

2024-2025

# CBM Italia

# Programme highlights



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## 1. Who we are

CBM Italia is an international organisation that promotes health, education, employment, and the rights of persons with disabilities, focusing its efforts where needs are greatest, both in Italy and around the world.

Founded in Milan in 2001, in 2009 CBM Italia was officially recognised as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, authorising its work in international development cooperation. In 2024, it transitioned into a Foundation.

CBM Italia is part of CBM International (Christian Blind Mission), a global organisation active since 1908 across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, committed to improving the quality of life for persons with disabilities.

# Vision

A world where persons with disabilities can live free from barriers and discrimination.

# Mission

We work to promote health, education, employment, and the rights of persons with disabilities, wherever the need is greatest, in Italy and globally.

## Values and guiding principles



## 2. Our approach and areas of intervention

CBM Italia adopts a **human rights-based approach** in all its activities, inspired by the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**. This approach guides our work both in developing countries and within Italy and the European Union.

We believe in **inclusive and participatory processes** that go beyond providing direct support. Our goal is to help create environments that are more accessible and inclusive, contributing to long-term, structural change within communities.

Our intervention model is built on collaboration. We work closely with **local partners**, institutions, government bodies, NGOs, civil society organisations, and, most importantly, **Organisations of Persons with Disabilities**. At the heart of our approach is the principle of Locally Led Development - an approach driven by local communities that values their knowledge, resources, and aspirations, fostering meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their families while promoting local knowledge and

community self-determination. We also engage with networks and consortia rooted in the local context, which play a vital role in driving and sustaining development efforts on the ground.

By working this way, we foster **partnerships** that value and build on existing local resources, both human and material, as well as the skills and knowledge already present within the communities we serve.

### IN PARTNER COUNTRIES

This approach is reflected in CBM's operational model in partner countries, where local **Country Offices**, part of the CBM International network, are fully staffed and managed by local professionals.

CBM's thematic **initiatives** provide specialised technical expertise to ensure the delivery of high-quality programmes, the identification and sharing of best practices and lessons learned.

In partner countries, CBM Italia focuses its efforts on three strategic areas of intervention:

#### INCLUSIVE HEALTH

CBM Italia is deeply committed to promoting inclusive health, ensuring that everyone, with or without disabilities, has access to quality healthcare. This goal is pursued through close collaboration with healthcare professionals, hospitals, communities, and institutions.

A key part of our commitment is the work we carry out in **Inclusive Eye Health**, a strategic area that fully reflects our broader vision. These projects are designed to ensure that no one is left behind and are developed in close connection with local and national health systems to guarantee long-term sustainability.

They take a comprehensive approach, addressing every stage of care, from health promotion and prevention to treatment and rehabilitation.

Beyond eye health, CBM Italia also works across the **broader health sector**. We help prevent and treat diseases, provide rehabilitation and physiotherapy services, and supply essential assistive devices like wheelchairs, crutches, hearing aids, and glasses. We also invest in training for doctors, nurses, and specialised healthcare workers, and we strengthen hospitals and healthcare systems in marginalised areas, making sure care reaches those who need it most.

#### COMMUNITY-BASED INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

CBM believes that real change in the lives of persons with disabilities starts with the **involvement and empowerment of communities**. This is key to reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Our approach, known as **Community-Based Inclusive Development**, promotes the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in every aspect of life, from health and education to employment, social participation, and decision-making. That's why CBM doesn't work only in the health sector, but also in **education and social services**. We support access to schooling, vocational training, employment opportunities, and other systems that enable persons with disabilities to live independently. This includes **training and awareness-raising** activities within communities to foster understanding of disability rights and promote inclusion. We also work to strengthen the **capacity and visibility of organisations of persons with disabilities**, helping them engage with local governments and advocate for their needs.

#### INCLUSIVE HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Emergencies, whether armed conflicts, natural disasters, or food crises, tend to affect persons with disabilities more severely, as they are often excluded from humanitarian aid and response efforts. CBM Italia is committed to **making humanitarian responses inclusive**, focusing on three key areas.

First, we ensure that **immediate relief**, such as food,

clean water, essential supplies, and medical assistance, is accessible to all, with particular attention to the needs of persons with disabilities. Together with local partners, we work to remove physical and logistical barriers that might prevent access to aid.

Once the emergency phase has passed, we provide **rehabilitation services and psychosocial support** to help persons with disabilities and their families recover and rebuild their lives.

Finally, we engage in **advocacy and awareness-raising**, collaborating with institutions and humanitarian organisations to promote inclusive response protocols. Our goal is to ensure that persons with disabilities are actively involved in shaping the response itself.

#### IN ITALY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

CBM has long been active in some of the world's most fragile contexts, where persons with disabilities often face extreme poverty and exclusion. However, vulnerability is not confined to distant places. In Italy and across the European Union, there are also forms of marginalisation which, although different from those in low-income countries, raise serious concerns around inclusion, access to rights, and equal opportunities.

Through our research "Disability and poverty in Italian families"<sup>1</sup>, we began to shed light on these issues by exploring the multidimensional nature of poverty and exclusion. We recognised that persons with disabilities often experience **overlapping forms of disadvantage**, and that addressing these challenges requires a **systemic and intersectional approach**. This understanding guides our projects and initiatives in Italy and throughout the EU.



**<sup>1</sup> FIND OUT MORE ABOUT DISABILITY AND POVERTY IN ITALIAN FAMILIES**

That is why we have chosen to focus particularly on **cultural obstacles and inclusive practices**, working on language, education, training, and service design to help make systems truly accessible. Our aim is not only to support individuals, but to **transform the environments** in which they live. We do this through a combination of knowledge generation, training, and an **inclusive design approach**, in which persons with disabilities and their organisations are actively involved in every phase of the project cycle, from the identification of needs and co-design to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

We develop local, national, and European initiatives in partnership with civil society organisations, organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), institutions, employers, and service providers. CBM Italia manages an active portfolio of projects across these levels, with a particular focus on the **Erasmus+, CERV, ESF+, and Horizon Europe programmes** for the 2021–2027 funding period. Our work spans training, capacity-building, and advocacy in the following areas:

#### INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

We promote the right to inclusive quality education for all students, with and without disabilities, in the fields of school education, adult learning, and vocational education and training. We support the training of school staff, raise awareness among students, and engage families through initiatives such as our national programme *Cambiamo Sguardo* (Let's change perspective)<sup>2</sup> and various Erasmus+ projects.

#### PARTICIPATION

We foster the democratic and community participation of persons with disabilities, particularly youth and women, by empowering them and strengthening their organisations. We aim to ensure their voices are heard and contribute to policy development through both national and European projects, including CERV and Erasmus+.

#### EMPLOYMENT

We work to dismantle cultural and attitudinal barriers to employment, promote inclusive recruitment and HR practices, and support policies that enable the full inclusion and retention of persons with disabilities in the open labour market. This is achieved through local, national, and European projects in partnership with employers and relevant public authorities, under Erasmus+, CERV, and ESF+.

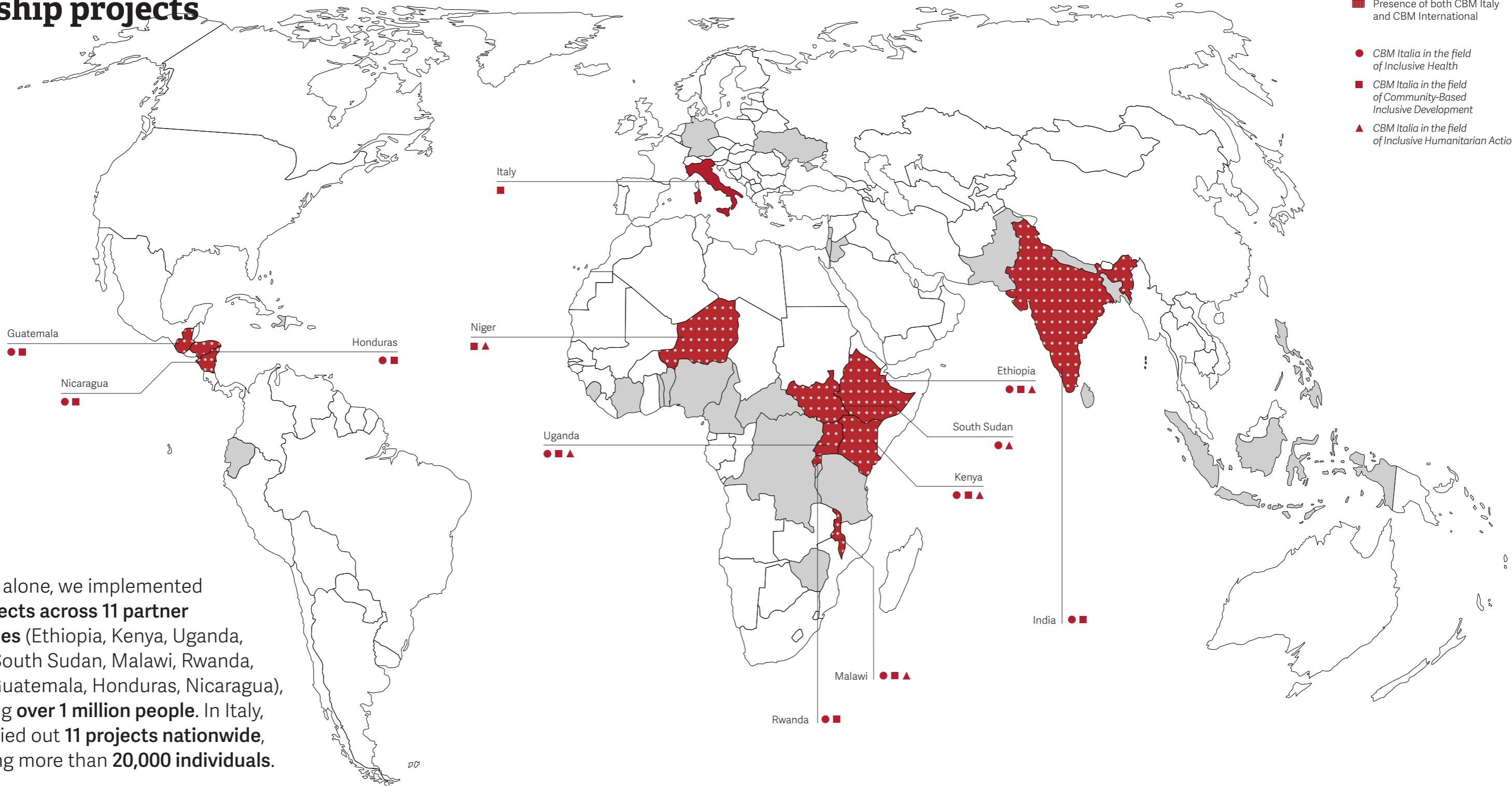
#### ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

We combat prejudice, discrimination, hate speech, and hate crimes by promoting inclusive language and attitudes. Our awareness-raising initiatives and campaigns include high-quality cultural productions, publications, videos, theatre, performing arts, podcasts, and more, delivered through national initiatives and programmes such as Erasmus+, CERV, and Creative Europe.



**<sup>2</sup> FIND OUT MORE ABOUT "CAMBIAMO SGUARDO"**

### 3. Key results and flagship projects





In the same year, we also launched our first European project under the Erasmus+ programme, Just 2 Steps, marking the beginning of a growing portfolio of impactful initiatives at the European level. **In 2025, we expanded our presence by launching our first projects in Ukraine and Zambia, reinforcing our commitment to supporting vulnerable communities in new regions.**

In the next pages are some of our **flagship projects**, offering a closer look at how we work and the impact we aim to achieve.

## IN PARTNER COUNTRIES

### INCLUSIVE HEALTH

#### PROJECT

#### **SOUTH SUDAN: "THE BRIGHT SIGHT"**

Financed by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS)

In September 2024, we proudly inaugurated South Sudan's first pediatric ophthalmology ward, offering 1,500 children each year access to high-quality eye care services. The new ward is located within the Buluk Eye Centre (BEC) in Juba, the country's first eye hospital, founded in 2015 by CBM, the first organisation that introduced eye care to South Sudan. Over the years, BEC has grown into a national centre of excellence and a vital reference point for visual health.

The ward's construction and launch are part of "The Bright Sight", a multi-year initiative aimed at improving access to eye health, pediatric ophthalmology, and rehabilitation services across South Sudan, with a focus on the states of Central Equatoria, Eastern Equatoria, and Lakes. The project also includes prevention activities for Neglected Tropical Diseases, such as trachoma and onchocerciasis, which remain widespread in the region.

#### PROJECT

#### **UGANDA & KENYA: "IMPACT 3D"**

Financed by Cariplo Foundation and Compagnia di San Paolo

Working for inclusive health means addressing physical disabilities through care, rehabilitation, and support that

restore dignity and opportunity.

In Kampala, Uganda, at CoRSU Hospital -a specialized orthopedic rehabilitation center - IMPACT3D was launched in 2024, marking the third phase of a journey that began with Print the Innovation and Innovation for Inclusion, which first introduced 3D printing for personalized orthopedic devices.

The goal is simple yet transformative: to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities by making prosthetic and orthotic devices more accessible.

Promoted by CBM, the project merges healthcare, innovation, and assistive technology to strengthen autonomy and inclusion. In Uganda, 3D-printed orthoses are now widely used thanks to staff training, community awareness, and a sustainable printing lab. In Kenya, local professionals produce lightweight, customized prostheses in collaboration with Prothea, bringing innovation and hope so that no one is left behind.

### COMMUNITY-BASED INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT (CBID)

#### PROJECT

#### **KENYA: "INJOB! PATHWAYS TO EDUCATIONAL AND EMPLOYMENT INCLUSION FOR VULNERABLE YOUTH"**

Financed by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS)

In Kenya, many young people, especially persons with disabilities, face barriers to quality education and employment opportunities. The InJob! project promotes educational, social, and professional inclusion for vulnerable youth by improving access to vocational training and supporting their transition into work and self-employment.

Led by No One out in partnership with CBM, GCN (Girl Child Network Kenya), and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA), the project works across 15 counties and within eight public vocational training centres in Nairobi.

Through inclusive education initiatives, teacher training, and engagement with employers, InJob! strengthens national and local systems to make technical education more accessible and employment more equitable.

With the support of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), the project is helping to build a

**"Saving the sight of young children means giving them independence and new opportunities, and building a better future for our country."**

*"The scholarship and training in paediatric ophthalmology allowed me to realise a dream and put my skills at the service of my country. In South Sudan, the medical profession is a true mission: sight is a precious gift and ophthalmologists have a responsibility to protect it, especially for children.*

*Today, I finally see a better future for eye care in our healthcare system. Saving the sight of children means giving them back their independence and opportunities, but also alleviating the economic and*

*psychological burden on families. Many forms of blindness here are preventable, which is why I have chosen to focus on diagnosis, prevention and surgery, helping to build a more robust care pathway. I would like to encourage other young doctors to pursue this specialisation, so that we can grow paediatric ophthalmology together in our country.*

Dr. Emmanuel Agwella, South Sudan's first paediatric ophthalmologist, trained by CBM



generation of skilled, empowered young people ready to lead Kenya toward a more inclusive future.

**PROJECT**

**NIGER: "WOMEN AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN ACTION FOR A SUSTAINABLE AGROPASTORAL SYSTEM"**

Financed by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS)

In Niger, one of the world's most vulnerable countries to poverty and food insecurity, women and persons with disabilities often face additional barriers to access food, water, and livelihood opportunities.

The project "Women and Persons with Disabilities in Action for a Sustainable Agropastoral System", implemented by CBM together with local partners Karkara, ACRA, CISP, and DEMI-E, works to strengthen food and nutritional security in the Zinder region, particularly in the departments of Magaria, Kantché, and Mirriah. By promoting sustainable agriculture, animal husbandry, and equitable access to safe water, the project empowers women and persons with disabilities to become key actors in local agropastoral value chains. It also supports local authorities in developing inclusive food policies and sustainable resource management practices.

Overall, the project is building stronger, more resilient communities where women and persons with disabilities can lead change toward a sustainable future.

**INCLUSIVE HUMANITARIAN ACTION**

**PROJECT**

**ETHIOPIA: "SAFE-TIGRAY: INCLUSIVE HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVE IN ADWA WOREDA"**

Financed by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS)

In the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia, years of conflict have left thousands of displaced families struggling with food insecurity, trauma, and loss of livelihoods. The SAFE-TIGRAY project supports displaced and host communities in Adwa Woreda (Central Zone) through an inclusive, multisectoral humanitarian response.

Led by VIS in partnership with CBM and the Ethiopian

Center for Disability and Development (ECDD), the project aims to improve food security, psychosocial wellbeing, and social inclusion for the most vulnerable, including women, children, and persons with disabilities. Activities include cash transfers, distribution of drought-resistant seeds and agricultural tools, psychosocial support, accessibility interventions, and community awareness on inclusion and protection. SAFE-TIGRAY strengthens resilience and dignity among communities recovering from crisis, ensuring that no one, especially persons with disabilities, is left behind in the path toward recovery and peace.

**PROJECT**

**SOUTH SUDAN: "FEED THE FUTURE: SUPPORTING FOOD AND NUTRITIONAL SECURITY"**

Financed by the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers – 8x1000 funds

In South Sudan, food insecurity remains one of the most pressing challenges, particularly for refugees, women, children, and persons with disabilities. The "Feed the Future" project aims to improve nutrition and strengthen food self-sufficiency in Gorom, a refugee settlement near Juba.

Implemented by CBM in partnership with ACROSS, the project combines nutrition education, climate-resilient agriculture, and livelihood support to promote long-term food security.

Through training on diversified diets, sustainable farming practices, and efficient water management, participants gain the knowledge and tools to improve food production and household nutrition. Seeds, tools, and small economic support are also provided to help families apply what they learn.

By empowering both refugees and host communities, the project builds more resilient and inclusive systems where everyone - especially women and persons with disabilities - can contribute to a healthier, self-sufficient future.



**"Now I can fetch water myself, my family is better off and there is more respect for the rights of persons with disabilities in the village."**

"My name is Zoueira Ali and I live with my husband and our three children. For me, as a person with a physical disability, fetching water was difficult and I often had to rely on others. The long queues at the village pump made everything even more complicated.

Since the new water system was built, our lives have changed: now I can fetch water on my own, my husband has more time

for his work, and the community is more attentive to the rights of persons with disabilities thanks to awareness-raising activities.

With this support, I have been able to start a small livestock farm and I am also planning to plant a vegetable garden in my yard."

Zoueira Ali, beneficiary of the project supported by CBM





## IN ITALY AND THE EU

### INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

#### PROJECT

#### LET'S CHANGE PERSPECTIVE AND LONG FRIENDSHIP PACTS

*Co-financed by multiple donors and local foundations*

In Italy and across the European Union, we work to uphold the full realisation of every student's right, with or without disabilities, to inclusive, quality education, as enshrined in Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Our main vehicle for this commitment is "Let's change perspective" (Cambiamo Sguardo: dire, fare, parlare di disabilità), a free educational programme designed to enhance the knowledge and skills of school and educational staff, students, and families. The programme fosters inclusive teaching practices and promotes a culture of inclusion within educational settings.

Building on this foundation, we develop targeted initiatives to explore key themes in greater depth. One such example is the "Long Friendship Pacts" (PAL – Patti di Amicizia Lunga) project, which enabled students with and without disabilities to strengthen mutual understanding and relationships. Together, they co-created the educational card game "Ask me a question" (Fammi una domanda), aimed at encouraging meaningful peer-to-peer connections.

#### PROJECT

#### JUST TWO STEPS: SCHOOLS OF INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION

*Co-financed by the European Union under the Erasmus+ programme*

The "Just Two Steps" project aims to make educational environments more inclusive and accessible by strengthening the knowledge and skills of school staff, addressing physical, cultural and behavioural barriers, and actively involving the entire school community: teachers, families, and students.

Through targeted activities such as Communities of

Practice, inclusive theatre performances, and advocacy workshops, the initiative empowers students with disabilities and their families to raise awareness, challenge prejudice, and foster inclusive behaviours in both school and social settings.

The impact has been tangible: 900 children (with and without disabilities) and 50 educators took part in co-designing solutions to improve school accessibility; 20 teachers joined a European Community of Practice, exchanging experiences and developing inclusive teaching materials based on Universal Design for Learning (UDL); These efforts led to the creation of a teacher toolkit and a white paper compiling student-generated proposals for more inclusive and participatory schools.

### PARTICIPATION

#### PROJECT

#### KEEP DRIVEN: FOSTERING KNOWLEDGE, EMPOWERMENT, AND PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

*Co-funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ programme*

KEEP Driven is a European initiative designed to empower young persons with disabilities and promote their full and effective participation in civic and political life, both locally and at the EU level.

Implemented in Italy, France, Latvia and Belgium, the project supports young people aged 18–26 through a journey of personal growth, helping them understand their rights and develop participatory initiatives rooted in shared values such as civic engagement and mutual respect.

KEEP Driven provides inclusive training, creates opportunities for advocacy, and promotes good practices to make youth and disability organisations more inclusive and effective.

Participants become leaders of a European advocacy campaign, raising awareness about the barriers to democratic participation and influencing public debate and policymaking.

**"Talking about the rights of persons with disabilities helps students understand that we are all different and that inclusion stems from language and welcoming others."**

*"Talking about the rights of persons with disabilities in schools is important because my pupils need to know that we are all different and that everyone can get involved with their own potential, flaws and abilities. The students became passionate about the subject, improved their language on inclusion and learned interesting aspects about persons with disabilities, including those related to their everyday lives.*

*Accessibility and inclusion start with language and the way we welcome others. Diversity creates beauty. Talking about the rights of persons with disabilities at school is very important. Living together at school and in society is a treasure, because the concept of difference is fundamental in education."*

*Adriana, lower secondary school teacher*



**PROJECT****WYDE.EU – WOMEN & YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES****EMPOWERMENT FOR EUROPE**

Co-funded by the European Union under the CERV – Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme

Across Europe, young women with disabilities continue to face barriers that limit their ability to participate fully in democratic life.

WyDE.EU was born to tackle this issue: a 19-month initiative led by CBM Italia, in collaboration with partners from five countries, aiming to ensure that young women with disabilities are actively involved in defining the EU's long-term priorities.

The project creates spaces for dialogue, learning and leadership. Through surveys, focus groups, training sessions and collaborative workshops, participants explore their rights, build confidence, and engage in meaningful conversations with institutions and civil society.

WyDE.EU fosters a vibrant community of changemakers. The journey culminates in a final conference where participants present their manifesto, a collective vision for a more inclusive Europe, shaped by those who have long been excluded from the conversation.

**EMPLOYMENT****PROJECT****INCLUSIVE GENERATION**

Supported by Fondazione CDP

The project responds to a pressing reality: in Italy, the number of students with disabilities is rising, yet many schools remain inaccessible. The lack of adequate training for teachers, limited access to extracurricular activities, and weak collaboration between schools and families further deepen the risk of exclusion, especially during the critical transition to adulthood.

To address these challenges, "Inclusive Generation" (Generazione Inclusiva: protagonismo, orientamento e autonomia) brings together students, teachers and families in a shared effort to break down barriers and foster inclusion. Through training, interactive talks, and creative challenges, the project equips school staff with inclusive

teaching tools and encourages students to reimagine their learning environments.

Families of students with disabilities are supported with practical resources to co-design personalised educational and life pathways, while a pilot orientation model helps young people navigate choices for their future.

**ANTI-DISCRIMINATION****PROJECT****CARE-INT: EQUIPPING FUTURE CARE PROFESSIONALS TO TACKLE INTERSECTIONAL DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES**

Co-funded by the European Union under Erasmus+ programme

Women with disabilities face disproportionately high levels of violence and discrimination. When gender and disability intersect, the risks multiply, often leaving women more vulnerable and less protected. In this context, care professionals working in domestic settings play a crucial role.

CARE-INT is a cross-border initiative implemented in Italy and the Netherlands, designed to address this urgent issue by training future care professionals to recognise, prevent and respond to intersectional violence and discrimination.

By defining the role of care professionals in preventing intersectional violence and embedding inclusive practices into vocational education, CARE-INT contributes to building a more just and responsive care system that protects, respects, and includes all women.



**"Spreading knowledge is the first step towards overcoming stereotypes and building a society that is more attentive and respectful towards persons with disabilities."**

*"I would like to work to raise awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities, especially those that are 'invisible'. I think that spreading knowledge can counter stereotypes and trigger real change: to be more attentive and respectful towards others."*

Nicoline, 18, project participant

*The Keep Driven experience was very rewarding. It gave me the opportunity to meet people with different disabilities, coming from other countries. It was enriching to discover other points of view, but also to understand that we share similar challenges and desires. For example, I discovered that I could access Erasmus programmes with the support of the European Union to receive the assistance I need."*

Valentina, 25, graduate in communication design, project participant





## 4. Economic sustainability

CBM Italia's model is built on a sustainable approach that relies on its ability to engage a broad network of both private and institutional donors. This support enables the organisation to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities to access healthcare, education and employment, through the design and implementation of projects in Italy, across Europe and internationally.

In 2024, CBM Italia secured:

- **€5.4 million from institutional sources**, including the Italian Agency for International Cooperation (AICS) and the EU, and unrestricted funds allocated by the Board of Directors.
- An additional **€5.2 million was raised through individual giving**, including contributions via the 5x1000 tax scheme.

In 2024, CBM Italia was supported by **45,624 individual donors**, with 18% of income from individuals coming from regular supporters. Remarkably, 87% of these donors have stood by CBM Italia for over a decade. For every euro invested in fundraising and communications, more than double was generated in return.

## 5. Networks and alliances

CBM Italia continues to play an active role within civil society networks, working to promote and defend the rights of persons with disabilities.



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