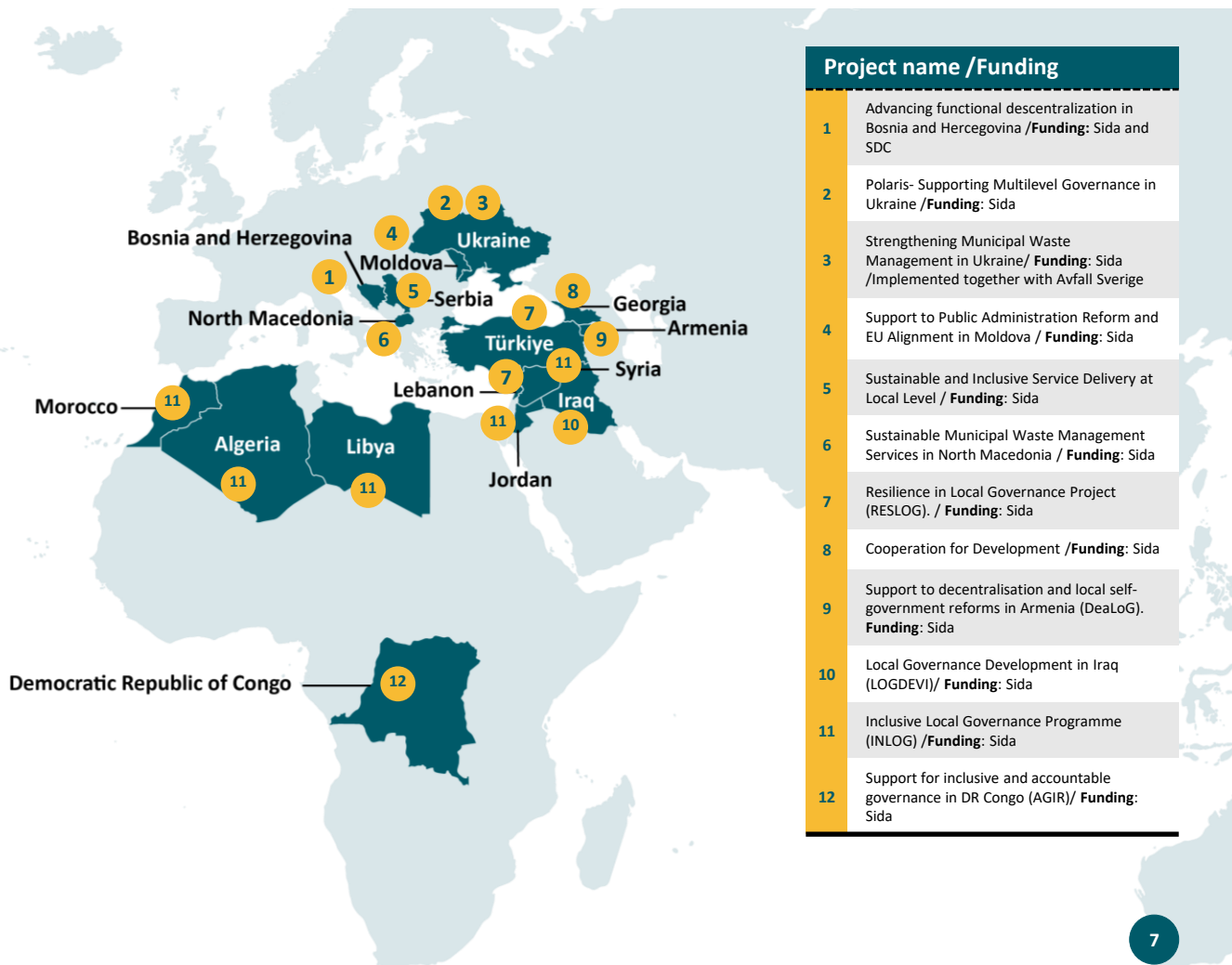
To measure the results of projects improving local governance and strengthening multi-level systems, a multifaceted approach is essential, considering interconnected levels of change. These levels include immediate results from activities, institutional changes in capacities and practices, and long-term systemic impacts on policy frameworks and local government resilience. Given the dynamic contexts and external factors influencing systemic shifts, upholding previous gains and sustaining organisational changes can also be significant. Employing both qualitative and quantitative indicators in results measurement facilitates meaningful learning to improve our work.

Our Domains of Change:



Our Project Portfolio

In 2024, SALAR International was active in 16 countries across 3 continents. This includes diverse contexts, from the Kharkiv Region in Ukraine, to Akkar Governorate in Lebanon and Haut-Katanga Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



2024 - month by month

During 2024, our teams have successfully organised and participated in various activities and events, achieving significant milestones, and celebrating key achievements. Here are some of the highlights.

JANUARY

An online course on International Cooperation for Communities took place, attracting 900 participants from Ukrainian local governments.

Organised by the Cities4Cities / United4Ukraine initiative in partnership with SALAR International, the course was a step forward for Ukrainian communities, in understanding and engaging in international municipal cooperation.

MARCH

Study visit from Türkiye focusing on migration and inclusion. Representatives from the Çukurova Regional Union of Municipalities and representatives from six Turkish municipalities participated in a study visit to explore Swedish experience and approaches to refugee integration, language education, and labour market inclusion.

MAY

- **Launch of new project supporting local public administration reforms and EU alignment in Moldova.** Moldova is moving forward towards greater alignment with the EU. A strong, accountable and responsive local government plays a critical role in this process, not least for citizens who demand and need it most. SALAR supports this important momentum through creating partnerships, mutual learning and bringing its extensive experience to bear from other reform contexts in the region.
- **Launch of the project C4D.** C4D aims to support Georgia's decentralisation reform by focusing on building capacity for locally led, sustainable urban development, a responsibility that was recently delegated to the municipal level.

FEBRUARY

- **Representatives from 35 Armenian municipalities, various ministries and international partners gathered in Yerevan for the first Municipal Forum in Armenia.** The annual forum provides Armenian national and local authorities with an opportunity to meet, discuss key issues, share insights, and exchange experiences related to decentralisation and local self-governance.
- **Launch of Roadmaps for Earthquake Recovery.** As a response to the Earthquakes in Türkiye in 2023, SALAR International supported Turkish municipalities to prepare evidence-based, inclusive and participatory Roadmaps that identified and prioritised needs for recovery of affected communities. This resulted in Roadmap for 11 cities, focusing on social services and broader urban functionality.

APRIL

- **Final conference of Prosto.** More than 100 heads of Administrative Service Centers, representatives of ministries, and local government associations met in Kyiv to discuss achievements of the Prosto project, implemented during 2021 - 24.
- **Orienteering event in Akkar promoting peaceful cohabitation in Lebanon, attracting 250 participants.** With inspiration from Laxå Municipality in Sweden, an orienteering event was organised by Lebanese partner municipalities, to foster positive interactions and peaceful cohabitation between Akkar's different communities.
- **The event "How to make local governments more inclusive?" took place in Bogota,** aiming to facilitate knowledge exchange, peer-learning and experimentation of innovative approaches between local governments in Sweden and Colombia to learn how to achieve more inclusive local governments. The event presented tools and methods for inclusive governance and evidence-based decision-making, building on the previous SALAR International project Foincide.

JUNE

Lviv Urban Forum took place in Ukraine, attended by over 400 representatives of local self-government bodies. The event is organised annually by the Department of Architecture and Urbanism of the Lviv City Council within the Cities 4 Cities | United 4 Ukraine initiative.

NOVEMBER

- **World Urban Forum took place in Cairo and representatives from SALAR International were there.** The team participated in sessions focusing resilience, recovery and sustainable urban development, together with partner organisations. In addition, the team organised a key networking session on the role of local governments in advancing the Urban Recovery Framework in Ukraine.
- **Meeting with President of the Union of Municipalities of Turkey and Mayor of Istanbul.** The meeting addressed the twenty years long, successful cooperation and explored new areas of collaboration and opportunities to strengthen Turkish municipalities. The meeting was also attended by the Swedish Ambassador, Consul General of Sweden in Istanbul and Head of Development Section at the Swedish Embassy.
- **The conference "Gender responsible Local governments: local approaches and development strategies in service of preventing domestic violence and violence against women" in Bosnia and Herzegovina was arranged together with partners.** The event highlighted the vital role local self-governments play in addressing domestic violence and violence against women, fostering collaboration and innovative solutions at the municipal level. Municipalities learned from each other and listened to Swedish experience.
- **Event in Brussels on Strengthening Local Government Capacities for EU Engagement in the EaP Region.** Local government associations, EU institutions, think tanks, NGOs and senior national representatives gathered in Brussels for a seminar on engagement of local authorities in EU Integration, co-organised by SALAR International and CEMR. The seminar yielded several recommendations for how EU engagement with local authorities in candidate countries could be strengthened.
- **Crisis response units in Lebanon deals with IDP influx as a result of conflict.** Through the SALAR International Reslog project, the Union of Municipalities of Jurd al Qayteh strengthened crisis management with a dedicated unit. In November 2024, Akkar, the only safe region, received a growing number of IDPs. The Crisis Management Unit enabled efficient aid distribution by coordinating with authorities and agencies and providing accurate data on vulnerable groups.

JULY

Sida and SALAR signed agreement to initiate new programme to support municipal waste management in Ukraine: WM4U – Waste Management for Ukraine, aimed at supporting Ukraine’s reforms – and adaptation to EU standards – of municipal waste management. The programme combines SALAR’s extensive experience in supporting municipalities and the decentralisation reform in Ukraine with Swedish Waste Management’ cutting-edge expertise in the waste management sector.

SEPTEMBER

- **Representatives from 6 pilot municipalities from Southwest and Pelagonija regions of North Macedonia gained insights from Swedish experiences** in sustainable waste management during a study visit to Sweden.
- **SALAR International Stockholm and country teams gathered in Stockholm for a result harvesting exercise.** The team reflected on project results, discussed challenges and identified further priorities, resulting in this Annual Report.
- **SALAR International attended the 1st Africa Urban Forum in Addis Ababa.** The delegation from SALAR International presented lessons from implementing the SymbioCity methodology, particularly regarding responses to climate change in Africa.
- **The second cohort of the INLOG programme started.** The programme explores local governance and decentralisation in-depth, focusing on building capacity among change agents across the MENA region. It is implemented to enhance regional and local governance practice and provide support to overcome the challenges that municipalities and regions have to face.

OCTOBER

- **Launch of the Polaris programme in Ukraine to strengthen decentralisation and multilevel governance in Ukraine.** The event in Kyiv brought together Ukrainian and Swedish officials, municipal leaders, local government associations, experts, and representatives of various international aid programmes.
- **Representatives from Serbia; the city of Kuseva Kruševac, the Ministry of environmental protection and Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM) visited Gothenburg Municipality’s department of Sustainable Waste and Water to learn about their experience on circular economy.**
- **Signing of MoU with the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI).** Through this partnership, SALAR International will explore opportunities to collaborate with AUDI to strengthen the capacities of local and regional authorities in the MENA region, and to promote knowledge exchange, supporting local governance, and advancing sustainable urban policies.

DECEMBER

- **First regional workshop of the Inclusive Local Governance (INLOG) programme.** Participants from five MENA region countries joined the workshop in Tunisia to exchange experiences from the region and from each other, discuss challenges and learn about Swedish experience and methods on decentralisation and local governance.
- **National Climate Conference took place in Iraq focusing on bringing together local and national authorities to make climate change high on the agenda of the government.** The conference was co-financed by SALAR International and FBA, in addition to having experts from SMHI mobilized by SALAR International to introduce the Swedish tool for climate integration at the municipal level.



Photo: Municipality of Bitola, North Macedonia

"We inherited the simplest system of household waste management from the USSR, focused on its complete disposal, withdrawal of huge areas of land from economic use for landfills, pollution of air, groundwater, surface water and soil with hazardous components - this is just one of the consequences of such management. Almost 6,000 landfills and dumpsites do not meet environmental requirements. At the same time, the country's economy loses millions of tons of valuable resources: waste paper, paper, polymers, metal, etc. We are changing this paradigm, and Sweden's assistance is very important for us."

Olena Kramarenko, First Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine, said on the launch of the WM4U programme.



REPORTED RESULTS
DOMAIN OF CHANGE 1

Support to democratic, accountable, and socially responsible multilevel governance systems

Support to democratic, accountable, and socially responsible multilevel governance systems

This year, SALAR International continued to support the development and strengthening of democratic, transparent, and accountable local governance systems. Our efforts focused on enhancing institutional capacity, improving service delivery, and enabling local governments and their associations (LGAs) to actively participate in national policy dialogue. These efforts have contributed to more transparent, data-driven, and coordinated governance structures, achieved through both national policy dialogue and local service delivery.

Strengthened Policy Frameworks to Support Local Government Mandates

SALAR International played a key role in advancing national policy dialogues to safeguard local autonomy and promote decentralisation in numerous countries. Building on 100+ years of SALAR’s own experiences as a lobby organisation our collaboration with partner LGAs, as well as strategies to influence national institutions and policy-makers, have contributed to strengthening the ability of local governments to influence national reforms and advocate for their communities:

- In **Ukraine**, institutional support to LGAs and evidence-based dialogue with national authorities, ensured that local governments retained competences and resources assigned during the country’s comprehensive decentralisation reform (2014 – 22). Furthermore, local government perspectives continued to influence national policies concerning the uptake of a range of competences, for example fiscal decentralisation and administrative service provision.
- Against the backdrop of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabach, engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including the key ministries and the Parliament, ensured that decentralisation remained a key reform priority in **Armenia**, with steps taken to articulate a transfer of competences to Municipalities.
- In **Moldova**, initial engagement provided technical arguments towards national stakeholders in support of Local Public Administration Reform Strategy, including on the process of territorial amalgamation.
- In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the two national LGAs jointly and successfully strengthened their engagement in national governance frameworks.
- In **Türkiye**, local migration policies were integrated in the national five-year development plan, reinforcing the role of municipalities in supporting inclusive urban governance.
- In **Syria and Libya**, country groups under the Inclusive Local Governance (INLOG) project started to articulate arguments for, and a strategy in support of, decentralisation, state-building and resilient recovery, including in response to political change.

3 Policy briefs were developed addressing Participatory local development, Local Government Associations and the importance of Local revenues and financial management in the MENA Region.



Putting citizens at the centre

Participatory local development in the Middle East and North Africa region



Financing local governments

The importance of local revenues and financial management for decentralisation, local development and public services in the Middle East and North Africa region



Joining forces for decentralisation and local development

Local Government Associations in the Middle East and North Africa region

Support to democratic, accountable, and socially responsible multilevel governance systems

Enhancing the fiscal capacity and financial management of local governments has also been a major focus. SALAR International supported local governments in Iraq, Ukraine, and the DRC in securing greater financial autonomy:

- The practice of sharing detailed Monthly and Quarterly Budget Reviews of subnational budgets in **Ukraine** has been re-established on the national decentralisation web portal after being suspended due to the war. This has improved transparency and made it easier to track local government financial performance, providing data-driven insights into local government revenues and expenditures.
- Engagement with the Ministries of Finance and Education ensured that **Ukraine** could continue implementing reforms in support of school effectiveness, as well as using data gathered by SALAR International to re-start education service provision in displacement-affected communities, following the full scale invasion of 2022.
- The Ministry of Finance in **Armenia** now promotes the introduction of participatory budgeting in municipalities, with support provided to the development of guidelines (rules, regulations and eligibility criteria) for the provision of earmarked grants (subventions) to municipalities and projects approved through participatory budgeting mechanisms, with initial piloting in four municipalities (Abovyan, Ashtarak, Armavir and Jermuk).
- **Iraqi** governorates pioneered budget reallocation practices that led to national discussions on expanding fiscal flexibility, ensuring that municipalities have more flexibility to tailor public services to local needs.
- Improved financial transparency was achieved through automation and strengthened reporting systems in **Iraq** and **Lebanon**.

Dialogue enabled new revenues and better services in Kasumbalesa, DRC

The AGIR project is implemented in the South-east of the DRC, and works directly with 6 partner municipalities, including Kasumbalesa. The aim is to stimulate concrete change by increasing functionality and service delivery and improving their organisational capacity and accountability. Generating local revenue while maintaining a trustful relationship with the inhabitants is pivotal. Especially for Kasumbalesa where local taxes are currently the only source of income. Kasumbalesa is a town on the border between DRC and Zambia, experiencing rapid urbanisation while urban infrastructure is insufficient. The road network is not well-developed meaning access and movements are difficult, including for transporting agricultural products to markets. The motorcycle drivers ensure mobility in the city. They are best able to access unpaved roads and they are the most affordable transport option for most people. At the same time, moto drivers are often subject to political manipulation and have tremendous power in local communities. When they strike, public life is heavily affected.

With support from the AGIR project, the Mayor decided to open a direct dialogue with the moto drivers to find solutions. Organised through local associations, the moto drivers welcomed the idea. The interaction led to re-activation of a previously dormant tax. In return, the authorities agreed to ensure that the revenue from the tax is invested in road improvements and information sessions are planned to account for the revenue generated. Another positive development was the involvement of the private sector. A private-public partnership has been set up to aid the collection the motorcycle tax.

As a result of increases in local tax revenues, Kasumbalesa has increased its means to implement service improvements. The local population is directly affected by seeing improved roads and better moto transport services.



Photo: Jeff Mbiya

Support to democratic, accountable, and socially responsible multilevel governance systems

Progress in improving the data-driven decision-making has signalled a more inclusive approach to education governance in Armenia and Ukraine, and better planning in Colombia:

- The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports (MoESCS) of **Armenia** has undergone a shift in its approach to school management, now showing greater interest in decentralisation and advancing discussions on the transfer of education competences to municipalities.
- The shift towards data-driven decision-making in the education sector was reported in **Ukraine**, with the Ministry of Education adopting more transparent and evidence-based practices in education financing and policy planning.
- In **Colombia**, enhanced data-sharing between national and local authorities has led to more effective urban planning and service delivery. This was possible through the creation of Terridata, a municipal statistics tool, that drew extensively from SALAR's own Kolada tool.

Through these efforts, SALAR International has contributed to reinforcing the role of local governments in shaping national policies, ensuring multi governance systems are more responsive, transparent, and accountable to community needs.

Enhanced Local Governments' Capacity to deliver Core Functions and Services

Although service provision is a broad area and dependent on the policy context in each country, SALAR International has made substantial contributions across several thematic areas. This has resulted in more responsive and effective local governance and local public service delivery in partner municipalities. Salar International's support strengthened local governments' ability to deliver essential services by improving waste management, education, administrative services and crisis management. These efforts focused on evidence-based decision-making, regional cooperation, and institutional capacity-building, ensuring more responsive and effective governance:

- SALAR International supported 15 municipalities in **North Macedonia** to develop an integrated waste management system, fostering regional cooperation and institutional coordination. Municipal leadership and utility companies adopted more sustainable practices, leading to the creation of Local Action Plans in six pilot municipalities, marking a long-term commitment to improving waste management.
- **Ukrainian** municipalities now use a standardized funding model to better align resources with local education needs. By engaging the Ministry of Education in a step-by-step, collaborative approach, SALAR International enabled the development of a more efficient and equitable financing system, improving service delivery in education.
- The establishment of Administrative Service Centers in 48 **Ukrainian** municipalities has streamlined service delivery, providing citizens with easier access to a wide range of government services. The expansion of available services has enhanced municipal responsiveness and improved citizens' overall experience with local governance.

“The new programme will provide systematic support and assistance in shaping and implementing regional policy and local self governance development. It will also help strengthen the capacity of Ukrainian hromadas to cope with the numerous challenges they face due to the war.”

– Nataliia Kozlovska, Deputy Minister for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, said about the new programme Polaris.



Bringing Services Closer to the Ukrainian People through Local Administrative Service Centers

Photo: Iryna Khvorostovska Krasyliv

Decentralisation has been one of the top priorities in the extensive reform programme that the Government of Ukraine launched after the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, and SALAR International has supported it ever since. A key part of this transformation is the creation of Administrative Service Centers (ASCs) to deliver administrative services to citizens on a local level, a mandate which was given to Municipalities in 2015.

Through the project Prosto, SALAR International has helped to improve local administrative services in Ukraine, **where 48 Municipalities have established Administrative Service Centres, benefiting a population of more than 550 000.** These centres provide citizens with access to a wide range of services in a single location, making it easier and more efficient for individuals to interact with local government. The number of services offered by these centres has increased, enabling citizens to access more comprehensive support at the local level. This advancement in service delivery has enhanced the responsiveness of municipalities and improved citizens' overall experience with public administration.

ASCs Amid the Full-Scale Invasion

The full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 brought significant challenges to ASCs. However, they quickly adapted, becoming some of the first institutions to respond to wartime conditions.

Many ASCs transformed into shelters for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in safer hromadas and also served as humanitarian aid and psychological support centres.

In the initial months of the Russian invasion, the Prosto project provided critical support to ASC staff, facilitating relocation and temporary employment in safer areas.

Experts also launched an online platform for municipal representatives and central authorities to coordinate service delivery, ensuring continuity in administrative functions. Training initiatives were introduced to prepare ASC staff to assist IDPs effectively

Additionally, the project focused on mental health support for ASC employees, organising a series of online and offline sessions with professional psychologists.

Expanding Crisis Support to Hromadas

As territories were gradually liberated, the project adapted its activities, launching comprehensive crisis support for affected hromadas. This initiative was implemented in phases, based on safety conditions, ongoing assessments, open calls, and coordination with national ministries.

164 hromadas, home to nearly 3 million people, have received crisis assistance from the project. Ten Municipalities were provided with vehicles and equipment along with expert support, enabling them to deliver administrative services directly to residents in remote areas.

Semen Baiev, a resident of the liberated Balakliia Hromada (Kharkivregion), shared:

"I needed help accessing 'Diia' to apply for property recovery funds. Today, a mobile ASC team arrived, explained everything, and assisted us. It's great they're coming to villages because traveling is difficult, and city ASCs have long queues. Thank you for bringing services to us."

Ongoing Systemic Support

Despite the war, the project also continues assisting Municipalities in establishing well-functioning ASCs. For example, on March 15, 2024, a new ASC opened in Dobrianska Municipality, Chernihiv region, serving over 4,000 residents across 21 border villages.

Svitlana Bytsko, head of Dobrianska hromada, emphasized: *"This ASC represents more than just accessible, quality services—it symbolizes our resilience and belief in victory. We will continue improving and expanding services. Thanks to steadfast partners like Prosto, we move forward despite external threats."*

Support to democratic, accountable, and socially responsible multilevel governance systems

Strengthened Local Government Associations to successfully represent Local Government Interests

SALAR International also reinforced the capacity of Local Government Associations (LGAs) to effectively represent municipal interests in governance and policymaking. Through organisational support, capacity-building, and peer learning, LGAs in **Türkiye, Ukraine, and Bosnia and Herzegovina** have gained stronger influence in national dialogues, particularly in migration governance and decentralisation reforms.

- In **Türkiye**, the Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (UMT) strengthened its advocacy role by establishing the Centre for Migration and Harmonisation, inspired by best practices from the Marmara Municipalities Union. This has enhanced UMT's ability to support municipalities in managing migration challenges and securing a stronger voice in national migration policies and dialogue on migration governance.
- In **Ukraine**, the Association of Amalgamated Territorial Communities has improved its internal governance, increased its membership and solidified its position as a key participant in national consultations, increasing its ability to represent local governments effectively.
- In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the Associations of Cities and Municipalities (AMCs) have improved their advocacy capacity through organisational changes and evidence-based policy engagement, particularly in EU accession negotiations and decentralisation reforms.
- In **Serbia**, the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM) leveraged its participation in government working groups to influence national policies, ensuring municipal concerns are reflected in decision-making processes.

While significant progress has been made, continued efforts are needed to deepen LGA engagement in national policy platforms and strengthen their advocacy capacity, ensuring local governments have a sustained and influential role in shaping national governance.



SALAR International contribution to the achievements in Domain of Change 1



Multifaceted approaches to supporting policy changes across different context (eg. institutional capacity development, advocacy and communications strategies, multi-stakeholder engagement, articulation of evidence-based policy positions).



Capacity building, knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer support, to enable local actors to engage more effectively in advocacy towards higher levels of government.



Strengthening the voice of Local Governments and Local Government Associations (LGAs) to become more influential in policy development and governance processes.



REPORTED RESULTS
DOMAIN OF CHANGE 2

Building sustainable, inclusive and resilient cities and communities

Building sustainable, inclusive, and resilient cities and communities

SALAR International empowers local governments to drive sustainable development, especially in the face of multiple crises and governance challenges. Local governments are central in providing essential services such as mobility, environmental management, urban planning, and local economic development, which are key to resilience. In 2024, SALAR International prioritised responses to urbanisation, climate change, inequitable economic development, and complex crises like migration and natural disasters. While progress has been seen in projects, scaling effective approaches through policy change remains a challenge.

Improving sustainable urban development

Though no new initiatives were launched, SALAR International revived the SymbioCity approach, a proven model for sustainable urban development. This model is being integrated into recovery projects in Ukraine and a new initiative in **Georgia**, aiming to enhance urban planning and sustainability. The approach was also presented in advocacy efforts on several events, highlighting its global applicability.

Strengthening environmental protection and climate resilience

SALAR International has long supported municipalities towards the goal of environmental sustainability in service provision. Building on SymbioCity experience, and the experience of Swedish Municipalities, an enhanced focus on climate resilience is now being adopted. We have seen important results in environmental protection and service provision, particularly through **strengthening waste management**:

- In **Serbia**, SALAR International contributed to Kruševac's understanding of the circular economy, which promotes resource efficiency and reduces environmental impacts. By adopting circular economy principles, the Municipality aims to enhance both its environmental and economic sustainability. Additionally, SALAR International helped develop Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) that address urban mobility and air quality, bringing together local governments and stakeholders to formulate targeted, sustainable solutions for traffic congestion and pollution.
- In **Ukraine**, SALAR International initiated a new programme focusing on supporting the reform of municipal waste management by aligning it with EU standards, fostering environmental sustainability, combating climate change, and enhancing the quality of life for Ukrainian Citizens – WM4U. The programme is based on a request for Swedish support and will mainly rely on Swedish knowledge and experience of waste management, especially from Swedish Municipalities. Swedish municipal experts will be extensively engaged in the identification of pilot areas where new ways of managing waste will be introduced.



Local Action Plans: A Step Toward Better Waste Management in North Macedonia

Photo: Marija Aleksova

Teachers learn innovative educational practices in waste management and sustainable environment.

Managing waste effectively remains a challenge for many countries, including North Macedonia, where waste management is still largely based on collection and disposal. To improve the system and align with EU regulations, SALAR International is working with municipalities to build on existing legislation and strengthen local efforts.

Across the Pelagonia and South-West regions, municipalities are making steady progress. With support from SALAR International, 15 municipalities collaborated to develop more effective waste management practices, leading to the adoption of Local Action Plans (LAPs), including in the six pilot Municipalities. These LAPs, developed through a transparent, collaborative and inclusive process, serve as roadmaps, helping Municipalities tackle waste-related challenges in a structured and practical way while effectively contributing to the implementation of their respective Regional Waste Management Plans. Endorsed by municipal councils, these LAPs signify transformative shifts in waste management practices.

The development of Local Action Plans was a collaborative journey for the participating municipalities, driven by a shared commitment to enhancing waste management through the lens of inter-municipal cooperation.

As noted by Katerina Cukalevska, coordinator at the Municipality of Novaci:

"Throughout the LAP preparation process, we maintained close cooperation with other municipal departments and the Public Utility Company, gathering vital data on waste collection, operational logistics, and available resources. This collaborative effort enabled us to map out key stakeholders and identify opportunities for future cooperation and joint initiatives within our community."

Transparency and community involvement were also key aspects of the process:

"To ensure the transparency of the whole process, we held a public presentation of the draft LAP where all residents of the Municipality were invited to participate and share their views on our collaborative endeavour towards more effective waste management."

-Katerina added. Though the journey is ongoing, these plans are already leading to real improvements. Since their launch, municipalities have mapped illegal dumpsites, distributed recycling bins to households, and introduced specialized containers for textile waste. Raising awareness has also been a priority—schools now integrate waste education into their lessons, and interactive activities like "waste basketball" and "recycling bingo" are helping children develop sustainable habits from an early age.

Municipal staff are also building their skills through training in monitoring, evaluation, and strategic communication, ensuring that improvements in waste management are not only implemented but also sustained over time, as Ivica Nikoloski from the Municipality of Kichevo reaffirms:

"A its core, the Local Action Plan serves as a foundation for building a sustainable waste management system in our Municipality."

Stronger partnerships with public utility companies, schools, and community organisations are further reinforcing these efforts and laying the groundwork for long-term change. The Local Action Plans have provided a clear direction for achieving the goals set in the Regional Waste Management Plans while taking into account the specific priorities of each Municipality.

Transferring knowledge and best practices from Sweden, the cooperation has enabled valuable insights to be gained throughout the process. As put by Per-Olof Hallberg, a Swedish Municipal Waste Management expert engaged in the project:

"These lessons will play a crucial role in shaping the upcoming Regional Waste Management Plan 2026-2031, fostering ongoing cooperation among municipalities, especially regarding the anticipated construction of a new regional landfill [for Pelagonija and Sout-west regions]."

If implemented successfully, these regional plans will help ensure a more effective and collaborative approach to executing the country's National Waste Management Plan. This plan is a cornerstone of North Macedonia's EU integration discussions, particularly in relation to Chapter 27, which focuses on environmental protection and sustainable development.

Advancing Local Economic Development strategies towards thriving and more sustainable local communities and economies

While a focus on Local Economic Development is not new in SALAR International programmes, the Global Strategy has a more explicit focus on recognising the different roles that local governments have in creating an enabling environment for Local Economic Development, connected to own source revenue generation. In this regard, a focus on green transition and women and youth employment have been priorities for partner municipalities in **Türkiye** and **Serbia**:

- In Mersin, **Türkiye**, the Metropolitan Municipality established a Centre on Green Transition, focusing on promoting a circular economy and green transition strategies. The Municipality played a leadership role in advancing local economic development by launching a pilot training programme on the European Green Deal for the food processing sector, raising business awareness about sustainability and eco-friendly practices.
- In Yıldırım, **Türkiye**, SALAR International's support for women's cooperatives has led to better guidance for women facing poverty cycles. The Municipality's tailored approach has enabled more effective support for women entrepreneurs, improving their economic independence and opportunities.
- Similarly, in Niš, **Serbia**, the Municipality developed an Employment Plan, adopted by the City Assembly, which includes specific measures to support women-led businesses, demonstrating SALAR International's commitment to fostering inclusive local economies and reducing gender disparities in the workforce.

Greater resilience and sustainable development of local communities through crisis preparedness, management, and response

SALAR International's work on crisis management contributed to results in multiple countries. Contextual-level results were reported for **Türkiye**, **Lebanon** and **Serbia**, building on work over several years, including the development of structured and systematic approaches to prepare for, and respond to, external shocks:

- In **Lebanon**, the Union of Municipalities of Jurd el Qayteh was supported to create Crisis Management Unit, which has used geospatial and socio-economic data to guide responses to various crises, including the 2024 conflict with Israel and related internal displacement. In addition, the Union created a volunteer first responded team to protect communities and natural resources in response to seasonal forest fires, as well as other shocks. This team, which includes both Lebanese and Syrian community members, responding to an average of 20 fires annually.
- In **Türkiye**, new Migration Units and Disaster Management Units have been supported in numerous Municipalities, taking a more systematic approach to migration and disaster management. Making use of a specifically developed resilience assessment methodology, Migration Master Plans have helped municipalities to strengthen their institutional capabilities. There has been a notable shift in municipal staff attitudes towards the sensitive issue of migration. This has resulted in more inclusive and supportive approaches, with direct engagement of over 15,000 Syrian refugees, improving social cohesion and quality of life through enhanced local services.
- In **Serbia**, SCTM was supported to develop disaster risk reduction guidelines. These guidelines, co-created with local gender experts and emergency response representatives.

Support has been provided in **Türkiye** and **Ukraine** towards locally-led recovery in response to manmade and natural disasters, taking account of the need for evidence-based, participatory and integrated planning:

- In **Türkiye**, recovery efforts in earthquake-affected cities like Kahramanmaraş and Mersin, involved comprehensive assessments of social service infrastructure. A gender lens was applied to ensure that Recovery Roadmaps also addresses the needs of vulnerable groups. This has resulted in the mobilization of additional financial resources for identified recovery projects.
- In **Ukraine**, a methodology for locally-led recovery and reconstruction was developed. A process was also launched to select the first set of pilot Municipalities affected by the conflict. These Municipalities, in addition to developing recovery plans, will receive financial support for catalytic projects. The funding for these projects will come through the Nordic Green Bank (Nefco).

Building sustainable, inclusive, and resilient cities and communities

Horizontal cooperation and knowledge dissemination among local governments has also been supported within countries:

- In **Ukraine**, support through the "Municipality to Municipality" initiative enhanced cooperation among municipalities, fostering mutual aid between regions during the conflict and ensuring the delivery of critical services and humanitarian support to those in need.
- The experience of the Crisis Management Unit in the Union of Municipalities of Jurd el Qayteh in **Lebanon** has been lifted as an example for replication by regional and national authorities.

SALAR International has made meaningful strides in building more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive local communities, fostering crisis management capabilities in different countries. Partnerships fostered by SALAR International have proven vital in situations where national policy environments became less conducive, showcasing the importance of adaptability and long-term collaboration.



SALAR International contribution to the achievements in Domain of Change 2



Organisational support, such as the use of tools for geospatial analysis, development of crisis management units (and their replication), volunteer strategies and frameworks, etc.



Development of methodologies to empower municipalities to handle crises more effectively, such as the Resilience Assessments, Migration Master Plans and Locally-Led Recovery.



LED assessments, multi-stakeholder consultations, and mechanisms in support of green transition.



Linking LED to local finances and migration management, while providing opportunities for SMEs and promoting education and training.



Municipal support packages and systematic approaches in developing and delivering environmental services as key entry points.



REPORTED RESULTS
DOMAIN OF CHANGE 3

Supporting peaceful, inclusive and more equitable local democracies

Supporting peaceful, inclusive, participatory, and more equitable local democracies

Local governments play a critical role in promoting equity, social cohesion, and human rights. Against a backdrop of global democratic backslide, in many contexts, communities and marginalized groups remain excluded from decision-making and access to resources. SALAR International prioritizes rights, participation, and equality as fundamental principle behind all our work, and in our efforts to support sustainable local development.

Community engagement improving the implementation of services

Efforts to support participatory governance through community engagement have resulted in positive changes in political priorities and municipal staff capacity, leading to increased social cohesion, improved accountability and transparency, as well as more inclusive service delivery.

One of the most significant changes reported has been strengthened social cohesion and trust-building between host communities and migrants/refugees, in displacement-related contexts:

- In Lebanon, tensions between Lebanese and Syrian populations decreased in partner Municipalities, and stronger relations were reported between different communities, as well as with municipalities.
- In **Türkiye**, the implementation of Migration Master Plans enhanced social cohesion, with community centers in 11 Municipalities providing inclusive services and creating vital spaces for interaction between different groups.

Community members have also increased their engagement in decision making:

- **Colombia** transitioned from rigid bureaucratic structures to open, inclusive processes, where citizens' input directly influenced decision-making and municipal projects, such as park development and community-led activities.
- Similarly, in **Ukraine**, 32 municipalities conducted information campaigns using gender-inclusive language to inform residents, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), about local services.

As a result of these participatory processes, citizens' trust in local governments has increased. Municipal officials have become more transparent and communicative towards their citizens, recognising the community as an asset to their work.

Inclusive Service Delivery addressing vulnerable groups

SALAR International has supported practitioners and Municipalities on the provision of inclusive services, particularly targeting marginalized and vulnerable groups.

- In **Türkiye**, 11 Municipalities upgraded community centers to provide services for both local and Syrian populations, offering counseling, health, and legal support. Furthermore, improved cooperation between Municipalities and Syrian NGOs led to joint activities, such as neighborhood walks and children's festivals, which helped build trust and integrate refugee concerns into local development planning.
- In **North Macedonia**, Municipalities included women and marginalized groups in waste management planning, ensuring services were responsive to all residents' needs.
- Participants of the INLOG project from **Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Jordan** and **Syria** were supported with practical exposure to examples of inclusive local public service delivery for replication and/or adaptation in their own contexts.

Increasing Gender Equality at the local level

Despite strong legal frameworks and mandated mechanisms to ensure that gender equality is integrated at the local level, awareness and practical capacity to apply it in local public services remains weak. Therefore, building awareness and demonstrating the arguments in support of gender equality remains critical, as well as the deployment of practical tools in support of gender equality.

Supporting peaceful, inclusive, participatory, and more equitable local democracies

SALAR International's projects address gender equality through mainstreaming and targeted interventions. These draw extensively from SALAR methodologies to support gender mainstreaming in Swedish Municipalities and regions. Our interventions have resulted in an increase in awareness and institutional commitment to gender equality in a wide range of contexts:

- In **North Macedonia**, gender mainstreaming and a human rights-based approach were integrated into waste management planning, focusing on addressing the needs of marginalized groups.
- In **Serbia**, Municipalities like Kanjiža and Vranje worked to integrate gender-responsive budgeting and planning, allocating funds to projects targeting gender-specific needs. Kanjiža received an award for its gender action plan, highlighting the impact of local government initiatives.
- AMCs in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** are increasingly recognised as relevant actors in gender equality at the local level, following organisational investment in this area. Improved co-operation with other actors working with gender equality reinforced the impact of interventions at the local and national level. Numerous Municipalities in **Ukraine** produced gender profiles and disaggregated data, further advancing gender equality efforts at the local level.

Through these efforts, SALAR International has supported the development of more inclusive, participatory and equitable local democracies, particularly through community engagement, inclusive services, and gender equality initiatives. However, a sustained focus on institutionalizing these efforts is needed to overcome resistance to gender equality and ensure long-term change to gender norms.



SALAR International contribution to the achievements in Domain of Change 3



Combination of **coaching, mentoring, and training on various areas including Gender Equality.**



Organisational Development of **handbooks and tools, e.g. the creation of the online platform aprenderparagobernar.com** in Colombia, coupled with training a group of trainers, has provided local governments with essential resources for sustainable learning and capacity building.



Development of methodologies Strengthened inclusive mechanisms for community engagement and supported mechanisms to structure community engagement and wide population outreach. In DRC, **participatory election processes** of Local Development Committees resulted in improved representation of women, people with disability and youth. In Ukraine, institutional support to the Starosta function, ensuring representation of interests of all residents of villages and rural areas.



"**Learning by doing**" approaches, placing LGs in the driver's seat, adapting Swedish-inspired methodologies to their unique context based on local needs.



Supported by **small-scale financing through mini-grants**, allowing municipalities to implement new activities despite budget constraints or changing conditions.



Community centres in Türkiye offering inclusive services enabled addressing the needs of marginalised groups.



Influencing global responses to support local governments

Influencing global responses to support local governments

As global challenges evolve, there is an increasing need to adapt and support local governments in fulfilling their mandates. The Sustainable Development Goals remain the foundation of global development, but geopolitical shifts, humanitarian crises, and other challenges mean that a more responsive, systemic approach is needed. SALAR International aims to ensure that local governments play a central role in addressing these challenges and are effectively supported in their efforts to serve citizens. During 2024, SALAR International focused on building external relationships and identifying key areas for global engagement.

Advocating for Local Governments in Global Dialogues

SALAR International actively engages in **global policy platforms and strategic networks** to elevate the role of local governments. SALAR International helped shape discussions, contributing to policy advocacy on the UN Pact for the Future, which now recognises that the role of local and regional authorities must be recognised in finding solutions to accelerate achievements towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2024, we participated in several key global and regional events, for example:

- **World Urban Forum 12 in Cairo** – Focused on local governments' role in crisis management, highlighting the need for evidence-based and participatory planning alongside integrated and inclusive investment approaches.
- **Africa Urban Forum in Addis Ababa** – Strengthened regional cooperation and advocacy for sustainable urban development, highlighting methodologies for addressing climate change and urban resilience.

SALAR International also engaged in policy dialogue with EU institutions about the new EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034, and the 'Global Gateway', particularly concerning the enabling environment for EU external action and investments supporting infrastructure development in low- and middle-income countries. Discussions have focused on the important role that local and regional governments can play in contributing to EU policy objectives targeting a 'value-based offer' that stimulates development through investments underpinned by transparency, good governance and (environmental and social) sustainability.

Positioning Local Governments in EU Accession Processes

SALAR International has supported local governments in countries pursuing EU accession by ensuring they are active participants in the process:

- In **Ukraine**, Municipalities are increasingly engaged in EU integration, gaining knowledge and building cross-border partnerships with European counterparts. This exchange has led to joint projects, furthering Ukraine's alignment with EU standards.
- In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the establishment of a credit line within the Development Bank for Municipalities qualifying for EU funding is a significant achievement. This credit line, subsidized annually by the Ministry of Finance, enhances Municipalities' access to financial resources for development projects, bolstering their capacity to participate in the EU accession process.

We also convened a Local Leaders Seminar in Brussels with partners from the Eastern Trio (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) and the Western Balkans 6 (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia) and representative from EU institutions, resulting in a advocacy paper calling for greater recognition of local governments in EU integration processes.



Seminar on Engagement of Local Authorities in EU Integration

Photo: Herve Devavry

In November, Local government associations (LGAs), EU institutions, think tanks, NGOs and senior national representatives gathered in Brussels for a seminar on engagement of local authorities in EU Integration, co-organised by SALAR International and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions.

In focus were Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, given the former's candidate status and the opening of accession negotiations in the latter two. Representatives from other candidate countries in the Western Balkans were also on hand to share their experience.

The discussions underscored that despite their central role in implementing EU policies—handling over 70% of the EU acquis—local governments have been largely sidelined in accession negotiations and preparations. It also became clear that the degree of local engagement varies greatly between countries. For example, some LGAs are invited to screening meetings and involved in negotiation working groups, while others are largely ignored. Hence, it was emphasized that the EU needs a renewed vision for engagement with local and regional governments in candidate and neighborhood countries.

The seminar concluded that there are many possible ways to involve local governments. Key recommendations include formalizing local participation in accession negotiations, improving funding accessibility for local projects, and strengthening capacity-building initiatives. An expectation was put forward to the EU that national governments should be encouraged to involve local governments more systematically, to smooth preparations, avoid costly mistakes and strengthen citizens' engagement.



Leveraging Swedish and International Experience

Josefin Hagström, Gender Strategist at the Municipality of Jönköping shared Swedish experiences on the conference **“Gender responsible Local governments: local approaches and development strategies in service of preventing domestic violence and violence against women”** in BiH.

Leveraging Swedish and International Experience

SALAR International has its roots in the Swedish system of local and regional self-governance, and the experience and expertise of SALAR and its members, seen from an international comparative perspective. Given SALAR's unique profile, and Sweden's long tradition of local self-governance, our knowledge bank is vast. We leverage this knowledge base, feeding back learning from our global experiences to SALAR's members. This way, we function as a bridge for two-way exchange of knowledge and best practices. This allows us to draw from global expertise, as well as the Swedish municipal resource base.

SALAR International responds to a demand from countries who want to know more about Swedish experiences of decentralisation, local self-government and local government associations. Our approach to supporting change in other countries draws from key principles that underpin the Swedish system of local and regional self-governance. Including democracy, equality, effectiveness and equity of public spending, subsidiarity to adapt to local conditions and priorities, as well as sustainability, equality and inclusiveness. Through our close engagement with SALAR, its staff, political leadership and membership base, we are able to draw from over 100 years of Sweden's decentralisation experiences to capture not just the philosophy, but also the processes, tools, methods and approaches, that can support key decisions concerning local governance reforms and capacity development in other countries. An emphasis on evidence-based analysis, partnership and multi-stakeholder dialogue have underpinned our work; this has often led to successful and sustained reforms in other country contexts.

Our team is composed of international development cooperation professionals with expertise in local democracy and good governance, who are at the same time experts in the Swedish system.

We do not seek to replicate Swedish experiences, but rather adapt and contextualise processes, tools, methods and approaches, where relevant.

For each project, SALAR's added-value is assessed and identified by SALAR International's team, together with SALAR and its members, in line with the relevant development cooperation strategy and the needs of our partners. This is what makes us unique; delivering impactful assistance to partners in different countries, in the form that is most relevant for them.

Co-located at SALAR's office in Stockholm, we have direct access to around 500 SALAR staff, who have sector-specific knowledge on Swedish local governance, local public service delivery and local sustainable development, and who often help us to identify relevant Swedish examples, methods and approaches for handling local and regional challenges. These experiences, as well as their extensive knowledge of how EU regulations are implemented at the local level, have contributed to building the unique expertise of our own team.

During 2024, as in previous years, we have organized strategic reflections together with SALAR colleagues on a range of topics, including digitalisation, gender equality, green transition, climate resilience, and crisis preparedness and response. We are members of SALAR's EU and Gender networks. We provide technical input to the global advocacy efforts of SALAR in different international fora.

SALAR Added Value and Engagement

As well as SALAR experts, members of SALAR's Board and Executive Committee play an important role in engaging SALAR's members in our projects, serving as role models for local government associations that we support, and leveraging their networks within international forums for local authorities for the benefit of our projects and partners. We organize study visits to, and knowledge exchange with, SALAR and its members. Through these various forms of engagement, SALAR's involvement in our projects often comes with no additional cost.

We also draw extensively from the Swedish local and regional government resource and knowledge base to deliver tailored outputs (eg. methodological guidance and tools), that are relevant for our partners in other countries.

Leveraging Swedish and International Experience

During 2024, SALAR politicians and experts, as well as politicians and experts from Swedish Municipalities and Regions, as well as their utility companies, contributed to our projects in the following ways:

SALAR as a Peer Local Government Association: SALAR has engaged in ongoing partnerships with Local Government Associations in a range of countries: the All-Ukrainian Association of Local Governments; Association of Units of Local Self-Government - Republic of North Macedonia (ZELS); Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities – Serbia (SCTM); Associations of Municipalities and Cities - Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska; Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM); Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (UMT) and Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU); Jurd al Qayteh Union of Municipalities (Lebanon).

SALAR politicians and experts as advisers: SALAR's President and SALAR's Chair of Health and Social Care Committee as well as various heads of departments, and SALAR experts have played the role of advisor on our projects. For example, in Ukraine, SALAR experts supported workshops with the political leadership of three local government associations, elaborating on SALAR's structure and principles. An expert from SALAR's Economics and Governance Division supported the development of tools for statistical analysis and surveys for Ukrainian Municipalities. SALAR gender experts delivered capacity-building activities for school leaders and teachers from Ukrainian Municipalities and shared experiences on integrating a gender perspective into educational processes. Furthermore, experts from SALAR and Stockholm Municipality supported Ukrainian partner municipalities in crisis communication, preparing the manual *"Informing the population in crisis conditions - Involving residents in the process of community reconstruction"*. In Türkiye, SALAR's Crisis Preparedness and Civil Defense expert supported the development of Roadmaps for Recovery in earthquake-affected Municipalities.

SALAR principles, methods and tools: Our projects have made use of various methods and tools developed by SALAR, including 'Model Municipalities' for Gender Equality (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine), Sweden's municipal statistics database (Ukraine), Guidelines for municipal climate change adaptation (Iraq), Checklist for Gender Sensitive Decision-Making and '4R method' for gender analysis and mainstreaming (Iraq) and the 'Styrksam' education model (Armenia).

SALAR member politicians and experts as advisers: SALAR member politicians and experts, as well as municipal utility companies, have been active in our projects. On migration and integration and service design (Stockholm Municipality), gender equality (Jönköping and Danderyd Municipalities), citizens' dialogue and circular economy (Gothenburg Municipality) and waste management (Gästrik Återvinnare and Gävle Municipality).

Municipal principles, methods and inspiration: Our projects have made use of various methods and tools developed by SALAR members including Municipal Cooperation for Crisis Preparedness (Serbia), Local Action Plans for Gender Equality (Serbia), Climate Contract (Türkiye), Sports and nature events for cohabitation (Lebanon); 'Svenska med Baby – Turkish with Baby' (Türkiye).

Exposure and knowledge sharing: Swedish delegates to the EU's Committee of the Regions, as well as SALAR experts in Brussels, supported visits to EU institutions (Eastern Trio and Western Balkan Six). In addition, we organize study visits to Uppsala and Stockholm Municipalities (migration - Turkey), Nacka and Eskilstuna Municipalities (crisis preparedness, rescue response and local economic development strategies - Lebanon), West Sweden regional municipal association including 15 municipalities (sustainable energy supply, innovation, digitalization - Ukraine), Gävle Municipality and Gästrik Återvinnare (inter-municipal cooperation and sustainable waste management including household-level recycling and reuse - North Macedonia), Sigtuna Municipality (sustainable waste management - Ukraine), Gothenburg Municipality (strategies for waste prevention, urban mobility, water treatment and climate change mitigation - Serbia).

Municipal Partnerships: In the framework of Polaris project, and the initiative Cities4Cities United4Ukraine, Ukrainian Municipalities have been supported to develop municipal partnerships, including over 50 partnerships between Ukrainian and European Municipalities (including 15 partnerships between Swedish and Ukrainian municipalities). Furthermore, work has been initiated to create Swedish and Ukrainian municipal partnership clusters including Swedish municipal waste utility organization. In 2025, the following will be engaged in the WM4U programme: Sysav (14 Municipalities in Skåne); Avfall & Återvinning Skaraborg (13 Municipalities); Gästrik Återvinnare (5 Municipalities); VafabMiljö (12 Municipalities in Västmanland); Stockholm Vatten & Avfall.

By enabling these exchanges, SALAR International bridges practical Swedish solutions with international needs, promoting sustainable development globally

Conclusion- SALAR International's contribution

During 2024, our support has been crucial in shaping local policies and services that are inclusive and responsive to the unique needs of local governments and their respective communities. We have supported our partners to enhance their knowledge in critical thematic areas, and illustrated how the adoption of new tools and methodologies can alter practices within Municipalities. This proactive approach enhances the capacity of local government to respond to their immediate challenges, whilst also thinking and planning for long-term horizons. This growth in awareness among Municipalities and key ministries cultivates a **sense of ownership and proactive engagement**, which is crucial for effective governance.

Institutional and organisational change remains an important aspect of our work in a wide range of contexts. By strengthening internal structures and processes within LGAs, municipalities, ministries and other institutions, SALAR International helped these organisations to improve their management and policy-making capacities. This, coupled with platforms for greater engagement of local politicians in policy-making, provided the necessary leadership to drive reforms at the local level in many contexts.

One of the defining features of SALAR International's approach in 2024 was our emphasis on **enabling change from within**, allowing local actors to identify their own needs and priorities. This fostered ownership of reform processes, increasing the likelihood of sustained impact. Additionally, the trust built between stakeholders over years of collaboration was critical in creating a positive reinforcing feedback loop, where meeting the needs of local governments enhanced trust, and trust, in turn, facilitated further change.

Employing a blend of technical assistance with more personalised approaches, such as coaching and mentoring, has been particularly effective in equipping pilot municipalities and target groups with the skills and practices needed to drive long-term improvements. These **changes have often resulted in ripple effects**, promoting better decision-making, increased community engagement, and ultimately fostering more resilient and effective local governments. However, the extent of these benefits varies, with some changes remaining at the individual level due to restrictive contexts or a lack of institutional support. The ongoing engagement of stakeholders in various contexts ensures that the momentum for positive change continues, leading to improved governance and service delivery across diverse settings.

Equipping local governments and associations with the tools and knowledge to improve governance and service provision is another important contribution. In 2024, SALAR International effectively utilised a range of tools and practices across different contexts to support local governments, ministries, and associations in improving governance, service delivery, and policy advocacy. Providing tools for data-driven decision-making improves policy and management decisions across countries. These tools provide essential insights for planning, allocating resources, and monitoring progress.

Tools for policy development and institutional strengthening enhance the capacity of Municipalities and Associations to develop and advocate for better policies. We have also created participatory platforms and dialogue mechanisms, which encourage collaboration between the government and local stakeholders. These platforms improve advocacy and ensure that policy development is informed by local contexts. Tools for financial transparency and management allow institutions to use resources more effectively and maintain accountability to citizens.

Despite challenges such as war and sectarianism, political polarisation and efforts to re-centralise governance, which limited the ability of local governments to influence higher levels of government directly, SALAR International found space to create or facilitate change at the local and national level. Overall, SALAR International's comprehensive and adaptive strategies have strengthened local government capacities, fostering more inclusive, transparent, and gender-sensitive governance. SALAR International has emphasised well-structured, evidence-based processes, providing Municipalities with handbooks and clear guidance to ensure systematic and long-term change. This has been particularly important in sectors like crisis management, migration, and urban planning, where SALAR International's inclusive methods have fostered multi-layered resilience.

During 2025, SALAR International will continue to engage in **new dialogues, partnerships and programming**, with a focus on the role that local and regional governments can – and should- play in the design and implementation of new infrastructure investments in low- and middle-income countries. In this regard, SALAR International will increase its engagement with the Swedish government, EU institutions and other actors in the public and private sector, concerning policies that **address global challenges, foster sustainable development, promote democratic values and enhance private sector led solutions**. Furthermore, in fragile states and crisis contexts, SALAR International will engage in the design and implementation of programmes supporting **inclusive recovery, community resilience and local public service delivery**. SALAR International anticipates a greater level of engagement in Team Europe and Team Sweden initiatives.

SALAR International's work highlights the power of inclusive governance and local empowerment in addressing global challenges. Looking ahead, the organisation remains committed to scaling its impact and contributing to sustainable development worldwide.

Administration Report

Perennial comparison

(KSEK)	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
Net sales	122 197	120 100	95 408	90 887	88 954
Operating profit	1 321	2 582	792	260	7 826
Res. by financial items	1 105	2 308	210	50	7 859
Total assets	53 516	50 220	49 852	50 370	51 736
Equity ratio (%) (1)	67,23	70,33	67,26	66,29	64,66
Return on equity (%) (2)	7,27	7,46	1,12	0,73	15,16
Return on assets (%) (3)	2,13	4,61	0,42	0,10	15,94
Average number of employees	26	25	27	26	27

(1) Adjusted equity/total assets, Adjusted equity means equity + untaxed reserves with deduction of deferred tax liability.

(2) Net profit/loss for the year/average equity.

(3) Profit/loss after financial items + interest expenses/average total assets.

Ownership

The parent company of which SALAR International is a subsidiary is the SALAR Group of Companies, corporate identity number 556117-7535, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of SALAR. SALAR and the SALAR Group of Companies have their domicile in Stockholm.

Proposal for appropriation of the company's profits

The following profits are available for appropriation at the annual general meeting

Profit brought forward from previous years	28 464 425
Profit/loss for the year	<u>2 590 555</u>
	31 054 980

The Board of Directors proposes that the following be carried forward

	<u>31 054 980</u>
	31 054 980

Proposal resolution on dividend

Regarding the company's earnings and position in general, reference is made to the subsequent income statement and balance sheet. All amounts are expressed in thousands of Swedish kronor unless otherwise stated.

Administration Report

INCOME STATEMENT	2024-01-01 2024-12-31	2023-01-01 2023-12-31
Operating income, etc.		
Net sales	122 197	120 100
Other operating income	95	10
	<u>122 292</u>	<u>120 110</u>
Operating expenses		
Other external costs	-89 498	-89 229
Personnel costs	-31 453	-28 289
Depreciation and write-downs	-7	-10
Other operating expenses	-13	0
	<u>-120 971</u>	<u>-117 528</u>
Operating profit	1 321	2 582
Profit from financial items		
Interest income	304	449
Interest expenses and similar profit and loss items	-520	-724
	<u>-216</u>	<u>-274</u>
Profit after financial items	1 105	2 308
Appropriations		
Reversal of accrual fund	2 474	2 240
Allocation to the allocation fund	0	-1 220
	<u>2 474</u>	<u>1 020</u>
Profit before tax	3 579	3 328
Tax on profit for the year	-988	-760
Profit for the year	<u><u>2 591</u></u>	<u><u>2 568</u></u>

Administration Report

BALANCE SHEET

ASSETS	2024-12-31	2023-12-31
Fixed assets		
Property, plant and equipment		
Inventory, tools and installations	0	19
	<u>0</u>	<u>19</u>
Total fixed assets	0	19
Current assets		
Current receivables		
Accounts receivable	50	15
Receivables from group companies	46 125	42 676
Current tax asset	0	222
Other receivables	4 978	5 441
Prepaid expenses and accrued income	1 218	352
	<u>52 371</u>	<u>48 706</u>
Cash and bank		
Cash and bank	1 145	1 495
Total cash and bank	<u>1 145</u>	<u>1 495</u>
Total current assets	53 516	50 201
TOTAL ASSETS	53 516	50 220

Administration Report

EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	2024-12-31	2024-12-31
Equity		
Restricted equity		
Share capital	1 000	1 000
Reserve fund	200	200
	<u>1 200</u>	<u>1 200</u>
Free equity		
Retained earnings	28 464	25 897
Profit for the year	2 591	2 568
	<u>31 055</u>	<u>28 464</u>
Total equity	<u>32 255</u>	<u>29 664</u>
Untaxed reserves		
Accrual fund	4 725	7 199
Total untaxed reserves	4 725	7 199
Current liabilities		
Accounts payable	8 052	6 494
Liabilities to Group companies	1	186
Current tax liabilities	231	0
Other liabilities	2 500	2 549
Accrued expenses and deferred income	5 752	4 128
Total current liabilities	<u>16 536</u>	<u>13 357</u>
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	53 516	50 220

*Please be aware that this is an abridged version of the full **SALAR International 2024 Results Report**.*

For more information, please visit www.salarinternational.se