



Youthpreneurs Unite

Youthpreneurs Unite - A Pathway to Purposeful Entrepreneurship

Youth Workers' Playbook: Strategies for Engaging Youth in Entrepreneurship

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The Youthpreneurs Unite – A Pathway to Purposeful Entrepreneurship project is an Erasmus+ KA210-YOU Small-scale Partnership in Youth designed to strengthen the capacity of youth workers and organisations to support young people in developing entrepreneurial skills, with a particular emphasis on social entrepreneurship and the social economy. The project brings together partner organisations from Greece and Lithuania and places youth empowerment, social innovation, active citizenship and purposeful entrepreneurship at the centre of its approach.

The project responds to the growing need for young people to develop not only entrepreneurial knowledge, but also the confidence, creativity, initiative and social awareness required to transform ideas into meaningful action. Rather than approaching entrepreneurship exclusively from a business-oriented perspective, Youthpreneurs Unite promotes an understanding of entrepreneurship as a means through which young people can identify challenges in their communities, develop innovative responses and create initiatives that combine economic sustainability with positive social impact.

A central element of the project is therefore the role of the youth worker as an enabler of youth entrepreneurship. By strengthening the knowledge and competences of professionals working directly with young people, the project seeks to create a supportive environment in which young people can explore entrepreneurial ideas, develop practical skills and take greater responsibility for addressing social challenges. The Youth Workers' Playbook: Strategies for Engaging Youth in Entrepreneurship is developed within this wider framework. It serves as a practical resource designed to translate key concepts related to social entrepreneurship, innovation and youth leadership into approaches that youth workers can use in their everyday practice. Its purpose is not simply to provide information, but to help youth workers engage, guide, motivate and empower young people throughout their entrepreneurial journey.





1.1. The Youthpreneurs Unite Project

Youthpreneurs Unite – A Pathway to Purposeful Entrepreneurship is an 18-month Erasmus+ KA210-YOU project. The project was developed around the Erasmus+ priority of promoting active citizenship, young people's sense of initiative and youth entrepreneurship, including social entrepreneurship. It also addresses the priorities of increasing the quality, innovation and recognition of youth work and strengthening common values, civic engagement and participation. The project recognises that youth entrepreneurship can contribute to both individual development and community development. Young people who are given the appropriate knowledge, guidance and opportunities can become active contributors to their communities, developing initiatives that respond to social needs while also creating opportunities for personal and professional development.

Within this context, the project focuses strongly on social entrepreneurship and the social economy. Its approach combines entrepreneurial learning with social responsibility, encouraging young people to consider not only whether an idea can become viable, but also whether it can create meaningful value for people and communities.

The project is structured around a series of complementary activities, including the Youthpreneur Success Kit: Tools for Purposeful Entrepreneurship, the Youth Workers' Playbook: Strategies for Engaging Youth in Entrepreneurship, the Youth Social Entrepreneurship Academy: Skills for Impact, youth forums in Greece and Lithuania, and the development of a dedicated project website. Together, these activities create a pathway from knowledge and resource development to training, practical engagement, networking and dissemination. The project consequently places particular importance on strengthening the capacity of the organisations and professionals that work directly with young people. By improving the expertise of youth workers, the project aims to create a multiplier effect, whereby improved professional capacity leads to better support for young entrepreneurs and, ultimately, stronger youth-led initiatives and social impact.

1.2. Project Objectives and Priorities

The primary objective of Youthpreneurs Unite is to enhance the capacities of youth workers aged 18–30 in the fields of social entrepreneurship and the social economy, enabling them to educate, mentor and support young people more effectively. The project combines theoretical knowledge with practical approaches that can help youth workers facilitate entrepreneurial thinking and encourage young people to develop innovative and sustainable responses to social challenges.

The project objectives are closely connected with its selected Erasmus+ priorities and topics. These include:

- Promoting active citizenship, youth initiative and youth entrepreneurship, particularly social entrepreneurship.
- Increasing the quality, innovation and recognition of youth work.
- Promoting social innovation.
- Strengthening entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship education.
- Supporting community development.

In practical terms, the project seeks to help youth workers develop the competences required to: Support entrepreneurial thinking. Youth workers should be able to encourage young people to recognise opportunities, explore ideas and approach social challenges creatively. Promote socially responsible entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial activity is approached not only as a route to employment or income, but also as a mechanism for addressing social and community needs. Strengthen youth initiative and leadership. Young people are encouraged to move from being passive recipients of support to becoming active participants, decision-makers and changemakers. Encourage innovation and collaboration. The project promotes approaches that bring together young people, organisations, communities and other stakeholders to develop sustainable solutions.

Build sustainable entrepreneurial capacity. Young people should have access to the knowledge and support necessary to develop initiatives that can remain meaningful and viable over time. Ultimately, the project aims to contribute to a stronger ecosystem for purposeful youth entrepreneurship, in which entrepreneurial skills, social responsibility and community engagement reinforce one another. The expected wider outcomes include improved youth-worker competences, increased youth participation, stronger collaboration among stakeholders and the development of youth-led initiatives addressing local needs.

1.3. The Role of Youth Workers

Youth workers occupy a central position in the Youthpreneurs Unite approach. They are not expected to act simply as providers of information about entrepreneurship. Instead, they function as facilitators, mentors, educators and enablers, helping young people move from initial interest and ideas towards meaningful entrepreneurial action. The project identifies youth workers, educators and community leaders who work directly with young people as the principal target group of the Playbook. These professionals may work in NGOs, community organisations, educational environments or other youth-focused settings and may already be involved in entrepreneurship, social innovation or community development activities.

Their role can involve several interconnected functions.

First, youth workers can create the conditions for engagement. Many young people may have ideas or concerns about issues affecting their communities without immediately seeing themselves as entrepreneurs. Youth workers can help them recognise the entrepreneurial potential of these ideas and create safe, inclusive environments in which experimentation and learning are encouraged. Second, youth workers can act as facilitators of entrepreneurial learning. Rather than simply presenting information, they can use participatory and non-formal approaches to help young people explore problems, generate ideas, test solutions and reflect on their experiences.

Third, they can provide guidance and mentoring. Young entrepreneurs may encounter challenges related to business models, communication, funding, technology, collaboration or impact measurement. Youth workers can help young people navigate these challenges while encouraging them to develop their own capacity for decision-making and problem-solving.

Fourth, youth workers can support socially responsible entrepreneurship. This includes helping young people consider the social, environmental and ethical consequences of their entrepreneurial decisions and encouraging them to balance purpose with sustainability. Finally, youth workers can act as connectors. Through their networks, they can facilitate links between young people and community organisations, experts, entrepreneurs, funders and other relevant stakeholders.

The Playbook is designed to strengthen all of these dimensions of youth work. Its ultimate purpose is to ensure that youth workers have practical knowledge and resources that can be translated into meaningful interactions with young people. As stated in the project proposal, strengthening youth workers' capacity is expected to create a wider impact by improving the support available to young entrepreneurs.

1.4. Purpose and Structure of the Playbook

The Youth Workers' Playbook: Strategies for Engaging Youth in Entrepreneurship has been developed as a practical resource for youth workers, educators and community leaders supporting young people interested in entrepreneurship and social innovation.

The Playbook responds directly to the need identified within the project to equip youth workers with practical tools, knowledge and methodologies that can help them guide young entrepreneurs. It therefore combines key concepts with practical strategies, examples, activities and opportunities for reflection. The objective is to make the content relevant not only for individual learning, but also for use within youth work sessions, workshops, mentoring processes and educational activities.

The Playbook is organised around **12 thematic areas** identified in the Youthpreneurs Unite project proposal:

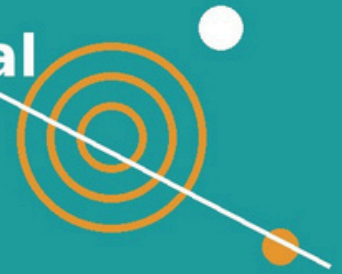
- 1. Emerging Trends in Social Entrepreneurship**
- 2. Design Thinking for Social Innovation**
- 3. Leveraging Technology for Social Impact**
- 4. Building a Brand with Purpose**
- 5. Storytelling for Social Change**
- 6. Measuring Social Impact**
- 7. Funding Strategies for Social Entrepreneurs**
- 8. Collaborative Approaches to Social Change**
- 9. Youth Leadership in Social Entrepreneurship**
- 10. Navigating Legal and Regulatory Frameworks**
- 11. Sustainable Business Models for Social Enterprises**
- 12. Ethical Considerations in Social Entrepreneurship**

Each thematic chapter approaches its subject from the perspective of youth work practice. The aim is not to provide an exhaustive academic treatment of each topic, but to identify the knowledge and approaches that are most useful when working with young people. Where appropriate, the chapters therefore move from a concise explanation of the topic towards practical strategies, tools, examples and youth-focused activities. Reflection elements are also included to encourage youth workers to consider how the concepts can be adapted to their own contexts and groups.

The Playbook also encourages connections between the different thematic areas. In practice, social entrepreneurship rarely depends on a single skill. A young person developing a social enterprise may need to identify a problem through design thinking, use technology to develop a solution, create a purposeful brand, communicate the idea through storytelling, identify funding opportunities, build partnerships and measure the resulting impact. The Playbook therefore presents these areas as complementary components of a broader entrepreneurial learning journey.

Ultimately, the Playbook seeks to support youth workers in moving from knowledge to practice. Its value lies not only in what youth workers learn from the resource, but in how effectively they can use that knowledge to create opportunities for young people to explore ideas, develop entrepreneurial competences, take initiative and contribute to positive social change. This directly reflects the expected results of the activity, particularly the development of a comprehensive practical resource, enhanced youth-worker skills, increased youth participation, youth empowerment and improved capacity for impact measurement.





Social entrepreneurship is evolving alongside broader changes in technology, society, the economy and the labour market. Social enterprises increasingly operate at the intersection of social purpose, entrepreneurial activity, digital transformation and sustainability, while young people are becoming important actors in addressing social and environmental challenges. At European level, the social economy is now recognised as an important part of economic resilience and inclusive growth. The European Commission's 2026 mid-term review of the Social Economy Action Plan highlights the growing importance of investment, skills, entrepreneurship, innovation and stronger evidence on social impact.

For youth workers, understanding these developments is important because the entrepreneurial interests and opportunities available to young people are changing rapidly. Digital technologies, artificial intelligence, green transition, new forms of finance and purpose-driven business models are creating new possibilities, while also introducing new challenges. This chapter provides an overview of the main emerging trends and translates them into practical approaches that youth workers can use to help young people recognise opportunities, develop ideas and connect entrepreneurship with meaningful social impact.

2.1. Understanding Current Trends

From traditional entrepreneurship to purposeful entrepreneurship

Traditional approaches to entrepreneurship have often focused primarily on business creation, market opportunities, growth and financial returns. Social entrepreneurship expands this perspective by placing a social or environmental purpose at the centre of entrepreneurial activity.

A social enterprise combines entrepreneurial activity with a social purpose, with its primary objective being to generate positive social impact rather than simply maximise profit for owners or shareholders. Social enterprises can operate in many areas, including employment and work integration, social services, environmental protection, education, community development and sustainable production.

This shift is particularly relevant for youth work. Young people may be motivated by questions such as:

- *What problem in my community could I help solve?*
- *Who is affected by this problem?*
- *Can an entrepreneurial idea create both social value and financial sustainability?*
- *How can technology help me reach more people?*
- *How can I measure whether my idea actually makes a difference?*

The role of the youth worker is to help young people move from these questions towards structured exploration and action.

The growing importance of the social economy

The social economy has become increasingly prominent within European policy. The European Commission's 2026 mid-term review reports that more than 4.3 million organisations across the EU including associations, cooperatives, mutual societies, foundations and social enterprises pursue social and environmental objectives, representing at least 11.5 million jobs.

The current European policy agenda places particular emphasis on three interconnected areas: appropriate regulatory frameworks, investment and skills, and stronger evidence and visibility. These priorities are directly relevant to youth entrepreneurship because young people need not only entrepreneurial ideas, but also access to knowledge, finance, networks and support structures.

Entrepreneurship and the green and digital transitions

Entrepreneurship is also being influenced by the simultaneous **green and digital transitions**. OECD research highlights that entrepreneurs and SMEs increasingly require combinations of entrepreneurial, digital and green skills, while rapid technological developments — including generative AI — are changing the skills needed to operate and grow businesses.

For young entrepreneurs, this means that entrepreneurial competence can no longer be separated easily from digital literacy, sustainability awareness, adaptability and responsible technology use.

2.2. Digital Entrepreneurship, Sustainability and Impact Investing

Three developments are increasingly shaping contemporary social entrepreneurship: digitalisation, sustainability and impact-oriented finance. These trends are closely interconnected and influence how social enterprises develop solutions, reach beneficiaries, create value and secure resources. The European Commission's recent work on the Social Economy Action Plan highlights investment, skills, entrepreneurship, innovation and impact measurement as important elements for strengthening the European social economy.

For young entrepreneurs, these developments create new opportunities but also require new competences. Youth workers can play an important role in helping young people understand these trends, identify relevant opportunities and assess them critically rather than simply following technological or market trends.

Digital Entrepreneurship

Digital entrepreneurship refers to entrepreneurial activity in which digital technologies play an important role in creating, delivering, promoting or scaling products and services. For young entrepreneurs, digital tools can reduce barriers to market entry, facilitate communication with users and communities, and enable new forms of collaboration and service delivery.

The digital landscape is expanding beyond websites and social media. Artificial intelligence, digital platforms, mobile applications, fintech, data analytics and online collaboration tools are increasingly relevant to entrepreneurial activity. The OECD's 2026 D4SME Survey highlights the growing adoption of AI among SMEs, while also identifying challenges related to skills, implementation, cybersecurity and responsible use.

In social entrepreneurship, however, technology should be treated as an enabler rather than an objective. Young people should first identify a genuine social or community need and then consider whether digital technology can provide an appropriate response. Youth workers can also encourage consideration of accessibility, privacy, cybersecurity, bias and responsible use of AI.

Sustainability and Green Entrepreneurship

Sustainability is increasingly becoming an integral part of entrepreneurial strategy. Social entrepreneurs can address environmental and social challenges through areas such as the circular economy, sustainable food systems, repair and reuse, sustainable mobility, renewable energy and responsible consumption.



The OECD highlights that the green and digital transitions are changing the competences required by entrepreneurs and SMEs. Technical green and digital skills increasingly need to be combined with creativity, problem-solving, adaptability and collaboration.

For youth workers, sustainability can therefore be presented not only as an environmental responsibility but also as a source of entrepreneurial innovation. Young people can be encouraged to identify local environmental challenges and explore how these could become opportunities for sustainable products, services or community initiatives.

At the same time, it is important to distinguish genuine sustainability from simply using terms such as *green* or *eco-friendly*. Young entrepreneurs should be encouraged to examine the actual environmental and social consequences of their activities.

Impact Investing

Impact investing refers to investment approaches that seek both financial return and measurable positive social or environmental impact. It is particularly relevant to social enterprises because it recognises that entrepreneurial initiatives can generate financial value while addressing societal challenges.

The European Commission identifies access to finance as an important issue for the development of the social economy and highlights the growing role of social investment and impact-oriented financial instruments.

For young entrepreneurs, understanding impact investing means learning to communicate both the financial and social value of an idea. They need to be able to explain what problem they address, who benefits, how value is created and how the resulting impact can be demonstrated. This makes impact measurement closely connected with financing. A social enterprise that can clearly demonstrate its outcomes is better positioned to communicate its value to potential funders, partners and impact-oriented investors.

Connecting the Three Trends

Digitalisation, sustainability and impact investing should not be considered as separate areas. They can work together within a single entrepreneurial initiative. For example, a young entrepreneur might identify an environmental problem, develop a digital solution, build a sustainable business model and seek impact-oriented funding to expand the initiative.

The key question for youth workers is therefore not simply “Which trend is emerging?”, but: How can this trend help young people develop a viable and responsible response to a genuine social or environmental need?

Youth workers can support this process by helping young people move from awareness to action: understanding emerging developments, identifying opportunities, assessing risks, developing solutions and considering their potential social impact.

Key Message for Youth Workers

Emerging trends should be used as **learning opportunities**, not as objectives in themselves. Digital technologies, sustainable practices and impact-oriented finance can strengthen youth-led initiatives when they are connected to a clear social purpose and genuine community needs.

A useful progression is:

Understand the trend → Identify a need → Explore an opportunity → Develop a solution → Consider sustainability → Define the expected impact.

2.3. Practical Strategies for Youth Workers

Understanding emerging trends is only the first step. For youth workers, the greater challenge is translating this knowledge into approaches that can help young people explore entrepreneurial opportunities, assess their relevance and develop ideas with genuine social value. The rapid development of digital technologies, the green transition and new approaches to finance means that youth workers increasingly need to support young people in navigating a complex entrepreneurial environment rather than simply transmitting predefined business knowledge.

The OECD highlights that the digital and green transitions are creating demand for combinations of digital, green and entrepreneurial competences. Technical knowledge alone is not sufficient; creativity, problem-solving, communication, collaboration and the ability to evaluate information are equally important for transforming ideas into viable products, services or initiatives. For this reason, the role of the youth worker should be understood primarily as that of a facilitator of exploration and learning. The following strategies can help youth workers create this type of learning environment.

Start with Needs Rather Than Trends

One of the most effective approaches is to ensure that young people do not begin their entrepreneurial journey by simply selecting a popular technology or market trend. Instead, they should first explore a problem, need or opportunity within their community.

For example, rather than asking young people *“How can we use artificial intelligence to create a business?”*, a youth worker might ask:

“What problem affecting young people in our community could be addressed more effectively?”

Once a problem has been identified, participants can explore whether technologies such as AI, digital platforms or mobile applications could contribute to a solution.

This approach helps prevent technology-driven entrepreneurship from becoming disconnected from real community needs. It also reinforces the central principle of social entrepreneurship: innovation should respond to a meaningful social or environmental purpose.

Use Emerging Trends as Learning Opportunities

Youth workers can introduce emerging trends through short presentations, case studies, news items or examples of existing initiatives. The purpose should not be to provide an exhaustive overview of every new technology or business development, but to encourage young people to analyse change and identify potential opportunities.

A useful discussion can focus on four questions:

What is changing? Why is it changing? Who could benefit from this change? What new challenges could it create?

This type of discussion develops entrepreneurial awareness while also encouraging critical thinking. It allows young people to understand that an emerging trend can create opportunities but may also involve risks, inequalities or unintended consequences.

The approach is particularly relevant to digital entrepreneurship. The OECD's 2026 D4SME Survey shows that AI adoption among SMEs is increasing rapidly, while strategic and secure integration remains uneven because of factors including skills gaps, implementation costs and cybersecurity challenges. Youth workers can use these findings to demonstrate that adopting technology is not the same as using it effectively or responsibly.

Connect Global Trends with Local Challenges

Another useful strategy is to encourage young people to connect broad developments with the specific context in which they live. A global trend such as the circular economy, for example, can be explored through a local issue such as food waste, excessive consumption or limited access to repair services. Similarly, developments in digital technology can be connected with local challenges involving education, accessibility, employment or community participation.



This approach makes entrepreneurship more tangible. Instead of discussing sustainability or digitalisation only as abstract concepts, young people are encouraged to consider how these developments could generate locally relevant entrepreneurial solutions.

It also supports the community-development dimension of the Youthpreneurs Unite project, where entrepreneurship is understood as a potential mechanism for addressing social challenges and creating positive local impact.

Encourage Critical and Responsible Use of Technology

Youth workers should also help young people develop a balanced understanding of digital technologies. The rapid availability of AI and other digital tools creates significant opportunities, but effective use requires awareness of limitations and risks. When young people propose using a particular technology, youth workers can encourage them to consider whether it is accessible to their intended users, whether the information or content produced is reliable, how personal data will be handled and whether there are potential risks related to cybersecurity, bias or exclusion.

The European Commission's 2026 review of the Social Economy Action Plan specifically emphasises the importance of trustworthy, inclusive and accessible digital technologies, as well as responsible data management and the development of digital capabilities within the social economy. This perspective is particularly valuable in youth work because it shifts the focus from *“What can this technology do?”* to *“How can this technology be used responsibly to create value for people?”*

Develop an Entrepreneurial Skills Mindset

Emerging trends also provide an opportunity to develop broader entrepreneurial competences. Young people do not necessarily need to become technology specialists, investors or sustainability experts. They need to develop the capacity to identify opportunities, evaluate information, solve problems, collaborate and adapt. The OECD's work on the twin transition emphasises the importance of combining technical digital and green competences with transversal and entrepreneurial skills. These include creativity, communication, collaboration, problem-solving and the ability to evaluate information effectively. Youth workers can therefore design activities in which participants have to make decisions, compare alternatives, defend an idea, respond to feedback and adapt their proposed solution. Such activities develop entrepreneurial thinking in a practical way.

Introduce Impact Thinking from the Beginning

Social impact should also be incorporated into the entrepreneurial process from its early stages. Young people should not wait until an initiative is implemented before considering whether it has produced meaningful results. When developing an idea, youth workers can encourage participants to identify the problem, target group, proposed solution and expected change. This creates a simple foundation for later impact measurement and also helps young people communicate the value of their initiative to potential partners or funders. This is increasingly relevant within the European social economy. The European Commission's current agenda places greater emphasis on strengthening the evidence base, improving impact measurement and developing more reliable information about the contribution of social economy organisations.

Facilitate Reflection and Adaptation

Finally, youth workers should create opportunities for young people to reflect on their ideas and adapt them based on feedback. Entrepreneurship is rarely a linear process. An initial idea may need to change after participants speak with potential users, test a prototype or discover that a particular technology or funding model is unsuitable.

A youth worker can therefore use simple reflection questions throughout the process:

What have we learned? What assumptions were we making? What feedback have we received? What should we change? What would we test next?

This approach encourages experimentation and reduces the perception that an entrepreneurial idea must be perfect from the beginning.

Key Message for Youth Workers

The role of the youth worker in emerging entrepreneurship is not to predict which trend will become the next major opportunity. It is to help young people understand change, identify relevant opportunities, evaluate risks and transform ideas into responsible action.

A strong youth-work approach therefore connects emerging trends with real needs and combines technological awareness with creativity, sustainability, critical thinking and social responsibility. In this way, youth workers can help young people move from simply being aware of new developments to becoming active and purposeful participants in the changing entrepreneurial landscape.

2.4. Tools, Examples and Youth Activities

The purpose of this section is to translate the concepts presented throughout the chapter into practical learning experiences that youth workers can implement with young people. Since emerging trends can be difficult to understand when presented only through theoretical information, practical activities can help participants explore how technological, environmental and financial developments may influence entrepreneurial opportunities.

The activities below are designed around a simple principle: young people should not be encouraged to follow trends simply because they are new or popular. Instead, they should learn to identify relevant trends, assess their opportunities and risks, connect them with real needs and transform them into purposeful entrepreneurial ideas. This approach is consistent with current European approaches to social entrepreneurship, which increasingly emphasise skills development, innovation, digital and green capacity-building, and practical support for social and inclusive entrepreneurship.

Tool 1: The Emerging Trend Opportunity Scan

The Emerging Trend Opportunity Scan is a simple analytical framework that youth workers can use to help young people move from awareness of a trend towards the identification of an entrepreneurial opportunity.

Question	Guiding prompt
What is changing?	Identify an emerging social, technological, environmental or economic trend.
Why does it matter?	What opportunities or challenges does the trend create?
Who is affected?	Identify potential users, beneficiaries or communities.
What problem could be addressed?	Connect the trend with a real need.
What could be created?	Develop a product, service, initiative or social enterprise idea.
What impact could it have?	Identify the expected social or environmental benefit.
What risks should be considered?	Consider ethical, environmental, financial or digital risks.

The tool can be used individually or in small groups. Youth workers can select a specific trend, such as artificial intelligence, circular economy, sustainable mobility or digital platforms, and guide participants through the questions. The objective is to develop the ability to connect trend awareness with opportunity recognition, while maintaining a clear focus on social value.

Youth Activity 1: “Trend to Opportunity”

Objective

To help young people identify how emerging trends can generate opportunities for social entrepreneurship and develop an initial entrepreneurial concept around a real community need.

Duration: 45–60 minutes **Group size:** 8–25 participants **Method:** Small-group work, discussion and short pitching

Step 1 – Explore

The youth worker introduces five or six emerging trends, such as AI, circular economy, sustainable mobility, digital platforms, impact investing or the green transition. A short explanation or real-world example can be provided for each trend.

Step 2 – Select

Participants form small groups and select one trend that they believe could create an opportunity in their community.

Step 3 – Identify a challenge

Each group identifies a specific social or environmental problem that could be connected to the selected trend. The youth worker should encourage participants to focus on a **real and identifiable need**, rather than inventing a problem simply to fit the technology.

Step 4 – Develop an idea

The groups develop a simple entrepreneurial concept that addresses the identified challenge. At this stage, the idea does not need to be a complete business plan. Participants should focus on the basic logic of the proposed solution.

Step 5 – Test the idea

Each group considers who would benefit from the initiative, what it would offer, how technology or sustainability would contribute, how it could generate or maintain resources, and what social or environmental impact it could potentially create.

Step 6 – Pitch and reflection

Each group presents its idea in approximately two minutes. The other participants provide feedback according to three criteria:

Purpose – Feasibility – Potential Impact

The youth worker concludes the activity by discussing which ideas were most closely connected to genuine needs and which required further development.

Tool 2: Trend Opportunity and Risk Matrix

Identifying an opportunity is only one part of entrepreneurial thinking. Young people should also learn to assess whether a trend can be used responsibly and whether the proposed solution may create unintended consequences.

This tool is particularly useful when working with digital entrepreneurship and AI. Current OECD research highlights that digital transformation creates new opportunities for SMEs and entrepreneurs while also generating challenges related to skills, security and the responsible integration of new technologies.



Dimension	Key question
Opportunity	What new possibility does the trend create?
Beneficiaries	Who could benefit from the proposed solution?
Feasibility	Can the idea realistically be implemented with available resources?
Impact	What positive social or environmental change could result?
Risk	What financial, ethical, environmental or technological risks exist?
Inclusion	Could some groups be excluded from accessing the solution?
Responsibility	Can the technology or approach be used safely and ethically?

This tool is particularly useful when working with digital entrepreneurship and AI. Current OECD research highlights that digital transformation creates new opportunities for SMEs and entrepreneurs while also generating challenges related to skills, security and the responsible integration of new technologies.

Youth Activity 2: “Opportunity or Risk?”

Objective

To develop young people's ability to critically evaluate emerging trends instead of viewing innovation only from a positive perspective.

Duration: 30–40 minutes **Group size:** 8–25 participants **Method:** Group discussion and decision-making

The youth worker presents several short scenarios involving emerging trends. For example, a youth organisation wants to use AI to personalise educational content; a social enterprise wants to introduce a digital platform for vulnerable users; or a community initiative wants to introduce a circular-economy service.

Participants discuss whether each example represents primarily an opportunity, a risk, or both. Rather than searching for a single correct answer, the activity focuses on the reasoning behind the decision. Participants should identify potential benefits, risks and groups that might be affected. The activity can conclude with the question:

“What would need to change for this idea to become a responsible opportunity?”

This encourages young people to move beyond a simple positive/negative assessment and think about how entrepreneurial ideas can be improved through responsible design.

Tool 3: From Trend to Social Enterprise Concept

The final tool brings together the main ideas of the chapter and helps young people develop a more structured concept.

Youth workers can ask participants to complete the following sequence:

Trend → Social Challenge → Target Group → Solution → Value → Sustainability → Impact

The process begins with an emerging trend and identifies a relevant social or environmental challenge. Participants then define the people or community affected by the challenge and propose a product, service or initiative that could respond to it.

The next step is to identify the value created by the solution and consider how the initiative could remain financially or organisationally sustainable. Finally, participants identify the expected social or environmental impact.

This approach reinforces the connection between entrepreneurial thinking and social purpose. It also introduces concepts that will be explored in greater depth in later chapters of the Playbook, particularly Sustainable Business Models, Funding Strategies and Measuring Social Impact.

Youth Activity 3: “Build the Concept”

Objective

To help young people transform an emerging trend and a social challenge into a structured social entrepreneurship concept.

Duration: 60–75 minutes **Group size:** 8–25 participants **Method:** Collaborative design and pitching
Participants work in small groups and choose one emerging trend. They then identify a social or environmental challenge related to their local community and develop a concept using the following questions:

What is the problem? Who experiences it? What solution are we proposing? What makes our solution different or useful? How could it become sustainable? What positive change could it create?

Groups then present their concepts to the rest of the participants.

The youth worker can facilitate feedback around three dimensions:

Social Value – Feasibility – Sustainability

The aim is not to identify a “winning” business idea but to help participants understand that a strong social entrepreneurship concept needs to connect **a real need with a credible solution and a realistic path towards sustainability and impact.**

Practical Example: From Trend to Social Enterprise

To illustrate the process, a youth worker could present the following example:

Emerging trend: Circular economy **Local challenge:** Large amounts of usable furniture are discarded by households and small businesses. **Target group:** Low-income households and young people setting up their first homes. **Potential solution:** A community-based digital platform connecting donors of unwanted furniture with people who need it, combined with a repair and upcycling service operated by young people. **Potential value:** Reduced waste, affordable access to furniture and opportunities for youth skills development. **Potential impact:** Environmental benefits through reuse and social benefits through improved access to essential goods and youth participation.

The example demonstrates that the trend itself is not the entrepreneurial idea. The entrepreneurial opportunity emerges from the connection between the trend, a specific need, a target group and a feasible solution.



Key Takeaway for Youth Workers

Emerging trends become educationally valuable when young people are given the opportunity to **analyse, question and apply them**. The role of the youth worker is to create a structured pathway from awareness to action:

Explore → Identify → Connect → Create → Evaluate → Adapt

Through this process, young people learn that social entrepreneurship is not about following the latest technology or business trend. It is about recognising change, understanding people's needs and using available opportunities to develop responsible, sustainable and impactful solutions.

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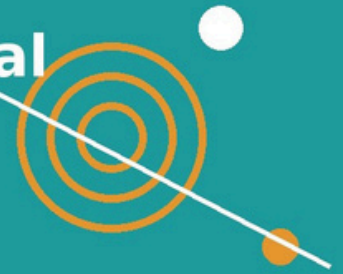
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Design thinking provides a practical way of approaching complex social challenges by placing people, their experiences and their needs at the centre of the innovation process. Rather than beginning with a predefined solution, it encourages participants to understand a problem, explore different perspectives, generate possibilities, test ideas and learn from feedback. This makes it particularly relevant to social entrepreneurship, where solutions need to respond to real community needs while remaining feasible and sustainable.

For youth workers, design thinking can become an effective methodology for helping young people move from “I see a problem” to “I can explore and develop a possible solution.” It encourages curiosity, empathy, creativity, collaboration and experimentation, while allowing young people to take an active role in defining the challenges they want to address. In the context of Youthpreneurs Unite, this approach supports the development of youth-led social innovation by connecting entrepreneurial thinking with meaningful social change.

3.1. Understanding Design Thinking

Design thinking is a human-centred approach to problem-solving and innovation. It brings together an understanding of people's needs, the possibilities offered by technology and the practical requirements of implementing a solution. A useful way of understanding the approach is through three complementary perspectives: desirability, feasibility and viability. A solution should respond to something that matters to people, be realistically achievable and have the potential to function sustainably in its context.

An important characteristic of design thinking is that it is iterative rather than linear. Although it is often presented through a sequence of stages, practitioners may move backwards and forwards between them as new information emerges. The process commonly involves understanding people and the context, defining or reframing a challenge, generating ideas, creating prototypes and testing them with users. IDEO's current framework describes these activities through seven flexible phases, from framing the question and gathering inspiration to generating ideas, making concepts tangible and testing them.

This way of working is particularly valuable in social innovation because social problems are rarely simple or isolated. They often involve different groups, competing perspectives and changing circumstances. Design thinking helps young people avoid making assumptions about what a community needs and instead develop a deeper understanding through observation, conversation and participation.

It is also important to distinguish design thinking from simply “being creative.” Creativity is an important component, but design thinking combines creativity with research, structured problem definition, experimentation and feedback. The objective is not to generate the most original idea possible; it is to develop a solution that is meaningful, appropriate and capable of creating value for the people concerned. For youth workers, this makes design thinking particularly suitable for non-formal learning. Young people can learn by doing, working collaboratively and testing ideas rather than simply receiving theoretical information. The methodology can also be adapted to different levels of experience and different social or community contexts.

3.2. From Social Challenges to Innovative Solutions

Social innovation begins with a **real social need or challenge**. According to the OECD, social innovation involves developing and implementing new ideas, products, services or models that address social needs while potentially creating new relationships and forms of collaboration. It therefore involves both the solution itself and the way people and organisations work together to create change.

For young people, the first challenge is often learning to look beyond the most visible symptom of a problem. For example, “young people are not participating in local activities” describes a situation, but it does not yet explain why this is happening. Through design thinking, participants can investigate possible underlying factors: lack of information, inaccessible activities, limited trust in institutions, unsuitable schedules or a feeling that young people's opinions are not taken seriously.

This is where empathy and user research become essential. Young people should be encouraged to listen to people affected by a challenge rather than designing a solution based solely on their own assumptions. Interviews, observation, informal conversations and simple surveys can provide insights into people's experiences, motivations and barriers. The next step is to translate these insights into a clearly defined design challenge. A useful formulation is the “How might we...?” question. Instead of stating “*Young people do not participate in community activities,*” a group might ask:

How might we create more accessible and meaningful opportunities for young people to participate in their community?

Such questions leave space for different solutions rather than directing participants towards one predetermined answer. Once the challenge has been framed, young people can move into **ideation**. The purpose is initially to generate a broad range of possibilities before deciding which ideas deserve further development. This encourages divergent thinking and reduces the tendency to immediately select the first practical solution. The selected ideas can then be transformed into **prototypes**. A prototype does not need to be a finished product. It can be a sketch, storyboard, mock-up, role-play, digital screen, service scenario or simple demonstration of how an idea would work. Prototyping allows young people to test assumptions early, gather feedback and identify weaknesses before investing significant resources.

This cycle of **understanding → defining → generating → prototyping → testing → improving** is particularly relevant to social entrepreneurship. It helps young people recognise that innovation is not necessarily about producing something completely new. It can also involve improving an existing service, changing the way a community problem is addressed or creating new forms of collaboration. Research on social innovation similarly emphasises experimentation, testing and learning as important elements in developing responses to complex social challenges.





3.3. Practical Strategies and Tools

Youth workers can introduce design thinking without requiring specialist design knowledge. What matters most is creating a structured process in which young people can listen, question, create and test. A useful starting tool is the Empathy Map. Participants select a specific group affected by their chosen challenge and consider what that group might say, think, do and feel. The purpose is not to guess people's experiences as if they were facts, but to identify assumptions that can later be explored through conversations or research. This helps young people shift from designing *for* people towards designing *with* a better understanding of people.

A second useful tool is the **How Might We Question**. Once participants have explored the challenge, the youth worker helps them transform a problem statement into an open question. A well-formulated question should be specific enough to provide direction but open enough to allow several possible solutions.

For example:

Problem: Young people in the area have limited opportunities to develop entrepreneurial skills.

How might we: How might we create accessible opportunities for young people to experiment with entrepreneurship through community-based activities?

The next stage can use an **Idea Generation Matrix**, where participants generate several possible solutions before selecting one for further development. The youth worker can encourage them to consider different types of responses, including products, services, digital solutions, community initiatives and partnerships.

Finally, participants can use a **Low-Fidelity Prototype** to make their selected idea tangible. The emphasis should be on speed and learning rather than presentation quality. IDEO's design thinking methodology specifically emphasises making ideas tangible and testing them with real people as a way of learning what works and what needs refinement. For youth workers, the most important principle is to treat these tools as learning instruments rather than assessment exercises. An unsuccessful prototype is not a failure if it helps participants understand why an idea does not work. The objective is to create a culture where testing, feedback and adaptation are considered normal parts of innovation.

3.4. Youth Activities and Reflection

The practical application of design thinking is particularly valuable in youth work because it allows young people to experience the innovation process rather than simply learning about it. The activities in this section are designed to help participants move from understanding a social challenge to developing, testing and improving a potential solution. They can be adapted to different age groups, levels of experience and local contexts.

Youth Activity 1: “How Might We?”

Objective: To help young people identify a social challenge, understand the people affected by it and transform the challenge into an open-ended opportunity for innovation.

Duration: 45–60 minutes **Group size:** 8–24 participants **Method:** Small-group discussion, empathy mapping and ideation

Step 1 – Identify a Challenge

The youth worker asks participants to identify a social or community issue that affects young people or another group in their local area. Examples could include youth unemployment, social isolation, limited access to cultural activities, food waste or lack of opportunities for young people's participation.

Step 2 – Explore the People Affected

Each group identifies who is directly affected by the challenge and discusses what they might experience, need or find difficult. Participants can use a simple **Empathy Map** based around four questions:

What might they say? What might they think? What might they do? What might they feel?

The youth worker should remind participants that these are initial assumptions and, where possible, should later be validated through conversations or research with actual users.

Step 3 – Reframe the Challenge

Groups transform their initial problem statement into a “**How Might We...?**” question.

For example:

Problem: Young people have limited opportunities to participate in local decision-making.
becomes:

How might we create accessible and meaningful opportunities for young people to influence decisions in their community?

The purpose is to create a question that is sufficiently focused to guide the group but sufficiently open to allow multiple solutions.

Step 4 – Generate Ideas

Participants generate several possible responses without immediately judging them. They can consider different forms of innovation, such as a service, digital platform, community initiative, campaign, product or partnership.

The group then selects one idea for further development based on its social value, feasibility and potential impact.

Reflection

The activity concludes with a short discussion:

Did we define the real problem or only its visible symptoms? What assumptions did we make about the people affected? How could we verify these assumptions? Which idea has the greatest potential to create meaningful change?

This activity helps young people understand that effective innovation often begins with **asking better questions**, rather than immediately searching for solutions.



Youth Activity 2: “Prototype, Test and Improve”

Objective: To help young people understand the iterative nature of design thinking by creating a simple prototype, receiving feedback and improving their initial idea.

Duration: 60–75 minutes **Group size:** 8–24 participants **Method:** Collaborative design, prototyping, peer feedback and reflection Participants work in small groups and use an idea developed during the previous activity or select a new social entrepreneurship concept.

Step 1 – Define the Solution

Each group briefly identifies the problem it wants to address, the people it intends to support and the main value of its proposed solution.

Step 2 – Create a Low-Fidelity Prototype

Groups create a simple representation of their solution. The prototype could be a paper version of an application, a storyboard showing how a service would work, a poster, a customer journey, a role-play or a simple physical model.

The emphasis should be on speed and learning rather than visual quality. Participants should be encouraged to produce something that can be discussed and tested rather than something that looks finished.

Step 3 – Test with Another Group

Each group presents its prototype to another group, which acts as the potential user or beneficiary. Instead of simply saying whether they like the idea, participants provide feedback around three questions:

What is clear? What is unclear or difficult? What could make the solution more useful?

Step 4 – Improve

Groups review the feedback and make at least one meaningful change to their prototype. They then briefly explain what they changed and why the feedback influenced their decision.

Reflection

The youth worker can conclude with questions such as:

What did we learn from testing the idea? Which assumption proved incorrect? What changed between the first and second version? Why is testing important before investing more resources?

The activity reinforces the idea that a first solution is rarely perfect and that feedback and iteration are essential parts of innovation.

Additional Ideas for Youth Workers

The two activities above can be expanded or adapted depending on the group and the available time. For shorter sessions, youth workers can use a **“5-Minute Challenge”**, in which participants have five minutes to generate as many possible solutions as they can to a selected social problem before choosing one to develop further. Another option is a **“User Journey” exercise**. Participants map the experience of a person affected by a social challenge, identifying the points where difficulties, frustrations or unmet needs occur. This can help them identify where an innovative intervention might create the greatest value.

For groups with more entrepreneurial experience, youth workers can introduce a **“Prototype Feedback Carousel”**, where groups rotate between different prototypes and provide structured feedback. This allows participants to receive several perspectives and also exposes them to different approaches to solving the same social challenge. A further option is to ask participants to deliberately **redesign an existing solution** rather than invent something completely new. For example, they could examine an existing youth service, community activity or digital platform and ask:

“How could we make this more accessible, inclusive, sustainable or useful for young people?”

This helps participants understand that social innovation does not always require creating something entirely new. Innovation can also involve **improving an existing service, adapting a model to a different context or changing the way people collaborate**.

Key Reflection for Youth Workers

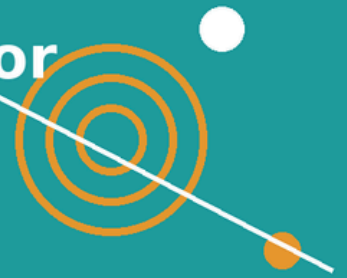
Across these activities, the central learning principle is that **design thinking is a process of learning through action**. Young people should be encouraged to move between understanding a problem, generating ideas, testing assumptions and improving solutions rather than treating these stages as fixed steps.

For youth workers, the objective is therefore not to help participants produce a perfect solution within one session. It is to help them develop the mindset and competences required to **question assumptions, listen to users, experiment with ideas, respond to feedback and continuously improve**. This provides a strong foundation for the later development of sustainable business models, funding strategies and impact-oriented social enterprises.

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Digital technologies are increasingly influencing how organisations identify social needs, develop solutions, communicate with communities and deliver services. For social entrepreneurs, technology can create new possibilities for reaching beneficiaries, reducing operational barriers, improving access to information and developing innovative products or services. The OECD notes that digitalisation can help SMEs improve performance, innovation, productivity and market access, while recent research also highlights the growing role of artificial intelligence, digital security and digital tools for sustainability.

However, technology does not automatically generate social impact. Its value depends on how effectively it responds to a genuine need and whether it is accessible, responsible and appropriate for the people it is intended to serve. This is particularly important in youth work, where young people need opportunities not only to learn how to use digital tools, but also to understand how technology can be applied critically and creatively to address social challenges. The European Commission and UNDP increasingly emphasise the importance of trustworthy, inclusive and human-centred digital transformation that benefits people and communities.

4.1. Technology and Social Innovation

Technology and social innovation are closely connected, but they should not be treated as synonymous. Social innovation focuses on developing new or improved ways of responding to social needs, while technology can provide tools that make these solutions more accessible, efficient or scalable. A social enterprise, for example, may use a digital platform to connect people who need a service with organisations able to provide it, develop an application that improves access to information, or use data to identify patterns in a community problem. In other cases, technology may support internal processes such as communication, fundraising, monitoring or impact measurement.

The European Commission recognises digitalisation as increasingly relevant to the social economy and highlights the importance of supporting social economy organisations in accessing digital tools and new technologies. Its current work also emphasises the development of trustworthy, accessible and inclusive technologies and a stronger evidence base on the implications of digitalisation and AI for social economy organisations.

For young entrepreneurs, this means that technology can be understood as an enabler of social innovation. The starting point should not be the technology itself, but the challenge that needs to be addressed. A useful sequence is:

Social need → Understanding users → Appropriate technology → Solution → Testing → Social impact

This distinction is important because technology-driven ideas can easily become disconnected from the people they are intended to help. A technically sophisticated application, for instance, has limited social value if its target users cannot access it, do not trust it or do not actually need it. Technology can also introduce new forms of inequality. Differences in digital skills, connectivity, affordability and accessibility can prevent some groups from benefiting from digital solutions. Youth workers should therefore encourage young people to consider **digital inclusion** from the beginning of the innovation process.

Another important consideration is responsible technology use. Artificial intelligence and data-driven tools can support creativity, research and decision-making, but they also raise questions concerning privacy, cybersecurity, bias, transparency and reliability. The OECD's recent research shows that while AI adoption among SMEs is accelerating, effective and secure integration remains uneven and is affected by skills gaps, maintenance costs and cybersecurity challenges. For youth workers, the key learning principle is therefore simple: technology should serve the social purpose, not replace it.

4.2. Digital Tools, Apps and Social Media

Young entrepreneurs have access to a wide range of digital tools that can support almost every stage of an entrepreneurial initiative. These tools can help them research a problem, communicate with users, develop ideas, create content, organise activities, collect feedback, build communities and promote their work. The 2025 OECD D4SME Survey identifies several areas that are particularly relevant to contemporary entrepreneurship, including AI technologies, digital tools for sustainability, fintech and digital security. The survey also highlights that digitalisation can support competitiveness while requiring organisations to develop the skills and capabilities necessary to use these technologies effectively.

For youth workers, it is useful to introduce digital tools according to their function, rather than presenting a long list of platforms. For example, collaborative tools can support teamwork and project management; visual design tools can help young people communicate an idea; survey and data-collection tools can support user research; AI tools can assist with brainstorming or content development; and social media platforms can support communication and community-building.

Apps and Digital Platforms

Mobile applications and digital platforms can be particularly useful when a social challenge involves access, coordination or communication. A youth-led initiative could, for example, develop a platform that connects volunteers with community organisations, helps users locate available local services or facilitates the redistribution of unused resources. However, young people should first consider whether an application is actually the most appropriate solution. Developing a digital product requires resources, maintenance and continuous attention to user experience, security and accessibility. A simpler digital tool or existing platform may sometimes provide a more effective solution.

Social Media for Social Impact

Social media can also play an important role in social entrepreneurship. It allows young initiatives to communicate their mission, build communities, reach potential beneficiaries, share stories and create visibility with relatively limited resources. The most effective approach is not simply to accumulate followers. Young entrepreneurs should consider who they want to reach, what they want people to understand or do, and how communication contributes to the project's social purpose. Social media can therefore support several stages of a social entrepreneurship journey: raising awareness about a problem, validating an idea, collecting feedback, recruiting participants, building partnerships and communicating impact.

Artificial Intelligence as a Support Tool

AI is becoming increasingly accessible to young entrepreneurs and can support activities such as brainstorming, research, translation, content development, data analysis and communication. The OECD's 2026 D4SME Survey confirms the rapid increase in SME adoption of AI tools, while also highlighting the need for more strategic, targeted and secure integration. Youth workers should therefore introduce AI as a support mechanism rather than an autonomous decision-maker. Young people should learn to verify AI-generated information, protect personal and sensitive data, recognise potential bias and maintain human responsibility for important decisions.

4.3. Practical Strategies and Examples

The role of the youth worker is not to teach young people every available digital tool. Digital technologies change too quickly for a fixed list of platforms to remain relevant for long. Instead, youth workers should develop young people's ability to select, evaluate and apply technology according to a specific purpose.

A useful strategy is to begin with a Technology–Need Fit exercise. When young people propose a digital solution, they should first identify the problem, the intended users and the desired change. They can then ask whether technology provides a clear advantage over a non-digital alternative. This prevents the common mistake of designing a technological solution simply because a particular tool is available.

Youth workers can also encourage young people to experiment with low-cost prototypes. Instead of immediately developing a full application, a group could create a paper interface, a clickable mock-up, a simple online form or a social media campaign and test it with potential users. This approach reduces costs and allows assumptions to be challenged early. Another useful strategy is to introduce digital tool mapping. Participants identify the different stages of their entrepreneurial idea and determine which digital tools could support each stage. For example, online surveys might support user research, collaborative platforms could support teamwork, design software could support communication, and social media could support outreach.

Technology can also be used to strengthen participatory social innovation. Young people can use digital surveys, online discussions or community mapping to collect perspectives from people affected by a particular challenge. This allows technology to become a means of listening to communities rather than simply promoting a predetermined solution.

Practical Example: A Digital Food-Waste Initiative

Imagine a group of young people identifies food waste as a significant local problem. Instead of immediately developing a complex application, they could first conduct a digital survey with local residents and businesses to understand where food waste occurs. They could then create a simple online matching system connecting businesses with community organisations and test the model with a small number of participants. If the pilot demonstrates demand, the group could explore whether a dedicated platform or application would provide additional value. This approach illustrates an important principle.

Test the social solution before investing heavily in the technology.

The same logic can be applied to AI. A young social entrepreneur might use AI to analyse survey responses or generate communication ideas, but the information should be reviewed by humans and decisions should remain grounded in the actual experiences of the target community. This approach is consistent with current international thinking on digital transformation, which increasingly focuses not only on technological adoption but also on skills, inclusion, security, responsible implementation and measurable value.



4.4. Youth Activity and Reflection

The following activities are designed to help young people move from understanding digital technologies to using them purposefully for social innovation. Both activities can be adapted according to the digital skills and experience of the group.

Youth Activity 1: “Technology for Good Challenge”

Objective: To help young people identify how an existing technology or digital tool could contribute to solving a real social or environmental challenge.

Duration: 45–60 minutes **Group size:** 8–24 participants **Method:** Group work, problem-solving and short presentations

The youth worker begins by presenting several social challenges, such as social isolation, food waste, limited access to local services, youth unemployment, environmental awareness or accessibility. Participants form small groups and select one challenge. Their first task is to define who is affected and what specific difficulty they experience.

The groups then identify one or more technologies that could potentially contribute to a solution. They might consider an application, digital platform, AI tool, social media campaign, online community, mapping tool or another digital approach.

Each group develops a simple concept answering four questions:

What is the problem? Who are we helping? What technology could support the solution? What positive change could it create?

Groups present their ideas in two minutes. The other participants provide feedback based on Usefulness, Accessibility and Social Impact. The youth worker concludes by asking whether the proposed technology is genuinely necessary or whether the same social objective could be achieved more simply. This final question is important because it encourages participants to distinguish between technology as a useful tool and technology as an unnecessary complication.

Youth Activity 2: “Build, Test and Improve a Digital Solution”

Objective: To help young people develop a simple prototype of a digital solution and understand the importance of testing it with potential users.

Duration: 60–75 minutes **Group size:** 8–24 participants **Method:** Collaborative design, prototyping, peer testing and reflection

Participants work in small groups and select a social challenge. Each group develops a basic concept for a digital solution, such as an application, website, online service, community platform or digital campaign. The groups first define their target user and the main problem they want to solve. They then create a low-fidelity prototype. This could be a paper-based application interface, a storyboard, a sequence of website screens or a simple demonstration of how the service would operate. Groups exchange prototypes and act as users of one another's solutions.

Each “user” provides feedback on three questions:

What is easy to understand? What is difficult or confusing? What would make this solution more useful or accessible?

Groups then revise their prototype based on the feedback and explain what they changed.

The activity concludes with a reflection on the importance of user-centred design, accessibility and iteration. Participants should understand that a digital solution should be tested with the people it is intended to serve before significant resources are invested in its development.

Additional Ideas for Youth Workers

If additional time is available, the activities can be expanded through a short Digital Impact Mapping exercise. Participants map how their digital solution is expected to create change:

Digital tool → User action → Immediate benefit → Social outcome
For example, a community platform may increase access to information, which may lead to greater participation in local services and ultimately contribute to stronger community engagement.

Youth workers can also introduce a Digital Responsibility Check before participants finalise an idea. Young people consider whether their solution is accessible, whether it protects users' data, whether AI is being used responsibly, whether the information provided can be trusted and whether any groups could unintentionally be excluded.

Reflection for Youth Workers

The central learning objective of these activities is not digital proficiency alone. Young people should learn to see technology as part of a wider social innovation process. Effective digital entrepreneurship requires an understanding of people and their needs, followed by appropriate technological choices, testing and continuous improvement.

The youth worker's role is therefore to encourage young people to ask not only **“What technology can we use?”**, but also:

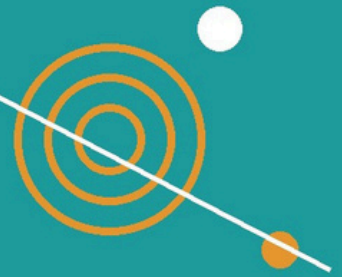
“Why do we need it, who will benefit from it, and how can we make sure it creates genuine value?”

This approach supports a responsible understanding of technology and helps young people develop the digital, entrepreneurial and critical-thinking competences needed to turn technology into a tool for meaningful social impact.

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5. Building a Brand with Purpose

For social entrepreneurs, building a brand is not simply a matter of creating an attractive visual identity or developing a memorable name. A strong brand can help an initiative communicate what it stands for, whom it serves and why its work matters. This is particularly important for social enterprises, whose activities often need to communicate both economic value and a broader social or environmental purpose. Recent OECD and European Commission work highlights that visibility, recognition, credibility and transparency remain important challenges for social economy organisations, making effective communication an important part of their ability to reach communities, consumers, partners and funders.

For young entrepreneurs, purpose-driven branding provides an opportunity to translate an entrepreneurial idea into a clear and recognisable identity. A well-developed brand can help build trust, differentiate an initiative from alternatives and create a stronger connection with its intended audience. However, purpose cannot be communicated effectively through statements alone. It needs to be reflected consistently in the organisation's actions, relationships and impact. As recent research on brand trust demonstrates, audiences increasingly expect brands to demonstrate relevance, authenticity and clarity through what they actually do.

5.1. Purpose-Driven Branding

Purpose-driven branding refers to an approach in which the identity and communication of an organisation are closely connected to a meaningful purpose beyond financial performance. In social entrepreneurship, this purpose is generally linked to addressing a social or environmental challenge while creating economic value that supports the sustainability of the initiative.

The purpose of a social enterprise should answer a fundamental question:

Why does this organisation exist beyond making money?

The answer provides a foundation for communication, decision-making and engagement with stakeholders. For example, an initiative addressing food waste may define its purpose around reducing unnecessary waste while improving access to food within the local community. Its brand should then communicate this purpose consistently through its products, services, partnerships and communication. Research on social entrepreneurship branding suggests that strong and authentic brands can be particularly important for social enterprises because they help organisations differentiate themselves while communicating their social mission and creating meaning around their activities. Purpose-driven branding is therefore closely connected with **trust**. Young entrepreneurs should understand that claiming to create positive impact is not enough. Stakeholders increasingly expect organisations to demonstrate that their values are reflected in actual practices.

The OECD's 2025 work on labels for the social economy similarly stresses that credibility, transparency and effective communication are essential for strengthening recognition and trust. Misleading claims about social or environmental responsibility can undermine this trust and contribute to practices such as greenwashing. For youth workers, this provides an important learning opportunity. Young people can be encouraged to think of branding not as a promotional exercise that comes at the end of developing an enterprise, but as a process of clarifying and communicating the identity and purpose of the initiative from the beginning.

A purpose-driven brand should ultimately create alignment between three elements:

What the organisation says → What the organisation does → What impact it creates.

When these three elements are consistent, branding becomes a mechanism for building credibility rather than simply attracting attention.

5.2. Mission, Vision, Values and Brand Identity

A clear brand begins with a clear understanding of what the organisation stands for. Four concepts are particularly useful for young entrepreneurs: mission, vision, values and brand identity.

The **mission** explains the organisation's present purpose. It describes what the initiative does, for whom and in response to which need. A good mission statement should be sufficiently clear to guide action rather than functioning only as a promotional slogan.

The **vision** describes the desired future. It answers the question of what the organisation ultimately wants to change or achieve. While the mission focuses on the organisation's current role, the vision provides a longer-term direction.

Values represent the principles that guide decisions and behaviour. For a social enterprise, these might include inclusion, sustainability, fairness, transparency, community participation or respect for human dignity. Values become meaningful when they influence actual decisions, such as how an organisation treats beneficiaries, selects partners or manages resources.

Finally, **brand identity** is the way the organisation expresses its mission, vision and values to the outside world. It includes its name, visual identity, tone of voice, messaging and overall communication style, but it is broader than these visible elements. It is the coherent impression that an organisation seeks to create among the people it engages with.

These elements should reinforce one another. For example, if a social enterprise promotes inclusion as one of its core values, this should be visible not only in its communication but also in the accessibility of its services, the language it uses and the people involved in its activities.

For young entrepreneurs, a useful way to understand this relationship is:

Mission explains why we act today. Vision describes the change we want to see. Values guide how we act. Brand identity communicates all of this to others.

This alignment is particularly important for social enterprises because stakeholders may evaluate not only the quality of a product or service, but also the organisation's credibility and social purpose. The OECD's recent work on social economy labels emphasises that effective identification and communication can improve visibility and trust when they are supported by transparent and credible practices.



5.3. Practical Strategies and Tools

Youth workers can introduce purpose-driven branding through practical exercises that encourage young people to clarify their identity before developing visual or promotional materials.

A useful starting point is the **Purpose Statement Exercise**. Participants complete a simple sentence:

“We exist to _____ by _____ so that _____.”

For example:

We exist to reduce food waste by connecting local businesses with community organisations so that more food reaches people who need it. The objective is not to produce a perfect final statement, but to help young entrepreneurs clarify the relationship between action, method and intended impact. A second useful tool is the **Brand Values Check**. Participants identify three to five values that should guide their initiative and then consider how each value would influence an actual decision. If *inclusion* is a core value, for example, participants could ask how their service would accommodate people with different abilities or levels of digital access.

This prevents values from becoming purely decorative statements. Young entrepreneurs can also develop a simple **Audience and Message Map**. Instead of communicating the same message to everyone, they identify their main audiences and consider what each group needs to understand. A beneficiary may need to understand how the initiative helps them, while a potential partner may need to understand the collaboration opportunity and a funder may be interested in the model's sustainability and impact.

Visual identity should come later in the process. Once mission, values and audiences have been clarified, participants can explore how these elements might be represented through the organisation's name, colours, imagery, tone of voice and communication materials. Youth workers should also introduce the concept of brand consistency. A social enterprise's website, social media presence, presentations and direct communication should communicate a recognisable identity. Consistency does not mean repeating exactly the same content; it means ensuring that different forms of communication express the same underlying purpose and values.

Finally, young people should learn to distinguish purposeful communication from exaggerated impact claims. If an initiative claims that it is sustainable, inclusive or socially impactful, it should be able to explain what this means in practice. The OECD's recent work on social economy labels highlights the importance of credible information and transparency in maintaining trust and avoiding misleading representations.



5.4. Youth Activity and Reflection

The following activities are designed to help young people move from understanding branding concepts to creating a clear and authentic identity for a social entrepreneurship idea.

Youth Activity 1: “Build Your Purpose”

Objective:

To help young people define the purpose, mission and values of a social entrepreneurship initiative.

Duration: 45–60 minutes

Group size: 8–24 participants

Method: Individual reflection, group discussion and collaborative development

Participants begin by identifying a social or environmental issue that they would like their initiative to address. They then answer three questions:

What problem are we trying to address?

Who do we want to help?

What change do we want to create?

Using their answers, participants develop a short purpose statement using the structure:

We exist to [create change] by [what we do] so that [who benefits].

Each group then identifies **three core values** that should guide the initiative.

The youth worker asks participants to test each value against a practical situation. For example, if *sustainability* is selected as a core value, participants should explain how this would influence the way the organisation operates. If *inclusion* is selected, they should identify a concrete action that demonstrates this value.

The activity concludes with a short presentation in which each group explains its purpose statement and values.

Reflection

Participants discuss:

Does our purpose clearly explain why the initiative exists?

Are our values reflected in concrete actions?

Would a person outside our group understand what we stand for?

The objective is to demonstrate that a strong brand begins with **clarity of purpose**, rather than visual design.

Youth Activity 2: “From Purpose to Brand Identity”

Objective:

To help young people translate their mission and values into a coherent brand identity and communication concept.

Duration: 60–75 minutes

Group size: 8–24 participants

Method: Collaborative design, audience analysis and presentation

Participants use the purpose statement developed in Activity 1, or work with a new social entrepreneurship concept.

First, they identify their primary audience and consider what this audience needs to understand about the initiative. They then develop a short core message that communicates the organisation's purpose in accessible language. Next, groups decide how their identity could be expressed visually and verbally. They can develop a provisional name, tagline, visual direction and tone of voice. The emphasis should not be on graphic-design quality but on consistency with the organisation's purpose and values.

Each group then presents its brand concept to another group. The reviewing group considers three questions:

Is the purpose clear?

Does the identity match the stated values?

Would the intended audience find the message relevant and credible?

Groups then make one improvement based on the feedback.

Reflection

The youth worker concludes by discussing the relationship between identity, communication and trust. Participants should recognise that a brand becomes credible when what an organisation communicates is consistent with what it actually does.

Additional Ideas for Youth Workers

If additional time is available, participants can carry out a Brand Consistency Challenge, in which they review a fictional social enterprise's website text, social media post and promotional message and identify inconsistencies between its stated purpose and communication.

Another useful extension is a Purpose vs. Promotion Exercise. Participants are given two short brand messages and asked to identify which one communicates a genuine social purpose and which one relies mainly on promotional language. They then rewrite the weaker message to make it more specific, credible and evidence-based. Youth workers can also introduce a short Brand Story Exercise, asking participants to explain their initiative in three stages:



The problem → The response → The change we want to create.

This can later support the work covered in the next chapter, **Storytelling for Social Change**.

Key Reflection for Youth Workers

The central learning objective is to help young people understand that **branding is not simply about looking professional**. For a social enterprise, a strong brand should make its purpose understandable, communicate its values consistently and help stakeholders recognise the social value of its work.

Youth workers can therefore encourage young people to build their brand from the inside out:

Purpose → Mission → Values → Audience → Identity → Communication → Trust.

When these elements are aligned, branding becomes a practical tool for building recognition, credibility and meaningful relationships with the communities and stakeholders that a social enterprise seeks to serve. This is particularly relevant in the social economy, where visibility and trust can influence access to consumers, partners, funding and wider support.

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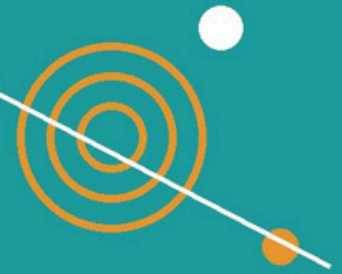
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Storytelling is one of the most effective ways for social entrepreneurs to communicate ideas, values and impact in a form that people can understand and remember. Social entrepreneurship often involves complex social or environmental challenges that cannot always be communicated effectively through statistics or technical descriptions alone. A well-constructed story can help audiences understand why a problem matters, who is affected and what change an initiative is trying to create.

For young entrepreneurs, storytelling is particularly valuable because it can help transform an entrepreneurial idea into a human and relatable message. It can support awareness-raising, community engagement, partnership development and the communication of impact. This is increasingly relevant at European level, where improving the visibility and recognition of the social economy is identified as an important policy priority. The European Commission highlights communication, dissemination of successful initiatives and greater public visibility as mechanisms for strengthening recognition of the sector.

6.1. The Power of Storytelling

Storytelling can be understood as the structured communication of an experience, challenge, idea or change through a narrative. Unlike a simple presentation of facts, a story provides context, people and meaning, helping an audience understand why an issue matters. In social entrepreneurship, stories can be particularly powerful because the central purpose of an initiative is often connected to people's experiences. A social enterprise working with young people experiencing unemployment, for example, can communicate its work through statistics about employment rates, but a carefully constructed story about one person's journey can help audiences understand the human dimension behind those numbers. An effective social impact story commonly contains several interconnected elements: a context or challenge, people affected by it, a response or intervention, and a change or outcome. The story does not need to be dramatic. Its strength comes from being clear, relevant and authentic.

For youth workers, storytelling can therefore become an educational tool for developing communication and entrepreneurial competences. Young people can learn to explain their ideas in ways that are accessible to different audiences rather than relying exclusively on technical or business terminology. Storytelling should also be distinguished from exaggeration. A compelling story does not require inventing information or presenting an initiative as more successful than it actually is. Authenticity is particularly important in social entrepreneurship because trust is closely connected to the credibility of an organisation's mission and impact. The European Commission's work on the social economy similarly emphasises visibility, recognition and reliable evidence as interconnected elements of a stronger social economy ecosystem.

The fundamental question for young entrepreneurs is therefore not simply **“How can I tell an interesting story?”**, but:

“What story can help people understand the problem, the purpose of my initiative and the change I want to create?”

6.2. Communicating Mission and Impact

A social enterprise needs to communicate two closely connected dimensions: what it stands for and what it achieves. Storytelling can help bring these dimensions together by connecting the organisation's mission with real experiences and evidence of change.

The **mission** provides the foundation of the story. It explains why the initiative exists and what problem it seeks to address. The **impact** demonstrates what happens as a result of its activities. A strong impact story connects the two: this is the problem we identified, this is why we decided to act, this is what we did, and this is the change that resulted. Young entrepreneurs should therefore avoid presenting impact only through isolated numbers. Statistics remain important, particularly when communicating with funders, partners or other professional audiences, but they become more meaningful when accompanied by context.

For example, stating that “120 young people participated in our programme” provides useful quantitative information. A stronger communication approach could explain what participation enabled, what participants experienced and what changed as a result. The quantitative evidence can then support the story rather than replace it.

This combination can be understood as:

Story → Evidence → Meaning

The story creates human relevance, the evidence supports credibility, and the explanation of meaning connects the results back to the wider mission.

This approach is particularly relevant to the social economy because the European Commission identifies **visibility, recognition and evidence** as important components of a stronger and more credible social economy. Current EU initiatives also encourage social economy organisations to communicate their achievements and disseminate successful practices more effectively. Youth workers can help young people adapt their storytelling to different audiences. A beneficiary may need a simple explanation of how the initiative can help them, while a potential partner may be more interested in the problem being addressed and the value of collaboration. A funder may additionally require evidence of outcomes, sustainability and scalability. The underlying story can remain consistent, but its emphasis and format should respond to the audience.

6.3. Digital Storytelling and Social Media

Digital technologies have significantly expanded the ways in which young entrepreneurs can tell stories. Websites, social media, short videos, podcasts, blogs, newsletters and visual content allow small initiatives to communicate directly with communities without relying exclusively on traditional media. Digital storytelling combines narrative with formats such as **images, video, audio, graphics and interactive content**. For young people, this can make storytelling more accessible and creative while allowing them to choose formats that match their skills and target audiences.

Social media is particularly useful for creating ongoing communication rather than relying on a single promotional message. A social enterprise can use short stories to introduce the problem it addresses, present people involved in its work, document activities, share milestones and communicate results. However, effective digital storytelling requires more than frequent posting. Young entrepreneurs should first identify the **audience, purpose and desired response** of each piece of content. A post designed to raise awareness will require a different approach from a post intended to recruit volunteers or communicate project results.

The European Commission's current approach to social economy visibility also demonstrates the importance of sustained and varied communication. Its Social Economy Gateway reports ongoing communication activities through events, videos, social media campaigns and testimonial content designed to improve awareness and understanding of the sector.

Digital storytelling also creates ethical responsibilities. When stories involve beneficiaries, particularly children, vulnerable groups or people experiencing difficult circumstances, consent, privacy and dignity must be prioritised. Young entrepreneurs should avoid presenting people simply as “victims” in order to make a story more emotionally powerful. Whenever possible, people should have agency in deciding how their experiences are represented.

Recent European work on social economy digitalisation similarly stresses trustworthy, accessible and inclusive approaches to technology and communication, reinforcing the importance of responsible digital practices.

6.4. Practical Strategies and Youth Activity

Storytelling is most effectively developed through practice. Young people need opportunities to experiment with different narrative structures, identify the most important elements of a social impact story and adapt their communication to different audiences and formats. The following activities are designed to help participants move from a general understanding of storytelling to the practical development of stories that communicate purpose, impact and social value.

Youth Activity 1: “The Story Behind the Idea”

Objective:

To help young people transform a social entrepreneurship idea into a clear, engaging and purpose-driven story.

Duration: 45–60 minutes

Group size: 8–24 participants

Method: Small-group work, storytelling and peer feedback

Step 1 – Choose the Initiative

The youth worker asks participants to work individually or in small groups and select a social entrepreneurship idea, project or community initiative. It can be an existing initiative or an idea developed during previous activities. Participants briefly write down:

What does the initiative do? Who does it support? What problem does it address?

The objective at this stage is simply to establish the basic context. Participants should avoid writing a long description.



Step 2 – Identify the Challenge

Participants describe the social or environmental problem behind their initiative in two or three sentences.

The youth worker can encourage them to move beyond general statements. Instead of saying “There is too much food waste,” participants could identify a more specific situation, such as “Local restaurants dispose of edible food at the end of the day while community organisations struggle to provide sufficient food to vulnerable households.”

This helps create a story with a clear starting point.

Step 3 – Introduce the Human Element

Participants identify one person, group or community affected by the challenge. They consider what this

situation means for them and what difficulties or unmet needs they experience.



The youth worker should remind participants that they should **not invent personal experiences and present them as real stories**. If they do not have access to real testimonies, they can create a clearly fictionalised example for the purpose of the activity.

Step 4 – Present the Response

Participants explain how their initiative responds to the identified challenge.

They should answer three questions:

What are we doing?

Why did we choose this approach?

How is our approach different or useful?

The emphasis should be on explaining the logic behind the initiative rather than simply listing activities.

Step 5 – Describe the Change

Participants identify the change they want to create. If the initiative already exists, they can describe actual results. If it is still an idea, they should describe the **expected change** without presenting it as an achieved result. They can include one or two indicators, such as the number of people reached, resources redistributed, skills developed or behaviours changed.

This introduces the connection between **storytelling and evidence**.

Step 6 – Build the Story

Participants now combine their material into a short narrative following the structure:

Challenge → Person/Community → Response → Change

Each group prepares a story lasting approximately **two minutes**.

The youth worker can encourage participants to use simple, accessible language and avoid unnecessary technical terminology.

Step 7 – Storytelling and Feedback

Each group presents its story to the others.

The audience provides feedback using three questions:

Was the problem clear?

Did we understand why the initiative matters?

Was the expected or achieved change clear?

The youth worker can then ask the group to identify one element they would improve.

Reflection

The activity concludes with a short discussion:

Which part of the story was easiest to communicate?

Which part was most difficult?

Did the story communicate the mission of the initiative?

How did adding evidence change the credibility of the story?

The key learning point is that a social impact story should connect **human experience, purpose and evidence** rather than relying only on emotional language.



Youth Activity 2: “From Story to Digital Campaign”

Objective:

To help young people adapt one social impact story into different digital formats while maintaining a consistent message.

Duration: 60–75 minutes

Group size: 8–24 participants

Method: Group work, digital content planning, presentation and peer feedback

Step 1 – Start with One Core Story

The youth worker asks participants to select a short social impact story, either from Activity 1 or from an existing social enterprise. Before creating any content, participants identify the **one key message** they want the audience to remember.

For example:

“Local businesses can reduce food waste while supporting families in need.”

This becomes the central message of the campaign.

Step 2 – Identify the Audience

Each group identifies a specific target audience. Depending on the initiative, this could be young people, potential beneficiaries, volunteers, local businesses, funders or members of the community.

Participants discuss:

What does this audience already know?

What would they need to understand?

What action would we like them to take?

This step prevents participants from creating generic content without a clear communication purpose.

Step 3 – Select the Digital Format

Each group chooses **two different digital formats** for the same story.

For example:

a social media post and a short video;

an Instagram carousel and a website introduction;

a short video script and a campaign poster.

The youth worker can provide simple templates if participants have limited digital experience.

Step 4 – Adapt the Story

Participants decide which elements of the original story should be emphasised in each format.

For a short video, they may focus on the human experience and use a simple visual sequence.

For a social media post, they may focus on the problem, one key fact and a clear call to action.

For a website introduction, they may provide slightly more context about the initiative and its mission.

The important principle is that the **core purpose remains consistent**, even though the presentation changes.

Step 5 – Add Evidence

Participants include at least **one credible piece of evidence** where appropriate. This could be a verified statistic, a project result, a number of beneficiaries reached or another relevant indicator.

The youth worker should emphasise that participants must distinguish between:

What has already happened and what the initiative hopes to achieve. This is particularly important when communicating social impact, because exaggerated or unsupported claims can undermine credibility.

Step 6 – Add a Call to Action

Each piece of content should end with a clear action appropriate to the audience.

For example:

Learn more.

Join the initiative.

Volunteer.

Share the message.

Support the project.

Contact us.

Participants should avoid using a call to action simply because it is expected in social media communication.

It should have a clear relationship with the purpose of the content.



Step 7 – Present and Compare

Each group presents its two digital formats.

The rest of the participants compare them and discuss:

Which version communicates the purpose most clearly?

Which one is most appropriate for the selected audience?

Which one is more likely to encourage action?

The group then explains why it made different communication choices for the two formats.

Step 8 – Improve the Content

Based on the feedback, participants make one final improvement to one of their digital pieces.

The youth worker can encourage them to check four elements before finalising:

Purpose – Audience – Evidence – Action

Reflection

The final discussion focuses on the fact that **one story can be communicated in many different ways.**

Participants consider:

What changed when we moved from a general story to a social media format?

What information did we remove or prioritise?

How did the audience influence our communication?

How can we make a story engaging without exaggerating its impact?

Additional Ideas for Youth Workers

The activities can be extended through short exercises that require little preparation. “One Story, Three Audiences” asks participants to communicate the same initiative to a beneficiary, a potential partner and a funder, helping them understand how the emphasis of a message changes according to the audience.

A “Story in Six Words” exercise can be used as a quick warm-up. Participants attempt to express the essence of their social initiative in only six words, forcing them to identify its central message.

Another useful exercise is the Story Ethics Check. Before publishing a story involving real people, participants consider whether they have appropriate consent, whether personal information is protected, whether the representation is respectful and whether the person is presented with dignity and agency.



Key Reflection for Youth Workers

The objective of storytelling activities is not simply to make young people better at producing attractive content. It is to help them understand how purpose, human experience, evidence and communication can work together.

A useful process for youth workers is:

Identify the purpose → Understand the audience → Build the story → Select the format → Add evidence → Encourage action → Reflect and improve.

Through this process, young entrepreneurs can develop communication that is engaging without becoming exaggerated, emotional without becoming exploitative, and creative while remaining connected to the real mission and impact of their initiative.

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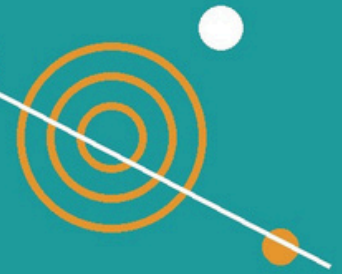
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7. Measuring Social Impact

Social entrepreneurship is ultimately concerned with creating positive change. However, having a social purpose does not automatically mean that an initiative is creating meaningful social impact. Young entrepreneurs therefore need to understand how to identify the changes they want to create, collect appropriate evidence and use that evidence to improve their activities. Social impact measurement helps social economy organisations understand how their activities contribute to changes in people's well-being, communities and the natural environment.

The OECD and European Union emphasise that impact measurement should not be viewed only as a reporting requirement. When integrated into organisational decision-making, it can help social enterprises learn from their activities, improve their strategies and communicate their contribution to stakeholders. For young entrepreneurs, this means moving beyond the question “**How many people did we reach?**” and asking “**What changed because of what we did?**” This distinction is central to developing credible and responsible social entrepreneurship.

7.1. Understanding Social Impact

Social impact refers broadly to the changes in people's lives, communities or the environment that can be associated with an organisation's activities. These changes may be positive or negative, intended or unintended, and may emerge immediately or over a longer period. A useful starting point is to distinguish between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact. Inputs are the resources invested in an initiative, such as funding, staff time, equipment or volunteers. Activities are what the organisation actually does. Outputs are the immediate and countable results of these activities, such as the number of workshops delivered or participants reached. Outcomes describe the changes experienced by participants or communities, while impact refers to the broader and longer-term contribution to social or environmental change.

For example, a youth entrepreneurship initiative may deliver ten workshops (**activity**) to 100 young people (**output**). If participants subsequently improve their entrepreneurial skills (**outcome**) and some use those skills to create sustainable initiatives or access employment (**longer-term impact**), the social value goes beyond simply counting attendance. This distinction is important because outputs are generally easier to measure than outcomes and impact. The OECD notes that areas such as social inclusion, well-being and community development can be particularly difficult to translate into quantitative indicators.

Impact measurement should therefore begin with a clear understanding of what change an initiative is trying to create and why its activities are expected to contribute to that change. The OECD recommends beginning the measurement cycle by defining a change strategy, identifying learning needs and setting impact targets.

For young entrepreneurs, a simple starting question is:

If our initiative succeeds, what will be different for the people or community we want to support?

The answer provides the foundation for selecting indicators and designing an appropriate measurement approach.

7.2. Social, Environmental and Economic Impact

Social enterprises can create several forms of impact simultaneously. These dimensions are often interconnected, but distinguishing between them helps young entrepreneurs understand the broader value of their initiatives.

Social impact concerns changes affecting people and communities. It can include improved access to services, increased participation, greater social inclusion, improved well-being, skills development or stronger community connections.

Environmental impact concerns changes to the natural environment and the use of resources. Examples include reducing waste, lowering emissions, increasing reuse, improving energy efficiency or protecting biodiversity.

Economic impact concerns changes related to employment, income, economic participation, local economic activity or the financial sustainability of an initiative. For a social enterprise, economic sustainability is particularly important because revenue can help maintain and expand its social mission. These dimensions should not necessarily be treated as separate objectives. A circular economy initiative, for example, may reduce waste (**environmental impact**), create employment opportunities (**economic impact**) and provide affordable refurbished products to local households (**social impact**).

The OECD identifies economic prosperity and employment, social inclusion and well-being, and community development among the impact areas particularly relevant to the social economy. It also emphasises that organisations should adapt their measurement approaches to their specific mission, stakeholders and context rather than attempting to apply one universal methodology. Young entrepreneurs can therefore use a simple **three-dimension impact check**:

People – Planet – Economy

The purpose is not to force every initiative to demonstrate impact in all three areas. Instead, it encourages participants to consider the different types of value their initiative may create and identify which dimensions are most relevant to its mission.

7.3. Indicators, Monitoring and Evaluation

Once young entrepreneurs know what change they want to create, they need a practical way to track progress. This is where **indicators, monitoring and evaluation** become important.

An **indicator** is a measurable sign that provides information about progress towards an objective. Indicators can be quantitative, such as the number of participants completing a programme, or qualitative, such as participants' reported confidence or perceptions of belonging.

A useful indicator should be connected directly to the change the initiative wants to create. For example, if the objective is to improve young people's entrepreneurial confidence, simply counting the number of workshops delivered is not enough. A more relevant indicator could measure changes in participants' self-assessed confidence before and after the activity.

Monitoring is the regular process of collecting information during implementation. It helps an organisation understand whether activities are taking place as planned and whether progress is being made. **Evaluation** goes further by examining the quality, relevance and results of an intervention and asking what can be learned from the evidence.

The OECD recommends treating impact measurement as a continuous cycle rather than a one-time exercise. Its 2024 guide structures this cycle around three broad phases: design; data collection and analysis; and learning and sharing.

For young entrepreneurs, this can be simplified into a practical sequence:

What do we want to change? → How will we know if change is happening? → What information do we need? → What does the evidence tell us? → What should we improve?

It is also important not to measure everything. A small initiative may not have the time, skills or resources to collect extensive data. The OECD specifically recommends choosing approaches according to an organisation's needs, capacities, impact areas and available resources.

Youth workers can therefore encourage young people to select a small number of meaningful indicators rather than producing complicated measurement systems. A combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence is often useful. Numbers can demonstrate scale, while interviews, testimonials, observations or open-ended feedback can help explain what the numbers actually mean.



7.4. Practical Tools and Youth Activity

The activities below introduce young people to impact measurement through practical exercises. The objective is not to teach complex evaluation methodologies, but to help participants understand how to connect purpose, activities, indicators, evidence and learning.

Youth Activity 1: “From Activity to Impact”

Objective:

To help young people distinguish between activities, outputs, outcomes and longer-term impact.

Duration: 45–60 minutes

Group size: 8–24 participants

Method: Small-group analysis and impact mapping

Step 1 – Choose an Initiative

Each group selects a social entrepreneurship idea or community initiative. It can be an existing initiative or one developed during previous activities.

The group briefly identifies the problem it wants to address and the target group it wants to support.

Step 2 – Identify the Activities

Participants write down what the initiative would actually do.

For example:

Organise financial literacy workshops for young people.

The youth worker should encourage groups to describe concrete actions rather than expected results.

Step 3 – Identify the Outputs

Participants ask:

“What can we directly count as a result of this activity?”

For example:

6 workshops delivered → 90 young people participating.

The group should recognise that these numbers demonstrate implementation but do not yet prove social impact.

Step 4 – Identify the Outcomes

Participants then ask:

“What could change for the participants because of these activities?”

Possible outcomes could include increased financial knowledge, greater confidence in managing money or improved ability to make informed financial decisions.

Step 5 – Identify the Longer-Term Impact

Finally, participants consider:

“If these changes continue, what broader difference could they make?”

For example, improved financial decision-making could contribute to greater financial resilience among young people.

Step 6 – Select Indicators

Each group chooses one or two indicators for its outputs and outcomes.

For example:

Output: Number of young people completing the workshops.

Outcome: Percentage of participants reporting increased confidence in managing personal finances.

Step 7 – Present and Discuss

Groups present their impact chain:

Activity → Output → Outcome → Impact

The youth worker asks whether the proposed impact is realistic and whether the selected indicators actually provide evidence of the expected change.

Reflection

Participants discuss:

Which part was easiest to measure?

Which part was hardest?

Why is counting participants not enough to demonstrate impact?

What evidence would give us greater confidence that change actually occurred?

The activity introduces the basic logic behind an **impact pathway or logic model**, without requiring participants to develop a complex evaluation framework.



Youth Activity 2: “Build Your Impact Dashboard”

Objective:

To help young people select a small number of meaningful indicators and develop a simple monitoring framework for a social entrepreneurship initiative.

Duration: 60–75 minutes

Group size: 8–24 participants

Method: Group work, indicator selection and peer review

Step 1 – Define the Main Objective

Each group identifies **one main social or environmental objective** for its initiative.

For example:

Increase opportunities for young people to develop employability skills.

The objective should describe a desired change rather than simply an activity.

Step 2 – Identify What Success Looks Like

Participants describe what they would expect to see if the initiative is successful.

They should think in practical terms:

What would people do differently?

What would they know or feel differently?

What would change in the community?

Step 3 – Choose Indicators

Each group selects three to five indicators. The youth worker should encourage them to include a mixture of **activity/output indicators and outcome indicators.**

For example:

Area	Indicator
Output	Number of young people completing the programme
Output	Number of mentoring sessions delivered
Outcome	Percentage reporting increased confidence
Outcome	Number of participants applying newly acquired skills

Step 4 – Decide How to Collect Evidence

For each indicator, participants decide how the information could be collected.

Possible methods include attendance records, short questionnaires, interviews, observation, feedback forms, digital analytics or participant testimonials.

The group should also decide **when** the information will be collected. For example, some indicators may be monitored during implementation, while changes in skills or attitudes may be assessed before and after an activity.

Step 5 – Consider a Baseline

Participants discuss whether they need information about the situation **before** the initiative begins. For example, if they want to demonstrate an increase in entrepreneurial confidence, they could ask participants to rate their confidence before the programme and again afterwards. The youth worker explains that comparing a starting point with later results can provide stronger evidence of change than measuring only the final situation.

Step 6 – Review the Dashboard

Groups exchange their dashboards and review another group's indicators.

They ask:

Are the indicators relevant?

Can the information realistically be collected?

Do the indicators tell us something about change?

Is there unnecessary data collection?

Groups then revise their dashboards based on the feedback.

Reflection

The activity concludes with a discussion about the balance between useful evidence and excessive measurement.

Participants consider:

Which indicators would actually help us make better decisions?

Which information would be difficult or expensive to collect?

How could we use the evidence to improve our initiative?

This reinforces the OECD's principle that impact measurement should support organisational learning and improvement, rather than becoming a purely administrative reporting task.



Additional Ideas for Youth Workers

A short “**Impact Indicator Challenge**” can be used as a warm-up. The youth worker presents several indicators and asks participants whether each one measures an activity, output, outcome or impact. This is particularly useful for helping participants recognise the difference between *doing something* and *creating change*.

Another useful exercise is “**Evidence or Assumption?**”. Participants examine statements such as “*Our project improved young people's confidence*” and decide what evidence would be needed to support the claim. This encourages critical thinking and prevents young entrepreneurs from confusing positive intentions with demonstrated results.

Youth workers can also introduce a simple **Before–After Reflection** for smaller initiatives. Participants identify one relevant measure before an activity and repeat it afterwards. This provides an accessible introduction to baseline data and change measurement without requiring complex statistical methods.

Key Reflection for Youth Workers

The central lesson is that **impact measurement should begin with the intended change, not with the available data**. Young people should first identify what they want to achieve and then determine what evidence would help them understand whether progress is occurring.

A useful progression is:

Define the change → Identify indicators → Collect evidence → Analyse results → Learn → Improve.

The objective is not to create complicated evaluation systems. It is to develop the habit of asking whether an entrepreneurial initiative is actually creating the value it intends to create and how evidence can be used to make that initiative more effective.

For youth workers, this approach also helps young people understand that measuring social impact is not about proving that an initiative is successful at all costs. It is about learning what works, recognising what does not, listening to stakeholders and improving the way social value is created. This participatory and learning-oriented approach is strongly reflected in the OECD/EU framework for social impact measurement and management.

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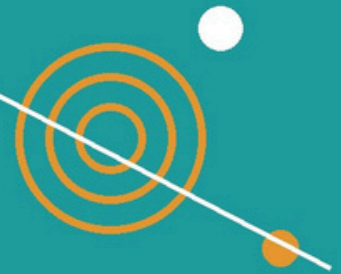
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Access to finance is one of the key conditions for turning a social entrepreneurship idea into a sustainable initiative. A strong concept may require funding to develop a prototype, purchase equipment, recruit people, reach beneficiaries or scale its activities. However, social entrepreneurs often face particular financing challenges because their primary objective is social value creation rather than maximising financial returns. OECD research notes that social economy organisations may have more difficulty accessing conventional loans and equity finance and may therefore require tailored instruments such as grants, patient capital, social investment funds and blended forms of finance.

For young entrepreneurs, understanding funding means learning that there is no single best source of finance. Grants, crowdfunding, loans, investment, public programmes and partnerships each have different requirements and implications. The European Union provides several mechanisms supporting social enterprise finance, including InvestEU instruments focused on social investment and skills, microfinance and social enterprise finance. The objective of this chapter is therefore to help young people understand the funding landscape, identify appropriate opportunities and develop a realistic strategy for financing an initiative while protecting its social purpose.

8.1. Understanding Funding Opportunities

Before looking for funding, young entrepreneurs need to understand what their initiative actually requires financing for. Funding needs can vary considerably depending on the stage of development. An early-stage idea may require a relatively small amount of money for research or prototyping, while an established social enterprise may require finance to purchase equipment, recruit staff or expand into new markets.

The first distinction to understand is between non-repayable and repayable finance. Grants and certain awards provide resources that generally do not need to be repaid, provided that the conditions of the funding agreement are respected. Loans and other forms of debt must be repaid and therefore require careful consideration of cash flow and repayment capacity. Equity or investment involves receiving capital in exchange for ownership or another financial claim and may therefore have implications for decision-making and future returns.

Social entrepreneurs can also combine different sources of finance. A grant, for example, may support the development of a prototype, while earned income can support ongoing operations and an investment may later be used for scaling. The European Commission recommends strengthening access to both public and private finance for social economy organisations and highlights the importance of tailored business-development and investment-readiness support.

A useful way for young people to begin is to ask:

What do we need the money for, how much do we need, when do we need it and what type of funding is appropriate for this purpose?

This prevents the common mistake of searching for funding opportunities before understanding the actual financial needs of the initiative.

It is also important to distinguish between funding opportunity and funding suitability. A programme may offer substantial financial support but still be inappropriate if the initiative does not meet its eligibility requirements, cannot provide the necessary co-financing or lacks the capacity to deliver the proposed activities.

Youth workers can therefore encourage participants to evaluate funding opportunities according to three basic dimensions:
Eligibility – Fit – Feasibility.

This approach helps young entrepreneurs understand that successful fundraising begins with strategic alignment, rather than simply applying to as many opportunities as possible.

8.2. Crowdfunding, Grants and Impact Investing

Different funding mechanisms respond to different entrepreneurial needs. Understanding their characteristics allows young entrepreneurs to select the most appropriate combination.

Grants

Grants are particularly relevant during the early stages of social entrepreneurship and for initiatives that generate significant social value but may not yet produce sufficient revenue. They can come from public authorities, foundations, philanthropic organisations or European and national programmes. Grants can support activities such as research, training, pilot projects, equipment, community activities and innovation.

However, they usually come with specific eligibility conditions, application requirements, reporting obligations and deadlines. Young entrepreneurs should therefore understand that receiving a grant does not simply mean receiving “free money”. It creates responsibilities concerning how resources are used and how results are demonstrated.

Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding allows an initiative to raise relatively small contributions from a large number of people, usually through an online platform. Depending on the model, contributors may donate, receive a reward, lend money or make an investment. Crowdfunding can be particularly useful for initiatives with a strong community dimension because it can combine fundraising with awareness-building and audience development. A successful campaign can demonstrate that people are willing to support an idea before substantial resources are invested. At EU level, the Crowdfunding Regulation (EU) 2020/1503 established harmonised rules for investment-based and lending-based crowdfunding services for business financing, including requirements relating to information, governance, risk management and investor protection. For young entrepreneurs, this means that crowdfunding should be approached as both a financial and communication strategy. A campaign needs a clear purpose, credible information, an identifiable target audience and a convincing reason for people to contribute.

Impact Investing

Impact investing seeks to combine financial returns with measurable positive social or environmental impact. It can therefore be relevant to social enterprises that have developed a viable business model and need capital to expand.

Unlike a grant, impact investment generally involves expectations regarding financial performance and impact. Young entrepreneurs considering this route need to demonstrate not only that their initiative creates social value but also that the underlying model can use investment effectively.

The European Commission's current social economy agenda is placing increasing emphasis on improving access to private social investment and developing financial instruments that are appropriate for social enterprises. The 2026 mid-term review specifically highlights the need to mobilise private capital and strengthen the social investment ecosystem.

The key lesson for young entrepreneurs is therefore that different funding instruments serve different purposes. Grants may be appropriate for experimentation, crowdfunding can help validate community interest, while investment may become more relevant when an initiative has demonstrated a credible model for growth.

8.3. Developing a Funding Strategy

A funding strategy is more than a list of possible funding sources. It is a structured plan that connects the financial needs of an initiative with appropriate funding mechanisms, timing and requirements. The first step is to calculate the actual funding requirement. Young entrepreneurs should identify the costs associated with developing and operating their initiative, distinguishing between one-off costs and ongoing costs. They should then consider how much funding is needed immediately and how much may be required at later stages.

The second step is to assess the initiative's funding readiness. A funder, investor or crowdfunding supporter will generally want to understand the problem being addressed, the proposed solution, the target group, the business or operating model and the expected impact. The stronger the underlying concept, the easier it becomes to communicate why financial support is needed.

The third step is to match different needs with different funding sources. For example, a young social entrepreneur could use a small grant to test an idea, earned income to finance regular activities and crowdfunding to expand community engagement. A more established enterprise could subsequently consider loans, impact investment or other forms of growth finance.

It is also important to consider financial sustainability. Funding should not create a situation in which an initiative becomes dependent on a single temporary source of income. Young entrepreneurs should therefore think about diversification and ask how the initiative could continue operating if a particular grant or funding programme ends. Current OECD research emphasises the importance of diversifying financing sources and instruments to respond to the different needs of entrepreneurs, particularly in a context of changing financing conditions.

A simple funding strategy can therefore follow this progression:

Define the need → Estimate the cost → Assess readiness → Identify suitable sources → Prepare the case → Apply or raise funds → Monitor use → Plan sustainability.

The final step is particularly important. Funding should contribute to the long-term development of the initiative rather than simply finance isolated activities.

8.4. Practical Strategies and Youth Activity

The following activities introduce young people to funding decisions through practical exercises. The objective is not to turn participants into professional fundraisers, but to help them understand how to analyse funding options, communicate financial needs and develop a realistic funding strategy.

Youth Activity 1: “Find the Right Funding”

Objective:

To help young people understand that different entrepreneurial ideas require different types of funding and develop their ability to match a funding source with a specific need.

Duration: 45–60 minutes

Group size: 8–24 participants

Method: Group work, analysis and decision-making

Step 1 – Present the Entrepreneurial Idea

The youth worker provides each group with a short social entrepreneurship scenario. For example, a group

may want to establish a community repair workshop, create a digital platform connecting volunteers with

elderly people, launch a sustainable food initiative or develop an educational programme for young people. Each group identifies the **main objective, target group and current stage of development**.

Step 2 – Identify the Financial Need

Participants list what the initiative would actually require money for.

For example:

equipment, website development, communication, staff, materials, training or initial operating costs. They then estimate whether the need is small, medium or significant. Exact financial calculations are not necessary at this stage.

Step 3 – Explore Funding Options

The youth worker introduces several funding mechanisms:

Grant – Crowdfunding – Loan – Impact Investment – Own Revenue –

Partnership/Sponsorship

Each group considers the advantages and limitations of each option for its specific initiative.



Step 4 – Match Funding to Need

Participants select the **two most appropriate funding sources** and explain their choice.

They should consider:

Does the initiative meet the likely eligibility requirements?

Would the money need to be repaid?

Does the initiative already generate revenue?

Does it have a community that could support a crowdfunding campaign?

Is there enough evidence of impact and financial viability for investment?

Step 5 – Identify Risks

Groups identify at least one potential risk associated with their preferred funding model.

For example, a loan creates repayment obligations, while a grant may involve strict eligibility and reporting

requirements. Crowdfunding requires significant communication effort, while investment may create

expectations concerning financial growth.

Step 6 – Present the Funding Choice

Each group gives a short presentation:

“Our initiative needs funding for _____. We would choose _____ because _____.

The main

risk is _____, and we would address it by _____.”

The other participants can challenge the choice and suggest an alternative funding mechanism.

Reflection

The youth worker concludes with:

Why is the same funding source not appropriate for every social enterprise?

What makes a funding opportunity suitable?

What would we need to demonstrate before approaching a funder or investor?

The activity reinforces the principle that funding should be matched to the stage, needs and capacity of an initiative.



Youth Activity 2: “Build Your Funding Strategy”

Objective:

To help young people develop a simple funding strategy for their own social entrepreneurship idea.

Duration: 60–75 minutes

Group size: 8–24 participants

Method: Group work, funding planning and pitching

Step 1 – Define the Initiative

Each group selects a social entrepreneurship idea and briefly describes:

The problem → The target group → The proposed solution → The expected impact.

The youth worker ensures that participants have a sufficiently clear concept before moving to funding.

Step 2 – Estimate the Funding Need

Groups identify the main costs required to launch or develop the initiative.

They divide them into:

Start-up costs and **ongoing costs**.

For example, start-up costs might include equipment, website development or initial materials, while ongoing costs might include staff, maintenance, communication or transportation.

Participants then estimate an approximate funding requirement.

Step 3 – Create a Funding Mix

Instead of selecting only one funding source, groups explore whether a **combination of sources** could be more appropriate.

For example:

Small grant + crowdfunding + earned income

or

Grant + partnership contribution + social investment.

The objective is to demonstrate that financial sustainability can involve multiple sources rather than dependence on one funder.

Step 4 – Prepare the Funding Case

Groups develop a short funding message answering four questions:

What problem are we addressing?

What are we proposing?

What will the funding enable us to do?

What change will the funding help create?

They should focus on communicating value rather than simply listing costs.

Step 5 – Consider Sustainability

Participants then imagine that their initial funding ends after one year.

They ask:

How could the initiative continue?

Possible answers may include earned revenue, membership fees, service contracts, partnerships, additional grants or a combination of different sources.

This step encourages participants to distinguish between **financing the launch of an initiative and financing its long-term operation.**

Step 6 – Funding Pitch

Each group delivers a **three-minute funding pitch** to the rest of the participants.

The pitch should communicate the problem, solution, funding requirement, proposed funding mix and expected impact.

The audience evaluates the pitch according to:

Clarity – Funding Fit – Social Value – Sustainability

Step 7 – Improve the Strategy

After receiving feedback, each group identifies **one weakness in its funding strategy** and proposes an improvement.

For example, they may decide that they need stronger evidence of demand, a more realistic budget, a different funding source or a clearer sustainability plan.

Reflection

The youth worker concludes with a discussion:

Was our funding request realistic?

Did we clearly explain why we need the money?

Would our preferred funder or investor understand the value of the initiative?

What would happen if our first funding source rejected us?

This final question is particularly useful for introducing the concept of **funding diversification and resilience.**



Additional Ideas for Youth Workers

A short **“Funding Match”** exercise can be used as a warm-up. The youth worker presents different scenarios and asks participants to choose the most appropriate funding mechanism. For example, a prototype may be more suitable for a small grant, while a proven social enterprise seeking expansion might explore impact investment.

Another useful exercise is a Funding Opportunity Checklist. Participants examine a fictional funding call and identify its target groups, eligibility requirements, funding amount, deadlines, expected outputs and reporting obligations. This helps them understand that finding an opportunity is only the beginning; applicants must also determine whether they are genuinely eligible and prepared to apply.

Youth workers can also introduce a short **“What If We Don't Get the Funding?”** exercise. Participants develop a Plan B and identify which parts of their initiative could still be implemented with fewer resources, through partnerships, volunteering or alternative revenue sources. This encourages resilience and reduces dependence on a single funding opportunity.

Key Reflection for Youth Workers

The central learning objective is to help young people understand that fundraising is part of entrepreneurial strategy, not a separate administrative task.

A strong funding strategy connects:

Social purpose → Financial need → Appropriate funding → Clear value proposition → Impact → Long-term sustainability.

Youth workers should encourage participants to think critically about the implications of each funding source. The question is not simply *“Where can we get money?”*, but *“Which form of finance is most appropriate for our purpose, our stage of development and the way we want the initiative to grow?”*

This approach reflects the broader European direction towards improving access to tailored finance for social economy organisations. Current EU instruments include grants, guarantees, microfinance, social enterprise finance and investment mechanisms, while the 2026 policy agenda places further emphasis on mobilising private capital and strengthening the social investment ecosystem.

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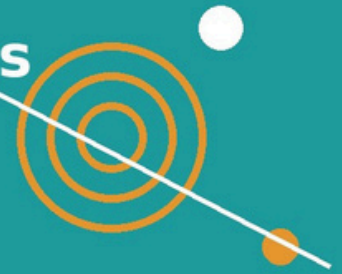
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Social challenges are rarely solved by a single organisation acting alone. Issues such as unemployment, social exclusion, environmental degradation, poverty or unequal access to services involve multiple actors and require knowledge, resources and perspectives that are often distributed across different parts of society. Collaboration can therefore become an important mechanism through which social entrepreneurs transform individual initiatives into broader and more sustainable responses.

The social economy is particularly suited to collaborative approaches because its organisations often work closely with communities, public authorities, civil society organisations, businesses and other stakeholders. Recent OECD research highlights that social economy organisations frequently rely on partnership formation, support networks and co-operation to innovate and grow. The European Commission similarly promotes multi-stakeholder partnerships and collaboration between social economy entities, public institutions and mainstream businesses as part of the development of stronger social economy ecosystems. For young entrepreneurs, collaboration is therefore not simply a way to obtain additional resources. It is a way to combine knowledge, strengthen legitimacy, reach different communities and increase the potential impact of an initiative.

9.1. The Importance of Collaboration

Collaboration involves two or more actors working together towards a shared objective while contributing different resources, competences, perspectives or forms of expertise. In social entrepreneurship, this can include collaboration between social enterprises, youth organisations, municipalities, schools, universities, businesses, NGOs, community groups and citizens.

One of the main advantages of collaboration is that social challenges are often too complex to be addressed effectively from a single perspective. A youth organisation may understand the needs of young people, while a municipality may have access to public infrastructure and a local business may provide technical knowledge or financial resources. Bringing these perspectives together can lead to solutions that would be difficult for one organisation to develop independently.

Collaboration can also improve **innovation and learning**. Partners can exchange experiences, test different approaches and provide feedback on emerging solutions. The OECD's 2025 research on social innovation highlights partnerships and new forms of social interaction as important components of social innovation, particularly when initiatives seek to move beyond experimentation towards wider adoption.

However, collaboration does not automatically lead to positive outcomes. Partnerships can become ineffective when roles are unclear, communication is inconsistent or organisations have fundamentally different expectations. Successful collaboration therefore requires a shared purpose, clear responsibilities, mutual trust and mechanisms for decision-making.

For young entrepreneurs, an important lesson is that collaboration should begin with a shared problem rather than simply a desire to find partners. Instead of asking “*Who can help our organisation?*”, they should ask:

“Who else is affected by this challenge, who has relevant knowledge or resources, and who could contribute to creating a better solution?”

This shift encourages young people to think in terms of ecosystems rather than isolated organisations.

9.2. Stakeholders, Partnerships and Networks

For young entrepreneurs, an important lesson is that collaboration should begin with a shared problem rather than simply a desire to find partners. Instead of asking “*Who can help our organisation?*”, they should ask:

“Who else is affected by this challenge, who has relevant knowledge or resources, and who could contribute to creating a better solution?”

This shift encourages young people to think in terms of ecosystems rather than isolated organisations. A stakeholder is any person, group or organisation that is affected by an initiative, has an interest in it or can influence its development. Stakeholders can therefore include beneficiaries, employees, volunteers, local communities, public authorities, businesses, funders, educational institutions and other social enterprises.

Before developing a partnership, young entrepreneurs should first identify the stakeholders connected to their social challenge. A simple Stakeholder Mapping exercise can help them consider two dimensions: the stakeholder's level of interest in the initiative and their potential influence over its development.

This mapping can help distinguish between different types of relationships. Some stakeholders may become formal partners, while others may simply provide feedback, participate in activities, provide resources or benefit from the initiative.

A partnership becomes stronger when each participant has a clear reason to be involved. One organisation may contribute expertise, another may provide access to a target group, while another may offer infrastructure, funding or communication capacity. The objective is not to make every partner perform the same role, but to create complementary contributions.

Networks operate at a broader level. A network allows organisations and individuals to exchange knowledge, opportunities and resources even when they are not working together on a single project. Networks can help young entrepreneurs discover potential partners, learn from peers and access support beyond their immediate community.

The OECD's 2025 analysis of the European social economy notes that social economy organisations often scale through co-operation and network-building, including partnerships with municipalities, civil society and ethical businesses.

Youth workers can therefore help young people develop a collaborative mindset by asking them to consider not only what their initiative can do itself, but what could become possible through relationships with others.

9.3. Good Practices and Case Studies

The following practices and examples demonstrate how collaboration can strengthen social innovation. They have been selected because they illustrate different dimensions of collaboration: co-design, multi- stakeholder partnerships, network-building and long-term institutional cooperation.

Good Practice 1: Co-Design with the People Affected

One of the most important collaborative approaches in social innovation is co-design: involving the people affected by a social challenge directly in the development of the solution.

Traditional approaches may involve organisations identifying a problem and then designing a solution for a target group. Co-design changes this relationship by involving users, beneficiaries or community members in defining the problem, developing ideas, testing prototypes and providing feedback.

This approach is particularly important because social entrepreneurs can easily make assumptions about what people need. A service may appear innovative from the perspective of its designers but fail to address the priorities or realities of the people who are expected to use it.

The OECD's 2025 research on social innovation recommends involving target groups early in the innovation process. Its analysis highlights approaches such as steering committees, living labs and participatory design, where stakeholders can review progress, test solutions and help identify barriers. Early involvement can also create greater ownership and make later adoption easier because stakeholders have already contributed to the development of the innovation.

For youth workers, co-design can be introduced through relatively simple methods. Young people can interview potential beneficiaries, organise focus groups, create user personas, test prototypes or invite community members to review an idea before implementation.

The most important principle is that participation should be meaningful rather than symbolic. Asking for feedback after all major decisions have already been made is not the same as involving people in the design process.



A practical co-design cycle can therefore be:

Listen → Understand → Co-create → Test → Adapt → Implement.

This approach also strengthens young people's entrepreneurial competences because they learn to validate assumptions rather than relying entirely on their own perceptions.

What can youth workers learn?

Youth workers should encourage young people to treat beneficiaries not simply as recipients of a service, but as potential contributors to the innovation process. This can improve relevance, build trust and increase the likelihood that a solution will respond to a genuine need.

Good Practice 2: Build Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

A second important practice is the development of multi-stakeholder partnerships, where actors from different sectors contribute complementary resources to a shared social objective.

A social enterprise addressing youth unemployment, for example, could work with a youth organisation, municipality, vocational training provider and local employers. Each partner contributes something different: the youth organisation may provide outreach, the training provider expertise, the municipality institutional support and employers opportunities for practical experience.

The European Commission's transition pathway for the proximity and social economy explicitly promotes collaboration between social economy organisations and mainstream businesses, while its stakeholder platform has been created to facilitate exchanges and commitments between different actors.

The value of multi-stakeholder collaboration lies in complementarity. A partnership should not be created simply because several organisations are interested in the same topic. Each participant should bring a resource, competence, relationship or perspective that strengthens the overall intervention.

Effective partnerships also require clarity. Partners should agree from the beginning on the common objective, expected contributions, decision-making processes, communication channels and mechanisms for dealing with disagreements.

For young entrepreneurs, a useful approach is to create a Partnership Value Map. For every potential partner, they identify:

What can this partner contribute?

What can the initiative offer in return?

What shared objective connects us?

This helps young people understand collaboration as a reciprocal relationship rather than simply a request for support.



What can youth workers learn?

Youth workers can use partnership development as a learning opportunity in negotiation, communication and stakeholder management. Young people learn that successful collaboration is based on shared value and complementary strengths, not simply on the number of organisations involved.

Good Practice 3: Develop Networks and Peer Learning

A third good practice is the creation and maintenance of networks for knowledge exchange and peer learning. Not every relationship needs to become a formal partnership. Networks can provide a lighter structure through which social entrepreneurs, youth workers, organisations and other stakeholders share experiences, identify opportunities and learn from one another. Peer learning is particularly valuable for young entrepreneurs because they often lack experience and may face challenges that have already been encountered by other organisations. A network can provide access to practical knowledge that is not easily obtained through formal training.

The OECD Toolkit for the Social Economy emphasises the importance of local social capital, supportive ecosystems and collaboration in strengthening social innovation. It also identifies the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders as an important condition for effective social innovation. Networks can take many forms: regular peer meetings, online communities, thematic working groups, mentoring schemes, local social entrepreneurship forums or cross-sector events.

For youth workers, an important principle is to ensure that networks are active rather than purely informational. A network becomes more valuable when participants exchange concrete resources, provide feedback, develop joint initiatives or connect members with opportunities. A simple network-building process can involve identifying relevant actors, establishing a shared topic or purpose, creating regular communication opportunities and gradually developing collaborative activities.

What can youth workers learn?

Young entrepreneurs should understand that building relationships is itself an entrepreneurial competence. A strong network can provide **knowledge, visibility, partnerships, mentorship, resources and opportunities for scaling.**

Case Studies

Case Study 1: ALMA France – Connecting Youth Organisations, International Partners and Local Authorities

Context

The **ALMA France** initiative provides a concrete example of how cross-border cooperation can be used to address youth exclusion and support young people who face significant barriers to education, employment and social participation.

The initiative was implemented within the European **ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve)** approach and focused particularly on young people who were not in employment, education or training, including participants facing additional difficulties such as mental health challenges, migrant backgrounds or long-term unemployment. Rather than providing support exclusively within France, ALMA France developed a model that connected French youth support structures with organisations and local actors in **Poland, Bulgaria and Romania**.

The Challenge

The central challenge was that some of the young people targeted by the initiative remained disconnected from existing employment and training opportunities despite the availability of support mechanisms.

The project identified that mobility, volunteering and structured experience could provide an alternative pathway for young people to develop confidence, competences and a stronger sense of participation. At the same time, the partner countries did not necessarily have equivalent systems of civic service or structured opportunities for young people to gain this type of experience.

This meant that the challenge could not be addressed effectively through the work of one organisation or one country alone. It required cooperation between organisations with experience in youth inclusion, organisations in the host countries and local public authorities.

Who Collaborated?

The collaboration connected French youth and civic-service organisations with partner organisations in Poland, Bulgaria and Romania, while local governments and public institutions also became involved in the process.

The international partners provided the local context and opportunities in the host countries, while the French side contributed experience from the Civic Service model and the ALMA methodology. The cooperation therefore combined youth work expertise, international mobility, volunteering and local institutional involvement.

This is particularly relevant from a partnership perspective because the partners did not simply perform parallel project activities. They contributed different forms of knowledge and infrastructure to a common intervention.

How Did the Collaboration Work?

Young participants travelled to Poland, Bulgaria and Romania to undertake activities of general interest. The international experience was combined with preparation and support, allowing mobility to function not simply as travel but as part of a wider process of personal and professional development.

The experience also generated knowledge that could be transferred to the local level. According to the European Social Fund Plus case study, the experience encouraged local governments in participating countries to explore similar approaches, including local volunteering schemes designed to support youth inclusion.

This demonstrates an important dimension of collaboration: **knowledge can travel between partners in addition to people**. A partnership can therefore produce value not only through the activities directly implemented, but also through the transfer and adaptation of approaches between different contexts.

Results and Wider Impact

The project involved **30 young people**, many of whom faced significant personal or social challenges. By the end of the project, **28 participants had entered employment, education or another form of positive pathway**, while participants also reported increased self-confidence and a stronger sense of European belonging.

The effects extended beyond the individual participants. The case study reports that Poland subsequently developed the basis for a national volunteering law, Romania studied the approach, and Bulgaria appointed a national coordinator related to the initiative. The ALMA approach was also subsequently implemented at regional level in two of the territories involved.

What Can Youth Entrepreneurs Learn?

ALMA France demonstrates that collaboration can create **transferable solutions rather than isolated project activities**.

For young entrepreneurs, the key lesson is that an organisation does not necessarily need to develop every element of a solution itself. It can combine its own strengths with the experience, networks and infrastructure of partners in other countries or sectors.

The case also demonstrates the importance of involving public authorities when a social innovation has the potential to become part of a wider local or national system.

A useful principle to take from ALMA is:

Start with a shared social challenge, combine complementary expertise and create opportunities for the solution to be adapted beyond the original project.

Case Study 2: Too Good To Go – Businesses, Consumers and Technology Working Against Food Waste

Context

Too Good To Go provides a highly recognisable European example of how a social challenge can be addressed through collaboration between a digital platform, businesses and consumers.

Founded in Copenhagen in 2016, Too Good To Go developed a mobile platform that enables businesses with surplus food to offer it to consumers at reduced prices. Rather than treating food waste as a problem that restaurants, retailers or consumers must solve independently, the model connects these actors through a digital system.

Recent research describes Too Good To Go as a social innovation in which different actors participate in the process of reducing food waste and associated environmental impacts.

The Challenge

Food waste is a systemic problem involving multiple stages of the food system. Businesses may have food that remains unsold at the end of the day, while consumers may have limited awareness of the scale and consequences of food waste. A single organisation cannot easily solve this problem. Restaurants and retailers control surplus food, consumers create demand, and technology can provide the infrastructure needed to connect the two sides. Too Good To Go therefore developed a model based on coordination rather than isolated intervention.

Who Collaborated?

The core model connects three main groups:

Businesses provide surplus food.

Too Good To Go provides the digital platform and facilitates the transaction.

Consumers purchase surplus food at a reduced price.

The model therefore creates a form of shared value. Businesses can recover part of the value of food that might otherwise be wasted, consumers obtain food at a lower price, and the environmental impact associated with unnecessary food waste is reduced. Research examining the model identifies the involvement of different actors as a central element of the social innovation process.



How Does the Collaboration Work?

The collaboration is facilitated through the mobile application. Businesses identify available surplus food and make it available through the platform. Consumers can then purchase it, usually without knowing the exact contents of the package in advance. The technology is therefore not the social innovation by itself. Its value comes from enabling interaction between actors who already have complementary resources and needs.

This is an important lesson for young entrepreneurs. A digital platform can become socially valuable when it solves a coordination problem. Recent research using data from two Italian cities found evidence that Too Good To Go contributes to surplus-food redistribution and can create economic benefits for participating businesses. It also highlights the importance of strong relationships between businesses and customers and of communicating the environmental purpose of participation.

Results and Wider Impact

Too Good To Go has developed into a large-scale European platform. A 2025 study reports that the company had more than 90 million registered users and 155,000 business partners across countries in Europe and North America, while its model had contributed to saving more than 300 million meals.

The significance of the model, however, is not simply its scale. It demonstrates how a social enterprise can create a win-win-win relationship between businesses, consumers and the environment. Businesses receive economic value from surplus products, consumers receive affordable food and the initiative contributes to reducing food waste and associated environmental impacts.

What Can Youth Entrepreneurs Learn?

Too Good To Go demonstrates that collaboration can become the core of a sustainable business model.

The most useful question for young entrepreneurs is therefore not only:

“What product or service can we create?”

but also:

“Which different stakeholders have resources or needs that could be connected through our solution?”



A young entrepreneur developing a digital platform for volunteering, sustainable mobility, local services or community exchange could apply the same principle: identify different actors, understand what each needs and design a system in which collaboration creates value for everyone involved. The case also reinforces an important principle from earlier chapters of the Playbook:

Technology becomes socially valuable when it enables people to solve a real problem together.

Case Study 3: SEFIT – Local Authorities and Social Innovators Co-Creating Fair Transitions

Context

The SEFIT – Social Ecosystems for Fair and Inclusive Transitions project provides a particularly relevant example of collaboration between local authorities, social innovation organisations and communities. The project was developed through a partnership between Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini, the City of Turin, Rethink Ireland and Cork City, with activities taking place in Turin, Italy, and Cork, Ireland. Its central objective was to strengthen collaboration between public authorities, social innovators and other stakeholders in order to address the social consequences of the green and digital transitions.

The Challenge

The green and digital transitions can create new opportunities, but they can also deepen existing inequalities if certain groups do not have equal access to skills, technology, employment opportunities or resources.

SEFIT identified a specific governance challenge: local authorities and social innovation actors were not always collaborating effectively enough to address these transitions, particularly for people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. The project therefore approached the problem not simply as a technological or environmental challenge, but as a collaboration and governance challenge.

Who Collaborated?

The partnership brought together public authorities, social innovation actors and intermediary organisations. The City of Turin and Cork City Council represented the local-government dimension, while Rethink Ireland and Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini contributed expertise in social innovation, ecosystem development and support for innovative initiatives. The project also engaged citizens, third-sector organisations, civil society representatives and public administration officials in the design of its mechanisms.

This is important because the collaboration was not limited to the formal project partners. Wider stakeholders were involved in understanding local challenges and shaping the response.

How Did the Collaboration Work?

One of the most concrete mechanisms developed by SEFIT was the **Challenge Fund**, a €400,000, 10-month fund co-financed by the European Union. The fund was designed to support social innovations in Cork and Turin addressing challenges related to the green and digital transitions.

Importantly, the design of the fund was informed by direct engagement with citizens, third-sector organisations, civil society representatives and public administration officials.

This means that collaboration took place at several stages:

Identifying local challenges → designing the support mechanism → selecting social innovations → supporting implementation → documenting lessons.

SEFIT also developed a **Shared Support Guide** intended to consolidate the lessons of the project into a practical and replicable tool for other municipalities, policymakers and social economy actors.

Results and Wider Impact

SEFIT generated several practical outputs, including the Challenge Fund, policy recommendations, a Shared Support Guide and analysis of local urban trends and existing initiatives. Its broader objective was to demonstrate how municipalities can move beyond their traditional role as decision-makers and become **facilitators and co-creators of social innovation**.

The project also has a strong replication dimension. Its tools and findings are intended to support knowledge transfer beyond Cork and Turin and to provide a framework that can be adapted by policymakers and social economy actors elsewhere in Europe.

What Can Youth Entrepreneurs Learn?

SEFIT demonstrates that social entrepreneurs should not automatically see public authorities only as **funders or regulators**. Municipalities can also become partners, facilitators, users of innovation and co-creators of solutions.

For young entrepreneurs, this opens an important perspective. An initiative addressing local challenges such as sustainable mobility, digital inclusion, youth participation or environmental sustainability may become significantly stronger when developed in dialogue with the municipality or other public institutions.



The key lesson is:

A social entrepreneur does not always need to work around public systems; in many cases, greater impact can be achieved by working with them.

SEFIT therefore provides a useful model for thinking about collaboration as a process of co-creation, in which public authorities, social innovators and communities contribute different resources and perspectives to a shared challenge.

What These Three Case Studies Show

Together, the three examples demonstrate three different models of collaboration:

Case Study	Main Collaboration Model	Core Lesson
ALMA France	Youth organisations + international partners + public authorities	Collaboration can transfer successful approaches across borders and support systemic change.
Too Good To Go	Social enterprise + businesses + consumers + digital technology	Collaboration can become the foundation of a sustainable social business model.
SEFIT	Local authorities + social innovators + communities	Public institutions can become co-creators and facilitators of social innovation.

For young entrepreneurs, this leads to a broader understanding of collaboration. Partnerships are not simply a way of obtaining additional resources. They can influence how a problem is understood, how a solution is designed, how it is implemented and ultimately how far its impact can reach.

The three cases also demonstrate that collaboration can take very different forms: cross-border cooperation, market-based collaboration and public–social innovation partnerships. This diversity is important for youth workers because it encourages young people to look beyond the traditional idea of a “business partner” and consider the wider ecosystem surrounding their social entrepreneurship idea.

9.4. Youth Activity and Reflection

The activities below allow young people to apply the principles of stakeholder engagement and collaboration to their own social entrepreneurship ideas. The emphasis is on identifying complementary actors, understanding their interests and designing relationships that create shared value.

Youth Activity 1: “Build Your Collaboration Map”

Objective:

To help young people identify the stakeholders relevant to their social entrepreneurship idea and explore how each could contribute to its development.

Duration: 60–75 minutes

Group size: 8–24 participants

Method: Stakeholder mapping, group discussion and partnership planning

Step 1 – Define the Social Challenge

Each group selects a social or environmental challenge and briefly describes the initiative they would like to develop.

They should identify:

What problem are we addressing?

Who is affected?

What solution are we proposing?

Step 2 – Identify Stakeholders

Groups brainstorm all the people and organisations that are connected to the issue. They can include potential beneficiaries, NGOs, municipalities, schools, businesses, funders, experts, community groups and other social enterprises.

At this stage, the objective is to be inclusive rather than selective.

Step 3 – Map Influence and Interest

Participants place the stakeholders on a simple matrix according to their **level of influence** and **level of interest**.

This helps them identify which stakeholders should be involved closely and which may simply need to be informed or consulted.

Step 4 – Identify Contributions

For the most relevant stakeholders, participants answer:

What can they contribute?

What do they need or expect from us?

What shared objective could connect us?

Step 5 – Select Potential Partners

Each group selects two or three stakeholders that could become active partners and explains why.

relationship: collaboration, consultation, sponsorship, service provision, knowledge exchange or formal partnership.

Step 6 – Develop the Collaboration Pitch

Each group prepares a short message to one potential partner explaining:

The problem → Our idea → Why we need you → What we can offer → The shared benefit

Step 7 – Reflection

Groups present their partnership proposal and receive feedback.

The youth worker asks:

Are we asking the partner for something without offering value in return?

Does the partnership respond to a genuine shared interest?

Would the initiative still benefit from this relationship if no money were exchanged?

The activity helps young people understand that strong partnerships are based on **shared value rather than one-sided requests**.

Youth Activity 2: “Collaboration Challenge”

Objective:

To help young people practise negotiation, role allocation and collaborative decision-making in a simulated social innovation project.

Duration: 60–90 minutes

Group size: 12–30 participants

Method: Role-play, negotiation and reflection

Step 1 – Introduce the Scenario

The youth worker presents a fictional social challenge. For example:

A town wants to create a new initiative that increases opportunities for young people to participate in community life.

Participants are told that several organisations need to work together to develop the solution.

Step 2 – Assign Stakeholder Roles

Participants are divided into stakeholder groups. For example:

Youth organisation

Municipality

Local business

School or university

Community organisation

Potential funder

Each group receives a short description of its interests, resources and concerns.



Step 3 – Define Priorities

Before negotiating, each stakeholder group discusses internally:

What do we want to achieve?

What can we contribute?

What are our concerns?

What would we need from the other partners?

Step 4 – Partnership Negotiation

All stakeholders meet and attempt to develop a joint initiative.

They must agree on:

The main objective, roles, contributions, target group, activities and expected outcomes.

The youth worker observes the discussion without immediately intervening.

Step 5 – Resolve a New Challenge

Halfway through the exercise, the youth worker introduces an unexpected problem. For example, the

available budget is reduced, one partner withdraws or the target group changes.

The group must renegotiate its plan without abandoning the main social objective.

This introduces an important element of real-world collaboration: partnerships need to adapt when

circumstances change.

Step 6 – Present the Final Partnership

The group presents its final collaborative solution and explains how each stakeholder contributes.

Step 7 – Reflection

The youth worker facilitates a structured reflection:

Which stakeholder had the strongest influence?

Did all voices receive sufficient attention?

What caused disagreement?

How was consensus reached?

What made the final solution stronger than what one organisation could have developed alone? Participants should also identify one thing they would change if they repeated the negotiation.

Additional Ideas for Youth Workers

A shorter exercise, “Partner or Not?”, can present participants with different organisations and ask them to decide whether each would be a beneficiary, partner, supporter, funder or simply an interested stakeholder. Another useful exercise is a Partnership Failure Scenario, where participants analyse why a fictional partnership failed because of unclear roles, poor communication or unequal expectations. They then redesign the partnership agreement. For more experienced groups, youth workers can introduce a Network Mapping Challenge, asking participants to identify five organisations in their own community that could potentially contribute to their entrepreneurial idea and explain how they would approach each one.

Key Reflection for Youth Workers

The central lesson is that collaboration is not simply about having more organisations involved. Effective collaboration creates **complementarity, shared ownership and collective capacity**.

Young entrepreneurs should learn to move from:

“What can my organisation do?”

towards:

“What could we achieve together that none of us could achieve as effectively alone?”

For youth workers, this means creating opportunities for young people to practise stakeholder engagement, negotiation, communication and collaborative decision-making. These competences are essential for social entrepreneurship because scaling social innovation often depends not only on financial resources but also on **relationships, networks, institutional support and collective action**. Recent OECD evidence confirms that co-operation and network-building are particularly important pathways through which social economy organisations develop and scale their activities.



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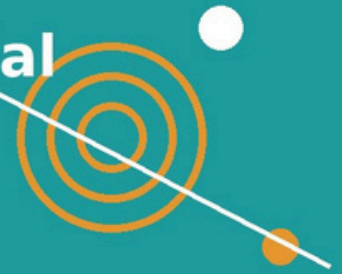
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Youth leadership is an important dimension of social entrepreneurship because young people are not only potential beneficiaries of social initiatives but can also act as **initiators, decision-makers, innovators and community leaders**. When young people are given meaningful opportunities to identify problems, develop solutions and take responsibility for action, entrepreneurship becomes connected with participation and social change.

The European entrepreneurship competence framework, **EntreComp**, approaches entrepreneurship as a transversal competence that involves acting upon opportunities and ideas to create value for others. Importantly, this value can be financial, cultural or social, making the framework particularly relevant to youth-led social entrepreneurship. EntreComp organises entrepreneurial learning around three interconnected areas: **Ideas and Opportunities, Resources, and Into Action**.

For youth workers, this means that developing youth leadership should go beyond encouraging young people to "have ideas". Young people need opportunities to **make decisions, take initiative, work with others, manage resources, deal with uncertainty and reflect on the consequences of their actions**. These competences can be developed effectively through non-formal education and practical experiences.

10.1. Youth Leadership and Entrepreneurial Mindset

Youth leadership in social entrepreneurship can be understood as the ability of young people to take initiative, influence positive change and assume responsibility for developing solutions to challenges that matter to them and their communities. Leadership in this context should not be confused with holding a formal position or being the person who gives instructions to others. A young person can demonstrate leadership by identifying an overlooked problem, bringing people together around an idea, proposing a solution, organising an activity or encouraging others to participate.

This understanding connects closely with the entrepreneurial mindset. Entrepreneurship requires individuals to recognise opportunities, work with uncertainty, mobilise resources and transform ideas into value. According to EntreComp, entrepreneurial learning develops progressively from creating value with external support towards increasing autonomy and responsibility for transforming ideas into action. For social entrepreneurship, however, the concept of value is broader than financial return. A youth-led initiative might create social value by improving inclusion, environmental value by reducing waste or community value by strengthening participation.

An entrepreneurial mindset therefore involves several interconnected attitudes: curiosity about problems, willingness to experiment, resilience when an idea does not work, openness to feedback and confidence to take responsible action. These characteristics are particularly important because social entrepreneurship rarely follows a completely predictable process.

Youth workers can help develop this mindset by creating learning environments in which young people are allowed to make decisions rather than simply following instructions. Instead of providing immediate solutions, the youth worker can ask questions such as:

What opportunity do you see?

What could you do about it?

What resources would you need?

Who could help you?

What could you test first?

This gradually moves young people from **passive participation towards ownership and initiative**.

The OECD also highlights the particular potential of youth-led social enterprises as vehicles for youth empowerment, entrepreneurship and community engagement, while recognising that young entrepreneurs may require targeted support to overcome gaps in skills, finance and experience.

10.2. Youth Initiative and Changemaking

Youth initiative refers to the capacity of young people to recognise an opportunity or challenge and take action without waiting for others to provide a solution. In social entrepreneurship, this capacity is particularly important because many initiatives emerge from young people's direct experiences of problems within their communities. Changemaking extends this idea further. A changemaker does not necessarily create a formal social enterprise. They identify a situation they want to improve and mobilise people, knowledge or resources to contribute to change. A young person organising a community repair event, developing a digital platform for local volunteering or creating a campaign around food waste can already be demonstrating entrepreneurial and changemaking competences.

The EntreComp framework is useful here because it places **“Into Action”** alongside ideas and resources. Entrepreneurial competence is therefore not complete when an individual has identified an interesting idea; it involves the ability to turn that idea into action and create value. Youth workers can support this process by helping participants move through a simple progression:

Notice a challenge → Understand the problem → Generate an idea → Mobilise support → Test an action → Learn → Adapt.

An important element is agency. Young people should experience themselves as people who can influence their environment, rather than simply as recipients of services or programmes. This does not mean that every youth initiative needs to become a business. Social entrepreneurship exists within a wider ecosystem of civic engagement, volunteering, community development and social innovation. The entrepreneurial mindset is useful because it provides young people with tools for turning ideas into meaningful action, regardless of whether the final outcome is a social enterprise, community project, campaign or other initiative. Youth workers can also help participants understand that changemaking involves responsibility. Taking initiative means considering who may be affected by a decision, whether the proposed solution is inclusive and whether the action creates unintended consequences. The objective is therefore not simply to produce more active young people, but to develop young people who can act purposefully, collaboratively and responsibly.

10.3. Strategies for Empowering Young People

Youth empowerment is most effective when young people have genuine opportunities to exercise **choice, responsibility and influence**. Simply inviting young people to participate in an activity does not necessarily create empowerment if all important decisions have already been made by adults.

Youth workers can therefore design learning environments where responsibility is gradually transferred to participants. At the beginning, young people may require considerable guidance. As their confidence and competences increase, they can take greater responsibility for defining objectives, selecting approaches, managing resources and evaluating results. This progression is consistent with EntreComp's movement from supported entrepreneurial action towards increasing autonomy and responsibility.

One practical strategy is to give young people **real decision-making responsibilities**. Rather than asking them to design a hypothetical initiative that will never be implemented, youth workers can allow them to choose a small community challenge and decide how to respond to it within realistic boundaries.

A second strategy is to create opportunities for **experimentation**. Young people should be able to test an idea on a small scale, receive feedback and modify it. This reduces the fear of failure and introduces an important entrepreneurial principle: an unsuccessful first attempt can provide useful information for the next one. A third strategy is to use **peer leadership**. Participants can take responsibility for facilitating a discussion, presenting an idea, coordinating a small task or supporting another participant. Leadership then becomes something that can be practised rather than something associated with a small number of naturally confident individuals.

Mentoring and role models can also be valuable. Young people may find it easier to imagine themselves as entrepreneurs or changemakers when they encounter people with relatable experiences. The OECD identifies role models, outreach and entrepreneurship programmes among approaches that can help young people recognise entrepreneurship as a possible pathway.

Finally, empowerment should be inclusive. Youth workers need to consider whether quieter participants, young people with fewer resources or those with less previous experience are receiving meaningful opportunities to contribute. Effective youth leadership is not about giving the loudest participant the greatest influence; it is about creating conditions in which **different young people can develop and exercise agency**.

A useful principle is:

Give young people enough structure to feel supported, but enough autonomy to feel that the initiative is genuinely theirs.



10.4. Youth Activity and Reflection

The following activities are designed to move young people from understanding leadership and entrepreneurial mindset to **practising initiative, decision-making, collaboration and responsibility**. Both activities can be implemented within non-formal education settings and adapted according to participants' age and experience.

Youth Activity 1: “From Problem to Youth-Led Initiative”

Objective:

To help young people identify a meaningful community challenge and develop a realistic youth-led response.

Duration: 60–75 minutes

Group size: 8–24 participants

Method: Group work, problem analysis, idea development and presentation

Step 1 – Identify a Real Challenge

The youth worker asks participants to think about their community, school, neighbourhood or wider society and identify problems that affect young people or other groups.

Each participant writes down two or three challenges that they consider meaningful.

Examples might include social isolation, food waste, limited access to cultural activities, digital exclusion, unemployment or lack of opportunities for young people's participation.

Participants then share their ideas and identify common themes.

Step 2 – Select One Challenge

The group selects one challenge using three questions:

Is the problem relevant?

Are people actually affected by it?

Could young people realistically contribute to a solution?

The youth worker should discourage participants from choosing an issue simply because it sounds important. The aim is to select a problem that can realistically be explored and acted upon.

Step 3 – Understand the People Affected

Participants identify who experiences the problem and what their needs might be.

They can create a simple “Who is affected?” profile, considering:

Who are they? What difficulties do they experience? What might they need? What existing solutions are available?

If possible, the youth worker can encourage participants to base their assumptions on real conversations, observations or existing evidence rather than speculation.



Step 4 – Generate Possible Solutions

Participants generate several possible responses without immediately deciding which one is best. The youth worker encourages them to consider different types of action: a service, campaign, digital solution, community activity, educational intervention or social enterprise. At this stage, quantity is more important than perfection.

Step 5 – Choose and Develop One Idea

The group selects one idea according to three criteria:

Social value – Feasibility – Youth ownership

They then define:

What will we do?

Who will benefit?

Who needs to be involved?

What resources do we need?

What could we achieve in the first month?

Step 6 – Define the First Action

Participants identify the **smallest realistic action** they could take to test the idea.

For example, rather than launching an entire digital platform, they might first interview 10 potential users.

Rather than organising a large community campaign, they might run a small pilot activity.

This introduces the principle of moving from **idea to action through experimentation**.

Step 7 – Present the Initiative

Each group presents its initiative in three minutes, explaining the problem, proposed solution, target group, first action and expected change.

The other participants provide feedback based on:

Is it needed? Is it realistic? Does it give young people a meaningful role?

Reflection

The youth worker asks:

Who made the important decisions?

Did everyone have an opportunity to influence the idea?

What would prevent us from taking the first step?

What could we test before investing more time or resources?

The activity helps participants understand that leadership begins not with having a perfect idea, but with recognising an opportunity and taking responsible first action.



Youth Activity 2: “Leadership in Action – The Changemaker Challenge”

Objective:

To develop decision-making, communication, teamwork, delegation and adaptive leadership through a simulated social entrepreneurship challenge.

Duration: 60–90 minutes

Group size: 12–30 participants

Method: Team challenge, role allocation, problem-solving and reflection

Step 1 – Introduce the Challenge

The youth worker presents a fictional situation:

A local community has €2,000 available to support a youth-led initiative that addresses a social or environmental problem. Your team has one day to develop a proposal and convince the community decision-makers that your idea should receive support.

The limited budget and time create a realistic decision-making context.

Step 2 – Form Teams and Assign Roles

Participants form small teams. Each participant chooses or is assigned a role, such as:

Team coordinator, community researcher, finance lead, communication lead or impact lead.

The youth worker explains that the purpose is not to create a permanent hierarchy. Roles are used to help participants experience different leadership responsibilities.

Step 3 – Understand the Problem

Each team receives a short description of a community challenge.

Before generating solutions, participants spend several minutes identifying:

Who is affected? What are the main causes? What existing resources could be used?

The youth worker reminds them that a strong leader does not immediately jump to a solution without first understanding the situation.

Step 4 – Develop the Initiative

The team develops a simple proposal including:

The problem, target group, solution, activities, estimated budget and expected impact.

The finance lead ensures that the proposed costs remain within the available budget, while the impact lead identifies how the team would know whether the initiative had produced results.



Step 5 – Introduce an Unexpected Change

Halfway through the activity, the youth worker introduces a new constraint.

For example:

Your available budget has been reduced by 30%.

or:

One of your main partners is no longer available.

The team must decide what to change while protecting the central purpose of the initiative.

This step allows participants to practise **adaptive leadership**. They experience that leadership is not simply about making an initial plan but also about responding constructively when circumstances change.

Step 6 – Prepare the Pitch

The team prepares a three-minute presentation answering:

What is the problem?

What are we proposing?

Why should people support it?

How will we use the resources?

What change do we expect to create?

Each participant should contribute to the final preparation, even if only one or two people deliver the final presentation.

Step 7 – Pitch and Peer Evaluation

Teams present their initiatives.

The other participants evaluate them according to:

Purpose – Feasibility – Leadership – Social Impact

The youth worker can ask each group to provide one strength and one constructive recommendation.

Step 8 – Leadership Reflection

The final stage focuses specifically on the leadership process rather than the quality of the business idea.

Participants discuss:

How were decisions made?

Did everyone have a voice?

How were disagreements handled?

Who took initiative?

Did anyone take too much control?

How did the team react when the circumstances changed?

The youth worker then connects these observations with real entrepreneurial environments, where leadership involves **coordination, listening, delegation, responsibility and adaptation**, rather than simply giving instructions.

Additional Ideas for Youth Workers

A short **“Leadership Without a Title”** exercise can be used to challenge participants' assumptions about leadership. Each participant describes one situation in which they influenced others without having a formal leadership position. The group then identifies the behaviours involved, such as listening, initiative, problem-solving or motivating others.

Another useful exercise is a **“Decision Diary”**. During a youth-led project, participants record important decisions they make, why they made them and what happened afterwards. At the end, they review which decisions produced positive results and which assumptions they would reconsider. Youth workers can also introduce peer mentoring, where participants with greater confidence or experience support others during a project. This develops leadership while reinforcing the idea that leadership can be distributed across a team rather than concentrated in one person.

Key Reflection for Youth Workers

Youth leadership in social entrepreneurship is fundamentally about agency: the ability of young people to recognise opportunities, make decisions, mobilise resources and take responsibility for creating value. The role of the youth worker is therefore not to become the leader of a youth initiative, but to create the conditions in which young people can progressively become leaders themselves.

A useful progression is:

Recognise a challenge → Develop an idea → Take initiative → Mobilise others → Act → Reflect → Adapt.

This approach is consistent with EntreComp's understanding of entrepreneurial learning as a progression towards greater autonomy and responsibility. It also reflects the wider evidence that young people can benefit from targeted opportunities for entrepreneurship education, mentoring, skills development and practical experience when developing youth-led social enterprises.

Ultimately, the purpose of youth leadership development is not simply to produce young people who can run projects. It is to help them develop the **confidence, judgement, responsibility and collaborative capacity to recognise that they can contribute to meaningful social change.**



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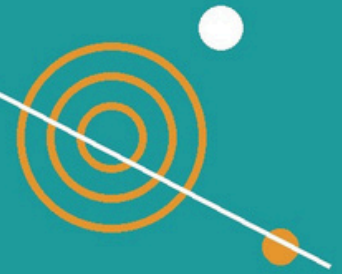
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Legal and regulatory considerations are an important part of responsible entrepreneurship. A promising social enterprise idea may still face significant challenges if its founders do not understand the legal framework within which the organisation will operate. Questions concerning legal form, contracts, intellectual property, personal data, employment, taxation, consumer protection and sector-specific requirements can influence how an initiative is established and developed.

For young entrepreneurs, legal knowledge does not mean becoming legal specialists. Rather, it means developing enough legal awareness to identify relevant obligations, recognise potential risks and know when professional advice is required. This is particularly important in social entrepreneurship because initiatives often work directly with communities, collect personal information, collaborate with public and private organisations, and use digital technologies.

The European Union provides a common regulatory framework in several areas, but many business requirements remain subject to national legislation. The European Commission's *Your Europe* portal therefore distinguishes between EU-level rules and country-specific requirements concerning issues such as business formation, taxation, employment, licensing, product compliance and consumer protection. The purpose of this chapter is consequently not to provide legal advice or a universal checklist for establishing a business. Instead, it introduces young entrepreneurs to the main legal areas they should investigate before launching or expanding a social enterprise.

11.1. Why Legal Knowledge Matters

Legal knowledge is an element of entrepreneurial responsibility because the decisions made during the development of an initiative can create legal obligations. Understanding these obligations at an early stage can help young entrepreneurs avoid preventable problems and make better-informed decisions. The first issue is the legal form of the organisation. Social enterprises can operate through different structures, including cooperatives, associations, foundations, mutual organisations and companies. The appropriate structure depends on the country, the purpose of the organisation, how it will be governed, how income will be generated and how profits or surpluses will be treated. The European Commission explicitly notes that there is no single legal form for social enterprises across the EU.

The second issue concerns the activities themselves. Some activities may require registration, licences, permits, professional qualifications or compliance with sector-specific legislation. A social enterprise offering educational workshops may face very different requirements from one providing food, transport, healthcare-related services or childcare. A third consideration is responsibility towards stakeholders. Entrepreneurs may enter into contracts with customers, suppliers, employees, volunteers, partners or funders. Understanding what has been agreed, who is responsible for what and what happens if an obligation is not fulfilled is an essential part of responsible management.



Legal awareness also helps young entrepreneurs understand the limits of their own knowledge. Not every legal question can be answered through general online information. Where the consequences of a decision are significant, professional advice from a qualified lawyer, accountant, data protection professional or relevant national authority may be necessary.

A useful principle for youth workers is therefore:

Legal awareness does not mean knowing every law. It means knowing what you need to check, where to check it and when to ask for professional advice. This distinction is particularly important when working with young people, as legal requirements may change depending on the country in which the initiative operates.

11.2. Legal and Regulatory Considerations

The legal requirements applicable to a social enterprise depend on its country, legal structure, activities and stakeholders. Young entrepreneurs should therefore avoid assuming that a requirement applying in one EU Member State automatically applies in another. One of the first areas to investigate is business or organisation registration. Entrepreneurs need to understand what legal structures are available in their country and what requirements apply to establishing them. These may include registration, governance arrangements, accounting obligations and reporting requirements. EU company law provides a common framework for certain aspects of company formation and operation, but national rules continue to play an important role.

Another area is taxation and accounting. Depending on the legal form and activities, an organisation may have obligations relating to income or corporate taxation, VAT, invoicing, financial records and reporting. These requirements should always be checked against the rules of the country in which the organisation operates. Employment and working relationships are another important consideration. If an initiative employs staff, the organisation must comply with applicable employment, social security and workplace requirements. The distinction between employees, contractors, volunteers and other forms of participation can also have legal consequences and should not be determined solely by what an organisation calls the relationship.

Young entrepreneurs should also consider consumer protection when selling goods or services. Depending on the activity, rules may apply to information provided to consumers, contracts, guarantees, pricing, cancellation rights and product safety. The EU's *Your Europe* business portal provides dedicated guidance on these areas as well as sector-specific compliance requirements.

Licensing and permits may become particularly important when an initiative operates in a regulated sector. Food businesses, for example, can face requirements that would not apply to a digital consultancy. Similarly, an initiative working with children or vulnerable groups may need to comply with additional safeguarding or professional requirements depending on the country and activity.

The practical lesson is that young entrepreneurs should develop a **legal and regulatory checklist specific to their initiative**, rather than relying on a generic checklist.

A useful sequence is:

Identify the activity → Identify the country → Identify the legal form → Check sector-specific requirements → Check ongoing obligations → Seek professional advice where necessary.

This approach allows legal considerations to become part of the business planning process rather than an issue addressed only after a problem appears.

11.3. Intellectual Property, Data Protection and Compliance

Three areas are particularly relevant to modern social entrepreneurship: intellectual property, data protection and regulatory compliance.

Intellectual Property

Intellectual property (IP) concerns creations and intangible assets such as trademarks, designs, inventions, software and copyright-protected works. For a young social enterprise, IP may become important when developing a brand, creating original educational materials, designing a product, developing software or producing digital content. The European Commission's *2025 Your Guide to IP in Europe* was specifically developed to help SMEs understand common intellectual property issues and explains the main IP rights and approaches to IP management in Europe.

Young entrepreneurs should understand the basic distinction between protecting their own creations and respecting the rights of others. For example, using a photograph, illustration, music track, software component or other creative work found online does not automatically mean that it can be used commercially or in a public campaign. Copyright protection applies automatically to original works in the EU, although the precise rules and exceptions can vary under national law.

A simple IP review can therefore ask:

What have we created? Who owns it? Is it protected? Are we using material created by someone else? Do we have permission or an appropriate licence?



Data Protection

Data protection becomes particularly relevant when a social enterprise collects information about individuals through registrations, surveys, mailing lists, websites, applications, customer accounts or participant databases. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) applies to organisations established in the EU and, in relevant circumstances, to organisations outside the EU that process personal data of individuals in the EU. The European Commission identifies seven central principles, including lawfulness and transparency, purpose limitation, data minimisation, accuracy, storage limitation, integrity and confidentiality, and accountability.

For young entrepreneurs, this means that collecting data should not be approached as simply “getting information from users”. They need to understand why the data is collected, whether there is a lawful basis for processing, what information is actually necessary, how long it will be retained and how it will be protected. Individuals also have rights concerning their personal data, including rights of access, rectification, erasure, restriction, portability and objection in the circumstances defined by the GDPR.

Compliance

Compliance means ensuring that the organisation's activities follow the rules applicable to it. This may include data protection, consumer protection, tax, employment, intellectual property, product safety, environmental requirements or sector-specific rules.

Digital initiatives may also need to consider additional EU digital legislation. For example, the Digital Services Act (DSA) regulates online intermediary services and platforms and introduces responsibilities related to areas such as illegal content, transparency and user protection. It has applied to most platforms and hosting services in the EU since February 2024, subject to the specific scope and exemptions of the legislation.

The key message for young entrepreneurs is therefore:

Compliance should be designed into the initiative from the beginning rather than treated as an administrative task added at the end.



11.4. Practical Guidance and Youth Activity

The following activities are designed to develop legal awareness, not to teach participants to provide legal advice. The aim is for young people to recognise legal and regulatory questions, identify reliable sources and understand when professional support is necessary.

Youth Activity 1: “Legal Check Before Launch”

Objective:

To help young people identify the main legal and regulatory areas they should investigate before launching a social entrepreneurship initiative.

Duration: 60–75 minutes

Group size: 8–24 participants

Method: Group analysis, research and decision-making

Step 1 – Select an Initiative

Each group chooses a social entrepreneurship idea. It can be an idea developed during previous chapters or a new initiative.

Examples could include:

- a digital platform connecting volunteers with community organisations; a social enterprise selling sustainable products;
- a youth training initiative;
- a community food project.

The group briefly describes what the initiative does, who it serves and where it will operate.



Step 2 – Identify the Legal Areas

The group receives a **Legal Check Canvas** with the following areas:

Legal form

Registration

Tax and accounting

Employment/volunteering

Contracts

Consumer protection

Intellectual property

Data protection

Licences/permits

Sector-specific requirements

Participants do not need to answer every question immediately. Their first task is to identify which areas are relevant to their initiative.

Step 3 – Turn Issues into Questions

For each relevant area, participants formulate one concrete question.

For example:

Do we need a specific licence to provide this service?

What legal form would be appropriate for our organisation?

Can we use these photographs in our campaign?

What personal data will we collect from users?

Do we need consent, or another lawful basis, to process this information?

This stage is important because it teaches participants to recognise a legal question before attempting to find an answer.

Step 4 – Find Reliable Sources

Participants use official sources such as Your Europe, the European Commission, EUIPO/EU IP Helpdesk and their relevant national authorities to investigate their questions. The youth worker should explicitly discourage participants from relying on random social media posts, unverified blogs or AI-generated answers as their final legal source. For country-specific questions, participants should check the relevant national authority because EU rules do not eliminate national differences.

Do we need consent, or another lawful basis, to process this information?

This stage is important because it teaches participants to recognise a legal question before attempting to find an answer.

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Participants use official sources such as Your Europe, the European Commission, EUIPO/EU IP Helpdesk and their relevant national authorities to investigate their questions.

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Step 5 – Separate EU Rules from National Rules

Participants classify their findings into:

EU-level framework

National requirement

Needs professional advice / further verification

This is an important step because many legal topics involve both EU legislation and national implementation.

Step 6 – Identify Compliance Actions

For each issue, participants write down what the initiative would need to do.

For example:

Check whether registration is required.

Prepare appropriate privacy information.

Verify ownership or licensing of creative content.

Check whether a sector-specific permit is required.

The objective is to transform legal awareness into practical planning.



Step 7 – Present the Legal Check

Each group presents its initiative and the three most important legal issues it identified.

The youth worker asks:

Which issue could create the greatest risk if ignored?

Which issue can we investigate ourselves?

Where would we need professional advice?

Reflection

Participants discuss:

Did we initially underestimate any legal issue?

Was it easy to identify reliable information?

Why can we not assume that rules are identical across EU countries?

When should an entrepreneur stop researching independently and consult a professional?

The activity reinforces the idea that legal awareness is part of responsible entrepreneurial planning.

Youth Activity 2: “IP & Data Protection Challenge”

Objective:

To help young people recognise common intellectual property and data protection risks in digital social entrepreneurship.

Duration: 60–75 minutes

Group size: 8–24 participants

Method: Scenario analysis, problem-solving and compliance planning

Step 1 – Present the Scenario

The youth worker gives participants the following scenario:

A youth-led social enterprise is preparing to launch a website and social media campaign. The team has created a logo, collected photographs from its activities, prepared an online registration form and plans to send a newsletter to participants. The group is told that the initiative wants to launch the campaign next week.

Step 2 – Identify Potential Risks

Participants examine the scenario and identify everything that could potentially raise an IP or data protection question.

They might identify:

Logo ownership

Photographs of participants

Use of third-party images or music

Personal information in the registration form

Email addresses for newsletters

Storage of participant data

Access to the database

Step 7 – Present the Legal Check

Each group presents its initiative and the three most important legal issues it identified.

The youth worker asks:

Which issue could create the greatest risk if ignored?

Which issue can we investigate ourselves?

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Reflection

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Participants examine the scenario and identify everything that could potentially raise an IP or data protection question.

They might identify:

Logo ownership

Photographs of participants

Use of third-party images or music

Personal information in the registration form

Email addresses for newsletters

Storage of participant data

Access to the database

The youth worker should not immediately confirm whether each issue represents an actual legal violation. The objective is to teach participants to identify questions requiring verification.

Step 3 – Investigate the IP Issues

Participants examine the creative-content elements.

They ask:

Who created the content?

Who owns the rights?

Are we using someone else's work?

Do we have permission or an appropriate licence?

Are there restrictions on how the material can be used?

The youth worker can introduce the basic distinction between ownership, permission and licensing and explain that copyright questions can depend on the specific work and circumstances. EUIPO notes that copyright is generally granted automatically to creators of original works and that national systems remain relevant despite EU harmonisation.

Step 4 – Investigate the Data Protection Issues

Participants then examine the registration form.

They identify what personal data is collected and ask:

Why is each piece of information needed?

What is the purpose of collecting it?

How will participants be informed?

How will the information be stored and protected?

Who will have access to it?

How long should it be retained?

The youth worker introduces the GDPR principle of data minimisation: organisations should process only the personal data necessary for the stated purpose.

Step 5 – Design a Safer Version

Each group modifies the fictional initiative's registration and communication process.

For example, they may decide to remove unnecessary questions from the registration form, provide clearer information about data processing, restrict database access or separate information required for participation from information intended for optional communication.

The aim is not to produce a legally complete privacy notice. It is to demonstrate how legal considerations can influence practical design decisions.

Step 6 – Compliance Decision

Each group prepares a short “Ready / Not Ready” assessment.

They must decide whether the fictional organisation is ready to launch and identify:

Two issues that must be resolved before launch.

One issue requiring further legal or professional verification.

One good practice they would introduce immediately.

Step 7 – Present and Compare

Groups present their decisions.

The youth worker compares the different approaches and highlights an important principle:

The safest entrepreneurial approach is not to ask “Can we probably do this?” but “What do we need to verify before we do this?”

Reflection

Participants discuss:

Which risk was easiest to recognise?

Which one was more difficult?

How could ignoring IP or data protection affect trust in a social enterprise?

Why is responsible compliance particularly important when working with young people or vulnerable groups?

The activity helps participants understand that compliance can be incorporated into the design of a product, service or communication campaign, rather than being treated solely as paperwork.

Additional Ideas for Youth Workers

A short “**Legal or Not?**” warm-up can be used before the main activities. The facilitator presents statements such as “*Everything online is free to use,*” “*A small organisation does not need to worry about GDPR,*” or “*A social enterprise can have any legal structure it wants in every EU country.*” Participants decide whether the statement is reliable and then explain what would need to be checked.

Another useful exercise is “**Who Should We Ask?**”. Participants receive different legal questions and decide whether the appropriate next step is to consult an official EU source, a national authority, an IP specialist, a data protection professional, an accountant or a lawyer. This develops an important competence that is often overlooked: knowing where expertise comes from. Youth workers can also create a Legal Readiness Checklist that participants revisit before developing any real youth-led initiative.

Key Reflection for Youth Workers

Legal awareness should not discourage young people from entrepreneurship. Its purpose is the opposite: it allows them to develop ideas with greater confidence, responsibility and foresight.

The most useful learning outcome is not that participants memorise specific regulations. It is that they develop the habit of asking:

What rules apply to us? → What do we need to verify? → What evidence or documentation do we need? → Who can advise us? → What should we do before launching?

Because legal requirements vary significantly according to the country, legal form and activity, youth workers should avoid presenting this chapter as a substitute for professional legal advice. The European Commission's Your Europe portal provides country-specific business information, while the Commission's official GDPR and IP resources provide reliable starting points for EU-level requirements.

The broader entrepreneurial lesson is that compliance is part of responsible innovation. A social enterprise that protects people's data, respects intellectual property, fulfils its regulatory obligations and communicates honestly is more likely to build the trust necessary for sustainable social impact.



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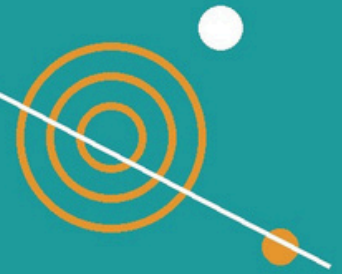
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European Commission – Company Law and Corporate Governance

European Commission. Digital Services Act – Legal Documents and Regulatory Framework.

European Commission – Digital Services Act





A social enterprise needs to achieve two objectives at the same time: it must respond effectively to a social or environmental need while maintaining sufficient economic capacity to continue operating. This makes the business model particularly important. A strong social purpose alone does not guarantee sustainability if an organisation cannot cover its costs, maintain its activities or adapt to changing circumstances.

The European Commission defines social enterprises as organisations that combine entrepreneurial activity with a social purpose and use their profits primarily to achieve social objectives. Across the European social economy, organisations operate through diverse models, including cooperatives, associations, foundations and companies. Their sustainability therefore depends on finding an appropriate relationship between mission, value creation, revenue generation, costs, resources and long-term impact. For young entrepreneurs, developing a sustainable business model means learning to ask not only *“Is this a good idea?”* but also *“How can this idea continue creating value over time?”* This chapter introduces practical approaches for answering that question.

12.1. Understanding Sustainable Business Models

A **business model** describes how an organisation creates value, delivers that value to its users or beneficiaries and generates the resources necessary to continue operating. In a social enterprise, the concept of value is broader than financial value. It can include social, environmental, community and economic value.

The European Commission emphasises that social economy organisations place people and social or environmental objectives before profit and commonly reinvest a significant share of their profits or surpluses to pursue their mission. This does not mean that financial sustainability is secondary. On the contrary, the ability to generate sufficient and predictable income is often essential for protecting the organisation's social purpose over time.

A sustainable business model therefore needs to answer several interconnected questions:

Who are we creating value for?

What problem are we addressing?

What are we offering?

How do we deliver it?

Who is willing to pay, contribute or provide resources?

What does it cost to operate?

How does the model support our social mission?

For example, a social enterprise providing employment opportunities for people experiencing exclusion might sell products produced through its activities. The customers provide revenue, while the enterprise uses that revenue to maintain employment and support services. The commercial activity is therefore connected directly to the social objective.

A business model can also combine several types of resources. An organisation might generate income through sales while also receiving grants, membership contributions, donations, public contracts or impact- oriented investment. This is particularly relevant for social enterprises because their missions may generate significant social value without always producing conventional market returns.

The OECD notes that social economy organisations often face specific financing challenges because their legal structures and social objectives can limit access to conventional finance. Tailored instruments such as patient capital, social investment funds, grant-loan combinations and public guarantees can therefore be important for their development. Young entrepreneurs should consequently understand that there is no single sustainable business model for all social enterprises. The appropriate model depends on the target group, sector, legal structure, market, social objective and available resources.

12.2. Balancing Purpose and Financial Sustainability

One of the central challenges of social entrepreneurship is maintaining a balance between social purpose and financial sustainability. A social enterprise needs financial resources to pay employees, purchase materials, maintain infrastructure, develop products, communicate with users and continue delivering its services. At the same time, excessive focus on revenue can create pressure to prioritise commercially attractive activities over the needs of the communities the organisation was created to serve. The solution is not to choose between purpose and financial sustainability. Instead, the two should be considered as interdependent dimensions of the same model.

A useful question is:

How can our economic activity strengthen rather than weaken our social mission?

For example, a social enterprise supporting unemployed young people could provide paid training services to organisations while using part of the revenue to finance free training opportunities for young people with fewer resources. The commercial activity supports the social objective rather than replacing it.

The European Commission's current social economy agenda explicitly recognises the need to improve access to finance while strengthening social entrepreneurship, skills, incubation and organisational capacity. Its 2026 mid-term review also notes that social economy organisations can face particular difficulties accessing finance because of their specific business models, lower financial returns and restrictions on profit distribution.

This is why young entrepreneurs should think carefully about the relationship between revenue and mission. A revenue stream may appear attractive but still be unsuitable if it changes the organisation's priorities or creates excessive dependence on one customer, funder or market.



A practical way to assess this relationship is to ask:

Does this activity generate income?

Does it contribute to our social or environmental objective?

Does it strengthen our relationship with beneficiaries or stakeholders?

Could it create a conflict with our mission?

Can we maintain it over the long term?

These questions encourage young entrepreneurs to assess financial opportunities not only according to their profitability but also according to their mission alignment. A sustainable social enterprise is therefore not necessarily the one that generates the highest possible profit. It is the one that can create sufficient economic value to protect and expand its social purpose over time.

12.3. Revenue, Costs and Long-Term Sustainability

These questions encourage young entrepreneurs to assess financial opportunities not only according to their profitability but also according to their mission alignment. A sustainable social enterprise is therefore not necessarily the one that generates the highest possible profit. It is the one that can create sufficient economic value to protect and expand its social purpose over time. Understanding revenue and costs is essential for determining whether a social entrepreneurship idea can realistically operate over time.

Revenue refers to the income generated by the organisation. Depending on the business model, this may come from the sale of products or services, subscriptions, memberships, licensing, public contracts, grants, donations, sponsorships or other forms of financing.

A social enterprise may deliberately combine several revenue streams. This can reduce dependence on a single source and provide greater resilience. However, diversification also creates additional management requirements, and not every revenue stream is appropriate for every organisation.

For example, a social enterprise could combine:

earned income from selling a service,

grant funding for activities that serve groups unable to pay,

and **partnership income** from organisations that benefit from the initiative.



The important question is whether these sources collectively create a model that can support the organisation's core activities. On the other side are costs. These include salaries, rent, equipment, technology, materials, insurance, transport, marketing, professional services and administrative expenses. Some costs remain relatively stable regardless of activity levels, while others increase when the organisation produces or delivers more.

Young entrepreneurs should therefore learn the basic relationship:

Revenue – Costs = Operating surplus or deficit

A positive result does not automatically mean that an organisation is financially sustainable, but persistent deficits indicate that the model needs to change unless they are intentionally covered through other secure resources. Long-term sustainability also requires considering cash flow. An organisation may have a viable business model but still experience financial difficulties if income arrives later than payments need to be made. This is particularly relevant for social enterprises relying on grants or public contracts, where reimbursement may occur after costs have already been incurred.

The European Commission's 2026 review highlights that social economy organisations may require financial instruments adapted to their particular characteristics, including longer investment horizons and financing that recognises their different risk-return profiles. Young entrepreneurs should therefore avoid evaluating an idea solely by asking whether it can eventually become profitable. They should also consider:

How much money is required to start?

How much does it cost to operate each month?

When will income be received?

What happens if one revenue source disappears?

How much financial capacity is needed to continue operating during difficult periods?

This introduces the concept of financial resilience. A sustainable organisation needs not only income, but the ability to withstand changes in demand, unexpected costs or temporary funding gaps.

Long-term sustainability can also involve scaling carefully. Growth is not always the objective. A social enterprise may choose to expand its activities, replicate its model in another community, license its approach, develop partnerships or remain relatively small while maintaining strong local impact.

The OECD and European Commission's 2025 Social Economy in Europe report illustrates the scale and diversity of the European social economy, which generated more than €912 billion in turnover and employed around 6.3% of the EU workforce. These figures demonstrate that social purpose and economic activity can coexist at significant scale, while also showing the diversity of models through which this can happen.

12.4. Practical Tools and Youth Activity

The following tools and activities help young people move from a social entrepreneurship idea towards a basic **financially and socially sustainable business model**.

Tool: The Sustainable Business Model Canvas

Youth workers can introduce a simplified canvas that participants complete for their own initiative.

Business Model Element	Guiding Question
Social Problem	What social or environmental challenge are we addressing?
Target Group	Who benefits from our initiative?
Value Proposition	What value do we provide?
Product/Service	What exactly are we offering?
Customers/Payers	Who will actually pay for it?
Revenue Streams	Where will our income come from?
Key Costs	What will we need to pay for?
Key Partners	Who can help us deliver the model?
Social Impact	What positive change do we expect to create?
Mission Alignment	How does the business activity support our purpose?

Mission Alignment

The youth worker should emphasise one particularly important distinction:

The beneficiary and the customer are not always the same person.

For example, young people may receive free training while an employer, municipality or another organisation pays for the service. Recognising this distinction can help participants identify realistic revenue models without compromising accessibility.

Youth Activity 1: “Build a Sustainable Business Model”

Objective:

To help young people transform a social entrepreneurship idea into a basic business model that connects social purpose with revenue and cost structures.

Duration: 75–90 minutes

Group size: 8–24 participants

Method: Group work, business modelling and peer feedback

Step 1 – Define the Social Purpose

Each group selects a social or environmental challenge and writes a one-sentence mission statement:

“We aim to improve _____ for _____ by _____.”

The statement should identify both the problem and the intended beneficiaries.

Step 2 – Define the Value Proposition

Participants describe what their initiative will actually provide.

They should answer:

What are we offering?

Why would people need it?

What makes our approach useful or different?

The youth worker encourages participants to avoid vague descriptions such as “we will help young people” and instead define a concrete service, product or intervention.

Step 3 – Identify Beneficiaries and Customers

Participants identify who benefits from the initiative and separately consider who might pay.

For example:

Beneficiary: unemployed young people

Customer/Payer: local companies or public organisations

This distinction helps participants understand the economic logic of social enterprises.

Step 4 – Develop Revenue Streams

Groups brainstorm possible sources of income.

They consider whether the initiative could generate revenue through:

Sales, subscriptions, service contracts, membership fees, licensing, partnerships, grants or a combination of sources. They then select the two most realistic sources and explain why.

Step 5 – Identify Costs

Participants list the main resources required to operate the initiative.

They should consider:

People, materials, technology, premises, transport, communication and administration.

They do not need to produce a detailed accounting budget. The objective is to understand the basic cost structure.

Step 6 – Test the Model

Each group asks:

If our main source of income disappeared, could we continue operating?

If the answer is no, the group considers whether another revenue stream, partnership or cost adjustment could make the model more resilient.

Step 7 – Check Mission Alignment

Participants return to their original mission and ask:

Could our business activity ever conflict with our social purpose?

If they identify a potential conflict, they propose a safeguard.

Step 8 – Peer Review

Groups exchange their canvases.

Each group provides feedback using three criteria:

Mission clarity – Financial realism – Long-term sustainability

Reflection

The youth worker asks:

Who creates value in our model?

Who pays for that value?

What costs are essential?

Which assumption would be most dangerous if it proved wrong?

This helps participants understand that a sustainable business model is based on connected assumptions that need to be tested, rather than simply a list of activities.

Youth Activity 2: “The Sustainability Challenge”

Objective:

To help young people test the resilience of a social enterprise when its financial or operational circumstances change.

Duration: 60–75 minutes

Group size: 12–30 participants

Method: Simulation, decision-making and reflection

Step 1 – Present the Business Model

Each group receives a fictional social enterprise or uses the model developed in Activity 1.

They are given a simplified financial situation showing:

Monthly revenue

Main monthly costs

Number of beneficiaries

Main revenue source

The objective is to understand the starting position before introducing changes.

Step 2 – Introduce a Challenge

The youth worker gives each group a different scenario.

For example:

A major funder reduces its contribution by 40%.

or:

The cost of a key material increases by 25%.

or:

Demand for the service falls unexpectedly.

or:

The organisation receives an opportunity to expand but would need additional staff and equipment.

Step 3 – Analyse the Impact

Groups discuss what the change means for their organisation.

They identify:

What income is affected?

Which costs remain unavoidable?

Which activities could be affected?

Who could be impacted by the decision?

Step 4 – Develop Three Responses

Each group must develop three possible responses:

Reduce costs

Increase or diversify revenue

Adapt the business model

They should not immediately choose the easiest solution. Instead, they consider the consequences of each option for both financial sustainability and social impact.

Step 5 – Protect the Mission

The youth worker introduces an additional rule:

The solution cannot eliminate the core social purpose of the organisation.

Groups must therefore decide which elements of their initiative are essential to the mission and which could be modified.

This introduces the idea of mission protection during periods of financial pressure.

Step 6 – Make the Decision

Each group chooses one strategy and explains:

Why did we choose it?

What financial problem does it address?

What risks does it create?

How does it protect our social mission?

Step 7 – Introduce a Second Change

The youth worker introduces another unexpected development.

For example:

A new organisation enters the market offering a similar service at a lower price.

Groups have five minutes to reconsider their strategy.

This demonstrates that sustainability is not a one-time calculation. Organisations need to monitor their environment and adapt continuously.

Step 8 – Final Pitch

Each group presents its revised model in three minutes.

The other participants evaluate it according to:

Financial resilience – Mission protection – Adaptability

Reflection

The youth worker asks:

Did we protect our mission or compromise it?

Which revenue source proved most reliable?

What would make our model more resilient?

When does growth become too risky?



What information would we need before making a real decision?

The final question is particularly important: good entrepreneurial decision-making depends on **evidence rather than assumptions**.

Additional Ideas for Youth Workers

A short **“Revenue Mix Challenge”** can ask participants to design three different revenue structures for the same social enterprise: one mainly market-based, one mainly grant-based and one mixed. They then compare the advantages and risks of each model.

Another useful exercise is **“Mission or Money?”**, where participants receive difficult scenarios—for example, accepting a highly profitable client whose activities conflict with the organisation's values—and discuss how they would make the decision.

Youth workers can also introduce a simple Sustainability Dashboard with five indicators: Monthly revenue, monthly costs, cash available, revenue diversity and social impact. Participants can use the dashboard periodically to understand that financial sustainability and social impact should be monitored together rather than treated as separate objectives.

Key Reflection for Youth Workers

A sustainable social enterprise is not defined simply by whether it makes a profit. Its sustainability depends on whether it can continue creating social or environmental value while maintaining the economic and organisational capacity required to operate.

For young entrepreneurs, the most useful mindset is therefore:

Purpose → Value → Revenue → Costs → Resilience → Impact

The European Commission's current social economy agenda places particular emphasis on improving access to finance, strengthening entrepreneurship and organisational capacity, and developing financial instruments that are better adapted to the characteristics of social economy organisations.

Youth workers can use this chapter to help young people understand that financial sustainability is not opposed to social purpose. When designed carefully, economic activity can become the mechanism that allows social impact to continue, grow and become more resilient over time.

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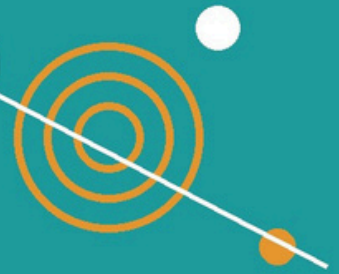
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Ethics is a central dimension of social entrepreneurship because social enterprises are created to address social, environmental or community needs. Their legitimacy therefore depends not only on whether they achieve financial or operational results, but also on how they create value, how they treat people and how responsibly they manage their impact. The European Commission describes the social economy through principles such as the primacy of people and social or environmental purpose over profit, the reinvestment of profits or surpluses, and participatory or democratic governance.

For young entrepreneurs, ethical entrepreneurship means learning to consider the consequences of decisions before acting. An initiative can have a positive objective and still create unintended negative effects—for example, by excluding certain groups, misusing personal data, making misleading environmental claims, exploiting workers or prioritising growth over the people it intends to support. Ethical thinking therefore needs to be integrated into the design, management and evaluation of a social enterprise rather than treated as an additional principle after the business model has been developed.

13.1. Ethics and Social Responsibility

Ethics in social entrepreneurship concerns the principles used to determine what an organisation should do, while social responsibility concerns how an organisation takes responsibility for the effects of its decisions and activities. For a social enterprise, this distinction is particularly important because its mission itself creates expectations. An organisation that claims to promote inclusion, for example, should consider whether its recruitment practices, pricing, accessibility and internal culture are consistent with that objective. Similarly, an organisation presenting itself as environmentally responsible should examine the actual environmental consequences of its products, operations and supply chain.

The European Commission connects responsible business conduct with the integration of social, environmental and ethical considerations into business decisions and operations, including areas such as human rights, working conditions, environmental protection and anti-corruption. This means that social responsibility should extend beyond the direct beneficiaries of a social enterprise. Young entrepreneurs should also consider employees, volunteers, suppliers, customers, communities and other stakeholders who may be affected by the organisation's activities.

A useful starting point is to ask:

- Who could be affected by our decision?
- Could anyone experience harm or exclusion?
- Are we treating stakeholders fairly?
- Are we communicating honestly?
- Are our actions consistent with our stated values?

Ethical decision-making also requires recognising that good intentions are not sufficient. An entrepreneur may genuinely want to create positive impact but still make decisions based on incomplete information or assumptions. This is why responsible entrepreneurship requires reflection, stakeholder engagement and evidence.

The OECD's responsible business conduct framework places particular emphasis on identifying and addressing actual and potential adverse impacts on people, the environment and society. Its due-diligence approach involves embedding responsible conduct into organisational systems, identifying impacts, preventing or mitigating them, tracking results, communicating actions and contributing to remediation where appropriate. For young entrepreneurs, this provides a practical way to understand ethics: do not only ask what positive impact you want to create; also ask what negative impacts your organisation could create and how you can prevent them.

13.2. Balancing Profit, Purpose and Impact

One of the most common ethical questions in social entrepreneurship concerns the relationship between financial sustainability and social purpose.

Social enterprises need resources to operate. They may need to generate revenue, attract investment, pay employees and achieve financial stability. However, financial performance should not undermine the purpose for which the organisation exists.

The European Commission defines a social enterprise primarily through its social impact objective rather than profit maximisation for owners or shareholders. This creates an important principle for young entrepreneurs: profit can support social impact, but profit alone does not define social entrepreneurship.

The tension can become more complicated as an organisation grows. A social enterprise may face a decision between accepting a highly profitable commercial opportunity and protecting access for the people it was created to serve. For example, an affordable service for low-income users may become more profitable if prices are increased, but this could simultaneously reduce access for the target group.

There is no universal formula for resolving such dilemmas. Instead, entrepreneurs need a clear mission and decision-making framework. A useful approach is to examine major decisions through three questions:

Financial sustainability:

Will this decision strengthen the organisation's ability to operate?

Social purpose:

Does it support the people or problem the organisation exists to address?

Impact:

What positive and negative consequences could result?

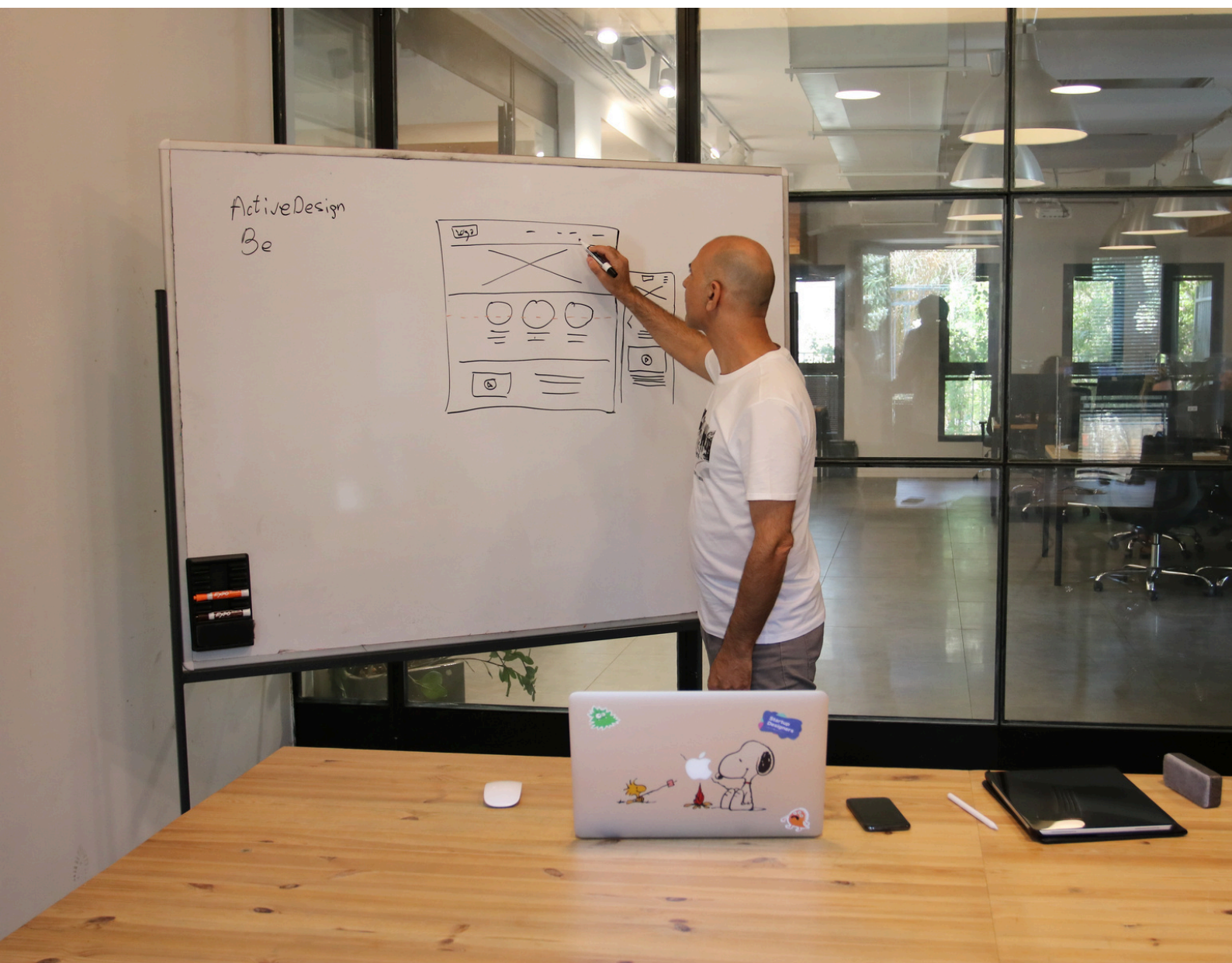


The three dimensions should be considered together. A decision that is financially attractive but significantly damages the organisation's social purpose may not be sustainable in the broader sense. Conversely, an initiative that creates substantial social value but has no realistic way of maintaining its activities may also struggle to produce long-term impact.

Ethical entrepreneurship therefore requires mission alignment. Young entrepreneurs should establish their values and non-negotiable principles before difficult decisions arise. These principles can then guide choices concerning customers, investors, suppliers, pricing, partnerships, employees and growth.

Another important consideration is transparency. If an organisation claims to create particular social or environmental benefits, it should be able to explain what those claims mean and what evidence supports them. This is especially relevant as consumers and investors increasingly encounter sustainability claims and labels.

The OECD warns that sustainability initiatives and certifications can support responsible business conduct but should not be treated automatically as proof that an organisation is responsible or sustainable. The objective is therefore not to eliminate the tension between purpose and profit. Rather, young entrepreneurs should learn to recognise the tension, make it visible and manage it consciously.



13.3. Ethical Dilemmas and Responsible Entrepreneurship

Ethical dilemmas occur when an entrepreneur must choose between alternatives that involve competing values or interests. These situations are particularly relevant to social enterprises because decisions can affect multiple stakeholder groups differently.

Consider a social enterprise developing an employment programme for young people. A private company offers substantial funding, but its employment practices are controversial. Accepting the funding could allow the social enterprise to support more young people, but it could also create reputational risks and conflict with its values.

There is no simple technical answer. The entrepreneur must consider the source of the funding, the potential consequences, the relationship with the funder and whether accepting the partnership would undermine the organisation's principles.

Other common dilemmas can involve affordability versus financial sustainability, speed versus inclusion, growth versus quality, data collection versus privacy, innovation versus safety, and environmental claims versus commercial pressure. A useful ethical decision-making process can help young entrepreneurs approach these situations systematically.

Step 1 – Identify the decision

Clearly describe what needs to be decided and avoid framing the issue too narrowly.

Step 2 – Identify the stakeholders

Consider who may benefit, who may be disadvantaged and who has an interest in the decision.

Step 3 – Identify the values involved

Ask which principles are relevant: fairness, inclusion, autonomy, transparency, privacy, sustainability, safety, dignity or accountability.

Step 4 – Examine consequences

Consider both **intended and unintended consequences**. A decision that produces a positive outcome for one group may create costs or risks for another.

Step 5 – Consider alternatives

Ethical dilemmas are not always limited to two choices. A third option may exist that protects the core purpose while reducing the negative consequences.

Step 6 – Decide, document and review

The organisation should be able to explain why it made the decision and should review its consequences afterwards. This process is consistent with the OECD's risk-based approach to responsible business conduct, which emphasises identifying actual and potential adverse impacts and taking appropriate measures to prevent or mitigate them. Importantly, due diligence is not based on an expectation that organisations can eliminate every risk; it is about **prioritising significant risks and taking meaningful action**. Ethical considerations are also increasingly relevant to technology-based entrepreneurship. For example, the EU AI Act follows a risk-based approach and includes requirements concerning fundamental rights and

transparency. From 2 August 2026, Article 50 transparency obligations apply to certain AI systems, including requirements concerning interactions with AI and certain AI-generated or manipulated content. For young social entrepreneurs, the broader lesson is that innovation does not remove ethical responsibility. Using AI, collecting data or introducing a new digital service may create opportunities, but entrepreneurs remain responsible for considering risks to users and affected communities.

13.4. Practical Strategies and Youth Activity

Ethics can sometimes feel abstract to young people if it is presented only through definitions and principles. The following activities therefore use realistic entrepreneurial situations in which participants must make decisions, consider different stakeholders and justify their choices.

Practical Tool: The Ethical Decision-Making Canvas

Before implementing an important decision, young entrepreneurs can use a simple five-stage framework:

What is the responsible option?

The canvas can be used alongside the business model and impact tools developed in earlier chapters.

Question	Guiding Prompt
What is the decision?	What exactly are we deciding?
Who is affected?	Who benefits, who may lose and who may be excluded?
What values are involved? What could go wrong?	Which ethical principles are relevant?
What is the responsible option?	What negative or unintended consequences could occur?
	Which option best protects our purpose and stakeholders?



Youth Activity 1: “The Ethical Dilemma Challenge”

Objective:

To help young people practise ethical decision-making by analysing realistic situations involving competing interests.

Duration: 60–75 minutes

Group size: 8–24 participants

Method: Scenario analysis, group discussion and decision-making

Step 1 – Introduce the Scenario

The youth worker presents a fictional situation:

A young social enterprise provides free digital-skills training to disadvantaged young people. A technology company offers €15,000 to support the programme. However, the company asks the organisation to give it access to participant data for marketing purposes. The group is told that the funding would allow the social enterprise to double the number of participants.

Step 2 – Identify the Stakeholders

Participants identify everyone affected:

Young participants

Social enterprise

Technology company

Youth workers

Funders

Wider community

They discuss what each stakeholder wants and what risks each may face.

Step 3 – Identify the Ethical Conflict

Participants identify the competing values.

For example:

Financial sustainability vs. privacy

Greater reach vs. protection of participants

Partnership opportunities vs. organisational independence

Step 4 – Develop Possible

Responses

Each group must develop at least three options.

For example:

- Accept the funding and the data request.
- Reject the funding completely.
- Negotiate a different agreement in which the company provides funding without access to personal data.

The youth worker encourages participants to look for alternatives rather than assuming that the dilemma has only two possible answers.

Step 5 – Evaluate the Consequences

For each option, participants consider:

Who benefits?

Who could be harmed?

What happens in the short term?

What happens in the long term?

Would this decision be consistent with our mission?

Step 6 – Make the Decision

Each group selects the option it considers most responsible and prepares a short justification.

The objective is not to find a single “correct” answer. Participants should demonstrate that they have considered the relevant stakeholders, values and consequences.

Step 7 – Challenge the Decision

The youth worker introduces an additional piece of information:

The social enterprise has only enough money to continue operating for three months.

Groups are asked whether this changes their decision.

This step demonstrates that ethical decision-making often takes place under real financial and operational pressure.

Reflection

Participants discuss:

Did the new information change our values or only our decision?

Is an ethical decision always the easiest decision?

Can an organisation protect its values while remaining financially sustainable?

What principles would we refuse to compromise?

Youth Activity 2: “Purpose, Profit or Impact?”

Objective:

To help young people understand the relationship between financial performance, social purpose and impact.

Duration: 60–90 minutes

Group size: 12–30 participants

Method: Simulation, stakeholder negotiation and reflection

Step 1 – Present the Social Enterprise

The youth worker introduces a fictional social enterprise that produces sustainable clothing while providing

employment opportunities for young people experiencing barriers to the labour market.

The organisation has received two opportunities:

Option A: A large commercial contract that would substantially increase revenue but requires cheaper materials and lower prices.

Option B: A smaller contract that generates less revenue but allows the organisation to maintain its current environmental and employment standards.

Step 2 – Assign Stakeholder Roles

Participants are divided into stakeholder groups:

Founders/management

Young employees

Customers

Impact investors

Environmental organisation

Commercial partner

Each group receives a short description of its priorities.

Step 3 – Examine the Two Options

Participants analyse:

Financial consequences

Social consequences

Environmental consequences

Reputational consequences

Long-term consequences

They should distinguish between immediate benefits and potential longer-term effects.

Step 4 – Stakeholder Negotiation

The groups meet to discuss the options.

Each stakeholder must explain:

What matters most to us?

What are we willing to compromise on?

What would we consider unacceptable?

The objective is to reach a decision while recognising that different stakeholders may have legitimate but conflicting priorities.

Step 5 – Introduce a Third Option

After the initial discussion, the youth worker asks:

Can you redesign the proposal instead of simply choosing A or B?

Participants may propose a smaller version of the commercial contract, negotiate different environmental requirements, seek additional funding or introduce a phased approach. This encourages **ethical creativity**: finding solutions that reduce the conflict rather than simply choosing one side.

Step 6 – Make the Final Decision

The group agrees on a final strategy and prepares a short statement explaining:

Why the decision supports the mission

How financial sustainability will be maintained

How social and environmental impact will be protected

What safeguards will be introduced

Step 7 – Reflection

The youth worker asks:

Did financial sustainability influence our decision?

Did the social mission influence it?

Which stakeholder had the strongest argument?

What would happen if the organisation grew significantly?

Would our decision still be ethical if nobody was watching?

The final question introduces the idea of **integrity**: ethical behaviour should not depend solely on external monitoring or reputation.

Additional Ideas for Youth Workers

A short “Ethical Red Flags” exercise can be used to help participants recognise warning signs in entrepreneurial decisions. The facilitator presents statements such as:

“Everyone uses these images online, so we can use them too.”

“We don't need to tell users that AI generated this content.”

“The environmental claim will help sales, even though we don't have much evidence.”

“The supplier is cheaper, so we don't need to ask how the products are made.”

Participants identify what needs to be investigated before the decision is taken.

Another useful activity is “Values Under Pressure”, where participants create five principles they would want their social enterprise never to compromise. They then receive different business scenarios and decide whether each principle should remain non-negotiable or whether a compromise is possible.

Youth workers can also introduce a simple Ethical Impact Check before major activities:

Who benefits? → Who could be excluded? → What could go wrong? → What evidence do we have?

→ What safeguard can we introduce?

Key Reflection for Youth Workers

Ethical entrepreneurship is not about creating an organisation that never faces difficult choices. It is about developing the capacity to recognise ethical tensions, consider different perspectives and make decisions that remain consistent with the organisation's purpose and responsibilities.

For young entrepreneurs, a responsible approach can be summarised as:

Know your values → Identify stakeholders → Assess risks → Consider alternatives → Decide transparently → Monitor consequences → Learn and adapt.

This approach is closely aligned with contemporary responsible business conduct frameworks. The OECD's current guidance emphasises that businesses should identify and address adverse impacts on people, the environment and society and should integrate responsible conduct into their policies and management systems.

It is also increasingly relevant to social entrepreneurs working with digital technologies. The EU's current AI framework demonstrates how ethical questions around transparency, fundamental rights, safety and responsible use are becoming increasingly connected with entrepreneurial activity.

Ultimately, the credibility of a social enterprise depends on the relationship between what it says, what it does and the consequences of what it does. Young entrepreneurs should therefore understand ethics not as a theoretical subject, but as a practical tool for building organisations that are trustworthy, responsible and capable of creating lasting social value.



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The previous chapters of the *Youth Workers' Playbook* have explored different dimensions of social entrepreneurship, from emerging trends and design thinking to technology, branding, storytelling, impact measurement, funding, collaboration, leadership, legal awareness, sustainable business models and ethics. Although each topic can be explored independently, their greatest value emerges when they are understood as interconnected elements of a broader entrepreneurial process.

For young people, entrepreneurship is not simply about developing an idea or creating a business. It is a process of identifying opportunities, understanding needs, mobilising resources, taking action and learning from experience. In social entrepreneurship, this process is further connected to the objective of creating meaningful social or environmental value. The final chapter brings the key concepts of the Playbook together and translates them into a practical pathway that youth workers can use to support young people from their first idea towards responsible action.

14.1. Connecting the Playbook's Key Concepts

The topics presented throughout the Playbook should not be viewed as twelve separate areas of knowledge. They represent different components of the same entrepreneurial journey.

The process can begin with **understanding change**. Emerging developments in technology, sustainability and society can help young people identify new opportunities, but these trends become meaningful only when connected to real social or environmental needs. From there, young people can use **design thinking** to understand a challenge, explore different perspectives and develop possible solutions. Technology can then support the implementation and scaling of an idea, while a **purpose-driven brand and effective storytelling** can help communicate its mission and connect it with users, partners and communities.

As an initiative develops, young entrepreneurs also need to understand whether they are actually creating value. **Impact measurement** helps them identify what they want to change and how they can recognise progress. At the same time, they need to consider how the initiative will obtain the resources required to operate. Funding strategies and sustainable business models therefore become connected to the wider question of long-term viability.

Collaboration and youth leadership strengthen this process further. Young entrepreneurs rarely have all the knowledge, skills or resources required to address a complex social challenge alone. Building partnerships and networks can provide access to expertise, communities, infrastructure and opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable. Finally, an initiative needs to operate responsibly. **Legal awareness, ethical decision-making and financial sustainability** help young entrepreneurs ensure that the process of creating social value does not generate avoidable risks or undermine the purpose of the initiative.

The overall learning journey can therefore be understood as:

Understand change → Identify a need → Design a solution → Use appropriate technology → Communicate purpose → Measure impact → Mobilise resources → Collaborate → Lead → Ensure compliance → Build sustainability → Act ethically.

These stages are not necessarily linear. An entrepreneur may return to an earlier stage after receiving feedback, discovering a new challenge or realising that an assumption was incorrect. This cyclical process of action, reflection and adaptation is an important part of entrepreneurial learning. The purpose of the Playbook is therefore not to provide young people with a fixed formula for creating a social enterprise. Instead, it provides knowledge, tools and learning experiences that can help them navigate this process more confidently and responsibly.

14.2. Supporting Young People from Idea to Action

Moving from an initial idea to meaningful action is one of the most important transitions in youth entrepreneurship. Young people may recognise a social or environmental problem and develop creative solutions, but this does not automatically mean that they know how to test an idea, mobilise resources, manage uncertainty or take the first practical step. The role of the youth worker is therefore to provide structure without taking ownership of the process away from young people.

The *Youth Workers' Playbook* presents entrepreneurship as a process in which knowledge should progressively lead to exploration, experimentation, decision-making and action. The youth worker can support this progression by connecting the different competences developed throughout the Playbook. A young person who identifies a community challenge, for example, may first need design thinking to understand the problem, digital skills to explore possible solutions, communication skills to present the idea, impact measurement to define the expected change, funding knowledge to identify resources and legal and ethical awareness before implementation. The different chapters therefore become most useful when they are applied together to a real initiative.

The EntreComp framework provides a useful European reference for this process by organising entrepreneurial competence around three areas: Ideas and Opportunities, Resources, and Into Action. Entrepreneurship is understood not simply as business creation, but as the ability to act upon opportunities and ideas in order to create value for others, including social and cultural value. (joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu)



For youth workers, this can be translated into a practical support approach. At the Ideas and Opportunities stage, young people can be encouraged to observe their communities, identify emerging trends and investigate problems rather than immediately selecting a business idea. At the Resources stage, they can explore the skills, people, partnerships, technologies, funding and other resources required to develop their response. Finally, the Into Action stage requires them to make decisions, organise activities, test assumptions and take responsibility for implementation. EntreComp's learning progression also emphasises the gradual development of autonomy, meaning that young people should progressively move from supported participation towards taking greater responsibility for their own entrepreneurial actions. (joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu)

This progression is particularly important in social entrepreneurship because action does not necessarily mean launching a fully developed social enterprise. A first action may be a short interview with potential beneficiaries, a prototype, a pilot workshop, a community campaign, a digital test or a conversation with a potential partner. These smaller actions allow young people to collect evidence, receive feedback and revise their assumptions before committing significant time or resources.

The youth worker should therefore help young people distinguish between having an idea and having something worth testing. Instead of asking only “Is this a good idea?”, participants can be encouraged to ask “What assumption are we making?”, “How can we test it?”, “What evidence would change our thinking?” and “What is the smallest action we can take to learn more?” This approach makes entrepreneurship more practical and reduces the pressure to develop a perfect solution from the beginning. Support should also change as the young person's confidence increases.

At the beginning, the youth worker may provide examples, questions, tools and closer guidance. As the initiative develops, the young people should increasingly decide what problem to address, which solution to test, whom to involve and how to respond to feedback. The objective is not for the youth worker to successfully manage a youth initiative, but for young people to gradually become capable of managing it themselves.

A useful principle for the final stage of the Playbook is therefore:
Support the process, not the outcome. Give young people enough structure to move forward, but enough autonomy to make the journey their own.



14.3. Designing a Youth Entrepreneurship Support Journey

The content of the Playbook can be translated into a practical Youth Entrepreneurship Support Journey that youth workers can use when accompanying young people through the development of a social entrepreneurship idea. Rather than treating the journey as a fixed programme with identical steps for every participant, it should be understood as a flexible pathway in which young people can move forward, return to earlier stages and adapt their approach as they learn.

The journey begins with Explore. At this point, the youth worker creates opportunities for young people to examine their interests, experiences, communities and emerging developments. The purpose is to identify areas that matter to them and to develop awareness of social, environmental, technological and economic changes. The questions are simple: What matters to us? What is changing? What challenges do we notice around us? The activities in Chapters 2 and 10 are particularly relevant at this stage because they connect emerging trends with youth initiative and leadership.

The second stage is Identify. Young people select a specific challenge and investigate it more carefully. Instead of assuming that they already understand the problem, they explore who is affected, what their needs may be and what existing responses are available. This is where the principles of design thinking become particularly useful. The aim is to move from a broad concern to a clearly defined problem that can realistically be addressed.

The third stage is Create. Participants generate possible responses and consider how technology, sustainability, collaboration and entrepreneurial approaches could contribute to a solution. At this point, the youth worker should encourage alternatives rather than allowing the group to become attached to its first idea. A strong idea is not necessarily the most technologically advanced or commercially attractive one; it is one that responds meaningfully to the problem identified.

The fourth stage, Validate, brings the idea into contact with reality. Young people can speak with potential users, test assumptions, create a prototype, run a small activity or gather initial feedback. This stage is essential because it prevents participants from developing an elaborate solution based entirely on assumptions. Feedback may confirm the idea, reveal a different need or demonstrate that the proposed solution needs to change. Returning to an earlier stage at this point should be treated as a normal part of the process rather than as failure.

Once an idea has sufficient initial evidence behind it, participants can move to Build. Here, the different components explored throughout the Playbook begin to connect. Young people can define their mission and values, develop a purpose-driven brand, consider storytelling and communication, identify stakeholders and partnerships, examine funding options and develop a sustainable business model. At the same time, they begin thinking more systematically about how social, environmental and economic impact will be created and measured.

The next stage is Prepare, where the initiative is examined from a responsibility perspective. Before implementation, young people should consider the legal and regulatory requirements relevant to their specific activity and country, intellectual property, data protection, financial risks and ethical implications. This stage does not require young entrepreneurs to become legal or financial experts. It requires them to recognise what needs to be checked and when specialist advice may be necessary. In parallel, they should identify the practical resources, roles and partnerships required for implementation.

The seventh stage is Act. The objective is to move beyond planning and take a realistic first step. This might involve delivering a pilot activity, launching a minimum viable version of a service, testing a product, approaching a potential partner, applying for funding or implementing a small community intervention. The emphasis should remain on manageable action. A young person does not need to launch a complete social enterprise immediately in order to demonstrate entrepreneurial competence.

The final stage is Learn and Adapt. Participants review what happened, examine the feedback they received and compare their results with their original assumptions and objectives. They can ask: What worked? What did not? What surprised us? What impact did we create? What should change? This stage connects directly back to the beginning of the journey because new information may lead to a new understanding of the problem or to a completely different solution.

The complete pathway can therefore be represented as:

EXPLORE → IDENTIFY → CREATE → VALIDATE → BUILD → PREPARE → ACT → LEARN & ADAPT

The important point is that this is not a linear checklist. A group may move from Validate back to Identify, from Build back to Create, or from Act back to Validate. The youth worker's role is to recognise where the young people are in their journey and provide the appropriate support at that moment.

This also provides a useful way of applying the entire Playbook. Chapters 2–3 support exploration and problem identification; Chapters 4–6 support solution development and communication; Chapters 7–8 support impact and resource mobilisation; Chapters 9–10 strengthen collaboration and youth leadership; Chapters 11–13 support responsible, sustainable and ethical implementation. The final chapter therefore brings the Playbook full circle: its individual themes become tools that can be selected according to the needs of a real youth-led initiative.

For youth workers, the central question throughout the journey should not be “Have the young people completed every step?” but rather:

“What does this young person or group need now to move one meaningful step closer to action?”

That question keeps the process youth-centred, flexible and practical, while ensuring that the knowledge developed throughout the Playbook is ultimately transformed into initiative, experimentation, learning and social impact.

14.4. Final Reflection for Youth Workers

The Youth Workers' Playbook has explored a wide range of knowledge and practical approaches, but its ultimate purpose is not to encourage young people simply to learn more about social entrepreneurship.

Its purpose is to help them become more capable of acting.

A young person may understand social entrepreneurship, know how a business model works and have an excellent idea, but still need encouragement to take the first step. Another young person may already be highly motivated but require support to structure their thinking, assess risks or work effectively with others.

This is where the role of the youth worker becomes particularly important.

Youth workers can create environments in which young people feel able to question, experiment, make decisions, fail safely, receive feedback and try again. They can help participants recognise their own strengths while also identifying areas where they need additional knowledge or support.

The role is therefore not to create entrepreneurs according to a predefined model. It is to help young people develop the capacity to make informed choices about whether, why and how they want to create value.

A useful final reflection for youth workers is to consider the following questions:

Are young people making meaningful decisions, or are we making the decisions for them?

Are we giving them opportunities to test real ideas rather than only discussing hypothetical ones?

Are we allowing space for mistakes and learning?

Are we helping them connect entrepreneurial ideas with genuine social or environmental needs?

Are we encouraging collaboration rather than individual competition?



Are we helping them understand both opportunities and responsibilities?

Are we gradually transferring responsibility from the youth worker to the young people themselves?

These questions can help youth workers evaluate not only what they teach, but how they create the conditions for youth agency.

The entrepreneurial journey is rarely linear. Ideas change, assumptions are challenged, partnerships develop in unexpected ways and some approaches fail. This should not be understood as a weakness of the process. It is part of entrepreneurial learning.

The EntreComp framework similarly presents entrepreneurial competence as something that develops progressively, with learners moving towards increasing levels of autonomy and responsibility in transforming ideas into action. (joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu)

For this reason, the most valuable outcome of using the Youth Workers' Playbook may not necessarily be the creation of a successful social enterprise. It may be a young person who becomes more confident in identifying opportunities, more capable of evaluating information, more willing to collaborate, more aware of their responsibilities and more prepared to take meaningful action.

Ultimately, the role of the youth worker is not to provide young people with all the answers. It is to create the conditions in which young people can ask better questions, explore opportunities, make informed decisions and take meaningful action. From knowledge to action. From action to learning. From learning to meaningful social change.

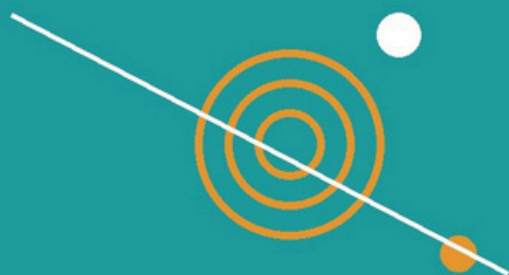
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The *Youth Workers' Playbook* has explored the main knowledge, competences and practical approaches that can support young people in developing socially responsible entrepreneurial ideas. From understanding emerging trends and identifying social challenges to designing solutions, building sustainable models, measuring impact and considering ethical and legal responsibilities, the Playbook presents entrepreneurship as a process that combines creativity, initiative, responsibility and continuous learning.

The different topics should not be understood as isolated areas of knowledge. They form a connected pathway through which young people can move from recognising a challenge to developing an idea, testing it, mobilising resources, collaborating with others and taking meaningful action. The ultimate objective is not simply to encourage young people to create businesses, but to help them develop the capacity to recognise opportunities and create value for people, communities and the environment.

15.1. Empowering Young Entrepreneurs

Young people have the potential to become important contributors to social innovation and community development when they are given the appropriate opportunities, resources and support. Empowerment

means more than providing information about entrepreneurship. It involves creating opportunities for young people to make decisions, express their ideas, experiment with solutions, take responsibility and learn from experience.

Throughout the Playbook, entrepreneurship has been approached as a competence that can be developed progressively. Young people may begin by identifying problems that affect their communities and gradually move towards designing solutions, testing assumptions and taking action. This process can strengthen not only entrepreneurial competences, but also confidence, creativity, problem-solving, collaboration and resilience.

Importantly, not every young person needs to establish a formal social enterprise. Entrepreneurial competences can also support community initiatives, campaigns, social projects, volunteering activities and other forms of changemaking. What matters is that young people are able to recognise that their ideas and actions can contribute to positive change.



15.2. The Role of Youth Workers in Creating Social Impact

Youth workers play an important role in creating the conditions in which this development can take place. Their contribution is not to provide young people with ready-made answers or to control the direction of their initiatives. Instead, youth workers can act as facilitators, mentors and connectors, helping young people explore opportunities, question assumptions, access resources and reflect on their decisions.

A strong youth-work approach creates space for experimentation. Young people should be able to test ideas on a manageable scale, receive feedback, reconsider their assumptions and try again. At the same time, youth workers can ensure that entrepreneurial activity remains connected to genuine social or environmental needs and is developed with attention to inclusion, sustainability, ethics and responsibility. The youth worker can therefore act as a bridge between knowledge and action. They help young people understand not only how an initiative could work, but also why it matters, who it should benefit, what risks it may involve and how its impact can be assessed.

The quality of this support is particularly important because young people have different levels of confidence, experience and access to resources. Effective youth work should therefore provide appropriate guidance while progressively transferring responsibility to participants. The long-term goal is for young people to become increasingly capable of leading their own ideas and making informed decisions independently.

15.3. Continuing the Journey

Completing the Youth Workers' Playbook should not be considered the end of the entrepreneurial learning process. The knowledge and tools presented throughout the Playbook are intended to be adapted, tested and reused in different youth-work environments and with different groups of young people.

A young person's first entrepreneurial idea may change substantially after speaking with potential users. A pilot activity may reveal a new challenge. A partnership may create an unexpected opportunity. A funding limitation may require the business model to be redesigned. These situations are not necessarily failures; they are part of the process of learning through action.

For youth workers, the Playbook can therefore serve as a practical reference point rather than a fixed programme. Activities can be selected according to the needs of a particular group, while individual tools can be combined to support a real youth-led initiative from the first idea through to implementation and reflection.

Ultimately, the value of social entrepreneurship lies not only in the organisations or projects that young people may create, but also in the competences, confidence and sense of agency they develop along the way. When young people are supported to identify challenges, imagine alternatives and take responsible action, entrepreneurship can become a meaningful pathway towards participation and social change.

The journey can therefore continue beyond the pages of this Playbook:

Explore the challenge. Develop the idea. Take action. Learn from experience. Adapt. And keep creating meaningful value for others.





Youthpreneurs Unite

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