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Building Back Better Through Social Entrepreneurship

WHITE PAPER

Project Lifespan and Key Recommendations

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Executive Summary

JA Europe, the largest entrepreneurship education provider is partnering with JA Georgia, JA Lithuania, JA Moldova, JA Ukraine, and We Share Forward Foundation on the EU4Youth project: Building Back Better through Social Entrepreneurship - Fostering Youth Employment and Societal Change through Social Entrepreneurship. The project aims to empower young people aged 17–19 in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine by equipping them with the skills, mindset, and resources to launch and sustain social enterprises. In response to socio-economic instability, conflict, and a growing skills gap, the project seeks to foster youth employment, community resilience, and inclusive economic development. Through a combination of entrepreneurship education, mentorship, access to funding, and a cross-border pre-acceleration program, the initiative builds a supportive ecosystem where youth-led social enterprises can thrive. Ultimately, it aligns with the EU's broader objectives of promoting social cohesion, reducing inequalities, and advancing the green and digital transitions in the Eastern Partnership region.

The white paper of the Building Back Better Through Social Entrepreneurship project presents the outcomes and key learnings from an ongoing regional initiative that strengthens youth-driven social entrepreneurship in Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Running from August 1, 2023, to July 31, 2025, the project is led by a consortium of partners, including JA Europe, JA Georgia, JA Moldova, JA Ukraine, JA Lithuania, and We Share Forward Foundation, with associated support from Unknown Group, The Municipality of The Hague (ImpactCity), and INTEL. The initiative brings together pan-European expertise to foster inclusive, sustainable business solutions led by young people.

The project is structured into two main phases. In the first year, a comprehensive Social Entrepreneurship Programme was implemented across the three implementing countries (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), engaging 2,293 students and training 276 teachers, who actively mentored the students throughout the year. This phase laid the groundwork for awareness, skill development, and capacity building in the field of social entrepreneurship in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

In the second year, the initiative progressed to a Pre-Accelerator Programme, designed to support the practical development of youth-led social enterprises. As part of this phase, 45 social enterprises (15 from each country) received 2,000 Euros in seed funding through a revolving fund mechanism, pioneered by We Share Forward Foundation. Additionally, mentors from various industries provided hands-on support to the student teams, assisting them in refining their business models and preparing for scaling. The total fundraised amount of 90,000 Euros has enabled these enterprises to formalize operations, test business models, and begin their journey toward financial and social sustainability. The objective that the newly established enterprises are actively contributing to the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, while also fostering a more stable and resilient economic landscape across the region.

With JA Lithuania providing strategic expertise on social entrepreneurship, the project has also promoted peer learning and cross-border collaboration. By focusing on themes such as social inclusion, the green economy, and youth empowerment, the initiative contributes to EU policy goals and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. To maximize long-term impact, the following key recommendations are made:

- Strengthen policy and legal frameworks to support social entrepreneurship and youth-led initiatives.



- Support and strengthen international collaboration, while raising public sector awareness of the importance of engaging with, contributing to, and supporting the financial and social entrepreneurship ecosystems.
- Expand access to blended and sustainable funding models for social enterprises.
- Establish a dedicated EU funding line within existing programmes to support early-stage social enterprises and inclusive financial services in the Eastern Partnership countries.
- Institutionalize support for women and youth-led initiatives to foster inclusion and innovation.
- Deepen regional collaboration through multi-stakeholder platforms for knowledge exchange.
- Integrate green innovation and inclusive business practices into national development strategies.
- Build a supportive ecosystem that connects education, entrepreneurship, and investment.
- Foster public-private partnerships to scale youth-driven solutions and align with SDGs.
- Support the development and integration of formal education modules on social entrepreneurship, sustainable finance, and innovation in secondary schools, vocational institutions, and universities across the region.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to empower young people to become proactive leaders in shaping socially and economically resilient communities. By promoting entrepreneurial thinking with a strong emphasis on social responsibility, the initiative aims to equip youth with the knowledge, practical skills, and support networks necessary to drive positive change. Focused on regions undergoing rapid transformation, the project fosters innovation and local engagement, contributing to long-term, inclusive development in line with European values and strategic regional goals.

This project responds to a series of interconnected global challenges - such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the energy crisis, and rapid technological progress - that are reshaping social and economic landscapes worldwide. These issues have created significant social, economic, and ecological concerns, while also highlighting a growing skills gap, particularly among youth, which is contributing to rising unemployment rates. This situation calls for innovative approaches to empower the next generation to address these challenges and help navigate the transformations shaping the future.

Social entrepreneurship education offers a powerful solution. It provides young people with the skills and tools necessary to create businesses that balance financial success with social, cultural, and environmental responsibility. Social enterprises enable youth to engage directly with the problems they see in their communities—whether through making cities cleaner and safer, supporting disadvantaged populations, improving public health, or promoting sustainability. By fostering social entrepreneurship from an early age, this project aims to cultivate a proactive and solutions-oriented mindset among young people, equipping them to lead their communities toward positive change.



In Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries such as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, social entrepreneurship is still in its early stages. As noted in the 2020 Baseline Report¹ for the EU4Youth project, social entrepreneurship in Moldova is developing slowly and requires continuous effort to grow. Similarly, in Ukraine, the concept is relatively new, and in Georgia, social enterprises face similar challenges. Given the early-stage nature of social entrepreneurship in these countries, **empowering the new generation with the knowledge and tools to drive local economic transformation is crucial**. The entrepreneurial mindset, coupled with an understanding of open markets, free trade, transparency, and financial independence, forms the foundation for the region's European future.

By equipping young people with practical tools to redesign local economies and build a robust social culture, this project contributes to the EU's policy objectives in the region, especially those outlined in the bilateral Association Agreements signed between the EU and these three countries. Ultimately, this initiative aims to strengthen the local economy, support green and digital transitions, and ensure that no one is left behind in the drive toward a more sustainable, inclusive future. The methodology of this project is designed to provide both theoretical knowledge and practical experience in social entrepreneurship, with a focus on youth empowerment and cross-border collaboration. The project is structured into two main phases. In the first year, a comprehensive Social Entrepreneurship Programme was implemented, including training for both students and teachers, creating a strong foundation of awareness and skills. In the second year, the project advanced to the Pre-Accelerator Programme, which provided direct support to 45 youth-led social enterprises through seed funding, mentorship, and tailored guidance. Throughout both phases, collaboration with industry mentors, local stakeholders, and international partners fostered knowledge exchange and peer learning.

Social Entrepreneurship

A Need of a New Skillset

In the face of unprecedented global disruption—from the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine to the energy crisis and accelerating technological change—young people stand at a critical crossroads. This reality is especially evident in Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia, where youth are disproportionately affected by unemployment, outdated education systems, and a lack of access to opportunities that match the needs of a rapidly evolving economy.

While the ecological, economic, and social challenges facing these regions are immense, so too is the untapped potential of their young people. Despite their resilience and readiness to lead positive change, many are held back by fragile ecosystems, limited access to quality training, and a lack of role models or pathways to action. They have ideas, passion, and purpose—but not yet the tools, networks, or confidence to build solutions that can transform their communities.

This disconnect is not just a local challenge, it is a European concern. Without targeted investment in entrepreneurial education—especially education rooted in social and environmental responsibility—these countries risk widening the skills gap, losing their brightest minds to migration, and falling further behind in the green and digital transitions.

¹ BASELINE REPORT IN REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, 2020,
https://antreprenoriatsocial.md/media/files/files/baseline_study_report_in_republic_of_moldova_ea2ba57953_9338632_1019586.pdf



Social entrepreneurship offers a powerful way forward. It empowers young people not only to find employment but to create it—for themselves and others—by addressing real needs in their societies. It builds agency, fosters innovation, and nurtures a mindset of responsibility, collaboration, and hope. While equipping youth with the skillset and mindset for social entrepreneurship we will rebuild stronger, fairer, and greener societies.

Following the EU Priorities

The project “Building Back Better Through Social Entrepreneurship” has closely aligned with key strategic priorities of the European Union, responding directly to pressing objectives outlined in the European Green Deal, the Digital Decade Policy Programme, and the EU Youth Strategy, while also supporting the broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

European Green Deal: By embedding green entrepreneurship and sustainability-focused modules into the educational curriculum, the project directly contributes to the EU’s ambition of becoming climate-neutral by 2050. Young participants were equipped to develop social enterprises that address environmental challenges such as energy poverty, biodiversity loss, and climate resilience—accelerating the green transition at local level in Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia.

Digital Transition: The project activities support the EU’s Digital Strategy by integrating digital competence development, AI literacy (through the Intel® AI4Youth component), and the use of digital tools for training and self-assessment (e.g., Entrepreneurial Skills Pass platform). This strengthens digital skills among youth in Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, bridging the digital divide and aligning with the EU’s goal of empowering 80% of the population with basic digital skills by 2030. The project also leverages digital platforms for training delivery and self-assessment and develops localized digital toolkits for educators and youth. By enhancing digital literacy and capacity in Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia, the project supports the EU’s ambition for inclusive and resilient digital economies.

Social Inclusion and the EU Youth Strategy: Targeting vulnerable groups—including NEETs, young women, migrants, and displaced youth—the project enhanced social inclusion and equal access to opportunities. It empowered disadvantaged young people to become economically and socially active, reinforcing the pillars of the EU Youth Strategy (2019–2027): Engage, Connect, Empower.

EU4Youth & Association Agreements: As a flagship initiative under the EU4Youth programme, this project directly advances EU efforts to strengthen employability and civic participation among young people in the Eastern Partnership. The project also supports the implementation of priorities outlined in the EU’s bilateral Association Agreements with Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia—particularly in the areas of youth employment, education reform, and civil society development.

SDGs and International Commitments: The project supports multiple SDGs, notably:

SDG 4 (Quality Education)

SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)

SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and

SDG 13 (Climate Action)



Through fostering entrepreneurship with a social and environmental lens, the project contributes to inclusive economic development and strengthens democratic and participatory processes in the region. Overall, the project contributes holistically to the EU's strategic priorities by fostering green, digital, and inclusive growth in the Eastern Partnership region. Through its integrated approach—linking education, entrepreneurship, and ecosystem development—it strengthens youth capabilities and creates a foundation for long-term socio-economic resilience.

Over the past decade, social entrepreneurship education has gained recognition as a vital tool to foster youth employability, civic engagement, and inclusive economic development. Several EU-funded programmes and international initiatives—such as Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships, Social Enterprise 360, Entrepreneurial Skills Pass (ESP), and national education reforms – have contributed to raising awareness and building basic entrepreneurial capacities among young people. These initiatives have laid a solid foundation, offering digital learning platforms, modular curricula, and practical learning experiences. However, despite these advancements, critical gaps remain, especially in the context of Eastern Partnership countries such as Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia:

1. Fragmentation and Limited Local Adaptation

Most available programmes were developed in Western European contexts and lack alignment with the specific socio-economic, legislative, and cultural realities of EaP countries. This limited relevance and uptake in regions facing systemic challenges such as weak ecosystems for entrepreneurship, underfunded education systems, and policy fragmentation. Many social entrepreneurship training programs in Western Europe assume the presence of supportive legal frameworks and access to seed funding, while such conditions are largely absent in Eastern Partnership countries like Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine. A Western-designed curriculum might emphasize scaling and investment-readiness, yet in Moldova, where social entrepreneurship is still emerging and lacks clear legislative recognition, young people struggle even to register a social business. Similarly, in Ukraine and Georgia, the absence of targeted public policies and fragmented educational systems means that imported models often overlook local barriers

2. Lack of Structured, Scalable Formal and Non-Formal Learning Pathways

While there were successful pilot initiatives, few models offer structured, formal and non-formal education pathways that are scalable and sustainable at national or regional levels. Youth often had no access to continued mentorship, funding, or certification to translate their learning into sustainable social business creation. The recognition and accreditation of JA's certification tool, the Entrepreneurial Skills Pass (ESP), would provide formal validation of young people's competencies and help sustain their engagement beyond initial training in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine.

3. Limited Integration with Access to Finance

Educational programmes rarely address the financial barriers young entrepreneurs face. Access to seed funding, impact investment readiness, and guidance on financial sustainability are largely missing – despite being critical for the kick off and survival of early-stage social enterprises.

4. Weak Linkages with Broader Ecosystems



Existing solutions often operate in silos, without sufficient engagement of policy makers, private sector, or civil society. There is a lack of long-term partnerships that could help mainstream social entrepreneurship into national education systems or labour market strategies. Cross-sectoral collaboration and multi-stakeholder networks are still underdeveloped in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine.

5. Insufficient Emphasis on Green and Digital, specifically AI Competences

Although some initiatives integrate aspects of digital learning or environmental sustainability, most do not provide young people with the transversal skills and AI needed to navigate the dual green and digital transitions. This leaves a gap in preparing youth to launch solutions that address the EU's Green Deal and Digital Decade goals.

In summary, while progress has been made in introducing social entrepreneurship, there was an urgent need for locally adapted, holistic, and impact-oriented approaches that combine education, mentorship, financing, and systemic support. The proposed project activities and close collaboration among peers responded to these gaps by delivering a comprehensive and context-sensitive model, built on international good practice and rooted in the specific realities of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia.

The project pioneered a fresh, interdisciplinary model that blended social entrepreneurship education with green and digital skills, tailored to local realities. Through cross-border and cross-sectoral cooperation between schools, businesses, policymakers, and civil society, the project partners built an enabling ecosystem where youth-led social enterprises can thrive. The enterprises not only addressed societal challenges but also contributed to local economic resilience by fostering entrepreneurial culture, creating jobs, providing innovation, and promoting sustainable development in Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia.

We started from addressing the lack of contextual relevance in existing programmes, this project applied a co-creation model that ensured full alignment of expertise from Lithuania with the socio-economic, legislative, and cultural landscapes of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia. Each country developed a localized roadmap – informed by stakeholder consultations and ecosystem mapping – to guide implementation in line with national priorities, legislation and realities. Furthermore, the social entrepreneurship curriculum was adapted and translated to fit local frameworks, integrating real-life case studies, national regulations, and community-specific challenges. This bottom-up, participatory approach ensured ownership, sustainability while bridging the gap between European best practices and Eastern Partnership realities.

The core educational approach taken was a design thinking-based experiential learning model for youth. The applied educational methodology of Social Entrepreneurship programme was built around a design-thinking approach and experiential learning principles, fostering competence development through active engagement, iterative reflection, and feedback-based improvement cycles. It integrated real-world business instruments – such as the Social Enterprise Business Model Canvas and SWOT analysis—contextualized for youth, thereby enhancing relevance and applicability.

The approach was underpinned by a social innovation orientation, encouraging learners to address tangible societal and environmental challenges through entrepreneurial solutions. Furthermore, the methodology leveraged team-based and collaborative learning structures, promoting inclusivity, intercultural dialogue, and shared leadership. A key feature was its



iterative development model, which enabled participants to continuously refine their ideas through prototyping, testing, and evidence-informed adaptation – aligning with EU priorities for competence-based, learner-centred and impact-driven education.

Social Entrepreneurship programme: Step-By-Step Learning Journey

Each module builds upon the previous, forming a logical progression from team building to business launch and impact measurement:

Module	Key Focus	Experiential Tools / Activities
1. Get to Know Your Team	Team building & dynamics	DISC profile, User Manual, "Pitch Yourself"
2. Start Your Social Enterprise	Understanding social entrepreneurship	Case studies, problem identification
3. Find a Need in the Market	Market problem analysis	Problem tree, Empathy Canvas, idea generation
4. Test & Evaluate Ideas	Market fit & impact	Theory of Change, SWOT, prototyping, Green Assessment
5. Register Your Social Enterprise	Legal and structural setup	Market analysis, legal forms
6. Business Model Canvas	Business planning	SE Business Model Canvas
7. Funding Your Enterprise	Funding & stakeholder engagement	Stakeholder mapping, fundraising pitch
8. Develop Your Social Enterprise	Communication & growth	Pitch deck, Communication Plan, Beneficiary Journey Map
9. Finance Management	Country-specific guidance	(optional, varies by region)
10. Impact Measurement	Impact tracking	Impact indicators, Measurement plan

From Theory to Real Social Enterprises

The **Pre-Accelerator** was designed as a short-term support programme to help young social entrepreneurs turn their ideas into real social businesses. It combines expert-led sessions, personal mentoring, and team-based work to guide participants through key steps in developing a real social enterprise.

The pre-accelerator begins with a **bootcamp**, helping teams connect, gain motivation, and start working intensively. It includes structured weekly activities combining expert-led workshops (3 hours/week), one-on-one mentoring (1 hour/week), and team-based independent work (6–9 hours/week). Participants receive professional guidance, improve their business ideas, and prepare to present them. Pre-accelerator ends with a **public pitch event**, where teams showcase



their solutions to local funders and stakeholders. This practical and engaging approach helps young people build strong, impact-driven enterprises.

To address the lack of financial support for early-stage social entrepreneurs, the project established a revolving philanthropic funding model tailored to the realities of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia. Through this model, seed capital of €2,000 per enterprise was provided to 45 youth-led social enterprises selected during the Pre-Accelerator phase. The model operated on a “Pay it Forward” principle, encouraging beneficiaries to voluntarily reinvest a symbolic share of their future success into the fund to support subsequent cohorts.

In parallel, work on bridging the JA offices with local organisations to ensure the after care of the programme was done. **To bridge the gap between education, policy, and practitioners**, the project implementing countries established multi-stakeholder collaboration frameworks that brought together educational institutions, private sector actors such as incubators, impact investors and policy makers across Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine. Local partners groups and alumni of the programme networks were created in each country, serving as permanent platforms for dialogue, coordination, and policy influence. In addition, policymakers participated in the programme’s closing event, highlighting and concluding the collective efforts of all activities.

These networks facilitated the integration of social entrepreneurship into education, and employment agendas, aligning project outcomes with long-term policy objectives. Local business associations, and impact investors were actively engaged in mentoring and providing market access for the youth-led enterprises. In addition, the project leveraged international partnerships – such as with Intel®, the Municipality of The Hague (Impact City), and the We Share Forward Foundation – to connect local efforts with global networks in innovation and social impact.

To equip young people with the necessary skills for the green and digital transitions, the project integrated dedicated modules on environmental sustainability and artificial intelligence (AI) into the social entrepreneurship curriculum. Under the leadership of JA Lithuania, green entrepreneurship content was developed in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal, focusing on energy efficiency, biodiversity, and circular economy principles.

In parallel, the project partnered with Intel® to implement the Intel® AI4Youth programme, a modular, hands-on learning experience that introduced participants to core AI concepts—such as natural language processing, computer vision, and data analysis—and their practical applications in creating social impact. This enabled young entrepreneurs to design data-driven solutions to address pressing social and environmental challenges in their communities.

Moreover, the use of the Entrepreneurial Skills Pass (ESP) and the digital self-assessment tool allowed learners to track their progress in acquiring green and digital competences. These innovations ensured that participants did not merely receive general entrepreneurial training but also developed future-ready skills essential for sustainable and inclusive innovation in line with EU policy goals.



The Social Entrepreneurship Programme Throughout the Project Lifespan

Moldova

The project in the Republic of Moldova was implemented by JA Moldova in partnership with Junior Achievement Europe, the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova, and the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova as an associate partner. During the implementation process, no barriers were encountered due to JA Moldova's partnership with the Ministry of Education and Research and educational institutions across the country. The social entrepreneurship programme is an optional subject included in the National Curriculum of the education system in the Republic of Moldova, with the social entrepreneurship component being an integral part of the pilot program.

The content related to the concept of social entrepreneurship was offered to all teachers instructing this subject in educational institutions to be disseminated to students. Over 800 young people from 32 educational institutions had the opportunity, through the social entrepreneurship programme and business incubators, to study and understand the importance of developing social entrepreneurship. Among these institutions were one university, 11 VET institutions (including six colleges, four centre of excellence, and one vocational school), and 20 high schools.

A total of 42 teachers expressed their willingness to receive training and later disseminate information about Social Entrepreneurship within the company program. The project was well received by educational institutions, teachers, and students alike. Currently, the relevance of social entrepreneurship in Moldova is highlighted by the need to find sustainable solutions to the social and economic challenges faced by society, such as social exclusion, unemployment, and economic inequalities. By focusing on social impact, social enterprises not only contribute to the well-being of the community but also create jobs and support long-term economic development.

The importance of this sector is also reflected in the financial and policy support provided by the European Union and other international organizations, which recognize the potential of social entrepreneurship to generate positive change in society.

In this context, during the 2023–2024 academic year, over 800 young people created 56 student teams in various fields.

Recycling and Environment

- Recycling used bicycles and reusing parts
- Toys made from recyclable materials (plastic)
- Eco-friendly paper bags/boxes made from recycled paper
- Eco-friendly boards for classrooms
- Recycled lighting
- Specialized containers for food waste
- Eco-friendly candles
- Fruit and vegetable boxes made from recyclable paper
- Plastic waste recycling



- Eco labels sewn from used clothes, especially jeans
- Compost creation from agricultural waste

Organic Agriculture and Natural Products

- Honey-based products: honeycomb, honey, pollen, propolis
- Dried fruits
- Beekeeping and honey production
- Vertical farms
- Greenhouses for eco-friendly vegetable production
- Organic wax candle
- Teas and blends from wild flora and plants grown in the School Garden
- Eco-friendly vegetable container

Tourism and Events

- Event organization, management, and planning
- Selling organized tours in Valea Lăpușna
- Mobile app for tourism promotion
- App for developing tourism in the Republic of Moldova
- Entertainment services for children in placement centres

Sustainable Fashion and Handmade Accessories

- Sustainable clothing
- Online store for recycled clothes
- Handbags made from recyclable materials, compartmentalized, with reflective elements
- Handmade crochet pin cushions by retirees, featuring national motifs
- Designing transformable shirts
- Painting on clothes, video courses on YouTube

Technology and Innovation

- Platform for volunteer services
- App for posting and completing paid tasks
- Tech start-up that developed an AI program for weather forecasting and natural risk assessment
- App to support students applying to universities abroad



- Student kits for facilitating STEAM learning / Robotics kit
- Tactile indicator for identifying counterfeit products
- Mini social networks for schools in the form of a mobile app

Education and Services

- Math courses for children from vulnerable families
- Platform for learning foreign languages
- Financial education for young entrepreneurs
- Legal consultancy for young entrepreneurs
- Accounting services for start-ups
- Accounting for social enterprises
- After-school program for children from vulnerable families
- Secretarial services employing women who are victims of domestic violence

Food and Bakery

- Baking eco-friendly bread
- Menus for visually impaired individuals
- Personalized chocolate

Digital and Creative Services

- Website creation
- Development of graphic design elements

Animal Protection

- Animal shelter
- Platform for animal adoption

Environmental Services and Urban Planning

- Company for planting and maintaining parks in schoolyards
- Mechanism for sorting potatoes

In general, the implementation process did not present significant challenges, the research conducted within the project highlighted several gaps:

The legislative framework

Lack of a dedicated law: Instead of a separate law for social entrepreneurship, Moldova has opted for amending and supplementing existing legislation. This can lead to confusion and inconsistencies in the application of specific social entrepreneurship rules. In addition, the regulation of social entrepreneurship by the general law on entrepreneurship and enterprises



covers only the activity of enterprises that have obtained the status of social enterprise. This excludes impact start-ups, which contribute to solving social or environmental problems without having social enterprise status, as well as social initiatives and projects implemented by traditional enterprises.

Complexity of procedures: The procedures for obtaining social enterprise or insertion status are complex and may deter potential social entrepreneurs. Simplifying them could encourage more entities to apply for this status.

Inconsistency in implementation: There is a risk that regulations are implemented unevenly at local level, which can create disparities and inequalities between different regions. An effective monitoring mechanism is needed to ensure uniform enforcement.

Policy Support for Social Entrepreneurship in Moldova

Lack of an approved national program dedicated to social entrepreneurship: The National Program for the Development of Social Entrepreneurship 2021–2025 has not been approved, remaining only a draft.

Lack of tax incentives: The Tax Code does not provide tax incentives dedicated to social enterprises. The current tax regime does not offer similar advantages to other sectors such as IT or HoReCa.

Limited public procurement: The current public procurement regulatory framework offers limited preferential conditions to social enterprises, without considering the social benefits they bring.

Lack of dedicated financial support programs: There are no specific government programs to fund social entrepreneurship, and social enterprises have to compete for funding under programs aimed at traditional enterprises.

Stakeholder Engagement in the Republic of Moldova

Low interest from traditional entrepreneurs: Although there is a legislative framework and support programs, the interest of traditional entrepreneurs in social business development remains low.

Limited funding: The main funder of social business is the non-governmental sector, with resources raised from external donors. The lack of a social investment fund and underdeveloped private financial practices pose a major challenge.

Legislative inconsistencies: There are inconsistencies in the legal framework regulating social entrepreneurship activity, leading to inconsistencies in the registration and official recognition of social enterprises.

Limited knowledge at local level: Local government representatives have limited knowledge of social entrepreneurship, which limits effective support for the development of this sector at community level.

Ukraine

JA Ukraine engaged 705 students across 71 teams in the program, reflecting a strong interest in social entrepreneurship among young people. The initiatives developed span a diverse range of thematic areas, including ecology, technology, education, social services. Notably, Ecology and Sustainable Development emerged as one of the most popular focus areas, highlighting students'



commitment to addressing environmental challenges through innovative solutions. The collaboration with JA Europe and the wider consortium further enriched the program, facilitating the exchange of ideas and resources across regions.

11 student teams (16% of the total number of teams) worked on environmental projects, which are becoming increasingly relevant due to the need to address energy issues caused by the recent actions in Ukraine. An example is the "SHARM" team from Kyiv, which is implementing a project to grow energy willow for renewable energy. Equally popular among the participants (16%) is the IT and Technology area with a focus on social impact. The "Catalyst" team from Lviv Polytechnic National University is working on the BookLoop mobile application for sharing and selling books, which has an environmental aspect. Another example is the 'Chance app' team from Lviv Higher Vocational Polytechnic Institute, which is developing an app to support people with disabilities, helping them integrate into society.

7 student teams (10%) turned their business ideas into educational projects aimed at preserving cultural heritage. For example, the "4SE" (For Social Entrepreneurs) team offers an innovative solution – 3D printing of Ukrainian architectural heritage. The project aims to recreate destroyed monuments and support people who have been forced to leave their homes, helping them to maintain a connection with their native places. The project was inspired by the awareness of the extent of the destruction of Ukraine's cultural heritage and the understanding of how many people are hundreds or thousands of kilometres away from their homes, unable to walk the streets they know.

The most relevant areas among the project participants were initiatives in the fields of medicine and rehabilitation (adaptive rehabilitation services); fashion and textiles (workwear); technology and engineering (development of drones, protective equipment, medical devices); and social inclusion (support for people through educational and professional opportunities). The "Wound Body" team at Novoyavoriv Higher Vocational School produces protective pads for first aid in case of eye injuries.

Four teams (Heart of Change, RUBKA Clothing Brand, T-ONE, and Generation of Change) are developing and producing adaptive clothing for the people with special needs. Such projects help to improve the comfort of the people.

Challenges, systematic barriers to engage teachers, schools

There are several challenges affecting the integration and development of social entrepreneurship in Ukraine. One major issue is the insufficient understanding of the concept and its practical application among academics. Additionally, the absence of a legislative framework that supports the creation and operation of social enterprises further hinders progress. Efforts to incorporate training formats into the curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education and Science face significant obstacles, including an already overloaded curriculum and limited time for additional projects.

Teachers often lack material incentives, such as credits, bonuses, or additional payments, for engaging students in entrepreneurial activities. For students, social entrepreneurship may appear less attractive due to uncertain career prospects, income instability, and limited opportunities for professional growth. Compounding these issues are the technical difficulties associated with the ongoing military situation, which further complicates implementation and participation.



Social Entrepreneurship Values and Practices in the Company Program

JA Ukraine has implemented a revolving funding model for the first time, providing student teams with financial opportunities through mini-grants. This initiative marked a significant milestone, including the formal registration of student-led businesses—an unprecedented practice in JA Ukraine's history. Legal documents developed during the program, such as contracts and agreements, now offer a solid foundation for future initiatives and programs. Additionally, a comprehensive database of business plans was created, enabling teams to further develop their projects and seek additional grant opportunities within Ukraine. The program also reached a more mature student audience than previous efforts, effectively expanding the scope and impact of JA Ukraine's operations.

Georgia

In Georgia, the "Building Back Better Through Social Entrepreneurship" project was implemented by JA Georgia in partnership with Junior Achievement Europe, the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Georgia. The Social Entrepreneurship program has demonstrated significant growth and resilience. A total of 41 educators from 40 schools participated, and 728 students engaged in the program. Despite political tensions and national protests, the curriculum was adapted to local conditions and successfully delivered through a series of in-person and hybrid training. These achievements reflect the program's adaptability and its capacity to create lasting educational impact.

Challenges and Systematic Barriers to Engage Teachers and Schools

The Social Entrepreneurship Program in Georgia encountered a range of systemic, organizational, and contextual challenges during its implementation. Political unrest and recurring student protests disrupted the educational process, complicating communication and coordination with schools and teachers. Several institutions faced infrastructural limitations and shifting academic schedules, which impacted the continuity of the program delivery. In addition, many educators were unfamiliar with entrepreneurship-related methodologies, necessitating comprehensive training and hands-on support to build their capacity and confidence in delivering the new curriculum.

To address this, an extensive teacher training initiative was launched across three cities—Tbilisi, Batumi, and Kutaisi—through a series of five sessions, including one online. The training process attracted 203 applicants, from which 126 teachers actively participated. Out of those, 76 successfully completed assignments and received certificates. As the program progressed, 50 teachers initially expressed readiness to teach the Social Entrepreneurship curriculum at their institutions; however, due to national disruptions, 32 educators ultimately implemented the program in 29 schools, engaging 506 students. An additional 11 teachers involved 222 more students during the extended implementation phase. Overall, 41 teachers from 40 schools contributed to teaching the program to 728 students, reflecting both the adaptability and scale of the initiative.

The absence of a clearly defined legal framework for social enterprises in Georgia also created uncertainty around how student-led projects could transition into fully registered ventures. Despite these complexities, the program demonstrated strong adaptability through its hybrid training format, broad regional outreach, and strategic extension of the teaching period into autumn 2024, ensuring the full engagement of participating schools and educators.



Social Entrepreneurship Values and Practices in the Company Program

The integration of social entrepreneurship into the Company Program has significantly enhanced the educational experience for both students and educators in Georgia. Rooted in a design-thinking methodology, the program encouraged students to identify real-world challenges within their communities, investigate root causes, and develop practical business solutions that carry social value. Through hands-on tools such as the Social Enterprise Business Model Canvas, social impact measurement frameworks, and beneficiary journey maps, participants were introduced to a dynamic, problem-solving learning environment that complemented and expanded traditional classroom instruction.

This approach empowered students to think critically and creatively, strengthening their entrepreneurial mindset while also instilling a strong sense of civic engagement and social responsibility. As students worked collaboratively on developing viable social enterprise concepts, they improved their communication, leadership, and teamwork skills, which are essential for both professional success and active citizenship. The process helped them connect theoretical knowledge with practical application, thereby bridging the gap between education and societal needs.

For educators, the program served as an entry point into modern, student-centered pedagogical methods. Teachers not only adopted new tools and strategies for delivering entrepreneurship education but also redefined their roles as facilitators of innovation and co-creators of impact with their students. The program's structure promoted ongoing professional development and fostered a culture of experimentation and responsiveness to real-world issues within the educational space. As a result, the company Program emerged as a transformative platform that fosters both individual growth and broader societal progress by nurturing a new generation of socially conscious entrepreneurs.

Thematic Areas of Newly Created Social Enterprises

In its first year, the program in Georgia generated 45 student-led social enterprise concepts from a diverse range of educational institutions, including universities, VET colleges, and public schools. These ideas reflect an inspiring array of thematic focuses rooted in students' understanding of their communities' challenges and aspirations.

Drawing from an analysis of the submitted project concepts, the most common thematic areas include:

- Environmental sustainability: including eco-friendly production, recycling, and conservation efforts.
- Gender equality and empowerment: projects supporting women's and girls' development and leadership.
- Education and learning: initiatives that promote access to quality education, mentoring, and digital literacy.
- Youth employment and skills development: business models focused on skill-building, job creation, and career guidance.
- Mental health and emotional well-being: platforms and services addressing psychological support and emotional resilience.



These themes not only reflect current societal priorities but also demonstrate students' ability to link entrepreneurial thinking with long-term impact. Many projects were cross-cutting in nature, combining environmental goals with education, or mental health with youth empowerment. The variety and thoughtfulness of the business ideas submitted affirm the program's success in sparking innovative, mission-driven thinking among young people across Georgia.

The Pre–Accelerator Programme

Moldova

Taking into account that we had many young people willing to get involved in the project, in the survey conducted between June and August 2024 within the project, we were interested in the topic "What makes you think you could be an entrepreneur?", the most frequent answers highlighted the young people's confidence in their creativity, 64% of the respondents stated that they are able to come up with innovative ideas. Also, 62% believe they can achieve the goals they set themselves, reflecting a strong achievement orientation. Their leadership and team coordination skills are also perceived as strengths by 48% of young people, while 44% mentioned their ability to identify people's problems and solve them. These data indicate a positive perception of the personal skills needed to become entrepreneurs, suggesting that young people have an optimistic view of their entrepreneurial potential, based on creativity, determination and leadership skills.

To support these young people, a Beginners Guide to Social Entrepreneurship has been created. The given guide contains information about the specifics of social business, business models applied by social businesses, their impact on the economy and, most importantly, the essential steps to take to develop your own social business. The guide helps to walk the path from choosing the idea to developing the business model, identifying funding sources and registering the social business. This guide is also useful in the teaching process, providing information about the basic characteristics of social entrepreneurship and encouraging young men and women to implement their ideas and become agents of change in their community. From October to December 2024, all applicants participated in the Pre–Accelerator, receiving additional trainings and private mentoring from actors working in the field of social entrepreneurship. The Pre–Accelerator gave young people the opportunity to:

- Validate their business idea,
- Develop the business model,
- Create and test an MVP,
- Develop marketing and sales strategies.

The research revealed that among the factors that motivate young people to become entrepreneurs are: the freedom to follow their own ideas and dreams (65%); the opportunity to earn more money than in a regular job (62%); being your own boss and making your own schedule (57%). Lower scores in responses have the options: making a difference in the world and in your community (24%) and solving real problems and bringing innovative solutions (46%).

According to the results of the project and the survey, the majority of young people show a positive interest in social entrepreneurship, suggesting an openness to the idea of combining economic success with social impact. This attitude reflects a growing awareness of social



problems and a desire to contribute to solving them through business. However, a significant 41% remain reluctant, which may indicate concerns about the risks and difficulties associated with launching a social business, such as lower profitability or the complexity of running such a business.

When asked to justify their answer to the question, "If you had the possibility, would you open a social business?", young people shared a variety of reasons that can be grouped into two main categories. On the one hand, those who would opt for opening a social business emphasized the significant positive impact on the community and the contribution to improving the lives of children from vulnerable families. These young people, often with a background in volunteering, see social entrepreneurship as a way of continuing to help those in need, thus responding to a real need for support in the community. Some also mentioned that with few businesses of this type, there are opportunities to make a difference.

In contrast, young people who said that they would not start a social enterprise expressed reluctance about the lack of strong personal motivation or the associated risks. These respondents feel that there is currently not enough to motivate them to engage in this type of entrepreneurship or perceive the risks as too high. According to the same research the following can be concluded with reference to the attitude of young people in Moldova towards social entrepreneurship:

High interest in entrepreneurship in general: 88.5% of young people want to become entrepreneurs, which suggests a high potential for the development of entrepreneurship among young people. Main motivations include the desire for freedom and the possibility to earn more than in a regular job.

Confidence in personal skills: 64% of young people consider themselves creative and able to come up with innovative ideas, and 62% believe they can achieve the goals they set themselves. This confidence in their own skills underlines an optimistic view of their entrepreneurial potential.

Willingness for social entrepreneurship: 59% of young people would be willing to launch a social business, showing a significant interest in integrating social objectives into entrepreneurial activity. However, 41% remain reluctant, indicating concerns about risks and difficulties.

Awareness of social entrepreneurship: 56.1% of young people are familiar with the term "social business," reflecting a growing awareness of this field. However, almost half of young people are not familiar with the concept, underlining the need for more information.

Motivations for social entrepreneurship: The desire to make a positive impact on society is the strongest motivator for social entrepreneurship, with 68% of young people believing that solving social or environmental problems is essential. Financial aspects and community recognition are also important motivating factors.

Social business-oriented consumption preferences: 80% of young people would choose products from social businesses if prices were lower, and 73% if prices were equal to the competition. These data suggest that price remains a decisive factor in supporting social businesses.

The role of social enterprises in solving community problems: 23% of young people believe that social enterprises are well suited to solving community problems, showing an openness to



innovative and social impact-oriented solutions. This reflects a confidence in the ability of these businesses to contribute to the common good.

Ukraine

As part of the programme's evaluation and impact measurement, a comprehensive survey was conducted involving 503 students and 91 lecturers. The feedback highlights the strong educational and practical outcomes of the initiative, revealing high satisfaction with programme content, skill development, and future applicability. Beyond survey results, the programme fostered a dynamic support ecosystem—connecting youth with experienced mentors, expanding access to entrepreneurial networks, and strengthening collaboration with educational institutions. These efforts have not only advanced participants' business acumen but have also contributed to building a sustainable and socially responsible entrepreneurial landscape.

Based on the results, students rated their satisfaction with the programme content at 4.7 (out of 5), indicating a high appreciation of the material and the likelihood of its application in their careers (4.6) and for the development of entrepreneurial skills (4.7). Teachers rate the programme 4.6 for its impact on improving their skills and knowledge. Teaching materials on social entrepreneurship and the practical application of the knowledge gained in the work of teachers (4.8) were also highly rated (4.9).

Youth access to the business ecosystem is expanding through growing cooperation with mentors, entrepreneurs, and Ukrainian market experts who are eager to share their experience, offer guidance, and support the development of social initiatives. This collaboration strengthens the youth entrepreneurial environment and accelerates the growth of innovative projects.

The project involved 37 mentors from various fields of activity and social entrepreneurship. They assisted the participating teams at all stages of the development of their social business ideas. The main tasks of the mentors included: educational support in financial planning, marketing, and project management; individual mentoring in the form of providing feedback and recommendations for refining business models, establishing contacts with potential partners, investors, and NGOs; and support at the launch stage, including advice on preparing presentations, developing a scaling strategy, and entering the market. Participants had the opportunity to receive advice from experienced mentors, including:

- Entrepreneur and restaurateur, shared his experience of running a restaurant business with the "Dreams for Action" (a coffee shop with calculated bread units for people with diabetes) and "SUPERIOR" (creating a patriotic anti-cafe) teams;
- An expert in the woodworking and wood-based veneer industry, advised the "PROFI" (educational toys made from recycled materials: wood, fabric) and "Edulution" (development and promotion of eco-friendly packaging) teams;
- Co-owner of the clothing business, worked with the "Generation of Changes" (rehabilitation clothing for the military and people undergoing rehabilitation), "RUBKA Clothing Brand" (modular designer clothing with the ability to replace parts) and "T-ONE" (exclusive clothing brand) teams;
- A specialist in information technology and computer systems, helped the "Catalyst team" (BookLoop, a mobile app for sharing and selling books that promotes reuse) and the "Chance app" (an inclusive mobile app for people with disabilities).



These are also a few of the mentors involved in the project who helped participants turn their ideas into real business models. It should be noted that all mentors played a key role in supporting young entrepreneurs by helping them find effective business solutions, develop business plans, and adapt their projects to modern challenges.

Participants have gained essential skills in business planning, financial modelling, and management, enabling them to independently scale their projects and attract support from investors and grantors beyond the scope of the programme. Many teams are actively expanding their partnerships—supplying products to medical institutions, cafés, and restaurants—thereby strengthening the social entrepreneurship ecosystem. Several teams have also begun collaborating with local suppliers in their regions. This activity contributes positively to the economy through official business registration and tax contributions, enhancing the financial sustainability of youth-led enterprises. Furthermore, cooperation with higher education institutions has been reinforced, with 16 Memorandums of Partnership signed during the programme, supporting the integration of social entrepreneurship into academic curricula.

Despite the progress made, several challenges persist for young social entrepreneurs in Ukraine. One of the main challenges faced by early-stage social entrepreneurs is aligning available funding with the full scope of development needs, particularly when aiming to create a minimum viable product (MVP). Furthermore, access to future funding remains limited, with students encountering obstacles in attracting additional investment. Bureaucratic hurdles also pose significant challenges, especially for underage founders, who face complex business registration procedures, tax burdens, and the absence of specific incentives for social enterprises.

A low level of financial literacy among youth, particularly in areas such as taxation and accounting, further complicates the situation. Additionally, Ukraine lacks a well-developed ecosystem to support social entrepreneurship, making it difficult for students to form partnerships with businesses and institutions. Many young people also report low levels of parental support, facing misunderstanding or skepticism when launching their own ventures. Lastly, ongoing geopolitical instability adds another layer of risk and uncertainty, further hindering the sustainable development of youth-led social enterprises.

Georgia

The Pre-Accelerator Program under the “Building Back Better through Social Entrepreneurship” initiative has had a profound and measurable impact on the Georgian youth entrepreneurship landscape. The program served as a bridge between theoretical social entrepreneurship education and the practical establishment of real-life social businesses by youth. Structured as an intensive support program, it offered bootcamps, expert-led weekly sessions, one-on-one mentorship, and team-based project development, culminating in public pitch events. In Georgia, this approach nurtured the development of early-stage social enterprises and enhanced the entrepreneurial readiness of young participants.

Thanks to the program, 15 youth-led social enterprises were created across Georgia. Each was supported by a revolving fund, providing 2,000 Euros seed funding per enterprise under a “pay-it-forward” principle. In Georgia specifically, over 728 young people from 40 educational institutions participated in the broader program, and 15 top-performing teams were selected and funded:



List of Funded Teams and Their Operational Areas:

- BIONOVA (Tbilisi): Biogas and biofertilizer production from organic waste to reduce emissions and utility costs.
- Voltrip (Kakheti): Student-employer connection app promoting youth employment in rural areas.
- Blue Lake (Guria): Local employment and eco-tourism via sustainable fish farming.
- The Kingdom of Bees (Guria): Agricultural development and employment through beekeeping initiatives.
- Poultry Corner (Guria) Women and youth employment via eco-friendly poultry production.
- Milk River (Guria) Economic support through dairy and meat production in remote mountainous areas.
- Georoots (Tbilisi): Preservation and promotion of traditional folk crafts to support regional entrepreneurship.
- Leadership Academy (Kakheti): Youth development through informal education and skills training.
- Bubble It (Shida Kartli): Introduction of bubble tea culture with profits supporting youth activities.
- Nairchiri (Shida Kartli): Production of healthy dried fruits as alternatives to chemically preserved products.
- GAMOEWEY (Adjara): Inclusive fashion initiative allowing the visually impaired to feel clothing textures.
- Milavie (Adjara): Platform for young designers to promote affordable, sustainable fashion.
- Penovani (Kakheti): Bakery employing women and youth affected by violence, combating rural poverty.
- Tamashobana (Kvemo Kartli): Inclusive recreational space promoting educational board games.
- Chako (Tbilisi): Accessories with solar panels promoting eco-conscious energy alternatives.

The pre-accelerator experience not only improved the business models and social impact strategies of these teams but also prepared them for future investment readiness. Participants enhanced their soft and technical skills in areas such as digital innovation, green entrepreneurship, impact measurement, and stakeholder engagement.

To further strengthen these outcomes, the program included a dedicated mentorship phase. A 3-day preparatory meeting of mentors was held gathering 20 selected professionals from various



sectors. These mentors received comprehensive orientation on Junior Achievement Georgia's approach and the "Accelerator X | Social Entrepreneurship" program. Over the following four months, they were assigned to work directly with youth-led enterprises, offering tailored guidance and support to refine their business ideas, strengthen operations, and enhance sustainability. This mentorship phase significantly contributed to ecosystem-building by fostering long-term professional relationships and providing targeted expertise to emerging social entrepreneurs.

The program also contributed to the creation of a **sustainable support ecosystem** by equipping local actors with the capacity to manage future cohorts independently and establishing collaborative networks between schools, incubators, investors, and civil society organizations. Additionally, it successfully integrated AI and sustainability-focused modules, aligning with EU strategic priorities such as the Green Deal and Digital Transition.

Despite its success, the implementation of the Pre-Accelerator Program in Georgia faced several challenges that highlight broader systemic issues in the country's social entrepreneurship ecosystem:

Legislative Gaps: One of the key barriers remains the absence of a formal legal status for social enterprises in Georgia. This legal ambiguity affects the ability of youth-led enterprises to register, access funding, or receive tax incentives, thereby limiting their long-term sustainability.

Weak Social Entrepreneurial Ecosystem: Many schools lacked prior exposure to entrepreneurship education, and engagement from teachers and administrators was uneven, partially due to curriculum overload, insufficient institutional support, and limited incentives.

Access to Finance: While the seed fund provided an initial boost, ongoing access to capital remains limited. Early-stage social enterprises often struggle to scale or attract follow-up investment due to a lack of financial infrastructure tailored to social impact ventures.

Awareness and Perception: The concept of social entrepreneurship is still relatively new in Georgia. Despite growing interest, public and institutional awareness remains moderate, as confirmed by empirical studies showing that only 50% of surveyed citizens had a general understanding of social entrepreneurship.

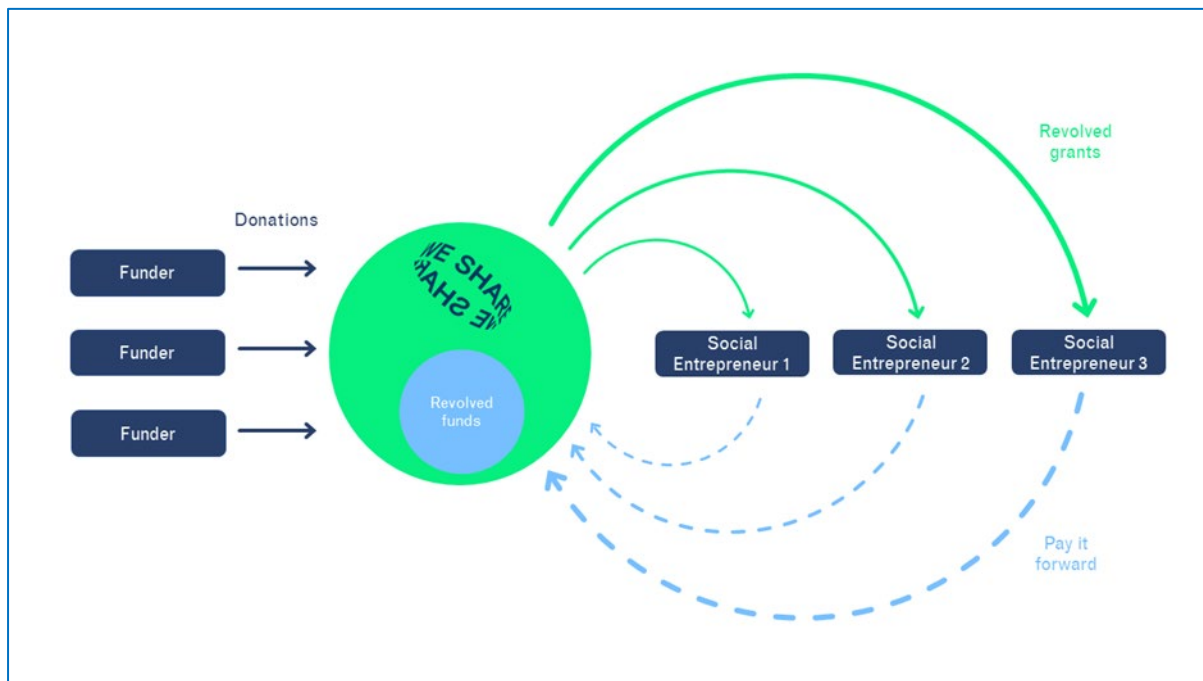
External Context: The program's rollout in schools was affected by political instability and student strikes in early 2024, which reduced the number of actively implementing teachers and temporarily disrupted planned training sessions and youth engagement.

These challenges underscore the need for systemic reforms, including formal legal recognition of social enterprises, development of sustainable funding mechanisms, enhanced teacher training, and nationwide awareness campaigns to strengthen the foundational environment for youth social entrepreneurship in Georgia.



Revolving Funding Model as part of Social Entrepreneurship

To enable circularity of the created social entrepreneur ecosystem, a revolving funding mechanism was created under the guidance of We Share Forward Foundation. The revolving funding mechanism aims to create a community of giving among the student companies provided with pre-seed funding through the “Pay it Forward” principle.



The model works on four elements:

1. **Receive donations** from donors,
2. **Tailor-made agreement** (through diverse mechanisms) with social entrepreneurs,
3. **Grant transferred** to social entrepreneur,
4. After a social entrepreneur is successful, **the social entrepreneur shares part of their success** with the next generation of social entrepreneurs, recycling the donations and enabling them to support more social entrepreneurs in the future.

The revolving element allows for the supported social entrepreneurs that participated in the program, once they became self-sustaining, to give back to their communities by donating part of their success to other social entrepreneurs. This creates a sustainable cycle and a self-sustaining source of philanthropic capital, which is used exclusively to support early-stage social enterprises in the target countries.

Design for the project

By fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the transfer of the revolving mechanism with the implementing JA organizations, We Share Forward Foundation aimed to create self-sustaining social entrepreneurship communities across Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. To do so, We Share Forward Foundation participated in knowledge exchanges, in areas of impact entrepreneurship, sustainable innovation, impact reporting among many others with the consortium partners. These formed the essential foundation that made the revolving funding model possible.



Furthermore, in response to the unique challenges of the local development context, We Share Forward Foundation empowered local partners to create and develop their own revolving funding models making the circularity self-sustaining. To support the development, We Share Forward Foundation provided tailored workshops and training sessions, offering best practices, insights, and lessons learned.

Additionally, We Share Forward Foundation addressed questions specific to the local context, such as how to implement the revolving funding model within each country in Eastern Europe, the technical aspects of managing the revolving element, and strategies for sustaining community engagement after the grant had been revolved

This approach ensured that the partners received guidance needed to successfully implement sustainable revolving models to independently operate their revolving funding models, driving long-term sustainability and knowledge exchange to future generations. By integrating the "Pay it Forward" principle, the process supports the re-use of additional philanthropic capital, ensuring ongoing support for new groups of young entrepreneurs and reinforcing the circularity of the model.

Workshops and materials developed for the project

The workshops created a space where We Share Forward Foundation shared expertise on sustainable funding, social entrepreneurship and the revolving funding model. Materials developed for the program such as fundraising guidelines, impact measurement and management guidelines, and revolving funding guidelines served as guidelines for ecosystem development.

Fundraising efforts

We Share Forward Foundation, JA Europe and the consortium successfully raised 90,000 Euros through their fundraising efforts to support the 45 social enterprises across Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. To do so, We Share Forward Foundation, JA Europe and the consortium empowered donors such as corporate foundations, private individuals and philanthropic organisations across Europe to commit to and support the initiative.

The process was made possible through We Share Forward Foundation's facilitation of memorandum of understanding agreement between the donor, JA Europe, and the implementing countries. The memorandum of understanding established a clear framework of collaboration, capacity building and the creation of 45 social enterprises in the countries. Furthermore, the framework created a revolving funding models suited for the needs of the targeted countries to support early-stage social entrepreneurs and impact students.

To raise the targeted amount, We Share Forward Foundation, and the consortium mapped and engaged the ecosystem of philanthropic actors across Europe. The process not only raised awareness of the consortium's efforts but also engaged key stakeholders capable of strengthening the ecosystem as social entrepreneurs advance beyond the early stages. Additionally, impact donors with a focus on Eastern Europe were identified. The results and best practices of this effort showcase a road map for pre-seed support in the target countries.

Ecosystem

As part of its commitment to ecosystem engagement, We Share Forward Foundation collaborated with the Unknown Group and the Municipality of The Hague to bring the Building Back Better Through Social Entrepreneurship consortium to Impact Fest in The Hague. Recognized as one of the largest gatherings in the Netherlands dedicated to sustainable innovation, Impact Fest serves



as a vital platform for startups, scale-ups, foundations, and investors striving for social and environmental impact. During the event, a dynamic panel discussion took place, featuring key voices from project consortium partners. We Share Forward Foundation, JA Europe, JA Georgia, JA Moldova and JA Ukraine partners shared insights on student's innovative business models, progress, and the role of entrepreneurship in addressing societal challenges. Attendees engaged in conversations, exchanging ideas on scaling impact-driven ventures.

Beyond the panel, the event fostered meaningful networking opportunities, knowledge exchange and ecosystem connections. Participants connected with potential collaborators, and like-minded changemakers, facilitating new partnerships and business opportunities. The consortium gained exposure, promoting its mission and initiatives to a wider audience. Additionally, We Share Forward Foundation connected the local JAs with other local actors that can participate in the social entrepreneur pipeline incubation such as Ukrainian Venture Fund, Impact Force, SAP, The First Impact Fund in Georgia or Ecovisio from Moldova.

Lessons Learned

The key lesson learned was the modelling of the revolving funding model for the ecosystem. The model needed to be modelled to fit the country the specific economic and regulatory context of each country to ensure sustainability and impact. The collaboration between the target demographic partners and We Share Forward Foundation was essential for the model to be aligned with the local context.

Building a new fundraising pipeline for the program proved to be a complex and demanding process, requiring We Share Forward Foundation and the consortium to navigate local infrastructure. Establishing trust and interest in these contexts proved to be a challenge. Yet, the collaboration with the partners proved to be crucial to overcome this barrier.

This required We Share Forward Foundation and the consortium to navigate local infrastructure while also working to shift donor perceptions and generate interest in the region to establish trust and engagement. However, collaboration with local partners proved essential in building credibility and opening new opportunities. Looking ahead, further improvement could come from highlighting success stories from the targeted regions across the countries to showcase the resilience and the abilities of the social entrepreneurs involved in the program.

Long-term Sustainability

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of youth-led social entrepreneurship initiatives is both a strategic imperative and a practical challenge. While the "Building Back Better Through Social Entrepreneurship" project demonstrated clear short-term successes—ranging from the establishment of student enterprises to the integration of social innovation in education—its enduring value depends on how well its models, mechanisms, and outcomes are embedded into national systems, supported by local actors, and financed beyond the project lifecycle. This chapter explores how sustainability was addressed within the current program and what measures can further anchor and extend its impact in the future.

At the core of the project's sustainability strategy lies the revolving fund mechanism—a locally managed financial tool that not only provided initial seed capital but also institutionalized a pay-it-forward principle among youth entrepreneurs. The fund successfully supported 45 youth-led enterprises and created a culture of mutual support, accountability, and reinvestment. By requiring successful grantees to reinvest in future cohorts, the model reduces reliance on external



donors and fosters a regenerative financing system rooted in community values. This approach, while still in early stages, has proven operational in Moldova and Ukraine and is adaptable to other national contexts, provided that legal and banking frameworks support its functioning.

Another pillar of sustainability is systemic integration into national education systems. The project trained 276 educators, developed localized entrepreneurship curricula, and piloted implementation in both formal and non-formal education settings. While teacher engagement varied, especially in Georgia, the initiative laid the groundwork for institutional uptake. In Moldova, for instance, close cooperation with the Ministry of Education signals a promising pathway for embedding social entrepreneurship into existing academic structures. Sustainability in this domain will depend on whether ministries formalize curricula, offer accreditation, and provide incentives for teachers to deliver entrepreneurship training as part of their core responsibilities.

Sustainability also hinges on the strength of the ecosystem that surrounds young entrepreneurs. Beyond financial support and education, the project mobilized a network of mentors, private-sector advisors, and community partners to guide youth-led ventures from ideation to implementation. This ecosystem-based approach reduces dependence on a single actor and builds local ownership. However, outside capital cities, access to such support remains limited. Sustaining the model will require continued investment in ecosystem development—particularly through regional incubators, public-private partnerships, and stronger rural outreach.

A further aspect of long-term viability is policy alignment and enabling legislation. The absence of legal recognition for social enterprises in Georgia, complex certification processes in Moldova, and regulatory restrictions for underage founders in Ukraine all pose systemic barriers to sustainability. The project responds to these gaps by identifying them explicitly and advocating for legal reform. Going forward, strategic engagement with policymakers and youth-led advocacy can institutionalize the legal and financial incentives necessary for long-term growth of social enterprises. Embedding legal recognition into national legislation is not just a policy goal—it is a sustainability condition.

Finally, domestic funding pathways will be critical to ensuring that the program's achievements can scale and persist. While donor support catalyzed early success, long-term viability requires financial commitment from national and local governments, as well as private-sector actors. This may include co-financing from municipal youth funds, integration of social enterprise support into national development plans, or CSR partnerships with local companies. The white paper calls for more structured domestic financing mechanisms, especially in Moldova and Ukraine, where promising foundations already exist but require scale-up.

In conclusion, the project has laid a solid foundation for long-term sustainability by operationalizing a revolving fund, localizing educational content, engaging national ministries, and identifying key policy gaps. What remains is to consolidate these efforts through formal policy adoption, stronger teacher incentives, expanded regional ecosystems, and predictable domestic funding streams. With these elements in place, youth-led social entrepreneurship can transition from a pilot initiative to a permanent feature of the region's social and economic development landscape.



Recommendations

EU Level

Strengthen Policy, Funding, and Legal Frameworks for Social Entrepreneurship: Encourage the creation of supportive legislative and financial environments to sustain and scale social entrepreneurship initiatives. This includes promoting inclusive business models aligned with the SDGs (e.g., quality education, climate action, decent work), supporting job creation for vulnerable groups, and reducing poverty and inequalities. Expanding EU-funded programmes like Erasmus+ and Green Deal initiatives to better include Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia—with a focus on youth and rural communities—is also key.

The "Building Back Better Through Social Entrepreneurship" project clearly demonstrates that without supportive legal, policy, and funding frameworks, youth-led social enterprises in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine struggle to transition from ideas to sustainable ventures. Across all three countries, the project uncovered significant legal gaps: Moldova lacks a dedicated law on social entrepreneurship, relying instead on fragmented amendments to general business legislation; Georgia offers no formal legal recognition of social enterprises, leaving youth teams unable to register or access support; and Ukraine's regulatory ambiguity, especially for underage founders, poses substantial barriers to business formation. These gaps were not just theoretical but directly affected project participants—many of whom had viable, socially impactful business models but faced institutional and bureaucratic obstacles that prevented formal establishment and growth.

Moreover, access to funding remains one of the most pressing challenges. While the project successfully piloted a €90,000 revolving seed fund to support 45 youth-led enterprises, this temporary mechanism cannot substitute for long-term, systemic investment infrastructure. In Moldova, 88.5% of surveyed youth expressed interest in entrepreneurship, yet cited lack of funding as a primary barrier. In Georgia and Ukraine, students developing enterprises in green tech, inclusive fashion, and educational services reported limited or no options for follow-up financing. These challenges highlight the urgent need for EU-level action to strengthen national legal definitions, create targeted fiscal incentives, and institutionalize youth-friendly funding models. Such interventions would directly support the objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Social Economy Action Plan, and the EU4Youth programme by enabling young people to contribute meaningfully to inclusive, green, and resilient economies.

Foster Multi-Sectoral and Regional Collaboration: Throughout the project, meaningful cooperation between public institutions, educational bodies, the private sector, and civil society played a pivotal role in supporting youth-led innovation. In Moldova, the integration of the social entrepreneurship component into the national company programme was made possible through a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Education and Research. In Georgia, the project engaged 40 schools and over 700 students despite disruptions from political unrest, showing the effectiveness of collaboration between JA Georgia, the Ministry of Education, and regional stakeholders. These partnerships ensured local ownership, aligned project goals with national priorities, and created space for education reform linked to real-world entrepreneurial outcomes. However, collaboration remained uneven across countries, often limited to short-term or pilot-based efforts rather than institutionalized cooperation.

To scale and sustain these outcomes, the EU should promote structured, long-term collaboration frameworks that integrate Eastern Partnership stakeholders into broader European networks focused on social innovation and youth employment. The participation of JA Europe and We Share



Forward Foundation, along with international partners such as the Municipality of The Hague and Intel®, brought essential expertise and mentorship that helped students access global innovation ecosystems. Events like Impact Fest in the Netherlands provided youth teams and country partners with visibility, knowledge exchange, and potential funding opportunities—yet these remain rare exceptions. EU support is needed to institutionalize such platforms by expanding initiatives like the European Social Economy Missions and embedding cross-border learning into Erasmus+ and EU4Youth programming. Establishing multi-stakeholder roundtables and public-private partnership mechanisms across the region would enable deeper cooperation, better policy alignment, and more inclusive scaling of youth-driven solutions in line with EU cohesion and regional development goals.

Promote partnerships between public, private, and civil society sectors to ensure long-term support for social entrepreneurship policies. Strengthen ties through joint EU-country advocacy efforts and include Georgian, Moldovan, and Ukrainian stakeholders in EU consultative bodies and thematic networks focused on social innovation, green economy, and youth employment. Building institutional bridges and embedding country-level pilot models into broader regional EU networks—such as the European Social Economy Missions—will enhance cohesion and shared learning.

Enable Knowledge Exchange and Community Building: The key success factor of the project in cross-national collaboration was the strategic exchange of expertise among consortium partners, which ensured both high-quality programme delivery and effective local adaptation. JA Lithuania played a central role by providing in-depth knowledge on social entrepreneurship education, leading the development of core content and delivering comprehensive training to all national JA teams, enabling them to implement the programme in alignment with local contexts and education systems. We Share Forward Foundation contributed its specialised expertise in philanthropic financing by introducing the revolving funding model and supporting the co-creation of locally tailored investment mechanisms in each country through close engagement with stakeholders. Intel added critical value by integrating AI-focused content into the curriculum and offering access to a global pool of mentors with advanced technical expertise, allowing teams to deepen their projects when specialized knowledge was required. This coordinated knowledge-sharing approach allowed for the seamless transfer of European best practices while building sustainable, country-specific ecosystems.

To institutionalize and expand these benefits, the EU should support the creation of pan-European communities of practice that bring together youth entrepreneurs, educators, local authorities, and policymakers from both Member States and Eastern Partnership countries. These networks could operate through structured exchanges, joint training programmes, and collaborative development of curriculum and policy tools, modeled after initiatives such as the Erasmus+ Knowledge Alliances and the European Social Economy Missions. For example, educators from Moldova who successfully integrated social entrepreneurship into the company programme could exchange methodologies with peers from other countries, fostering mutual capacity building. Similarly, students from Ukrainian teams who developed innovative social apps and inclusive fashion projects could benefit from sharing challenges and solutions with counterparts across Europe. These communities should also link with EU institutions and national ministries to ensure that the grassroots knowledge generated by young people informs policy implementation and aligns with broader EU strategies such as the Digital Education Action Plan and the Green Deal. By embedding youth-driven innovation into a permanent, collaborative



structure, the EU can enhance the resilience and relevance of its development cooperation in the region.

Facilitate the development of pan-European communities of practice involving social entrepreneurs, educators, and policymakers to co-create scalable, adaptable solutions. Establish policy and knowledge exchange platforms between EU institutions and national ministries to support localized implementation of EU development policies, ensuring youth-driven innovation remains at the core of social and environmental transformation across the region.

Advance Green and Inclusive Economies through Social Entrepreneurship: The "Building Back Better Through Social Entrepreneurship" project provided compelling evidence that youth-led social enterprises in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are not only capable of addressing local socio-economic challenges but are also actively contributing to the EU's broader green and inclusive growth objectives. Across all three countries, young entrepreneurs developed solutions aligned with the goals of the European Green Deal and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in the areas of circular economy, environmental protection, and inclusive employment. In Georgia, initiatives like BIONOVA, which transforms organic waste into biofertilizer, and Blue Lake, which promotes eco-tourism through sustainable fish farming, showcase how youth-led enterprises can directly support low-carbon, locally rooted economies. In Moldova, school-based enterprises produced recycled packaging, composting systems, and eco-friendly candles—demonstrating that even in under-resourced settings, green entrepreneurship can take root when supported by education and seed funding. Similarly, Ukrainian teams developed AI-driven apps for book sharing and designed adaptive clothing for military veterans, highlighting how inclusion and innovation can be embedded in business models that serve both environmental and social goals.

To scale these outcomes, the EU should prioritize the inclusion of Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine in consortia and funding schemes focused on green and inclusive innovation. Existing instruments such as Horizon Europe, LIFE, and the European Social Fund+ could be leveraged to deepen capacity-building for green entrepreneurship and ensure youth from these countries have access to EU-level mentorship, financing, and policy networks. In addition, new funding streams under the Green Deal Investment Plan should consider setting aside dedicated resources for youth-led, impact-oriented ventures in the Eastern Partnership region. These efforts should be paired with targeted support for inclusive entrepreneurship—particularly initiatives led by women, migrants, and displaced youth, as seen in the Georgian project Penovani, a bakery employing women affected by violence, or Moldova's school companies creating accessible services for children with disabilities. By embedding these countries more fully into EU green and social innovation ecosystems, the Union will not only advance its external action goals but also tap into a generation of young changemakers ready to build resilient, equitable, and climate-conscious economies.

Support the development of green products and services that contribute to the transition toward a sustainable economy. Align social entrepreneurship initiatives in Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova with EU strategies that promote climate action, inclusive education, and gender equality—reinforcing SDGs 5, 8, 9, 11, and 13. Prioritize the integration of these countries into EU-funded consortia focused on social innovation and green growth.

Foster Regional Collaboration and Investment in Green Innovation: Cross-border cooperation can serve as a powerful catalyst for advancing green innovation and sustainable



development in the Eastern Partnership region. While youth in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine share similar aspirations to contribute to climate action and digital transformation, the project revealed that their efforts are often limited by fragmented ecosystems, unequal access to resources, and a lack of structured regional collaboration. Nonetheless, the project succeeded in creating a foundation for joint action by piloting shared methodologies, hosting regional bootcamps, and supporting the exchange of green business models across borders. For example, Georgian and Moldovan student teams working on sustainable agriculture—such as vertical farming and eco-friendly poultry production—shared their experiences and refined their models through the Pre-Accelerator programme, while Ukrainian participants applied AI and digital tools to address environmental challenges, from energy efficiency to inclusive waste management. These examples underscore the potential for scalable, regionally coordinated innovation when platforms for cooperation are intentionally created.

To build on this momentum, the EU should promote structured regional collaboration through the establishment of innovation hubs and research partnerships tailored to the specific development trajectories of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Leveraging EU programmes like Horizon Europe, Interreg NEXT, and NDICI–Global Europe, the Union could support cross-border investments in green infrastructure, climate-smart agriculture, and clean energy entrepreneurship. These hubs should be designed not only as centres of technical expertise, but also as convening spaces for students, educators, municipalities, and private sector actors to co-create solutions to shared regional challenges. Emphasizing joint action would also strengthen resilience in the face of crises, such as those related to war, energy dependency, and ecological degradation—challenges that all three countries are currently navigating. Embedding these countries more deeply into regional green innovation frameworks would allow them to move from pilot-stage initiatives, like those seen in the project, toward long-term, systemic impact aligned with the EU Green Deal and the broader climate and cohesion objectives of the Union.

Promote structured cross-border cooperation and joint investments in green infrastructure, renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and digital transformation. Establish innovation hubs and joint research programmes tailored to the specific socioeconomic contexts of Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, while leveraging EU expertise and resources. These efforts will enable scalable co-created solutions that address both regional challenges and EU-wide priorities.

National Level

Promote Social Entrepreneurship and Inclusive Economic Growth: Encourage social entrepreneurship by offering tax incentives for businesses that foster social inclusion and environmental protection. Support job creation in disadvantaged regions to reduce economic disparities and promote regional development.

Integrate Social and Green Entrepreneurship into Education: Introduce social entrepreneurship and sustainability concepts into school and university curricula. Foster student innovation through practical engagement with real projects in collaboration with organizations that promote social entrepreneurship.

Support Green Transitions through Public Awareness and Policy Initiatives: Advance the green and circular economy by funding projects that reduce waste and pollution. Launch nationwide education and awareness campaigns on sustainable consumption and climate-friendly business practices, in partnership with civil society and EU actors.



Align National Policies with EU Strategies and the SDGs: Implement and harmonize national policies with EU frameworks and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDGs 4, 8, 10, and 13) to amplify the social and environmental impact of social entrepreneurship. This includes creating supportive legislation and government-led programs for youth and women entrepreneurs.

Strengthen Education Systems for Sustainable Development: Integrate social entrepreneurship, sustainability, green and digital economy topics into both formal and non-formal education. Encourage educational institutions to collaborate with international organizations and leverage EU-funded platforms like eTwinning to promote cross-border learning and innovation.

Foster Multi-Stakeholder Cooperation and Monitoring: Establish partnerships and roundtables involving EU institutions, local governments, and civil society to enhance policy coherence. Design national performance indicators aligned with EU and SDG standards to track progress in education, clean energy, and inclusive job creation.

Foster a Supportive Ecosystem for Social Enterprises: Encourage the development of a business-friendly environment that supports social enterprises at all stages. This includes promoting access to finance, offering government-backed seed funding, and creating hybrid financing models that combine grants, loans, and foreign investment. Support initiatives that can be scaled across regions and institutionalize policies for marginalized groups, especially women, youth, and ethnic minorities.

Strengthen Policy and Institutional Frameworks: Institutionalize monitoring and evaluation systems for social impact at both national and local levels. Develop SDG-compatible development plans and push for deeper alignment with EU standards through the EU-Georgia Association Agreement. Encourage local governments and ministries to adopt successful models for social enterprises and institutionalize participatory governance by involving youth and community leaders in policy design.

Promote Education and Innovation for Social Entrepreneurship: Promote the integration of social entrepreneurship into the educational system by developing curricula aligned with labor market and sustainability trends. Support the creation of business incubators and accelerators in universities and collaborate with EU educational institutions to provide students with resources and mentorship. Additionally, organize multi-stakeholder events like civic hackathons and policy labs that foster collaboration between students, policymakers, and NGOs.

Create Sustainable Partnerships and Collaboration Models: Establish national and local partnerships with industry representatives, academic institutions, and civil society to co-design curricula and strengthen social entrepreneurship education. Build public-private platforms that involve ministries, business associations, and youth communities. Encourage civil society innovation labs to address local needs and support the scaling of national policies.

Leverage Media and Awareness Campaigns: Develop media campaigns co-created with young people and educators that highlight grassroots social change and humanize policy impacts. Create platforms to aggregate program achievements, share stakeholder voices, and amplify the results of EU-funded initiatives to a wider audience.



Replicability of the project

One of the main goals of this project is to create a model that can be used in further throughout Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia, as well as in countries with similar challenges and opportunities. The programme is built in flexible parts - raising awareness, building skills, helping young people start their projects, and giving them funding. This structure makes it easy to adapt to different local needs. By sharing what worked, what didn't, and what we learned, the project offers useful tips for policymakers, teachers, and community groups. Final results, best practices, and practical tools will be shared to help others use this model and support more young people in starting social enterprises across the region. This document will also be shared with the wider community to support replication and encourage broader adoption of the approach.

Replicating the “Building Back Better Through Social Entrepreneurship” project across other Eastern Partnership countries or similarly situated regions requires a context-sensitive, flexible approach grounded in the lessons learned during implementation. A key success factor was the co-creation model, which ensured that the programme content, delivery, and support structures were tailored to the specific legal, cultural, and socio-economic contexts of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Each country developed its own implementation roadmap, informed by national consultations and ecosystem mapping, allowing for effective adaptation of the curriculum, teacher training, and mentorship structures. This localization was essential in navigating systemic differences, such as Moldova's partial legal framework for social enterprises, Ukraine's challenges with youth registration and institutional recognition, and Georgia's fragmented entrepreneurial ecosystem. For successful replication, future programmes must invest in early-stage ecosystem analysis and stakeholder engagement to identify entry points within national education systems and policy frameworks.

Another critical element for scaling is ensuring the availability of sustainable support mechanisms—both financial and institutional. The project's use of a revolving funding model, pioneered by We Share Forward Foundation, provided not only initial seed capital but also cultivated a culture of reinvestment and community support. For replication, this model must be adapted to local regulatory and economic conditions, as was done successfully in each target country.

Furthermore, cross-sector collaboration between ministries, educational institutions, private sector mentors, and civil society - proved vital in embedding the programme into existing systems and creating continuity beyond the project's lifespan. Future implementations should incorporate formal agreements with ministries of education, leverage EU-funded platforms for teacher training and digital delivery and ensure access to regional and international knowledge networks. By integrating these components into a modular, adaptable structure, the project offers a practical blueprint that can be scaled across diverse contexts to foster youth-driven, green, and socially inclusive entrepreneurship.

The “Building Back Better Through Social Entrepreneurship” project set out to support youth-led social enterprises in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine as engines for inclusive recovery and innovation. Its progress was tangible and inspiring—hundreds of students trained, dozens of ventures launched, and national ecosystems energized. However, the project also encountered real-world constraints, implementation challenges, and systemic barriers that shaped its evolution. These experiences yielded essential lessons about what works, what doesn't, and what



future efforts must anticipate. This chapter reflects on the limitations faced, the operational and contextual challenges encountered, and the key lessons learned from the journey.

Limitations

One of the most persistent limitations was the lack of a robust legal and policy framework for social entrepreneurship, particularly in Georgia and Moldova. In Georgia, no dedicated legal status for social enterprises existed, which hindered teams from formalizing their ventures and accessing relevant incentives. In Moldova, fragmented and often bureaucratic legislation made the process of registering as a social enterprise complex and discouraging, especially for first-time youth founders. Ukraine, while slightly more advanced in certain regulatory respects, still imposed unclear and often prohibitive rules for underage entrepreneurs seeking to start formal businesses.

Financial constraints also limited the program's long-term sustainability and reach. While the project's revolving fund and initial €2,000 seed grants provided a much-needed injection of capital, follow-up financing opportunities remained scarce. Most ventures found it difficult to attract additional investment after their initial grant, partly due to the absence of local impact-investment funds or accessible social finance mechanisms. This dependency on external donor support created an unstable funding landscape, making it difficult to scale promising enterprises or develop minimum viable products.

On the educational front, the project had to contend with the rigid and overloaded school curricula in all three countries. Social entrepreneurship training modules were frequently perceived as an add-on rather than an integral part of national education systems. Moreover, teachers who were trained to deliver the program received little in the way of institutional incentives—such as reduced workloads, professional credits, or stipends—which made it harder to maintain consistent engagement. This disconnect limited the program's ability to grow within existing educational frameworks.

Finally, infrastructural and contextual factors such as political unrest in Georgia, rural-urban digital divides in Moldova, and the ongoing war in Ukraine further constrained implementation. Power outages, student protests, and lack of internet access in some regions disrupted schedules and made hybrid or online learning models difficult to maintain. These external shocks created a volatile operational environment, demanding continuous adaptation from both students and facilitators.

Challenges

Beyond these structural limitations, the project faced several practical and logistical challenges. Recruiting and retaining active teachers proved difficult across all three countries. For example, in Georgia, out of the 126 educators initially trained, only 41 ultimately went on to teach the entrepreneurship curriculum. This drop-off stemmed from multiple causes, including workload pressure, lack of administrative support, and insufficient recognition of the value of extracurricular programming.

The transition between in-person and remote formats posed another significant challenge. Given the unstable political and infrastructural conditions—especially in Ukraine—teams often had to switch to online delivery with little notice. This demanded the rapid digitization of training



materials and the development of flexible mentoring strategies, which not all regions or facilitators were equally equipped to handle.

Another challenge lay in the fragility of the broader ecosystem for youth social enterprises. Outside the capital cities, the private sector's engagement with social innovation remained limited. There were few incubators, mentor networks, or investment channels available to early-stage entrepreneurs in rural or marginalized areas. This lack of infrastructure made it difficult for teams to scale their ideas or gain exposure beyond their immediate communities.

In addition, public awareness of social entrepreneurship remained low, particularly in Moldova. Survey results showed that nearly half of the young people in Moldova did not clearly understand what a social business was, which impacted both consumer support and parental encouragement for student entrepreneurs. This knowledge gap weakened the market viability of many ventures and hampered their ability to generate sustainable demand.

Regulatory and bureaucratic hurdles also posed significant difficulties. In Ukraine, for instance, underage founders found themselves excluded from standard business registration procedures and burdened with complex tax regulations. Similarly, in Moldova, government procurement policies did not provide any preferential treatment for certified social enterprises, closing off a potentially valuable revenue stream from public-sector contracts.

Even when teams succeeded in launching promising ventures, they often struggled to secure follow-up funding to grow their businesses. While the revolving fund worked well in catalyzing early-stage innovation, there were few pathways to second-round financing. Most domestic investors remained risk-averse or unfamiliar with social enterprises as a viable business model, leaving youth-led initiatives undercapitalized at critical stages of their development.

Lessons Learned

Despite these limitations and challenges, the project generated a number of powerful insights. One of the clearest lessons was the importance of co-creation and localisation. The project's success in adapting Lithuanian pedagogical expertise to Georgian, Moldovan, and Ukrainian contexts was a direct result of its collaborative design. Programs that were locally grounded—tailored to each country's language, legislation, and cultural norms—enjoyed far greater uptake and legitimacy than generic models imported from abroad. Another important lesson was the value of flexible, context-sensitive funding. The revolving fund model, which required recipients to reinvest in the next cohort, worked well—but only after significant time was spent aligning it with local financial regulations, banking infrastructure, and legal systems. This showed that innovative funding mechanisms can succeed, but only when carefully adapted to the local context.

Mentorship emerged as a critical success factor. Across all countries, youth teams that had regular access to professional mentors achieved better outcomes. In Ukraine, for instance, mentor engagement helped teams pivot from unviable concepts to market-ready innovations, including a book-sharing platform powered by AI and a line of adaptive clothing for people with disabilities. These kinds of breakthroughs often came directly from mentor intervention, highlighting the value of experienced guidance alongside formal training. Another lesson was the centrality of teacher motivation and institutional support. Training teachers alone was not enough; their ongoing involvement depended on whether they were properly incentivized. Future programs must consider integrating social entrepreneurship education into national curricula and offering



tangible rewards—such as reduced workloads, financial bonuses, or formal recognition—to teachers who take on this additional responsibility.

The absence of clear legal recognition for social enterprises also revealed itself as a major structural bottleneck. Without appropriate legal status, youth-led ventures were excluded from tax incentives, social-procurement programs, and many forms of institutional support. Moving forward, legislative advocacy should accompany any educational or funding initiative, and youth themselves should be empowered to lead these campaigns for legal reform. Finally, the project reinforced the necessity of designing delivery models that are resilient to crisis. From war to political unrest to pandemic disruptions, the last few years have shown that such events are no longer rare exceptions. Programs must be built to withstand interruptions by incorporating hybrid learning, cloud-based platforms, asynchronous coaching, and decentralized support systems from the outset.

Conclusion

The project's achievements—nearly 2,300 students trained, over 270 teachers upskilled, and 45 youth enterprises funded—stand as testament to its vision and adaptability. Yet these results were shaped, and in many ways made more meaningful, by the constraints it faced. Limitations in legal status, financing, institutional support, and infrastructure forced teams to innovate creatively and respond flexibly. The challenges, while formidable, yielded valuable lessons that can now inform future programs. These include the necessity of local adaptation, the importance of accessible funding and mentorship, the power of teacher incentives, and the urgency of legal reform. Together, these insights form a blueprint for scaling youth-led social entrepreneurship in the Eastern Partnership region and beyond.

This white paper shows how youth-led social entrepreneurship can make a real difference in tackling today's challenges—like unemployment, social inequality, and the green and digital transitions—in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The project gave young people the skills, support, and opportunities to turn their ideas into action. Over two years, students received training, mentoring, and funding to develop their own social businesses. In total, 45 student teams each received €2,000, adding up to €90,000 across the three countries. These early investments helped them build and test their ideas while creating positive change in their communities. As the project continues, the focus on sharing results and expanding the model to other regions will help more young people become changemakers in their societies.

Authors: Andzelika Rustekiene and Rasa Valaityte (JA Lithuania), Berkay Hacımustafa and Emma Kiraly (JA Europe), Elene Rtveladze (JA Georgia), Laurentia Filipachi and Natalia Iacob (JA Moldova) Michaela Marcinoval (We Share Forward Foundation) and Yelyzaveta Radutna (JA Ukraine).