



Annual Report 2023





"What drives our work is the idea that everyone deserves the chance to live a fulfilling and rewarding life."

Herbert Stepic



Thank you for your compassion and support!





Foreword

A message from Andreas Gschwenter



As a member of the RBI Management Board, but especially as a member of the Board of the Stepic CEE Charity, I am very proud of the achievements that the charity has been making since day one to alleviate the suffering of affected children and families in Central and Eastern Europe.

In the regions where we have established our presence as a bank, a distressing number of young individuals face the daunting reality of being disconnected from education, employment, and training opportunities. Yet, the circumstances of one's early life should never be a limiting factor in shaping their future potential. The Stepic CEE Charity has supported numerous young people from economically disadvantaged communities. We are proud that our joint efforts have transformed so many lives by empowering them to learn, earn, and grow.

For another year, we have dedicated our energy to fighting poverty in Central and Eastern Europe. We focused on social and educational projects for women and children, as these groups of people are often the most vulnerable and educational measures in childhood have the greatest long-term effect.

Read in this report how we managed to alleviate suffering and, at the same time, give the recipients a way to take their lives into their own hands.



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Ukraine Focus

The Kids Safe Haven program was launched, in cooperation with Raiffeisen Bank Ukraine in Kyiv, which is intended to support small projects of up to EUR 5,000 to help Ukrainian kids, affected by the war, quickly and unbureaucratically.

The supported organizations include schools, charitable foundations, hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, boarding schools, orphanages, and others located in different cities and regions. The CEE Charity has released EUR 400,000 for this project; an expansion is possible as required.

Help in times of war.

Ukraine has been a priority country for the CEE Charity for many years. We are currently supporting, among others, a project in Odessa. Furthermore, since the outbreak of the war at the end of February 2022, the CEE Charity has provided immediate as well as project aid worth more than EUR 800,000. We support initiatives in the border areas next to Romania, Slovakia, and the Republic of Moldova, as well as displaced people in Austria.

In addition to the project Kids Safe Haven and the project in Odessa, new projects are being supported on a continuous basis.

Kids Safe Haven

Kids Safe Haven supports preschool, primary and secondary education institutions, hospitals, orphanages, dormitories, and other social infrastructure facilities, as well as charitable funds.

Institutions and bodies can easily submit their application for financial support using a form on the Raiffeisen Bank Ukraine website.

Shortly after the program started in December 2023, grants were awarded to, among others, an educational institution and a children's hospital. In addition, school furniture was purchased, a kindergarten in the Kyiv region was equipped with art, sports and office materials, and much more.

Kids Safe Haven is a program to meet the needs of children affected by war. The help can be used for the following purposes:

1. Aid for the repair or renovation of buildings or other property of the beneficiaries to ensure the safety of children and in the event of damage due to combat operations.
2. Help ensure education and training for children in Ukraine.
3. Help to ensure the recovery and rehabilitation of children in Ukraine.
4. Any other financial support to ensure the security and meet the needs of children in Ukraine affected by combat operations or in need of assistance.



Foreword by Herbert Stepic

The year 2023 has been a year full of suffering, humanitarian tragedies, and heartache. Also, in Ukraine the continued war has brought another year of pain and despair to so many. Families were torn apart and lost their homes. Children have been deprived of the opportunity to pursue a regular educational path.

With our Charity, supported by our many supporters we implemented important projects during the past year and, together with the local Raiffeisen banks, were once again able to help many people in need.

Among many other projects realized in 2023, our focus was on the implementation of the project "Safe Haven". This project is dedicated to Ukraine. In cooperation with Raiffeisen Bank Ukraine in Kyiv, supported by numerous employees in the bank branches, we have launched a wide range of projects in many cities and villages. A budget of around 500,000 € has been

earmarked just for this purpose. "Safe Haven" is a lighthouse project for the CEE Charity, with the aim to provide fast support based on the urgent needs of local communities.

My very special thanks go to the RBI Management Board and the many colleagues in RBI who support the CEE Charity and devote their time to our projects, deliberately and successfully. Without the great support of RBI, we would not be able to operate at this high level of quality and at the same time marginal administrative costs. Last, but not least I want to thank our sponsors who generously support the CEE Charity; your donations enable us to develop and sustain the many projects that make a real difference in the daily life of so many children and young women in our region!

Yours
Herbert Stepic



People engagement is the Stepic CEE Charity's success

"Helping people help themselves" is not just F. W. Raiffeisen's motto put into practice for disadvantaged children, young people, and women in Central and Eastern Europe. The dedicated volunteers are role models for living the values of Raiffeisen Bank International and putting them into practice by using their know-how, time, and creativity to change the lives of so many people in need.

> Who we are

Highly motivated employees of Raiffeisen Bank International and its subsidiary banks in Central and Eastern Europe. By volunteering and bringing in our know-how and "hands-on" mentality we deliver help where it is needed most.

> How we help

By creating for children, juveniles and women the chance of a self-determined life and an independent future through sustainable development and education projects.

> What we do

Our focus is on education as the most sustainable mean of overcoming poverty. By our projects we offer children and women in need tutorials, assistance and warm meals. Education and training shall support them on their way to an independent life.

We do not incur any administrative costs, so the donations flow directly and entirely into our projects.

If you would like to know more, please visit our website www.stepicceecharity.org or follow us on [LinkedIn](#).

RBI's Sustainability Premiums



RBI donates sustainability premiums to the CEE Charity

The three letters ESG do not only stand for environmental, social and governance, they cover an entire development that is currently changing society, economy and people's behavior and thus also has a massive impact on banking. RBI is committed to responsible banking. It was the first bank in Austria to sign the UN Principles for Responsible Banking and supports its customers in Austria and CEE with sustainable financial products and comprehensive know-how. Customers shall be incentivized by lower premium if they improve their sustainability performance in environmental, social and governance terms.

If the borrower's ESG performance improves, the credit margin goes down and vice versa.

RBI does not want to benefit financially from a borrower's non-achievement of an ESG target. In 2023, RBI has therefore committed to donating any resulting sustainability premiums (from loans to corporate customers) to the CEE Charity.

It all started with Adrienn Petres-Majsa who worked in the Sustainable Finance Solutions team at RBI. When a client came up with the intention to have a donation structure in its sustainable finance agreement with RBI, she had the idea to propose a systematic approach within RBI's Corporate Board area to donate the sustainability premiums for a charitable cause. Since then, the donation structure in RBI is implemented for existing and for new sustainability-linked transactions.

RBI is unique in the market with this approach.



"The Stepic CEE Charity makes an important contribution to society in all the countries in which Raiffeisen Bank International AG operates. As a member of the management board of RBI and future board member of the Stepic CEE Charity, I see myself as a link between the two organizations. Sustainability plays a major role in both organizations. For RBI, taking ESG risks into account is part of our daily business. In the context of financing, this means: When the ESG performance of a borrower ameliorates, the margin also improves, and our customers receive a sustainability discount on their financing. In the opposite case, if ESG performance deteriorates, there is a sustainability premium. As a responsible banker, we support and encourage our clients in their sustainability efforts. It is consistent with RBI's values to donate any sustainability premiums to a charitable cause. RBI has therefore prolonged its initiative to donate premiums from sustainability-linked financings to be paid by customers who do not meet agreed environmental, social and governance indicators to the Stepic CEE Charity for the next three years."

Valerie Brunner

RBI Board Member
Stepic CEE Charity



**Engagement
Highlights
2023**

A safe haven for Ukrainian children



In cooperation with Raiffeisen Bank Ukraine in Kyiv, the Kids Safe Haven program was launched, which is intended to support small projects of up to EUR 5,000 to help children in Ukraine affected by the war quickly and unbureaucratically. The supported organizations include schools, charitable foundations, hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, boarding schools, orphanages, and others located in different cities and regions. The CEE Charity has released EUR 400,000 for this project; an expansion is possible.



The project at a glance

- > Help for children affected by war
- > Education and training
- > € 400,000 in total for Ukraine
- > Supported from the Merck Family Foundation

Kids Safe Haven is a program to meet the needs of children affected by war. We ensure education and training for children in Ukraine. We support recovery and rehabilitation of children in Ukraine. The help can further be used for to repair or renovate buildings damaged as a result of combat operations. Our goal is to meet the needs of children in Ukraine affected by combat operations or in need of assistance.



Ready for high school

Romania is the EU country with the highest school dropout rate. The Casa Bună association works with at-risk children in Romania to enable them to transfer to high school.



The project at a glance

- > 45 children
- > Graduation from elementary school
- > Tutoring in Romanian and mathematics
- > Study groups
- > Learning camps

In Romania, schoolchildren must pass a demanding standard exam in Romanian language/literature and mathematics at the end of the 8th grade in order to be accepted into secondary school. The children cannot afford expensive tutoring and the parents also come from less educated backgrounds. Almost all children in care are the first in their family to go to secondary school. In some cases, the parents are abroad, in prison or addicted to drugs.

The children are guided through the complicated process of registering for the national standard examination and choosing a secondary school. The children take the exam at the end of June. In July, Casa Bună awards scholarships to the most successful students to cover the costs of back to school, clothing, books, and transport.



Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo

We have been supporting Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo since autumn 2023. 600 young people from disadvantaged population groups have the opportunity to receive an education.

The project at a glance

- > 600 young people
- > 5-15 years old
- > five learning centers
- > 30 tutors

Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo offers learning support and afternoon care at five locations for up to 600 children and young people. Former Sunflower children help younger ones as tutors. In return, they are accompanied on their way through secondary school or university and receive textbooks, on-the-job training, tutoring for their lessons and valuable experience.



Pictures: Copyright © Jugend Eine Welt

Employment Support Program

This program has been established in 2019 and since then, supported over 80 Roma street children. The main problem addressed by the project is unemployment and lack of access to the labour market among of street-involved and formally street involved Roma youth. Since last year the Stepic CEE Charity is partner in this important program.

The project at a glance

- > 47 beneficiaries who were supported to start working formally
- > 51 beneficiaries have gained formal certificates
- > VET theory (Vocational Education and Training) classes
- > Support Roma youth to complete secondary level education

Lack of education is one of the major obstacles Roma Street involved youth is facing in order to be competitive in the labour market. Education support is, therefore, a key component. Throughout their participation in the program, beneficiaries are provided support to continue education and provided constant tailored learning support. Collectively, this approach supports beneficiaries to acquire skills and knowledge, build self-confidence, which are key to developing resilience and coping in a competitive labour market.



Future in your schoolbag

One of our association's guiding principles is that education is a long-term investment in the future that pays off for every individual. Since the program "Future in your schoolbag" started more than 10 years ago, we have been working to make a lasting impact on the lives of children in need in Central and Eastern Europe.

In 2023 the Stepic CEE Charity has supported a total of around 1,600 children, 1,000 of them as part of the "Future in your schoolbag" program, which provides children not only with schoolbags but also with materials needed for daily school attendance. In Romania, for example, together with our project partner Casa Buna and Raiffeisen Bank Romania, we helped to ease the financial burden on hundreds of families and ensure that children have unhindered access to education. The same applies for Kosovo, as a further example, where we together with Raiffeisen Bank Kosovo, provided support to children from marginalized communities. Additionally, we also distributed school supplies in Bosnia and Herzegovina through our local project partner, Medo.



Free and compulsory elementary education is a human right. Equal access to education is a priority for the Stepic CEE Charity because the doors to education must be open to everyone. With the ongoing support of the "Future in your schoolbag" program from our sponsors and individual donors, we will continue to foster dreams and create a world where every child can grow through education.



Digital Contribution

Autonomous power supplies and hardware for online lessons.

A war brings suffering, injury and death. And it shows us dramatically how vulnerable societies are. When war breaks out, the affected areas quickly lack a lot of things that were previously taken for granted. First and foremost, this includes the constant supply of electricity. However, electricity is what keeps our modern world running. Without electricity, people are quickly left in the dark and cut off from the rest of the world - and children also from access to education - without a functioning means of communication. This is the situation, which many families in Ukraine are facing currently.

With the project "Dream Energy", the Stepic CEE Charity, together with its local partner "Mriya Ukraine Foundation", helped to alleviate the most immediate energy poverty. The beneficiaries are Ukrainian families in which at least one family member is considered a victim of war (killed, missing or prisoner of war). The aim was to give these families autonomous access to electricity during the permanent power cuts. A total of 2,000 families were provided with autonomous power



supplies in the form of power banks with a capacity of 10,000mAh each.

However, the war has also taken a physical toll on many people. Many school-age children were so badly injured in the chaos of war that they are unable to attend lessons at school. For them, either online lessons are offered, or they can study



independently via the internet. The Stepic CEE Charity provides the necessary devices - tablets and laptops - via "Mriya".

Another of our association's projects is also working towards the same goal. The project partner "Helping Hand" also provides tablets for online lessons: Due to the difficult security situation in some areas, for many children, even those who are unharmed, it



is not regularly possible to attend lessons in their school building. For this reason, lessons are often held online, which means that these children need the appropriate digital hardware. If they are lucky enough to have a laptop or tablet at home, they can regularly take part in lessons. However, many families are not in this fortunate position. This is where our local project partner "Helping Hand" in Uzhgorod helps in two ways: The organization's teachers visit pupils from families who do not yet have digital devices for online lessons twice a

week to teach them and bring them new learning materials. At the same time, they are gradually trying to equip more and more pupils with suitable devices so that they can regularly take part in online lessons together with their classmates.

In 2023, a total of 3 projects with a total volume of just under € 37,000 were implemented. This enabled 34 tablets, 62 laptops and 2,000 power banks to be handed over to children and families in Ukraine.



Our footprint

**The Stepic CEE Charity
operates in RBI's markets**

Total number of beneficiaries 2023

- 218 in Albania
- 840 in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 104 in Bulgaria
- 15 in Croatia
- 15 in Hungary
- 1388 in Romania
- 859 in Serbia
- 930 in Slovakia
- 100 in Ukraine
- 80 in Moldavia
- 1130 in Kosovo
- 4433 in Ukraine

**Together we
impacted the lives
of 10,112 children
and women.**





Why do we engage as a charity?

The Stepic CEE Charity not only puts F. W. Raiffeisen's motto into practice by offering "Help for Self-help" for disadvantaged children, young people and women in Central and Eastern Europe. The dedicated volunteers are role models for living up to RBI's values and translating them into action by using their know-how, time and creativity to change the lives of so many people in need.

**What one cannot
achieve alone, many can.**

F. W. Raiffeisen



My dedication to the Stepic CEE Charity is a testament to my belief in the transformative power of education. It's not just about being socially responsible, it's about breathing life into the principle of "Help for Self-help." What drives me is a profound social consciousness, an innate desire to contribute not just financially but as an integral part of a larger cause. The joy of witnessing the direct impact of our collective efforts, the success stories of those we've aided, fuels my passion.

Ulf Wallmann



"For years I'm getting my monthly salary from a financial institution doing its business mainly in doing their business mainly in the CEE region – hence, I like the idea, to give something in return and to support the people there. To engage for the Stepic CEE Charity is a great, meaningful activity besides the daily job and helps a little bit to set the right priorities in business as well as in private life."

Hedwig Ziernhöld-Pichler



"Despite being retired, I actively engage with Stepic CEE Charity, leveraging my resources to make a meaningful difference in the lives of disadvantaged children, young adults, and women across the CEE region."

Anita Filaus

Frequently asked Questions

Visit our [website](#) to learn more about the Stepic CEE Charity.

Subscribe to our [newsletter](#) to never miss any news.
#EducationMeansFuture

How can I describe the Stepic CEE Charity to family and friends?

The Stepic CEE Charity supports disadvantaged children, adolescents, and women in Central and Eastern Europe. Thanks to its deep local roots, pragmatic approach, and active support from RBI's subsidiary banks, the Stepic CEE Charity offers the prospect of a self-determined future beyond poverty.

Education is the key to this. All projects are aimed at a sustainable change and are carried out in cooperation with renowned local or international partner organizations and supervised by volunteers from RBI in Vienna and its CEE subsidiaries.

This keeps administrative costs to a minimum, and all financial contributions go directly to the projects. The Stepic CEE Charity is on the official list of charitable organizations (kept by the Austrian Ministry of Finance), meaning your donations are tax deductible in Austria.

How can I become a member?

You can subscribe directly online at our website. As a member you are invited to participate in our Annual General Meeting and discuss the Stepic CEE Charity's future as well as receive our yearly Board reports. The annual fee for a regular membership is € 50 and € 500 for an extraordinary membership.

How does the Stepic CEE Charity generate its donations?

The Stepic CEE Charity is supported by RBI through the Corporate Volunteering Program in order to keep the administrative costs as low as possible. All donations by members, individuals and sponsors are spent for our beneficiaries. Like any other charity organization, we depend heavily on recurring contributions from our members and donors, necessary to continue our current projects and to initiate new ones. We welcome any form of support and encourage you to become a member.

How does tax deductibility work?

If you are taxable in Austria we take care of it. Please make sure to state your date of birth and your full name in the reference in all your bank transactions, so we can link your donation to you. You can find out more about the deductibility of donations on our website.

Can I visit a project?

The heart senses what the eye sees. When we see children in need, there is a strong urge to help them immediately. This reaction and feeling are understandable and often the reason our (team) members join us in the first place. However, the dignity of the children we support is very important to us and logistics is a challenge, too. We invite you instead to follow us on our various communication channels where we update you on the progress of our projects regularly.

Is the Stepic CEE Charity audited?

Yes. The Stepic CEE Charity Management, receives and evaluates the financial reports, on a regular basis. The statement of accounts and the financial statements are audited by our internal independent auditors. In addition, the Compliance Comitee verifies the regularity of incoming and outgoing donations and whether conflicts of interest prevail for donations above a certain amount. Since the founding of the Stepic CEE Charity, KPMG Austria GmbH Wirtschaftsprüfungs- und Steuerberatungsgesellschaft is our external auditor. Its role is to confirm according to §4a EstG that more than 90% of our association's total expenditure is used for beneficial purposes.

Who selects the projects and what are the criteria?

The project proposals reach us through different channels: our colleagues at RBI, subsidiaries, project partners and/or private individuals. According to our focus, we pre-select them in conformance with our Articles of Association and other comprehensive criteria. In-depth discussions based on objective criteria and input from all stakeholders such as project managers and legal counsels follow. Once all information and funds are available, a decision about the project is finally taken in a Management meeting. For further information on how we work, please visit our website.

You like what the Stepic CEE Charity does?

You want to get involved with the Stepic CEE Charity but don't know what your part could be?

"What one cannot achieve alone, many can." Remember? Every single stroke contributes to painting a bigger picture. Every single contribution counts to give children a better future. By joining us as member for only € 50 a year, you can impact the lives of those who need it the most.

Become engaged, become a member, support us with your contribution!

> **"Do something wonderful.
People may imitate it."** <

Albert Schweitzer



Click here and sign up!



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done it without you!**

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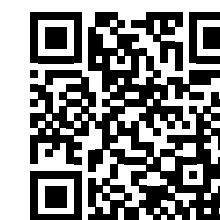
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