



UN PONTE PER

STRATEGY

2021-2025

BUILDING BRIDGES NOT WALLS

Approved by the Steering Committee of UN PONTE PER

Rome, December 21st, 2021

Summary

- 1. Premise 4
- 2. Preface 6
- 3. Looking ahead 12
- 4. Strategy 2021-2025 15

Premise

The present document marks Un Ponte Per's decision to adopt a five-year strategic plan, instead of the usual three-year plan. This will enable us to establish medium-term strategic goals and to focus our efforts in a clearer and broader way. Instead of reacting to the changing context, we will focus on the impact we want to produce.

It will free us from constraints imposed by the requirements of any given context and will allow us to concentrate our efforts on achieving our predetermined goals. We have identified a pathway of quantifiable goals which we feel represent our core identity, as well as how we intend to achieve them. These specific goals will be the foundations of our Annual Action Plan, designed to help us identify the year's work plan, while showing us how far we have come along our pathway and how efficient are our initiatives, so they can be improved upon over time.

This strategy expresses our absolute commitment to our goals and the coherence of how we will achieve them.

Since Un Ponte Per has been active for thirty years, this strategy was written in collaboration with our staff in Italy as well as our field workers, activists, members of UPP and representatives of local associations and groups.

This long collaborative process, which evolved gradually as different priority areas were identified, was articulated as follows during 2020:

- In-depth evaluation of the most recent three-year strategy.
- A group meeting on May 15th to facilitate detailed discussion and reflection.
- Three public seminars on current geopolitical trends, the role of organised civil society in the process of social and political transformation in

the Middle East and North Africa, and UPP's contribution and expectations in Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.

- Evaluation of our upcoming commitments in North Africa (Tunisia and Libya), and the relaunch of past initiatives with local civil society.
- Integration of country strategies in the five-year strategy.
- Collection and elaboration of outcome data, as summarised in this proposal for our Assembly, where our specific and general goals must be identified and elaborated.

During these phases, the following recommendations were made, in relation to the definition of our specific goals and initiatives:

- Implement more initiatives in Italy.
- Increase UPP's financial independence.
- Include access to healthcare as a structural factor of people's self-determination and territorial ownership, particularly during Covid times.
- Establishment of fair-trade economies based on solidarity and cooperation to facilitate employment opportunities and income generation (with a special focus on young people) in times of crisis.
- Greater focus on our eco-feminist perspective and mode of action.
- Prioritise young women and men in decision-making and on grassroots action.
- Boost conflict-prevention work and address the structural injustices which provoke deprivation, discrimination and inequality.
- Strengthen our work on the ground through constant dialogue with our local partners and communities about shared initiatives, beyond sparse occasions for collaborative project design.
- Consider our localisation strategy for development initiatives, in an attempt to disprove the perception of humanitarian aid and development as colonialism, while promoting our role as protec-

tors and de-fenders of human rights.

- Boost our status and reputation in sectors including education for peace, training (for example, UPP should be registered as a training company with MIUR, the Italian Ministry for Education and Research) and research (through collaboration with universities etc.).

- Explore opportunities to expand our activities in North Africa, starting with Tunisia and Libya, offering concrete solidarity to those suffering the long-term consequences of colonialism, while holding a critical stance of current European and Italian migration policies.

- Consider the importance of this strategy as a means to communicate UPP's mission to all those we meet or work with.



Preface

WHAT IS UN PONTE PER?

Un Ponte Per is an association which has been working in conflict prevention since 1991, mainly in the Middle East, through awareness campaigns and advocacy for human rights, disarmament, cultural exchange, cooperation projects and peace building programmes. The association re-jects war as a means of resolution for international conflict and strives to build peace and soli-darity between peoples, by promoting their right to self-determination. UPP encourages ex-change and interaction between cultures, genders, and different traditions, in order to promote a plural society based on equality, justice and a mutually beneficial way of life in full respect of the dignity of individuals and communities.

Un Ponte Per's main areas of work are intrinsically linked: initiatives to support victims of war; political commitment to relieve the underlying causes of war; and the creation of a strong civil society network.

Un Ponte Per acts as a hub for national and international networks, because a better world will only be achieved by improving relations between its peoples. Our association works alongside civil society and social movements in its contexts of intervention; promoting platforms and pro-jects in support of associations, trade unions and local NGOs dedicated to facilitating non-violent con-

flict resolution, social and environmental justice, and the defence of human rights.

Un Ponte Per is committed to implementing high quality projects with a special focus on self-determination for the beneficiary communities and populations, by enhancing partnerships while respecting individual points of view and above all the political and social circumstances of every person and situation involved in the projects.

Un Ponte Per is an intrinsically pacifist association founded upon a belief in international soli-darity; however, structurally it is an NGO, with development projects and programmes designed with this spirit. Since its foundation, advocacy has been at its very core – crucially, we do not seek to speak for the men and women victims of injustice and conflict; rather, UPP seeks to cre-ate opportunities for the voices to make themselves heard in order to make a difference. We un-der-take political initiatives to launch awareness-raising campaigns and calls to action, including pressuring institutions for disarmament and greater social justice. This is backed up by grass-roots education, in the spirit of 'mutualism', for example on migration issues. The association al-so works with twinning programmes initiatives, training courses and workshops for students, and training courses for teachers and parents of students of all ages, in order to educate young girls and boys about a 'culture for peace' and to facilitate mutual understanding. UPP workers and volunteers operate in many areas across the Mediterranean, and thanks to our development projects they have the privilege of experiencing situations very few people will ever know about: their 'voices' need to be taken into schools and places of formal or informal education.

OUR WORLD VIEW

The world has changed in the 30 years since our foundation. We have witnessed the collapse of the bipolar power structures, where the winds of war and conflict constantly swept an ever more globalised world, culminating in the war on 'terror' triggered by the attacks on September 11th, 2001, and the hellish devastation caused by armed fundamentalist and integralist groups, with their persecution of minorities and establishment of fundamentalist and theocratic regimes. Obsession with antiterrorism legislation on both sides resulted in perverse side-effects, including islamophobia and the repression of political dissent, which in turn brought about, in the name of security, a gradual reduction of fundamental human rights which we thought were guaranteed. The capitalist system generated new divisions, considering everything - including every hour of our lives - only in monetary terms, dehumanising work into a hellish pirouette of economic and financial crises which make it impossible to reconcile human security¹ with economic growth.

Visible and invisible border walls were built up, bringing death and oppression to thousands of men and women, victims of new and old forms of racism and discrimination. We were active in the 'No War' demonstrations and in the global anti-liberalism movement, and we supported the betrayed and quashed Arabic revolutions. Currently, we are tackling the Covid-19 pandemic in the Arab world and beyond, where the next generations are challenging norms of identity, sectarian division, corruption, exploitation, patriarchy and the organisation of democracy, in their struggle for environmental, economic and social sustainability.

In light of these recent events, Un Ponte Per is going against the tide. In the words of the famous Italian singer-songwriter Fabrizio De André, we move "in direzione ostinata e contraria" (lit. 'In a stubborn and contrary direction'). Despite great change over the years, we have never lost sight of the core reasons for Un Ponte Per's foundation in 1991. We have always been and will continue to be allied with the pacifist movement and supporters of international solidarity between peoples. We have continued our work to support victims of war during bombing raids and dictatorships, fully committed to making connections, restoring hope, breaking down walls and building bridges.

UPP is intrinsically aligned with a feminist view of the world, given the importance we give to gender issues and efforts to break with patriarchal power systems.

Years ago, we decided to become a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO): this decision allowed us to access development funds, brought greater understanding and opportunities for long-term fieldwork with local partners and activists, while improving our reputation in Italy and around the world. But our NGO status has also brought challenges relating to superstructure and hierarchisation, including the loss of some services, and the fact that we now depend on funding from some of the very institutions whose hurtful actions we are trying to 'heal'. We are protected from these challenges by our on-going and participatory approach to localisation - 70% of Un Ponte Per staff are local hires and all our projects are implemented in synergy with local workers and people who are striving to build a better future for themselves. The direction we are taking is dictated by strong internal policies founded on reflection and in-depth consideration of recent world events in keeping with our means and our goals. To this aim, we have identified a broad range of core values, and their relative operational considerations, to ensure our political legitimacy and spirit of solidarity are upheld. Immense individual and collective efforts in self-awareness and self-discipline ensure that these values are at the core of all our work from the earliest planning stages, by sharing them with our partners and the communities that host us.

We are also very careful when it comes to how we are funded: not only in terms of funding sources, but also on how donors could be perceived by the local communities, with a special effort to avoid undermining self-determination efforts by competing for funds with local organisations. We often need to make difficult decisions to sacrifice UPP structures and staff, to avoid the ‘trap’ of self-funding.

The decision to increase Un Ponte Per’s presence in Italy, in this delicate period in our country’s history, is becoming increasingly relevant. As an association, we rely heavily on our volunteers, who act as our ‘antibodies’, by actively monitoring our political coherence and our organised civil commitment, as well as internal matters of decision-making and communication. A good example of this is the integration of the Universal Civil Service programme and of the Civil Peace Corps in Italy, Lebanon and Jordan, who not only play an active role in our NGO activities but also offer

new ideas and build bridges with new groups and partners, representing UPP in formal and community networks.

We must strengthen our network, to increase the exchange of ideas about our goals and our means, to reach a critical mass with our advocacy when facing massive and unknown counterparts, to encourage a better and stronger distribution of local and international efforts. To this aim, joining forces around a ‘hub’ of individuals and associations is more important than ever. It will be an experiment in setting up a collective of associations, following the Ya Basta model in Padua, AMAD in Ancona and ‘Memoria in Movimento’ (“Memory on the Move”) which is soon to be founded in Salerno.



THEORY OF CHANGE

When an enormous global transition of economics and power lead to the emergence of a new balance of superpowers, a cold war has been triggered and fought in other countries (war by proxy), based on military might, trade and technology. This renewed the threat of war on this side of the bridge. When economic power is wielded by 'corporations' rather than states - who become mere imprisoned surrogates of private economic interests, thus minimising the typical separation between state, market and the third sector - the role of patriarchal and military logic is reaffirmed, regardless of the ecosystem's fragility. The market is fluid, multi-faceted and hard to identify and therefore challenge; it depends entirely on the exploitation of people and natural resources; the wellbeing and indeed the survival of humankind (99%, as the Occupy protestors shouted) are sacrificed on the altar of quarterly economic reports introduced by financiers who are invading the real economy. Our house is on fire, as Greta Thunberg said. It's time to act.

The survival of humankind will depend on a new model for sustainable economic development which separates local and international relations, whether economic or social, from the system of extreme competition for cooperation funds.

If we go back to the start, most European countries bear responsibility for interfering in politics beyond their own borders, provoking sectarian division within populations and installing a ruling class from minorities which wielded power through violence and repression. The economic system which arose from this - the 'rentier' state - has failed.

As Europeans, it is our duty to bring neo-colonialisation to an end: this is the first of many nec-essary actions to move beyond this time of crisis. The struggle against European neocolonialism and the introduction of co-development are the main contributions that the international soli-darity movement can make in support of movements striving for change.

Now more than ever, peace is a conscious political construction. But the economic resources and power of Italy and Europe mean they have a role to play, provided they can discard any co-olonial ambitions for influence to benefit the financial interests of their own élite. Peace-building policy is contingent on maintaining absolute neutrality towards diverse political systems in neighbouring countries - going beyond just the expectation (and potential benefits) of conflict between others, but actively using the key instruments of foreign policy and trade for conflict prevention.

Un Ponte Per's movement for peace must therefore establish goals and promote decolonisation policies through Italian and European foreign policy and trade, with a focus on exclusively civil - rather than military - action. It must gather and promote the beliefs of civil society and human rights defenders in the countries where UPP is operational. It must demand that institutions protect their freedoms; freedom of expression and the right to protest.

Meanwhile, not far from Un Ponte Per, Italy and the European continent, armed conflicts continue to rage in Maghreb and Mashreq, regions which were colonised following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. Here, since the Gulf War of 1989 and the failure of the enforced neo-colonial reset (itself characterised by competition and disagreement), the actions of European nations, Russia, USA and more recently Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and China have provoked a massive

structural, economic - and existential - crisis. This crisis became a root cause of wars for hegemony, fomenting jihadism and a wave of popular up-risings.

In recent decades, a large and varied civil society has been built up in the Maghreb and Mashreq countries, boosting protest movements and getting involved with popular mobilisation, with strong support from the younger generations. If we are to support these civil society movements as possible drivers of change, we need to ensure that they receive enough funding to achieve their goal of social transformation, change and the provision of services designed to test new concepts of rights. The goal of 'aid localisation' as discussed in the Grand Bargain², depends on the reinforcement of civil society if aid is to be considered more than just a summary of service provision.

It is vital that the localisation and financing of social innovation evolve together, extending beyond the concept of resilience: otherwise, local civil society groups risk becoming mere service providers, working within limits imposed by the dominant powers. That would render social change impossible and, by taking the place of the State, would facilitate the State's failure to fulfil its duties toward citizens.

The current conception of aid for development and humanitarian assistance stems from a school of thought which is still unable to acknowledge the importance of decolonisation or outcome-based financing to bring about positive change and improvement.

Un Ponte Per's approach to international cooperation is based on creating an alliance for change. The countries we work in have shown us how institutional donors prioritise financial guarantees over results, and have always preferred Western organisations, particularly the largest ones. In these cases, criteria such as access to - and acceptance by - local communities, or process and results,

were largely ignored nor taken into consideration.

Un Ponte Per has been actively trying to address these issues with some international NGOs and donor partners. Meanwhile, UPP is encouraging local NGOs to take the lead in initiatives, even offering to concede our own role in long-term partnership agreements with donors to ensure space for local access to funds.

Within this context, Un Ponte Per acknowledges the commitment required by local civil society organisation to get prepared and ready to deal with donors' exorbitant requests. They will have to demonstrate their progress in reaching their goals, adapt their own governance dynamic, ideals and aims (internal coherence), while adopting procedures that could be too demanding for small organisations working in hostile environments for forming associations.

In order to establish strong alliances for change to ensure a real localisation of funds, we cannot simply withdraw from all the countries where we are working; but as a first meaningful step, we can start helping local civil society get prepared as described above. Our goal is not just to encourage more direct funding for local NGOs, but also to help establish the necessary framework for that to become the consolidated norm.

To achieve this, in keeping more than ever with Un Ponte Per's core identity, we will be setting up a department (in Italy and in the field) dedicated to social research and continuous learning³ with beneficiary communities, starting with a participatory analysis of the current context to better understand the impact of initiatives in terms of social transformation. A solid basis in research would enable our local allies to plan their work with greater precision, while on this side of the bridge it would enhance our advocacy work. This important hub would also help us with the complex process of cooper-

ating on project design with the local community, which is frequently underestimated. This new structure will be useful in many ways, including the identification of political indicators to gauge how the local communities feel about the project outcomes, instead of using obsolete criteria which were designed based on values elaborated and set within the Western context, and largely unrelated to that of the project.

No other international NGOs have adopted this approach, and most of them use simple risk assessment tools to evaluate any potentially damaging side effects, to avoid 'doing harm'⁴.



OUR KEY OBJECTIVES

1. Promotion of human security and well-being for all women and men in the current global context of economic and power injustice, with a special focus on the most vulnerable groups including those enduring armed conflict, by providing guarantees of freedom and the defence of the rights of individuals and communities.
2. Contribution to the reaffirmation of the central role of civil society as key stakeholders in the democratic structure for change..
3. Support the leadership role of the next generation in establishing models for a more inclusive society based on notions of solidarity and environmental and social justice, feminism and eco-pacifism.

OUR MEANS

- International cooperation and social project development.
- Establishment of initiatives and networks to promote solidarity, environmental and social justice and mobilisation.
- Campaigns for advocacy, awareness-raising and social communication.
- Training, social research and self-training.
- Exchange of best practice.
- Self-evaluation.

OUR APPROACHES

- Decolonisation of cooperation and terminology.
- Ecological transformation to a carbon-zero goal.
- Increase participatory processes.
- Maintain transparency at all times.
- Consolidate an activist vision of humanitarianism beyond the dogma of neutrality (meant as indifference or staying equally removed from all stakeholders), in recognition of our legal, operational and ethical obligations in ensuring the respect of human rights and basic freedoms of one stakeholder against any entity which may want to ignore or remove them.
- Maintain our strong cross-sectorial focus on gender issues, with full awareness that every initiative has a different impact on men and women, and that in some cases there will be a need for positive discrimination in favour of the most vulnerable and under-represented stakeholders.



STRATEGY 2021-2025

Sector **HUMAN SECURITY**



The promotion of the human security and wellbeing of all women and men in a current global context of economic and social injustice, with a special focus on the most vulnerable, including those living through armed conflict, through the defence of freedoms and human rights of individuals and communities.

Sector **CIVIL SOCIETY**



Help establish the central role of civil society in social and political processes as a vital stake-holder in democracy and the quest for change.

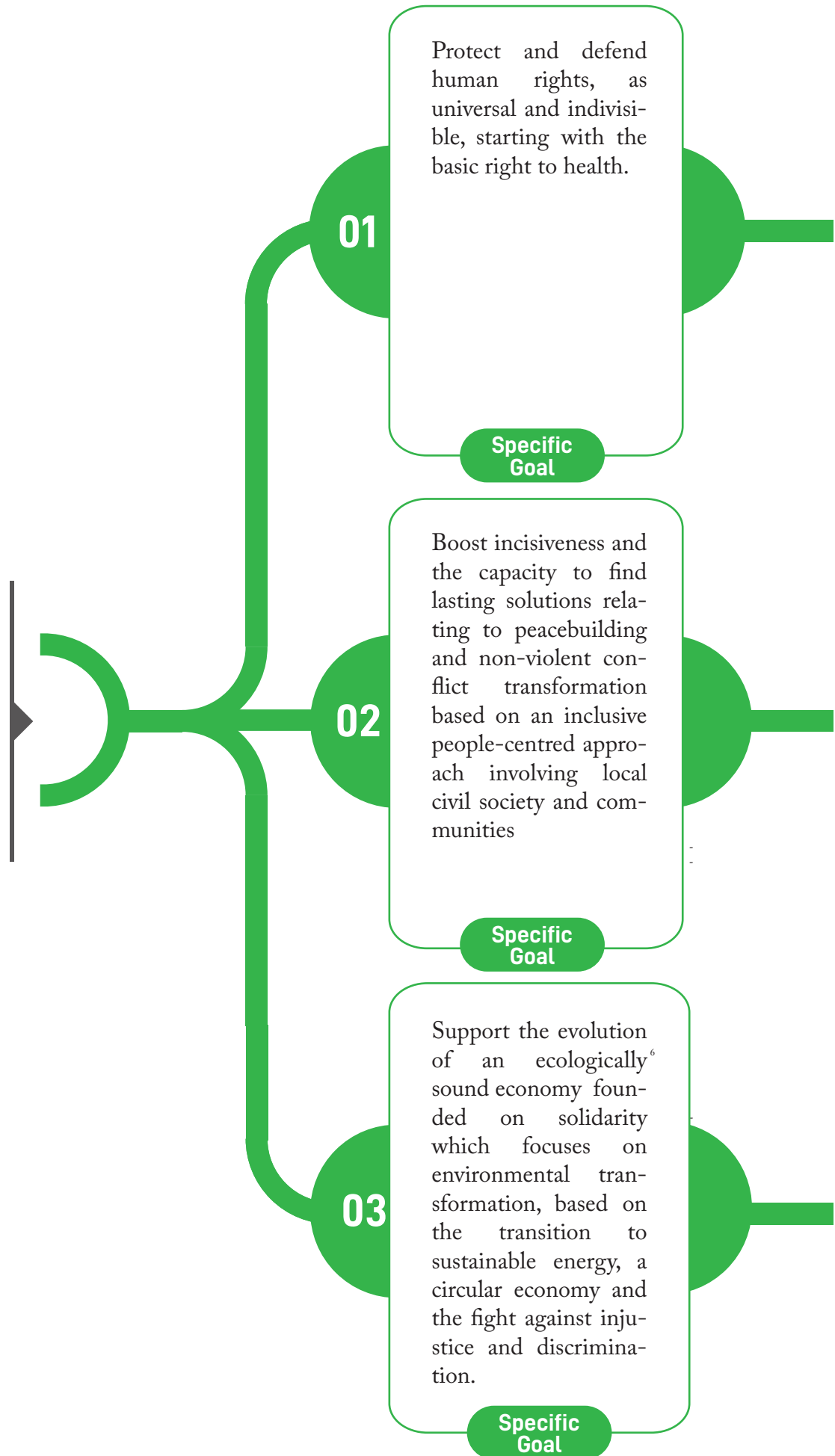
Sector **LEADERSHIP OF THE NEXT GENERATION**



Support active leadership by the next generation for the establishment of an inclusive society founded on solidarity and principles of environmental and social justice, feminism and eco-pacifism⁵.

Our general and specific goals will run simultaneously in our international projects and in our social project initiatives in Italy and Europe, in a way which ensures they are mirrored and inter-connected but not identical, so that their relevance to the respective contexts is guaranteed.

Sector
**HUMAN
SECURITY**



- 01 Strengthen the capacity for assertion and self-protection of the most vulnerable members of the population in UPP project countries, suffering from limited access to economic, social and cultural rights.
- 02 Support all human rights defenders, individually and collectively, in their work of promotion of human rights in UPP project countries.
- 03 Reinforce local public healthcare services in UPP project countries, upholding the notion of basic healthcare as an inclusive, fair and sustainable system for the protection of the population's right to health.
- 04 Remove any obstacles to the complete achievement of an individual's human rights, tackling any institutions or organisations whose policies impede or reduce their achievement of them (e.g., securitisation).

Expected outcomes

01

- 01 Promote the elaboration, implementation and adaptation of public measures which are attributable to European and Italian foreign policies in trade, migration and defence relating to the application of the active neutrality paradigm.
- 02 Promote and encourage the reorientation of key institutional stakeholders in the development and humanitarian aid sectors towards 'human security', beyond notions of safety and the fight against terrorism.
- 03 Promote disarmament policies and nuclear disarmament together with civil society and the next generations in the name of eco-pacifism.
- 04 Promote the adoption of methodologies for nonviolent conflict transformation, including the transformation of violent extremism, by activists, civil society organisations and movements. The central role of women and young people must be acknowledged (UN Resolution 1325, UN Resolution 2250).
- 05 Improve and increase scope and quality of our education for peace and nonviolence projects, with the goal of making them an integral part of formal education curricula; this in light of the impact educational institutions and systems have on young people's personalities, therefore exerting influence on their country's cultural and social assets, and ultimately affecting political choices.
- 06 Promote greater and more coherent public funding for civil peace-building through programmes such as the Civil Peace Corps.

Expected outcomes

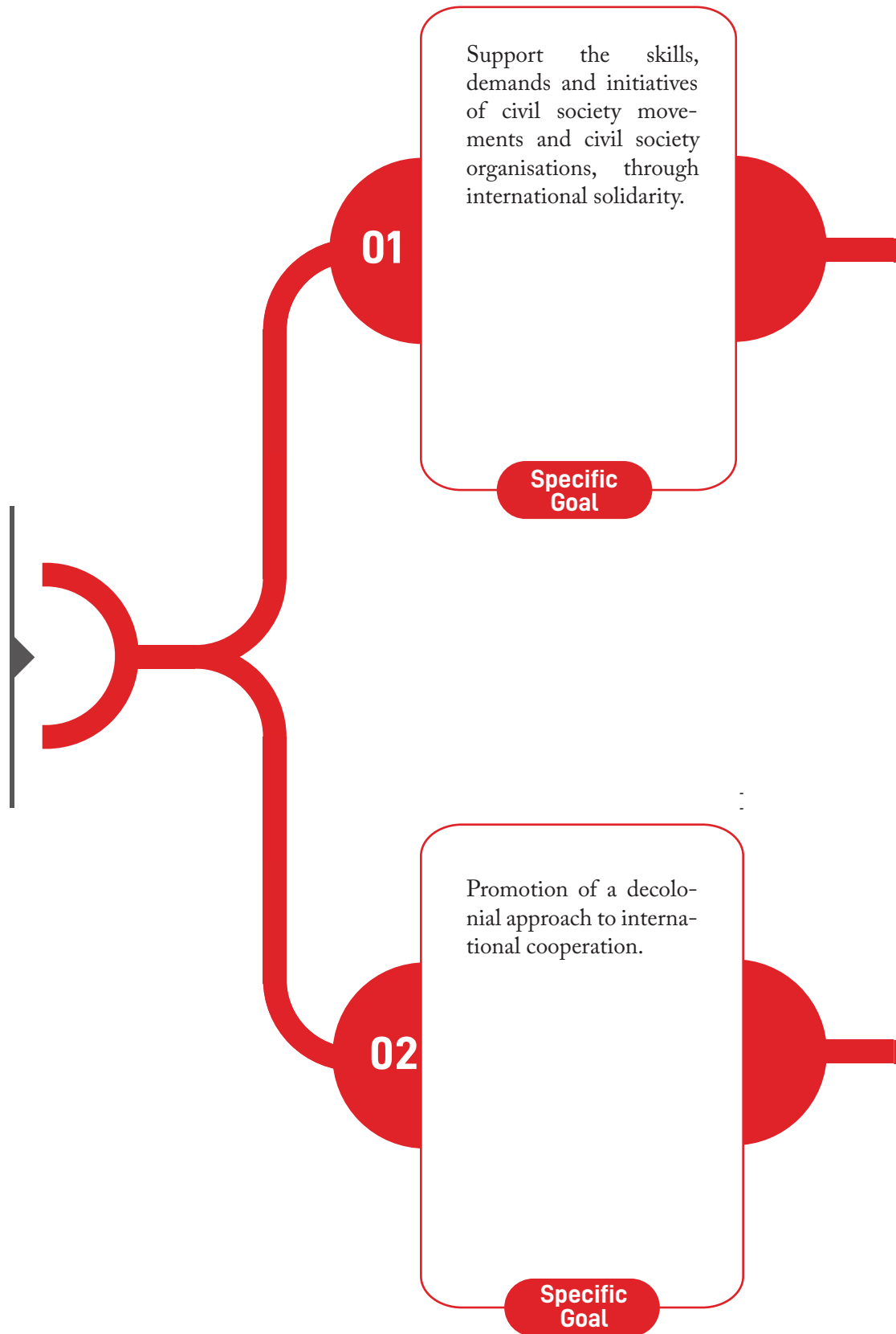
02

- 01 Promote independent businesses, with a focus on cooperatives and the creation of networks which promote dignified employment, a circular economy and fair trade, ideally set up by women and/or disadvantaged people.
- 02 Strengthen cooperation between local businesses and civil society, in sectors which test and encourage ecologically sound models of local development and the transition to sustainable energy.
- 03 Provide access to credit for ecologically sound initiatives which offer dignified employment opportunities and raise awareness on the importance of ethical funding amongst Un Ponte Per's supporters, staff and partners.
- 04 Build awareness and skills of civil society, local authorities and communities, in relation to climate change prediction, analysis and adaptation, with a special focus on the most vulnerable.

Expected outcomes

03

Sector
**CIVIL
SOCIETY**



01

- 01 Support civil society's demands for freedom of association and freedom of expression in UPP project countries.
- 02 Boost active participation of women activists, feminists, with emphasis on how their struggle intersects that of environmentalists.
- 03 Promote and support the central role of civil society and governing institutions in protecting and assisting human rights defenders, whether individual activists or movements.
- 04 Promote and support trans-feminist mobilisation amongst civil society, to reflect their shared quest for change in the Middle East and Mediterranean regions.
- 05 Reinforce the sustainability of activism (security, inclusion, solidarity, convergence and non-violence) and its success in proposing and undertaking processes of social, political and economic transformation.

**Expected
outcomes**

02

- 01 Promote development plans designed through strategic alliances with associations and local businesses in Italy, the Middle East and the Mediterranean, grounded in notions of complementarity and subsidiarity in order to overcome competition or mutual dependence.
- 02 Increase Un Ponte Per's capacity for context risk analysis, with particular focus on foreign policy or trade issues which could influence local dynamics and collaborative development work.
- 03 Consolidate the capacity of associations and institutions in project countries to respond independently to local needs through direct relationships with international donors.
- 04 Encourage strategic donors to adopt the localisation of international funding, through continuous international action and training in development and aid policies.
- 05 Capacity-building to enable ongoing evaluation of Un Ponte Per's coherence in pursuing decolonisation and localisation in our international cooperation initiatives.

**Expected
outcomes**

Sector

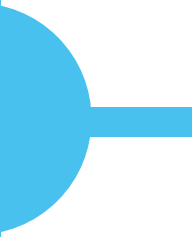
LEADERSHIP OF THE NEXT GENERATION



01

Encourage the next generation to be proactive and to take action, especially Un Ponte Per's young volunteers, staff and partners, by boosting their skills, knowledge, competencies and political awareness in Italy and in all the countries where UPP is active.

Specific Goal



- 01** Encourage solidarity and interaction between the next generation, while highlighting the value of cultural and linguistic differences and identifying the best use of tools for interaction, including sports, art and culture.
- 02** Promote non-governmental international cooperation and peacebuilding as means of transformative action (agency) for the next generation.
- 03** Boost the participation of young people in the association, by encouraging and coordinating volunteer pathways, including indepth policy discussions and training in the use of media for activism.
- 04** Increase the presence of young people in positions of responsibility and decision-making for UPP action, projects and programmes in Italy and in other UPP project countries.

**Expected
outcomes**

¹ Human security, as defined in Art.22 of The Declaration of Human Rights: Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to human security and is entitled to realisation, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organisation and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality. "The right to life is linked to the right to freedom and the right to security: this is the vital triad, which cannot be separated. Security is not just a feeling, it is above all the concrete ability of a person to express their 'freedoms' (freedom to, from and for). Freedom can only exist, be acquired and practiced when certain conditions are satisfied in key sectors (education, politics, economics). Human security means security for individuals and human communities - People security - and comprises many elements." Antonio Papisca, Commentary on Art.3 of the Italian Constitution.

² <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>

³ Community Research and Learning Program – CRLP

⁴ <https://conflictsensitivity.org/conflict-sensitivity/do-no-harm-local-capacities-for-peace-project/>

⁵ Ecopacifism: a position which promotes nonviolent action and the connection between peace and protection of the environment, in recognition of the link between the systemic violence of war and that inflicted on the natural world.

⁶ Ecologically sound implies a system which integrates respect for the environment with economic and production processes, removing negative impacts on the ecosystem in accordance with social, inter-sectional and intergenerational justice.



Un ponte per