



# ***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

**Ashoka  
Italy  
IMPACT  
REPORT**

**2015-2025**







# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ashoka Italy

## IMPACT REPORT

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## Methodological Note

The data and evidence presented in this document represent an extract from the Impact Report covering Ashoka's first ten years in Italy. The analyses are based on a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative tools, and include a total of 216 contributions (37 qualitative and 177 quantitative). The work included focus groups and interviews with Ashoka Fellows, young changemakers, partners, and education leaders, together with questionnaires and the analysis of international surveys.

# TEN YEARS OF CHANGEMAKING IN ITALY

**Since 2015, Ashoka has been present in Italy with a clear vision: to contribute to building a society in which every person can actively participate in the common good as a changemaker.**

Developing changemaking skills is now essential to address what we call the "new inequality": in a world marked by increasingly rapid digital, climate, and social transformations, the divide between those who are included and those who are excluded increasingly depends on the ability to understand change, shape it, and participate in it. In other words, the distance is growing between those who can influence the rules of the game and those who remain on the margins.

Over these ten years, we have worked to make this vision tangible by creating contexts and fostering opportunities in which individuals and communities could exercise and strengthen their ability to act in complex systems: with empathy, creativity, collaborative leadership, and entrepreneurial spirit.

# VENTURE & FELLOWSHIP

## Social entrepreneurs who change the rules of the game and transform systems

At the core of our work is the identification and support of social entrepreneurs capable of addressing the root causes of social problems. Once identified, these visionary and innovative leaders go through a rigorous international selection process, which, if successful, elects them as **Ashoka Fellows**.

Ashoka Fellows do not simply provide services or generate local impact: they work to transform the rules, institutions, markets, and mindsets that perpetuate inequalities. The systemic nature of their action is expressed through their ability to operate on multiple levers simultaneously: they mobilize people, build coalitions, influence public policy, develop new economic models, and contribute to reshaping collective narratives.

### Influencing public policy and social norms



In Italy, **75% of Fellows have provided effective advisory support to policy-makers or legislative bodies;**



**50% of them have contributed to regulatory change, and five new laws or public policies have been introduced** thanks to their direct action or to alliances they have led.

The work of **Ugo Vallauri** (The Restart Project) is an emblematic example: through a coalition of more than **110 organizations across 23 countries**, he has made a decisive contribution to the development of the European “Right to Repair” Directive.



**Ugo Vallauri**, *Ashoka Fellow, The Restart Project*

This impact is not only cultural or environmental but also translates into a modification of market rules at a continental scale.

### Multi-stakeholder and cross-sector collaborations

Systemic change requires the ability to connect diverse actors — civil society organizations, institutions, companies, and the scientific community — around a shared objective. Coalitions led by Fellows act as **permanent infrastructures for change**, capable of influencing political agendas, regulation, and market orientations.

**Mariasole Bianco**, founder of Worldrise and Ashoka Fellow since 2024 coordinates the “30x30” coalition, which brings together more than 85 environmental organizations with the objective of protecting 30% of Italian seas by 2030.



**Mariasole Bianco**, *Ashoka Fellow, Worldrise*

The strength of the initiative doesn’t lie on a single actor, but on the ability to aggregate expertise, legitimacy, and public pressure within a shared strategy. In Italy, 100% of Fellows are actively engaged in collaborations, partnerships, and alliances for change.

## Replication and independent diffusion

A distinctive feature of systemic change is the ability of a solution, idea, or model to be replicated beyond the direct control of its originator, including through **spontaneous adoption** by other actors.

Fellows are, by nature, **“happy to be copied”**: independent diffusion is a strong indicator of the relevance, robustness, and transformative potential of their innovations.

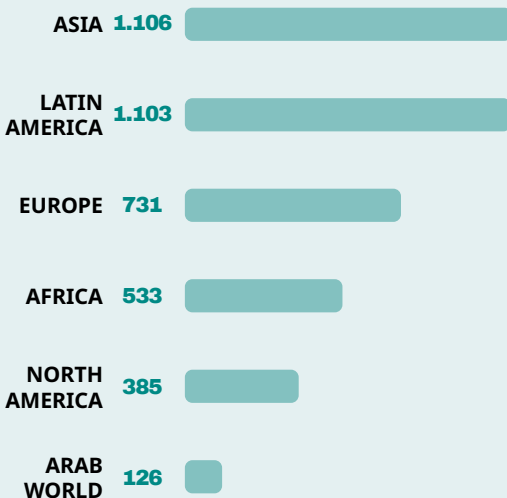
**Italian Fellows operate in more than 30 countries beyond Italy, and their models have been replicated independently in at least 15 cases outside the original context.**



Globally, 75% of Fellows see their idea adopted by others.

## Ashoka Fellow in the world

98 COUNTRIES



## Enabling changemaking within communities

A defining feature of Fellows is their ability to unlock the changemaking potential within communities, enabling groups often seen as “beneficiaries” — or even as part of the problem — to become active drivers of the solution.

This is exemplified by **Lefteris Arapakis**, founder of Enaleia and an Ashoka Fellow since 2023, who has redefined the role of fishers: shifting them from being seen as contributors to the overexploitation of marine resources to becoming **active stewards of the sea**.



**Lefteris Arapakis**, Ashoka Fellow, Enaleia

By engaging over **6,000 fishers** in recovering more than **2 million kilograms of plastic** since 2018, Arapakis has done more than launch an environmental initiative: he has mobilized an entire profession around a new collective identity. In this process, fishers have rediscovered their potential as agents of change, becoming part of a systemic solution that modifies economic incentives, behaviors, and supply chains.

This capacity to activate individuals and communities is also reflected in the scale of Fellows’ organizations: in Italy, Fellow-led organizations employ more than **200 staff members** and engage more than **1,600 volunteers**, reaching approximately **500,000 direct beneficiaries** and over **4 million indirect beneficiaries**.

**Globally, Fellows’ organizations mobilize more than 200,000 employees and 500,000 volunteers, generating impact on approximately 650 million people.**



## The Fellowship journey

Once the international selection process is complete, the social entrepreneur joins Ashoka's global community of Fellows and enters the **Fellowship Programme**: a long-term support pathway that goes beyond strengthening a project, investing instead in the person behind it and in their capacity to drive systemic change over time.

Over the past ten years, we have selected and supported **32 Ashoka Fellows in Italy**, providing more than **€2 million in direct support**. The initial stipend allows Fellows to dedicate themselves fully to their mission at a crucial stage of development, but the value of the Fellowship goes beyond financial support.

Support includes strategic mentoring, peer exchange at national and international level, access to a global network of more than **3,900 Fellows**, institutional visibility, and connections with partners and funders. It is a relational and strategic infrastructure that remains active throughout the Fellow's professional journey.

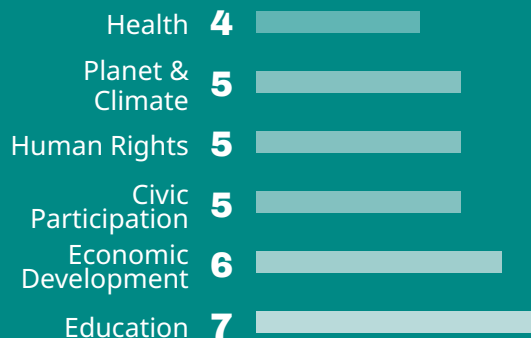
## The Fellows and Ashoka

*Thanks to the Fellowship and the opportunities promoted by Ashoka...*

- **100%** of Ashoka Fellows report that Ashoka has stimulated new partnerships and collaborations;
- **80%** report they strengthened leadership;
- **72%** state they have gained a clearer understanding of the systemic contribution of their work;
- **63%** report having adapted their organization's strategy towards a more systemic approach.

The Fellowship therefore acts as an accelerator of change: it clarifies vision, expands alliances, and strengthens the capacity to influence public policy, markets, and collective narratives over the long term.

### MAIN AREAS OF INTERVENTION Social challenges addressed



### SIZE OF ITALIAN FELLOW'S ORGANIZATIONS

**200** employees | **1.600** volunteers

### NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES REACHED IN ITALY

**500.000** direct beneficiaries  
**4 million** indirect beneficiaries

# TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

**An education system that is truly equitable and relevant must nurture the agency of every member of the learning community.**

Since 2017, Ashoka Italy has worked to support the education system from a clear conviction: schools must enable everyone to develop the **changemaker skills** — empathy, collaboration, initiative, and shared leadership — needed to respond to today's challenges and reduce inequalities. The programme operates across three interconnected levels:



**1. COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE**, connecting educators, schools, and education innovators in spaces for exchange and collaboration;



**2. SKILLS AND TRAINING**, strengthening educational leadership and environments supportive of experimentation;



**3. INFLUENCE AND ADVOCACY**, making replicable models visible and contributing to the evolution of public policy.



## 1. Communities of practice

Ashoka Italy has helped build a **national community dedicated to educational innovation**, bringing together more than **200 education leaders** across **over 10 regions** and **engaging more than 50 strategic partners**, including companies, institutions, and universities.

This network is strengthened through structured opportunities for exchange and dialogue. To date, **8 national events** on educational innovation have brought together more than **1,000** educators, school leaders, researchers, and key stakeholders from across the Italian education system, creating a recurring space for inspiration, connection, and collaboration.

*With Ashoka we met around the idea of building a certain vision of school: one in which the teacher is an agent of change, not an executor.*

**Emanuela Guarcello**, University of Turin

In 2023, this work culminated in a **national mapping of educational innovation in Italy**, identifying **1,200 innovative initiatives** and engaging more than **100 leaders, methodologies, and models in transformative education**. The result is a nuanced overview of the key actors advancing innovative educational approaches across the country. Among the mapped experiences, **InVento Lab** has engaged over **20,000 students** in environmental impact entrepreneurship pathways, and **Casco Learning** has reached **6,000 students and 8,000 teachers** with experiential learning models inspired by neuroscience.

In previous years, Ashoka Italy also recognized **11 Changemaker Schools**, institutions that structurally integrate active learning, shared leadership, and student agency. Ashoka's mapping work goes beyond documenting existing practices: it connects and strengthens them, supports their diffusion, and helps build a more cohesive educational ecosystem oriented towards systemic change.



## 2. Skills and training

Ashoka Italy has engaged **more than 10,000 people** in the education ecosystem, training more than **3,000 teachers** and school leaders through more than **100 workshops** and **support trainings**, implemented with more than **30 partners** and involving over **60 schools** across **10 Italian regions**. The training offer focuses on the methodologies and tools needed to navigate complexity, design strategically, and create more participatory learning environments. Its purpose is to strengthen a systemic mindset, enabling both **teachers and students to see themselves as active agents of change**.

“Ashoka trains our teachers on a vision of systemic change, because we want them to become changemaker leaders, not only teachers.”

**Andrea Pastorelli**, *Teach for Italy*

Collaborations with organizations such as DeaScuola, alongside universities and institutions including INDIRE, have further expanded the programme’s reach by linking training, research, and experimentation.

These partnerships have strengthened the dialogue between educational innovation and the institutional education system.



## 3. Influence and advocacy

Ashoka’s work in community building, training, and mapping has gradually opened up more structured dialogue with institutions, helping bring changemaking in education into the national public debate

Since 2017, Ashoka has contributed to **five significant institutional moments**, bringing its perspective into parliamentary, governmental, and public-sector settings:

- **Parliamentary inquiry on educational innovation** (Chamber of Deputies, October 2019);
- **Ministerial meeting** with **students** from Changemaker Schools with **Vice Minister of Education** Ascani (January 2020);
- National event **“Rethinking Education”** promoted by **Minister** Azzolina (December 2020);
- Presentation of the **educational innovation mapping** at the **Chamber of Deputies** (2023);
- Presentation of the **Changemaking Curriculum** at the **Municipality** of Rome (2024).

In a particularly meaningful step, Ashoka facilitated direct dialogue between students and institutions, positioning young people as active interlocutors in decision-making processes. On 8 January 2020, students from Changemaker Schools met with Vice Minister of Education Anna Ascani at the Ministry of Education, presenting proposals on student wellbeing, experiential learning, curriculum relevance, and youth agency.

At the same time, Ashoka contributed to developing concrete policy innovation tools. As scientific partner of the **Digital & Changemaking Learning project**, it developed a **changemaking curriculum** integrating experiential learning, systemic skills, and youth protagonism into a structured and replicable model.

The production of **eight publications** — including reports, academic articles, and practical tools — has helped consolidate a shared language, evidence base, and set of reference points.

This has strengthened the legitimacy of transformative education while creating a bridge between grassroots innovation, academic research, and the institutional system.

# YOUTH PROGRAM

**Every young person has the potential to be a changemaker!**

Since 2018, Ashoka in Italy has worked to promote a narrative that recognizes a generation capable of adapting, reinventing itself, and leading change for the common good. The objective is to strengthen youth agency, enabling young people to move beyond the role of beneficiaries and become **co-creators of solutions and drivers of transformation**.

This commitment develops along three strands:

- 1 BUILDING A NATIONAL COMMUNITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO RECOGNIZE THEMSELVES AS CHANGEMAKERS;**
- 2 RECOGNIZING AND STRENGTHENING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF YOUTH AND THEIR ACTIVE ROLE IN SOCIETY;**
- 3 STRENGTHENING TERRITORIAL AND NATIONAL ECOSYSTEMS THROUGH CO-LEADERSHIP, INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE, AND STRUCTURED PARTICIPATION TOOLS.**

## 1. Building a national community of young changemakers

Since 2017, Ashoka Italy has contributed to shaping a **national community of young changemakers**, beginning with a systematic effort to identify and map youth leadership across the country. Through national and local calls, Ashoka analysed more than **1,000 applications** from young people developing high-impact solutions to social challenges in their communities.

This process has nurtured a dynamic and diverse community that continues to grow through training pathways, residential experiences, networking opportunities, and national events.

Within this program lies **Gen C - Generation Changemaker**, launched in 2021 and again in 2023 together with the Italian National Youth Agency: two national calls through which **100 young changemakers aged 16-35** were selected for the impact generated in their communities.

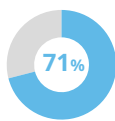
**GEN C REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE IN THIS JOURNEY, STRUCTURED AROUND FOUR INTEGRATED LEVERS:**

- community building and shared identity;
- skills development; activation of an ecosystem supportive of youth participation (60+ partners);
- promotion of a narrative that recognizes young people as drivers of social innovation.

“Gen C allows many young people to meet, build networks, and join a large community of changemakers.”

**Lucia Abbinante**, former Director of the National Youth Agency

Results go beyond the selection of profiles, reaching the identity and strategic transformation of the entire community involved:



**71% of young participants in Ashoka programs now identify as changemakers**, strengthening confidence, systemic vision, and collaborative capacity.

Community building does not end with a call or a single program but generates an ecosystem of young people who continue to collaborate, activate initiatives, and create impact in their communities over time.

“The real strength is the network: meeting other young people my age doing interesting things and wanting to make a difference. You realize you are not alone.

Stefano Frosi, Open Stage

## 2. Strengthening the transformative potential of young people

Ashoka Italy has engaged **over 5,000 young people nationally** in training, activation, and change-making support pathways, working with **more than 150 youth organizations** — including associations and social enterprises led by under-30s — through mentoring and tailored support.

Within this context are the **30 Transformative Weekends**, implemented across more than 10 Italian regions: intensive spaces for personal growth and social innovation design that represent the core of the youth offer. **More than 400 young people** have participated in this residential experience combining individual development, work on real problems, and community building.

“The merit of the Transformative Weekends was to act as an initial propeller, a real incubation moment.

Giulia Romagnolo, Start-net Youth



The evidence points to a particularly strong impact on young people's ability to build relationships, collaborate with others, and respond creatively to complex challenges:

- ▶ **93%** of Transformative Weekend participants report increased empathy;
- ▶ **92%** practiced active listening;
- ▶ **89%** perceived themselves as active members of a group;
- ▶ **92%** increased their ability to read situations from different perspectives;
- ▶ **83%** felt able to generate new ideas.

Participants also acquire concrete tools to transform insights into structured initiatives — **theory of change, stakeholder mapping, social innovation design, and public speaking.**

- ▶ **80%** report improved design skills;
- ▶ **73%** learned how to structure a project;
- ▶ **64%** feel more capable of leading a social initiative;



In terms of **intervention strategies**:

- ▶ **69%** state they better understand the systemic contribution of their work;
- ▶ **62%** report having revised their approach to social change.

“Ashoka helped me organize some thoughts regarding the startup and systemic change. I now feel more competent.

These experiences often become starting points for new local initiatives: creation of associations, participation in calls for proposals, collaborations, and projects initiated from learning experiences.

“After that weekend we founded an association with six other women. We have already won two grants. Ashoka gave us the inspiration.

### 3. Strengthening ecosystems that support youth participation and intergenerational dialogue

#### 60+ partners

*involved, including public authorities, foundations, companies, and third sector organizations*

#### 5 national events

*dedicated to young people*

#### 4 pathways

*to establish consultative bodies and youth representative organizations*

Since 2018, Ashoka Italy has engaged **more than 60 partners** — including public institutions, foundations, companies, and Third Sector organizations — to build **ecosystems that recognize young people as active drivers of change** and create **spaces for intergenerational dialogue**, shared responsibility, participation, and social innovation. This commitment has translated into **4 processes supporting the establishment of Youth Commissions and youth advisory groups, 5 national events dedicated to youth participation**, and contributions to complex institutional initiatives, including the **Municipality of Parma's candidacy for European Youth Capital 2027**.

Ashoka's approach is grounded in a clear conviction: strengthening youth agency is not enough if decision-making systems themselves remain unchanged. For this reason, the work focuses on creating **lasting mechanisms for representation and shared decision-making** — such as **Youth**

**Commissions, Youth Forums, and Young Advisory Boards** — that move beyond one-off consultation and embed younger generations structurally within strategic processes.

Pathways developed with Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Biella, Intesa Sanpaolo per il Sociale, and Fondazione Cariverona led to the creation of groups composed, overall, of more than **60 young people selected through public calls, with multi-year mandates, access to decision-making processes**, and in some cases management of dedicated budgets. Across these processes, Ashoka designed the overall framework, led the selection of participants, and provided training support, equipping young people with tools for co-design, facilitation, and systemic thinking. The work also engages partner organisations, helping them embed youth perspectives more effectively into decision-making and participatory practices

A significant example is the **Municipality of Parma**. In 2023, Ashoka facilitated the creation of a Local Youth Commission, which contributed to the development of the city's candidacy dossier and engaged **more than 200 local organisations**. This process led to the formal establishment of **the Local Youth Council** (Consiglio Locale dei Giovani), embedding young people more structurally in the city's decision-making mechanisms. Building on this work, Parma was officially selected as **European Youth Capital 2027**.

## CONCRETE ACTIONS OF THE YOUTH PROGRAMME



**MAPPING YOUNG LEADERS**  
*of change, to identify and value emerging youth leadership and engagement*



**BUILDING AND NURTURING**  
*a national community of young changemakers through events and networking opportunities*



**TRAINING AND RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMMES**  
*aimed at developing and strengthening empathy, collaborative leadership, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit*



**SUPPORTING**  
*co-leadership and youth-led local initiatives, strengthening their impact within local communities*



**PROVIDING GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**  
*to public bodies, foundations, businesses, and third-sector organizations to promote tools and new forms of engagement*

# FUNDING SYSTEMS CHANGE

Since 2019, Ashoka has recognised the need to transform the way social impact is financed, working to **shift philanthropic practice from project-based funding:**

**towards support for structural, collaborative, and long-term change.**

Evidence highlights the potential of this approach. A 2019 study conducted by Ashoka and McKinsey in Germany (From small to systemic. The multibillion-euro potential in social innovations) analyzed four Fellows in the health and education sectors, estimating a potential economic return of **approximately €1 billion per year** — including cost savings and indirect benefits — if innovations were scaled nationally. Applying the same methodology to the **72 Fellows active in Germany**, the estimate reaches **€18 billion per year**.

Despite this potential, the most widespread funding practices still prioritize short-term projects and immediate results, rather than supporting collaborative, adaptive, and multi-year pathways capable of addressing root causes. To respond to this challenge, Ashoka promoted a structured reflection culminating in the report **Embracing Complexity** (2020), developed with the contribution of the Skoll Foundation and McKinsey & Company and translated into Italian with Assifero under the title “Accogliere la complessità”.

The report proposes operational guidelines for **philanthropy oriented toward systemic change**:



This reflection has not remained theoretical: through the **Inspiring Change** event series, organized in 2024 and 2025 in Rome, Naples, Milan, and Turin,

- ▶ Ashoka engaged **more than 50 philanthropic organizations** in dialogue and co-learning moments on financing systemic change.
- ▶ **90% of participants** recognize the need to innovate philanthropic approaches
- ▶ **60%** report greater clarity on how to concretely contribute to systemic transformation.

Ashoka’s role in this area is not to replace funders, but to facilitate alliances, orient visions, and make explicit the mechanisms of change.

“What truly struck me straight to the heart was the awareness of how important it is for ideas and solutions born from the brilliant minds of individuals to be able to scale and transcend individual action, so they can spread and trigger systemic change.”

Financing systemic change means investing in relationships of trust, multi-year commitment, and shared learning: enabling conditions for generating durable and large-scale impact.

# LOOKING AHEAD

Reviewing ten years of work has allowed Ashoka to take stock of the results achieved and draw out key lessons. First, the growing role of **social entrepreneurship** as a lever **for systemic change**: the experiences of Ashoka Fellows demonstrate how addressing complex challenges requires strategies capable of acting on root causes, going beyond the direct impact of individual organizations. In this process, Ashoka acts as an enabling platform, strengthening leadership, connections, and opportunities for collaboration among diverse actors.

Looking ahead, Ashoka will continue to focus on three strategic priorities: promoting **funding practices oriented toward systemic change**, strengthening work on **transformative education** and **youth agency**, and supporting **social innovation ecosystems** capable of responding to emerging challenges.

**In a context marked by technological transformation, ecological transition, and new inequalities, the objective is to contribute to building a society in which more and more people can recognize themselves and act as changemakers for the common good.**





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