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Supporting multi-party democracy amid crises

Outcomes of Demo Finland's strategy period 2021–2025

DEMO FINLAND

Introduction

The aim of Demo Finland's 2021–2025 strategy was to strengthen inclusive multi-party democracy by supporting political parties in becoming more programmatic, inclusive and democratic, by promoting dialogue between parties, and by strengthening Finnish parties' commitment to international democracy support.

During the strategy period, the operating environment for democracy support deteriorated globally. This meant that Demo Finland implemented its strategy under exceptionally unfavourable conditions.

The state of democracy deteriorated significantly worldwide between 2021 and 2025: the proportion of the world population living under autocratic regimes rose from 70% to 74%[1]. In 2024, autocracies outnumbered democracies for the first time in over 20 years, and by 2025, global democracy had regressed to 1978 levels[2]. Political rights, civil liberties, and the state of civil society and civic participation declined in more countries than they improved[3]. We are experiencing the third global wave of autocratisation since the 1930s and 1970s. A defining feature of this wave is the gradual erosion of democracy, as opposed to, for example, sudden coups d'état[4].

The countries where Demo Finland works rank at or below the midpoint on democracy indices[5]. In these countries, developments during the strategy period were even more challenging than the global average. Two programme countries, Myanmar and Tunisia, experienced an outright collapse of democracy. The political environments in Ethiopia and Myanmar were marked by conflict. The space afforded to the political opposition was highly circumscribed in all of these countries. The state of political rights and civil liberties deteriorated in many places, and violent clashes with demonstrators occurred during the strategy period in several countries, such as Kenya, Mozambique, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Tunisia. There are, however, more positive examples as well. In Kenya, for example, competitive elections, a functioning judiciary and a vibrant civil society have sustained hopes for democratic progress.

> **During the strategy period, Demo Finland's work reached 8,472 politicians from altogether 585 political parties in 11 countries. 59% of the people reached were women.**

During the strategy period 2021–2025, the strongest evidence came from women's strengthened leadership and participation, which successfully embedded inclusivity and multi-party dialogue into the core structures and practices of political parties. These results are documented in two comprehensive final evaluations carried out during the strategy period: external evaluations of the Sri Lanka project in 2023 and the Ethiopia project in 2024.

Two major crises coincided with the planning and implementation of the strategy period: the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2020, and Russia's illegal full-scale invasion of Ukraine from 2022 onwards. In 2023, a mid-term review of Demo Finland's strategy was conducted, which concluded that the strategy's objectives remained relevant.

As international democracy support drops, the importance of organisations such as Demo Finland as defenders of democracy stands out. Demo Finland is a globally unique multi-party organisation to which all the Finnish parliamentary parties are committed. This makes Demo Finland an interesting case internationally. Demo Finland's long-standing priorities – multi-party dialogue and inclusivity – are more relevant than ever in the context of the global decline of democracy. Equally paramount is Demo Finland's operational model, which anchors itself on enduring partnerships.

What is needed to counter the decline of democracy? Actors who can build change over the long term, even in challenging contexts, and who are able to adapt their actions when risks materialise. Democracies face a lower risk of violence, and a key security benefit of democracy is its ability to channel, manage and contain political conflicts[6]. It is unlikely that democracies will start violent conflicts with one another. Supporting democracy is therefore a means of preventing violent international conflicts.

Key achievements

The challenges during the strategy period included the shrinking of civic space, conflicts, political polarisation, geopolitical instability and the reduction in international democracy support. In practice, this means that Demo Finland has achieved many of its objectives while the conditions for international democracy support work deteriorated. The most important achievements of the strategy period can be summarised in five key areas:

Disability inclusion

The political participation of persons with disabilities has evolved from a marginal issue to one that is embedded in political party structures and has even led to electoral and constitutional reforms in Kenya, Ethiopia and Zambia.

Women

The standing of female politicians grew more robust in Ethiopia, Sri Lanka and Zambia.

Multi-party dialogue

In all programme countries, multi-party platforms or networks were supported. Institutional structures were strengthened, particularly in Kenya, Zambia and Myanmar.

Continuity

Civic dialogue was maintained in exceptionally challenging environments in Myanmar and Tunisia.

Democracy support

Support for democracy became established as a shared topic among political parties in Finland.

During the strategy period, Demo Finland demonstrated a strong ability to identify and manage the political risks of rapidly changing environments in collaboration with its local partners. In particular, following the military coup in Myanmar, the programme was redesigned and its operating methods revised. Dialogue continues online and from outside the country. The number of beneficiaries interested in democracy is growing every year, despite challenges.

Demo Finland's work in Myanmar, Tunisia and Ethiopia focused on maintaining democratic culture in a deteriorating environment, whilst in Zambia and Kenya the programmes supported broader social changes that promoted democracy.

Between 2021 and 2025 Demo Finland diversified its range of partners, succeeded in developing its self-funding, particularly for domestic work, and raised its profile as an international democracy expert organisation. Demo Finland also launched climate and environmental dialogues to support the sustainable transition. Demo Finland's international profile was strengthened by Executive Director Anu Juvonen's presidency of the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), an umbrella organisation for European democracy organisations, which began in 2024, and by her role as Special Representative for Civil Society during Finland's (2025) and Switzerland's (2026) chairpersonship of the OSCE, as well as close co-operation with the Council of Europe.

Achievements according to the strategic priorities

Outcome 1: Political parties are more programmatic, inclusive, and democratic

The most significant outcome of the strategy period was the strengthening of the standing of underrepresented groups within political parties. In line with the strategy, Demo Finland and its local partners succeeded in promoting the participation of women and persons with disabilities.

> With Demo Finland's support (2019–2023), 600 female politicians were trained in Sri Lanka.

> By 2025, 20 political parties in Ethiopia had changed their structures, rules or practices to improve the participation of women and persons with disabilities. At the start of the strategy period, the parties generally did not have any tools or requirements to ensure the inclusion of these politically underrepresented groups.

> In 2022, political parties in Kenya reduced or waived nomination fees for candidates with disabilities, and several persons with disabilities were elected to parliament and county assemblies. By the end of 2024, 19 Kenyan political parties had an active disability wing, compared with just two parties in 2020.

Outcome 2: Political parties perform strengthened multi-party dialogue

Multi-party dialogue was institutionalized as a cross-cutting approach throughout the strategy period. By 2025, the sustainability of these efforts was evident, as structures began operating independently.

> In 2025, the vast majority of the political parties in Ethiopia (88%) took part in the activities of the mentoring network for female politicians organised as part of the programme.

> In 2025, the country's first multi-party platform focusing on intra-party democracy was established in Kenya, with 20 political parties taking part in its activities.

> In 2025, 12 political parties were still taking part in various dialogue events in Tunisia, providing a rare forum for cross-party discussion within a constricted political landscape.

> During the strategy period, dialogue platforms and multi-party networks were supported in all the countries covered by the programme – namely Ethiopia, Kenya and Tunisia, as well as Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Zambia, Finland, Somalia, Uganda, Mozambique and Myanmar.

Outcome 3: Finnish parliamentary parties' commitment to supporting democracy is reflected in policy

Demo Finland consolidated its position as an expert in international democracy support, took part in consultations organised by ministries and the Parliament, and influenced both Finland's and the EU's democracy support policies. At the end of the strategy period, the leaders of all the parliamentary parties reaffirmed their commitment to international democracy support in a joint statement.

> For example, in 2023, 90% of the participants of the training programme for political women's organisations felt that their confidence in participating in discussions on foreign and security policy had increased.

> During the strategy period, a total of 130 young people from political youth and student organisations were trained in the Democracy Academy, strengthening their understanding of international democracy issues and their dialogue skills. At the end of 2025, the alumni network had 77 members. The alumni's expertise has been utilised to support international programmes.

> The commitment to supporting democracy is also reflected in Demo Finland's funding, which has remained stable throughout the strategy period (€1.5–1.8 million annually). In 2025, as a result of years of advocacy work, the organisation transitioned to a two-year funding arrangement with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Results by country



Ethiopia

Following Demo Finland's collaboration with the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA) and the Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association (EWDNA), the inclusion of women and persons with disabilities within political parties was strengthened. By 2025, as many as 20 political parties had already amended their structures, rules or practices to improve inclusion. At the start of the strategy period, the political parties generally had no rules, structures or practices in place to ensure the participation of underrepresented groups. Co-operation between political parties increased, and by the end of the strategy period, the programme had reached 88% of all the political parties. The number of women in leadership roles within political parties at national and regional level rose significantly during the strategy period: in 2020 there were two women, and by 2025 already 127. An external evaluation completed in 2024 confirmed that the work has strengthened the inclusive multi-party system. Inclusion within the parties strengthened considerably, and local and party-specific results have been achieved, even though the conditions for political activity and democracy support have clearly deteriorated during the strategy period. Ethiopia is categorized as an authoritarian state under international governance indices.



Kenya

In the programme carried out in collaboration with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), the political participation of persons with disabilities became institutionalised within political parties: amongst other things, the parties waived or reduced nomination fees for candidates with disabilities, and by the end of the strategy period, 19 parties already had an established disability wing. At the start of the strategy period, only two parties had a disability wing. In 2025, the country's first multi-party platform, bringing together 20 parties and focusing on intra-party democracy, was also established. Although the political parties continue to operate in a competitive multi-party environment and positive progress has been made during the strategy period in areas such as freedom of expression, the violent suppression of the 2024 protests, police brutality and the treatment of those critical of the government show that progress can be fragile.



Kosovo

Demo Finland's collaboration with the Prishtina Institute for Political Studies (PIPS) began in 2024, and led to a pilot programme which strengthened multi-party dialogue and democratic co-operation in a new country of operation. Particularly promising is the commitment shown by young politicians to refrain from hate speech. In 2025, political youth organisations issued a joint statement on the matter. Kosovo's domestic political crisis and repeated elections are creating uncertainty and slowing down social reforms. Corruption, the functioning of the judiciary and ethnic tensions are hampering the functioning of democracy.



Mozambique

Demo Finland's work entailing multi-party co-operation strengthened the parliamentary oversight of the natural resources sector and climate adaptation. The work also facilitated dialogue across party lines in an environment where democracy has gradually deteriorated. During the strategy period, the preconditions for parliamentary oversight of natural resources were strengthened, and parliamentarians produced better-structured reports and recommendations than before. The programme, carried out in collaboration with the local partner Instituto para Democracia Multipartidária (IMD), also succeeded in strengthening dialogue between decision-makers and local communities and civil society organisations. Following the disputed elections of 2024, violence against the opposition, human rights abuses and fatalities have caused instability in society.



Myanmar

The main outcome of the programme of Demo Finland and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) is the preservation of the democracy movement's capacity to act, engage in dialogue and develop skills within an extremely authoritarian environment. Following the military coup in 2021, the programme was adapted and co-operation continued online and from outside the country. This has made it possible to maintain the capacity and dialogue among political parties and democracy activists – particularly women – within a highly difficult operating environment. In 2025, the programme reached over 2,500 people through its networks and mobile app. During the strategy period, the programme has also supported a unique state-level dialogue platform, whose multi-stakeholder co-operation has led, among other things, to reforms concerning women's rights being incorporated into the state-level constitutional process. As one of the world's most authoritarian regimes, Myanmar has been plagued by internal conflict nearly continuously since gaining independence.



Somalia/Puntland

Between 2022 and 2023, Demo Finland, with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), supported women's political participation and multi-party co-operation in Puntland. A key achievement of the collaboration with the Oslo Centre and the Puntland Development and Research Centre (PDRC) was the establishment of a multi-party network of women. The capacity of the state of Somalia remains weak, and it is unable to guarantee its citizens' political rights and security.



Sri Lanka

Following Demo Finland's collaboration (2019–2023) with the One Text Initiative, 600 female politicians were trained, giving them greater self-confidence and the ability to influence local decision-making. At the same time, cross-party co-operation among women was strengthened, for example through a network of female politicians involving women from 20 political parties. In 2024, credible, competitive and peaceful presidential and parliamentary elections were held, featuring a record number of female candidates. Women's participation was also institutionalised at local level with the establishment of 60 women's committees within local government.



Tunisia

In collaboration with its long-standing partner, Centre des Études Méditerranéennes et Internationales (CEMI), Demo Finland maintained dialogue between political parties despite the severe decline in democratisation. The Tunisian School of Politics is the only remaining space where representatives of different political parties can come together. Many alumni of the School of Politics have advanced within their respective political parties and organisations. During this strategy period, greater emphasis has been placed on training young people with a civil society background and reaching out to other young people, as the operating space for political parties has narrowed. In 2025, 12 parties still participated in various dialogue events, which provided a rare forum for cross-party discussion within a constricted political landscape. During the strategy period, Tunisia has clearly shifted from a democratic system towards an authoritarian regime. Whilst Tunisia was still classified as a free country at the start of 2021, President Saïed's 2021 self-coup, the sidelining of parliament, the introduction of a new constitution and the curtailment of the space for civil society and the opposition to operate rapidly changed the situation.



WYDE Civic Engagement (2022–2026)

The EU-funded project, focused on the political participation of young people in East Africa, produced the East Africa Youth in Politics Roadmap. The project covered Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Somaliland, and it identified significant barriers to youth participation in the region. As a result of this collaboration, the Democracy Academy was established in Uganda in 2023, which strengthened mutual trust, dialogue skills and co-operation amongst young politicians from different political parties. The project was led by the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), in collaboration with Demo Finland and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD).



Zambia

The political participation of women and persons with disabilities was strengthened over the long term. In particular, the political dialogue network for persons with disabilities and advocacy work targeting political parties helped to embed inclusivity within party structures and political processes. As a result of the programme, eight political parties now have an inclusion plan and a disability wing with representation in the parties' highest decision-making bodies. As a result of this collaboration and by the end of 2025, 59 persons with disabilities had risen to leadership positions within political parties. The programme was implemented in collaboration with the Zambia National Women's Lobby (ZNWL) and Disability Rights Watch (DRW). In Zambia, the state of democracy has improved slightly during the strategy period, and international reports indicate a strengthening of civil liberties and civic space. Concurrently, however, the operational space for the opposition continues to shrink.



Finland

All parliamentary parties participated in co-operation on democracy support, and at the end of the strategy period, the leaders of all parliamentary parties reaffirmed their commitment to international democracy support in a joint statement. In addition, the expertise and understanding of the parties' youth and women's organisations, as well as other party actors, on democracy and inclusivity strengthened. Between 2021 and 2025, 800–1,000 people annually took part in Demo Finland's seminars and other public events.

Endnotes

1 Nord, M., Good God, A., & Lindberg, S. I. (2026). State of the world 2025: unravelling the democratic era? *Democratization, 33*(4), 703–728. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2026.2661683

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5 International IDEA (2025). The Global State of Democracy 2025: Democracy on the move. https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2025.53 ; World Population Review (2026). Freedom Index by Country 2026. https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/freedom-index-by-country

6 Merkel, K. (2026). Democracy as a security asset. Global evidence review. https://www.wfd.org/what-we-do/resources/democracy-security-global-evidence



Political Parties of Finland for Democracy – Demo Finland is a co-operative organisation of all Finnish parliamentary parties. It enhances democracy by strengthening the political participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities in particular and by supporting dialogue between political parties.