

**2021 EDITION**

European  
Innovation  
Council



European  
**Social Innovation**  
Competition 2021

Supported by the **EIC**



**IMPACT REPORT**

(2013-2020)

Insights from the Alumni Census 2021

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The European Social Innovation Competition: a beacon for social innovation in Europe

## 2. INSIGHTS FROM THE ALUMNI CENSUS 2021

### 2.1 The alumni

- *Geography*
- *Editions*
- *Results*
- *Post-Competition engagement*
- *Overall satisfaction*
- *Self-awareness*

### 2.2 The projects

- *Launch*
- *Operations & HR*
- *Partnerships for financial and non-financial support*
- *Impact management*

### 2.3 The Competition's impact on alumni projects

- *Skills*
- *Other projects/initiatives*
- *Funding*
- *Markets*
- *Turnover*
- *Staff*
- *Networks*

### 2.4 Lessons and further support needs



## 3. OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

### 3.1 Recommendations



## 4. CONCLUSION



## 5. ANNEX I – ALUMNI CENSUS 2021



## 6. ANNEX II – METHODOLOGICAL NOTE ON ENTRY SELECTION

### DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this report, as well as the information included in it, do not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of the European Commission and in no way commit the institution. The European Commission cannot be deemed liable for any errors, omissions or inaccuracies present in this report. Furthermore, the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The *European Social Innovation Competition's Impact Report (2013-2020)* – Insights from the Alumni Census 2021 is one of the publications issued as part of the 2021 European Social Innovation Competition.

This report is especially aimed at European and global social innovators, social entrepreneurs, social finance providers, policy makers, and the general public, who are interested in having an overview of how the former participating teams of social innovators have benefitted from participating in the European Social Innovation Competition<sup>1</sup>.

The objective of this publication is to report on the impact that the Competition has had on its alumni over the years. Specifically, alumni are members of teams that have participated in the Competition – as semi-finalists, finalists or winners – in one of its past editions.

This report was built upon the Alumni Census 2021 'Count Me In'<sup>2</sup>, an online survey administered to the Competition's alumni, which provides data and meaningful information about the impact of the Competition on the European social innovators and their projects.

The Census is an integral part of the Alumni Network strategy<sup>3</sup>, and functions as a formal and consistent annual contact point with the former participating teams. The Census aims to track the progress and trajectory of the innovators supported by the Competition. More generally, the Census aims to collect valuable information on the impact that the Competition has on participants and their social innovation projects. In particular – as we will see in the main section of this report (Insights from the Alumni Census 2021) – the survey carried out with the Alumni Census 2021 has covered four main dimensions:

1. **The participating individuals (our alumni);**
2. **The social innovation projects with which alumni participated in the Competition;**
3. **The impact the Competition has had on a number of areas of interest (e.g. turnover, team size, expansion into new markets, skills acquired, funding opportunities raised, networks/partnerships built, etc.);**
4. **Alumni's learnings and further support requested.**

The structure of the report is outlined as follows:

In this **Introduction**, the European Social Innovation Competition's outcome areas and long-term impact goal, derived from the Competition's Theory of Change, are presented briefly. The Competition's Theory of Change is the reference impact framework used in the analysis of the data from the Alumni Census 2021.

In the main body of this report, the **Insights from the Alumni Census 2021** are outlined, showing and commenting on the data analysis that has been undertaken. In outlining the analysis, four main dimensions are taken into account: the alumni; the projects; the Competition's impact on alumni; learnings and further support needs.

The results of the analysis are then summarised and assessed in the '**Overview of findings**' section, in which brief recommendations for the next developments of the Competition are also included.

Lastly, the **Conclusion** shows the path that the Competition should take in the future to fully accomplish its impact goals.

Two final **Annexes** include further information on the Alumni Census 2021 (Annex I) – the main source of information for this report – and a methodological note related to data analysis (Annex II).

1 From here on it is also abbreviated as 'the Competition'.

2 From here on it is also abbreviated as 'the Census'. For more details on the Census, see also Annex I.

3 The Alumni Network was created with the goal to enhance the visibility of semi-finalists, finalists, and winners of the Competition, to offer them a platform to network and to continue developing their connections made whilst participating in the Competition.

# THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL INNOVATION COMPETITION: A BEACON FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION IN EUROPE

Launched in 2013, in memory of Diogo Vasconcelos – a Portuguese politician and social innovation pioneer – the **European Social Innovation Competition** acts as a beacon for social innovators across Europe, by supporting early-stage ideas and facilitating a network of changemakers who are shaping our society for the better.

From 2013 to 2020, eight editions were organised, each one focussing on a particular theme:



2013 – [New Forms of Work](#)



2014 – [The Job Challenge](#)



2015 – [New Ways to Grow](#)



2016 – [Integrated Futures](#)



2017 – [Equality Rebooted](#)



2018 – [Re:Think Local](#)



2019 – [Challenging Plastic Waste](#)



2020 – [Reimagine Fashion](#)

Since its early years, the Competition has raised awareness of some of the major social and environmental issues facing European society, while also stimulating and channelling social innovation which addresses them. Indeed, through the financial and non-financial support and the networking opportunities it has continued to offer to the alumni over the years, the Competition has unearthed several game-changing ideas from all corners of Europe and helped them to become viable, scalable and visible social enterprises.

By supporting the promotion of European social innovators and their ideas, the Competition ultimately helps to boost the recognition of purpose-driven organisations, facilitates policy dialogue and fosters collaboration with the wider community of social innovation stakeholders.

All this is well summarised in three impact objectives that constitute the overarching layer of the Competition's Theory of Change:

- 1. Innovation Impact** – The Competition stimulates and channels socially innovative solutions towards addressing big societal problems with the aim of promoting growth, employment and inclusion.
- 2. Capacity Impact** – The Competition attracts and supports talented early-stage social innovators to build viable and scalable social enterprises and fosters the creation of a supportive community of peers and stakeholders for future collaboration/partnerships, aimed at further financial and non-financial opportunities.
- 3. Ecosystem Impact** – The Competition unlocks systemic change, raises awareness of big societal problems and equalises the social innovation playing field across Europe by addressing regional disparities and promoting policy change and market shifts.

All together, these objectives contribute to define a broader, long-term impact goal: to create a multitude of new approaches that can help transform systems and value chains, making Europe more competitive, sustainable, greener and inclusive.

As will be demonstrated in the two final sections (see 'Overview of findings', p. 36; and 'Conclusion', p. 40), the results of the analysis of the Alumni Census 2021 represent evidence of the overall positive capacity of the Competition to promote change within the three impact areas of *innovation, capacity and ecosystem*. Nevertheless, the report highlights that there is also

room for improvement. Indeed, some of the limitations highlighted by the alumni are linked to external factors which are not directly influenceable – such as the level of maturity of the social finance market in a number of countries. At the same time, areas for improvement include, for example, the need to offer the participants even more effective support for network building and the acquisition of skills to access finance and new markets. The report findings will serve as recommendations (see p. 39) to ensure better support and promotion of social innovators in Europe in the next editions of the Competition.

## 2. INSIGHTS FROM THE ALUMNI CENSUS 2021

The information extracted from the Alumni Census 2021 has been grouped into four main dimensions and several sub-dimensions:

### The alumni



The alumni are the European Social Innovation Competition's former participants (semi-finalists, finalists and winners).

Information is provided on:

- Their geographical origin;
- The edition they participated in;
- Their final status at the end of the Competition;
- Their further engagement as coaches, speakers or judges;
- Their level of satisfaction as participants.

### The projects



The projects are the ideas which the alumni submitted to the Competition, which may have become established socially innovative organisations.

Information is provided on:

- The projects' launch dates;
- The projects' current status (operativeness, market reach, team size);
- Partnerships for financial and non-financial support;
- Impact measurement activities.

### The Competition's impact on alumni's projects



The Competition's impact on the alumni's projects has been tracked along several lines:

- Skills acquired;
- Additional projects/initiatives launched;
- Funding raised;
- Market growth;
- Turnover growth;
- Staff count;
- Network growth.

### Lessons and further support needs



Alumni's lessons and further support requested.

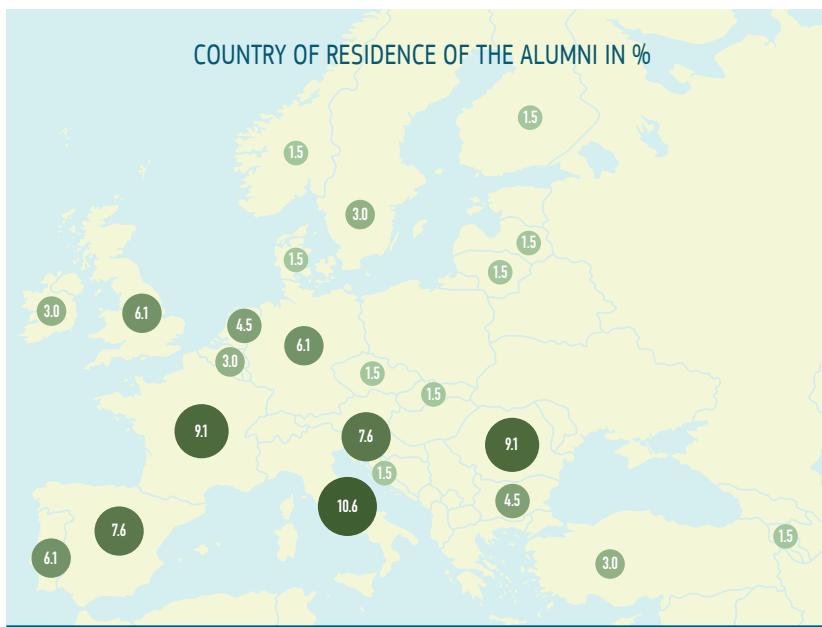


## 2.1 THE ALUMNI

### Geography

#### Where do alumni currently reside?

The countries shown on the table are the *current* place of residence of the alumni and do not indicate the place where the projects with which they participated in the Competition are based. It is interesting to note that the list includes two non-EU countries – Chile and Ecuador. Specifically, the alumna resident in Chile participated in the Competition with a project based in Slovenia, while the alumnus resident in Ecuador participated with a project based in the Netherlands.



Italy is the most common country of residence among our Alumni Census respondents, followed by Romania, France, Spain and Slovenia. In general, there was a trend towards greater participation of social innovators from Southern and Western European countries. Northern and Eastern European countries are less represented – with one exception: Romania.

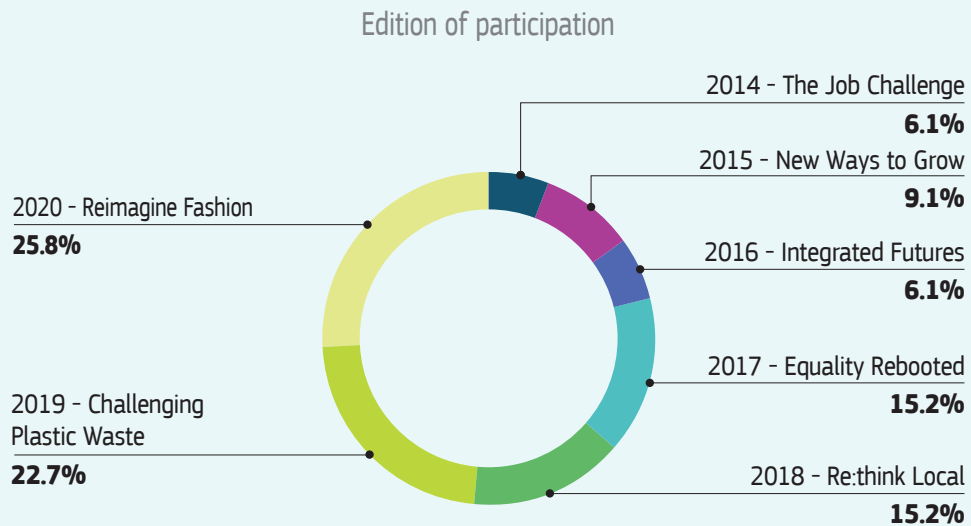
Across the whole of our wider Alumni Network we see that, over the course of the various editions, the programme has had a wide geographical reach, with the vast majority of European countries represented. This confirms the Competition's ability to reach out not only to countries where social innovation is a common and widespread practice, but also to countries where social innovation ecosystems are less mature, thus contributing to promote change and greater regional cohesion.

Current country of residence	Percentage (out of the total)
Italy	10.6%
Romania	9.1%
France	9.1%
Spain	7.6%
Slovenia	7.6%
United Kingdom	6.1%
Portugal	6.1%
Germany	6.1%
Netherlands	4.5%
Bulgaria	4.5%
Turkey	3.0%
Sweden	3.0%
Ireland	3.0%
Belgium	3.0%
Slovakia	1.5%
Norway	1.5%
Lithuania	1.5%
Latvia	1.5%
Finland	1.5%
Ecuador*	1.5%
Denmark	1.5%
Czechia	1.5%
Croatia	1.5%
Chile*	1.5%
Armenia	1.5%

\* 'Ecuador' and 'Chile' were deliberately not included in the map for reasons of practicality.

## Editions

### Which Competition edition did alumni participate in?



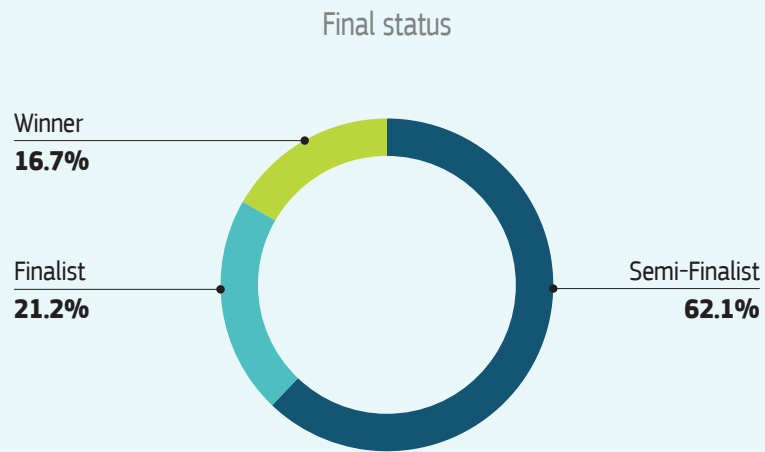
It is noticeable that the vast majority of alumni who responded to the Census participated in the most recent editions of the Competition (2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020). The lower engagement of alumni who participated in previous editions is evident. This can be

partly explained by the fact that the Alumni Network – our main alumni engagement tool – was established in October 2019, as part of past improvements to the Competition.



## Results

### *What was the alumni's final status in the Competition?*



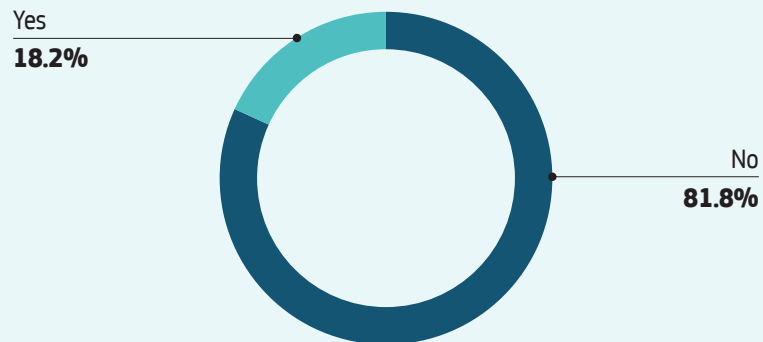
The majority of alumni who responded to the Census are semi-finalists. In relative terms, the data on finalists (21%), and especially on winners (17%), is however significant, and is indicative of a greater engagement of

those alumni who managed to reach a more advanced stage of the Competition, compared to those who stopped at the semi-final stage.

## Post-Competition engagement

*Have alumni engaged with the Competition after its completion?*

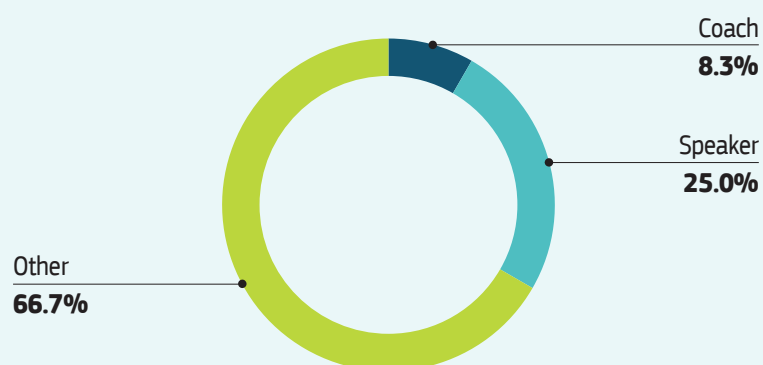
Engagement with the Competition's staff after participation



A large amount of respondents (over 80%) reported to have limited to no contact with the Competition after completing the programme. This result was expected by the team, as the Alumni Network formally launched in Autumn 2019, with proper network structure and strategies for engagement refined throughout

2020. The Network became an integrated part of the programme towards the end of 2020, with strong engagement and integration seen throughout the launch period of the 2021 edition. We aim to see much stronger engagement reported in the 2022 Alumni Census.

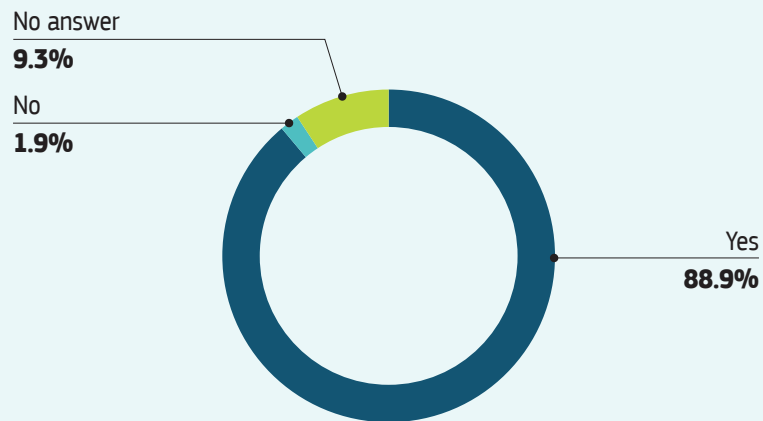
Role after participating in the Competition



Those who answered that they did engage positively with the Competition programme post participation (18.2%) were asked in which role they participated.

The majority of this portion of alumni did not specify (66.7%). The others participated either as speakers (25%) or as coaches (8.3%).

### Availability to participate as assessor, judge or speaker in the Competition



For those who replied that they had not engaged as speakers, coaches, assessors, etc. across the programme, as per the previous statistics, we asked if they would be willing to be engaged as speakers, coaches, assessors, etc. in future editions of the Competition.

As evident from the graph above, almost 90% of such respondents answered in the affirmative. This confirms the strong interest among our alumni to take an active role and to be involved in the activities and events of the Competition, even after some time has passed.

## Overall satisfaction

*How do alumni evaluate their overall experience in the Competition, on a scale from 1 (totally negative) to 10 (totally positive)?*



Score average  
(in tenths)

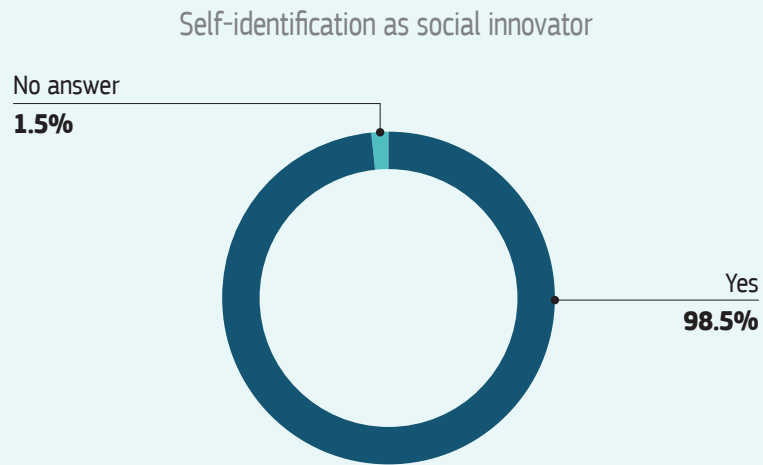
# 9.1

The vast majority of our alumni have had a very positive Competition experience. In fact, 91% of them gave a mark above 8/10. The average rating (9.1/10) indicates a very high level of general satisfaction amongst alumni. Furthermore, it should be noted how there are no remarkable differences of satisfaction

levels among alumni throughout the Competition's editions, showcasing a cohesive and consistent programme delivery and strong alignment across both entries, projects and the support the programme provides.

## Self-awareness

*Do alumni still consider themselves as social innovators?*



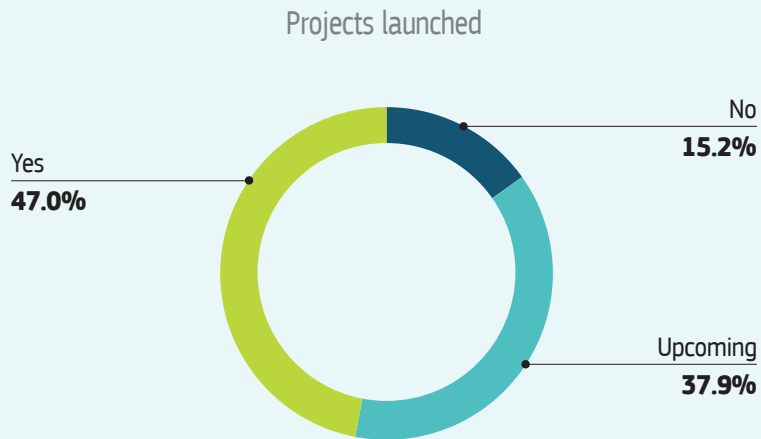
Almost all of our alumni believe they are (still) social innovators. This self-perception as social innovators continues even several years after their participation in the Competition.



## 2.2 THE PROJECTS

### Launch

*Did alumni succeed in launching their projects?*

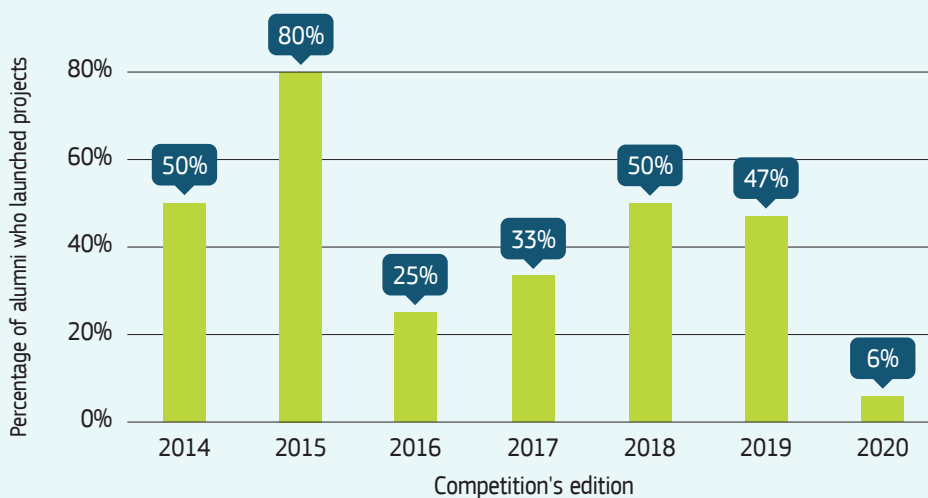


The majority of our alumni have launched or are in the process of launching the project with which they participated in the Competition. Only 15.2% of our alumni failed to launch their projects. Considering the

Competition's focus on early-stage ideas, this is to be expected and indicates that the selection process has been pitched appropriately.

Percentage of alumni who launched projects following participation in the Competition, by edition

Note: no data was provided from alumni participating in the 2013 edition ('New Forms of Work')

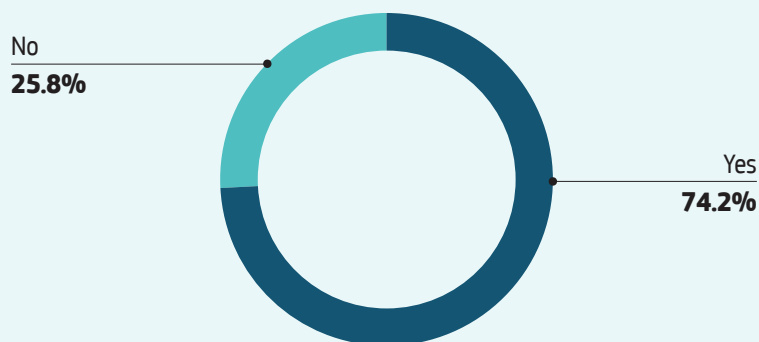


The graph above shows the percentage of alumni – in each edition – who managed to launch their projects, resulting from their participation in the Competition. The very low percentage (6%) of projects launched

following participation in the 2020 edition is due to the very little time that has passed since the end of that edition; therefore, it can be assumed that more time is needed before projects may be launched.

*Are projects still operational and are alumni still involved in their projects?*

Projects/businesses still operational



Proportion of still operational projects/businesses, by edition

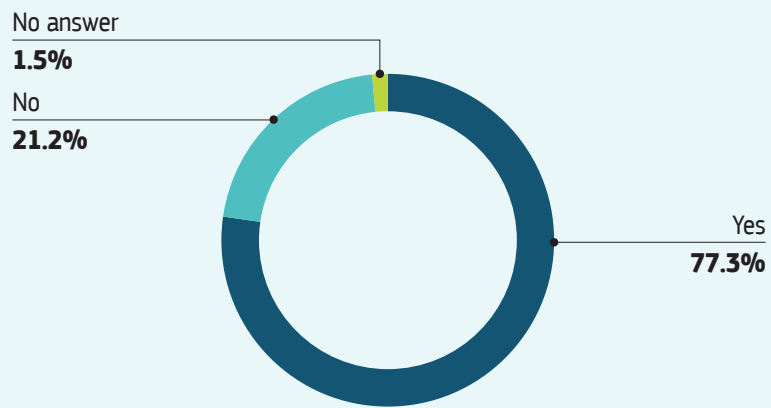


As can be seen from the pie chart, approximately three quarters of the projects/businesses that have been involved in the various editions of the Competition are still operational.

In the bar chart, it can be seen that there is a higher number of still operational projects/businesses launched in the most recent editions (namely 2019 and 2020). However – despite the fact that the number of still-operational projects/businesses from previous editions

is proportionally lower than the most recent ones – the graph shows a good ‘resilience’ of the less recently launched projects/businesses. Indeed, on average, between 25 and 50% of the projects/businesses that participated in the Competition between 2014 and 2018 are still on the market, and have managed to overcome the difficult passage of the first two to three years of operations since the launch of the project/business.

### Alumni's current involvement in the project



As can be seen, the percentage of projects still operational – shown earlier – is closely aligned with the number of alumni still actively involved in their projects, as the above graph indicates. About three

quarters of the respondents confirmed that they are still involved in the projects with which they participated in the Competition.



## In what countries are alumni projects operational?



### Percentage (out of the total)

Italy	9.4%
France	8.5%
Germany	7.7%
Romania	7.7%
Netherlands	6.0%
Spain	6.0%
Portugal	4.3%
Slovenia	3.4%
Sweden	3.4%
United Kingdom	3.4%
Other (non-EU)	3.4%
Austria	2.6%
Belgium	2.6%
Bulgaria	2.6%
Denmark	2.6%
Ireland	2.6%
Norway	2.6%

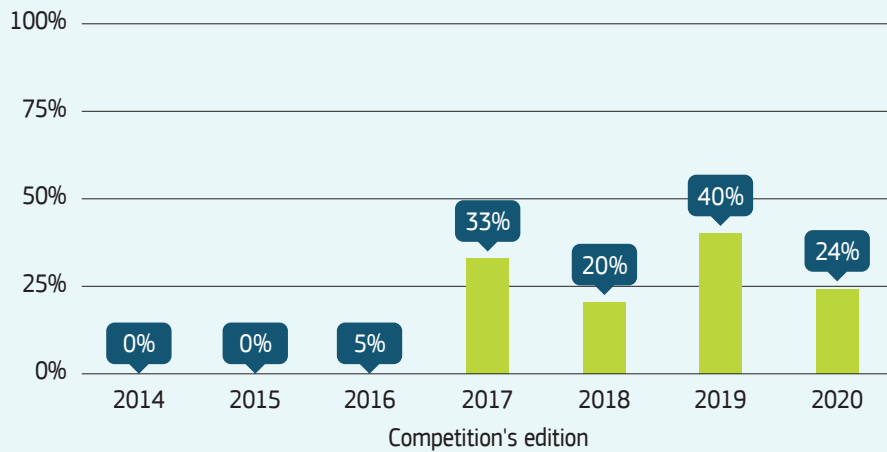
Turkey	2.6%
Croatia	1.7%
Estonia	1.7%
Finland	1.7%
Hungary	1.7%
Lithuania	1.7%
Switzerland	1.7%
Armenia	0.9%
Czechia	0.9%
Georgia	0.9%
Greece	0.9%
Latvia	0.9%
Malta	0.9%
Moldova	0.9%
Montenegro	0.9%
Poland	0.9%
Slovakia	0.9%

As visible from the infographic, Italy, France, Germany and Romania are among the European countries with the highest number of operational alumni projects. As mentioned previously in this report (see Geography section, page 7) we saw the highest numbers of

Census participating alumni from a similar range of countries – Germany being the only country standing out as a strong country for implementation of social innovations, even with participation numbers from that region not making the top 4.

### Percentage of organisations/projects who have internationalised, by edition

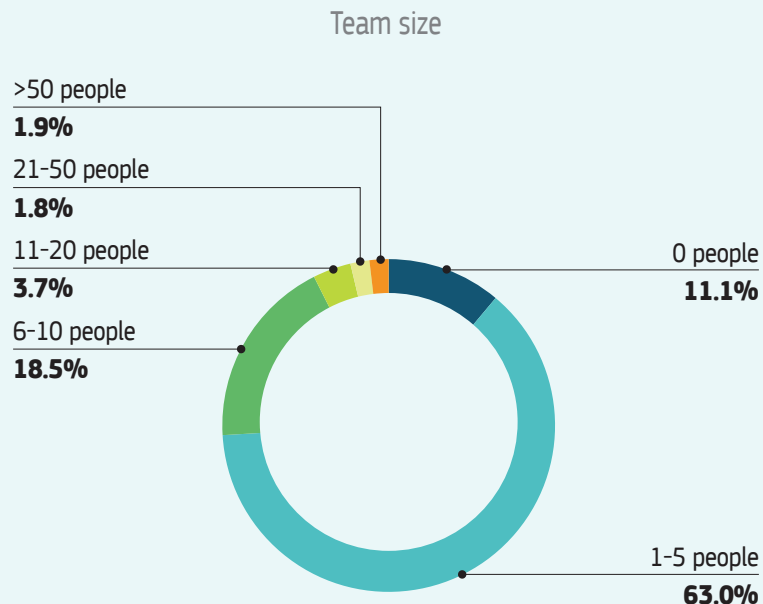
Note: no data was provided from alumni participating in the 2013 edition ('New Forms of Work')



The graph above shows the percentage of current operational organisations/projects that have internationalised per edition. From the 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 editions we see a strong number of

projects that not only operate within their domestic market, but who have reached at least one other market as well, thus reflecting the Competition's pan-European ethos and ambitions.

### How big are the alumni project teams currently?



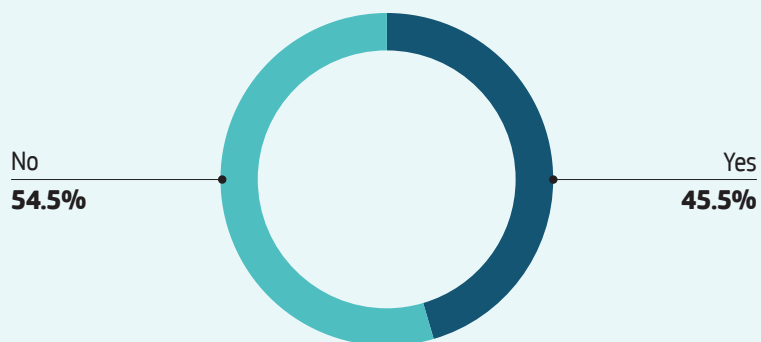
Most projects operate with a small team (between one and five people). Across our alumni, teams with more than 10 members are rare. This is consistent with the

early-stage nature of the businesses and projects that participated in the Competition.

## Partnerships for financial and non-financial support

*Did alumni manage to connect, engage and/or partner with other alumni?*

Connection/engagement with other Competition's alumni

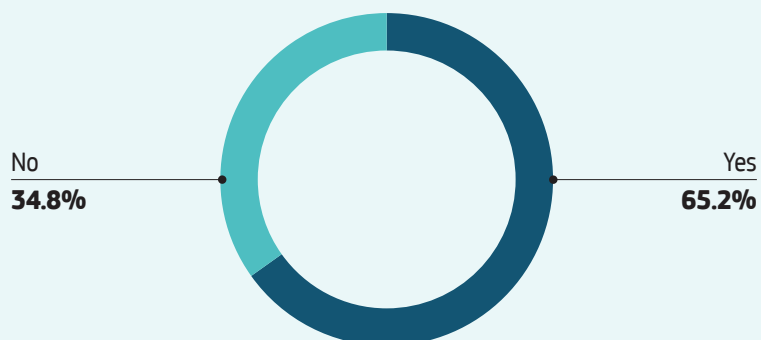


As this graph shows, about 46% of the respondents answered that they have managed to connect, engage and/or partner with other alumni. It is part of the Competition ethos to support and create opportunities

for peer learning and connect social innovators across editions, so we are delighted to see that almost 50% of our alumni are actively engaging and using the network to positively move their project along.

*Did alumni succeed in building supportive partnerships?*

Setup of partnerships for financial/non-financial support

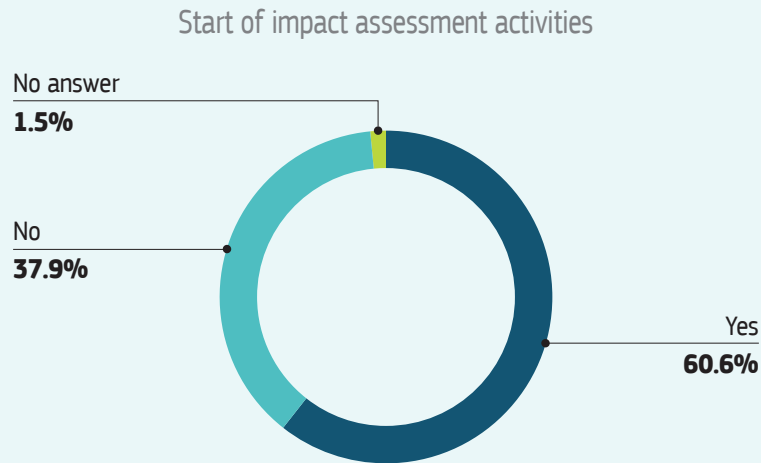


More than 60% of our alumni stated that they have built relationships and/or partnerships with social innovation stakeholders (companies, public bodies,

institutions, third sector organisations, etc.), with the aim of receiving financial and/or non-financial support.

## Impact management

*Have alumni initiated measuring the impact of their project(s) or organisation?*



We are proud to note that the majority of our alumni (60%) currently undertake strong activities to measure the social impact of their project(s) and/or organisation. The Competition aims to support ideas with the potential to enable real social impact. We take projects through a package of support including social innovation approaches and tools, workshops and webinars on thematic content, expert coaching and emphasize the importance of a strong impact methodology and consistent impact measurement. With approximately 74% of alumni projects currently operational, seeing 60% actively focusing on integrating strong social impact methodologies is a great achievement.

Among the most used methodologies/tools are the Theory of Change, the LCA (Life Cycle Assessment), as well as other qualitative and quantitative impact measurement methodologies, such as baseline assessment, ethnographic models, predictive impact analysis and SROI (Social Return on Investment).

By acquiring tools for measuring and communicating the social impact generated by their projects, alumni are able to present themselves to public and/or private investors – and the wider community – with an excellent trump card. With their growing awareness and expertise on impact, they demonstrate that they are worthy of stakeholders' trust as well as capable to be promoters and managers of systemic change, together with their peers.

The decisive contribution of the Competition in initiating impact management processes within the projects of a large number of the alumni surveyed is an incentive to continue, expand and make even more effective the activities supporting the dissemination of impact knowledge and skills, both within the Challenge Prize and the Impact Prize – the two strands of the Competition. In recent years, and even more so in the years to come, this kind of focused support has and will become more and more decisive, thus contributing to the ultimate goal of the Competition's Theory of Change, that of a new European season based on greater competitiveness, sustainability and inclusiveness.

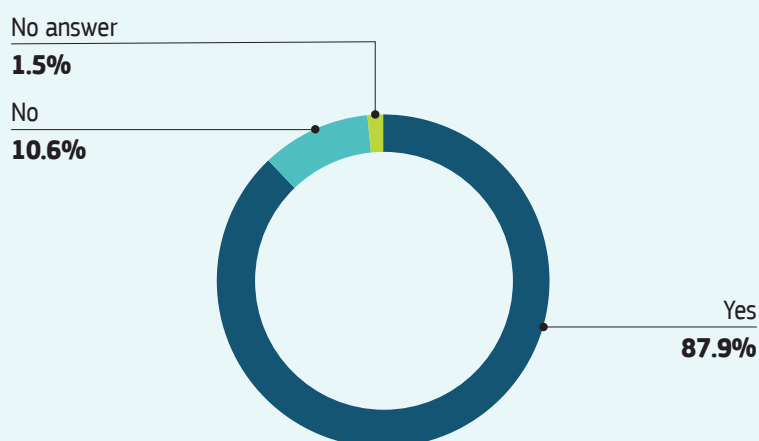


## 2.3 THE COMPETITION'S IMPACT ON ALUMNI PROJECTS

### Skills

*Did alumni gain any skills/capabilities from their participation in the Competition?*

Skills gained from the participation in the Competition

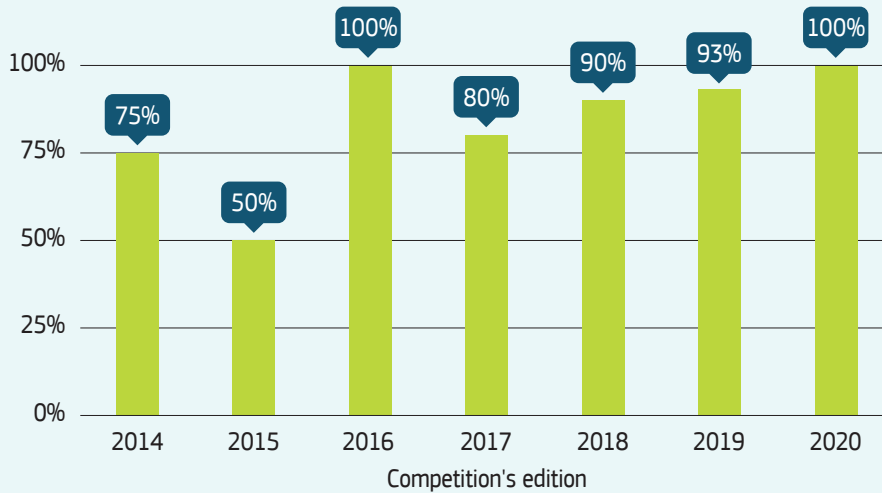


Nearly 90% of our alumni confirmed that they acquired new knowledge, skills and abilities as a direct result of participating in the Competition. This result is very positive, indicating that the support package offered over the course of the various editions was able to bridge many of the alumni's skill gaps, contributing to the Competition's long-term goal of capacity impact (see Theory of Change, pages 4-5).

Indeed, the theoretical and practical support offered by experts in the social innovation sector, the personalised facilitation provided by the coaches, as well as a whole series of opportunities for the exchange of good practices and mutual learning represent the rich wealth of activities on which the Competition has based its training proposal over the years. A capital of know-how on which the Competition intends to leverage, improving from year to year, to respond more and more effectively to the needs of social innovators and changing markets.

## Percentage of alumni who reported skill gain as a result of participating in the Competition, by edition

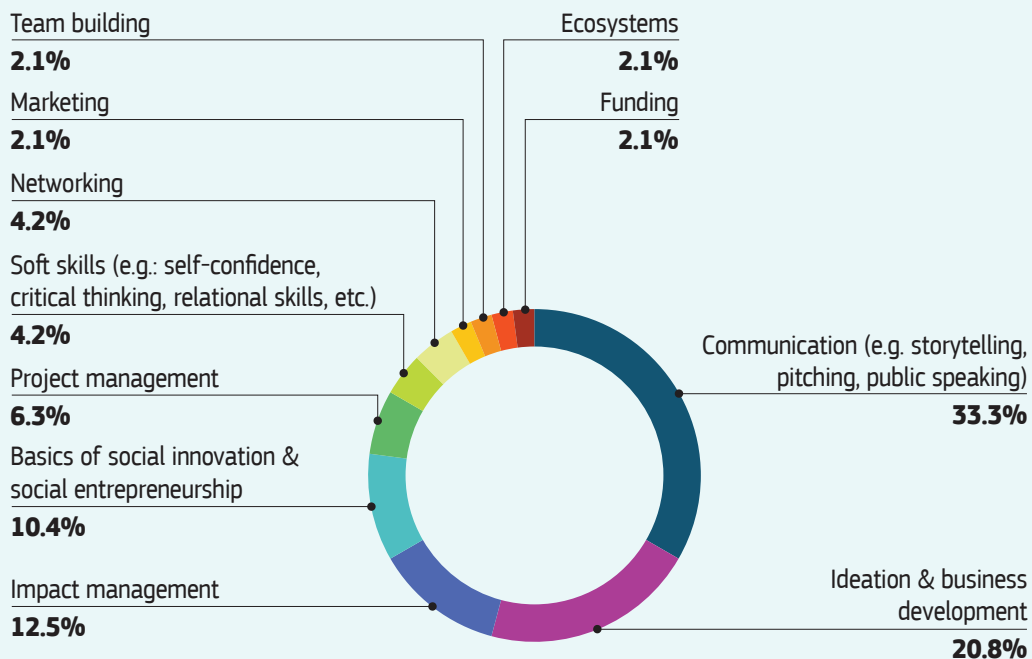
Note: no data was provided from alumni participating in the 2013 edition ('New Forms of Work')



The bar chart shows the data on alumni who responded positively to the question, disaggregated by edition of participation. As can be seen, in almost all editions, the

percentage of alumni who responded positively to the question exceeded 75-80%, confirming a very positive figure that has remained constant over time.

## Kind of skills gained



Among the skills most frequently mentioned by our alumni are 'Communication' (first place), 'Idea & Business Development' (second place), Impact Management (third place) and 'basic knowledge on social innovation and social entrepreneurship' (fourth

place). The data shown in this pie chart was processed following a clustering of alumni responses, which in this case were open-ended responses and therefore needed to be systematised. The range of responses indicates the value of the tailored semi-finalist support package.



## THE VOICE OF ALUMNI

**Who:** Peter Mangan ([The Freebird Club](#)), from Ireland, winner of the 2015 Competition 'New Ways to Grow'

*The theoretical and practical tools I gained – particularly in the areas of communication, business planning, social innovation and impact – were really useful, and continued to evolve following our participation in the Competition. Certainly the fundamentals and grounding provided by the Competition helped me to acquire further knowledge which I was able to use to grow.*



## THE VOICE OF ALUMNI

**Who:** Constantin Ferseta ([Kidibot](#)), from Romania, semi-finalist of the 2019 Competition 'Challenging Plastic Waste'

*The atmosphere, the people, the exchange of ideas, the environment, how the organisers of the Competition set the scene – it really helped us to improve. It was a hugely beneficial experience for us because of soft skills. We came from that experience totally energised. And the most important thing to state is that we were able to spread this energised feeling over a long period after our participation in the Competition. This is the fourth year we're doing our project and we're really optimistic about how it is going: the Competition was such a huge opportunity for us!*



## THE VOICE OF ALUMNI

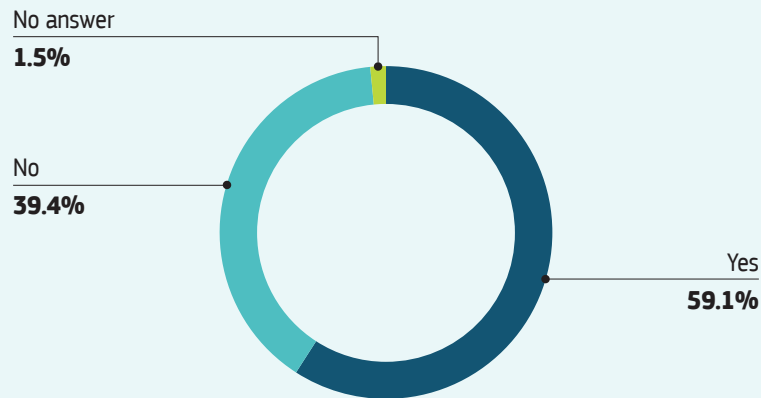
**Who:** Martin Leban (RIScosmetics | [123Zero](#)), from Slovenia, finalist of the 2019 Competition 'Challenging Plastic Waste'

*Even now, after two years, I still remember those 90 seconds I had to pitch during the 2019 edition of the Competition. It was the first time for me really trying it out loud to an audience that had nothing to do with our idea. Before that, I never did a 90 second pitch – very concise, very intense! The coach who followed us in that event was brilliant – I am very happy with the support he gave us. After that presentation, I became much more confident when it came to public speaking and presenting ideas.*

## Other projects/initiatives

### Have alumni launched new/additional social innovation initiatives?

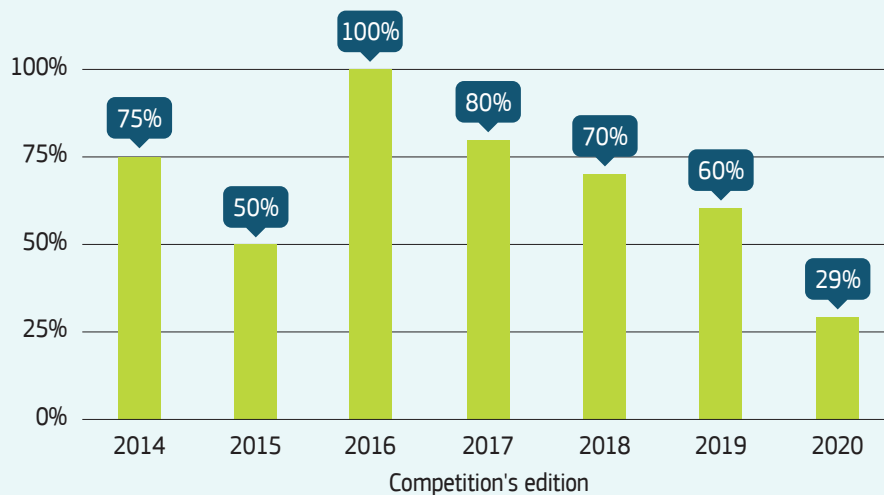
Additional/new social innovation initiatives launched after participating in the Competition



More than half of our alumni (about 60%) launched new projects/initiatives after participating in the Competition.

Percentage of alumni who reported new projects/initiatives launched as a result of participating in the Competition, by edition

Note: no data was provided from alumni participating in the 2013 edition ('New Forms of Work')

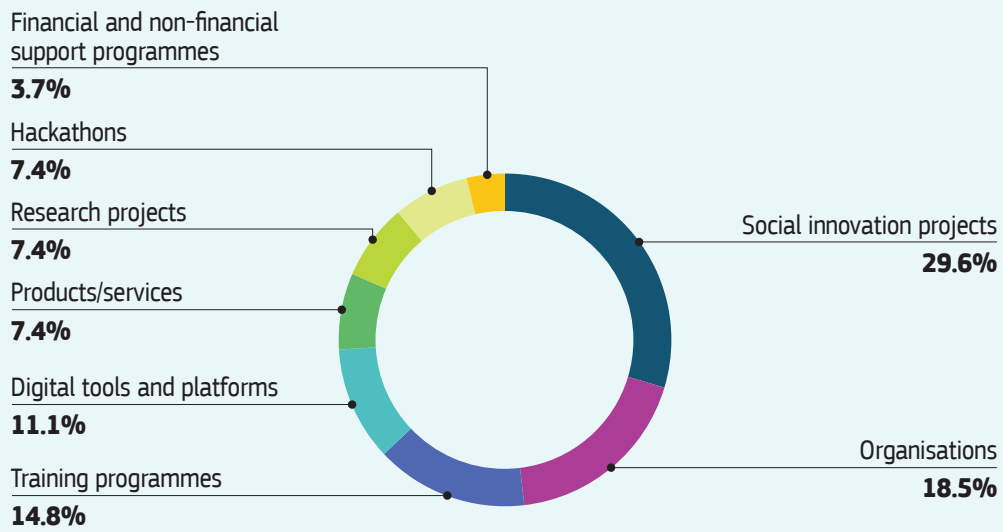


The bar chart shows the data on alumni who responded positively to the question, disaggregated by edition of participation. The low percentage of new projects/initiatives launched by the alumni who participated in the last two editions can be partly explained by the

advent of the COVID-19 pandemic – which effectively inhibited the emergence of several innovation and social entrepreneurship projects – and by the short time elapsed since the alumni participated in the Competition.



## Kind of new initiatives/projects launched



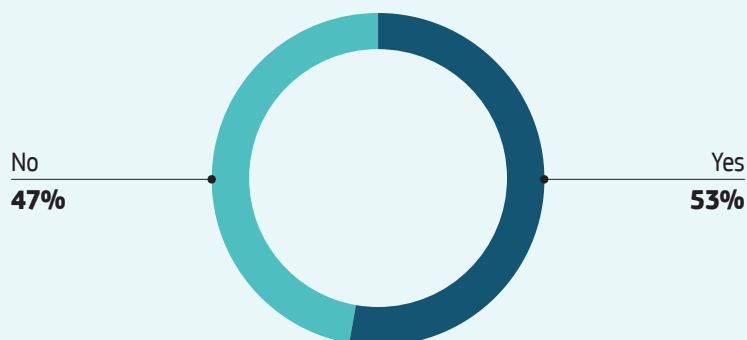
The kind of new initiatives launched, as can be seen in the graph above, are mainly social innovation projects, newly created organisations, training programmes and digital platforms/tools. The Competition teaches our

participants how to work through the process from idea to implementation, not only supporting them in the launch of the project they enter the Competition with, but also on their wider social innovation journey.

## Funding

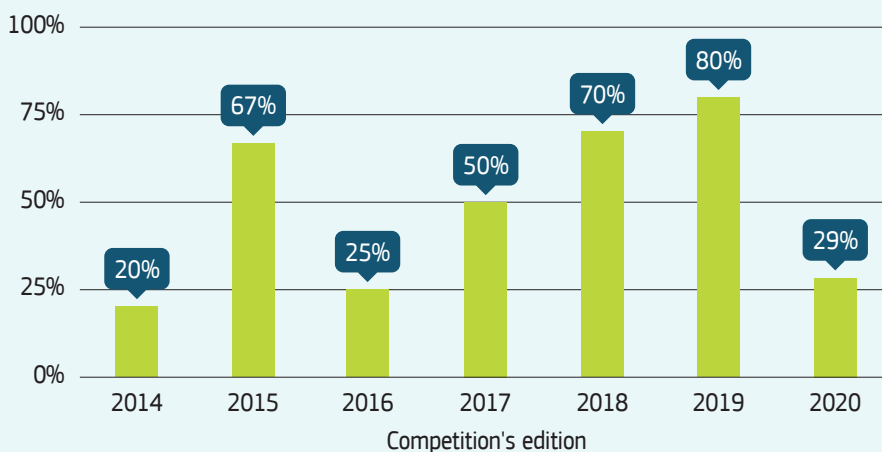
### Did participating in the Competition help alumni raise additional funding?

Funding raised as a result of participating in the Competition



Percentage of alumni who reported additional funding raised as a result of participating in the Competition, by edition

Note: no data was provided from alumni participating in the 2013 edition ('New Forms of Work')



In the pie chart it can be seen that more than half of respondents have accessed funding opportunities as a result of participating in the Competition.

The second graph (bar chart) shows the data on alumni who responded positively to the question, disaggregated by edition of participation.

Considering the early-stage nature of the participating projects, the aggregated value of those who have accessed funding opportunities (53%) is positive. In fact, the Competition has played a decisive role in providing support to alumni on the various funding opportunities available on the market, in helping them acquire the skills necessary to present grants

or investment proposals as well as to develop good financial plans and to intercept different types of finance providers.

The support package offered to alumni since the first editions of the Competition has involved, and still involves, experts in EU funding, social finance, fundraising, impact investing – who have participated as trainers during the various Academies – as well as

coaches and other experts in social innovation who have offered advice, 1:1 support and access to their own networks of financiers and/or institutional partners.

Positively, our alumni's general sentiment is that the Competition is a great opportunity to gain visibility, promote their business ideas and engage with networks – including peers and financiers – while also gaining access to additional funding routes directly.



#### THE VOICE OF ALUMNI

**Who:** Peter Mangan ([The Freebird Club](#)), from Ireland, winner of the 2015 Competition 'New Ways to Grow'

*“The European Social Innovation Competition convinced me that the entrepreneurial challenge I had decided to start with my project was something worth pursuing. The Competition gave me a basic platform on which to build something concrete: to go from an idea to a real business. As well as enabling me to hire my first employee, the experience as a participant – and as a winner in the 2015 edition – undoubtedly helped me to get other grants and funding, and hugely increased the credibility and public visibility of my project.”*



#### THE VOICE OF ALUMNI

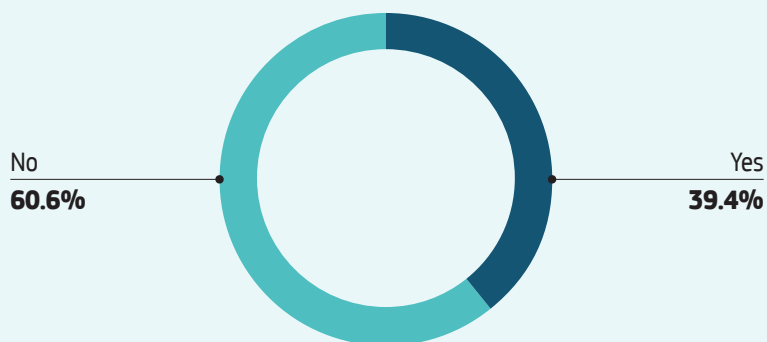
**Who:** Constantin Ferseta ([Kidibot](#)), from Romania, semi-finalist of the 2019 Competition 'Challenging Plastic Waste'

*“Before the Competition, we very often didn't know what to do or what to say in front of finance providers or other companies interested in our project. Or, when we did know, we weren't sure how best to do that. After participating in the Competition, we went to our partners with more confidence, having well-written documents and plans in hand – which made it much easier for us to get funding.”*

## Markets

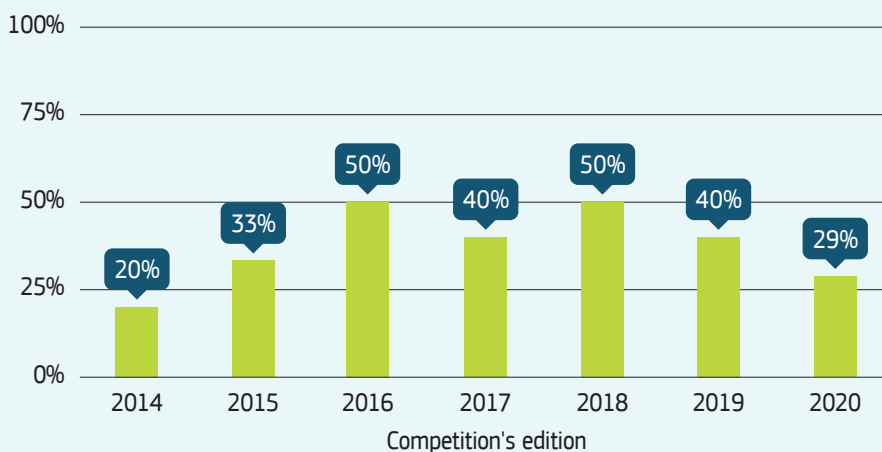
### *Did the participation in the Competition help alumni expand into new markets?*

Expansion into new regions/markets as a result of the participation in the Competition



Percentage of alumni who reported new markets accessed as a result of participating in the Competition, by edition

Note: no data was provided from alumni participating in the 2013 edition ('New Forms of Work')



In the first graph, it can be seen that 40% of our alumni state that they have gained access to new markets/regions as a direct result of participating in the Competition.

The bar chart shows the data on alumni who responded positively to the question, disaggregated by edition of participation.

Similar to the insight on funding raised (see page 26), the figure on the expansion of the alumni projects/businesses into new markets (40%) is very positive. Ultimately, almost one in two alumni managed to expand their operations into new markets, demonstrating that the Competition's support package succeeds in stimulating the growth of participants' social innovation projects and the expansion of their networks, also in a transnational perspective.

Many of the alumni, in fact, following their participation in the Competition, manage to tap into the local and EU-wide social innovation ecosystems, taking full advantage of their resources and opportunities, both financial and non-financial. At the same time, the type of support provided by the Competition in terms of

development and expansion of their networks, allows alumni to leverage the pool of social innovators and peers ready to support each other across borders, thus contributing to a significant growth of their projects, both in economic terms, but also in terms of systemic impact generated.



#### THE VOICE OF ALUMNI

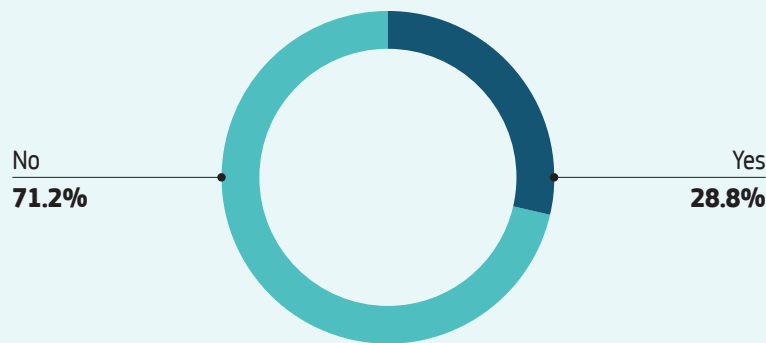
**Who:** Constantin Ferseta ([Kidibot](#)), from Romania, semi-finalist of the 2019 Competition 'Challenging Plastic Waste'

*“We participated in the Competition two years ago, in 2019. At that time, we were operating in Romania and the US. Now we’re also present in Italy, Moldova, Canada and this year we’ll also launch in the UK. The Competition really helped us to talk with smart people, to see social innovators from all over Europe and beyond, and to learn so much from them! The mindset that we gained after our participation in the Competition was so important to us: it opened us up to many new interesting ideas. Even if we experienced a language barrier as Europeans, we have eventually developed the same ‘social innovators’ mindset, which has made it much easier to enter into new markets and to go international.”*

## Turnover

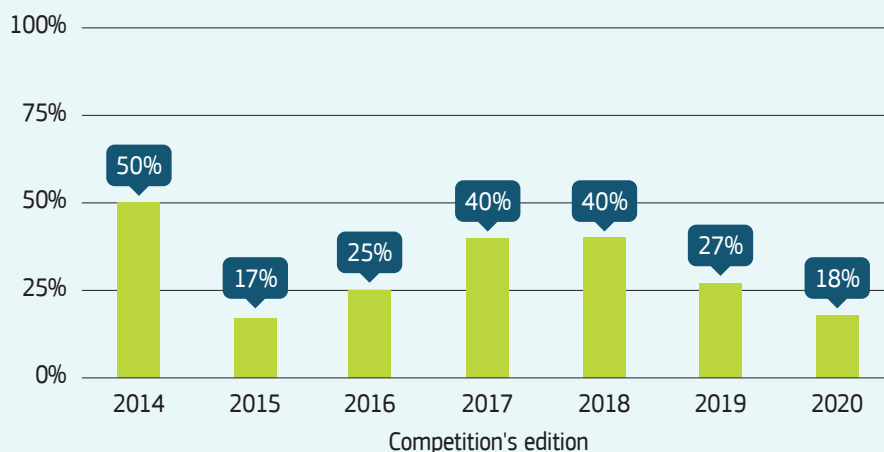
*Did participating in the Competition help alumni grow their turnover?*

Turnover grown as a result of participating in the Competition



Percentage of alumni who reported staff count grown as a result of participating in the Competition, by edition

Note: no data was provided from alumni participating in the 2013 edition ('New Forms of Work')



According to the first graph, almost 30% of our alumni state that they have seen an increase in turnover as a result of participating in the Competition.

The bar chart shows the data on alumni who responded positively to the question, disaggregated by edition of participation.

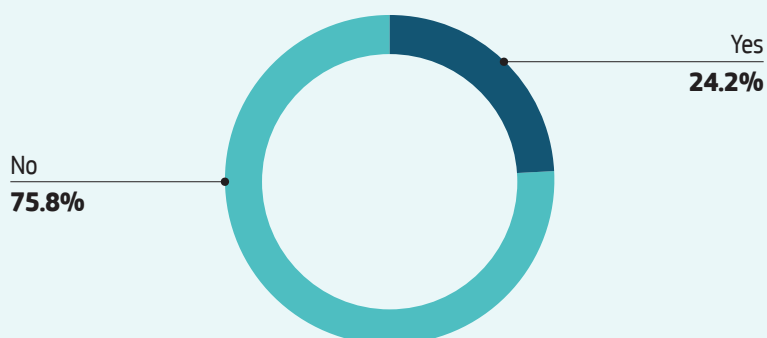
Many of the alumni surveyed pointed out that the Competition has had a positive impact, very often indirectly, on their turnover, some years after their participation in the programme. Some alumni stated that the Competition, through the 1:1 support provided by the coaches and the skills transferred by the experts

involved in the training (especially in the subjects of marketing, impact, communication and finance), has impacted their mindset and pushed them, over time, to integrate more and more trading activities into their business models. Several alumni, in fact, giving credit to the Competition, have managed to increase their awareness of the importance of becoming self-sustaining through trading activities, making less use of external subsidies, such as grants and donations. In fact, although the latter are recognised as important by them – especially in the start-up phase of their projects – if they are not flanked by trading activities, in the long term they can affect the long-term sustainability of the alumni's businesses.

## Staff

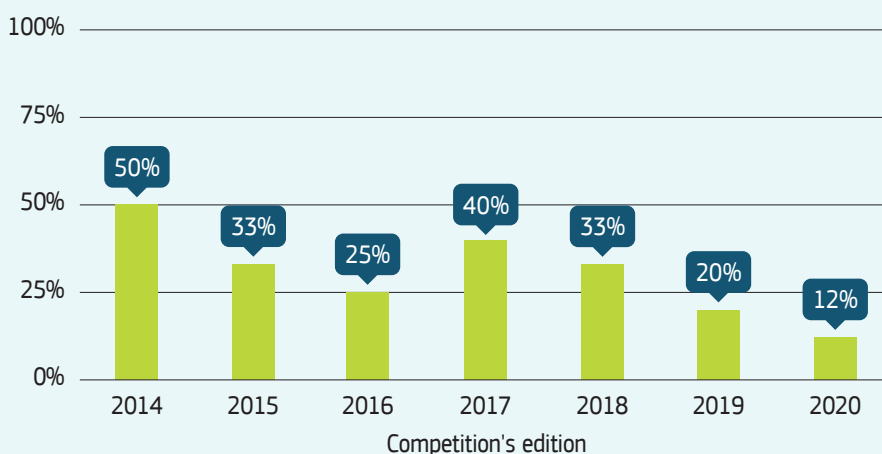
### Did participating in the Competition help alumni grow their staff count?

Staff count grown as a result of participating in the Competition



Percentage of alumni who reported staff count grown as a result of participating in the Competition, by edition

Note: no data was provided from alumni participating in the 2013 edition ('New Forms of Work')



About one quarter of the respondents state that they saw an increase in the number of their team members as a result of participating in the Competition, as can be seen in the pie chart.

The bar chart shows the data on alumni who responded positively to the question, disaggregated by edition of participation.

Although 75.6% of our alumni currently report that they did not actively grow their team as a direct result of their participation in the Competition, they are still

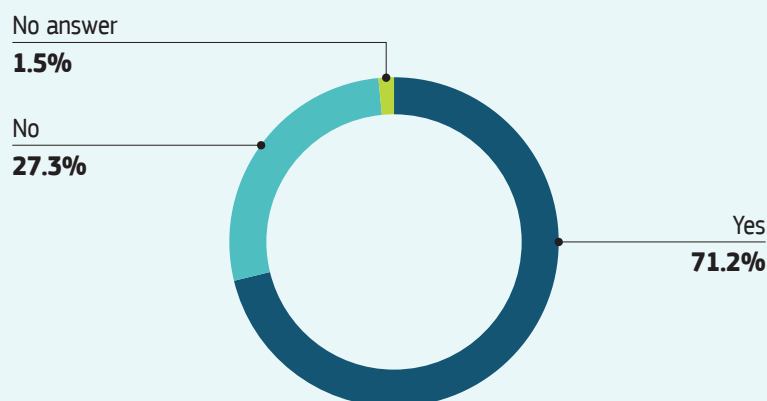
active social innovators, working on their projects and supporting the generation of changemakers across the EU and the Horizon Europe countries.

Moreover, the fact that several alumni have not seen an increase in the number of their staff members is not necessarily a negative indicator. In fact, many social innovation initiatives, while remaining modest in terms of staff numbers, have the advantage of being able to be more agile within their local ecosystem and to better adapt to sudden changes, thus ensuring a high social impact within their operational context.

## Networks

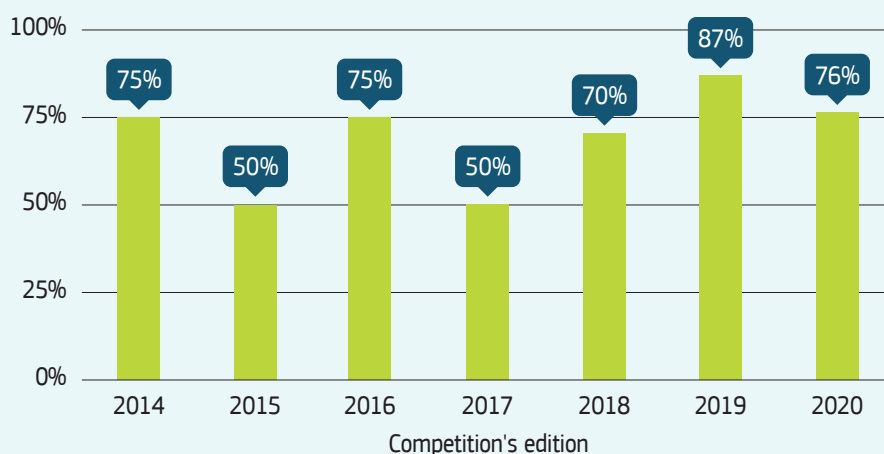
### *Do alumni feel that they have a better network after participating in the Competition?*

Perception of wider/better network after participating in the Competition



Percentage of alumni who reported better network as a result of participating in the Competition, by edition

Note: no data was provided from alumni participating in the 2013 edition ('New Forms of Work')



Over 70% of our alumni say they have gained access to more and better networking opportunities as a direct result of participating in the Competition.

The bar chart shows the data on alumni who responded positively to the question, disaggregated by edition of participation.

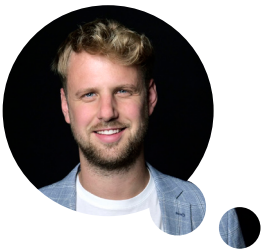
This very positive result on networks – which was also extensively observed during many interviews

carried out with alumni – is symptomatic of the great ability of the Competition to foster ecosystems of social innovators ready to support each other, in a collaborative spirit that very often goes beyond the competitive one. In fact, the Competition has always believed in the importance of fostering the building of networks of social innovators in order to promote the radical transformation of Europe into a space where competitiveness and economic growth are harmoniously linked to social and environmental needs.



The Alumni Network – the platform that connects and gives visibility to our alumni – is a feature recently introduced with the aim of capitalising on the results of the excellent alumni engagement and to further disseminate knowledge and good practices, thus encouraging dialogue, relations and partnerships.

As emerges from the Conclusions of this report (see p. 40), the ability of the Competition to foster networks and connections between social innovators across Europe is one of the most successful factors of the Competition.



#### THE VOICE OF ALUMNI

**Who:** Martin Leban (RIScosmetics | [123Zero](#)), from Slovenia, finalist of the 2019 Competition ‘Challenging Plastic Waste’

“*The networking possibilities enabled by the Competition and the learning acquired from our peers were the best take-out, in my experience. Your peers are in the same position you are at the end of the day. They’re having the same struggles, the same hopes, and the same willingness to learn from each other. At the end of the Competition, you gradually start to realise how all the other participants have somehow impacted your work and how you have started incorporating their insights within your own project. This is just amazing!*”

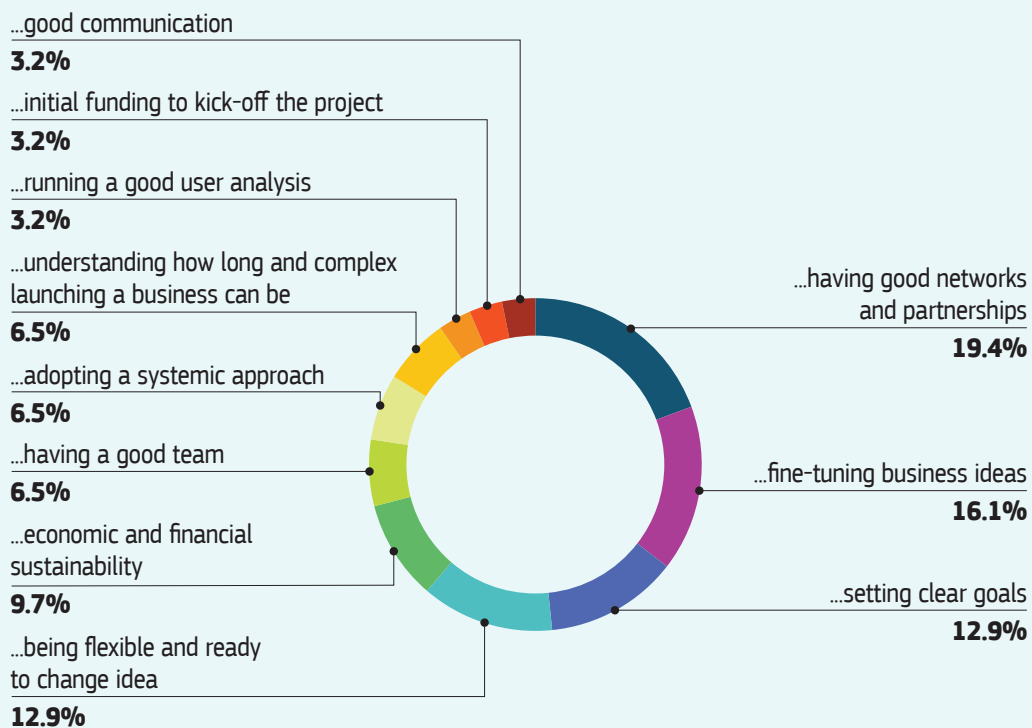


## 2.4 LESSONS AND FURTHER SUPPORT NEEDS

*What lessons have alumni learnt and how the Competition staff might support them?*

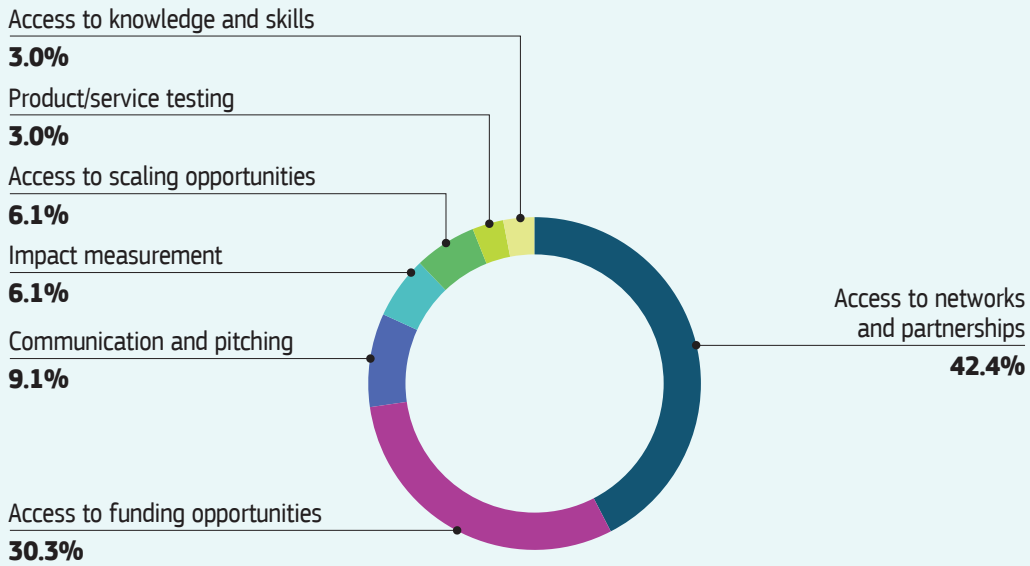
### Lessons from participating in the Competition

#### Importance of...



## Areas of need and support

### Request to the Competition's staff



The Competition, as seen in the section on networks (see page 32), places great importance on fostering connections between alumni and promoting their visibility throughout Europe and beyond. This is also evident from the data on alumni learnings, in the first pie chart presented here. The majority of alumni report, in fact, that having understood the importance of building and maintaining a good network is one of the best take-outs of the Competition.

However, it is necessary to underline that there is a substantial difference between recognising the importance of networks and being able to build one's own network. It is not a coincidence, in fact, that among the support needs most requested by alumni is access to networks and partnerships, as evident in the second pie chart.

Besides the need for additional networks and partnership opportunities, other gaps reported by our alumni concern access to bigger funding opportunities and a need for ongoing support in their impact measurement processes and management.

In light of these insights, the challenge for the next editions of the Competition will be to connect even more effectively alumni networks and social innovation ecosystems in Europe through more and better opportunities for exchange, visibility and mutual growth. Not only that, but also to provide better tools and channels for alumni to access funding and get the 'fuel' they need to continue their journey towards systemic change. In this way, alumni will be enabled and skilled to leverage a rich pool of stakeholders and peers able to offer a wide range of resources – both financial and non-financial – thus ensuring continuity and increasing impact to their change-making experiences.

# 3. OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

Before closing, a summary of the picture that emerged from the analysis of the Alumni Census 2021 data outlined in the previous section is presented here.

The four dimensions and eighteen subdimensions analysed in this report have been discussed with the indicators drawn from the Alumni Census data linked to each of them explicitly. In the 'Value/result' column, the

results obtained from the Alumni Census analysis are summarised. This has been done through a series of qualitative assessments ranging from very positive to very negative (illustrated in the 'Assessment' column by means of emojis). On the basis of the results obtained and assessments given, recommendations in the form of possible actions to be taken have been included in the 'Recommendations' section.



Dimension	Subdimension	Indicator	Value/result	Assessment*
<b>The people</b>	<b>Geography</b>	Geographical spread	Southern and Western European countries are well represented	
			Central-Eastern and Northern European countries are less represented	
	<b>Editions</b>	Year/edition of participation	High engagement of alumni from latest editions in the Census	
			Low engagement of alumni from early editions in the Census (linked to 2019 launch of Network, with full implementation in 2020.	
	<b>Results</b>	Final status in the Competition	Semi-finalists relatively less represented in the Census	
	<b>Post-Competition engagement</b>	Level of engagement as speaker, coach, etc.	Very low engagement High interest in future engagement	
<b>Overall satisfaction</b>	Level of satisfaction	Very high		
<b>Self-awareness</b>	Level of self-awareness	Very high		

very negative  
 negative  
 neutral  
 positive  
 very positive



Dimension	Subdimension	Indicator	Value/result	Assessment*	
The projects	<b>Launch</b>	Launch status	High no. of projects launched or about to be launched	😊	
		<b>Operations &amp; HR</b>	Current status of projects		High no. of projects still operational
		Geographical spread of projects	Central-Eastern and Northern Europe less represented	😊	
		No. of alumni currently involved in projects	High no. of alumni still involved in the projects		
		No. of team members	Small teams (one to five)		
		<b>Partnerships for financial and non-financial support</b>	No. of connections established with other alumni	Fair no. of connections established with other alumni	😊
			No. of connections established with financial/ non-financial support organisations	Quite high no. of connections established for financial/ non-financial support	
			Type of support received	Mostly grants	
		<b>Impact management</b>	Impact measurement activities started	Quite high no. of impact measurement activities initiated	😊
			Type of methodology/tool	Mostly Theory of Change and Life Cycle Assessment	



Dimension	Subdimension	Indicator	Value/result	Assessment*
<b>The impact of the Competition on the alumni's projects</b>	<b>Skills</b>	No. of new skills acquired	Vast majority of alumni acquired new skills	
		Type of new skills acquired	Mostly communication, business development and social innovation	
	<b>Staff</b>	No. of new team members acquired	Staff count generally not grown	
		<b>New projects/initiatives</b>	No. of new projects/initiatives launched	
	<b>Funding</b>	Level of funding raised	Modest no. of alumni who raised funding	
		Type of funding raised	Mostly grants	
	<b>Markets</b>	No. of new markets/ regions accessed	Low no. of alumni accessed new markets/regions	
	<b>Turnover</b>	Level of turnover	Low no. of alumni who increased their turnover	
	<b>Networks</b>	No. and quality of new networks built	High/very high no. of alumni who built new and better networks	
	<b>Lessons and further support needs</b>	<b>Lessons and further support needs</b>	Type of new lessons acquired	Networking, fine-tuning business ideas and setting clear goals
Type of support needs requested			Networking, communication	



Some of the factors influencing various 'negative' data shown above are not directly attributable to the Competition, but to environmental constraints (e.g. degree of maturity of social innovation ecosystems, funding opportunities available in a given geographical context). Further investigation within the next Alumni Census can be used to detect the underlying reasons for some of the areas of improvement that emerged from the research.

The picture coming from the Alumni Census 2021 does provide useful indications about the direction of future editions of the Competition. Specifically, on how to provide even better support and promotion opportunities for social innovators and their projects.

## 3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this report, the following recommendations are presented:

- **Increase engagement in relatively under-represented regions (Central-Eastern and Northern European) by:**
  - During entry period, investing in outreach to potential entrants from these regions for example through social media spend, targeted outreach to regional networks, as well as getting influential individuals in these regions to promote the Competition on either a voluntary or paid basis.
  - Run informal experiments to see whether we are able to raise general awareness of the Competition in a country, regardless of topic. Select one to two countries in an underrepresented region (alongside control countries from a consistently well represented region) to target over multiple editions, throughout the delivery of each edition. Engaging the social innovation community in that country with the aim of raising general awareness of the Competition, focusing on overarching social innovation competencies. Activities might include hosting physical events in-country or orientating digital events to the country audience through the selection of local speakers and experts.
  - When selecting the annual theme, consideration could be given to the level of interest in these regions, for example whether the theme is a priority area for these regions as well as the level of existing social innovation regionally. Survey our alumni, past judges, assessors and coaches to identify high profile topics.
- **Facilitate a strong integrated community of Competition participants, past and present.**
  - Trial matching service open to alumni and current participants. Using a light touch online survey to pair them based on geography, topic, interests and/or learning needs.
  - Test practicalities of integrating current semi-finalists into the alumni network from the outset.
- Support alumni's ongoing journey as social innovators through ongoing access to key elements of the semi-finalist stage support package, such as sessions at the events.
- Reinforce connections amongst alumni and provide them with access to other relevant stakeholders, based on skills gaps and needs that were highlighted in the alumni survey.
- Support network building through knowledge and skills transfer by inviting alumni to host masterclasses.
- Tailoring alumni engagement activities (such as signposting or delivery of events) towards challenges facing later stage projects.
- **Support greater internationalisation of projects**
  - Integration of tailored training and materials into the 'Delivery Skills' track. This support will enable innovators to better understand the impact their ideas could have in a different context and country, as well as be introduced to the skills they will require to go abroad.
  - Make this content available to alumni.
- **Support alumni in accessing funding**
  - Annually revising the Funding Toolkit with latest updates and insights.
  - Introduce the Funding Toolkit to the alumni and integrate their feedback in the next revision.
  - Foster more and better networking opportunities and better connections between alumni and financial/non-financial service providers such as through pitch deck clinics.
- **Maximising the value of our social media channels to support the visibility of alumni.**
  - Capture information through incorporating a standard 'tell us about a recent achievement' icebreaker at the start of alumni events
  - Including in the newsletter a call for successes that we can share in our networks
  - Making the alumni aware that we monitor the Competition hashtag and will repost, as appropriate.

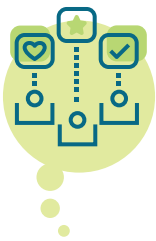
# 4. CONCLUSIONS

By supporting early-stage ideas and facilitating a network of changemakers who are shaping our society for the better, the European Social Innovation Competition is really a beacon for social innovation in Europe. Its impact from 2013 to 2020 on its alumni across Europe is presented in this Impact Report.

Through the support and the networking opportunities it has continued to offer alumni over the years, the Competition has unearthed several game-changing ideas from all corners of Europe and helped them to become viable, scalable and visible organisations.

By supporting the promotion of European social innovators and their ideas, the Competition ultimately helps to boost the recognition of purpose-driven organisations, facilitate policy dialogue and foster collaboration with the wider community of social innovation stakeholders.

Based on the Alumni Census 2021 '*Count Me In*', this report revealed areas where the positive impact of the Competition is beyond expectations. Main success factors include:



## Overall satisfaction of alumni

There is a very positive assessment from the alumni of their Competition experience. The average rating is 9.1, indicating a very high level of general satisfaction.



## Skills

The vast majority of alumni acquired new skills which they continue to use and develop, mostly in communication, business development, impact measurement and social innovation.



## Networks and partnerships

A remarkably high number of alumni built new and better networks through the Competition.

Some ambitions have not yet been fully met. They warrant reflection for the future, to ensure that the three long-term impact objectives of the Competition

– *innovation impact, capacity impact and ecosystem impact* – are fully achieved. Main factors include:





### **Access to funding**

A modest number of participants experienced increased access to funding. Further research can be done to improve support in transferring relevant hard and soft skills and better networking opportunities with social finance providers.



### **Access to markets**

Access to other markets and regions remains a boundary to alumni. Further support on internationalisation strategies is considered to be key in order to overcome this limiting factor.

The Competition – such as the social innovators themselves – continuously strives to increase its impact, advance its approach, and identify new opportunities. In the Recommendations, some of these new avenues have been outlined to take the Competition even further.

Through the incorporation of this annual Census, we will be able to understand how the inclusion of these improvements will support our Competition's participants, past and present. All together, these insights all contribute to the broader, long-term impact goal: to create a multitude of new approaches that can help transform systems and value chains, making Europe more competitive, sustainable, greener and inclusive.

# 5. ANNEX I – ALUMNI CENSUS 2021

The Alumni Network was created with the goal to enhance the visibility of semi-finalists, finalists, and winners of the Competition, to offer them a platform to network and to continue developing their connections made whilst participating in the Competition. The Network is the community of past participants, currently organised in a closed LinkedIn group plus an online public [directory](#). Inclusion in the Alumni Network is on a voluntary basis, and all semi-finalists, finalists and winners of past editions of the Competition are invited to join and participate.

The main source of information for this report comes from the 2021 Alumni Census – ‘*Count Me In*’ – a census shared with all former Competition alumni.

The Census is an integral part of the Alumni Network strategy, and functions as a formal and consistent annual contact point with the former participants. The Census aims to track the progress and trajectory of the innovators supported by the Competition. More generally, the Census aims to collect valuable information on the impact that the Competition has on alumni and their social innovation projects.

The 2021 Census was shared in a digital form to a total of 410 alumni between 8 and 26 March 2021. It was sent directly via email to the members of the public directory as well as in the closed LinkedIn group. Out of a total of 410 alumni contacted, 86 alumni responded giving us a total response rate of 20.98% which is significantly higher than the average expected response from a voluntary census/survey.

Such a sample (20.98% of our total alumni pool), though satisfactory and higher than average, is still a limited one. The moderate Census engagement could be explained by the fact that Alumni Network is still a relatively new addition to the programme, with its strategy on engagement still being implemented throughout the wider Competition programme. It is hoped that, in the years to come, the Alumni Network will represent an increasingly broader and more active pool of alumni, able to provide a useful litmus test to monitor the impact of the Competition over time and the progress of the former participants.

The modest participation in the Census, however, has not prevented the demonstration – illustrated by this report – of the fact that the impact of the Competition is strong and aligning with our wider impact goals (see p. 4-5).

# 6. ANNEX II – METHODOLOGICAL NOTE ON ENTRY SELECTION

At the end of the Census period, a total of 86 entries (20.98% out of the total alumni pool) were collected through the 2021 Alumni Census – ‘Count Me In’.

Of these collected entries:

- 14% were found to be blank;
- 1% was entered twice;
- 8% were entered by alumni belonging to an organisation/project for which another alumnus/a had already entered an entry<sup>4</sup> (‘double entries’).

The total number of entries that could be processed in the data analysis was therefore reduced from 20.98% (86 entries) to 16.1% (66 entries).

The reason why it was decided to select only one alumnus/a’s entry among the two pertaining to the same organisation/project (i.e. one of the ‘double entries’) was to avoid discrepancies when comparing data. To further clarify this, it should be noted that some of the questions contained in the Census are aimed at collecting information on the individual alumnus/a’s experience in the Competition, while others concern the organisation/project developed after participating

in the contest.

The ‘double entries’ selection process has been based on the following criteria:

- *Alumnus/a role in the Competition* – Preference has been given to the alumnus/a who played the role of team leader during the Competition.
- *Alumnus/a role in the organisation/project* – Preference has been given to the alumnus/a who have held a top management role (e.g. as founders) in the organisation/project.
- *Alumnus/a current working status in the organisation/project* – Preference has been given to the alumnus/a who is still working for the organisation/project.
- *Level of information details provided* – Preference has been given to the alumnus/a who provided a considerable level of detail and more accurate information.

It is believed that this emphasis on entries selection and data comparability should be taken into account when designing future versions of the Alumni Census.

4 This means that for seven organisations/projects there were two entries from two different alumni, for a total of seven ‘double entries’.

