

# Better together for youth

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Social Impact

# Better Together for Youth Empowering Future Generations through Collective Action

# STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS

4 | FOREWORD *Mario Nava*

6 | FOREWORD *Youth Alliance*

10 | INDICATORS OF YOUTH

12 | **Executive Summary**  
*The Power of Collective Action*

24 | **1\_ Youth Challenges**  
*Where to Start?*

38 | **2\_ Collaborating for Youth**  
*Knowledge Sharing & Co-investing*

56 | MEASURING IMPACT:  
STRATEGIES AND  
MODELS FOR ASSESSING  
COLLECTIVE IMPACT

64 | **3\_ Advocating for Youth**  
*Policy Frameworks for Systemic-Change*

80 | **Call to Action**  
*Better Together for Youth*

84 | APPENDIX

86 | ENDNOTES

90 | IMPRESS

# Foreword

by  
*Mario  
Nava*

**As a young Bocconi student, I dreamt of working in Europe and having a tangible impact on people's lives. After more than three decades in Brussels, this vision has become my daily reality.**

**S**erving at the heart of the European Union, I've had the privilege of contributing to the integration of our 27 member states and advancing policies that make a difference, particularly for those who need it most—our youth.

The European Union has always been committed to its founding principles as a social market economy. This means not only fostering economic growth but ensuring that this growth benefits all citizens, especially young people. The challenges they face today, from unemployment to social exclusion, require urgent, coordinated action.

As Director General of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, my focus is on shaping policies that empower youth and offer them the opportunities to find their place and feel useful, just like I had the chance to feel. This commitment is deeply embedded in the European Youth Strategy, a dynamic blueprint designed to empower young people across Europe, ensuring they have the tools to thrive and actively engage in society with the goal of placing youth at the centre of EU policies.

EU initiatives such as the *Youth Employment Support*

package and the *reinforced Youth Guarantee* reflect our commitment to supporting young people through education, training, and employment. But these efforts are just the beginning.

Addressing youth challenges requires collective action, bringing together governments, businesses, civil society, and youth themselves.

This is the kind of synergies we endeavour to establish as regards youth entrepreneurship with the learning network *Youth Entrepreneurship Policy Academy*.

The Youth Alliance's work, as presented in this position paper, is an important contribution to the EU's broader mission. It emphasizes collaboration, co-investment, and the need for inclusive policies that ensure no young person is left behind. Initiatives

like *NextGenerationEU* and the *European Pillar of Social Rights*, supported by EU funds, in particular the ESF+, are already laying the groundwork for a more just and inclusive future for Europe's youth, but we must continue to strive for more.

***Now more than ever, we need to foster partnerships that create real, sustainable impact.***

I encourage all stakeholders to join us in this mission to empower the next generation, ensuring that Europe's youth are not just beneficiaries of our policies but active contributors to shaping the future of the Union.

With sincere thanks,

**Mario Nava**  
*Director General, DG Employment,  
Social Affairs and Inclusion  
European Commission*

**Today's rapidly changing world confronts young people with many challenges spanning across various aspects of their lives. From economic instability and educational disparities to mental health issues and environmental concerns, today's youth face both new and old complex obstacles yet to be overcome.**

One of the most pressing issues is the economic uncertainty young people encounter. Youth unemployment is a significant barrier that adds to the complex challenges faced by young people today. With the rise of automation, economic instability and shifts in global labour markets, many young people find it difficult to secure stable, long-term employment. In 2023, every ninth young person

future planning. At the same time, some of these young people are ready to start their own businesses and become agents of change in efforts to achieve a sustainable future, but face various barriers, such as inadequate financial support from financial institutions.

Another critical area of concern is youth's mental health. The pressures of modern life – e.g., financial

# Foreword *by Youth Alliance*

These challenges are not confined to any single region or community; they are global in nature, affecting young individuals with various backgrounds and circumstances.

in the labour force in the European Union (EU) aged between 15 and 29 years old was unemployed.<sup>1</sup> This uncertainty causes financial stress, with one-third of Gen Zs and millennials indicating that they feel financially insecure and with over half of both groups living pay check-to-pay check.<sup>2</sup> Securing stable employment has become a daunting task for young people, hindering

stress – coupled with the pervasive influence of social media, have led to a significant increase in mental health issues among young people, with 40% of Gen Zs and 35% of millennials sharing they feel stressed all or most of the time.<sup>3</sup> Anxiety, depression and mental health disorders are becoming alarmingly common, necessitating urgent attention and support.

With environmental challenges looming large and climate change posing a significant threat to the future of our planet, young people have stepped to the forefront of the fight against climate change, advocating for sustainable practices and policies, with more than two-thirds of Gen Zs (73%) and millennials (77%) taking action to minimise their environmental impact and feeling government should play an active role in scrutinising business to address climate change (77% of Gen Zs and 79% of millennials).<sup>4</sup>

By working together, we can create a more inclusive, fair and sustainable future for all.<sup>5</sup> It is our collective responsibility to ensure that young people have the resources, opportunities and support they need to thrive in an increasingly complex world.

The Youth Alliance is the Community of Practice for youth empowerment established in 2022 at the initiative of Impact Europe and Schneider Electric Foundation to foster collaboration and advocacy for empowering youth in Europe. We acknowledge youth's needs and aim to support them by mobilising resources collectively and maximising impact through 1) co-funding and co-investing in projects supporting disadvantaged youth, 2) sharing knowledge on strategies and best practices and driving systemic change through a collective voice, 3) ensuring our accountability through impact measurement and management and 4) empowering youth by integrating their voices in decision-making.

We thereby want to ensure that our interventions are relevant, effective and sustainable, while guaranteeing long-term program success tailored to young peoples' needs. We hope this paper will inspire other impact actors to join this Alliance and provide an additional perspective for policymakers to drive meaningful policy change while learning from young people and organisations we support and work with.

Enjoy the reading presenting the first findings of this Alliance journey!



# INDICATORS

## on youth

roughly **1 in 6** people in the EU are youth aged between **15 to 29 years old**<sup>6</sup>

as of 2023 **every 9<sup>th</sup> young person** in the labour force in the EU aged between 15-29 was **unemployed**<sup>7</sup>

in 2023 **13%** global youth **unemployment rate**<sup>8</sup>

in 2023 **20%** of young people were **NEET** not in employment, education or training

as of 2023 **25%** of youth aged between 15-29 in the EU are **at risk of poverty or social exclusion**<sup>9</sup>

## *Executive Summary*



**THE**

**POWER**

**OF**

# Collective Action



**Economic instability, educational disparities, mental health issues and environmental concerns – collaboration and collective action are essential to addressing these issues effectively, ensuring that young people have the resources, opportunities and support they need to thrive.**

The Youth Alliance, hosted by Impact Europe, aims to empower youth by co-funding and co-investing in projects, sharing knowledge, driving systemic change and integrating youth voices in decision-making.

This position paper outlines the **Youth Alliance's efforts to support disadvantaged youth and youth social entrepreneurs.** It builds on research to provide best practices, insights and new

developments on collaboration, co-investing, impact management and measurement and advocacy.

The paper is intended for a diverse audience of **impact capital providers and supporters (from public to private sectors), as well as policymakers** committed to youth empowerment. The authors aim to inspire new impact capital providers and supporters interested in collectively addressing youth challenges to join the Youth Alliance, as well as provide an additional perspective for policymakers to drive meaningful policy change for better youth empowerment across Europe.

As the paper details the collaborative methods of the Youth Alliance, we hope to highlight areas where these audiences can find ways to add to the collaboration and leverage their resources. Impact capital providers can find, throughout Section 2, opportunities to share knowledge and co-invest, while a framework for policymakers is presented in Section 3. While this paper is written from the perspective of current Youth Alliance members, its insights apply to potential funders, impact capital providers, donors and grantees, as well as actors active in the field of youth work. The recommendations in Table 1 apply to these various actors.

General challenges for young people are discussed in Section 1, but notably the focus zooms in on the challenges of youth social entrepreneurs, as supporting this group is a key leverage point for the Alliance and its co-investment strategy; readers who support social enterprises, even those unrelated to youth, may still find insights in the mapping of these challenges. While some recommendations presented throughout the paper refer specifically to the work of the Youth Alliance (e.g., Section 2), we offer these learnings to a

wider audience to show a unique collaborative methodology that adds the voice of youth to the ongoing conversation about their challenges. Throughout Section 2, the Youth Alliance uses a survey to reflect on the efficacy of our methods and discuss avenues for refinement in depth; we show our inner workings with the hope that they will apply beyond the Alliance. Specifically, these learnings may apply to other communities of practice and coalitions that attempt to align investments and support to a group or theme.

**The Alliance is testament to the fact that together we can make a difference for young people, with young people.**

As a community of practice, we want to collaborate and learn while growing and becoming more successful in supporting disadvantaged youth and social entrepreneurs across Europe.



# Four main objectives and solution approaches emerge from this work:

## Youth challenges transcend individual or localised circumstances, calling for a more systemic approach to address them.

To effectively tackle youth-related issues, it is essential to go beyond addressing symptoms and delve into root causes through building partnerships and cross-sector collaboration, thereby allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of these issues, while enabling tailored and impactful solutions. Youth should be actively engaged in shaping projects and programs to better fit their needs.

## The Youth Alliance offers a compelling model of collaboration, sharing knowledge and orchestrating funding solutions that are complementary across the capital chain.

By creating a platform for peer learning and knowledge sharing, we try to reduce complexity while aligning along shared interests and goals. Innovative financing approaches like co-funding, co-investing and public-private partnerships are pivotal, as they enable larger, more sustainable projects but also reduce risks for investors and funders, while maximising impact.

## Collective efforts should be evaluated collectively.

The Youth Alliance emphasises the importance of measuring and managing impact to understand the changes created by its activities and refine them to increase positive outcomes. Embedding impact measurement and management in its operations is vital for learning from current results and understanding what to improve in the future. To achieve systemic change, it is important to align along shared goals and a shared set of indicators for measuring impact across initiatives. Integrating a systems-change lens could enable the Youth Alliance to understand how investments influence systemic and structural barriers. Timely and adaptive data collection is essential for refining collective initiatives, strengthening responsiveness and assessing the effectiveness of collective strategies. An iterative process, forming a collective Theory of Change, could further clarify objectives, actions and KPIs, enabling better evaluation of investments' expected impact.

**Advocate for youth.** We want to provide an additional perspective for policymakers by engaging with them to drive meaningful policy change while learning from young people and organisations we support and work with. We need to engage with policymakers to drive meaningful policy changes that align with youth needs, while fostering learning and collaboration between impact capital providers and policymakers to improve joint projects and their impact. Simpler regulation, cross-border impact finance and better leveraging of public and private funding mechanisms are needed for fostering more public-private partnerships to support youth better. Additionally, building coalitions and learning networks to amplify the impact of youth initiatives can ensure policy frameworks tailored to the needs of young people left behind.

TABLE 1

Recommendations  
for strengthening  
co-investing,  
knowledge  
sharing, impact  
measurement and  
management and  
advocacy.

	WHAT do we want to achieve?	HOW can we achieve it?
Co-Investing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Bolstering sustainable outcomes</li><li>&gt; Reducing risk for investors</li><li>&gt; Support partner organisations to increase their impact on the ground</li><li>&gt; Maximizing impact</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Shift from a single investment to a multi-actor approach</li><li>&gt; Avoid isolated funding strategies</li><li>&gt; Stronger public private partnerships</li><li>&gt; Comprehensive co-investing (e. g. through complementary capital, blended finance, collaborative grant-making, donor-advised funds)</li><li>&gt; Explore revenue-sharing to better include private partners</li><li>&gt; Thoughtful and strategic program design</li></ul>
Knowledge sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Sharing tools, methodologies, and strategies</li><li>&gt; Engage in collaboration for fostering knowledge exchange and collaborative learning</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Set specific learning questions and goals</li><li>&gt; Establish a task force or working groups for specific issues</li><li>&gt; Foster knowledge exchange through organising conferences, hackathons, or other interchange formats</li><li>&gt; Curate a joint learning platform</li></ul>
Impact Measurement and Management (IMM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Aligning decision-making</li><li>&gt; Learn form results and strengthen accountability</li><li>&gt; Integrate systems change lens</li><li>&gt; Operate on clear principles</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Map the impact ecosystem on youth issues</li><li>&gt; Develop a systemic and structured theory of change</li><li>&gt; Create a set of KPIs</li><li>&gt; Establish a set of core objectives</li><li>&gt; Set up a timely and adaptive data collection process to monitor changes and re-evaluate strategies and goals</li><li>&gt; Develop case study to explore real-world experiences</li></ul>
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Drive policy changes aligned with youth needs and challenges</li><li>&gt; Foster collective action for systemic change supporting disadvantaged youth</li><li>&gt; Create an enabling policy environment for youth entrepreneurship</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; Engage policymakers and impact capital providers to collaborate on joint projects and initiatives</li><li>&gt; Leverage public-private partnerships and co-funding mechanisms</li><li>&gt; Utilise data-driven research</li></ul>

### — Co-Investing

This pillar focuses on identifying opportunities for collaboration, effectively mobilising both financial and non-financial resources, and experimenting with innovative investment approaches. This collaborative effort aims to pool resources and expertise to drive impactful projects.

### — Knowledge Sharing

By creating a platform for exchange, members can share and collect their experiences and continuously improve their approaches. This collective intelligence helps in identifying best practices and lessons learned, which can then be applied to future projects. This pillar ensures that the alliance remains adaptive and evolves based on real-world insights and experiences.

### — Advocacy

This pillar is focused on recording and disseminating shared learnings beyond the alliance itself. By informing decision-makers and guiding public policies, the alliance aims to promote collective, innovative, long-term, and systemic solutions. This advocacy work is based on a thorough analysis of systemic barriers that youth face, ensuring that the policies promoted are grounded in practical, on-the-ground realities.

# THE YOUTH ALLIANCE

The Youth Alliance, launched with the support of Impact Europe (formerly European Venture Philanthropy Association, EVPA) and the catalytic funding of Schneider Electric Foundation during the Impact Week 2022 in Brussels, is a community of practice (CoP) of more than fifty active members dedicated to addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by youth, **focusing on empowering disadvantaged youth and youth social entrepreneurs in Europe.** The Alliance brings together impact capital providers, practitioners, and investors committed to tackling youth issues through collective action. By employing a systemic and holistic approach, Alliance members jointly work on three pillars: **initiating co-investments, sharing knowledge, and advocating for systemic change.**

# Methodology & Participants

**In Spring 2024, the Youth Alliance decided to strengthen its knowledge, practices and engagement with members and stakeholders by building on its existing expertise and integrating new trends and insights.**

**T**his position paper reflects a collaborative effort among Youth Alliance members and the Esade Centre for Social Impact (ECSI), a key European academic partner actively engaged in researching and strengthening social impact.

The Youth Alliance, together with ECSI, circulated a survey among Youth Alliance members and conducted interviews with a selected number of members. Among the 72 Impact Europe member organisations contacted to fill out the survey, 20 took part in it, which included impact funds, foundations, corporate impact actors and

financial institutions. The survey employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative questions and was conducted through Qualtrics. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with Youth Alliance members actively working in the field of youth empowerment, for additional detailed insights that could further complement those collected by the survey. Primary and secondary data (e.g., documents and publications of Alliance members) were key to develop useful strategic insights to further empower youth and strengthen the Alliance.

*"Acting in coalition is the most effective but also the most ambitious way to support social entrepreneurs who are involved with youth. This brings more efficiency and more strength. Success is not anymore individual, it is carried and comes from the group. This involves reaching agreement, acting outside your comfort zone and focusing on the common project."*

— Patricia Benchenna,  
Foundation Director at Schneider Electric Foundation

# 1\_

*"Young people own the future  
— and they want to shape it."*

*— Marek Wallenfels,  
Director Education and the Next Generation,  
Bertelsmann Stiftung*

# YOUTH CHALLENGES

*Where to Start?*

**Supporting and encouraging young people** is of significant importance to the Youth Alliance. But among many young adults there is a shared deep sense of anxiety about what the future holds for them.<sup>10</sup> From global climate change, slow economic development, continuous social inequality to political instability, regional conflicts, war and rapid technological changes with consequences for future employment, young people across the world live in a highly volatile living and working environment.<sup>11</sup>

**Financial instability and the vicissitudes of employment** dominate the concerns of youth, according to Youth Talks, a global youth consultation.<sup>12</sup> Another study conducted by YMCA and Deloitte identifies **three main challenges young people worldwide face today: hopelessness, unemployment and mental health issues.**<sup>13</sup> As these are pressing issues entailing severe future consequences, what can be done about these challenges to support the next generation?

**The hurdles young people face** in contributing to a sustainable and equitable transition are significant. Nonetheless, there is cause for optimism because young people are eager to be involved in this change. Ideas and solutions for some pressing issues already exist but require implementation. Governments, NGOs and companies need to be part of these solutions as they implement promising concepts, but also test and pilot new ones to the extent that they can be implemented in multi-stakeholder alliances where everyone does what they can do best.

With around 1.2 billion young people

***"Of course, we must talk about climate, biodiversity, and desertification... But let's not forget that to fight these battles, we have an invaluable treasure: our youth, which has never been so numerous and receptive."***

— Gilles Vermot Desroches,  
Chief Corporate Citizenship Officer at  
Schneider Electric

between the age of 15 and 24 worldwide, young people will play an increasingly important role in shaping the future in the coming decades through their views, their activism and the skills they bring to the workforce.<sup>14</sup>

**Although we live in a connected,**

**global world,** the challenges for future careers are very different, subject to where one lives. A survey conducted by Gallup and Amazon in the United Kingdom, France and Germany found that four out of ten young people cannot yet envision what careers they will have pursued by the age of 30.<sup>15</sup>

Youth, it seems, faces multiple barriers to strive, but solutions to supporting them exist.



# From ~~BAR~~RIERS

## to ~~B~~RIDGE *Mapping the Field* ES

In the 2023 comprehensive mapping of gaps and barriers faced by youth in Europe, carried out by Ashoka – an NGO that promotes social entrepreneurship – in partnership with the Youth Alliance, it was found that a lack of soft skills development, mental health challenges, a need for unrestricted funding and pervasive inequalities are the most frequently mentioned barriers for young people to thrive as social entrepreneurs (see figure 1). This mapping provided a first starting point for the Youth Alliance to prioritise youth issues it aims to tackle. Addressing these issues could help young people better find jobs that suit them, combat the stigmatization of mental health issues and provide financial support for social entrepreneurs (see box 1). To address these issues, challenges analysed via the mapping focused on two main questions:

— How can we empower disadvantaged youth?

— And how can we support youth social entrepreneurship?

## Empowering disadvantaged youth and strengthening social entrepreneurship

As members of the Youth Alliance, we want to support **disadvantaged youth** as young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) and address inequalities in education, build skills and job readiness, support mentoring and support families. We believe that **social entrepreneurship**, defined as innovative businesses that develop products and services that create economic value while also addressing social and environmental challenges, can be an accelerator of a just and green transition. We therefore support skills development and network building for young social entrepreneurs. With the “European Year of Youth,” the European Union in 2022 aimed at supporting young people to acquire relevant knowledge and competences. We refer to **youth or young people** as people aged between 15–29 years (European Union, 2022).

BOX 1



EMPOWER

## Disadvantaged Youth

The three systemic obstacles preventing disadvantaged youth from flourishing are related to a lack of or limited education, challenges in the job market and issues in collaboration in the contexts of policy dialogue and insights from the ground. In education, there is a mismatch between the skills taught and those needed, a shortage of teachers and difficulties in reaching and integrating disadvantaged youth into programs. There are also significant gaps between skilling and job pathways, as well as gender and digital skills gaps. In the labour market, inefficient recruitment systems, often poor talent-job matching, and social biases create substantial barriers for youth, while collaboration barriers include insufficient scaling through public-private partnerships, a disconnect between policy dialogue and

ground insights, and a lack of youth involvement in decision-making regarding venture impact measurement, scaling and systems-change influence.

Empowering disadvantaged youth requires addressing systemic barriers in education, the labour market and collaboration efforts. Education, for example, is crucial for a functional society; it enables community living, political participation and economic contribution. Investing in educational advancements benefits individuals, countries and the world. For individuals, it boosts employability, earnings and health.<sup>16</sup> Globally, education investments enhance social cohesion, economic growth, competitiveness and innovation, an insight even better understood after the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>17</sup>

ENGINING

# Systemic barriers

## GAPS TO BE FILLED

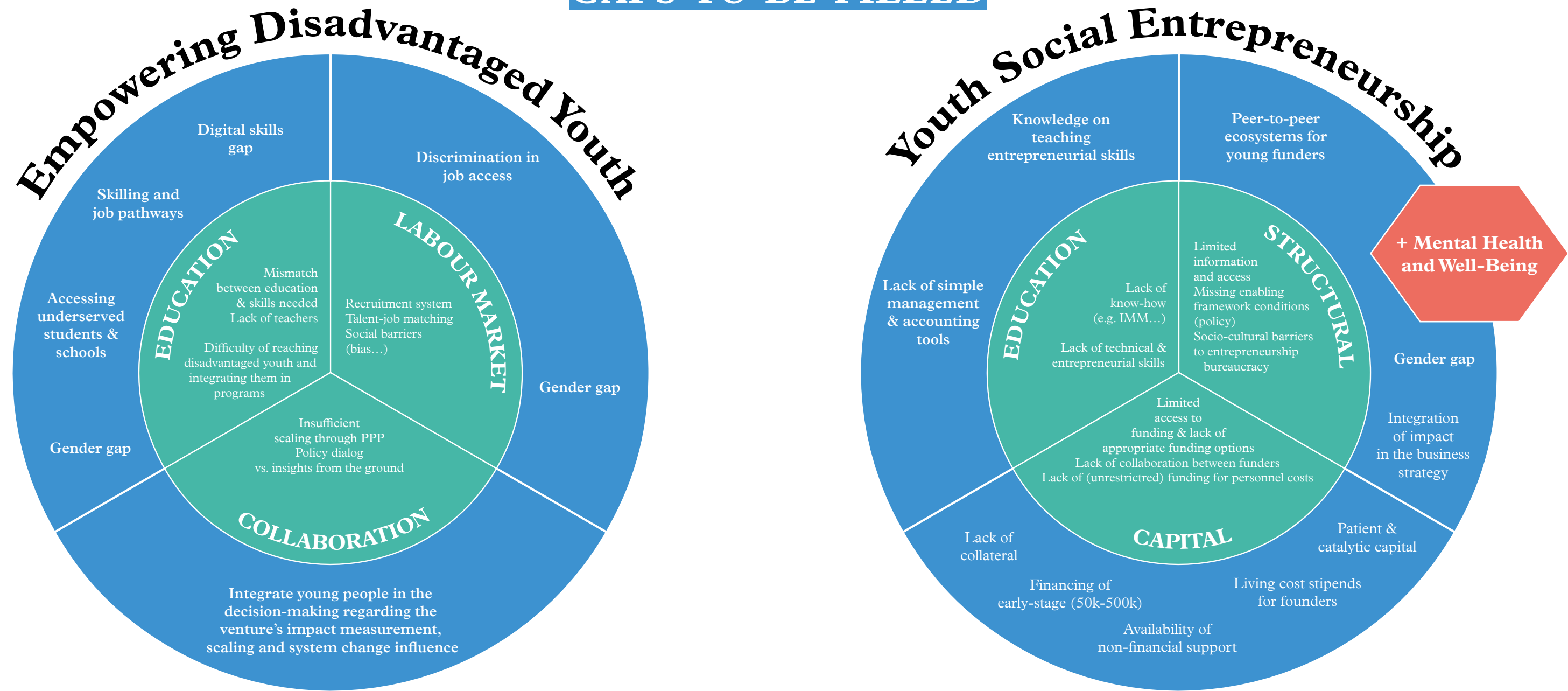


Figure 1. Mapping the field (figure from Ashoka research, 2023).

# Supporting Youth Social Entrepreneurship

TO BOOST  
ECONOMIC

I N E P E N D E N C E  
D E N C E

**S**ocial enterprises and entrepreneurs change the world and lead with solutions that create both economic value and social impact, and a growing number of companies worldwide strive for this combination. Young people are particularly open to the idea of not only creating a profit but also doing good for society with their (social) businesses and non-profits.<sup>18</sup> The key contributions of social entrepreneurs to a socially and environmentally sustainable economy have long been overlooked. Today, however, an estimated 10 million social enterprises worldwide generate \$2 trillion in revenue and provide 200 million jobs, underscoring their significant impact.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, young people face significant obstacles when trying to become social entrepreneurs. The

primary challenges include educational barriers, structural hurdles and a lack of capital. Educational barriers include a lack of know-how in areas such as impact measurement and management (IMM) and insufficient technical and entrepreneurial skills. Structural barriers consist of limited information access, missing enabling framework conditions, socio-cultural barriers to social entrepreneurship and bureaucratic hurdles. Capital barriers include limited access to funding, a lack of appropriate funding options and insufficient collaboration between capital providers. Additionally, there is a need for unrestricted funding for personnel costs, early-stage financing, non-financial support and living cost stipends for founders.

# Perceived challenges by Youth Alliance members in 2024

Working with disadvantaged youth and social entrepreneurs, members of Youth Alliance were asked to name the most pressing challenges for these two groups according to their research and insights. Data is not representative for the whole group but intends to indicate the perceived prominence of the issues the members are trying to solve (See figure 2 and 3).

Limited access to skilling and job pathways is perceived by almost all respondents as the most pressing issue in empowering disadvantaged youth (94,1%). More than half of the respondents perceive discrimination in job access (58,8%) and the digital

skills gap (52,9%) significant gaps for young people, while almost half complain that youth voices are underrepresented (47,1%) (Figure 2).

Supporting youth social entrepreneurship is a key element of many Youth Alliance members. Nearly half of the respondents criticize the lack of patient and catalytic capital (47,1%) as a major gap, while every third cites a shortage of early-stage financing (35,3%). Besides the lack of sufficient capital, a third of them perceive a lack of knowledge in teaching entrepreneurial skills and scarcity of non-financial support as relevant challenges to young social entrepreneurs (Figure 3).

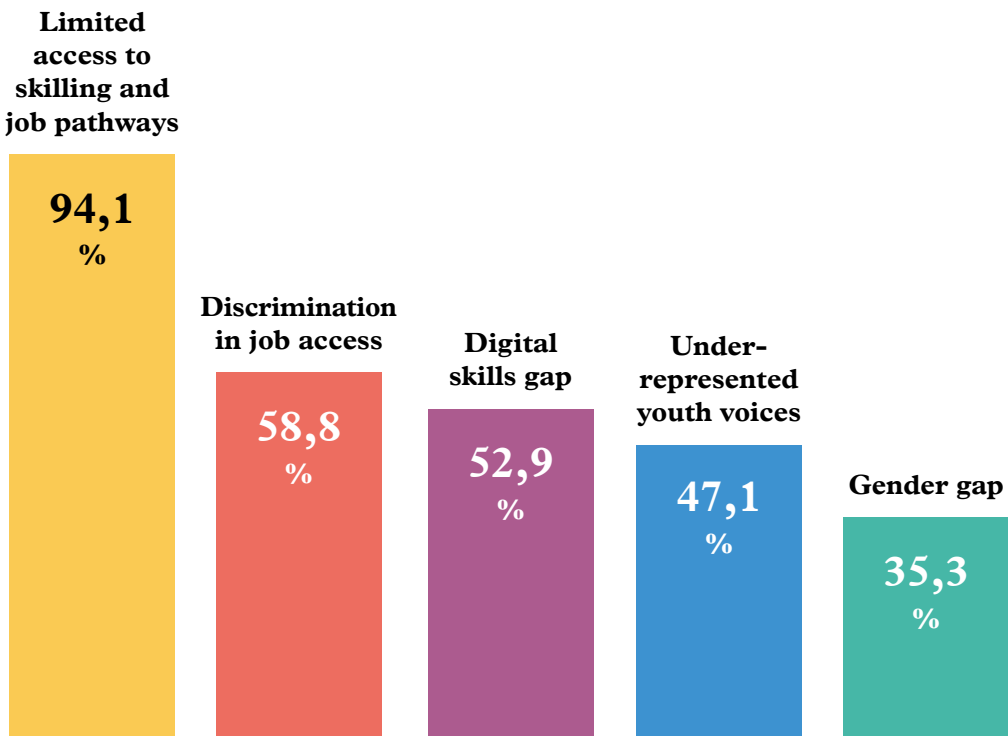


Figure 2. What are the three most significant gaps to be addressed to empower disadvantaged youth?

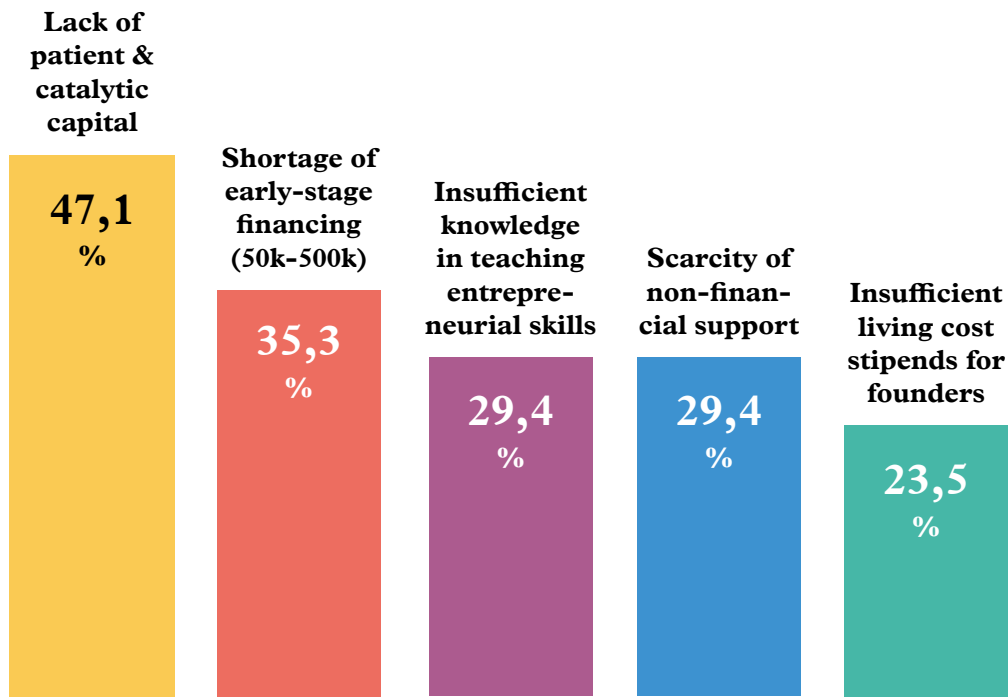


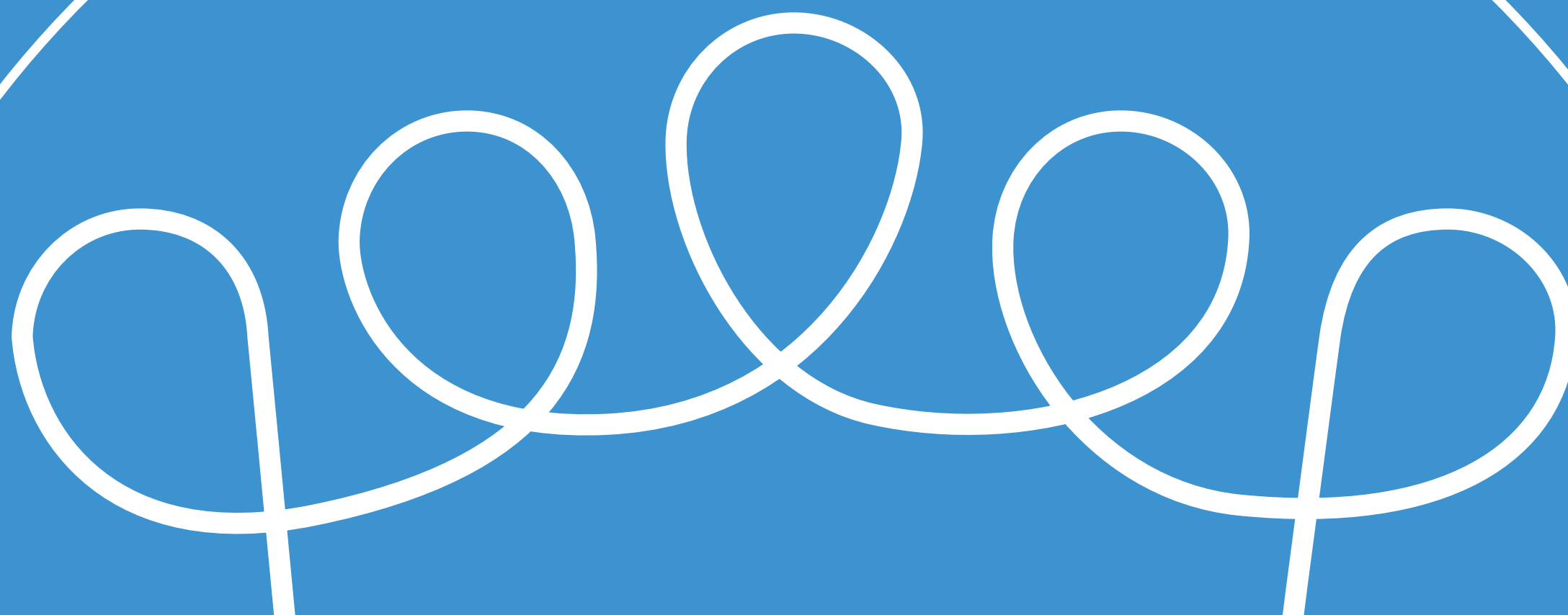
Figure 3. What are the three most significant gaps to be addressed to support youth social entrepreneurship?

# 2\_\_COLLA- for BORATING YOUTH

*“Youth organisations need long-term funders and supporters that can deploy a set of capabilities to be activated at the right time and for the right need.”*

— Patricia Benchenna,  
Foundation Director at  
Schneider Electric Foundation

Knowledge Sharing & Co-investing



**Y**outh challenges often transcend individual or localised circumstances, calling for a more **systemic approach** to address them. To effectively tackle youth-related issues, such as unemployment and limited access to social entrepreneurship, it is essential to go **beyond addressing symptoms** and delve into **root causes**<sup>20,21</sup>. Partnerships and cross-sector collaboration allow for a more comprehensive understanding of these issues, enabling tailored and impactful solutions. From a **systems-thinking perspective**, strategies aimed at fostering social innovation and change for youth empowerment can only succeed by involving multiple organisations working together.

“Collaboration is key. We cannot address

these complex, wicked problems alone,” as one stakeholder put it. **Communities** must be at the heart of these collaborative efforts, ensuring that the **voices** of those affected are central to decision-making processes. This

can empower youth to co-create solutions, foster democratic processes and ensure that interventions are relevant, sustainable and long-lasting.

Initiatives such as **Youth Lead the Change** or the

**Opportunity Youth Forum** illustrate how collaboration and advocacy of young people can go hand-in-hand. Youth Lead the Change<sup>22</sup>, in Boston and Hamburg, exemplifies how youth can be

actively engaged in democratic processes, helping shape the future of social and political engagement.<sup>23</sup> The program aims to enhance leadership skills and civic engagement, **strengthening the connection between**

**young people and local politics**. It operates on an annual cycle from ideas presentation to idea implementation and works with specific projects building on an extensive consultation of **multiple stakeholders** (e.g., city officials and community experts). The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions’ Opportunity Youth Forum<sup>24</sup> is another example of

collaboration aimed at **improving the life of the most vulnerable youth and young adults** in the U.S., specifically investing in **community-based, cross-system and cross-sector collaborations** for building education and career opportunities for youth. For other examples showing how different types of collaboration models can empower youth and youth social entrepreneurship, see table 2.

# Why Collaborate for Youth Empowerment?

TABLE 2

Examples  
of joint initiatives

Fundação Ageas	Junior Achievement Europe	Youth Lead the Change	Opportunity Youth Forum	Collective Impact Funder Community of Practice	Co-Impact
<p>Fundação Ageas<sup>25</sup> has been actively involved in various collaborations aimed at promoting social innovation and impact in Portugal. Recently, they launched the ÍMPARES Program in collaboration with CUF Hospital. This initiative aims to support organisations and social entrepreneurs with the potential for growth and to prepare them for impact investment.</p>	<p>Junior Achievement (JA)<sup>26</sup> Europe is a pan-European network of 40 JA organisations that deliver entrepreneurship education programs to young people. This collaboration includes co-developing educational content, sharing best practices, and coordinating efforts to engage stakeholders. JA Europe also supports its members in navigating policy challenges, advocating for entrepreneurship education, and creating opportunities for young people across Europe to develop essential skills for the future.<sup>27</sup></p>	<p>The Youth Lead The Change<sup>28</sup> initiative is a collaborative program designed to empower young people by involving them in democratic processes through participatory budgeting. This program demonstrates how engaging youth in decision-making not only enhances their sense of responsibility but also deepens their commitment to their communities. Through active participation, young individuals gain valuable experience in leadership and civic engagement, contributing to more inclusive and responsive community development.</p>	<p>The Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF)<sup>29</sup> is a network of forty local collaborators across various communities in the United States. It connects young people, organisations and communities to tackle the challenges faced by “opportunity youth” — those disconnected from education or employment. OYF focuses on driving local action through shared learning, policy advocacy and innovative solutions. Its goal is to create opportunities for personal and professional development, helping youth access meaningful employment and build brighter futures.</p>	<p>The Collective Impact Funder Community of Practice<sup>30</sup>, facilitated by the Collective Impact Forum, serves as a learning community focused on leveraging collective impact to drive change. This forum provides a space for funders to build relationships, share insights and enhance their approach to investing in and supporting collaborative, community-driven initiatives.</p>	<p>The goal of Co-Impact’s<sup>31</sup> funds is to create systems that deliver fundamental services — such as health, education and economic opportunities — in a more just, inclusive and effective manner. Co-Impact fosters collaboration by helping partners to create coalitions that include government, market leaders and other key stakeholders, enabling these groups to work together effectively to achieve shared goals.</p>



# Role of the Youth Alliance

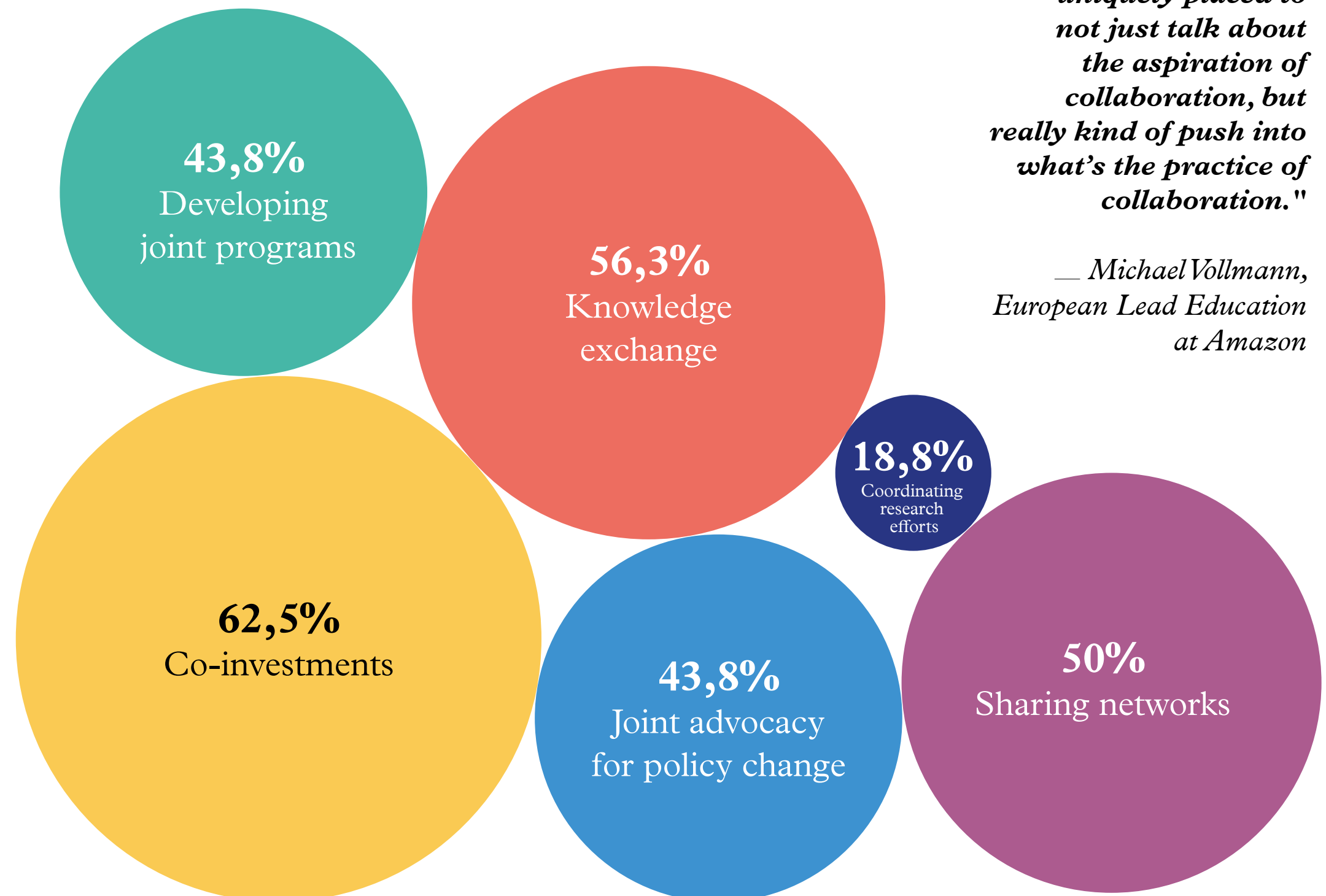
## *in Fostering Collaborative Efforts*

The **Youth Alliance** offers a compelling model of collaboration, identifying urgent needs and orchestrating funding solutions that are complementary across the capital chain. By creating a platform for **peer learning and knowledge sharing**, the Alliance ensures that no single organisation has to tackle these complex challenges alone.

As Maximilian Herrmann from SAP noted, “Many projects operate in isolation, with scattered programs and business KPIs.” The collective approach of the Youth Alliance not only avoids such fragmentation but also enables the **mobilisation of larger resources and the pooling of efforts for greater impact**. As survey respondents indicate (Figure 4), the Alliance should particularly continue to strengthen and focus on **co-investments** (63%), **knowledge exchanges** (56%) and **sharing networks** (50%). Other important types of collaboration are **joint advocacy for policy change** (44%) and **developing joint programs** (44%).

*“I think the Youth Alliance is really uniquely placed to not just talk about the aspiration of collaboration, but really kind of push into what’s the practice of collaboration.”*

— *Michael Vollmann,  
European Lead Education  
at Amazon*



*Figure 4. What are the three most important types of collaboration the Youth Alliance should focus on?*

# Challenges in Collaborative Efforts

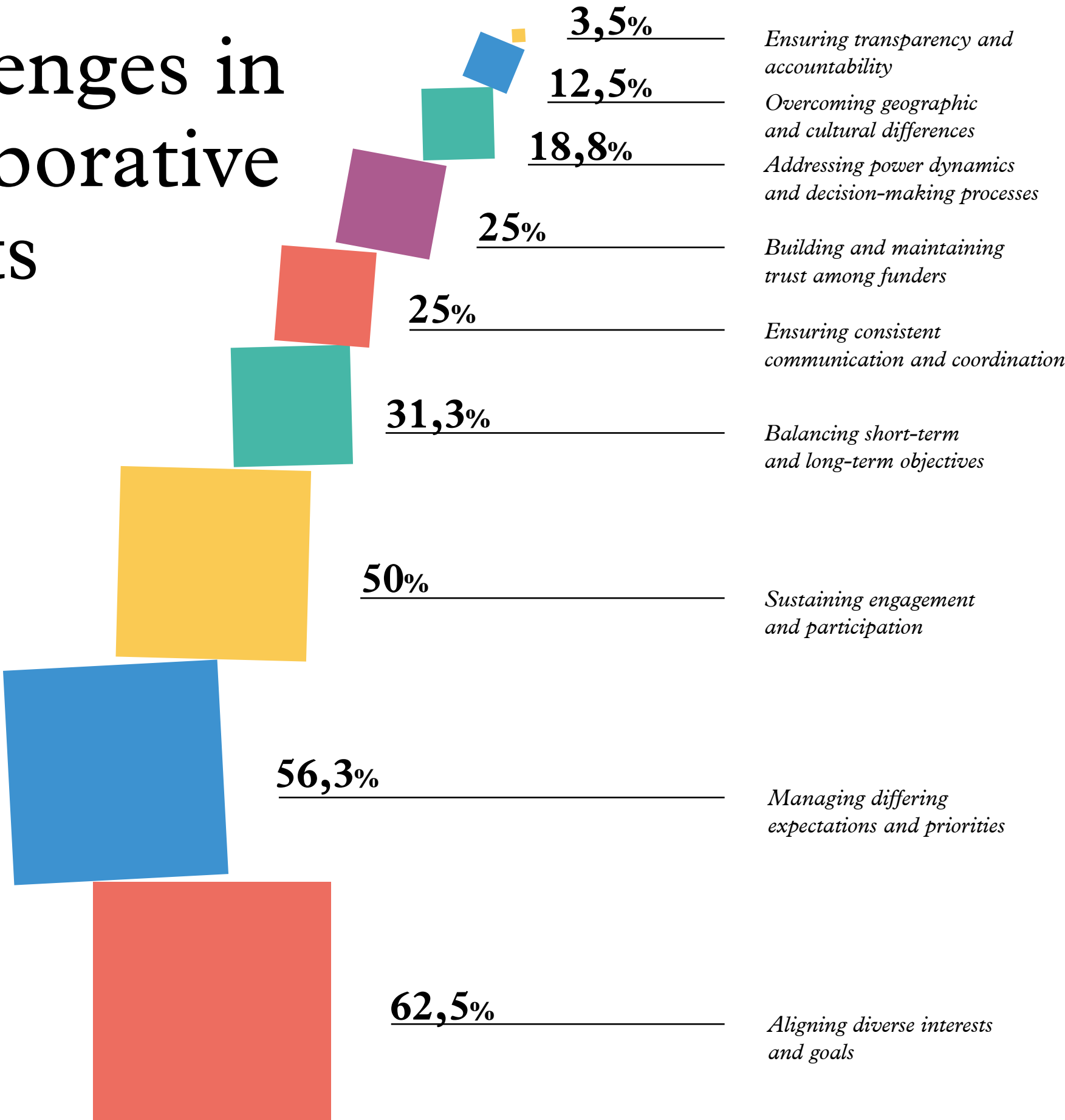


Figure 5. What do you see as the three main challenges in building and maintaining a strong coalition of funders?

## Collaborative efforts face barriers.

As Figure 5 indicates, the main challenge of building a strong coalition of funders is to **align diverse interests and goals** (63%). **Managing different expectations and priorities** (56%) and **sustaining engagement and participation** (50%) are secondary challenges. Other relevant obstacles are **balancing short-term and long-term objectives** (31%), **ensuring consistent communication and coordination** (25%), **building and maintaining trust among funders** (25%) and **addressing power dynamics and decision-making processes** (19%).

Giving more relevance to concrete examples of collaboration is a priority of this community of practice. **Setting specific learning questions** can contribute to building the focus of the collaboration and help members understand the value of the Alliance in terms of field-building. This, in turn, will support the building of coordination mechanisms, reciprocity of sharing and peer learning around specific questions.

# Strengthening Co-investments



**C**ollaboration and collective funding are crucial for addressing systemic issues and empowering youth. Innovative financing approaches like **co-funding** and **co-investing** are pivotal in this realm. These methods not only enable larger, more sustainable projects but also **reduce risks for investors and funders, while maximising impact**. A holistic approach to capital can unlock its full potential<sup>32</sup>, leading to greater positive outcomes and reducing investment risks. As systemic thinkers say, in the words of Aristotle, “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” The philanthropic sector has already begun integrating systems perspectives in its funding models, as seen in initiatives like Co-impact, a global philanthropic collaborative focused on promoting inclusive systems change<sup>33</sup>.

In the context of **co-investing** (e.g., in impact investing), the application of systems logic, though still emerging, is gaining recognition as crucial for addressing complex challenges<sup>34</sup>. This logic encourages impact investors to go beyond isolated investments and adopt a broader

systems perspective, which involves considering networks and dynamic contexts. Such an approach reveals deeper root causes and calls for tailored financial strategies, helping **shift away from frequently ineffective single-investment paradigms towards a more comprehensive, multi-actor approach**.

Eleni Theodorou from We Share Forward Foundation pointed out that “**complementary capital** for youth empowerment and youth social entrepreneurship is needed at every stage, from pre-seed to scaling, which can be achieved through blended finance, including grants, revolving grants, debt, equity, guarantees, outcome-based funding, amongst others, and non-financial support.” These approaches also have the potential to catalyse further capital, amplifying their impact. She added that “**isolated funding strategies can also have a negative net impact**, as they could fail to address the broader, systemic nature of youth challenges.” Targeting only specific countries or programs limits the potential for widespread change. Instead, a unified approach can mobilise more substantial capital and resources, leading to more comprehensive and effective solutions for youth empowerment.

*According to survey respondents, the Youth Alliance can employ **several strategic co-investing approaches to maximise its impact**. One of the most recommended methods is **blended finance**, which merges philanthropic capital with private sector investments.*<sup>35</sup>

This approach helps de-risk projects, making them more attractive to both foundations and businesses. By providing clear roles for different types of contributors, blended finance ensures sustainable funding for initiatives. Having a foundation actively involved in impact investing or catalytic funding within the Youth Alliance might contribute as a grant to cover initial operational costs for a youth entrepreneurship program, while a business member could invest additional capital in the same initiative, knowing the foundation's grant absorbs some of the risk.

This combined investment could support the development and scaling of youth-led social start-ups. To implement this model, the Youth Alliance could require a minimum annual financial commitment from its members with the Alliance selecting some projects to sponsor each year.

Another highly effective strategy proposed by the Alliance members is **collaborative grant-making**, where multiple funders pool their resources for a shared cause<sup>36</sup>. Through this approach, Youth Alliance members could combine financial and non-financial contributions to support large-scale youth programs, such as capacity-building for young entrepreneurs. This model also emphasises the importance of pairing **grant funding with technical assistance** to ensure that youth-led initiatives receive not only financial backing but also the skills and guidance necessary for success. This combination helps projects thrive by offering **expertise alongside capital**<sup>37</sup>.

A **revenue-sharing model** was also suggested by interviewees as a means to incentivise business members to co-invest by offering a financial return on their investment. This approach supports the sustainability of youth entrepreneurship initiatives while aligning with the financial goals of private sector partners. Blending philanthropic, patient and commercial funding allows for several types of capital to be utilised at various stages of a project's development, making it more adaptable and resilient.

The Youth Alliance itself has allowed for different types of co-investing and non-financial support to take place: from creating co-investment opportunities among Youth Alliance members, to inspiring other organisations to co-invest in similar initiatives. Examples of such are:

### — From Learning to Earning

YMCA's Learning to Earning initiative supports disadvantaged youth by bridging digital skills with sustainable employment. It assists NEETs in acquiring high-demand job skills, collaborates with employers for effective recruitment and prepares youth for future-focused roles. This European project is part of a global youth employment effort. HP, Macquarie Foundation, Accenture Foundation and Youth Talks (Higher Education for Good Foundation) joined as co-investors to the initiative.

### — Building Back Better Through Social Entrepreneurship

We Share Forward Foundation invested in JA Europe's project entitled "Building Back Better Through Social Entrepreneurship", an initiative equipping youth in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine with skills to start social enterprises. The initiative fosters entrepreneurship, enhances employability and prepares young people as proactive community changemakers by supporting their social business ideas through mentorship and a Pre-Accelerator Program. YMCA and SAP contributed to the initiative with non-financial support. There is current discussion with Schneider Electric Foundation to join the initiative.

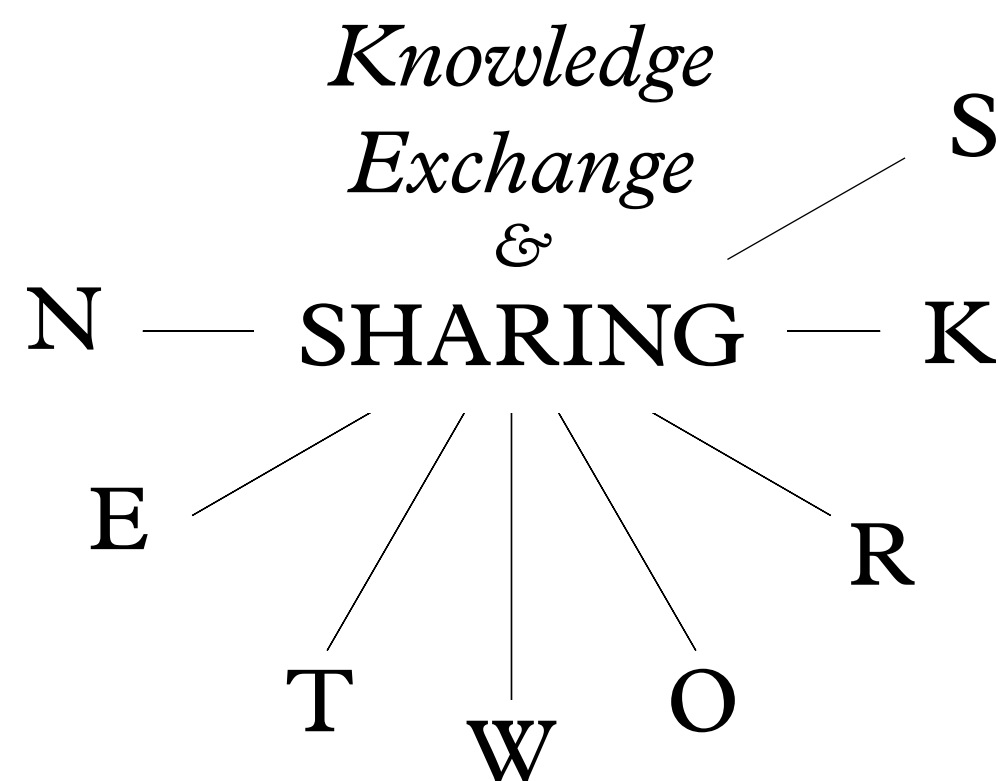
### — Meet & Code

Amazon and SAP invested in Meet & Code, an initiative empowering young Europeans to enhance digital skills through local events focusing on programming, digital literacy and technology. These events aim to inspire future tech innovators and bridge the digital skills gap across Europe.

### — ReDI School of Digital Integration

Microsoft invested in the ReDI School of Digital Integration, an initiative providing free tech education to migrants and marginalised communities, equipping them with digital skills and career support to foster job opportunities and social integration. Amazon and SAP also financed the initiative at a later point.

Together, these strategies, blended finance, collaborative grant-making and revenue-sharing models, emerge as some of the most impactful co-investing approaches from which the Youth Alliance can benefit. They encourage intentional, active contributions from members while ensuring that investments are scalable and aligned with the Alliance's mission to foster youth-led initiatives. It is essential that projects be designed to attract diverse contributors, both financial and non-financial, by being naturally suited for collaboration. This requires a **thoughtful approach to program design**, ensuring that it is easy for others to contribute meaningfully, and that the initiative **aligns with the strategic interests of various stakeholders**.



By working together on joint initiatives, members can share tools, methodologies and strategies, leading to more effective solutions. Based on interviewee recommendations, the Youth Alliance can **enhance partnerships with other organisations by engaging in collaborative projects that foster knowledge exchange and mutual learning**. For example, the Alliance can establish working groups that focus on specific issues, where members with similar interests co-develop solutions.

Moreover, organising **conferences** and **hackathons** would create a **dynamic environment for knowledge exchange**. These events would allow young people to collaborate, brainstorm and co-create solutions, learning from both peers and experts. A regular series of webinars on topics such as sustainable development, project management or impact investing could further enhance learning opportunities, providing accessible and valuable insights for all members. In addition, **joint learning platforms** would allow members to access a variety of educational materials, participate in discussions, and collaborate on projects at their own pace. This approach can further strengthen the Alliance's commitment to fostering **mutual learning and sharing expertise**.

## *Key takeaways & recommendations*

# for collaboration and co-investing

**Empower young people** by creating structures that ensure that their voices are heard in decision-making processes and co-design solutions with affected stakeholders.

**Engage youth** in regular dialogues and working groups to ensure a holistic understanding of the issues they face. This encourages the development of **joint programs and advocacy initiatives** that align with members' priorities.

**Design and implement co-investment strategies** such as blended finance, collaborative grant-making, revenue-sharing models to mobilise larger investments, de-risk projects, attract diverse funding and encourage joint responsibility.

**Foster knowledge-sharing** by organising conferences, hackathons and workshops where members of the Youth Alliance can share insights, brainstorm solutions and learn from each other.

**Use collaboration examples** to inspire new collaborative efforts and establish **specific learning questions** to focus efforts.

**Create joint learning platforms** and formal structures to coordinate efforts, where members can access educational resources and join discussions, to foster a culture of continuous learning and collaboration.



# Strategies and Models for Assessing Collective Impact

**E**very collaborative effort can have positive and negative outcomes and impact for different stakeholders. Thus, measuring and managing impact is crucial to understand “the change created by an organisation’s activities, and using the information/data to refine activities in order to increase positive outcomes and reduce potential negative ones.”<sup>38</sup> It ensures that all partners not only work together on solutions but also track and evaluate the impact they aim to create, leading

The Alliance seeks to embed impact measurement and management in its DNA and understand outcomes and impact of the initiatives. This is especially important to **learn from current results** and understand what to improve in the future. IMM is also key to reflect upon the additionality – the positive effect that would not have happened otherwise – of those projects promoted and developed by the Youth Alliance. Understanding additionality deals with questions such as:

*Would this change have happened without our financial or non-financial support? Has this change happened because of us or other organisations with which we can potentially partner?*

## MEASURING IMPACT

to more effective and accountable outcomes. A mix of modelling practices such as theory of change, multiple IMM frameworks (such as SDGs, EVPA's 5 Steps Framework, etc.) and methodologies (e.g. SROI) can support this endeavour.

Even if there is a great enthusiasm to collaborate, it is key for members to go beyond silos and individual agendas and centralise **key performance indicators** (KPIs), **align decision-making, balance short and long-term objectives** and effectively **demonstrate achievements as a unified group**. In line with a systemic approach, traditional measurement approaches focusing on single projects cannot work, as



collaborative efforts include multiple activities, programs and initiatives, which should be evaluated collectively.

Showcasing collective impact and encouraging shared learning about what supports youth best is the new objective of the Youth Alliance.

*But what does it mean in practice?*

*What are the relevant approaches to IMM in this context?*

To start, partners should focus on **systemic change** and ensure that their efforts are always aligned with the ultimate goals of the collaboration. This requires large and continuous consultations with members to identify appropriate indicators that can effectively measure impact across various initiatives. Reflective work on what constitutes good impact measurement in a collaborative setting is necessary, as is the development of outcomes frameworks and consistent data collection. **Integrating a systems-change lens** can enable

the Youth Alliance to develop a deeper understanding of how their investments tackle complex issues and influence youth empowerment and social entrepreneurship. In this way, investment goes beyond its immediate impact and can be understood as part of a larger system.

**Timely and adaptive data collection** is essential for refining initiatives. For example, the Alliance could map systemic barriers it aims to address annually and adjust as needed if a specific intervention results in a negative or neutral impact. This iterative process allows the Alliance to stay responsive to the **needs of stakeholders** and adjust its strategies accordingly. The assessment of the expected impact of investments can be done through a **systemic and structured Theory of Change**<sup>39</sup>, which should be considered as an **iterative process**.<sup>40</sup> By clarifying objectives, actions and KPIs, and adopting a flexible approach, members of the Youth Alliance can better evaluate the expected impact of their investments. For instance, the theories of change of the Laudes Foundation<sup>41</sup> and Rethink Ireland<sup>42</sup> are good examples of how to integrate a systemic view.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, collective impact should be regularly verified by external organisations, which can help establish frameworks for impact assessment and confirm the accuracy of self-reported data. Verification not only strengthens **accountability** but also helps adjust the Alliance's **Theory of Change**<sup>44</sup> as it continues to evolve in response to systemic challenges.

To ensure accountability, the Alliance should adopt a set of **clear principles and objectives** taking a short-, medium-, and long-term perspective, thereby guiding its support for organisations and helping in measuring success. These objectives serve as a foundation for improving outcomes and ensure that the Alliance remains accountable to its stakeholders.

**TABLE 3**

**Examples of key indicators (outputs, outcomes and impact) for measuring social change.**

<i>Partnerships and collaborations</i>	<i>Youth engagement</i>	<i>Youth entrepreneurs supported</i>	<i>Youth training completion</i>	<i>Improved business network for youth entrepreneurs</i>	<i>Improved peer support</i>	<i>Long-term impact on social businesses</i>
Number of strategic partnerships established (both private and public) that enhance program outcomes and impact.	Number of young people engaged through awareness programs, training or educational pathways.	Number of youth entrepreneurs who receive mentoring, training or funding support through the Alliance.	Number/percentage of youth (including entrepreneurs) who complete at least one module or training pathway.	Number of youth entrepreneurs with an expanded business network or increased collaborations, resulting from program activities (e.g., training, networking events, support services)	Youth reporting stronger peer networks and support systems in the medium and long-term (tracked through feedback and engagement surveys).	Percentage of social businesses reporting positive long-term effects from participating in the program.
OUTPUTS (Short-term)			OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS (Medium and long-term)			
Increase in the ability of young people to understand and effectively use financial concepts such as investing, debt management, and financial planning.	Number of youths involved in Youth Alliance programs transitioning into paid jobs (*retention rate should be monitored in the medium and long-term).	Number of policy documents (e.g., policy briefs, white papers) produced and distributed.	Percentage increase in income in the medium and long-term among youth participants who have completed training or educational programs.	Increase in the ability of young people to transition into independent living and stable housing situations.	Number of public policies, frameworks or regulations that have been directly influenced or shaped by the advocacy efforts of the Alliance.	
<i>Improved financial literacy</i>	<i>Youth transitioning into paid jobs</i>	<i>Advocacy work</i>	<i>Youth income improvement</i>	<i>Access to housing</i>	<i>Policies influenced or shaped by the Alliance’s advocacy work</i> (e.g., social procurement policies, skills recognition frameworks)	

The Alliance must embrace this comprehensive and adaptive approach to collective impact evaluation by asking three key questions: *What? Why? and How often?* By continually reflecting on these questions, the Alliance can foster a culture of learning and improvement, making its collective efforts more impactful and sustainable over time. Table 3 consolidates key impact indicators proposed by members to measure the social change generated by the Alliance's activities. Focusing on these quantitative and qualitative indicators will help the Youth Alliance track and manage its impact while aligning with its objectives and assessing the success, sustainability and reach of its projects.<sup>45</sup>

Lastly, it is also important to monitor the satisfaction and loyalty of program participants (e.g., net promoter score), to ensure continuity and Alliance's constant improvement. By focusing on these metrics, the Youth Alliance can effectively track and manage its impact while ensuring alignment with its objectives. A mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators that align with its goals and mission can help to evaluate the success, sustainability and reach of its projects.<sup>46</sup>

## Key takeaways & recommendations for measuring and managing impact

**Create** a set of KPIs that align with the Youth Alliance's overarching goals and mission and use them to guide decision-making processes. These KPIs should reflect both outputs (e.g., number of youth entrepreneurs supported) and outcomes and impacts (e.g., improved skills). The indicators should be defined collaboratively with Youth Alliance members.

**Ensure** that IMM goes beyond project-level impacts and measures how initiatives contribute to larger systemic changes.

**Adopt** flexible data collection tools that can respond to the evolving needs of the Youth Alliance's projects and use an **iterative approach to learning**, where insights from data are regularly analysed and used to improve strategies.

**Demonstrate** collective impact by producing transparent and regular impact reports that show successes and areas for improvement of the Alliance. Reports should include **learnings from real-world application** to demonstrate how collective initiatives have led to changes in youth initiatives.

**Implement** a structured but also **flexible Theory of Change** that can be updated with real-time data and continuous feedback. The indicators suggested can be a starting point to develop it.

Collective impact should be regularly **verified by external organisations**, to **validate** the accuracy of self-reported impact data and strengthen accountability among stakeholders.

3\_

Advocating

Policy Frameworks

for Systemic Change

for



Youth

*“The evolution of a comprehensive policy framework to support disadvantaged youth and social entrepreneurs is critical for matters such as lobbying, pushing for better and clearer frameworks, and giving support to young social entrepreneurs to be able to navigate existing frameworks and help them make the right choices when setting up their own business entities.”*

— Nick McGirl,  
Co-Founder & Managing Director at  
ChangemakerXchange

*How can the Youth Alliance work better together with young people and policymakers to foster meaningful dialogue that addresses youth challenges? What existing frameworks can advance youth initiatives? And what needs to change?*

**T**oday young people are increasingly recognised as powerful agents of social change. However, many young people face significant cultural, structural and policy barriers preventing them from realising their full potential, which is also due to a lack of space for their involvement.<sup>47</sup> These shortcomings in working with young people can perpetuate the very inequalities that need to be addressed as an alliance of capital providers, practitioners and investors.

# Existing Policy Frameworks

## *Supporting*

### Disadvantaged youth and Social Entrepreneurs

The European Union has continuously recognised key thematic areas essential for youth empowerment and development, actively addressing challenges faced by young people today through various policy strategies. These areas include education, training, employment, entrepreneurship, innovation and mental health, amongst others, each targeted to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for youth to thrive.<sup>48</sup>

Current initiatives such as **Erasmus+** and the **European Solidarity Corps** promote mobility, intercultural learning and foster inclusion, while lifelong learning policies ensure that youth can remain adaptable in a rapidly changing job market, particularly in addressing the digital skills gap. Building on mobility and inclusion, programs like the **Youth Guarantee** and **Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs** provide critical access to employment, training and entrepreneurial resources.

The **EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027)**<sup>49</sup> focuses on engaging and empowering young people across Europe by promoting participation in democracy, enhancing employability through skills development and fostering inclusion. This initiative aligns with the Alliance's mission to drive systemic change for disadvantaged youth through its support of youth empowerment, social entrepreneurship and collaboration. **Mario Draghi's report on the future of European competitiveness**<sup>50</sup> also outlines key economic and policy shifts that can open new pathways for youth social entrepreneurship. While not explicitly addressing youth social entrepreneurship, its broader economic context stresses the importance of creating an inclusive market environment to support disadvantaged groups, including young people.

These insights empower advocacy efforts, particularly for collaborative initiatives like the Youth Alliance, to promote policies that create an equitable entrepreneurial landscape.

Additionally, the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) report on youth-led social enterprises**<sup>51</sup> offers critical research and policy recommendations that can guide the Youth Alliance's advocacy for policies that support young entrepreneurs through data-driven insights.

While these EU-led initiatives provide broad, systemic support for youth development, there are also impactful frameworks from the market and civil society sectors that address more specialised needs. Current examples of such initiatives include the **Gatsby Benchmarks**<sup>52</sup> in the UK, which provide a structured model for

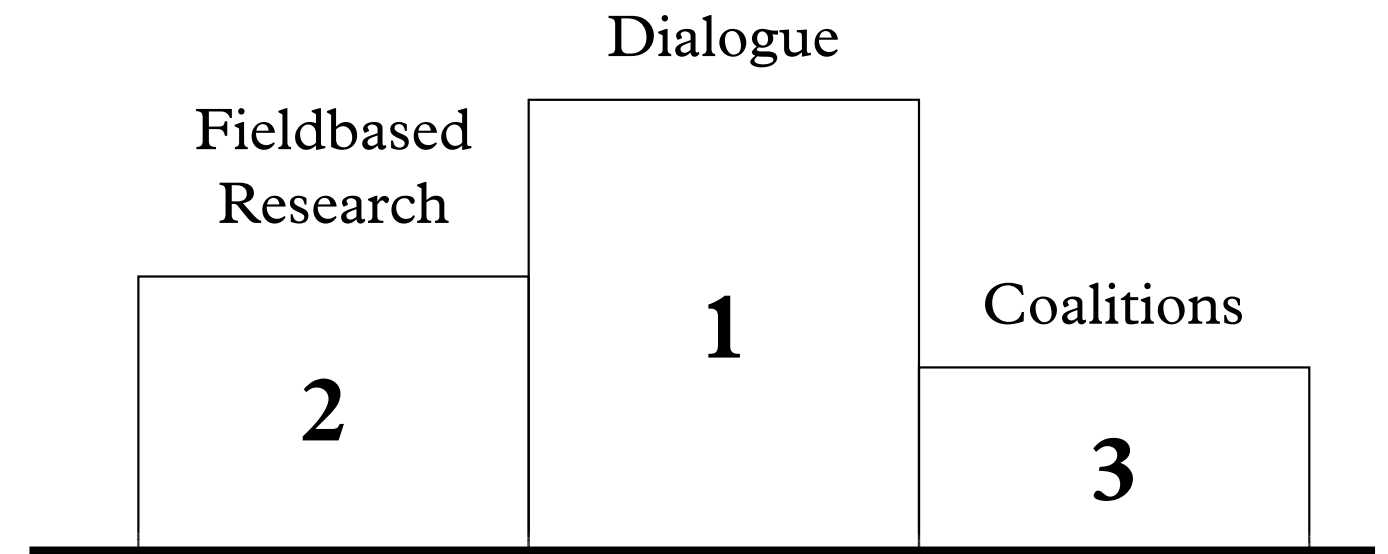
career guidance, aligning education with employment goals and helping disadvantaged youth acquire the skills needed for pursuing social entrepreneurship. Additionally, **Youth Empowerment & Participation Austria**<sup>53</sup> emphasises youth participation in decision-making, aligning with the Youth Alliance's mission to amplify youth voices in policy dialogues and foster leadership among disadvantaged groups. Another example, the **Youth Entrepreneurship Framework**<sup>54</sup>, developed by Youth Business International (YBI) and the Global Entrepreneurship Network (GEN), offers actionable recommendations and resources to help young entrepreneurs overcome their challenges. This framework advocates for youth-focused policy and assists organisations in empowering young people to pursue social and green business models, ultimately enabling them to drive social and economic change.

Through a combination of targeted policies, funding mechanisms and collaborative efforts, the EU provides a robust framework able to support disadvantaged youth and foster social entrepreneurship. Looking to the future, the EU should continue to strengthen its actions by fostering collaborations and further enhancing more comprehensive support for youth, particularly amongst disadvantaged youth.<sup>55</sup> Building bridges with stakeholders already active in the field could benefit youth and support building trust between partners advocating for joint solutions.

The Youth Alliance's mission is to drive systemic change empowering young people to take a leading role in tackling the challenges of the future.



As Maximilian Herrmann (SAP) emphasised, “We should think about our strategic goals and then derive policy requirements from them,” thereby highlighting the need of aligning the strategic goals of the Youth Alliance with EU youth policies to support young people better. While funders play a crucial role in amplifying the voices of NGOs and social entrepreneurs, these organisations should lead the advocacy for policy changes that directly impact youth. Shared understanding and existing policy frameworks offer valuable starting points for joint advocacy.



## *SETTING THE PRIORITIES to support youth*

There is a clear consensus among Youth Alliance members on the type of policy work to be prioritised, with two-thirds (71%) of respondents backing the need to support **building stronger relationships with policymakers to develop more inclusive and effective policies**, suggesting members see direct engagement with decision-makers as a key strategy for driving meaningful policy changes that align with youth needs. As Eleni Theodorou from We Share Forward Foundation sees it, this is critical at two levels.



“First, there needs to be **interaction among funders**, as you cannot shift policies if you don’t do it collectively.” Collective action among funders could involve two steps: 1) the financing of advocacy-policy related initiatives, programs, and supporting social entrepreneurs and organisations and 2) leveraging endowments to catalyse broader policy shifts.

Then, there is **interaction of funders with policymakers**, which can happen in two ways: 1) funders can use their catalytic capital to invest in high-risk areas, underserved themes or communities, helping them prepare to attract future public funding; 2) policymakers can provide insights about future challenges that need to be addressed, allowing funders to deploy agile capital – flexible and responsive resources – where it is needed most. By coordinating various stakeholders with each other, the community can share knowledge of funding and working with young people, processes which are sometimes complex. At the same time, dialogue with policymakers can create early awareness and visibility for the projects of funders and coordinators. Ideally, both sides learn from each other, enhancing joint projects and providing more effective aid to those in need.

More than half of Youth Alliance survey respondents (57%) shared their wish for more effective collaboration through means such as **providing information to build public support** and **conducting research to advance the policy agenda**, this way contributing for increased public knowledge and producing data-driven evidence that can shape a more favourable policy landscape for youth.



Figure 6. What kind of policy work should the Youth Alliance do?

TABLE 4

Examples of efforts around a better cross-link between evidence-based work and policy dialogue.

The Business Commission to Tackle Inequality (BCTI)	The Business Commission to Tackle Inequality <sup>60</sup> mobilises private-sector leaders to promote inclusive growth and reduce inequality. Through data-driven strategies and multi-stakeholder collaboration, it fosters policies that integrate social accountability within business practices, enhancing evidence-based impact and guiding equitable market transformation.
Jacobs Foundation	The Jacobs Foundation <sup>61</sup> focuses on enhancing children’s education by investing in research to discover effective learning methods. It collaborates with educational and policy stakeholders to apply evidence-based strategies, fostering policies and practices that support children’s diverse learning needs for sustainable, impactful education reform.
International Labour Organisation (ILO)	The International Labour Organisation <sup>62</sup> advances social justice and promotes decent work globally. By setting international labour standards and engaging in social dialogue with governments, employers and workers, the ILO develops evidence-based policies to address work-related challenges and supports sustainable, equitable labour practices worldwide.

Examples of such are **Amazon’s and Gallup’s Joint Report**<sup>56</sup> exploring future career opportunities in the UK, France and Germany for youth, and the work of the **Bertelsmann Stiftung**, supporting the policy making process of the **WHO Youth Council** on creating healthy societies.<sup>57</sup>

Stronger partnerships with universities, public and private capital providers and working groups strengthen the role of research in advancing the policy agenda, thereby **improving the cross-link between research and evidence-based work.**

As Caroline Chernov from World YMCA points out: “It is necessary to work with policy groups to make sure their dialogue is informed by field practice projects, and that their dialogue informs collaborative projects around youth, creating a more direct link between collaborative project work on youth and policy dialogue reform.”

**Building coalitions for promoting learning and collaboration within the policy community** is another necessity according to survey respondents (29%). Learnings can be bilateral: capital providers can learn more about European institutions, and policymakers can also learn about the resources impact capital providers can bring to the table. The Youth Alliance can play a pivotal role in facilitating the exchange of best practices by **providing recommendations** to

EU policymakers on effective funding strategies that empower disadvantaged youth and promote youth social entrepreneurship. Additionally, the Alliance can amplify the message of collaboration and the importance of impact finance, ensuring that all stakeholders work together to create sustainable change.

Youth Alliance members also shared actions necessary for supporting disadvantaged youth and social entrepreneurs through policy change, including **better access to funding and resources, social safety nets, education and skills development through ‘Learn to Earn’<sup>58</sup> and the recognition of skills over formal qualifications.**

These actions aim to create an enabling environment where disadvantaged groups can thrive. An example of such efforts already under-way is the **Allianz für Informatische Bildung<sup>59</sup>**, which has the goal to strengthen computer science education among students in Germany through the mandatory introduction of IT studies from an early age. This initiative has proven to empower underserved students in the field of career orientation and work experience.



## Exploring funding models, strengthening existing ones

Alliance members proposed concrete policy changes that could strengthen co-funding and co-investing initiatives, supporting the Alliance’s mission. **Tax incentives and social procurement** were highlighted as key mechanisms to encourage co-funding. Additionally, members emphasised the importance of **better leveraging public and private funding mechanisms** and fostering more **public-private partnerships** to drive youth policy work. An example of such a partnership is the **Deutschlandstipendium<sup>63</sup>**, which successfully enables collaboration between the public and private sectors to support youth development in Germany.

Another priority mentioned was **advocating for a ‘single market’ for philanthropy** to enable greater cross-border philanthropic activities. Both **Impact Europe and Philea** have advanced this cause through their **joint paper**, *Philanthropic Organisations using the Entire Toolbox for More Impact<sup>64</sup>*, while **King Baudouin Foundation’s guide<sup>65</sup>** further illustrates the importance of creating an enabling policy environment to support cross-border philanthropy in Europe.



Lastly, members also called for regulatory simplification, particularly in **cross-border impact finance**. The lack of harmonised regulations across countries is a significant barrier to impact investing and philanthropy, as each country has different rules. Addressing these regulatory inconsistencies would allow for more seamless cross-border collaboration and enable impact finance strategies to scale more effectively across Europe.

Aligned with these suggestions, the **Impact Manifesto**<sup>66</sup> – led by Impact Europe in partnership with key European National Partners and the GSG Impact – advocates for **unlocking private capital** and establishing a policy framework. Impact investors are ready to collaborate with EU policymakers to prioritise an **enabling policy framework that puts impact at the centre of EU policymaking**. The manifesto calls for **doubling the social impact budget** under the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework and ensuring that public funds are designed to drive measurable social and environmental change.

By advocating for structural reforms that foster collaboration between the private and public sectors, the Impact Manifesto closely aligns with the Alliance's goals of **leveraging EU and national funding mechanisms** to support youth and social entrepreneurship. Additionally, the Impact Manifesto underscores the importance of **public procurement** as a powerful tool to drive impact, urging policymakers to implement strategies that facilitate greater investment in socially responsible projects and support sustainable growth.

Together, these frameworks provide the Youth Alliance with a solid foundation to advocate for systemic policy changes that empower disadvantaged youth and promote sustainable growth through social entrepreneurship.

## *Key takeaways & recommendations* for policymakers and capital providers

### FOR POLICY- MAKERS

**Prioritise** data-driven policy development by collaborating with universities, research institutions and working groups to better address youth challenges.

**Facilitate** regulatory simplification across borders, fostering an enabling environment for cross-border funding.

**Encourage** policy dialogues informed by youth-led initiatives, emphasizing direct youth input on issues affecting them, and create structures that elevate youth voices in decision-making processes.

### FOR CAPITAL PROVIDERS, PRACTITIONERS AND IMPACT INVESTORS

**Engage** more with policymakers to drive meaningful policy changes that align with youth needs. Support policies that provide young people, especially disadvantaged youth, with platforms to advocate for their needs and participate as proactive change-makers in community and economic development.

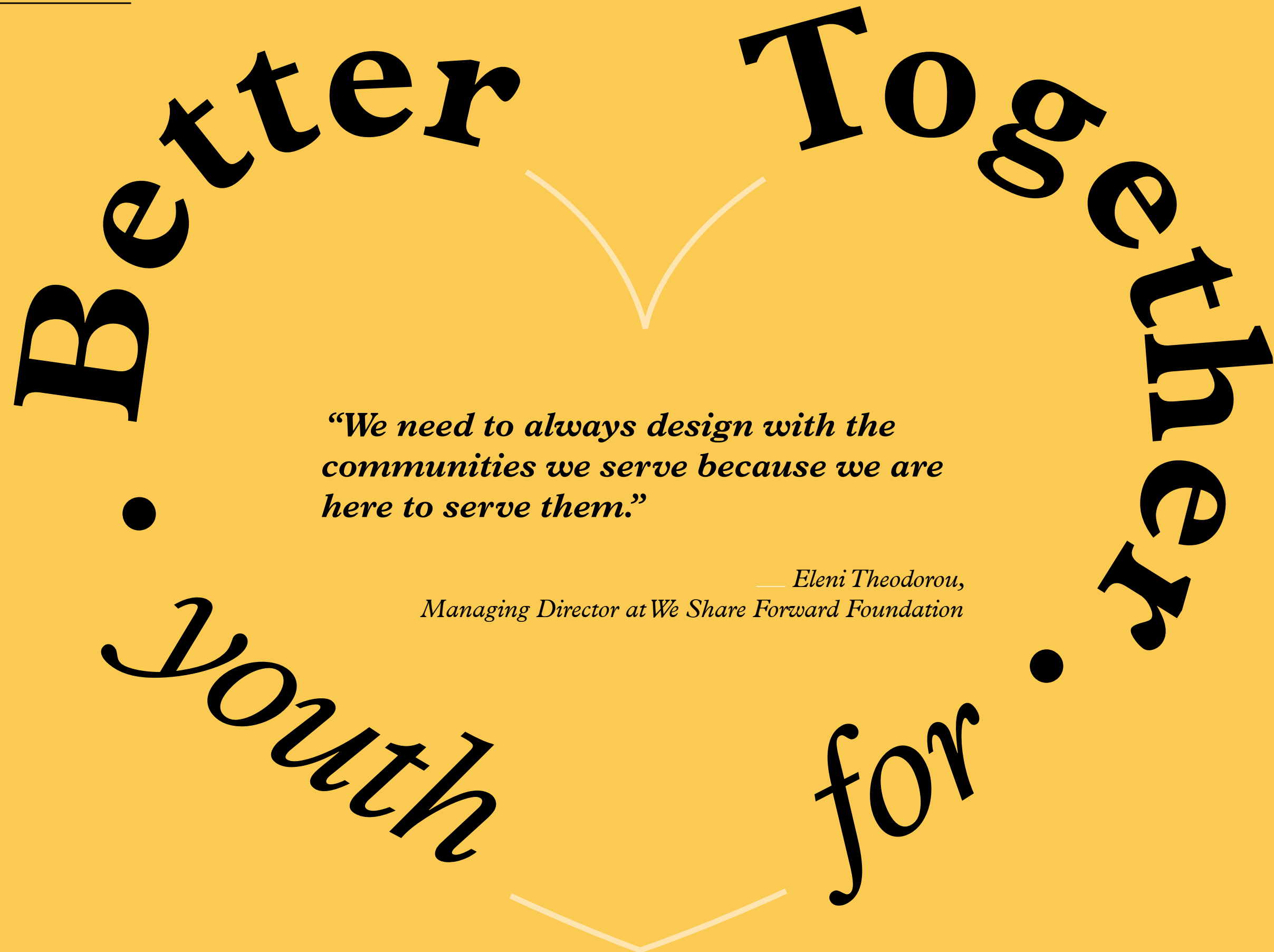
**Prioritise** collective action among funders to amplify the impact of youth initiatives and ensure stronger policy frameworks.

**Build coalitions** and learning networks among funders and policymakers to enhance joint projects and impact.

**Strengthen** public-private partnerships and advocate for a single market for philanthropy by implementing tax incentives, social procurement and simplifying regulations to enhance co-funding mechanisms for youth development and entrepreneurship.

**Explore** new co-funding models, particularly those aligned with high-risk, underserved areas.

## Call to Action



**We want to empower the next generation of citizens, entrepreneurs and employees by supporting disadvantaged youth and social entrepreneurs.** Investing in education benefits young people by boosting employability,

**How building and supporting an inclusive environment for empowering young people can be successfully realised is our key concern.**

This position paper provides the building blocks for supporting this ambition, by collecting actionable insights and recommendations, while

the same time, we want to encourage active participation of young people in social and economic development, thereby strengthening their role as responsible citizens.

**Engagement and collaboration are at the heart of the Youth Alliance.** For strengthening our impact, we are committing time, capital and expertise. Creating a trusted environment for ex-change while bringing together the diverse interests of everyone involved is a challenge, but also our call. As we want to

management and advocacy, we aim to address the unique challenges faced by youth today and in the future.

**The success of this initiative depends on collaboration and building trust between educational institutions and initiatives, government agencies, non-profit organisations, corporations and the private sector.** By working together, we can create an ecosystem that caters to the current and future needs of youth. We need a collective effort to invest in their future, recognizing that their success is integral to the overall progress of society.

**We invite impact capital providers and supporters (from private and public sectors) as well as policymakers to join us on this journey. Join the Youth Alliance.** Together, let's empower young people, remove barriers and shape a future with and for the next generation. Let's get to work!

# Let's get to work!

earnings and health. We need to reduce systemic barriers in education and in the labour market by collaborating to better support disadvantaged youth. Social entrepreneurship is an opportunity to foster economic independence while creating businesses that generate both economic value and social impact. Our solutions not only focus on immediate needs but emphasise long-term sustainability and growth.

underscoring the need for accessible educational initiatives that are tailored to the different needs of the young people. By supporting opportunities for them to build their skills, we seek to bridge the gap between education and employment, ensuring they are well-prepared for the future job market. At

drive thought-leadership and contribute to systemic change for better empowering youth, we value diversity in the approaches we take, while together focusing on the barriers we want to break. By leveraging innovative approaches to collaboration, co-funding, knowledge building, impact measurement and

# IMM frameworks

EVPA’s 5 steps	Introduced by the European Venture Philanthropy Association (EVPA), prior to becoming Impact Europe, in its Practical Guide, this five-step process for impact measurement and management includes: (i) Setting objectives, (ii) Analysing stakeholders, (iii) Measuring impact, (iv) Verifying and valuing impact and (v) Monitoring and Reporting. Its flexibility has made it popular among impact investors and philanthropists.
IMPACT Model	IMPACT is a collaboration between Bertelsmann Stiftung, Phineo, Bundesinitiative Impact Investing and Social Entrepreneurship Network Germany. The IMPACT model provides a structured framework for the measurement and management (IMM) journey of impact entrepreneurs and investors, simplifying the otherwise complex process. Focusing on four key areas - Impact Strategy, Impact Management, Impact Governance and Impact Communication - users can track their progress through the development stages, from ideation to scaling phase.
IMP’s 5 dimensions of impact (now Impact Frontiers)	The Impact Management Project (IMP) developed the "5 dimensions of impact" framework to measure and compare organisational impact. The dimensions are What, Who, How Much, Risk and Contribution. This framework became widely adopted and is often combined with other tools.
IRIS / IRIS+	It consists of a catalog of impact indicators launched by the Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN) to promote standardization in the sector. In 2019, it evolved into IRIS+, a more comprehensive impact measurement system, compatible with frameworks like the SDGs and IMP’s five dimensions of impact.

Lean data	A methodology developed by Acumen and promoted by its spin-off 60 Decibels, Lean Data focuses on gathering data directly from beneficiaries, often through digital means, to better understand and manage project impact.
OPIM	The International Finance Corporation (IFC) introduced the Operating Principles for Impact Management (OPIM) to set a standard for how impact investment funds manage their impact across all phases of the investment process, reducing the risk of 'impact washing'.
SDGs	The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are seventeen global goals established by the United Nations under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They call for urgent action across sectors to tackle issues like hunger, poverty, inequality and climate change. The SDGs are frequently used in impact investing to communicate intended impact, often in combination with other tools.
SDGs Impact Standards	Developed by SDG Impact, a UNDP flagship initiative, the SDG Impact Standards are designed to guide investors and enterprises in operating sustainably while contributing to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
SROI	Social Return on Investment (SROI), promoted by the SROI Network, aims to quantify, and monetize social impact.
Theory of change	A tool developed in the context of international development to help organisations identify which aspect of a social problem to address and what kind of change their activities can generate. It focuses on organisational assumptions and became widely adopted by impact investors in the late 2010s.



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Tools such as the Iceberg Model to analyse issues and solutions from a systems thinking perspective. The Iceberg Model is a systems thinking model based on the idea that an iceberg has only 10 percent of its total mass above the water while 90 percent is underwater. Challenges youth are experiencing can be approached in the same way. For example, please check: <https://ecochallenge.org/iceberg-model/>.

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