ASHOKA
EVERYONE A CHANGEMAKER™

Save the Children

Humanitarian Leadership Academy

YOUTH LEADERSHIP FOR EMERGING FUTURE

THE MANUAL

In 2024, Ashoka, in collaboration with its partners, implemented a pilot of an innovative program to support young changemakers - Youth Leadership For Emerging Future (YLEF).

YLEF is an educational, networking and grant program in which Ashoka, Save the Children and the Humanitarian Leadership Academy bring together the experiences of the humanitarian sector and the perspectives of young and social action leaders to complement each other. This created a strong support network of young changemakers who have the resources and opportunities to take action in the face of challenges and permanently change the world around them.

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Save the Children | Humanitarian Leadership Academy

THANK YOU

As team of Ashoka Poland and Ashoka Czechia and Slovakia, we want to express our gratitude to our partners – Save the Children and Humanitarian Leadership Academy, for enabling the program to happen.

We thank young leaders, who trusted us in learning process, engaged in transformatory experience and grown with Ashoka.

We thank our experts – Ashoka Fellows, staff and mentors from Humanitarian Leadership Academy, for support in development and delivery of the program, constant learning and provided mentorship to young leaders.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. ABOUT THE YLEF PROGRAM MANUAL

The purpose of this document is to capture the methodological know-how to enable future iterations of the program. The manual has three key objectives, which provide the framework for its structure:

CLARIFY THE CONTEXT

Present the purpose of the YLEF program, key actors and other important aspects to establish the context in which the pilot was conducted.

DESCRIBE THE METHODOLOGY

Document the essential methodological aspects of the YLEF program to ensure its replicability in the future.

COMPILE LESSONS LEARNED

Formulate methodological recommendations based on learning moments from the pilot to make the YLEF program even better in the future.

1.1 PURPOSE AND OUTCOMES OF THE YLEF PROGRAM

The future is uncertain, and while we may predict some crises, many others will emerge unexpectedly. In such a dynamic environment, the next generation of leaders must be equipped not only to respond to crises but also to lead and innovate within the social sector. The Youth Leadership for Emerging Future (YLEF) program was conceived as a pilot project to explore how young leaders can master the skills necessary for this preparedness approach, blending foresight with adaptability.

YLEF gives young leaders the chance to explore their leadership potential, establish valuable connections, and make a meaningful impact in their communities through cooperation, engaging workshops, and mentorship. This program offers participants the guidance and resources they need to excel in their leadership roles.

The YLEF program contributes to the societies prepared to react to different challenges connected to human-made risks and climate change consequences. This initiative goes beyond the traditional scope of humanitarian response. It focuses on providing young leaders with a comprehensive skill set, extensive knowledge, and robust network-resources essential for inspiring and empowering one another.

The program aims to cultivate a new generation of leaders capable of navigating complex social challenges and fostering meaningful change across diverse sectors.

The need emerged because the region of Central Eastern Europe unexpectedly became an arena for humanitarian response, due to the full-scale war in Ukraine. When the first dust passed, the social and humanitarian leaders jointly saw a need for more preparedness for future crises. The humanitarian sector suddenly became needed nearby, not only far away, and the connection between social challenges and humanitarian responses showed to be blurred. Having living experience "everyone become humanitarian" in certain moment, we understood that this is a new dimension of Ashoka's visionary "Everyone a changemaker".

The three key outcomes towards which the YLEF program was designed are as follows. Both participants individually and society benefit from all three goals while all results are participant-centric and still contributing to strengthen local capacity to respond to humanitarian needs.

OUTCOME 1: BROADEN UNDERSTANDING:

At least 35 people will experience the collaborative learning and designing process, leading to emerging new solutions and leading with empathy.

OUTCOME 2: STRENGTHENED LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Collaborating with local business associations and chambers of commerce to connect with our target audience.

OUTCOME 3: STRONGER NETWORKS

Leaders will expand their professional networks and build meaningful relationships with other leaders in their field.

1.2 FIELD OF SUPPORT FOR YOUNG LEADERS

Working with young leaders involves specifics. This is the reason why we conducted a probe into the lives of young changemakers.

We selected more than 200 people (65 from Poland, 65 from Ukraine, 35 from Slovakia and 40 from the Czech Republic). Most of them were in their 20s. We spoke with approximately 70 leaders of socially beneficial initiatives across four countries to deeply recognize the context young leaders navigate through.

Our intention was to obtain up-to-date information about their current focus, needs and plans around social engagement. We talked to people who have demonstrated their motivation to change the world for the better and who are successfully implementing socially beneficial initiatives - with empathy and determination to work with others for the common good.

In the mapping phase we relied on the existing networks and explored new ones thanks to the methodology of the snowball. More about it in the next chapter. Between others we had included in the snowball the data collected for mapping of young socially engaged Poles and Ukrainians, done for the purpose of **People on the Move report**.

1.2.1 KEY LESSONS REINFORCED THE FOUNDATIONS

6 key lessons emerged from the result of this qualitative probe.

The overall results are presented in a separate document:
6 Insights from Young Leaders

The need for true participation

Young leaders often experience symbolic involvement in activities, highlighting the need for real inclusion in decision-making processes. They often encounter "youngwashing," where their engagement is superficial.

Pressing workload

Many young leaders combine studies or work with unpaid civic engagement, leading to exhaustion due to the lack of paid leave and overtime limits. They struggle to balance their time between education, paid work, and civic activities, which can lead to burnout.

Financial challenges

Young people are often expected to be grateful for unpaid work to gain experience, but they need financial support to live. Existing financial aid often goes to established organizations rather than new initiatives. There is a need to create opportunities for paid positions and financial support for youth initiatives.

Burnout and mental health struggles

Constant time pressure and overload of responsibilities affect young people's mental health. Young leaders experience burnout, even as teenagers.

Collaboration and skills development

Young people are motivated, but they often face problems and lack guidance with cooperation. They need to learn how to manage projects, teams, and organizations, find people with specific skills, and collaborate effectively. They have experience in their field but not in organizational development and management.

The need for a community of changemakers

Young changemakers often feel isolated, as they may be the first to develop an activity and may not have people around them who share their vision. They need a community to share their experiences and inspiration. Building a supportive community where they can connect, share experiences, and seek advice is vital for their growth and resilience.

2. METODOLOGY OF THE YLEF PROGRAM

Before the start of the program, the framework approach to fulfilling the purpose of the program and the key methodological elements were known. Detailed aspects were developed as the program required.

2.1 THE YLEF PROGRAM BRIEFLY

The program had four main phases corresponding with three outcomes desired:

01 **Mapping and recruitment:**

We recognized over 200 youth leaders with diverse backgrounds, including activists, social entrepreneurs, community organizers, and policy advocates. Learning about their needs and context of work allowed us to tailor the program in detail. And we selected groups of 42 participants.

02 **Capacity Building and Strategy Development:**

We recognized over 200 youth leaders with diverse backgrounds, including activists, social entrepreneurs, community organizers, and policy advocates. Learning about their needs and context of work allowed us to tailor the program in detail. And we selected groups of 42 participants.

03 **Implementation and Scaling:**

The strategies and projects co-developed in Phase 1 were piloted during this phase which runs for 3 months between July and September 2024. A dedicated support team, including mentors and advisors, assisted participants in executing their plans, for them to obtain strengthened leadership skills. The outcome was empowering them to lead more effectively in their respective fields. This phase also provided opportunities for participants to engage with broader networks, including INGOs and funding bodies, to ensure the sustainability and growth of their initiatives.

04 Network Expansion:

Establishment of a network of youth leaders and key stakeholders, fostering ongoing collaboration beyond the YLEF. Through creating a net of connections between participants, experts and more senior leaders, participants should expand their professional networks and build meaningful relationships with others in their field. This element of the program contributed to developing collaboration skills.

2.1.2 KEY OUTLINES OF THE YLEF PROGRAM IN NUMBERS

- 1 year
- 40 participants
- 4 countries
- 2 introductory three-day live meetings in Warsaw and Prague
- 8 Community Keepers (core team)
- 6 online learning sessions (workshops and multistakeholder collaboration)
- 3 online group consulting sessions
- 4 co-created projects
- Unlimited individual support,
- 4 mentors
- 1 two-day final meeting in Warsaw

2.2 PRINCIPLES OF THE YLEF PROGRAM

To effectively fulfil the project's aim of enhancing responsiveness in humanitarian situations, it is essential to build both preparedness and action capability. This requires a specific set of competencies that balance leadership and proactivity with the ability to act within the current context and adapt to the demands of the situation. The program is therefore designed based on four key principles that support these competencies.

It is very easy to get bogged down in methodological technicalities. That is why we want to draw attention to these key principles that manifest everywhere in the YLEF program and directly affect both the participants and the actors ensuring the program organizationally.

2.2.1 PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Program participants are viewed as adults with internal motivation, creators of their lives, who can be active, make decisions and take personal responsibility for their participation in the program.

It sounds obvious, but it's important to mention. There is a different level of initial personal responsibility for each of the participants. The program is designed to assume personal responsibility and it tries to promote the growth of personal responsibility in all directions.

This principle requires everyone to fully commit to the program and its activities, understanding that their level of involvement directly impacts their personal growth and the collective success of the program.

2.2.2 CO-CREATION

A number of other programs for young leaders are built on the principles of education, networking or acceleration of their projects with which they enter the program. All these elements can be found in the YLEF program; however, the key principle is co-creation.

This means that the participants bring all of themselves (strengths, experiences, cultural context, activities they engage in, etc.), however, what exactly is created within the program depends on the interaction with other participants so that the projects make sense to everyone in the team, the YLEF program and the world.

This principle requires from everyone openness to the new, empathy, active listening and the ability to cooperate in new forms. The program also created a space for proactive actions and initiative that were important for the growth of participants.

2.2.3 EMERGENCE

The program is based on the assumption that if you offer responsible young leaders who are interested in co-creating an enviable space, a framework process to lean on and support roles, something new will emerge that we could not even imagine at the beginning.

The principle of emergence is another word for life. And although the YLEF program has clear outlines, it is necessary to accept this liveliness as essential, with all its beauty and challenges.

This principle requires everyone to accept uncertainty as a necessary and natural part, trust in people and program design, but also the ability to build their personal trustworthiness.

2.2.4 LEARNING BY EXPERIENCE

As part of the program, participants work on co-created projects, among other things. Project results are important and encourage personal responsibility. However, still, the basic essence of the YLEF program is to build a skillset and thus learn through experience.

This is particularly important in the context of the principle of emergence. Different situations can happen. And they will happen. This is the essence of the program to expose participants to uncertainty and support them in learning from it.

The learning by experience requires everyone to have a growth mindset, mindfulness, and self-reflection.

2.3 ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS

2.3.1 DESIGN TEAM

The core Ashoka team members implementing the YLEF included:

- 1 project manager
- 1 partnership, monitoring and learning manager
- Few experts in learning processes
- 1 communications specialist
- Few project activities support staff, including facilitators, community manager
- Back-office core support

External support:

- Translators for offline meetings and online sessions
- 1 Monitor chat & technical back-up support

Ashoka had received broad support from the Humanitarian Leadership Academy and Save the Children team, including partnership supervision, finance, HR, logistics and procedures support, MEAL management and others.

Additionally, at the stage of mentorship, 4 mentors – senior humanitarian leaders from Save the Children network had been engaged pro bono.

2.3.2 BUDGET

The program was designed with the highest standards of transparency of costs. The total cost of the program was approximately 250 000 GBP.
The main cost categories were:

- Four grants for participants to implement own projects.
- Offline meetings, including travel, accommodation, venue etc.
- Renumeration for Community Keepers.
- Special requirements for accessibility, including translations.
- Highly qualified staff members, including dedicated manager.
- Content creation for online sessions and communication.

3. MAPPING AND SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

3.1 INTERVIEWS

The YLEF team undertook a comprehensive mapping process to identify and engage young leaders across Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. This process involved evaluating existing Ashokan databases—such as those of young changemakers and social entrepreneurs working with migrants—and selecting the contacts most relevant to the project.

The mapping was designed to recognize active young leaders in two areas mainly:

Nature, Ecology, Climate Actions: Identifying young leaders involved in environmental initiatives and sustainability efforts.

Social Cohesion, Inclusion, Equity and Support for Vulnerable Groups: Engaging changemakers working with disadvantaged populations, including children with disabilities, migrants, and other groups at risk of exclusion.

While both areas were explored, the methodology of managing two parallel snowball processes - one for social issues and another for ecological topics presented challenges. The team noticed a greater focus on social issues during this stage, partly because of existing networks, which made networking and collaboration easier. It is anticipated that participants will collaborate effectively across both areas following a common learning process.

The trend of lower youth engagement in ecology suggests the need for future strategies to better mobilize young leaders around environmental topics. However, the potential for combining social and ecological efforts was discussed, as many changemakers recognize the interconnected nature of these issues.

Learnings & Suggestions

The interview process revealed several important learnings and suggestions that may be used outside of the program. Thus, the team decided to publish a paper about **lessons learnt from young social entrepreneurs.** It had not been planned previously but by the time of data collection was recognised as valuable.
Sharing gathered knowledge inside and outside of the program team should be one of the key capacities of the staff, reflecting the value of high standards.

The interview phase aimed to create transparency between participants and the program design team. These interviews allowed both parties to manage expectations openly, offering candidates clarity about the program's demands while enabling the design team to evaluate which candidates were best suited.

Transparency and honesty were vital throughout the process. Interviewers emphasized the time and energy required, and candidates were given space to express any concerns or doubts.

Participants were asked key questions to evaluate their changemaking journey:

- What is the nature of your social activity? (Option A)
- What is your focus in the planet and climate area? (Option B)
- Who is the vulnerable group you work with?
- What are your social engagement plans and dreams for 2024?
- What kind of support do you need to develop further as a changemaker?

These questions helped the team determine which candidates would most benefit from the project and how the program could support them moving forward.

In Poland, the recruitment process leveraged an existing database of participants and used a snowball method, where current participants recommended others. Ashoka Poland targeted young changemakers across the country, evaluating individuals for their potential contribution to the program's social and ecological objectives. Interviews were outsourced to partners, particularly for selecting participants from Ukraine living in Poland.

The Czech Republic and Slovakia teams, on the other hand, had to start from scratch conducting a probe of potential participants through direct contacts and partner organizations. Before the interviews, participants were required to submit forms to assess their suitability for the program keeping in mind in which of their activities we can see changemaking. Both Teams conducted their interviews over a two-month period, gathered insights to shape the program and evaluate candidates.

Learnings & Suggestions

Sufficient time should be allocated for conducting interviews and reflecting on the insights gathered. Rushing the process could limit the depth of understanding about participants and the project's ability to evolve based on new information. Limited time and resources will underscore wider outreach.

Expanding the search for participants beyond the organization's immediate network likely yields a more diverse and inclusive cohort. This effort requires time and planning.

The team recognized that personal connections with some participants could introduce bias in the selection process. To address this, decisions were made collaboratively with team members to ensure fairness.

With the time that passed already from that stage and taking into account the experience of the program, it is also recommended to underline the engagement and time to be allocated in the process – the more it is repeated, the bigger chances that participants understand it.

3.2 SELECTION CRITERIA

The recruitment phase for the Youth Leadership for Emerging Future (YLEF) project was critical to its success. It required a thorough and systematic approach to identify and select participants who would not only benefit from the program but also contribute meaningfully to its objectives.

The final selection process involved synthesizing insights from the interviews and recommendations from network partners, with an emphasis on participants' leadership potential and their fit within the program's objectives of promoting social cohesion and ecological issues.

The first step is to align internally with the selection criteria, identifying the qualities and skills we believe participants need to possess for the work to have a lasting impact. The YLEF team focused on identifying individuals who:

- Are committed to an in-depth process where they actively participate in developing and implementing preparedness strategies, particularly in social and humanitarian contexts.
- Are willing to share their experiences and collaborate with others in a supportive and empathetic environment.
- Possess a strong understanding of the ecosystem and are at a stage where they can dedicate time and energy to developing systemic solutions alongside peers.

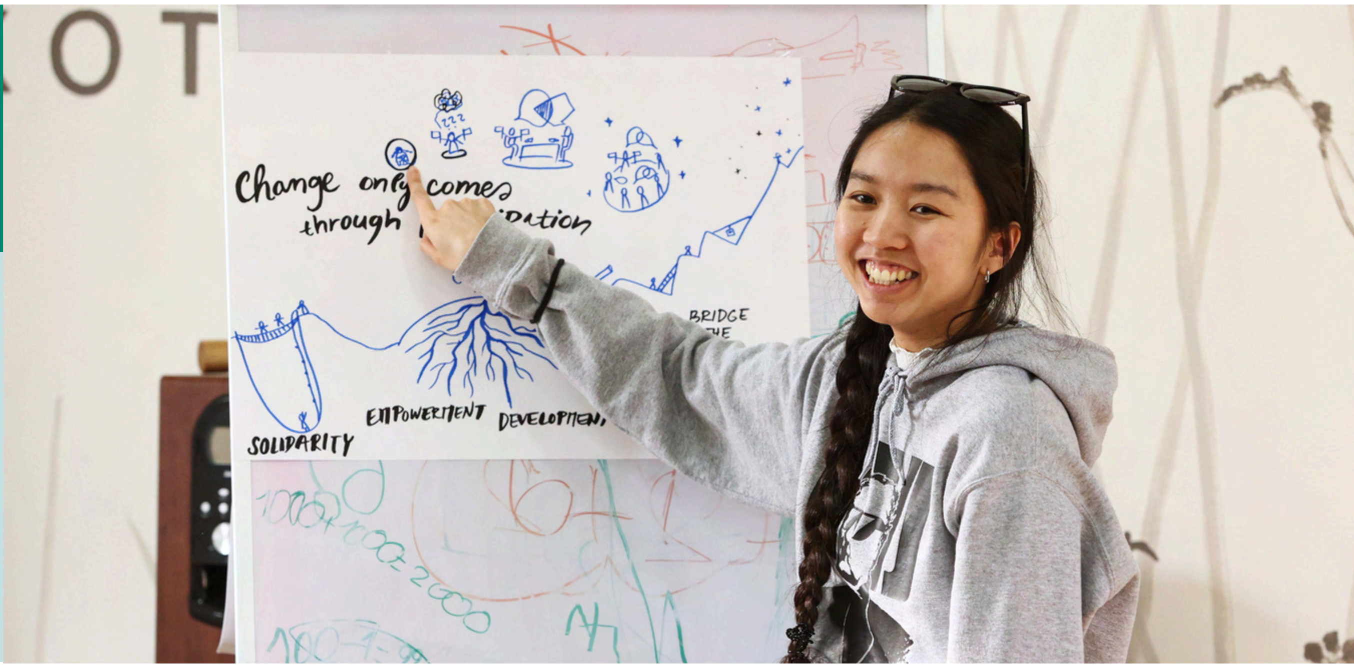
Additionally, the cohort shall be aligned around one broad topic. Thus, the mapping was designed to recognize active young leaders in two areas:

- Nature, ecology, climate actions
- Social cohesion, inclusion, equity

Learnings & Suggestions

The cohort should have at least broad common interest, to avoid misunderstandings and foster collaboration. It is far easier to cocreate joint projects and align on shared interest if persons are working with overlapping topics. Moreover, they had more opportunities to learn from each other.

Participants should be selected not only based on what they have done, but also on how they think and approach challenges. We had search for one common broad topic, but maintained as much diversity as possible, looking for people with various backgrounds, identities, styles of leadership.



3.3 THE COHORT

Investing time and resources into the interview phase proved essential in building a motivated, diverse cohort of 42 participants from Poland, Ukraine, Czech Republic, and Slovakia, who were mostly under the age of 26.

- 11 from Poland
- 11 from Ukraine (some temporarily based in Poland)
- 10 from the Czech Republic
- 10 from Slovakia

This diverse cohort was selected based on their proven leadership potential and key changemaking competencies, such as empathy, the ability to engage others in cooperation, and the personal strength to turn ideas into action.

Most of the group was under 26 years old, with participants ranging from 19 to 47 years old. The group is also balanced in terms of gender, with 18 males and 24 females.

All participants are actively involved in supporting vulnerable groups, thereby promoting social inclusion. Many have experience working directly with war refugees, migrants, and individuals affected by conflict. Several participants are self-advocates, working on issues such as mental health and youth participation. Others use creative approaches, such as organizing cultural events, music festivals, or integrating diverse groups through theatre performances. This rich diversity in experience and expertise ensures a broad range of perspectives and a strong support network for achieving the project’s goals.

Learnings & Suggestions

We recommend selecting a final cohort of slightly over 40 participants, with a minimum of 7 from each country.
This range strikes a balance between fostering deep connections and ensuring a diverse representation. A smaller group may lead to under-representation and risks continuity if participants drop out, while a larger group may dilute engagement.
Along the program implementation we understood how young leaders juggle between different life commitments and drop-outs from the program are unavoidable.

4. LEARNING PROCESS AND TEAM BUILDING

4.1 THE PREPARATION

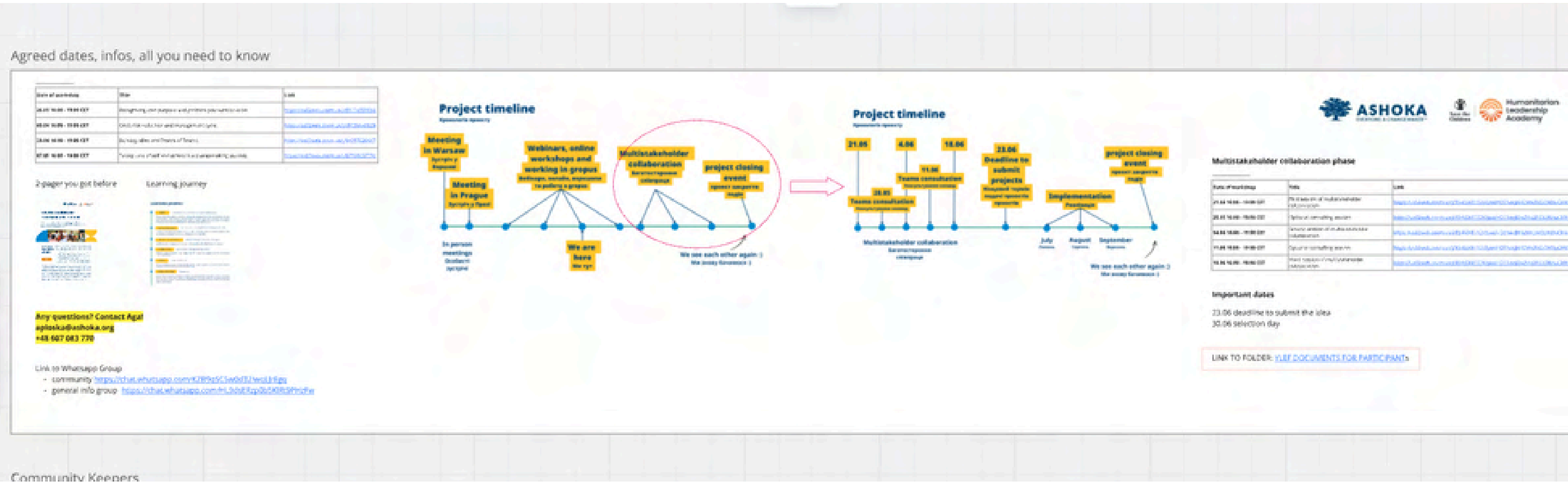
Based on knowledge gained in the first phase, the program team – project manager, learning processes specialists, monitoring and communication specialists – had prepared the details of following phases.

First, the learning experience had been designed, maintaining room for agile changes, according to the cohort needs. The monitoring plan had been embedded from the very beginning to effectively collect feedback and track progress which help to improve the process along the way.

The plan was communicated to the cohort members as a package of introductory materials. It included the overall scope of the program with more detail information about the workshops, calendar of meetings, expected time of involvement and outcomes. The package also included a contract, which each participant signed.

Before inviting the cohort members for the offline meetings, one additional online kick-off took place. It was necessary for participants to get to know Ashoka, meet the organisers and prepare well for the travel arrangements. It is part of the accountability to properly inform participants what we invite them for. We created for them a space to ask all the questions clarify all doubts for them to feel secure in the process.

Additionally, we also created for them the online space using MIRO (an online, collaborative whiteboard platform that was used to store all the necessary information, bio of participants with contact details for each other as well as the visuals from the learning process).



Learnings & Suggestions

In the two-pagers and signed contract, the dates of the online meetings had been clearly stated, as well as calendar invites were sent, all dates and meeting links were added to the shared MIRO board. Still some participants had not attended them, being surprised with the intensity and timing.

Make sure many times that participants effectively receive your information about expected level of their involvement. Still, there is always a certain absence rate, due to unforeseen events. The absences shall be individually followed-up by project or community manager.

The above leads to the suggestion to take some time to set the communication expectations and channels. Due to different experiences and backgrounds, being in touch may not be necessarily a norm for everyone – the more you focus on sharing expectations and building connections at the preparation stage, the easier it will be during the learning process.

Regarding the scheduling of events, it was the calendar dates April to June for online collaborations were not ideal, particularly since many participants were students. Some other time of the year would have been a better fit, as it would have aligned more effectively with their academic schedules, ensuring better attendance and engagement.

4.2 CHANGEMAKER JOURNEYS

At the beginning of the project the cohort members were invited for the offline meeting, which we called Changemaker journey. They could choose one of two dates and places, one in Warsaw (Poland) and one in Prague (Czech Rep.). Depending on the availability, location, and openness to travel, we created for them these two opportunities. As expected most Slovak and Czech participants had attended the Prague meeting, and most Poles and Ukrainians had come to Warsaw, we also had few participants who did chose the nonobvious destination. It allowed us for more diversity in both teams.

It is easier to work with the group of 20, rather than 40 people. It was important for us to design a meeting which is very interactive, based on workshops and with spaces that allow everyone to engage and feel ownership of the process. This is a reason why we proposed two groups, instead of one.

The agendas of both meetings can be found below.

WARSAW MEETING AGENDA	PRAGUE MEETING AGENDA
Day 0	Day 0
Opening dinner – first chance to meet with the group	Hello, who is here with us? – Getting to know each other games and dinner
Day 1	Day 1
Let's begin - why are we here? What can we expect from the next two days? Common contract	Let's begin - why are we here? What can we expect from the next two days? Common contract
Changemaker Journey – recognizing the way that led me to this point (using collage techinique)	get to know the Changemaker Village
Lunch	Lunch

Teambuilding activity led by Adam Jagiełło-Rusiłowski (Ashoka Fellow)	stories of changemakers: Silke Horáková, Mikuláš Minář, person from the program for former prisoners.
Day debrief – pulse check, points of reflection.	Day debrief – pulse check, points of reflection.
Joint dinner	Dinner and an informal evening together
Day 2	Day 2
Getting to know Olga Ślepowrońska (Ashoka Fellow), her story and path leading to start Mudita Association Joint game	What is YOUR changemaker journey? – all day of making and presenting own stories. (Lunch in the meantime)
Lunch	
Meeting with Ashoka Fellow Maciej Podyma in Park Jazdów – story behind wildflower meadow revolution in Poland – Fundacja ŁĄKA, connecting activism with scientific approach.	
How to ask for help, learn from others and on our own mistakes.	
Wrap up with Maciej – questions and sharing feedback Session summary – next steps in Young Leaders programme.	Wrap up of the two-day workshop

The meeting in Warsaw and in Prague varied in terms of programme, venue, and facilitation. In the end it became two different experiences, but both had the same outcome of building a group.

Both meetings had an important role of getting to know each other, validation of group needs, deeper understanding of the group dynamics, and aligning the joint understanding of the programme itself.

The key element of both meeting was to create safe spaces for sharing. The enabling elements were translations and contract. We embraced the awkwardness of having a group with mixed language capacities, left enough space for translations, also enabled participants to step-in to help each other understand and speak up.

The contract between participants was very important in building new joint culture. It is especially crucial if we meet in the group where some participants have lived experience of war, forced migration and may hold traumas.

Learnings & Suggestions

There is not one best recipe of how to create an agenda of the offline meeting. The good practices are:

- use the potential of partners you have in place, ideally by visiting them. Each time brief them about what young participants should get out of the meeting, so both sides feel satisfied with the encounter
- give enough space for games, laughing, conversations 1-1
- invest in great facilitation, where experts provide the group with good amount of deep work, tension release, can address conflict and enable integration.

4.3 ONLINE LEARNING PROCESS

After meeting in person, program participants came back home and the rest of work had to be done online. In the first part of the program, we wanted to strengthen capacities of participants in key areas relevant to leadership in times of crises. We offered four online workshops held every second Tuesday from 4pm to 7pm.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT:

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 pushed many social actors to become humanitarian. We had observed many non-profits developing their humanitarian plug-in and we recognized some patterns:

The more you know about your own area – root causes, symptoms, actors, and forces in the systems, the better you can recognize own added value to response. For example, specialized non-profit working with Roma communities engaged in support Roma refugees and they are until now a great experts and key stakeholders in this area. While NGOs without strong core were jumping from one sector to another, leading to short-term projects, not sustainable growth, and burnout.

The better you collaborate, the more you can achieve in the long run. There is no crisis that can be addressed by one stakeholder and cooperation, partnerships, networks are key to effective response with strong foundations for rehabilitation, mitigation, and preparedness.

The better you care about self and others, the further you go. Humanitarian response cannot be based on heropreneurship, nor pushing self toward edges without support and rest. Resilience can be achieved by a good balance between teamwork and self-care.

Knowing the humanitarian system allows us to navigate in it. The earlier you have at least basic recognition of the system, the better you can navigate, find partners and avoid harm by unprofessional, well-meant aid.

The topics of sessions:

1. Recognizing own purpose and problem;
2. Crisis risk reduction and management cycle;

3. Building alliances
4. Taking care of self and others

The workshops were designed to engage participants in interactive activities, foster collaboration, and utilize visual tools like the MIRO board for problem-solving exercises. The workshop structure involved a mix of group and individual tasks, allowing for both personal reflection and team-based discussion.

Online sessions were translated simultaneously, enabling all the participants to speak in own language. It was important to create safe space online and ensure that even though behind the screens, participants feel included and engaged.

To every participant that was not present in any of the webinars, an invitation to catch up were sent with links to MIRO board. Not only separate meetings were organised for them, but also the project manager shared materials from the workshops, summary emails, and recordings.

4.4 SESSION 1: RECOGNISING OWN PURPOSE AND PROBLEM

Objective:

After meeting in person, program participants came back home and the rest of work had to be done online. In the first part of the program, we wanted to strengthen capacities of participants in key areas relevant to leadership in times of crises. We offered four online workshops held every second Tuesday from 4pm to 7pm.

Learnings & Suggestions

If your cohort is speaking multiple languages and you need translations, it may occur that simultaneous translation is available only in the main room (this is the case with ZOOM). At the same time, you may want to mix participants in the breakout rooms to support networking. It may help you to ask everyone to write the abbreviation(s) of the languages they speak in the name visible during the call (i.e. EN,PL_Agnieszka) - it will help you to mix together participants who speak the same languages.

No matter how experience participants are going to take part in the program, technical issues are always present. Consider creating a small manual or a document with print screens explaining how to turn on translations, edit the name, etc.

The program of the first session was as follows:

Welcome and Introductions

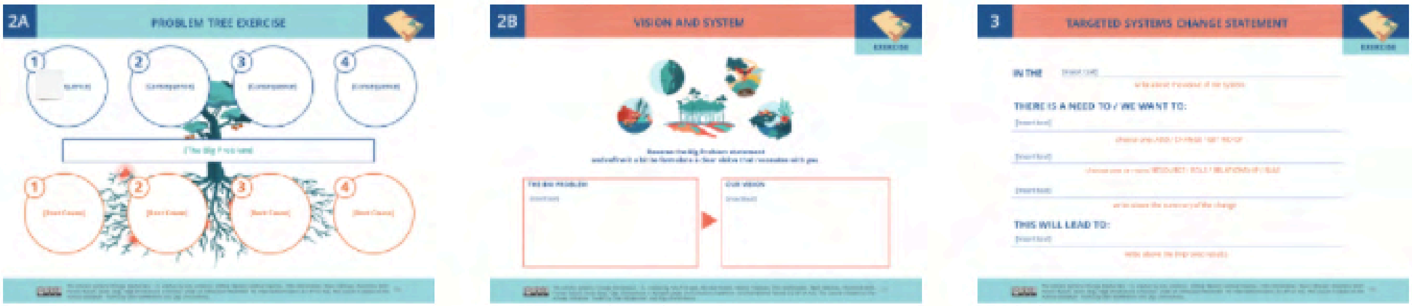
- Facilitator welcomed participants and introduced staff members and their roles during the workshop
- Brief information shared about MIRO as the main collaborative tool.
- Invites for future webinars and joining a WhatsApp group for communication.

Check-in Exercise

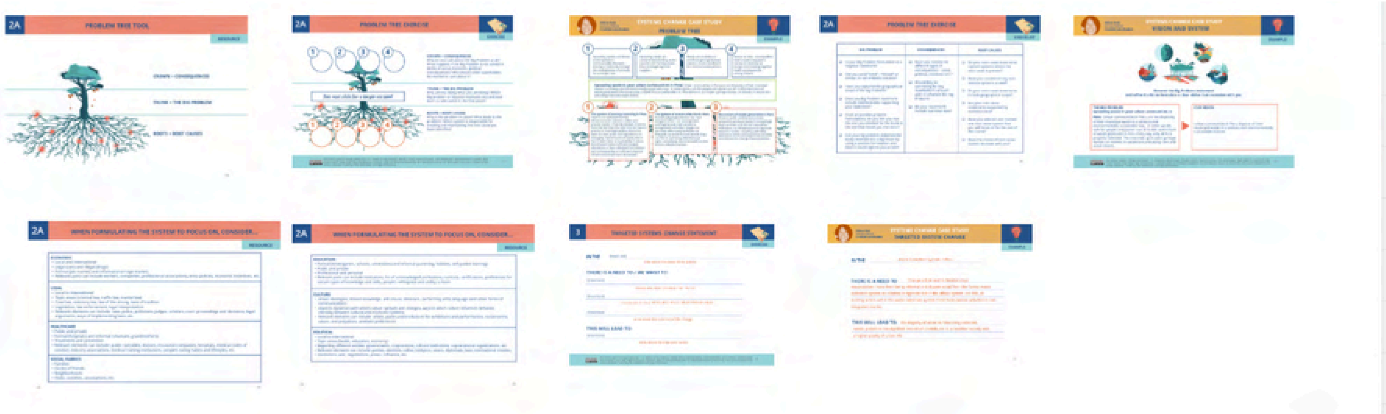
- Participants paired in breakout rooms to reflect on their feelings and contributions to the workshop (6 minutes).

Problem Tree Exercise

- Introduction of the Problem Tree exercise using MIRO.
- Individual mapping of problem trees in breakout rooms. To ease the process, we created templates of problem trees with their names on.



- Group sharing in trios (3 minutes per participant for presentation, followed by 2 minutes of feedback).



Short Break

- Time provided for participants to relax and regroup.

Vision Statement Development

- Focus on transforming identified problems into actionable visions.
- Participants articulated vision statements in breakout rooms (15 minutes).

Group Sharing

- Participants returned to the main room to share their progress on vision statements

Wrap-up Session

- Summary of work and final remarks from facilitators.
- Participants left with a clear understanding of their individual problems and vision statements, along with a system change framework.

Everyone was invited to fill in the problem tree for the problem they want to focus on (even if they were not present during the session). Participants were sharing positive feedback about the session – even if they already knew the tool, they could have looked at the problem from different perspective. What they appreciated a lot was also an opportunity to get the feedback from other participants about the problem they see and how they talk about it.

Learnings & Suggestions

The MIRO board was an essential tool throughout the workshop, enabling real-time collaboration and visualization of ideas. It helped participants structure their thoughts during the Problem Tree and Vision Statement exercises. The digital space encouraged creativity and clarity, allowing participants to see their ideas visually, making the process of turning problems into visions more intuitive and collaborative.

There were additional materials shared with them after the session as well (all stored on MIRO board) allowing to dive deeper into the problem and how they are set in the system.

4.5 SESSION 2: CRISIS RISK REDUCTION AND MANAGEMENT CYCLE

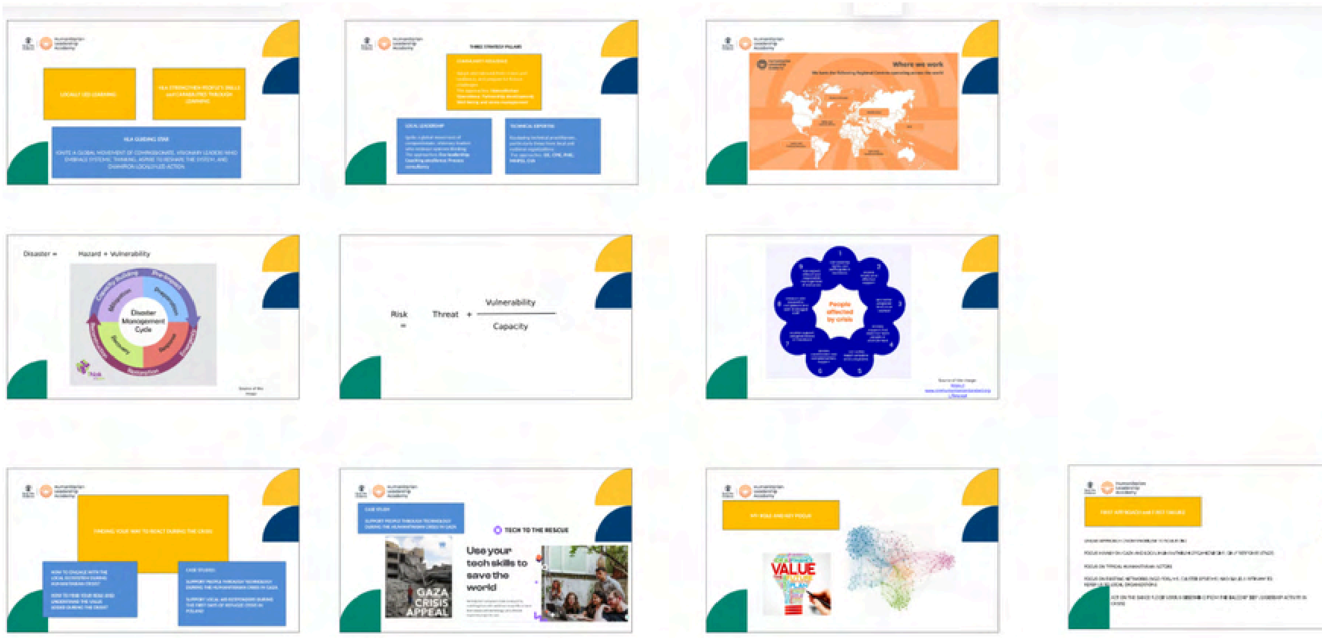
The second workshop was designed to equip changemakers with the knowledge to act in crisis situations and ensure participants can understand and apply disaster risk reduction principles.

Welcome and Organizational Details

- Project manager welcomed participants and reviewed the schedule and objectives.
- Facilitator Introductions
- Conducted a knowledge check to assess participants' understanding of the humanitarian system.

Introduction to Disaster Management Cycle (DMC)

- Emphasized connections to humanitarian work and risk reduction.
- Explored the intersection of social entrepreneurship with disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.



Group Discussions

- Participants divided into groups of four to discuss their work within the DMC framework.
- Individual reflection (5 minutes) followed by group discussions (15 minutes). There were templated prepared for every participant. To ease the logistics, every template was signed with a name of the participant.
- Facilitator summarized group work, emphasizing individual roles in disaster risk reduction and response.

Leadership in Humanitarian Crises

- Reflections on the role of leadership and collaboration across sectors.
- Focus on fitting individual work into stages of mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

Core Humanitarian Standards and Do No Harm Principle

- Review of core humanitarian standards (translated into Ukrainian).
- Group work to identify needs for confidence in standards and observations.
- Discussion of positions in the management cycle and lessons learned.

Final Questions and Overview of Upcoming Sessions

Participants appreciated a lot the life examples and the discussions that took place during the session. The more they could relate to the cases presented during the session, the more they were willing to share their perspective.

4.6 SESSION 3: BUILDING ALLIANCES AND TEAMS

The third session focused on team engagement, breakout group discussions, and theoretical insights, all aimed at guiding participants through thematic areas of interest and encouraging them to "To focus deeply on understanding the root of the issues rather than rushing to find solutions."

The project manager began by sharing a link to the MIRO board, kicking off the session with an energizer and welcome question to engage participants and set a positive tone. This was followed by a reminder about the project timeline, key dates, and an introduction to the concept of Community Keepers - individuals assigned to help maintain the community dynamic. The manual was also mentioned, informing participants of the project's guiding resources.

As a result of analysis of the problem trees of participants (refer to session 1), everyone was invited before the session to choose the thematic group. They could also change their mind during the session (i.e. if after initial discussion they didn’t want to continue in a certain group). Participants were invited to assign themselves to thematic clusters that best aligned with their focus areas such as:

- **People on the Move (8-13 participants)**: focused on integration, relocation, empowerment, cultural bridges, and combating discrimination.

- **Care (7-10 participants)**: centered around mental health, burnout, disabilities, and family crises, including issues like menstrual poverty and exclusion.
- **Forming Experience (6-12 participants)**: dedicated to education, mindset shifts, and rethinking the educational system.
- **Inviting to Participation (6-8 participants)**: focused on public dialogue, decision-making, and political participation.
- They could also propose 5th cluster if they felt that none of the group is matching their interest.

Learnings & Suggestions

It is key for a project manager or other learning specialists to look at the cohort of participants from a bird eye view, recognising common threads interests and areas of engagement. This analysis allows the team to divide the cohort into groups, which may suggest for them future team members.
It is important here not to push anyone intergroup where we see them, but maintaining the suggestion give people the freedom to self-identify with the topic.
This kind of division of the cohort into four groups allows them to also recognise that the big group has some common threats within. It is not so obvious for the participants to be able to recognise those patterns, so it must be a role of community manager.

Introduction to the Session

- Facilitator explained the importance of building “teams of teams” and empowering collaboration across thematic areas.

Icebreaker Exercise

- Participants entered breakout rooms to discuss their identities within thematic clusters. This was the first time they could see who else chose the same theme, so it was important to give them the space to reconnect, understand the purpose and find common ground.
- Focus on personal and professional connections to issues and hopes for group contributions.
- Emphasis on ideas, dreams, and potential for future collaboration.

Significant Idea Generation

- Concept of an international workshop potentially to be held in Ukraine emerged.
- Each thematic group had an Ashoka facilitator and Community Keepers (CKs) to support group dynamics.

Group Dynamics Support

- Examples of Community Keepers per thematic group:
  - Inviting to Participation" group had four CKs.
  - Forming experience” group had 1 CK.
  - CARE" group had two CKs.
  - People on the Move" group had one CK.

Reflection and Theoretical Segment

- Participants reconvened in the main room after a short break.
- Facilitator presented on team building, managing expectations, and effective group leadership.

Imagining Change and Impact

- Participants envisioned the change or impact they hoped to create within their teams.
- Tasked to write on the MIRO board about potential events, locations, and invitees.
- Encouraged creative thinking, though some found it challenging without concrete goals.

Check-out Question

- Workshop concluded with a reflection question: "What is one thing you would take away from this session?"
- Allowed participants to reflect on their learning and contributions, reinforcing connections to ongoing work within their thematic groups.

Learnings & Suggestions

At every session, a technical check-in session took place 30 minutes before the official start. The Ashoka team and translators joined early to ensure smooth execution of roles and to check all technical aspects, including connections and breakout room assignments. Translators were briefed ahead of meeting about the program, topic and specific linguo, ensuring language barriers were addressed effectively.
Facilitators and translators were also always using prepared scenarios (with exact time and tasks) which helped everyone to manage effectively the time, check if the sessions were on time or there were any adjustments needed and manage the energy level.

4.7 SESSION 4: TAKING CARE OF SELF AND OTHERS

The 4th workshop was designed to provide participants with an opportunity to engage in deep, reflective discussions on their roles in social change, explore wellbeing strategies, and evaluate future collaboration approaches. The session was a blend of individual work, group discussions, and theoretical inputs, structured to build resilience and promote balanced collaboration among participants.

Welcome and Icebreaker:

- Participants engaged in informal "coffee chats" in small groups to ease into the session.

Introduction of Due Diligence Process:

- Explanation of the formal requirements for organizations to receive seed funding.

Individual Reflection Activity:

- Participants reflected on their contributions and gains from social change work using the MIRO board.

Wellbeing and Burnout Discussion:

- Facilitator introduced a model with three levels of wellbeing and five key areas for building resilience.
- Participants created individual micro-plans for self-care and resilience called “Library of micropractices”

Group Wellbeing Concept:

- Emphasis on the idea that "wellbeing inspires welldoing."

Thematic Group Work:

- Participants discussed strategies and boundaries for maintaining balance and shared experiences of collaboration.

Burnout Culture Framework:

- Introduction of six key areas of burnout culture based on Christina Maslach's framework:
  i.Lack of control
  ii.Insufficient reward
  iii.Lack of community
  iv.Absence of fairness
  v.Conflict in values
  vi.Work overload

Collaboration Strategies:

- Participants framed future collaboration strategies to support personal wellbeing and productive outcomes in thematic groups.

Sharing Insights:

- Groups shared their insights and frameworks with the larger group.

Wrap-Up and Reflection:

- Participants reflected on their experiences and shared key takeaways, collected by an Ashoka Team member.

Conclusion:

- The project manager summarized the day's activities and outlined next steps, ending with a final check-out question for participants.

Learnings & Suggestions

During all sessions facilitators were introducing the concepts and tools that can be useful for participants not only when working on projects but in their life as well (i.e. library of micropractices or discussing about the mindset). This is a well-seen practice that is also engaging the participants more.

4.8 COMMUNITY KEEPERS

One of the most highly regarded aspects of the YLEF program has been the introduction of Community Keepers (CK's) role. In April, an Open Call was extended to all YLEF participants, inviting them to apply for a more engaged part in the co-creation of the community of young leaders. As part of this initiative, participants were encouraged to help shape the YLEF space, suggesting sessions, co-organizing workshops, brainstorming ideas for the final event, and actively managing communication channels such as WhatsApp groups.

To apply for the role, candidates needed to reply within the given deadline to the following questions: why should it be you? Share one observation about community of Young Leaders.

Additionally, the overall attitude and attendance was taken into account as well.

Successful applicants were offered additional support, leadership skill development, and a monthly financial recognition, depending on the participant's country of residence. Ultimately, eight participants: two from each country (Poland, Ukraine, Czechia, and Slovakia) were selected as Community Keepers by the end of April, with the goal of announcing them during the workshop on April 23rd.

The CK role is an opportunity for growth, more self-catalytic network, and better user experience. At the same time, it may be a challenge, especially in understanding the scope of responsibilities, leadership and autonomy of the role. While preparing such role in the project, it is worth to consider:

- Consultative time of PM with community keepers, both 1-1 and group.
- CKs mostly need mentorship rather than micromanagement.
- Process of management, monitoring and self-driven KPI for community keepers
- Process of 360 feedback loop, focused on participants assessing the usefulness of support of community keeper.

Being a resource-heavy element of the program, the CK is a part that gives significant additional impact, as it is a unique opportunity, rarely experienced in leadership programs. The monitoring proves that eight people selected to be CK progressed significantly in their leadership skills.

During the program each CK set the individual goals for themselves (such as improving leadership skills, open communication, managing challenging situations, etc.) and assess themselves twice: at the beginning of the role, at the end of the program.

Some learnings from the CK element include:

- Fostering responsibility and autonomy: Early emphasis on self-driven leadership helped CKs transition from dependence on project management to becoming leaders within the group.
- Clear objectives and communication: Establishing clarity and co-creation model around expectations and objectives from the beginning is crucial to avoid confusion and maintain ownership and progress.
- Mentorship over supervision: Young leaders thrive when provided with mentorship and guidance, rather than having tasks dictated to them. This approach encourages initiative and strengthens leadership development.
- Early involvement and relationship-building: Involving CKs early in the project built strong relationships and a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
- Adaptability and continuous support: The need for regular feedback sessions and adaptable strategies was emphasized, ensuring ongoing improvement and addressing emerging challenges.

Learnings & Suggestions

It is very interesting how differently every person was answering the questions – from the broader perspective to a program specific answer. By analyzing the answers, we could already recognize the main challenges young people see and want to tackle. Giving the space and trust that they can do that, at the same time building the culture of open communication is essential to the success of this role.

4.9 COMMUNITY BUILDING

4.9.1 BEING IN TOUCH

The group had received many opportunities to engage aside of the sessions, such as: Whatapp group, email lists, Instagram profiles and Miro board, common for the whole process. The opportunities had not been used in their full potential, remaining rather static and dependent on the incentives from Project Manager and Community Keepers. It is not necessarily wrong; however, we keep asking ourselves and the cohort, what needs to happen for them to engage in contact?

Learnings & Suggestions

Be mindful of motivation to engage with people online. In times of constant flood of information, the channels you create for the cohort may not be prioritized. It needs an investment of community management, time, and patience to build a network online. At the same time significant collaborations may happen 1-1, without being visible in the channel.

Thus, it is important to monitor the connections, asking “who are you in touch with?” to understand the density of the network.
From the very beginning communicate that you want to know what is emerging: any new friendships, projects, invites for the events. Every new connection is a great news; however, it is not natural for majority of participants to share it with Project Manager. The more you repeat and share why it is important, share examples, the bigger chances that you will be informed.

Some of the cohort members had been in touch with Project Manager quite often, however their responsiveness and proactiveness in this contact varied significantly.

YLEF participants say that the most powerful are always meetings offline. They appreciated the informal offline gathering, called out by one of community keepers. The aim of the meeting was to check-in, think together about the future and just spend time with each other. The meeting was also a moment to record each other and promote on social media.

This example shows how the cohort members had created a network, where some people are „nods“ and join others for common actions. Building trust by small acts of kindness, like reaching out to each other through social media or phone, is key to maintain a relationship and network, which gives a leader security that the community is active, and new possibilities will be emerging.

4.10 MONITORING

The whole program had been supervised by a monitoring, evaluation, and learning specialist. Having the implementation plan allowed us to adjust diverse and enjoyable tools to collect feedback, gather data for monitoring, and create moments of joint learning.

The offline Changemaker Journeys meetings had been carefully observed by Ashoka staff, who were equipped with a set of questions they should answer while observing the group. Later, the findings were shared internally to improve subsequent steps and future events of this kind. They also contributed to this publication.

You can find the questions here:

- To what extent do the group members interact with each other?
- What are the visible attitudes of empathy, understanding, and enabling others?
- What languages do they use to interact? Are there mixed national groups?
- Are people moving between groups and pairs naturally?
- Do people get to know each other's names?
- Is there an idea of following the meeting through a joint channel?
- Who is taking the lead in the group?
- What is the visible approach to solving problems during the event?
- Other observations?

Of course, the observation was introduced to the group, explaining the purpose after presentations and data gathering.

A participatory evaluation approach was used at all relevant moments of the process. Rounds of sharing in the forum, individual journaling, and peer sharing were introduced to meet two purposes. One was to gather data for program progress assessment conducted by the monitoring specialist.

The second was to encourage self-awareness and observation of personal progress for participants, as this capacity is very important for leadership performance.

During the offline meetings we also wanted to see the shift in participants seeing themselves as changemakers, asking them at the beginning and at the end the same set of questions:

- I know what Ashoka does,
- I understand my leadership role for the others to be included and enabled to act,
- I see the big picture behind the problem,
- I understand what changemaking is.

Additionally, we asked the following questions after every module, to be answered in the written form:

- I feel good with this group (scale 1 to 5, where 1 = I don’t feel good with this group and 5 = I feel good with this group)
- One thing I had learnt from this session was... / the most interesting thing during the session was...

Learnings & Suggestions

Build from the very beginning the culture of reflecting. It is not common for everyone to name lessons (even if someone says there are no lessons, it may be still considered as a learning for this person – is it about attitude, approach, experience, interactions with people, not being fully present, etc,). The more you ask and the more space for sharing you secure, the more interesting findings you’ll get. Sharing and reflecting need time.

The online sessions were a bit more challenging in terms of monitoring. We had to rely on the feedback provided by the group, both in the forum and individually. Throughout the program, participants also had access to an anonymous feedback channel provided by our partner, Save the Children. An anonymous physical box for feedback and complaints was present at the offline events.

We conducted a few rounds of individual calls with each participant. Some of them were contacted by the project manager, while others were contacted by community keepers. This was to create a safe space for honest conversations about the program, a person's place and role, findings, and observations. All of this information was collected and analyzed by the monitoring specialist, maintaining high standards of confidentiality. The findings were shared with all relevant specialists in a short team, who are designing the next steps and taking care of the community.

The questions we asked in the 1-1 monitoring conversations ranged slightly, but some of them were:

- Have you been to webinars? (if **YES**, ask next questions, if **NO**, ask why the person was not participating)
- Which one you found the most useful?
- The first workshop was about the problem tree and recognizing systems. Have you learned anything new about system change?
- What was the thing that stayed with you the most from the workshop on problem identification?
- The second workshop was about the disaster management cycle. Have you learned anything new about humanitarian response and disaster management?
- What was the thing that stayed with you the most from this workshop?
- The third one was about building teams and collaboration. Have you learned anything new about collaboration from this workshop?

- What was the thing that stayed with you the most from this workshop?
- The last one was about wellbeing, taking care of oneself and the team. Have you learned anything new?
- What was the thing that stayed with you the most from this workshop?
- Have you developed any skills until now in the program? What were they?
- Is there anything else you want to share about the knowledge and skills development in the program until this moment?
- How is it going, what's the current situation?
- Are you engaged in any of the projects?
- What is your role?
- How do you assess the time of forming projects, what lessons have you taken for yourself?
- Which competences or skills from the program are you using in your daily work?
- Are you in touch with anyone from the program?
- ·Are you aware of the CK role?
- Do you know who these people are?
- How do you assess the role?
- Do you know there is a final event? (followed by invitation) are you planning to come?
- Is there anything that would interest you to happen during final event that would motivate you even more to come?
- Is there anything that should happen during next 3 months that you are interested in (calls, weorkshops, etc.)
- Other comments

The monitoring questions had been also embedded in the final reporting from the seed funding. The questions focused mainly on the team collaboration models, individual and group learning. They also reflected the outputs and outcomes assumed by the implementing team, with additional questions about the reasons for success or failure in certain elements of project implementation.

4.11 LEARNING FROM THE PHASE 2

Initially, the transition to an online format posed challenges, particularly in maintaining consistent engagement. However, participants quickly adapted, embracing new digital tools and strategies to stay connected. By integrating interactive sessions and using tools like breakout rooms, and live discussions, we saw a marked improvement in engagement. In the first month, engagement fluctuated, but soon contributions were increasingly insightful as participants adjusted to the online format of workshops. During the third workshop, it was the first time when in groups participants started discussing systematic problems with other members interested in the same problem. Participants reported feeling more connected and energized by the dynamic format, leading to richer and more meaningful discussions.

The disassociation with themes of workshops also impacted engagement, with participants showing more interest when the topics were directly relevant to them. This highlights the importance of tailoring the workshops schedule and content to better suit the participants' needs and interests. Additionally, addressing the issue of online fatigue is essential, as many young participants expressed difficulty in maintaining the same level of focus and interaction online as they would in an offline setting.

The overwhelming nature of continuous online learning contributed to difficulties in meaningful participation. Considering the fast-paced lives of the youth nowadays, a significant challenge emerged was that many participants failed in responding to emails promptly or providing meaningful written feedback to the project manager. This lack of timely communication and engagement hindered the project's overall effectiveness and made it difficult to maintain momentum and assess progress.

5. SEED FUNDING

5.1 CREATION OF PROJECTS

After the time of joint learning, the project manager, together with learning process specialists created the next phase of engagement – the seed funding for four teams.

Due to the nature of funding, the grants for projects had to be given to legal entities which played a role of backbone organization for the implementing team. Thus, the preparation was going two-fold: selection of the back-bone organization and shaping of the design and implementing teams.

5.1.1 BACK-BONE ORGANIZATIONS

We seized the opportunity to introduce the due diligence process to the selected backbone organizations for the participants. This process is a crucial aspect of the humanitarian system, as financial partners and donors in humanitarian development often require extensive due diligence from organizations seeking to become implementing partners.

The process we proposed to participants was based on a framework developed by our partners, Save the Children and the Humanitarian Leadership Academy. While we simplified it, it still adhered to all funding requirements. We invited all participants, along with the organizations they represented, to engage in the due diligence exercise.

At the same time, we made it clear that we needed to select four organizations that would serve as the backbone for the implementing teams.

To support all participants, especially those representing young organizations in the early stages of development, we offered assistance throughout the due diligence process. This exercise provided them with an opportunity to identify gaps within their organizations and make improvements.

Ultimately, four organizations participated in the exercise, and each of them was already connected to four implementing teams. Each organization was required to complete the following form.

- Name of organisation
- Legal form of the organisation
- KRS or relevant register No.
- Persons representing the organisation (authorised to sign on its behalf)
- Organisation's website address or social media profile
- Contact person (alternative to the participant of YL)
- Contact email address
- Contact telephone number
- Address (town, street, building and premises number)
- Date of commencement of activities (according to documents)
- Substantive report for the previous year (link to website)
- ‘Financial report for the previous year (web link), in case of lack of report - description of financial situation
- Describe past experiences of the organization with list of past and present financing partners, list of major projects
- Describe current programs, projects with information about financing source and financial volume
- Describe current programs, projects with information about financing source and financial volume
- What is the way of proceeding if you have to make a major purchase (assume over 1000 USD) in the organization? In case the way of work differs depending on the volume of purchase, describe how.
- Describe the structure of your team, professional relations between members and their employment status.
- Tell us who and how take strategic decisions in the organization?
- How do you proceed if you want to hire someone?

- Describe your ways of monitoring the programs you implement? How do you know if you had been successful?
- How do you ensure the feedback mechanisms from participants and within the organization?

After reviewing the applications, the project manager, along with an internal specialist from the organization, held a separate meeting with representatives of the applicants. During this meeting, they provided feedback on the submitted responses, offered suggestions for improvement, and shared additional information regarding the expected policies of the backbone organization, including logistical, accounting, and safeguarding procedures.

This process ensured that the financial resources allocated to the participant teams would be managed effectively, adhering to high standards of transparency and accountability. For some participants who had less experience in project and organizational management, this meeting proved to be an invaluable learning opportunity.

5.1.2 TEAMS CREATION

The project manager together with community manager supported the cohort of participant to identify the common elements in their work, proposing four cross-cutting themes. On the last session of learning process, these themes were introduced to divide the cohort into working groups in an exercise. It was an experiment to see if participants will feel well in such groups and how they work with each other.

Still it was not a final division of groups, but a suggestion to start the conversation about the teams.

Learnings & Suggestions

It is crucial to allow participants to build the teams as they want. The division should never be given by project manager. From the very beginning we saw the some of the people go along with each other and others don't. We never pushed for collaboration, but give freedom the participants to engage in the group as much as they want and to whatever group they want. It allowed also participants to show the initiative and proactive approach – if they didn't feel they match the pre-defined group, they were given a chance to suggest the new group and invite other members to join them.

It is a good idea to take a balcony view and analyse the recognised interests and talents of participants, and try to connect them in preliminary groups, which are based on common interests.
In each cohort this division will look differently, so we do not suggest or share any examples of the cross cutting themes.

In May, so a few weeks after the learning process, we set a deadline for the participants to form teams. While we did not specify that there had to be four groups, we closely observed how they divided themselves and the emerging topics they expressed interest in exploring. This approach allowed us to remain flexible in allocating the funding across more or fewer groups than initially anticipated.

In our budget and project proposal, we suggested the possibility of four groups for grant funding. However, in collaboration with our financing partner, we maintained an agile approach, remaining responsive to the participants' preferences and ideas.

Learnings & Suggestions

At certain moments, you may notice the formation of many small teams. This is perfectly acceptable, provided you are prepared to support multiple teams. You can also encourage a few teams to come together and explore the possibility of collaborating and combining their efforts.
The process of team formation can be messy and may involve some tensions.

Use the power of relations that participants have with community keepers. They can be facilitators of teams' formation, without tension of power imbalance that is inherently present in relation with project manager or another senior specialist. Avoid suggestions, if participants progress in teams' formation and do not ask for intervention.

The time of team formation was also important in checking the individual level of motivation and involvement in the whole programme. Inevitably some of participants are more engaged than others and hold more leadership and had been more active in proposing the team formation and the topic for the project. While the others got slightly disengaged or even discouraged, as faced the difficulty in finding their space in teams. This is a natural process, which shall not be surprising. The key is to maintain the relationship with all the participants, open feedback channels and supportive attitude, even if young leader steps out from this moment of the program.

Learnings & Suggestions

We know about participants who had great ideas but didn't want to propose it due to various reasons (on purpose didn't want to take leadership role on themselves, didn't want to compete with other ideas, didn't have the space in live to push for their ideas). All reasons are valid and we recommend to stay in touch with participants (both by project manager and community keepers) to monitor this and support if it is possible.

5.1.3 PROJECTS' DESIGN AND MULTISTAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION

Once the teams were established and the backbone organizations selected, all participants were invited to engage in a series of design sprints based on multistakeholder collaboration approach. Learning specialists created a manual to assist the teams in answering key questions necessary for designing effective projects within the framework provided and the following content:

- reminder about the goal of the YLEF project and timeline,
- explanation about evaluation process,
- guidelines on team forming and team workbook (rules, tips to consider building a diverse team, in the workbook to be filled in by every team: name of the team, members, values, principles and rules of cooperation, social problem and project goal),
- due dilligence process described with questions,
- project proposal (title, summary, team, humanitarian plug-in, social change, target group, objective and key results, activities, scale and scope of the actions, risk mitigation, key partner, budget, possible future steps),
- implementation rules (policies, safeguarding, Ashoka's values, purchase procedures, data and privacy, GDPR, complaint and feedback mechanisms, monitoring),
- reporting.

Each team was allocated a budget of PLN 40,000 (around EUR 9400), with no preconditions, and given three months to implement a project of their own design. While we considered a strong project to be connected to the humanitarian system, this was not a strict requirement.

Even if a project's topic was not directly related to humanitarian efforts, we could still identify key elements of the Core Humanitarian Standards that would be enhanced during the project's implementation. An analysis of these Core Humanitarian Standard elements is provided in this **article**.

We set a deadline for the submission of project proposals, after which a group of specialists reviewed the submissions and provided feedback with suggestions for improvement. The second round of project proposals resulted in enhanced quality, planning, and budgeting. Ultimately, four out of the five submitted proposals were awarded seed funding. Details of the projects implemented under this program can be found in the **following description.**

The criteria for assessment of the project proposals are reflected in the table below.

NO	CRITERION	DESCRIPTION	ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS	POINTS
1	Everyone a changemaker	The proposed project is focusing on agency and allows community to participate in the idea. We aim to build a world in which every person has agency, the skills and tools to act for the common good. We support ideas and individuals whose activities enable their beneficiaries to empower themselves, co-determine and influence the actions directed at them.	How are the participants empowering the self-agency? Are they creating options to participate by their target groups?	0-4
2	Preparedness to plug-in to humanitarian system	There is a clear explanation of how the idea demonstrates the preparedness to plug-in to humanitarian system.	Are participants able to explain how the idea is fitting in the humanitarian system? Are they referring to disaster management cycle? Are they referring to Core Humanitarian Standard?	0-4

3	Makes the impact	The team demonstrates that they check the scope of the problem (made analysis of the problem). They are able to name the impact made by the solution and how the idea is answering in the systemic challenge, what change it may bring – they are able to say what can be best result and sets up the steps for the future	Has the team made analysis of the problem? Is the team able to name the system the idea is in? Is the team able to name the impact? Is the team able to present next steps for the future after the project?	0-4
4	Promotes collaboration and equal participation of all partners	The team describes the participations of all parties involved – everyone has a clear role and responsibility within a project. The team explains the collaboration and equal participation.	Is a team describing the roles of all the participants? Is the work divided equally? Are the assignments explained (why particular participant has these tasks)?	0-3
5	Is international	This criterion may be considered in 2 possible options: 1) the team is international (participants are representing minimum 2 different countries), or 2) the team is national, but the impact of the project is international (so the actions planned are not only directed to the target group of one country). Points 1 and 2 may be met either separately or both at the same time.	Is the project team international? Is the impact of the project international? (minimum 2 countries for both questions) Give 1 point for every aspect	0-2

6	Is realistic and within the budget of the grant	The project is going to be implemented within 3 months, so the actions planned need to be done within the given period of time. The budget of the grant will not exceed PLN 40,000.	Are the actions planned realistic to be done within given period of time? Are the actions forming a whole picture of the project? Is the budget planned in a clear and economic way? Are there included personal costs?	0-3
7	Meets technical criterium as a result of due diligence process	Within a project team there needs to be at least one organisation that is able to receive the grant. This means that organisation needs to undergo the formal process of due diligence as described in the chapter Due Diligence. If there are more than 1 organisation within a team, the one who will receive the grant must be chosen by the team members.	Is there an organisation who underwent the due diligence process and may receive the funds? Additional point for sending it on time Additional point for sending 2-pager (as requested)	0-3
			Sum Additional comments/ recommen-dations	

5.1.4 CONTRACTING

After accepting for project proposals for backbone organisations had entered into a process of a formal grant agreement. It was necessary for the organisations to ensure transparency and have a clear accountability about the funding entrusted to the programme participants.

5.2 PROJECTS’ IMPLEMENTATION AND CLOSURE

It is important to recognise the fact that project implementation was not aim for successful delivery of those projects. The 1st and the most important aim of this face of the programme was actually for participants to experience how to manage project, work in the team, be accountable for a financial grant and improve leadership skills.

Project implementation was planned for July, August and September, which was quite challenging as being also summer holidays time. However, naming this challenge and recognising the possible risks around the fact that some of the project participants partners or beneficiaries might not be available during summer break, allowed to plan the implementation accordingly.

Learnings & Suggestions

Young leaders often tend to overestimate the amount of work they can accomplish within a given timeframe. It is an important lesson to learn how to plan realistically in order to meet the established indicators. The role of the community manager or project manager—a trusted senior individual—is to recognize the risk of overestimation and to address potential tensions within the team. They can assist the teams in managing internal conflicts in this way, all while ensuring they do not take control of the project.

5.2.1 ONGOING SUPPORT AND MENTORING

When implementing the project, especially when it is the first time for the team working together as well as managing the project, it is crucial to have diversified support. Highly appreciated idea was to offer the support from experienced specialists.

Therefore, all four teams had been offered mentoring. They had been paired with specialists from the cohort of senior humanitarian leaders provided by Humanitarian Leadership Academy based on the common interest in the same or similar area.

Each team meet the mentor at least two times.

The first step was to get to know each other, connect and agree on the goal of the mentorship. The teams were free to participate in the session as a group or to nominate a leader (or leaders) who would participate in the sessions with mentors.

As in any mentor mentee relationship also here the experience may deliver very different results and can be assessed differently depending on the person. However, the overall assessment of the support was very positive.

The lessons highlighted by the participants (mentees) were the following:

- The lesson of how to ask for help – participants noticed that they all had similar challenges and were not alone, sometimes it was a matter of asking for help.

- Taking inspiration from the valuable experience – participants underlined that experience of practitioners is a key to the growth of young leaders. Regular access to such discussions is immensely valuable.
- Focusing on the problem – as less experienced participants tend to jump into solutions and sometimes, they may lose the goal, an experienced mentor is able to check if the focus is not lost and undervalued.
- See the bigger picture – experienced mentors were able to present a bigger picture to the participants and direct them into unobvious solutions.

This part of the project brought the value also to Mentors. They were pointing out how refreshing it is to be working with young and ambitious leaders who are brave to design bold ideas and goals.

Additionally, the teams were offered connection to Ashoka Fellows, who could support their efforts. Here, the benefits of the experience and wide networks were well visible. The connections and working together resulted in the European presence of the teams (one group publishing an article in an international magazine, other started the conversation to join the European association).

Learnings & Suggestions

In YLEF the mentoring process was proposed at the stage of implementing the projects. Some participants were pointing out that because of the packed and short timeline, they didn't really have enough space to fully dive into mentorship. Others were using this opportunity to the maximum. You will always have both type of participants. However, it is worth considering if mentor may be introduced also at the earlier stage and support participants throughout the entire process (from ideation phase to implementation).

It is worth to remember that this is two-side relation and both parties may benefit from the work by i.e. exchanging the ideas, energy and inspiring each other. It is a very important aspect that should not be forgotten.

5.2.2 MONITORING

During the implementation of the projects, the support from project manager and specialists were offered, as well as monitoring activities were happening for every team.

There were 2 online monitoring activities. Additionally, 2 teams that were organizing the final events in Poland had also MEAL specialists from Ashoka and Save the Children visiting them offline.

The first monitoring took place in the first month of implementation and was done with team leaders. The following questions were asked:

- Who is actively participating in the project? Who is around the project?
- How do you see your leadership?
- How is the work with coach?
- What is the energy in the team?
- What has been done so far?
- How is the budget spending going?
- What are the lessons learnt from this project so far?
- Is there anything else we should know?

The second monitoring took place at the end of the second month and at the beginning of the third month and was done with every participant of the team.

The following questions were asked:

- What is your role in the project?
- What have you learnt from the process of creating the projects?
- Is there anything else we should know?

Learnings & Suggestions

Not everyone understands why it is important to be in touch and evaluate the progress during the implementation of the project. We recommend building the culture of sharing feedback and reflecting on lessons learnt from the very beginning – it should ease the work on final report as well.

5.2.3 REPORTING

The teams were provided with a template for reporting already at the stage of contract. We were expecting two parts: financial and substantive. It was a little challenging for them, still being an important exercise in the process of improvement of leadership and management skills. All of the teams we're constantly offered support from project manager and other specialists. It was very important for us that the project report do not only reflect the activities outputs and outcomes of the product itself, but allow us to self evaluate as a team and as individual. It was key also to understand how each participant use this opportunity to grow and develop on leadership skills, knowledge and attitude.

The report consisted of the following parts:

- A short attractive (for the media) summary,

- How do you currently see the social problem you are addressing? What has changed and what has influenced this change?
- Describe what activities you were able to implement as a result of the grant.
- What outputs and outcomes did you achieve?
- How do you know what did or did not work for you? What measures did you use to observe? Did you measure the results and how?
- Did you get closer to the change you want to see in the world, and in what way?
- What steps towards this change have you been able to take?
- What went differently than you anticipated? How did you react to this?
- How large was the final group of people who benefited from the action - directly and indirectly.
- Do you intend to continue the activity?

Questions we wanted every team member to answer:

- What were the outcomes of this project for you personally?
- What are you particularly proud of?
- Funny and clever things happen during every project. Tell us a short story that has stayed with you after this project.
- How you assess your collaboration as team of organizations and individuals? Did you learn anything about cooperation?
- Did you perform leadership in any part of the project? How did you feel as leader and as follower?
- What leadership capacities you recognized in your work on the project?
- Did new partnership opportunities arise for you during the project?
- What did you learn from this project?

All the reports were assessed by few specialists from Ashoka. After written assessment, we met with each team to provide feedback.

Learnings & Suggestions

At the stage of reporting there are many questions. Consider delivering a session, where you can explain your expectations and answer any questions that may arise. It is also recommended to be available for questions (especially very close to the deadline) as the more participants are working on answers, the more doubts they may have.

It is also worth giving the feedback as soon as possible, especially if you require them to add more content to the report.

Based on the final reports we created posters for every project (that were presented during the final event). **You may check them here** (scroll down to see the posters).

5.2.4 FINAL EVENT

After finalising the seed funding projects, we found ourselves in a moment where the cohort was divided into different levels of engagement. Those who are very active in implementation of seed funding projects were still very motivated to be in a relationship with Ashoka, with other cohort members and they had been very responsive. Some others were not so active in the last phase of the project, so they also felt a little bit more disconnected.

This is why we planned for a final event where we could meet in person, somehow renew the personal connection between participants, but also to celebrate and showcase the work of young leaders done throughout the whole year of their engagement.

Learnings & Suggestions

From the very beginning of the programme, we communicated all of the dates of both offline and online meetings. From the very beginning we knew the date of the final event, it was even included in an engagement contract of a participant.
Still, some of the participants did not plan ahead their presence on the final event, and we needed to confirm with them their engagement in this meeting.

The final event was divided into two days. The first day was very much internal, with only the group members gathering with a support team. These were community keepers who were fully responsible for designing and organizing the first day. They designed activities for themselves to harvest learnings, address challenges and failures, and also have some fun. It was very important for young leaders to have this space.

The plan of the day was following:

10:00	Welcome & let’s get to know each other better	
11:15	Coffee break	
11:30	SELFCARE Talking & Sharing lessons learnt	A workshop on the topic of taking care of one's mental well-being for a group of YL program participants. This is a space where we will focus on the sphere of wellbeing and self-development. Topics we will cover during the meeting: taking care of your state of mind and body, practical exercises for releasing stress, maintaining work-life balance, discussion on taking care of yourself and loved ones.
13:00	Lunch break	
14:15	Sharing lessons learnt	“You miss 100% shots you don’t take.” - Interactive and playful (offline) facilitation exercise/ discussion with the aim of sharing our failures regarding our projects, or work as such. The aim is to exchange our experiences and learn from each other.
15:45	Coffee break	
16:00	“Emerging future” - what’s next? What's the action?	Creating the video about the future – from young leaders to other young leaders
17:30	The end of this part	

The second day of the final event was open to the public. Despite being larger, it was also organized by young participants, who served as presenters and facilitators throughout the day.

The program for the second day, the conference, was as follows:

09:30	Official opening
09:45	PART 1: PAST
09:45	YLEF wrap-up
09:55	“Fireside” conversation: Humanitarian social innovation = Everyone a changemaker in crisis
10:35	Results of the projects
11:20	The break with project posters
12:00	PART 2: PRESENT
12:00	Every young person identifies as a changemaker
12:20	Fish bowl conversation about present
13:00	"What is a message you would like to give to another young changemakers?"
13:10	Lunch Break
14:00	PART 3: IMAGINE THE FUTURE
14:15	Group work
14:50	Summary of the group work
15:10	Short coffee break
15:20	Panel discussion
16:00	Summary and celebration
16:30	Networking

This collaborative approach to co-creation during the final event signaled that we truly believe in empowering young leaders to take responsibility for their actions. It paid off because we saw how proud they were and the great work they accomplished, even if it was slightly different from what we expected.

The summary of the event **can be checked here**.

Learnings & Suggestions

The decision to organize a two-day event was very important and turned out to be crucial. Thanks to the first day when young leaders could have reconnected and dive deep into their experience, this energy was scaled to the second, more official day. Consider giving the space to participants to just connect, discuss and spend time together exactly the way they want and need. Trust is a key factor in successful cooperation.

6. LESSONS LEARNED FROM PILOTING YLEF PROGRAM

This section is intended to capture lessons learned. We present key recommendations that affect the entire program, as well as a number of other tips and hints for individual phases of the program.

6.1 EIGHT KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

There are decisions in program design that have a major impact and are very difficult to change. It is to these moments that the key recommendations listed below apply.

6.1.1 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS AND MANAGEMENT OF EXPECTATIONS IS CRUCIAL

In this cohort, we invited leaders in leading positions of organizations and leaders of initiatives to the program. It seems that for some of them it was a great opportunity for development, while others had the attitude that they knew everything before. When it came to whether to prioritize YLEF or their own organization, they chose their own organization.

We may consider recruiting young middle management rather than young executives. At the same time, our other experiences from different programs show that older leaders are much humbler when they learn the same things. We never heard that they knew everything from before.

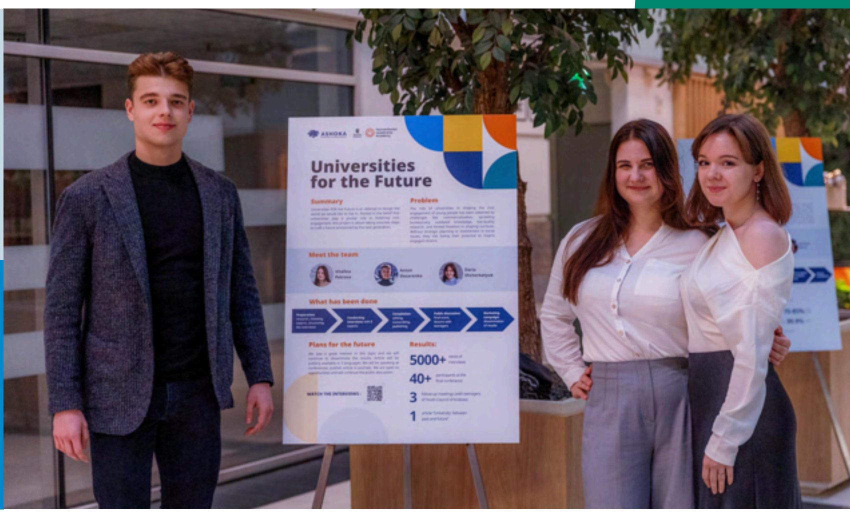
This can also be related to managing expectations. . And although the maximum was done for onboarding during recruitment to the program and we obtained approvals for full participation, the reality was different for some. It is possible to think about creative or gamification approaches for onboarding and awareness of the principles of the program, which would attract the attention of young people.

6.1.2 MORE 1:1 CONTACT HELPS MAINTAIN ENGAGEMENT

The core element is the one-on-ones. Despite being online literate, participants are online overwhelmed. And remote and asynchronous collaboration requires attention, which participants don't always have or want to give. Mass communication is not enough, people want to be listened and seen.

Results are different if we invest in conversations on the phone and one-on-one. The key to this is the beginning of the program, which sets expectations. At the same time, it is necessary to have organizational capacity for this.

Another related factor is that participants have to trust Ashoka to be taught. They won't be open enough to learn if they do not perceive Ashoka as an authority. We trusted participants by default. But for the young participants who were often hearing about Ashoka for the first time, we were often one of many. We hypothesize that more 1:1 contact has the potential to grab their attention and gradually introduce Ashoka naturally. It is possible to look for other ways for a wow moment.



6.1.3 WORKING WITH YOUTH IS HERE AND NOW

Committing to something in February doesn't guarantee the same level of accountability in June or September, as circumstances constantly change. Young people value adaptability and agility, but they also need structure, safety, and care. There's a delicate balance between offering freedom for creativity and leadership and maintaining boundaries and discipline.

With busy schedules and shifting priorities, young people may deprioritize projects, especially if they don't see immediate, practical applications for the knowledge and skills they gain. Their short attention spans and frequent sense of "I've heard this before" make it challenging to engage them in topics tied to an undefined future. Timing is critical—students often disengage in May or June, impacting the entire team's work quality. When planning dates, it is possible to consider how to take into account the rhythm of the academic year.

6.1.4 MORE LIVE MEETINGS DURING THE YEAR TO CONSIDER

Participants want more live meetings. There is a possibility of a third joint live meeting, which would serve at a key moment - forming teams and writing project requests. It has the potential to bring greater urgency to the present moment and at the same time reduce the coordination effort for participants from agreeing on an important milestone online and asynchronously, sometimes with technical issues.

There is also another related factor - capacity to change the role from leader to follower is hard to be developed. Ability to choose the moment when I should follow others and when I should lead may come with time and experience. The most important thing is to be aware of those two roles that participants hold. It happens that young people when they perceive themselves as leaders, they do not understand their followership role. A face-to-face live meeting to build teams and projects could help to treat this factor better organizationally.

We also should not look for savings in offline meetings nor in community keepers and very engaged managers. Even this project participants engaged in activities, participants of the project to not feel obliged so much to respond to emails on time or give meaningful feedback in written.

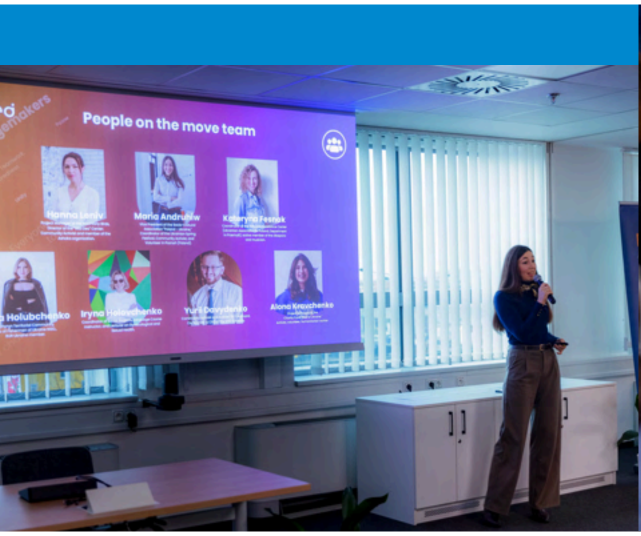
6.1.5 LEARNING BEFORE BUILDING TEAMS AND PROJECTS BRINGS NERVOUSNESS

The live event at the beginning of the program (Changemaker Journey) had great energy and set high expectations. This puts the following online learning sessions in a difficult position - to maintain engagement and attention. All the while, most of the participants were also asking themselves the question - when will the action come? How will the teams be formed? What should be the project outlines? Participants were nervous and tended to run their attention forward.

Nervousness is not necessarily bad, but it needs to be expected and treated. Participants received a manual with details of cooperation on projects after the online learning sessions, it is possible to consider giving it to them earlier. A third live meeting for team building mentioned above could also work.

6.1.6 CO-CREATION WITHIN EXISTING INITIATIVES IS OK

The time for the co-creation of the project is relatively short, as well as the time for implementation within three months. Some participants tend to use the support of the YLEF program for their existing activities. We were nervous about it at the beginning, but it's ok if the principle of co-creation is fulfilled. On the contrary, this approach can also bring benefits! A more experienced young leader will gain new perspectives that can lead him or her in a new direction. For young leaders who accept the follower role, it can be an inspiring experience of working together on something big.



6.1.7 THERE ARE DIFFERENT FORMS OF PARTICIPATION

Thanks to the liveliness of the entire program because of the principle of emergence, it is natural for participants to regroup through the time. The key moment is assembling teams and writing project requests. It is possible that someone will not find common ground and will not present their own project. However, there are still other forms of participation in the program, whether it is the role of community keeper, project ambassador, peer-to-peer mentor or others. Where there's a will, there's a way.

6.1.8 COMMUNICATION REQUIRES MORE ATTENTION AND BUDGET

The project provides generous support to participants, and it is natural that many stakeholders crave ongoing information. It is therefore necessary to devote effort to communication and to have allocated funds for this in the budget. We see the following outputs that are needed: well-crafted medallions of participants, a monthly internal newsletter, well-crafted project briefs and results and stories of changemakers journeys - a comparison before entering the program and at the end. There is also a need for increased communication with participants to capture news and unplanned collaborations, which are other indirect outputs of the program. It is necessary to have organizational capacity for this.

ABOUT

The YLEF program was created in collaboration with Ashoka, Save the Children and the Humanitarian Leadership Academy.

ASHOKA

Ashoka is a global non-profit organization that has been identifying and supporting social innovators around the world for more than 40 years. These are enterprising people who see behind the serious problems of our society their systemic causes and are determined to solve them. Those whose solutions are unique and impact internationally become Ashoka Fellows. But Ashoka's work goes far beyond supporting Ashoka Fellows. Ashoka creates a world where everyone can be a changemaker and can fully participate in the future direction of the world.

Ashoka Poland and Ashoka Czech and Slovak were involved in the project.

SAVE THE CHILDREN

Ashoka is a global non-profit organization that has been identifying and supporting social innovators around the world for more than 40 years. These are enterprising people who see behind the serious problems of our society their systemic causes and are determined to solve them. Those whose solutions are unique and impact internationally become Ashoka Fellows. But Ashoka's work goes far beyond supporting Ashoka Fellows. Ashoka creates a world where everyone can be a changemaker and can fully participate in the future direction of the world.

Ashoka Poland and Ashoka Czech and Slovak were involved in the project.

HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

The Humanitarian Leadership Academy strengthens skills and capabilities through learning, supporting individuals and organizations in the humanitarian sector and beyond to prepare for and respond to crises.

As part of Save the Children, the Academy draws on a century of crisis-response experience while maintaining independence to complement Save the Children's work. It amplifies impact by helping organizations share knowledge, expand networks, and collectively build the skills needed to tackle global crises effectively.

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