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Nuevas dinámicas mundiales  
en la era post-Covid; desafíos para  
la economía pública, social  
y cooperativa

# Profiling the new young social entrepreneur

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## Short abstract

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2022 is the European Year of Youth, an EU initiative on the importance of youth to building a better future. Social entrepreneurship is becoming very attractive to young generations. By becoming social entrepreneurs, young people contribute to the economy, unlock their skills, and contribute to shaping Europe's future. Young generations' contribution is very meaningful when it comes to the twin transition, bringing them to the heart of the upcoming economic transformation. Young social entrepreneurs can also have a great role in facing youth unemployment, creating decent and fair jobs and promoting social inclusion and innovation. However, there is a need to better outline the skills and profiles of the young entrepreneurs to understand if policies and tools are answering their needs. This paper aims at profiling the young social entrepreneur while making an overview of the main EU level policy instruments and tools that address this topic.

**Keywords:** social economy, social entrepreneurship, youth, profile, skills, transition, young generations, year of youth.

**JEL codes:** A13, B55, J13, L31, O35

**Theme:** New Global Dynamics in the Post-Covid Era: Challenges for the Public, Social and Cooperative Economy

**Subtopic:** New global dynamics of the public economy and the social economy in the post-Covid era

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## Expanded abstract

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The social economy and social entrepreneurship can be the answer to many of the problems and challenges that the young generation face nowadays. The socially driven principles that characterise social enterprises make them especially adequate to address the risks of social and labour exclusion faced by many young Europeans today.

Not only social economy can be beneficial in identifying solutions to the challenges young generations are facing, but young people can drive themselves this change.

Indeed, social entrepreneurship is becoming more and more attractive and a source of self-employment for young generations. By becoming social entrepreneurs, young people contribute to the European economy but also unlock their skills and contribute to shaping Europe's future. Young generations' contribution is particularly important and meaningful when it comes to the digital and green transition, which brings them at the heart of the upcoming economic transformation that will drive Europe in the future years.

By becoming social entrepreneurs, the young people can thus have a great role in facing youth unemployment, creating decent and fair jobs and promoting social inclusion and social innovation. This is why, the role of youth social entrepreneurship has been recognized and enhanced by several EU policy instruments; such as the Youth Employment support, the Skills Agenda, the recently published Social Economy Action Plan.

To understand better how to further promote young social entrepreneurship, there is a need to outline better the skills and profiles of the young entrepreneurs, narrow their challenges and their strengths, as well as understand why their businesses are particularly innovative. Therefore, our paper wishes to profile the new young social entrepreneurs. 2022 is the European Year of Youth, a European Union's initiative to a light on the importance of European youth to build a better future. In this framework, Diesis Network wishes to shed a light on the important role that young social entrepreneurs play in the social economy and in the European economy and society in general.

Our paper aims at developing an overview of young social entrepreneurship in Europe, including the main EU level policy instruments that address this topic, and wish to further promote youth social entrepreneurship. Indeed, the future of youth is at the heart of the European Union's interests and strategies. We will identify and analyse which policy instruments that serve this purpose linking it to the social economy, such as the Youth Employment support and the new Social Economy Action Plan.

Then, we would like to collect the direct experience of young entrepreneurs through an online survey. Thanks to this survey, we will be able to better profile these young entrepreneurs, to understand the skills they needed and used for the creation of their social enterprise and the challenges that they faced. We also wish to understand the impact that the social enterprises created by young people have on the ground in their community.

Finally, our objective is to search and identify the existing possibilities to enhance and support young social entrepreneurs at the EU level. Often, the problem is not the lack of interest or



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motivation that young generations have in the social economy. Nor is their willingness to start their social entrepreneurial journey. The issue is the absence of concrete tools to get them started, or knowing how to find them. Awareness-raising, education, exchange of good practices and peer learning on social economy and social entrepreneurship should thus be further promoted.



## 1. Introduction

The social economy is a major socio-economic player in the European social market economy. There are almost 3 million social economy enterprises and organisations, ranging from SMEs to large EU groups, operating in a wide variety of sectors, employing 13.6 million citizens and accounting for 8% of the Union's GDP (Social Economy Europe, n.d.). Indeed, social economy enterprises are operators in the social economy, combining societal goals with an entrepreneurial spirit. These organisations focus on achieving wider social, environmental or community objectives (European Commission, n.d.).

Not only can social economy be beneficial in identifying solutions to the challenges young generations are facing, but young people can drive this change. Indeed, social entrepreneurship is becoming more and more attractive and a source of self-employment for young generations. By becoming social entrepreneurs, young people contribute to the European economy but also unlock their skills and contribute to shaping Europe's future. Young generations' contribution is particularly important and meaningful when it comes to the digital and green transition, which brings them at the heart of the upcoming economic transformation that will drive Europe in the future years. Young people can thus have a great role in facing youth unemployment, creating decent and fair jobs, and promoting social inclusion and social innovation. (Eurodaconia, 2017) (Federighi, 2015) Therefore, the role of youth social entrepreneurship has been recognized and enhanced by several EU policy instruments, such as the recently published Social Economy Action Plan, the Youth Employment Support, the European Skills Agenda, etc.

Understanding the profile and the specific social entrepreneurial skills that young social economy entrepreneurs have is of major importance to promote specific policies and tools adapted to their needs and challenges, helping to boost social economy innovations in Europe which is translated to major well-being and the reduction of social and environmental inequalities.

This paper takes place in a favourable EU framework environment with the publication in December 2021 of the Social Economy Action Plan, putting forward concrete measures to help mobilise the full potential of the social economy, building on the results of the 2011 Social Business Initiative and the 2016 Start-up and Scale-up Initiative. Moreover, social entrepreneurship is to be a key economic model to address the twin challenges of climate emergency and social crisis (European Economic and Social Committee, 2019).

The paper will start with a general theoretical overview and methodology. The paper will describe the main EU policies and strategies around social economy and social entrepreneurship directly affecting both young and/or the entrepreneurs' skills. It will then draft the profile of the young social entrepreneur thanks to both a desk and field research, the dataset campaign of 30 under 30 led by Diesis Network, also defining the main EU tools available and used by young social entrepreneurs.



## 2. Theoretical framework, paper aim and methodology

### 2.1. Theoretical framework: social Economy and social entrepreneurship

The social economy is made up of a diversity of enterprises and organisations such as cooperatives, mutuals, associations, foundations and social enterprises among other forms that can be specific to each country. They are united around the values of the primacy of people and the social objective over the capital, democratic governance, solidarity and the reinvestment of most profits to carry out sustainable development objectives. (Social Economy Europe, n.d.)

A historical approach to the concept shows the complexity of the framework. The social economy is mainly recognized either by its objectives - health and education, the right to work, social progress in the nineteenth century, innovation and modernization, local development in the 1970s and the 1980s; by its institutional frameworks - patronage, association, social rights - followed by statutory frameworks - cooperatives, mutual societies and associations - although the statues are bound to evolve as a function of the insertion of the social economy into its environment; or by its modus operandi and their internal characteristics (Jane Clary, Betsy; Dolfsma, Wilfred; M. Figart, Deborah, 2006). This paper takes a perspective on the social economy as the social capital of a society, contributing to human development and a democracy-based society, in line with Paxton (2022).

The capacity of the social economy to create social entrepreneurship and innovation processes has been identified as key to the institutional, social and democratic development of countries (Acemoglu et al. 2012). In this line, it is Muhammad Yunus who raises the concept of social entrepreneurship as an alternative to the production and innovation model in populations with high poverty rates, while extending it to environments of greater wealth as a model to be pursued and internalized in existing economic and business processes. Until then, entrepreneurial processes were mainly linked to continuous destruction for the production of new resources, products and services (Shumpeter, 1942), without taking into account economic alternatives that would guarantee social, economic and environmental sustainability, as on the contrary, social entrepreneurship does.

Alternatively, it is not until the last decades that different currents begin to present production and innovation models based on sustainable economies, such as the economy of the common good (Felber, 2015), the collaborative economy, the circular economy, and the feminist economy. Social economy is being also a key development factor for rural areas; indeed, social economy enterprises can be considered a role model for the embedded intermediary in rural areas, given local embeddedness and their position between rural and supra-regional networks (Ritcher, 2019) (Costantini, Pastorelli, 2021). Guaranteeing human rights, promoting sustainable use of resources, and distributing social benefits to society: the roots of all these social economy responses are embedded in society's growing social, economic, and environmental needs.



Finally, through this change in the mentality of economic development, the concept of social innovation and social entrepreneurship is taking shape and adapting to the context, integrating different peculiarities over time.

The Commission uses the term 'social enterprise' to cover businesses whose objective is the common good over the commercial activity, often in the form of a high level of social innovation, businesses whose profits are mainly reinvested to achieve this social objective and enterprises whose method of organisation or the ownership system reflects the enterprise's mission, using democratic or participatory principles or focusing on social justice. (European Commission, 2021)

There is no single legal form for social enterprises. Many social enterprises operate in the form of social cooperatives, others are registered as private companies limited by guarantee, some are mutuals, and a lot of them are non-profit-distributing organisations like provident societies, associations, voluntary organisations, charities or foundations.

## **2.2. Paper aim**

The objective of this paper is to understand and outline the profile and the specific social entrepreneurial skills that young social economy entrepreneurs have. Thanks to this, it will be possible to understand if EU policies and tools are adapted to their needs and challenges, with the overall objective of both supporting the young generation and helping to boost social economy innovations in Europe which is translated to major well-being and the reduction of social and environmental inequalities.

## **2.3. Research methodology**

To develop this paper, a mix of research methods were applied; for the first part of the paper, we focused on policy review in order to understand which the main existing policy frameworks were addressing our target (young social entrepreneurs) or at least one of the sub targets (social economy or social entrepreneurship, young people and their challenges, young people skill development, etc.). Therefore, the documents collected will cover directly or indirectly our topic but will be able to show the political relevance of our discourse. The main policy documents analysed were the Social Economy Action Plan, the Youth Employment Support, the European Skills Agenda and the Pact for Skills, the European Pillar for Social Rights and its Action Plan, and the EntreComp.

In the second stage, profiling through both desk and field is carried out with literature research and contrasting available reports on skills and target definition of social entrepreneurs across various EU and international organisations, mainly from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, Euclid Network and Ashoka, complemented with a primary database source based on the “30 under 30 social entrepreneurs” on social entrepreneurship carried out by Diesis Network. The “30 under 30 social entrepreneurs” was a campaign launch by Diesis Network in 2022 to collect



social entrepreneurship ideas developed by young entrepreneurs under 30 (at the moment of the creation of the social enterprise). The participants needed to fill in an online survey (please find the survey in Annex 1) to collect information on their social enterprise, the link with the community and the beneficiaries, the impact of the social enterprise on the community, the skills and the tools used to create and scale up the social enterprise and the difficulties in the creation and scaling up of the enterprise. (Diesis Network, 2022) A deep explorative analysis was carried on the answers which gave us more information on the profile of these entrepreneurs. This data was not meant to be statistically relevant, but to provide explorative qualitative information on our target group and to have more points of analysis and reflection. Starting from some of the answers given by the entrepreneurs, EU tools used by these to develop their skills, gain knowledge, and support the creation of their social enterprise were also explored. Thanks to all this information, it was possible to draw a profile of the new young social entrepreneur.

In the conclusions, the results from the policy review and the exploration of the EU tools were put in parallel to what emerged from the profiling, and it was possible to understand if these respond to the characteristics and needs of the young social entrepreneur profile.





## 3. Policy and data analysis

### 3.1. EU Policy framework

Despite the overall decrease in youth unemployment in the last seven years (from 24,2% in 2013 to 15,4% in 2020), the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic has, even more, emphasised the difficulties that young generations face when entering the EU labour market.

Young people should be able to play an active role in the EU, both from a social and an economic point of view: this is a priority of the European Commission. Indeed, promoting youth employment is essential to allow young people to contribute to the European economy but also to unlock their skills and let them shape Europe's future. Therefore, special attention is brought to the contribution that young people can bring to economic and social growth, as well as the digital and green transition. (European Commission, n.d.)

At the European level, a set of policy instruments target youth social entrepreneurship and its promotion, directly or indirectly. Indeed, some focus on youth employment, others on social entrepreneurship or youth entrepreneurship. In this first part of the paper, these policy instruments will be addressed and analysed to what extent they target the topic of youth social entrepreneurship and promote its development.

- Social Economy Action Plan

The Social Economy Action Plan - Building an economy that works for people, was released by the European Commission in December 2021, after a co-creation process with stakeholders of the social economy carried out in 2020 and 2021. It consists of a strategic document aiming at improving the right framework conditions for the social economy across Europe, including improved visibility and recognition and access to finance and markets. It sets out concrete actions linked to the policy objectives, to be implemented within 2030. (European Commission, 2021) (European Commission, 2021)

The Plan highlights in multiple parts the mutual benefits that young generations and the social economy generate for each other. On one hand, the young generations bring innovative ideas and are particularly well fit to find solutions to the green and digital transition. On the other hand, social entrepreneurship can be a way to access the job market, both by becoming social entrepreneurs and starting a business, both by joining an existing one, that will provide quality conditions.

Therefore, in the Plan, in particular in section 4.1 “Business support and capacity building”, under the paragraph “Broadening the appeal of entrepreneurship”, it is highlighted what has been mentioned above. Indeed, the plan underlines that not only social entrepreneurship can be particularly interesting for young people, being the latter interested in sustainable development and sustainable business and economic forms, but also a valid form of labour market integration. Nevertheless, the Plan underlined the lack of awareness and/or appeal of



young generations towards these business models, including the low presence of this kind of entrepreneurship in educational programs. The plan also mentions that there is a real lack of awareness among young people on the positive impact of the social economy.

The plan proposes some concrete actions targeting young people:

- The Launch of a new Youth Entrepreneurship Policy Academy in 2022 under ESF, with the objective of fostering youth social entrepreneurship, by working with national policymakers and youth entrepreneurship networks
- Foster mutual learning between social economy entrepreneurs by better promoting the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs programme to social economy stakeholders. (European Commission, 2021)

Finally, the plan also mentions that the fields related to the green transition in the social economy could be particularly interesting for young people, such as agri-food and bioeconomy.

- Youth Employment Support

To try to bring concrete solutions to this EU-level challenge, in 2020 the European Commission published a communication “Youth Employment Support: a bridge to jobs for the next generation”. This communication has a double scope: to tackle youth unemployment and to provide young people with the skills they will need to face the future labour market. The Youth Employment Support sets ambitious objectives: to reinforce the Youth Guarantee, update the EU’s vocational education and training policy, to shine a stronger light on apprenticeships and bring additional measures to support young employment. It is estimated that, with the Next Generation EU and EU budget, €22 billion will be spent on youth employment support. This communication and its willingness to invest in the future of youth, is also perfectly in line with the recent EU strategies and initiatives, such as the EU Green Deal. (European Commission Press Corner, n.d.)

The Youth Employment support underlines the important role that social economy and social entrepreneurship can have in facing youth unemployment, by creating decent and fair jobs and promoting social inclusion and social innovation. Indeed, two meaningful elements are stressed in this document. First of all, it is pointed out that the positive impact that social entrepreneurship has on the communities, from an economic, social and environmental point of view, encourages many young people to walk this path. This suggests that, with their job, young generations wish to have real power and to bring a positive impact on their societies. Second, it is noted that social economy organisations, “are often more resilient to economic cycles”. Also, these kinds of enterprises can quickly adapt to the new social and economic changes and are able to better include vulnerable categories, such as young people.



- **European Skills Agenda and Pact for Skills**

The European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, is a strategic document published by the European Commission. The document is a plan developed over five years aiming at supporting individuals and businesses to develop the right skills (by learning new ones, upskilling or re-skilling), in order to be competitive in the changing EU labour market. Indeed, the objective is to provide EU citizens and businesses with the tools to face the challenges engendered by green and digital transition and the COVID crisis, achieving like this a greater resilience and social fairness. The agenda focuses also on vulnerable groups that are the most at risk of being excluded from the labour market, including young generations. (European Commission, n.d.)

Among the skills and the field that should further receive attention, is also present social entrepreneurship. Indeed, the Agenda underlines that the social economy has a great capacity to offer solutions to the fair green and digital transition, to develop high-quality employment and contribute to innovating the EU economy. It also suggests that further attention should be put on raising awareness and increasing the appeal of social economy and social entrepreneurship, as well as focusing on the development of social entrepreneurship skills and education programs. This would be particularly beneficial for vulnerable groups, including young people. (European Commission, 2021)

Finally, a flagship of the European Skills Agenda is the Pact for Skills (published in late 2020), which offers a common engagement model to develop skills in Europe. The Commission invited stakeholders from different levels (from local to digital) to sign the Pact and commit in delivering opportunities to skill, upskill and reskill. The pact offers chances for networking, share knowledge, guidance and resources. One of the topics tackled is also the social economy (European Commission, n.d.).

- **European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan**

The European Pillar of Social Rights is a landmark initiative published by the European Commission in 2017. The initiative develops a set of 20 key principles that aim at building a fairer and more inclusive Europe. (European Commission, 2017) (European Commission, n.d.). In 2021, the European Commission issued the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) Action Plan to develop concrete actions to implement the principles within 2030. In particular, the Action Plan sets three main objectives: At least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment by 2030, at least 60% of all adults should participate in training every year and the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion should be reduced by at least 15 million by 2030. (European Commission, 2021)

In the plan, particular attention is set on young people (including and especially NEETs – people that are neither employed, nor in education or training), that are more vulnerable and therefore at risk of being excluded from the labour market. The Plan sets out several actions to actively support labour market integration for young generations, including developing new



skills. The EPSR Action Plan also recognizes the important contribution that the social economy and social entrepreneurship sectors bring in building a fairer social Europe. It suggests both political and funding tools for the development of social economy, social enterprises and social entrepreneurship skills.

- **EntreComp**

In 2016, the European Commission developed EntreComp: the European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework: a reference framework to map skills to possess a modern and innovative entrepreneurial mindset. The framework identifies a set of 15 competencies that delight the skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to be entrepreneurial and create financial, cultural or social value for others. (European Commission, 2022)

The documents can be used by several actors and organisations in different frameworks (education, training, policy activities, recruiting process, entrepreneurial activities, etc.). One of its objectives is also to promote entrepreneurial skills among young people to foster their employability opportunities and their access to the labour market. (European Commission, 2018)

## **3.2. Data research and analysis**

### **3.2.1. Literature review**

To frame better the development of young social entrepreneurship, a short overview of the sector will be done, followed by the explanation of the set of skills that normally social entrepreneurs possess.

Social Economy Enterprises in the EU need to be contextualised at the international level. Corresponding to the last Global Entrepreneurship Monitor on social entrepreneurship (2016), it is found that among 18- to 34-year-olds, there is a greater representation of nascent social entrepreneurs than nascent commercial entrepreneurs in three of the world's regions – namely the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and Western Europe. However, in Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, South-East Asia, Australia, and the United States of America (US), there are more nascent commercial entrepreneurs than nascent social entrepreneurs in this age range. Concerning operating initiatives, organisations, or activities, there are more social entrepreneurs than commercial entrepreneurs in every global region, except for Latin America and the Caribbean. Moreover, GEM monitor also profiles in Eastern Europe and Western Europe around half of operational social entrepreneurs to be highly educated.

In the EU, a social entrepreneur is defined as a person with an entrepreneurial behaviour which is translated in a or multiple economic activity with the desire to it as a tool for meeting social needs, serving the general interest. (European Commission and OECD, 2013). Therefore, the



social entrepreneur pursues at the same time an economic and a social mission, values and ethic guiding his/her actions to achieve a positive impact.

Moreover, another definition of social entrepreneur is someone who imagines a new reality, takes action and collaborates with others to bring that new reality into being. This includes 4 areas of competency; a) Conscious Empathy, as the ability to be aware of and understand our own, other individuals' and groups' perspectives, and to use that understanding to recognize patterns over time and guide one's actions to contribute to the good of all. b) Sophisticated Teamwork; as the ability to contribute and thrive in a fluid ecosystem of teams that mobilises around a problem or opportunity. c) New Leadership; as the capacity, as a leader, to envision, enable, and ensure that every player is an initiator and sees the big picture. d) Practising Changemaking; as the process of creating a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society rather than to private individuals. (Ansari, Beeta, 2021)

Very little research is focused only on young social economy enterprises and young entrepreneurship, while we have some interesting studies on social enterprises in general. At the EU level, the study carried out under the European Social Entrepreneurship Monitor (ESEM) published by Euclid Network (2021), shows main data and trends of social entrepreneurship. For instance, social enterprise management teams consist of 59% women. They employ on average 40% disabled people and 56% ethnic minorities. In that study, 37% of ESEM Social Enterprises had high or very high involvement in the decision-making of the organisation by their employees, while 69% of ESEM Social Enterprises involved their beneficiaries in their production processes/services. Finally, the study also showcased that the main barriers social entrepreneurs faced came from the area of “financial support”. This included the three most influential barriers which are experienced by the highest number of ESEM Social Enterprises: “lack of options to finance the organisation once started”, “too complex public financing” and a “lack of patient capital”.

When it comes to skills that social economy entrepreneurs possess, the research of Coburn and Risdijk (2010) profiling on social entrepreneurship skills, shows that internal factors determine the success of social enterprises include: clear missions, strong and inspiring leadership, valuable products, excellent operation systems, entrepreneurship and business acumen, a culture of learning and innovation, scale, income base and ability to manage finances, as well as effective relationship and alignment with the needs of stakeholders.

Finally, according to the European Commission and OECD Policy Brief on Social Entrepreneurship, the main barriers to social enterprise creation are legal and regulatory frameworks, financial resources, access to markets, business support and development services and training and research. (European Commission and OECD, 2013)

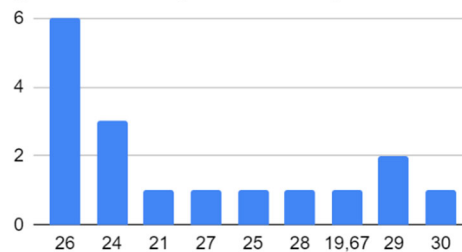


### 3.2.2. Database results

In 2022, Diesis Network carried the “30 under 30 social entrepreneurs” campaign, asking young entrepreneurs to answer a survey with specific questions on their social business, their profile, and skills, as well as main challenges and tools used to create and scale up their social enterprise.

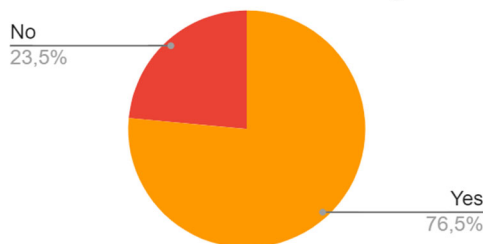
According to the explorative analysis of the profiles of social entrepreneurs under the 30 under 30 campaign the following information is extracted; the average age of start-up of the enterprise is placed at 25 years old, with 60% of the responses coming from entrepreneurs based at capital cities in Europe, and 30% representation from East European Countries. The analysis has a higher representation of male respondents, with 67% of them represented.

Age of start-up the activity



The analysis also shows that 40% of the respondents build the business model around the integration and participation of vulnerable communities, while 70% of them also show previous experience in the field and in relation with the observed problematic before starting their businesses. Moreover, 76% of the total sample had accessed previous business training in their career.

Previous business training

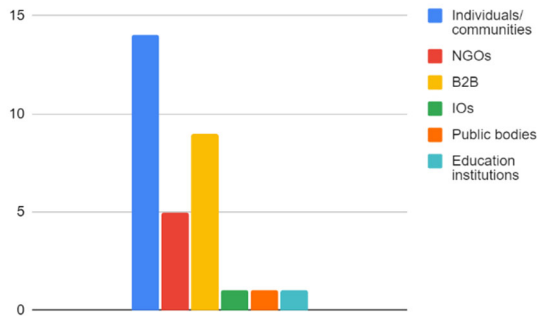


At the market level, interestingly, 24% of the enterprises correspond to food services while another 35% belong to tech and social media business models. We can see an overall interest in green and digital topics, and in general to sustainability. The major client of the businesses are particulars and communities, with an 82% of the responses, followed by B2B clients with a 53% of the responses. In terms of impact, 59% of the given answers clearly identify social

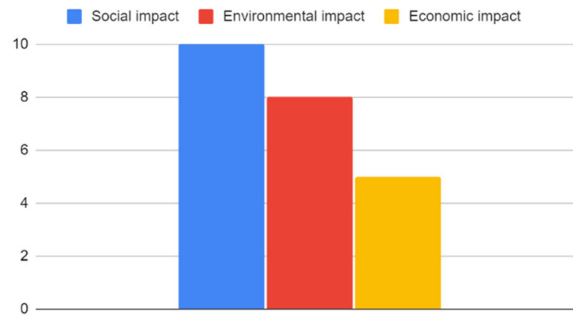


impact as part of their business model, and this is translated to the 47% corresponding to environmental impact solutions.

Clients & Beneficiaries



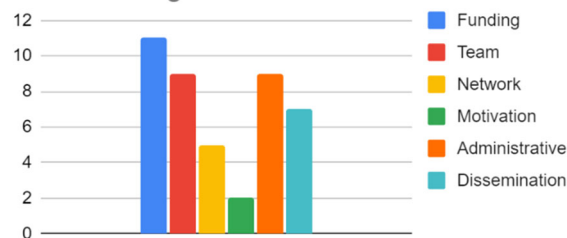
Type of generated impact



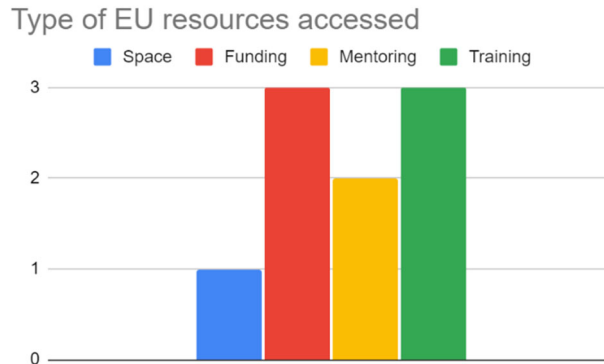
At the skills level, it is noted that young social entrepreneurs had by the time of starting their enterprise vision, teamwork, learning from previous experience, creativity and motivation as the most relevant skills identified, while the least was mobilising resources, followed by coping with ambiguity and uncertainty and risk.

The main challenges that the social entrepreneurs faced was funding, with 65% of the responses, followed by the creation of a team and administrative and legal procedures with 53% of the results in both cases.

Main challenges faced



At the same time programmes incurred to improve entrepreneurship skills and tools were accessed mainly through mentoring (with 71% of the responses), and technical and funding opportunities with 47% of the sample of participants in both cases. Contextualised in EU resources, 47% claimed to have participated from them, being the most represented funding and training available options, among which the European Voluntary Service, EU incubators and Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs are named.



### 3.2.3. Exploring EU tools emerged from the analysis

In the answers given in the “30 under 30 social entrepreneurs” campaign, several young social entrepreneurs mentioned that they access European tools, programs and/or funding opportunities that supported them in the creation of their social enterprise. In this paragraph there is a short overview of the EU opportunities used by the young social entrepreneurs in order to understand better to which needs these tools are able to reply and which skills and/or support there are able to furnish. By doing so, it is also possible to see if these tools reflect the willingness expressed in the policy documents analysed above.

- Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs

An observed tool across participants has been the programme of Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE). The EYE is a very successful European cross border program facilitating the exchange of entrepreneurial and management experience cross-country wise. The objective of the program is to allow aspiring entrepreneurs or less experienced entrepreneurs to work and be mentored by experienced entrepreneurs leading enterprises in another EU country. (European Commission, n.d.) (Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, n.d.)

- Mentoring programs funded by EU programmes and funds

Several entrepreneurs affirmed that participating in a mentoring program or other kind of training activity financed, directly or indirectly, by the EU has been very useful to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to become an entrepreneur and kick-off their social enterprise.

In particular, social entrepreneurs mentioned the following types of mentoring program or activities:

- Taking part in a training or mentoring in the framework of an Erasmus+ project;





- Participating in a training or mentoring programme organised by an organisation that received funding by an EU programme or funding for the organisation of such learning activity;
- Participation in a training or mentoring programme organised by a local authority thanks to EU funding programmes.

- **European Solidarity Corps**

The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) is a programme of the European Union targeting young people who wish to build a more inclusive society, supporting vulnerable people and responding to societal challenges. The ESC experience allows young people to travel to another country or stay on their own, and take part in projects that benefit communities and allow them to develop new skills and make a difference. Young people will be hosted by an organisation (which receives funding from the EU for this activity) in a framework of a specific social project in the role of trainees, volunteers or employees. (European Union, n.d.) (European Union, n.d.)

Even if these experiences are not linked to entrepreneurial activities, it can allow young people to develop a set of new skills and knowledge, to broaden their horizons and to dive deeper in a social issue that interests them while creating cross-country business connections.

- **EU funding for social business**

Some of the entrepreneurs have also accessed EU funding to finance their social business in form of grants, likely coming from start-up competitions. This has allowed them to have the necessary resources to start or scale up their business.

### **3.3. Profiling the new youth social entrepreneur**

According to both the literature review and the desk and field research, a defined profile of the young social entrepreneur can be outlined.

On the first side, young social entrepreneurs are identified to be impact-oriented and focus-driven people whose main objective is to create first both positive social and environmental impact contributions, and then an economic one. Being very conscious of the challenges of the present in which they live - both from an economic, social and environmental point of view - their objective is to generate a positive change in an altruistic manner. Often and most frequently, the aim of their social enterprise is social inclusion and a positive impact on their community, and an eye to environmental sustainability.

At the gender level, this study does not get a clear result on female representativity in the sector, placing its participation likely at shorter levels than other generic social



entrepreneurship levels when it comes to younger ages. It is also noted that if motivated, young people can take the risk of opening their business from a very young age (circa 25 years old). Moreover, the vast majority of them are located in capital cities, and not in rural areas. This can be explained by the fact that cities offer more opportunities and innovation.

Previous professional experience is a great asset when creating a business. Generally, they have a previous professional and/or personal experience that has inspired them to take the lead and make a change. In terms of skills, when starting the enterprise, the most present seem to be vision and motivation, creativity, teamwork and ability to learn from past experiences (professional, educational, personal). While skills that seem to lack the most are being able to mobilise resources and coping with ambiguity and uncertainty and risk. It is observed across studies that the main challenges for young social entrepreneurs would be accessing funding, and in the second position dealing with all the administrative and bureaucratic procedures, and the creation of a solid and balanced team.

Young entrepreneurs are open-minded, willing and motivated to be trained and attend education/mentoring programs that can allow them to acquire new skills. The “30 under 30” campaign, also highlighted that several young aspiring entrepreneurs are aware and have accessed some kind of EU tool and/or programme that has in some way inspired and/or helped them in the creation of their enterprise.



## 4. Conclusions

Thanks to the topics addressed via the policy review, the research and the explorative analysis made thanks to the “30 under 30 social entrepreneurs” campaign, this paper contributes to shaping the profile of young social entrepreneurs in Europe: a motivated and vision-driven one. Young social entrepreneurs are attentive to both social and environmental aspects, as well to sustainability in general, and provide innovative solutions. This makes them particularly fit to address the EU’s main future economic, social and environmental challenges, in particular related to the green and digital transition, the twin transition. The profile of the young social entrepreneur does not differ greatly from the one of the “regular” social entrepreneurs and remains in line with general trends related to the social economy. Plus, it is possible to conclude that there is a direct reach from EU placed tools in promoting social entrepreneurship economic activities with greater presence in major cities in Europe.

The policy framework offered at the EU level seems to address the overall aim, needs and challenges of the young social entrepreneurs. First of all, policies clearly underline the potential of both young people and both social economy and entrepreneurship. Plus, at the EU level, policies encourage the development of skills, exchange of good practices, development of knowledge through previous experiences (both professional and educational), equal access to opportunities and more awareness about social entrepreneurship models in general. EU tools identified thanks to the explorative analysis made from the results of the 30 under 30 social entrepreneurs’ campaign and used by the young entrepreneurs also reflect these tendencies, which are mainly related to education, skills development, peer learning and exchanges.

What seems to remain an issue and a mismatch in offer from EU programs and tools and demand from young social entrepreneurs is the need for initial funding and the administrative complications related to the creation of a social enterprise in general. This is in line with the main difficulties and barriers identified at EU level for the creation and scaling up of social enterprises.

Therefore, EU tools seems to be useful and support young entrepreneurs, nevertheless they are limited and not sufficient to reply to all the needs, challenges and barriers that exist.

Moreover, young social entrepreneurs are not analysed as a specific category and therefore research, policies and tools are not targeted specifically for them, as they often fall under other targets such as “social entrepreneurs”, “young entrepreneurs” or “young people”. Both these points could be a further and future areas of research.

The present analysis and profile are limited to sample extension provided by our explorative analysis and further research can contribute to strengthening the specific knowledge. In particular in relation to young social entrepreneurs profiling with more specific data on gender participation, young social entrepreneurship in rural areas, the role of young entrepreneurs in tackling the twin transition and the part of vulnerable communities itself leading social response processes. Nevertheless, despite the limits, our analysis seems to reflect overall EU social



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Nuevas dinámicas mundiales  
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economy, social entrepreneurship and youth trends: with further analysis and better and further qualitative and quantitative data, a more defined profile could be built in the future.



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