

**Sustainability is just a transitory step.
Central and Eastern European
climate changemakers should head towards
regeneration.**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	4
Ashoka Romania	
Building Momentum in the Field of Planet & Climate Changemaking	6
Changemakers Map	7
Ashoka Fellowship	8
Impact Transfer / Localizer	11
Social Innovation to Tackle Energy Poverty	13
Going Digital During the Covid-19 Pandemics	16
A Partnership for Resilient Climate Changemaking Ecosystems	18
The Energy Poverty Advisory Hub	25
Future trends	26
Next Now: Planet & Climate	27
Insights From “Thinking Differently: Ideas for Action on Planet & Climate” Report	28
“Six Ways to Bring People & Planet Back Into Balance”	31
Conclusion	32
Acknowledgements	33

Foreword

If a problem were designed to make it hard for human brains to tackle, it would look like climate change. It not only has the standard collective action problems, but also is psychologically unprecedented for several other reasons: its scale, its systemic nature, and the gradual, distributed and indirect link between our behavior and the consequences we experience. Humans are not separate from nature and nature is not simply a resource we can extract. **We Are Nature.** Together, we are in a crisis that is serious and difficult, by anyone's standards. And what really matters, more than anything, is how quickly we act. The good news is that re-setting our course is, just about, still possible. Right now, in the next five years, we can change our entirely planetary course. This is an extraordinary moment!

For the first time in its 40 year history Ashoka, as an ecosystem building organisation and as the world's largest network of social entrepreneurs, is galvanizing the strength of its global community on a handful of globally urgent themes. Planet & Climate is one of them. We began our work in a region widely regarded as a laggard in climate action: Central and Eastern Europe. This meant searching for Central and Eastern European climate changemakers, supporting them, facilitating spaces for collaboration, and nurturing the insights gathered from all over the world to inspire and encourage the endless energy of climate innovators in the region.

Despite the myth around the lack of Planet & Climate orientation of Central and Eastern Europeans what we noticed during our ecosystem work is that the climate changemakers in the region are growing exponentially and are shaping a new reality. They are showing that affordable new alternatives to the business as usual way we run our societies exist and they bring social, economic, and environmental benefits. They need the support and the framework that would allow them to scale these solutions nationally and regionally, something we are seeing already in countries such as Malaysia, India, or Peru, where Ashoka Fellows have been working for decades with local and national governments, as well as with large local businesses.

Ashoka offers a platform for growth for the social innovators that we elect into our network as Ashoka Fellows, through life-long access to our global network, as well as financial and strategic support. We also support local ecosystems of changemakers with global resources, ideas and growth opportunities. But we are realizing that more is needed: political openness, cross-regional ecosystem development, cross-sectoral collaborations, investment in climate innovation, as well as probono professional services support for emerging changemakers. Our main learning after almost two years of working on Planet & Climate in CEE is that creating a supportive ecosystem for all actors to come together and participate in the climate changemaking process is paramount for the region to become a frontrunner in the green transition. As a global network with a presence in over 90 countries, we plan to use the learnings gained in Central and Eastern Europe as a blueprint for nurturing similar processes in other regions of the world.

Whether you are based in Central and Eastern Europe or elsewhere, we hope the story of the journey Ashoka took in this part of the world, and in particular in Romania, to build a world in which humanity rebalances its relationship with the planet will inspire you and invite you to do more for yourself and for nature. Because **We Are Nature.**

ASHOKA ROMANIA BUILDING MOMENTUM

**IN THE FIELD OF
CLIMATE CHANGEMAKING**

Changemakers Map

During the first months of Ashoka's arrival in Romania, one of the first steps we took was to understand "Who's Who" by mapping the whole country in search of changemakers. The mapping step was extremely needed to understand not only where innovation is, but also what are the main barriers to more social and environmental impact in the country.

At that time, 2016-2017, the mapping showed us that the Romanian ecosystem of changemakers is unique because women outnumber men by about 10%, unlike all other European countries in which Ashoka offices researched the local ecosystem. We mapped 932 individual changemakers, most of them working on social inclusion (155), socio-economic development (155), education (152), civic participation (148). At the time we did the research, climate was not showing up as a prominent theme in local civil society, so we catalogued those working on energy and environment under the 'others' (115) category. Nonetheless, many of the changemakers we categorized under the label of 'socio-economic development' were actually involved in sustainable tourism and agriculture, thus making a significant contribution to climate action at the local level. The most nominated changemakers in the country comprised well-known climate changemakers Anca Gheorghică (Asociația 'Mai Bine'), who's developed a unique human and urban ecology hub in Iasi, Northeast Romania and Alin Prunean (Agapis) who provides economic development opportunities for small farmers in rural areas of Romania while safeguarding environmental limits of local ecosystems.

The network painted back then was a densely connected one, with a high number of relationships between different fields, which showed that Romania exhibits a strong and diverse network of changemakers. The mapping helped us source the first Ashoka Fellows based in Romania, one of them working specifically in conservation and the sustainable development of the human – environment interface.



Ashoka Fellowship

Ashoka searches the world for leading social entrepreneurs through an intensive, human-centered process, selecting them into our global, trust-based fellowship of peers. The process of selection is a transformative and enlightening experience. Candidates articulate their innovations, and how they have the potential to change sector-wide systems. They scrutinize their strategies and methods while reflecting on how they engage as individuals and leaders in today's world. The selection process is not simply a means to an end, but rather generates robust discussion, sharpens ideas, and gives room for a journey of self-discovery and growth.

Although a complex process for all the stakeholders involved, our evaluation always relies on five core criteria:

A new idea – an innovative solution that can address systemic problems.

Social impact – an implemented solution that proved it can have a positive social impact in society.

Entrepreneurial quality – a strong-willed person with a clear vision who will overcome any challenge to achieve the needed systems change.

Creativity – a person capable of developing and continuously refining a solution that can address the evolving systemic problem.

Ethical fibre – a person with strong values that has her motivation drawn from a strong commitment to the problem and the people affected by it.

The urgency of addressing the climate crisis gradually started to be reflected in our Fellowship. Oftentimes the unique angle our Planet & Climate Fellows take is related to a multi-solving approach. They demonstrate that good climate solutions bring multiple other benefits, such as healthy economic development for disenfranchised communities or educational opportunities for urban youth. Climate action is not about trade-offs and sacrifices but can make our lives better in so many other ways. Florin Stoican is among the first fellows we elected in Romania and he exemplifies this approach.



Case Study: Florin Stoican and the ‘Oltenia de sub Munte’ Geopark



Florin Stoican was elected in 2018 and dedicated his entire life academically and professionally to nature. He triggered a bottom-up transformation of the way conservation is undertaken across the country and developed a three-tier strategy targeting citizens, businesses, and leaders of protected areas. His goal is to make the state take responsibility for conservation, through citizen pressure, while encouraging citizen-led and participatory projects to preserve the natural heritage.

‘I believe in the bottom-up approach for nature conservation – it can’t be done without taking into account the interests of local communities and visitors.’

(Medium, 2021)

The UNESCO ‘Oltenia de sub Munte’ Geopark project started in 2019 and is a continuation of Kogayon Association’s activity from the past 15 years. It is a project that aims to sustainably develop the region and the communities around the Buila-Vânturarița National Park – the first and only national park in Romania established and run by an NGO. Florin’s team has been involved in the administration of the park in the past and they have carried out over 20 research and monitoring projects of biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural heritage, while developing the local infrastructure for educational visits and promoting sustainable development. These have led to an increase in the number of visitors to the area, to the creation of a market for local products, to the opening of local businesses, and to job creation.

‘**Oltenia de sub Munte**’ means the development of a network of partners and projects, which will lead to the ownership, realization, and implementation of a regional development strategy. The project currently has over 80 partners, from civil society, academia, local public authorities and local entrepreneurs. Together, they work on many small projects with a large cumulative impact, based on the promotion and capitalization of the exceptional natural and cultural heritage that ‘**Oltenia de sub Munte**’ has and which can become the basis for the development of the entire region. It is a new chance, perhaps a unique one, that will provide the pathway and resources for the conservation of biodiversity, geodiversity, and local cultural heritage.

Another Romanian whom we elected as an Ashoka Fellow reflects a wider trend identified in our global network of social entrepreneurs. Many Fellows whom we have elected for their systems-changing work in diverse fields such as human rights, education, media, or art, turned their attention, and sometimes up to 100% of their time, towards Planet & Climate and integrated climate action in their priorities. Ultimately, this echoes the idea that everyone can become a climate changemaker, by simply embracing a climate lens in one’s work. We see this trend spreading throughout our entire network of 4000+ Ashoka Fellows, making Ashoka, potentially, the strongest global network of climate changemakers, that can make a genuine dent globally on the climate crisis.

Case Study: Paul Radu and The Impact of Investigative Journalism in Stopping Environmental Damage



The living evidence of this trend from Romania is **Paul Radu**, elected in 2018 for his work in building the world's largest decentralized and collaborative global network of local investigative journalists, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project. Programmers, scientists, and civic hackers join journalists and Paul's organization in building an open global 'intelligence' agency that builds the necessary technology, toolkits and free access to data, encouraging and enabling everyone to investigate the causes they care about. Recently, he started to devote special attention to the intersection between organized crime and environmental degradation, so that environmental crime can be spotted before it occurs, using OCCRP's classical model of intervention.

'You can't investigate organized crime without talking about the environment, because the environment is one of its main victims.'

(Forbes, 2020)

Investigative journalists are often the first to see how crime and corruption damage the environment and Paul has witnessed this repeatedly in the course of his work. Criminals and corrupt actors destroy forests, fisheries, and wildlife areas for financial profit.

Paul's perspective brings a novel point of view in global action against climate change. Although multifaceted, organized crime and corruption are rarely taken into consideration as important factors for halting the environmental degradation in sensitive ecosystems around the world, such as Colombia, the Amazon, and the virgin forests in Europe. In all of these places, Paul and OCCRP have covered environmental destruction in crucial investigations.

For example, after OCCRP's investigative documentary **Clear Cut Crimes** about organized crime and illegal logging in the Carpathian Mountains aired, Romania signed a law defining illegal logging and any action which endangers the country's water, forests, and lands as a national security threat. A Forest Stewardship Council report cited the investigation, which led to a major retailer severing ties with the Austrian timber giant Holzindustrie Schweighofer that benefited from the illegal logging by criminal groups. Romanian prosecutors executed 23 search warrants across the country related to a criminal investigation of Holzindustrie Schweighofer.

Impact Transfer/ Localizer

Impact Transfer/ Localizer was a ‘tried’ and ‘tested’ Ashoka methodology, which aimed to identify, showcase, and support the adaptation of proven social innovations from the Ashoka network and beyond for addressing burning problems in Romanian society. It provided a platform for business and social sector leaders to collaborate productively for social change.

It was a 10 months’ process split into four stages:

- 01 Source and select:** identify major social, economic, environmental challenges in Romania and identify some of the most appropriate and feasible Ashoka Fellows’ solutions that address similar challenges (months 1-3);
- 02 Showcase and connect:** invite these Ashoka Fellows in Romania to present their solutions within local events, connect them with local stakeholders and experts and discuss the potential of local replication/ adaptation (month 4);
- 03 Accelerate local adaptation:** identify local changemakers to develop a local strategy and implement the co-designed solution with the help of pro-bono consultants and advisers, the international Fellow, Ashoka staff, and other supporters (months 5-9);
- 04 Test it:** launch a local project to test the local strategy and have a proof of concept; Ashoka would continue to support via communication, invitations to events, connections with possible partners and funders, training offers, etc (months 10-on).

In the last years, we showcased over 20 innovations from our international network in Romania, out of which four were focused on agriculture, energy, and circular economy:

Gijsbert Huijink – is the founder of Som Energia, a cooperative that is offering to over 40.000 members the possibility of consuming energy from sources that are 100% renewable, as well as developing their renewable energy projects. Cooperativa de Energie Verde is a local replica of this solution and they started to operate in 2019 as the first green energy cooperative in Romania.



Jérôme Deconinck has created the first agricultural land trust to mobilize the French population to preserve their agricultural heritage and to promote the development of a more unified small-scale organic farming culture. Inspired by Jerome’s model, ALPA/ Ecoruralis created in Romania the possibility for farmers, donors, and citizens to work together in securing the local production of healthy food to feed the people while taking great care of the natural environment.



Localizer – Climate & Energy (2018)



Albina Ruiz is globally recognized as a pioneer in the waste management field, as a social entrepreneur, and as a public leader. She founded a non-profit organization that seeks to build healthy, inclusive cities where everyone can live in harmony, with justice and equality of opportunity. In Romania, some of the changemakers she met believed that the Romanian context was not favorable for her model of turning informal waste pickers into officially recognized entrepreneurs, while others started developing pilot plans for a similar solution to be rolled out locally.



Martín García founded **Iluméxico** to promote community development through energy access by deploying solar-powered home systems in rural communities. He is ensuring long-term sustainability via engagement programs, technical support, microfinancing, and diverse workshops. During his visit to Romania, the social entrepreneurs that he met were both interested in the technical novelty and the business model, as well as reproducing it in Jiu Valley, but believed that a community-focused model is more suitable in the Romanian context.

Social Innovation to Tackle Energy Poverty 2019

For two consecutive years, Ashoka Europe and the Schneider Electric Foundation organized a pan-European solutions accelerator open to the most innovative social entrepreneurs in Europe which can help entire communities tackle energy poverty and move towards energy sustainability.

Being aware that close to 4 million Romanians are affected by energy poverty, in 2019, Ashoka Romania, for the third edition of the project, sought to bring a solutions-based approach to Romania and the wider CEE region, based on the past success of the partnership with the Schneider Electric Foundation.

Before developing and coordinating the program, Ashoka Romania had organized, in June 2018, an Energy Poverty Solutions workshop – “Social Innovation to Tackle Fuel Poverty: What Works in Romania?” – with support from ENEL Romania. The special guests of the event were the four winners of the previous editions of the Social Innovation to Tackle Fuel Poverty Solution Accelerator:

- 01** **Samenlevingsopbouw** (Belgium) – a rent-lease program for energy efficiency home appliances in poor houses, started by a social worker and scaled with the support of Bosch.
- 02** **ECODES** (Spain) – an audit and refurbishment program based on IT instruments and corporate volunteering.
- 03** **Verbraucherzentrale NRW** (Germany) – a public-private partnership from North-Rhein Westphalia that successfully prevents up to 80% of planned power cuts through mediation and customized support.
- 04** **Plymouth Energy Community** (UK) – a community-based organization aimed to identify innovative solutions to local energy poverty, from decentralized green generation to tailored social assistance.



Over 20 local changemakers were inspired by the solutions from the Ashoka network and started to think of ways to integrate these good practices in their daily work with vulnerable communities.

In December 2018, Ashoka and Schneider Electric Foundation co-created and hosted a one-day event at COP24, aiming to offer a space of discussion for the regional community of experts, leaders, scholars, and innovators working in the field, as well as to better prepare the framework for the competition in 2019. Romanian journalists and changemakers were invited to attend the event and to start looking at energy poverty with a solutions-focused lens.

Three former finalists and winners of the program shared their experiences with participating changemakers and journalists from CEE:

Claudio Avella (Italy) presented insights about **Invento Innovation Lab**, an organization that empowers students to create and develop start-ups to solve the challenges of our time.

Cristina Pizzorno (Italy) talked about the work that **Fratello Sole** does, operating in the field of reducing energy poverty in favor of Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) in Italy, while wishing to create the first Non-Profit ESCO (Energy Saving Company) in Europe, exclusively dedicated to NPOs and the Third Sector.

Vicky Tzega (Greece) presented details about **EKPIZO**, an organization that seeks to achieve the vision of 'energy for all' by providing consumers with the information, legal and technical support on energy issues, and assuring consumers' energy rights during the Greek energy market liberalization.



After these two major events organized in 2018, Ashoka Romania and Schneider Electric Foundation were able to design the objectives of the 2019 edition for **The Social Innovation to Tackle Energy Poverty Solutions Accelerator**.

Namely, to identify and support young innovative ideas and mature projects working in the field of energy poverty in five European countries – Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. While all Ashoka offices in CEE participated in the program, Ashoka Romania was the main coordinator of the third edition, consolidating our capacity of building an ecosystem of climate changemakers in CEE.

The accelerator searched for innovations for three months, from February to April 2019, and gathered a total of **60 applications** from the abovementioned five countries. Out of these, between April and May, 28 were selected for the European Selection phase and 14 of them were chosen to join a **5-months acceleration program**, designed to help these social entrepreneurs improve their strategy and amplify their positive impact on society and the environment.



At the end of the accelerator, between 20-21 November, a final event was organized in Brussels, where all the 14 finalists were brought together, along with an array of stakeholders that amounted to a total of 60 passionate participants willing to work on the pressing problem of energy poverty. At the end of this event, five winners were announced and awarded total prizes of EUR 17,500:

- 01 FOSa (Poland)** – They created a Monopoly-style board game through which they empower people affected by energy poverty to make small changes that reduce energy use and energy costs.
- 02 Energy Self-Sufficient Municipality (ESO Kněžice)** – A municipality-owned electricity and district heating system in Obec Kněžice (Czech Republic) could reduce energy bills for 500 people and become a model for decentralized, secure energy networks in the EU. They decided to scale this solution to other municipalities and are actively working on it.
- 03 Apro'Tech (Hungary)** – By making traditional brick and tile masonry heaters more energy-efficient, they reduce fuel costs and increase the comfort of extremely vulnerable people.
- 04 World Vision (Romania)** – With their project Winterization, they target families with vulnerable children. They repaired and retrofitted 90 homes in disadvantaged regions.
- 05 A solar-powered e-bike** developed by two high-school students from John Atanasov School (Bulgaria) saves on transportation costs, reduces traffic congestion and emissions. Normal bicycles can also be adapted into solar-powered e-bikes through their process.



Going Digital During the Covid-19 Pandemics

The pandemic was both a curse and a blessing. The blessing was that, for many months, Ashoka Romania could foster conversations and gather people from all around the world at an unprecedented pace. We hosted or participated in tens of events. About ten of these focused on discussing the social innovations in our network that rebalance humanity's relationship with nature.

Some of the topics tackled in these virtual spaces were agriculture against climate change, eco-entrepreneurship, conserving nature, and circular economy. We were at the same virtual table with both public, private and non-profit actors, ranging from social entrepreneurs to corporate executives, NGO leaders, and academia.

'The future is already here. Civil society is changing. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the drivers and mechanisms of change that are impacting the future of our society. And we are part of the solution.'

Diana Stafie

Foresight Strategist and Founder at Future Station

During these conversations curated primarily for a Romanian and Central European audience, three major transversal insights emerged, going beyond topic specificity. These insights go along the lines identified by Ashoka at the global level, by researching the work of hundreds of Ashoka Planet & Climate Fellows.

01 Everyone has the power to act.

02 Consumers have the power to ignite sustainability.

03 Cross-sector collaboration is very powerful.

Citi Global Community Day: Addressing Food Insecurity Through Social Entrepreneurship

Realizing we need to stand behind the principle that climate action is “an everyone – everywhere mission” (Christiana Figueres) during the pandemic we piloted a special online workshop format to ignite behavioral change among corporate employees by curating a digital space in which they could meet and learn from social entrepreneurs in the field of Planet & Climate.

Over 30 Citi Bank employees from Romania met four exceptional local social entrepreneurs (Mihai Abagief, from Grădina Molcom, the founder of one of the few community composting projects in Romania; Ana Maria Răducanu, the founder of the first zero waste shop in Romania's capital city; Damien Thiery, the Executive Director of Ateliere Fără Frontiere, a social farm and subscrip-

tion-based farm-to-fork delivery system for urban consumers; and Cami Gui, a major leader of the national food waste combat movement).

The method we used in holding the space for connection and learning used a combination of panel-based insights gathering, small group journaling and personal reflection work on how we can change our food usage patterns to nurture both personal and planetary health. As a result of the workshop Citi employees got closer to changemaking when it comes to food systems and started to plan towards long-term paths for involvement through volunteering, mentoring, or supporting social entrepreneurs and changemakers.

What Ashoka Romania Fellows Did During the Once-in-a-Century Pandemic



Florin Stoican, from Romania, President of environmental CSO Kogayon Association, kept pushing the public's attention on environment-related aspects. He was part of various online events that continued monitoring, educating the public and advocating for the importance of nature during the pandemic. Together with his peer Ashoka Fellow Paul Radu he co-created and implemented the first environmental journalism school in Romania and together with his other Ashoka Fellowship peer, Elena Calistru, he created a citizen-led advocacy coalition to preserve and develop natural habitats within urban setups.

In an interview for **Medium**, Florin shared with us his approach for motivating people to step up to the urgency of the moment:

“We have to overcome this moment by looking at what is happening around through the eyes of our children. They ask themselves questions. I talk to my children and other children about pollution, about plastics, about forests, about the decline of biodiversity in their language and they immediately ask me a direct question: ‘Why are you doing this to us?’ If you look from their perspective, you will start planning for 80 years, 100 years, not just 10 and 15.”

A Partnership for Resilient Climate Changemaking Ecosystems: Ashoka CEE and EIT Climate-KIC

EIT Climate-KIC is a Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) working to accelerate the transition to a zero-carbon economy. Supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, EIT Climate-KIC identifies and supports changemakers and their innovations that help society mitigate and adapt to climate change.

In 2019 EIT Climate-KIC and Ashoka CEE joined hands to identify climate changemakers working in Central and Eastern Europe. The first stage of our partnership consisted in creating Changemaker Maps for all countries in the region. In the second stage of the partnership, we built a Community Lab meant to facilitate collaboration and exchange of ideas between changemakers in the region. The months-long co-learning experience was meant to also generate new innovative climate-positive ideas in CEE.

Climate Innovators Maps in CEE

In partnership with EIT Climate-KIC Ashoka CEE built on its several years of experience in mapping Who's Who in the Social Innovation in the region, engaging with ecosystem players, and supporting the advancement of systems-changing social entrepreneurs. Using this expertise, Ashoka was able to dive into the field of social innovation in the climate sector, with a specific focus on energy efficiency in buildings, climate-smart agriculture, socio-economic transformation in post-coal regions, and air quality.

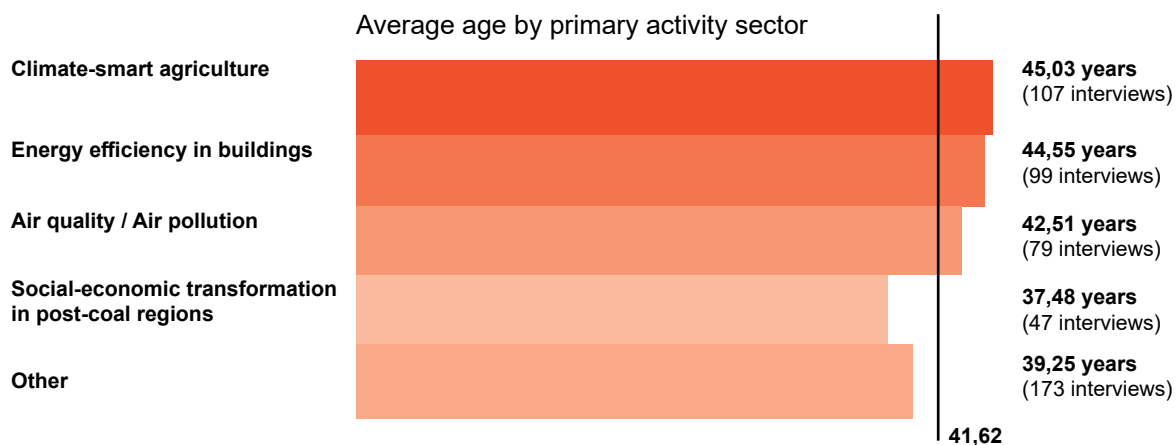
We looked for climate changemakers in nine countries in CEE: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia. [The Climate Innovators Ecosystem Mapping in Central and Eastern Europe](#) used snowball sampling and hundreds of individual interviews to identify more than **800 climate changemakers**. We also surfaced a variety of other insights about the national climate changemaking ecosystems, such as:

[The fields of climate innovation that are over/ underrepresented in CEE](#)

Most of the changemakers we identified work on climate-smart agriculture, with a total of 21,19% of changemakers from the whole regional network being active in this field, followed by energy efficiency in buildings (19,6%) and air quality/ air pollution (15,64%). Unfortunately, the least represented subdomain is the socio-economic transformation in post-coal regions (9,31%).

[The demographic profiles of climate innovators in the region](#)

On average, the male changemakers in the region are 43 years old, while women changemakers are about 40. The difference stays the same in all countries, except for Estonia, where men are younger (34 years old on average).

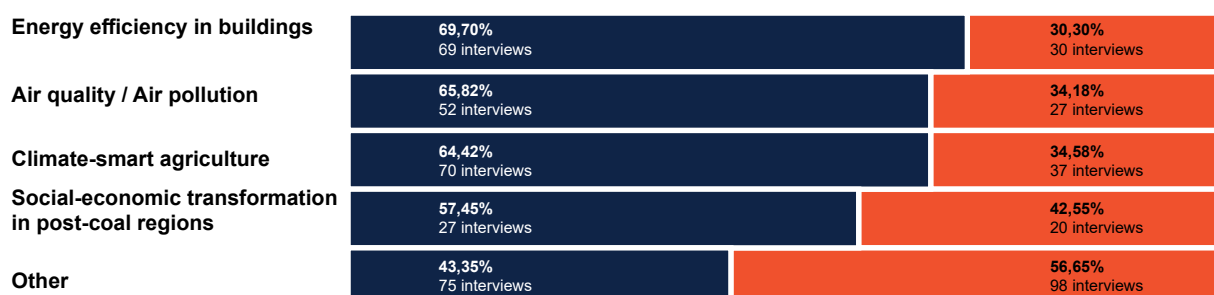


On average, men are better represented in all the sub-fields and countries we examined, with 58% of the total number of changemakers we mapped being men. The only country where women have a larger share is Latvia, with 62,5% women. Hungary has the most balanced gender distribution (51% men and 49% women), followed closely by Romania (52% men and 48% women). The country with the most unequal gender distribution is the Czech Republic, with 75% of the changemakers active in the field of climate action being men and only 26% women.

Gender distribution



Gender distribution by primary activity sector



Barriers to greater impact

Access to funding and legislation are seen as the most important barriers to further scaling social and environmental impact in the region. Access to funding is mentioned on average by 25% of the respondents, while 24% of the respondents mention legislation. Workforce and access to professional know-how are seen as a barrier by 15% of the respondents, while infrastructure by only 10% of them. The top two barriers stay the same in all sub-domains.

The strength of national changemakers networks

The research showed that the most powerful relationships are in Romania and Slovakia, followed by Poland, Bulgaria, and Estonia where most of the people interviewed answered they are either 'working with each other' or interacting constantly/ occasionally. The least powerful relationships are in Latvia and Lithuania, where it seems that people have weaker work connections, answering when asked about different climate changemakers in the national ecosystems merely that 'I've heard of him/ her'. We also looked at the connectivity of the network: how often the members of the network repeat when counting nominations. The most connected network is in Slovakia, followed by Romania and Estonia, with the least connected network found in Latvia, followed by the Czech Republic.

Working deep vs. working broadly

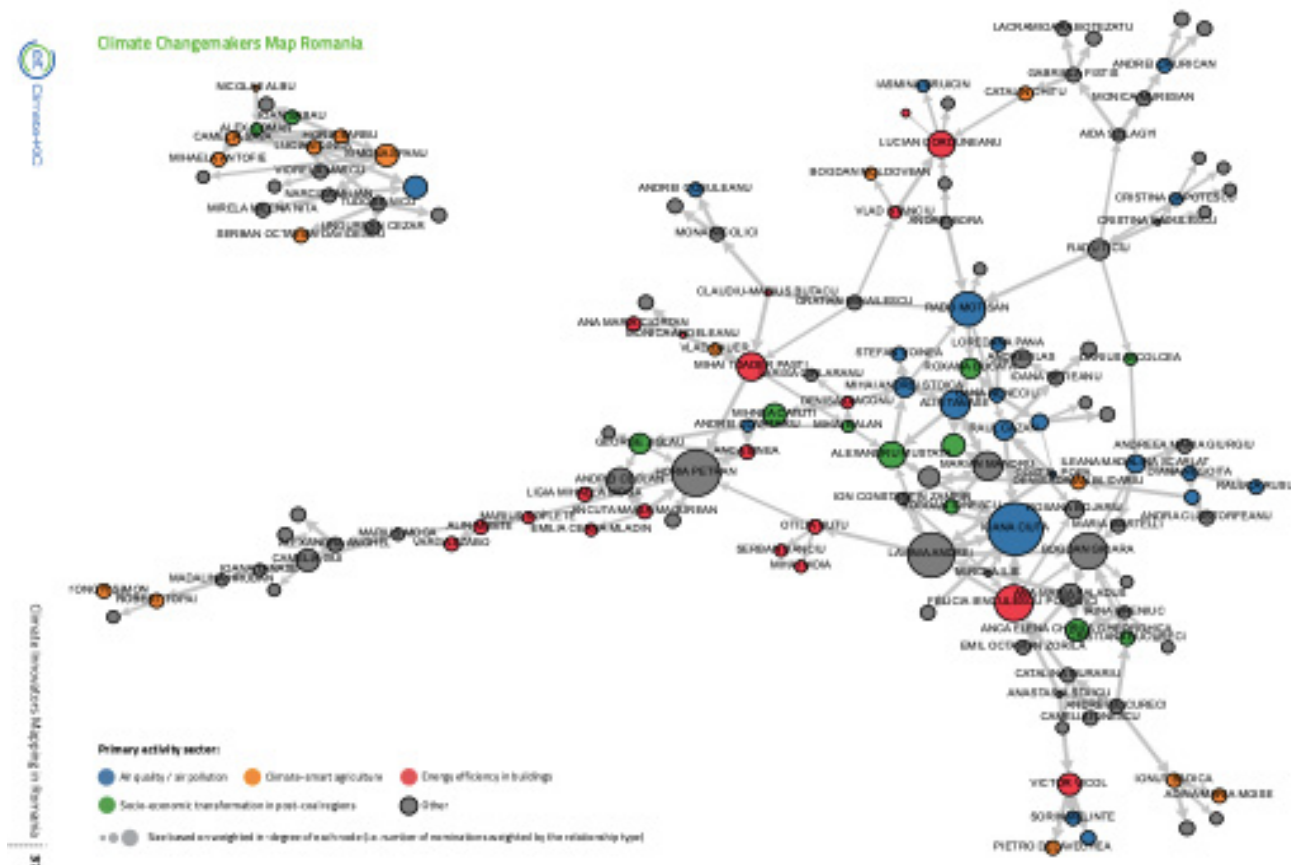
Unlike the rest of the countries in the region, where climate changemakers are working on topics of narrower focus, Romania is similar to Bulgaria when it comes to the distribution of changemakers: most changemakers are distributed equally among the four fields we examined, but a high percentage of the interviewees identify themselves as working transversally, on different climate-related topics, blending together environmental education, climate activism, advocacy and so on.

Climate Innovators in Romania

Zooming closer into the **Romanian landscape**, in addition to the insights mentioned above, we discovered that the work experience in climate innovation is lower than the regional average. The field which displays the highest level of experience is Climate-smart agriculture (17y), which is a lot higher than the regional average (13.73y). Most experienced changemakers activate in the public field with almost 22y experience (compared to 16.49y in the region). Even if the most experienced changemakers are from the public field, the current legislation and access to funding are seen as the highest barriers.

The most nominated changemakers in the mapping were: Ioana Ciută (Asociația Bankwatch România), Lavinia Andrei (Terra Mileniul III), Horia Petran (Institutul National Urban-Incerc), Radu Motisan (Magnasci SRL), Felicia Ienculescu Popovici (Greeninitiative), Bogdan Gioară (Asociația Reper 21), Alin Tănase (Greenpeace), Mihai Toader Paști (EFdeN) și Lucian Corduneanu (Sensix).

Moreover, even though the legal framework is perceived as one of the biggest obstacles for climate change innovation, changemakers from the public sector are one of the smallest cohorts surfaced during the study.



Based on the ecosystem mapping and on the conclusions of an open space workshop held at Climate KIC's Annual Partners Retreat in 2019, as well as on many years of regional experience in nurturing an ecosystem of changemaking in the region, we accumulated a series of learnings that we tried to pilot through a community-building approach as part of our renewed partnership in 2020 with EIT Climate KIC.

We co-developed this new stage in our strategic partnership with EIT Climate KIC by working with other experienced organisations in the regions, such as 4CF Strategic Foresight, Centre for Systems Solutions, Cleantech ForEst, Impact Hub, and the University of Warsaw.

This is how the concept of the Lab emerged, as a pathway for engaging the changemakers we had mapped, as well as others, whom we did not have a chance to map in the first phase of our regional ecosystem mapping, through multiple channels - digital events, webinars, workshops, moderated Slack channel, Calls for Projects, etc. - to create more climate-positive impact in Central and Eastern Europe.

Thus, the CEE Community LAB was designed as an action-oriented network and co-creation 'LAB' that brings people together – from the public and private sectors – to address climate change challenges in CEE. The LAB aimed to build the trust, capacity, and cross-sectoral collaborations that are needed to trigger transformative, systemic change.

Collaborations were designed to address priority areas for the region, including energy efficiency in buildings, climate-smart agriculture, re-industrialization, and other significant fields in CEE. The events we organized addressed the lack of collaboration and low level of trust in the region and employed co-creative methods, ideation, and social simulations. We engaged citizens, NGOs, designers, businesses, and public authorities in collaborative project designs, to build the trust and networks needed to tackle the climate emergency collectively.

Find below a glimpse of some of the LAB's events:

Webinar on Igniting Trust and Collaboration

One of the first topics tackled inside the LAB was around igniting trust and collaboration in the CEE, both crucial for sparking cross-border initiatives, as well as establishing the virtual community of the climate changemakers. Magdalena Dul-Komosinska, CEE Director of Climate-KIC, and Ashoka Fellow Wietse van der Werf, Executive Director of Sea Rangers Service, accepted our invitation and talked about the necessity of embedding a cross-sectoral perspective when it comes to collaboration. This is because success in the climate movement comes down to building trust with those who have the resources, the infrastructure, and the expertise needed for real change.

When building the bigger movement, it's important to recognize that many people do not think alike, which is the reason why looking for partners with intrinsic motivation and a practical way to get them on board is a rather better approach.

(Wietse van der Werf, **Ashoka Fellow**)

In terms of building alliances with less progressive sectors that don't display yet the needed level of intrinsic motivation, packing opportunities for climate action in terms of economic profit and technological innovation is an attractive hook. Ultimately, the two underlined the significance of developing open, symbiotic relationships with different players in order to mobilize efforts and resources to tackle climate change.

You can read more about the event also in this Medium article – [To build the climate movement, look to those unlike you.](#)

Our New Economic Model: We live better if we rebalance our relationship with nature

Two Ashoka Fellows, [Uygar Ozsemi](#), Founder Good4Trust.org, and [Brandon Dennison](#), Founder of Coalfield Development, alongside Gonzalo Saenz de Miera, Director of Climate Change at Iberdrola, spoke about their strategies for climate action, building a truly sustainable economy and the power of prosumers. A brief of their discussion can be found in this [Medium article](#).

After the panel, the LAB participants were invited to join a Zoom conversation to further reflect on the ideas presented by the speakers and integrate them into the reality of the CEE region. Two LAB participants from Romania shared their idea of planting crops of miscanthus giganteus, perfect for soil restoration in coalfield areas, requiring minimal water and fertilizers. Moreover, these crops absorb high volumes of carbon emissions and make an ideal raw material for industrial uses. Regionalizing such innovative local solutions is not straightforward though. The pattern we noticed in the whole region is wider: due to language barriers, but also to the lack of experience in regionalization, local climate changemakers in CEE do not scale cross-border and a much more intensive program of hand-holding must be tailored for each of them individually, to support their impact transfer.

The best energy is the one we don't consume. Energy efficiency perspectives

Ashoka Fellows [Amory Lovins](#), Chairman/Chief Scientist at Rocky Mountain Institute and one of the leading thinkers globally on natural capitalism and energy efficiency, and [Neil McCabe](#), CEO of The Green Plan, sat down virtually in a workshop with LAB participants and inspired them using the success stories of their organizations, underlining several solutions that can be used to limit drastically the waste of energy. They both believe that small actions are important in the overall process of transitioning to more sustainable practices, as they improve morale and drive behavioral change in the long term. An example given by Neil is a system of used battery collection he installed in Ireland's firefighting stations. Although small at first, this initiative sparked a more holistic approach to resource management and for promoting a blueprint of sustainable infrastructure for the local administration.

'All in all, it's about concentrating on all resources we use.'

(Amory Lovins, [Ashoka Fellow](#))

Where willingness exists, technology can facilitate the transition to eco-friendly buildings, as Amory testifies with the use of 'superinsulation' – windows consisting of several layers equipped with technology that allows light but not heat to pass and adds on an extra ventilation and heat recovery system.

Building trust to co-create. Who is not at the table?

Within the LAB, we organized a call for seed funding, between the end of November and the beginning of December 2020 to build trust and spark possible collaborations between LAB participants we organized a webinar aimed to support this process.

We used the help of the artist Cecylia Malik and the Lisewo commune mayor Jakub Kochowicz to discuss the important elements needed in creating effective cooperation, such as integrity, dialogue, true openness to co-creation, fun, and vision. The discussion ended with the participants admitting that the climate-related issues are so vast that no one can solve them alone. Furthermore, climate action projects must always create spaces for other persons to grow beside the project leaders.

A Call for Projects was designed from the very beginning of the LAB as a collaborative experience: to apply for seed funding (total of 40.000 EUR), participants had to develop climate-positive ideas to be implemented cross-border. Out of approximately 80 applications, we selected three of them for seed funding:

01. Food for the Earth: Composting Communities for Climate – a cross-border collaboration between the Urban Cultor start-up in Romania and Our Neighbourhood Association for Sustainable Practices in Bulgaria. 'Food for the Earth' is a community-based initiative for composting on-site. It builds low-carbon infrastructure and offers low-carbon services as an integrated and innovative green economy and social approach



Source: **Urban Cultor**

02. Apro'tech – a cross-border collaboration between Habitat for Humanity Hungary and Energy Agency of Plovdiv (EAP) Bulgaria. The mission of Apro'tech Habitat is to make efficient, safe, and eco-friendly heating technologies accessible to the most marginalized communities. Their idea is to design, build and test the prototypes of a low-cost heater, as well as work on policy recommendations for a social stove-replacement scheme which will be disseminated in the CEE region.

03. Intergenerational food cooperatives – Romain (Romania), Maria (Estonia), and Catherine (Bulgaria) joined forces to create intergenerational food cooperatives in Bulgaria and Romania for cross-border family reunions, connecting underserved community members to local, regeneratively grown food.

LEARNINGS

Learnings for creating a regional collaborative climate action ecosystem

Piloting the Climate Community LAB in CEE during a global pandemic was a challenging experience, yet offered us learnings of what an enhanced regional ecosystem building approach should be predicated on. We've learned that:

The region has notoriously low trust and low collaboration between ecosystem players, and especially at the cross-sectoral level (due to the historical legacy, bumpy democratic transitions, educational systems that emphasize competition over collaboration etc.)

Therefore, building trust-based connections is the essential precondition for collaboration. To architect these connections, the steering and convening must be done by a third party, neutral actor, with a good knowledge of the region, but with an international profile (the "myth of the foreign expert").

Large group gatherings need to be complemented by informal one-to-one connections between the convener and the actors in the ecosystem.

A tangible, collaborative low-key concrete output/ result works best to keep actors on track when it comes to communicating and collaborating. If such a goal is not set, actors tend to lament endlessly on what does not work, instead of focusing on something tangible that can work.

People thrive as collaborators when their achievements are recognized. The mapping was the first stage in this direction, but local changemakers need to be put in the spotlight more.

While the average age of the innovators' network in the region is fairly advanced, there is a young(er) generation of changemakers who sees the world's attention on the climate emergency as a key opportunity for more impact-driven changemaking and who can navigate in global fluid networks much better than their more senior peers.

Although the region faces very similar contexts, opportunities and barriers, there are few connections between climate changemakers from different countries in the region.

The region's potential for innovation varies widely between countries, yet there is a desire of regional changemakers to learn, get inspired, and navigate broader, global, contexts and patterns.

Some unlikely actors can be very supportive of climate changemaking in the region if properly capacitated (e.g.: corporate intrapreneurs, policy intrapreneurs, journalists, etc.) and both the mapping and the LAB had limitations in surfacing these unlikely actors.

Connections must be nurtured over time before the network effect takes off and these nurturing requires time, patience, and effort. Moreover, these connections are best nurtured cross-regional with a clear thematic focus in mind (e.g.: build a regional community, not around all Planet & Climate issue areas, but build instead several smaller, thematically-focused cross-regional communities).

The Energy Poverty Advisory Hub

Over 34 million people in European Union are experiencing energy poverty to various degrees, with the most vulnerable groups being also the most affected.

Started in January 2021, The Energy Poverty Advisory Hub (EPAH) is the leading EU initiative aiming to eradicate energy poverty and accelerate the just energy transition of European local governments. EPAH's mission over the next 4 years is to be the **central platform of energy poverty expertise** in Europe for local authorities and all stakeholders interested in taking action to combat energy poverty in Europe by providing direct support, online trainings, and research results and by building a collaborative network of stakeholders interested in taking action to combat energy poverty in Europe.

Building on the EU Energy Poverty Observatory legacy, EPAH adapts an action-based approach by creating a space for collaboration and exchange for local and regional authorities planning a variety of measures to tackle energy poverty in the pursuit of a just and fair transition.

Tackling energy poverty at the local level requires a wide range of expertise, so EPAH brings together five partner organisations from across Europe with the ambition to embrace the multi-sector dimension of energy. Over 2021, they collected over 200 inspirational cases and created an online interactive database, the **EPAH ATLAS**, "**Tackling energy poverty through local actions – Inspiring cases from across Europe**", available now online.

Ashoka Romania is one of the seven the local partners of the project (local antennas) and its role in the next phases is to disseminate at a local level the large amount of knowledge and expertise gathered in the project. During EPAH's launch event, held on November 22-23, 2021, we shared how local Ashoka Fellows empower vulnerable groups to figure out their own pathways to reduce and even eliminate energy poverty.



FUTURE TRENDS

Next Now: Planet & Climate

Starting 2020, for the first time in its 40-year history, Ashoka is galvanizing the strength of its global community around a handful of globally urgent themes. Planet & Climate is one of them. Through Next Now: Planet & Climate we aim to identify the key insights and mindset shifts that will rebalance the relationship between humanity and the planet at a global scale. Equipped with a new vision for Planet & Climate, we will mobilize teams of outstanding changemakers to make it a reality.

The power of social entrepreneurship and Ashoka's wide network of changemakers (from Fellows to business entrepreneurs, changemaking universities, corporate intrapreneurs, and young changemakers) in the field of Planet and Climate is vast and has enormous potential. In the past forty years, we've elected more than 600 Fellows and 40 Ashoka Young Changemakers for their systems-changing solutions in the environmental field.

For decades, Ashoka has accompanied our Fellows along their impact journeys with catalytic investments, strategic guidance, and with an unmatched peer-to-peer community. But the scope, urgency and interconnectivity of our social problems demand collective action. For this purpose, Next Now was launched in 2020 to advance field-level change, starting with Planet & Climate.



Insights from Thinking differently: ideas for action on planet & climate report

By channeling the energies of Ashoka's network around strategic collective goals, we believe we have a unique opportunity to significantly shape the future of our Climate & Planet. We looked for patterns in the work of hundreds of leading social entrepreneurs working in the field of Planet & Climate, through in-depth interviews, mappings, and a global survey with all Ashoka Fellows elected in the past 40 years.

We came to several design principles for global Planet & Climate action which cut across fields and geographies, as well as to an meta-level insight that points to an emerging paradigm shift.

The meta-level insight deals with reframing our relationship with nature: we need to move from seeing humanity as separate from and superior to nature and recognize the interconnectedness that means in fact, **We Are Nature**.

Everyone is necessary.

Every person is involved in contributing to the collective impact humanity is having on the rest of the natural world. One of the most important tasks is therefore helping people find the role they can play and making sure no one is left out of this process – particularly those who the traditional environmental movement has tended to overlook, leave behind, or shun.

Work with the complexity: create holistic, systemic solutions.

Each of the planetary crises we are facing sits at the intersection of several systems, such as national and global economic systems, the physical climatic system, and socio-political systems. The deep interconnectivity between systems requires that we tackle climate change holistically and systemically. This means, in other words, that lasting climate crisis solutions will multi-solve poverty, health, the economy, and much more.

Update our economic structures to guide more equitable, sustainable decisions.

There is no way to seriously address the interconnected issues in the field of Planet & Climate without engaging with our global economic system. This system which sees nature as a 'resource' to be extracted to fuel profit and growth provides us with the default framework for billions of decisions every day. What would an economic system look like that focused on human and planetary health rather than solely financial growth?

The design principles social entrepreneurs in our network are working with to land these framechange ideas can be summed up in eight headings, presented in the diagram below:



Among the Central and Eastern European Planet & Climate fellows we elected since launching Next Now: Planet & Climate we find Polish social entrepreneur Dominika Szacillo, who proves that everyone has a responsibility and can take better decisions if they employ a Planet & Climate lens to everyday actions. Also, a recent addition to our CEE cohort of Planet & Climate Fellows, Maciej Podyma of Poland, exemplified the multi-solving trend we've noticed as a typical strategy for action among the social entrepreneurs in our network, as his solution of urban meadows in cityscapes both preserves biodiversity and achieves savings on public budgets.

Case Study - Dominika Szacillo, Quick: Garbage Truck Approaching!, Poland

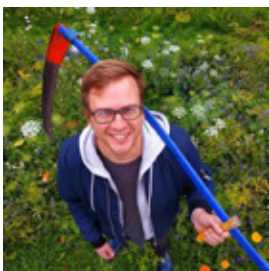


In 2013, inspired by noticing great chairs and rescuing them right before a garbage truck arrived, Dominika created an online group called Quick: Garbage Truck Approaching! (Polish: Uwaga, śmieciarka jedzie). Through this group, citizens are able to give new life to discarded objects, redefining their status.

Now, seven years later, the network has grown to 130 local leaders who facilitate interactions among nearly 400,000 trash brokers across 216 values-based, online local groups all over Poland. These trash brokers redefine the fate of 76,000 bulk waste objects per month. Annually, this amounts to almost forty tons of large format objects that don't go to landfills but get a second life – at zero expense of the municipal budgets.

The Quick: Garbage Truck Approaching! movement is growing exponentially, attracting users through many perceived benefits – it is easy, fun, time effective, stigma-free, economically viable and empowering. Dominika is expanding the idea to other countries, and bringing businesses and public administrations on board, to ensure that no item that has the potential to be reused or upcycled ends up wasted on landfills.

Case study – Maciej Podyma, Fundacja Łąka



Maciej naturally and effectively nurtures biodiversity and counteracts the devastation of natural resources such as air, water, and soil by giving back to the wider public an opportunity of sowing meadows instead of lawns as a part of the urban greenery, next to roads, at embankments, roofs, and backyard gardens.

One of the research studies that he did has already confirmed the effects of catching air pollution particles by a meadow grown from an anti-smog seeds mix created by Maciej's team. Maciej with his team has already trained 5000 persons on the role of flower meadows in the ecosystem, changed the local law in 8 counties, and saw 85 flower meadows in 8 cities.

Six ways to bring people & planet back into balance

To challenge our emerging thinking between April and June 2020 we organized a series of ten closed-door global Socratic dialogues with fellows, partners, friends, and experts in the field.

Our briefing – Six ways to bring people & planet back into balance – sums up the messages we take into the future from our core constituencies. It became clear for us that we must work, as a global network, to make the following shifts come true:

01

Businesses must move from a “Reduce” to a “Regenerate” mindset.

02

Governments must enforce green taxation regulations and push companies for long-term planning.

03

The **global financial system** must move to more sustainable risk-return ratios.

04

Social entrepreneurs must transition from shining individually to working collectively and funders must reward this.

05

Ashoka and other ecosystem organizations must use global, interconnected datasets.

06

We must use culture, language, and education to shift behaviors.

CONCLUSION

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

REFERENCES

Conclusion

There is no doubt that local solutions exist in the our region, as well as the energy and the motivation of social innovators to drive a faster transition to a greener, net-zero future, where we make the new paradigm that We Are Nature a living reality. But this means that, politically, decision-makers have to make a dent in eliminating coal as an important source of energy in the region, overcome the legacy of our heavily industrialized economies and move towards new economic models. This means both political and corporate decision-makers must dedicate resources to support the new alternatives that we see emerging, led by local social innovators in this field. The real systemic change comes when climate changemakers help authorities see the solutions that work and bring multiple social benefits, and, in return, authorities scale these solutions and facilitate the spaces for others to be shaped.

Investing in accelerating the impact and scale of climate changemakers solutions is not just an environmental topic and we hope that this report has shown that. In Romania, Ashoka will continue to bring the latest trends and innovations from our international network, gather insights and share them with local ecosystems and connect diverse perspectives and intersections with other fields of our vast humanity. We aim to create intersectional trust-based spaces where collaboration and collective impact can thrive.

Supporting the innovations that bring climate-positive impact requires of us, as a network organisation, to work closely both with hundreds of Planet & Climate changemakers and with decision makers. Also, it implies creating circles of trust and collaboration between private/ corporate actors and the civil sector for long-term, in-depth, impact-oriented strategies. In the upcoming years we hope we can facilitate those processes in Romania and more widely in the region.

We also call upon you to support our efforts. You can [nominate](#) to our global Fellowship bold entrepreneurs that are living examples of the trends presented above, work with us and these innovators in scaling impact deeper and further or simply spread the ground-breaking transformations that are happening in the field of Planet & Climate with your peers.

Every action brings us closer to understanding that the magnitude of climate-positive solutions transcends the field of Planet & Climate and that these solutions are benefitting us from multiple angles and standpoints. We all have a responsibility to act and make better decisions. What comes next must start now.

Acknowledgments

This report is a reflection over the past years of work in the field of climate changemaking within Ashoka Romania, regionally in Central and Eastern Europe with our colleagues, and globally, through our emergent **Next Now**: Planet and Climate strategy.

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Six ways to bring people & planet back into balance

Thinking differently – ideas for action on planet & climate

To build the climate movement, look to those unlike you.

Restoring the economy and environment together

O pandemie care apare o dată la un secol: obstacole și oportunități emergente pentru schimbarea socială

Organized Crime Is Destroying Our Planet. We Need To Spot The Patterns





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