Social
Entrepreneurship
Netzwerk
Deutschland

Envisioning an inclusive Social Entrepreneurship Sector in Germany: A Journey to Impact

Final report

Google.org's Social Innovation Fund

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1. Intro

January 25th, 2022 marked a significant milestone for the German Social Entrepreneurship Network (SEND e.V.) as the organisation announced it would receive EUR 1.6 million from Google.org's Social Innovation Fund, aimed at strengthening the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Germany and empowering people from underserved communities.

The aim was to both reach and directly work with (potential) founders and social entrepreneurs, while also engaging the wider support ecosystem and public institutions. The programme design, therefore, consisted of three main components:
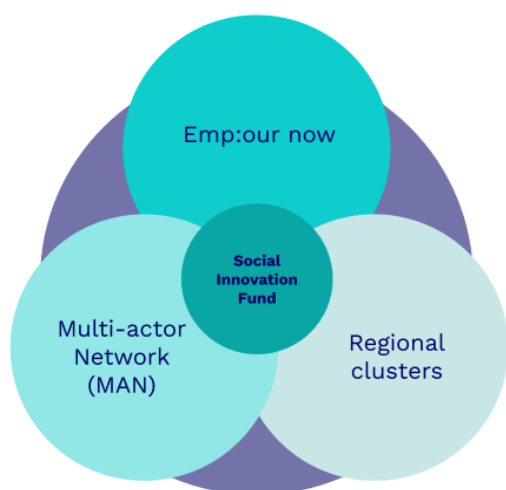
1. Emp:our now: a call for proposals for support programmes and offers for people from underserved communities.

2. Meta-actor network (MAN): a community of practice for intermediaries within the German Social Entrepreneurship sector.

3. Regional clusters: networks on federal state level to strengthen social entrepreneurship locally.

SEND was responsible for setting up the Multi-actor network and regional clusters. For the support programmes of Emp:our now SEND redistributed EUR 1 million to funding partners to develop and host the support programmes and offers. Further

details are given in the chapter "Supportive Conditions: the three programme components".

The 2.5 years of emp:our now have been a rich journey filled with five exceptional funding programmes, starting and strengthening regional clusters for social entrepreneurship, seeing ideas come to life and building lively communities.

This report is a **chance to look back on the experiences, lessons learned and impact created**. It is also an **opportunity to talk about challenges** the sector faces in creating a truly inclusive environment for people from underserved communities, and to map out pathways for the future.

The **first sections** of the report will provide further context and present key findings. The following table provides an overview of these sections with a short summary of their content:

Narratives this report is embedded into	Connecting the report to the wider discourses of (1) Shaping an inclusive society, and (2) Political will and a systemic approach.
Executive summary	Presenting the key insights and lessons learned from the three main pillars of the Social Innovation Fund.
Recommendations	Outlining recommendations for (1) policymakers, (2) funders and philanthropy, and (3) setting up inclusive funding offers.
Methodology	Introducing the Impact Garden as the Theory of Change used for data collection.
Supportive conditions	Detailed insights into the three components of the Social Innovation Fund: (1) Emp:our now, (2) Meta-actor Network, and (3) regional clusters.

The **core of the report,** from a data and insights perspective, is the chapter on "Pathways of change". In it, the report lays out in-depth information about the

programme's impact and scenarios for shaping an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector. The three pathways of change are:

From support to empowerment	Describing how the programme enabled founders from underserved communities to be empowered and successful long-term.
From awareness to commitment	Describing the steps for public institutions and organisations from the social entrepreneurship sector to strategically commit to inclusion.
From networking to alliances	Indicating how partnerships can be formed to advance the mission of an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector.

For each pathway, the report lays out the **guiding question and high-level data, key systemic enablers and a general description** with further context. Lastly, the annex contains an overview of the programme's internal and external sources and references.

Before diving into the findings and exploring how to jointly shape the social entrepreneurship sector in Germany to be more inclusive, a heartfelt thank you goes to the following people and organisations. Without you and your contribution, the project would not have been possible:

- Google.org for the funding and trust.
- Our funding partners for their dedication: Impact Hub Berlin together with tbd*, Migrafrica together with minds & makers, Caritas Köln and In VIA Köln, founded, BIWOC* Rising together with Founderland, zusammen leben e.V. together with FWTM Freiburg, Amt für Migration und Integration, Radio Dreyeckland - Our Voice and Co-Working Stühlinger.
- Our diverse emp:our now jury for their time and expertise: Andreas Heinecke, Dr. Irène Y. Kilubi, Jacqueline Grundner, Katja Urbatsch, Olaolu Fajembola, Said Haider and Sidonie Fernau
- The SEND community and everybody who supported us with their trust and throughout the set-up and implementation of the programme.

Further information can be found on SEND's website.

2. Narratives this report is embedded into

Social entrepreneurship is seen as a promising approach by many actors to contribute to societal challenges the world faces. This chapter therefore outlines the key narratives this report and the Social Innovation Fund is connected to. These are:

1. **Social Entrepreneurship as a promising approach for transformation**
2. **Shaping an inclusive society**
3. **Political will and a systemic approach**

The aim of this report is to contribute to these discourses with insightful data and information, resources to draw from and concrete recommendations.

2.1 Social entrepreneurship in Germany and beyond - painting a picture

According to the German Startups Association monitor, 45% of entrepreneurs consider themselves social entrepreneurs - which means that "working towards the common good in society or for the environment represents the sense and purpose of their commercial activity." (Startup Verband, 2024) According to a study by the consulting firm Ramboll (Ramboll, 2025), around 156,000 to 172,000 companies in Germany belong to the social entrepreneurship sector (many of whom have a SME character) - this corresponds to over three per cent of all companies. They generate annual sales of up to 82 billion euros and secure over three million jobs - more than the automotive industry.

On a **European level**, there are estimated to exist 2.8 million social enterprises, employing almost 13.6 million people, representing 10% of all businesses and more than 6% of all EU employees (Pollack et al., 2023). And it's the young people who are increasingly leading social enterprises in the European Union. In France and

Spain, up to 20% of leadership roles are filled by young people. Over 25% of social entrepreneurs and nearly 40% of aspiring social entrepreneurs in Western Europe are under 34. Additionally, many older social enterprise leaders and workers are set to retire soon, such as in France, where over 750,000 social enterprise employees are expected to retire by 2028, creating new opportunities (OECD, 2024).

Founding and maintaining social enterprises is both **rewarding and challenging**. The Possibilists study (2023) surveyed 1656 young changemakers from 135 countries. The path of being a changemaker seems to be fulfilling, with respondents reporting very high levels of life happiness and motivation to mobilise and empower other people. At the same time, respondents report very high levels of financial insecurity, needing to juggle multiple responsibilities and a lack of important contacts.

All this indicates huge opportunities for social entrepreneurship in Germany. Unfortunately, there is still a large **gender disparity in enterprise leadership as a whole in Germany**. According to the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, of Germany's 3.8 million small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), only 16% (approximately 608,000) were run by women in 2021. An interesting point to note is that women-led businesses are primarily found in the services sector, non-licensed trades, and social enterprises (BMWK, 2021). In fact, the latest German Social Entrepreneurship Monitor (DSEM, 2024) shows that more than half of the 329 social enterprises considered in this report were (co-)founded by women.

One key characteristic of social enterprises is their **resilience during and after crises**. During the 2008 financial crisis, employment in social enterprises rose significantly, with Belgium seeing a 20.1% increase and Italy an 11.5% increase from 2008 to 2010. They showed similar resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, with only 1% of social enterprises across 38 countries being forced to close due to the crisis. (OECD, 2024)

Social enterprises are also **important drivers for economic activity**: In Germany, one in five social enterprises reported on by the Deutscher Social Enterprise Monitor generated millions in revenue over 12 months between June 2023 and 2024 (DSEM, 2024). This economic value is evident across Europe, where social enterprises make significant contributions, generating an annual turnover of EUR 2.3 billion in Hungary, EUR 37.3 billion in Italy, EUR 3.5 billion in the Netherlands, and EUR 3.3 billion in Portugal (OECD, 2024).

These numbers all indicate that **social entrepreneurship is becoming increasingly more recognised as an alternative to conventional business practices**. The following two sections explore how social entrepreneurship can be seen as an opportunity to shape an inclusive society and systemically contribute to addressing our current societal challenges.

2.2 Shaping an inclusive society - through social entrepreneurship

As you are reading this report, chances are that you see value in contributing to and shaping an inclusive society in Germany with social entrepreneurship as a promising vehicle to do so.

Social entrepreneurship can also be a response to one's personal life circumstances and the wish to actively contribute to social change. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2023/2024, in Germany, the start-up rate of people with an immigration history was 12.6% in 2023, 5.6 percentage points higher than the start-up rate of the population without an immigration history (around 7%) (Sternberg et al., 2024).

When discussing the cultivation of an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector, one of the central issues that inevitably arises is that of power dynamics. In traditional

models, power often resides in official structures and hierarchies, which can marginalise certain voices and perspectives.

The publication on Migrant Entrepreneurship (David et. al., 2022) paints a very **diverse picture of migrant founders**, their motivation and sectors they operate in. While foundations in the technology and knowledge-intensive fields increase, the narrative remains that migrant founders mostly operate out of financial necessity.

In an inclusive framework, founders are not merely seen as individuals to serve a predefined system but as **allies in reshaping systems**. Founders bring diverse insights crucial for addressing societal challenges. Supporting them involves empowering and enabling their unique strengths and perspectives, creating environments where their voices are valued and their ideas are implemented in shaping solutions. This requires reimagining power dynamics to be equitable and collaborative, fostering spaces where all founders can thrive and contribute meaningfully to social change.

> *"The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being." (Toni Morrison)*

The data of the previous chapter shows that social entrepreneurship in itself is more inclusive and diverse from a gender perspective, and inherently addresses social dynamics and challenges. This report therefore explores what the needs are of founders from underserved communities to start and grow their social businesses, and how support offers and a support infrastructure can be designed to address those needs.

In all this it's crucial to reflect critically on power dynamics. All too often, support offers were set up, seen or practised as ways to maintain existing structures. If the understanding is that "we" help "them", then "we" got it wrong.

2.3 Political will and a systemic approach

Throughout this report, it is argued that shaping an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector needs a systemic approach. What is not meant with a systemic approach is a radical approach to changing existing systems. Rather, from the perspective of founders from underserved communities, **the current systems and support infrastructure don't fully deliver their potential value**. The report will explore the reasons behind this, alongside recommendations on how to bring about meaningful change.

A long-term systemic approach doesn't primarily depend on large financial investments. While additional funding would certainly be beneficial, what founders from underserved communities primarily need is **access to existing support infrastructures**, including funding programmes, continuous support and consultancy services.

More than financial resources, advancing a systemic approach requires political will. If there is a genuine desire to support ideas, initiatives, and visions from these founders, it's crucial to approach the issue from their perspective.

> *What are the disadvantages founders face, how do they impact founders on a personal and structural level, and how can actors therefore create a bridge between their lived experience and the existing structures?*

This report emphasises that political will and systemic approaches are crucial to all the pathways identified as key long-term enablers of change. In the first pathway, "From support to empowerment," the discussion highlights the necessity of not only providing access to resources but also establishing a long-term plan to ensure founders receive ongoing support and opportunities. For maximum success, these support mechanisms should create safe(r) spaces for participation, access to key players such as local economic and development leaders, and provide opportunities and resources to implement their ideas within a broader supporting

network. Additionally, offering long-term security nets through consultancy, coaching and funding would empower founders to undertake complex and risky initiatives that lead to wider positive impact. In this way, **official structures can be seen as enablers and supportive allies**, rather than obstacles in the founders' path.

The 2024 Deutscher Social Entrepreneurship Monitor (DSEM) highlights that **the structural and legal anchoring of social enterprises within the federal government is crucial for their development** in Germany, as successfully demonstrated in France, Spain, and Portugal. This report recommends strengthening social enterprise support within the Federal Economic Ministry (now BMWE) by establishing a dedicated department for social enterprises, and within the Federal Ministry of Research (now BMFTR) by creating a dedicated department for social innovation. The report emphasises that the further anchoring of the topic in the two ministries must however be accompanied by inter-ministerial cooperation on social entrepreneurship with dedicated responsible contact persons in other ministries. This is to reflect the fact that the topic is so diverse and is of high importance for areas such as health, work, environment.

An effective way to connect political will to social enterprises is by **providing politicians with evidence of the positive impacts** that can be achieved by supporting these ventures. For instance, a significant issue in the German market is the shortage of skilled workers. The DSEM indicates that this shortage is almost non-existent for the social enterprises surveyed. One explanation is that social enterprises are particularly attractive to the younger generation due to their connection to meaningful work. Political leaders could leverage this narrative of strong interest among younger generations to garner support and implement more robust resources for social enterprises. This approach could help address the skilled worker shortage while promoting the growth and impact of social enterprises. (DSEM, 2024)

The facts and figures indicate the enormous potential of social entrepreneurship. Good practices and examples from Germany, the European Union, and the world at large are available. What is holding back progress?

3. Executive summary

Shaping an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector in Germany calls for a systemic and long-term approach, supported by a narrative that highlights the potential and opportunities for all actors.

This report presents an opportunity to ground this conversation in data and evidence, while also sharing lessons learned and concrete recommendations for different actors. For this reason, the executive summary is structured in the following way:
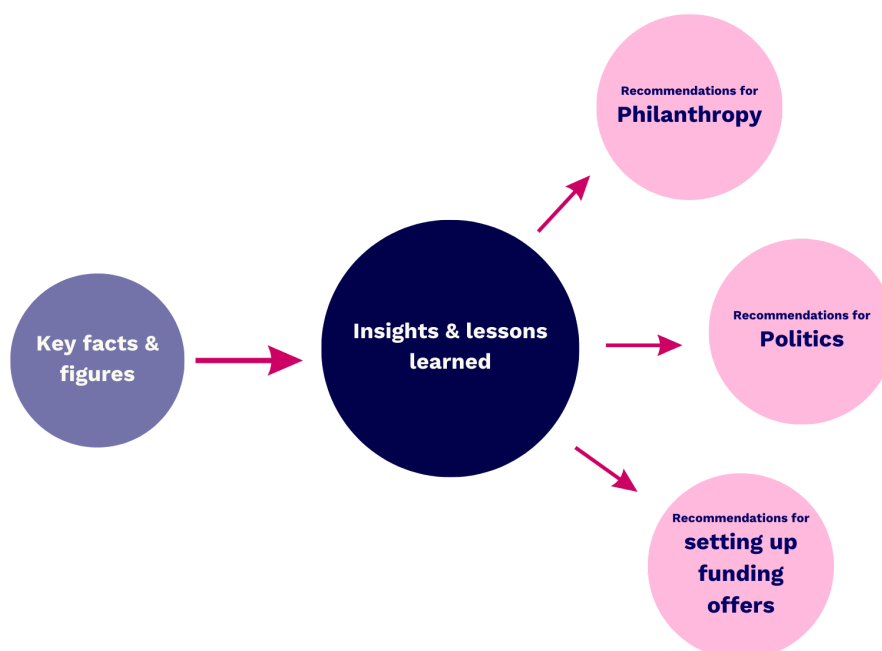
The key facts and figures provide a snapshot into the high-level data, before the following section outlines the most important insights and lessons learned from both the data and implementing the project. This then leads to recommendations for (1) foundations and philanthropy, (2) political actors and (3) for setting up inclusive funding offers.

3.1 Key facts and figures

94%

of supported initiatives that either already founded before, during or plan to found right after the programmes*

498

people supported in five support programs

93%

trust rate (trusted relationship established between funding partners and supported individuals)
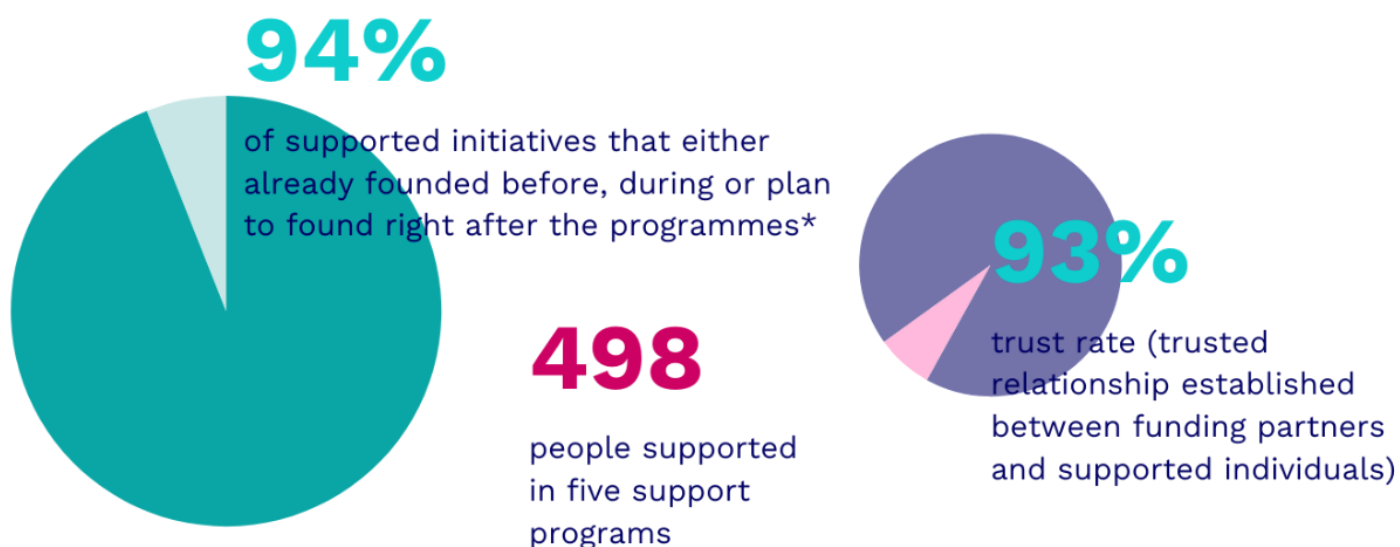
emp:our now

52

workshops given during the support programs, which lasted

1.6 million € received from Google.org's Social Innovation Fund, out of which

1 million €

was redistributed through emp:our now.

18 months

on average

*excluding Brave Spaces 2.0. Further details in the respective chapter of the report

92,760

people reached through SEND e.V.'s social media channels

68

meetings with stakeholders (SEND)

General reach of SEND

5

training sessions facilitated

18 workshops

held with more than

300 participants

3.2 Insights and lessons learned

This chapter describes three central insights from implementing the project more in-depth, which are:

1.   **Creating safe(r) spaces with time and presence**
2.   **Combining intimate small-group programmes with open bigger-scale offers**
3.   **Thinking beyond time-bound programmes**

The focus is on lessons learned from emp:our now and the process of creating and implementing inclusive support programmes for people from underserved communities.

1. Creating safe(r) spaces with time and presence

A reflection across all five funding programmes under emp:our now was the importance of safe(r) spaces for participants to feel seen, open up, connect with each other and the supporting organisation, and to be able to voice their challenges. Founders from underserved communities have oftentimes experienced discrimination, also from people within public institutions. Trust-building, therefore, is the foundation for structured support.

Trust-building also encompasses individual learning processes aimed at deconstructing oppressive systems and understanding their personal impacts. This journey involves introspection and education to recognize and dismantle barriers created by systemic inequalities, empowering individuals to navigate and challenge these structures effectively.

2. Combining intimate small-group programmes with open bigger-scale offers

Four of the funding programmes were cohort-based support programmes for a limited number of people. This setup made it possible to create an intimate environment with time for each participant individually. One programme, Brave

Spaces 2.0, centred around public offers (one-off events and regular meetings) that anybody could join.

Both types of programmes have their strengths, and combining them seems to be a promising approach. Examples from the data are that:

- **87%** of all 498 participants across the five funding programmes attended the offers of Brave Space 2.0.
- **72%** of initiatives that joined a small-group programme either founded an enterprise or decided to do so during the programme itself - compared to **23%** of Brave Spaces 2.0 participants. Yet in absolute terms, the numbers are very similar (10 and 11).

3. Thinking beyond time-bound programmes

A core challenge of founders from underserved communities is the missing link to (and rather fear of) official government institutions. Throughout support programmes, this can be mitigated by tailored workshops and 1:1 support. Yet the question then is: What happens once the official programme is over?

This question becomes even more relevant considering that participants of the programmes made the decision to found, to start ventures but have not yet launched them (50% of supported initiatives). The challenges that lie ahead for them might prevent them from actually following through.

This question has multiple dimensions, for example

- Thinking about existing programmes, community spaces and funding opportunities to connect with and prepare for, even if they don't have a focus on people from underserved communities.
- Starting an alumni community and peer-support system that continues after the end of a programme.

More ideas are given below in the section on "recommendations for inclusive support programmes".

4. Recommendations

This chapter shares concrete recommendations for policy makers and funders. All recommendations are derived from evidence that is further described in this report, mostly in the chapter "Pathways of change". The third section then highlights crucial aspects to consider in designing and implementing support programmes for people from underserved communities.

4.1 For policymakers

(1) Engage with and listen to founders from underserved communities

Lived experience is often more important than theoretical knowledge. Transforming systems requires changing attitudes and prioritising the voices of people from underserved communities. **These experts offer authentic voices and insights that challenge assumptions, motivate organisations to adopt new approaches, and identify areas for change.** People with relevant lived experience are often excluded from research and policymaking, but including them can enhance research relevance and impact with diverse, firsthand knowledge. (CFE Research, 2020)

- Given the historical discrimination against underserved communities, policymakers must proactively engage them by creating safe(r) spaces for dialogue rather than waiting for these communities to approach with their demands.
- Cultivate a supportive ecosystem where diverse perspectives are valued and celebrated, ultimately leading to more inclusive and impactful initiatives.

(2) Establish support mechanisms for founders from underserved communities

A long-term and systemic approach for an inclusive Social Entrepreneurship sector requires building bridges between the lived experiences of founders from underserved communities and the existing support infrastructure. This might require developing new resources or programmes. Yet it's much more about the genuine will to make the existing support structures more inclusive. This can be done via:

- Ensuring representation of diverse groups within institutions by intentionally hiring individuals from these communities.
- Hosting dialogues with individuals from underserved communities when planning, implementing or communicating a new support programme.
- Ensuring diverse representation within decision-making bodies to reflect the communities served.
- Providing culturally competent training and resources to support staff, ensuring they understand the unique challenges faced by underserved groups.
- Developing inclusive networking opportunities and platforms that facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing among diverse entrepreneurs.
- Create a cycle of empowerment and inspiration within the community enabling relatable mentors who offer insights, encouragement, and powerful success stories to guide and inspire new participants.
- Highlight evidence showing that social enterprises attract younger workers and face fewer skill shortages, leveraging this to garner support and resources for these ventures.

(3) Implement an equitable financial strategy in policies

To empower entrepreneurs from underserved groups, policymakers must integrate comprehensive finance mechanisms into (new) policies. Successful policies need relevant, equitable, and diverse funding strategies to support individuals who face heightened risk aversion due to a lack of safety nets like family wealth. Without

foundational financial support, these individuals may struggle to benefit from (new) policies.

- Seed funding helps level the playing field by addressing initial financial barriers.
- Long-term support should include access to low-interest loans, grants, mentorship programmes, and business development services.
- Sustained financial support helps entrepreneurs navigate challenges and encourages long-term visioning, innovation and resilience.
- Support systems should be flexible and tailored to the unique needs of underserved communities.

4.2 For funders and philanthropy

(1) Investing into systemic change

Having a systemic perspective still implies to invest into and fund individual programmes and ideas for start-ups. Yet it asks to do so with a long-term and holistic perspective. This can be done via
- Careful and intentional planning of own offers to assure that funding is embedded into the existing social entrepreneurship ecosystem.
- Foster collaborations with diverse stakeholders including other funders, community organisations, and public institutions to leverage resources and expertise.
- Support capacity-building initiatives within underserved communities to strengthen their ability to participate meaningfully in the social entrepreneurship sector.
- Implement feedback mechanisms to continuously assess and improve the impact and effectiveness of strategies on systemic transformation.
- Advocate for policy changes that create a more equitable environment for social entrepreneurs from underserved communities.

(2) Money to the people

There's a reason why microcredits work and why Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel Peace Prize-winning economist, along with the modern philanthropic movement argue that the best way to give is to give directly to people without any conditions attached. Below are a few successful concepts:

- **Microcredits:** The modern concept of microcredits provides underserved communities with small loans, enabling them to invest in better financial conditions, such as starting a business, with low and manageable interest rates. (German Bundestag - Scientific Services, 2024)

- **Trust-Based Philanthropy:** Funders approach their relationships with grantee partners from a place of trust and collaboration rather than compliance and control. This can be done by streamlining application and reporting processes to reduce administrative burdens on grantees. Funders should also encourage open and honest communication, allowing grantees to share challenges and successes without fear of losing support. (Trust-based Philanthropy Project)

- **Multi-Year, Unrestricted Funding:** Describes a no strings funding that organisations can use for anything within the project objectives. Funders can offer flexible financial support to recipients, enabling them to allocate resources where they are most needed, giving organisations the stability to plan and innovate effectively to scale impact. (IVAR - Institute for Voluntary Action Research)

This implies a shift in the role of foundations and philanthropists: from givers to coaches and allies where funders offer guidance and support while trusting organisations' expertise. This collaborative approach enhances impact and long-term sustainability by empowering organisations to make decisions that best serve their communities.

The Social Innovation Fund provided SEND with the opportunity to shape the funding criteria for emp:our now, and the role SEND can take during the implementation phase. Funding partners appreciated the flexibility and trust,

saying that "the unbureaucratic setup of the emp:our now funding is great: the documentation requirements are absolutely project-friendly, which means that our focus is fully on the design and provision of our offers for people from underserved communities."

(3) Regenerative and participatory evaluation

A regenerative and participatory approach to evaluation can support funders and philanthropists to ensure projects are sustainable, impactful, and continuously improving. This approach helps to identify available resources as well as gaps, anchoring learning and a systemic perspective into programmes, and foster long-term community benefits.

- Regularly assess the project's impact and adaptability from a regenerative, systemic perspective fostering a culture of creating the conditions for impact, continuous learning and adaptation within the project team.
- Deepen the understanding of what works and what doesn't, and have backed-up evidence for decision-making and further improvement.
- Develop an evaluation framework (Theory of Change) for the programme that captures the nuances of the work to be able to communicate both the learnings and the positive impact to others.
- Implement indicators and impact logics with a strong(er) and more consistent focus on the inner dimensions, circularity, regeneration and capacity development.
- Analyse and optimise resource allocation based on what works best for funders and founders.
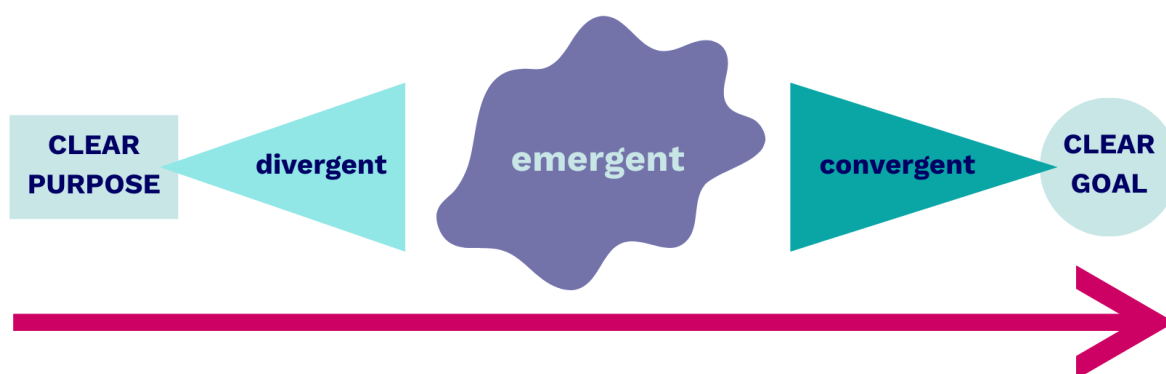
4.3 For setting up inclusive funding offers

A core question of Emp:our now has been on **how to create, communicate and implement inclusive funding offers**. The following recommendations draw on the data of the impact evaluation, as well as the experiences gathered by SEND, the funding partners and participants of the support programmes.

(1) Planning for connection and emergence

Trust plays a crucial role in successful funding programmes for people from underserved communities. At the same time, every founder has their unique lived experiences, ambitions and needs. A central design principle should therefore be to plan for connection and emergence: to calculate in sufficient time to have conversations with participants, and to create the connections within the group.

It's important that this does not cause tension with other goals such as providing content-related workshops. A helpful framework is Kaner et al.'s Diamond of Participation. It describes three phases for meaningful events and programmes: diverging, emerging and converging, framed with a clear purpose and clear goal.

```
CLEAR        divergent    emergent    convergent       CLEAR
PURPOSE                                                 GOAL
```

This can mean to:
- Give participants the time and chance to connect, build trust and shape certain elements of design and content. This includes defining their own goals, and supporting them in achieving those.
- Set up an advisory board for the programme and (jointly) develop a code of conduct that provides orientation.
- Work with methods such as peer-coaching or world cafès.

(2) The power of community and role models

Several funding partners and participants of support programmes reported on the importance of community, building networks and having access to role models. An important question to ask therefore is if one's intention is to build their own new community around a support programme, or to connect to an existing one.

In general, the following aspects can be considered:

- Coaching and mentoring for participants, ideally supported by a clear process (e.g. for matching, expectation setting, frequency of sessions, link of mentoring process to other programme activities).
- Balancing internal sessions for trust building with public events for wider networking.

(3) Institutionalisation beyond the programme

An important opportunity of emp:our now was that funding partners had the chance to attend training sessions and actively bring topics around diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging into their own organisation. Actions to support this process are to

- Allocate (annual) budget to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB).
- Develop an internal strategy to strengthen diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging, and make that strategy a vital component in all activities.
- Make one's own intentions and commitments transparent and visible, e.g. on the website.

A second dimension is to link the support programme with existing funding and support structures, and to think about ways to continue one's own activities within the wider support ecosystem. This can include to:

- Build partnerships with public institutions and other organisations throughout the programme.
- Identify parts of the programme (e.g. the community, mentoring, a cohort-based approach) that can be maintained over a longer period of time, e.g. through funding or a business model.

5. Methodology and terminology

The methodology for this report and the impact evaluation of the Social Innovation Fund in Germany is based on Unity Effect's Impact Garden model. The model was used to create a Theory of Change that highlights the cyclical nature of change work, and the importance of creating the supportive conditions to make social and systemic change possible.
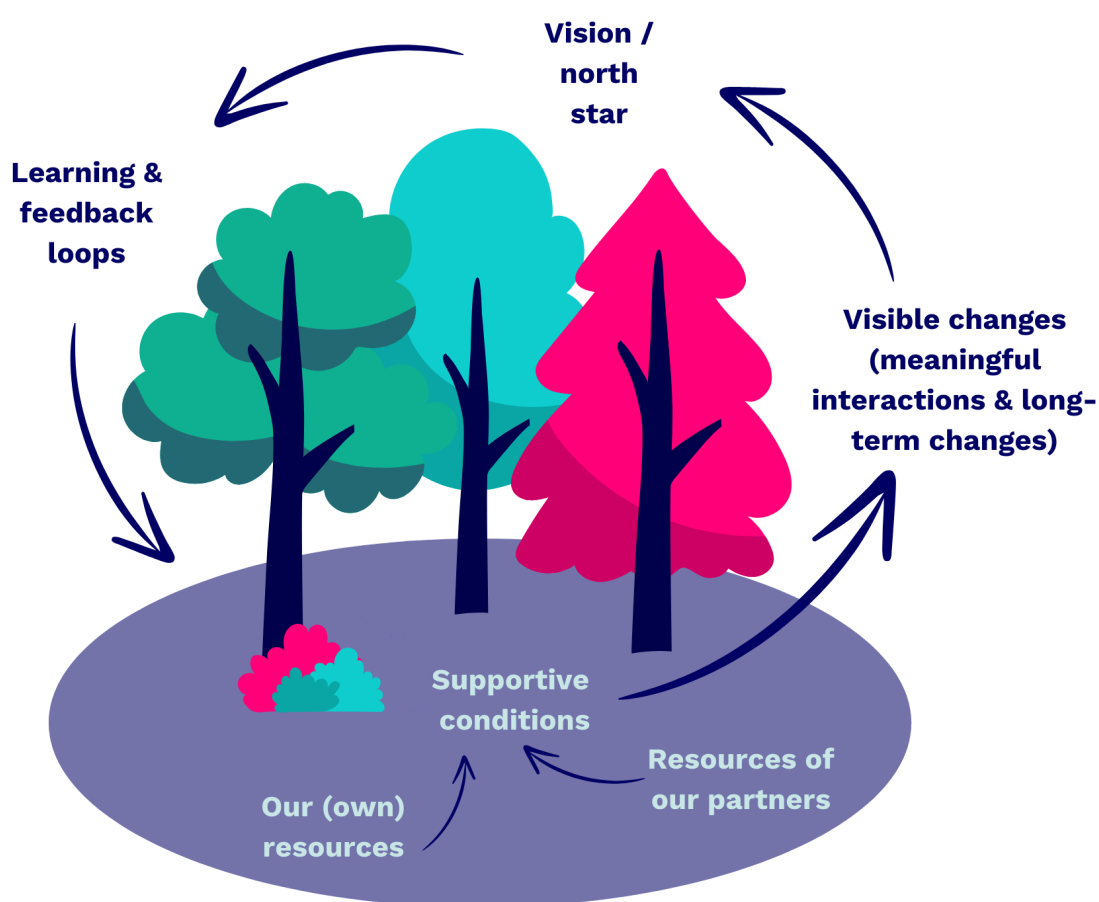
In the model, resources refer to the "raw materials" of a project or programme such as time, existing networks or financial means. Supportive conditions refer to the packaging of these resources. In the case of the Social Innovation Fund, this was creating inclusive funding offers through emp:our now, setting up the

Meta-Actor-Network and the regional clusters. These supportive conditions then led to meaningful interactions: people from underserved communities taking part in the support programmes, actors of the ecosystem coming together and visibility that was created for the topic. A core question of the impact evaluation then was how these immediate actions can lead to longer-term change towards an inclusive entrepreneurship sector in Germany.

To answer this question, three pathways of change were created with more specific guiding questions and themes, as well as indicators for measurement. Main data sources include:

- **A survey with emp:our now funding partners.**
- **A survey with founders from underserved communities.**
- **Other data available within SEND (including social media data).**
- **Own research and drawing on existing literature.**

The model also emphasises a participatory approach to developing one's Theory of Change, and therefore defining what to measure and why. Two workshops were conducted to jointly refine the model and reflect on how to describe and present the results.

Ambitions are to take an intersectional perspective that gives space to the many facets of the lived experiences from founders from underserved communities. This also implies to critically reflect on power dynamics and to ensure that different voices are heard throughout the report.

The structure of this report follows the logic of the Impact Garden: starting with the supportive conditions and then moving towards the three pathways of change.

If you wish to receive further information on the methodology, Theory of Change, data sources or process to implement the impact evaluation, do not hesitate to reach out Unity Effect (info@unityeffect.net).

Three of the central terms used in this report are "underserved community", "intersectionality" and "diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging", all of which this section elaborates more on.

Based on our research and feedback from the community, we refer to **underserved community** as:

- people with migration background and/or refugee experience
- people with physical, mental or psychological impairments
- people from precarious financial circumstances
- people without higher education qualifications
- people from structurally weak regions
- people from the LGBTQIA+ community
- people of Color (PoC)
- single parents
- women or "FLINTA" people (female, lesbian, intersexual, non-binary, transgender and agender people)

The term underserved refers to the historic and present-time discrimination and structural disadvantages that those groups are faced with.

Intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), highlights that the lived experience by many people are shaped by facing multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination (compound discrimination). Crenshaw also argues that not accounting for intersectionality bears the risk of oversimplification and misrepresentation.

Lastly, **diversity, equity and inclusion** (also abbreviated as DEI) can be seen as a framework to promote respect and understanding between and full inclusion of all people, especially in the workplace. The term emerged out of the United States and can be linked to different independence movements. The latest discourse often includes "belonging" as an additional dimension, abbreviating it to DEIB.

6. Supportive conditions: the three programme components

As stated in the intro above, the entire programme at SEND consisted of three main components:

1. **Emp:our now**
2. **Meta-actor Network (MAN)**
3. **Regional clusters**

Speaking in the garden metaphor as outlined in the methodology chapter, these three components are the supportive conditions, the fertile soil, for the work towards an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector.

This chapter provides further details on each of the three programmes components, with emp:our now being the central one.

6.1 Emp:our now

One million EUR, the majority of available funding from Google.org's Social Innovation Fund, was regranted from SEND e.V. to funding partners for developing offers and support programmes. With the motto "Strong together for a diverse tomorrow", the goal of SEND e.V. was to create the best conditions for funding partners to address people from underserved communities and support them on their entrepreneurial journey. And this is emp:our now:

- **1 million € of available funds**
- **1 diverse jury of experts in the fields of social entrepreneurship and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB)**
- **5 selected applications (out of 70)**
- **Continuous support to funding partners and bringing actors together.**

On the following pages both the **selected projects and organisations** are presented. Out of the five projects, four were conducted in consortia, meaning that next to one lead organisation at least one further organisation was actively involved in the design and implementation.

Most projects had multiple elements, for example an incubation and support programme for people from underserved communities and activities to create visibility and understanding for the topic in public.

The main focus of the analysis in the later chapters lies on the support programmes of each project. For this reason, this chapter also provides an overview of the five support programmes specifically.

Each selected project included one support programme for people from underserved communities. This section provides an overview of the five support programmes as well, which were at the heart of emp:our now.

One important aspect to be aware of is that four programmes centred around a small-group experience and individual support, whereas one programme (Brave Spaces 2.0) encompassed public events and a wider reach with a platform approach. A central observation is that there is value in combining more intimate with public spaces, both rooted in creating a safe and trusting environment.

> "Overall, the personal empowerment fostered through the shared tools and mentorship of project managers was transformative for both me and my project. It equipped me with the confidence, skills, and resilience needed to navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship and realise my project's vision" (support programme participant)

The five projects and organisations involved

Project	Organisations	Location	Activities
Empower Now	Impact Hub Berlin with tbd*	Berlin	(1) Sensitisation IHB Community & Team, (2) Empower Now Incubator, (3) Membership Scholarships (4) Community Events
WirkungsStart – sozial gründen leicht gemacht!	Migrafrica with minds&makers, Caritas Köln, IN VIA Köln	Cologne	(1) Incubator program, (2) Qualification and awareness-raising measures for representatives of the Wirtschaftsförderung (3) Additional support services from founders (4) development of toolkits on How to fund social enterprises and opening social startups for everybody
Founded - Gründen statt finden!	founded	online	2 runs of the founded course program including one offsite each
Brave Spaces 2.0	BIWOC* Rising with Founderland	Berlin and online	(1) Network and community building (2) Building of a digital platform (3) Events (online & offline) (4) Journey of Courage Summit for BIWOC & TIN*BIPOC (5) Coaching Open Hours
zukunft+	Zusammen leben e.V. with FWTM Freiburg, Amt für Migration und Integration Freiburg, Radio Dreyckland, Co-Working Stühlinger	Freiburg in Breisgau	(1) Incubator program (2) Support hours from experts (3) Showcase events

The five support programmes of emp:our now supported projects

Support programmes	Purpose and intention	Highlight and achievements
Zukunft + (11 participants)	Empowering people with a migrant background to become social entrepreneurs in the field of gastronomy - to build up their own livelihood as a chef for hire with social impact!	Developing a modular workshop series and being able to sensitise local actors in Freiburg for DEI-related themes.
Empower Now Incubator (10 participants)	A support programme for FLINTA* (female, lesbian, intersexual, non-binary, transgender and agender people) that takes intersectionality into account.	Establishing a DEI ecosystem in Berlin with more than 1000 participants at events and a DEI advisory board.
WirkungsStart Incubator (6 participants)	The project aimed to activate founders with a migration and from precarious backgrounds, and support them in an incubator programme for social start-ups.	Empowering six founders on their path and creating visibility for the topic. Sensitising people in public institutions.
Founded course program (17 participants)	founded was aimed at neurodivergent women* and women* who are not represented in conventional work structures due to physical, mental and psychological impairments or chronic illnesses.	Creating a strong sense of belonging and self-acceptance among programme participants. Visibility in public for the topic.
Brave Spaces 2.0 (454 participants)	Brave Spaces 2.0 is an intersectional, empowering platform for women, trans, inter- and non-binary people of color who want to start their own business.	Creating a network which did not exist before and was highly sought after. Being able to strengthen the self-confidence of many participants.

Founders

The emp:our now support programmes directly reached almost 500 people. In this section you can get to know two participants more personally.

Raina Sun

Support programme attended	Brave Spaces 2.0
Initiative / organisation	Raina Sun Coaching, self-employed

Raina Sun Coaching helps marginalized talent navigate the challenges of business ownership, freelancing, and succeeding in an industry where one is underrepresented.

Most significant change due to the support program

Building community with people who have the same goals as I do.

This conference [Journey to Courage Summit] was an incredible experience! I loved connecting with so many like minded women of color entrepreneurs because I rarely get the opportunity. I left feeling truly connected and empowered. Amazingly, I created genuine friendships and new business connections.

Genefer Baxter

Support programme attended	Empower Now Incubator
Initiative / organisation	Aula Future, either UG or GmbH (in foundation process)

Aula Future is an online platform that guides sustainable solution exploration, ideation, and development. With us, Changemakers can learn about cutting-edge topics in sustainable design, apply what they've learned by developing innovative solutions to real-world challenges, and collaborate with a strong network of peers and professionals to implement those solutions. Aula Future's reason for existing is to develop the Green Economy through disruptive design.

Most significant change due to the support program

We had significant business development improvement. We gained a lot of clarity on the direction and, through the program, created a great network.

The Empower Now incubator was pivotal in the development of Aula Future. The programme was the first "yes" that we received; to have an outside entity validate the potential of our idea gave me the confidence to keep going. The programme offered immense value throughout, and I gained support and guidance from my mentors and peers. I was also invited to speak on several occasions, increasing our brand's exposure and allowing me to meet new people and potential stakeholders. Even after the incubator ended, I continued to receive support and encouragement from the programme managers. I am very grateful, and I know that the relationships formed from this experience will last a long time.

6.2 Meta-Actor Network (MAN)

The support landscape for start-ups in the social entrepreneurship ecosystem consists of private and public organisations. They are dedicated to the needs of founders, e.g. through start-up workshops, incubation programmes or the creation of local networks. In this way, social innovations can become properly established in Germany and have the best possible impact.

However, this support landscape of so-called meta-actors still has some gaps in terms of content and regions in Germany. In addition, there are not yet enough opportunities for organisations to network with each other and share good practices.

In the decentralised Meta-Actor Network (MAN), spaces for new collaborations in moderated, regular exchange formats were created.

Central activities of the Meta-actor Network:
- Stock-taking and needs analysis: understanding the needs and offers of actors to identify gaps and opportunities.
- Trust building: hosting meetings to exchange, develop a shared vision and strengthen trust between organisations and individuals.
- Joint projects: joining forces to create awareness for topics around discrimination and belonging of people from underserved communities.

Key data - what was achieved

- **9 events with 107 participants**
- **Reached 77 organisations through the network**
- **Guideline for inclusive funding offers developed by SEND with feedback from key stakeholders and partners.**

6.3 Regional clusters

The core aim and opportunity of this component was to strengthen and professionalise SEND's presence and work on a regional level. Experience and science tells that local embeddedness of founders is crucial for their success (Terstriep et. al., 2022).

The primary goal therefore was to establish regional clusters in order to provide contact points for founders of social enterprises, especially from underserved communities. More specific tasks of regional clusters include to:

- Strengthen regional networks and ecosystems.
- Host multi-stakeholder workshops to bring actors together and raise awareness for social entrepreneurship.
- Creating visibility for founders and social enterprises.
- Advocate for regional funding programmes and provide support to access funding.

Key data - what was achieved

- **Strategic recommendations for social entrepreneurship published in North Rhine-Westphalia**
- **Strategy for social entrepreneurship & social innovation in progress in Munich**
- **Participations in events and fairs to increase visibility**

It's important to mention that the work of the regional clusters primarily centres around creating awareness and improving framework conditions for social entrepreneurship as such.

7. Pathways of change

This chapter lays out the three central pathways of the programme funded through the Social Innovation Fund towards an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector. The three pathways are:

1	From support to empowerment	Describing how the programme enabled founders from underserved communities to be empowered and successful long-term.
2	From awareness to commitment	Describing the steps for public institutions and organisations from the social entrepreneurship sector to strategically commit to inclusion.
3	From networking to alliances	Indicating how partnerships can be formed to advance the mission of an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector.

The following sections outline each of the three pathways, starting with the guiding question and the key data at a glance to provide a general overview.

This is followed by systemic enablers: opportunities to further strengthen this pathway and therefore shape an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector in Germany.

Lastly, each section then provides further details, data and contextual information, including voices from participants and actors involved in the programme.

Guiding question & key data → Systemic enablers → More about the pathway
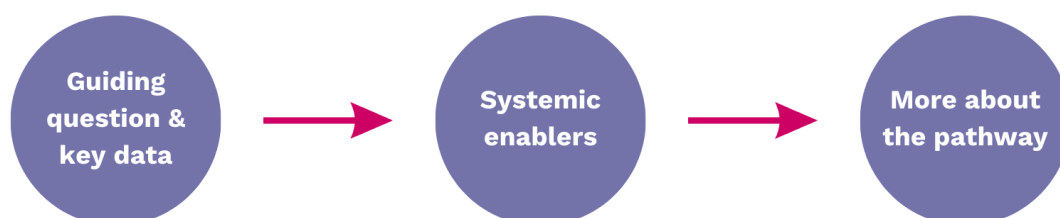
7.1 From support to empowerment

What are the needs and challenges of people from underserved communities in becoming social entrepreneurs? What type of funding and support programmes, both on national and regional level, are most suited to meet those needs and mitigate those challenges?
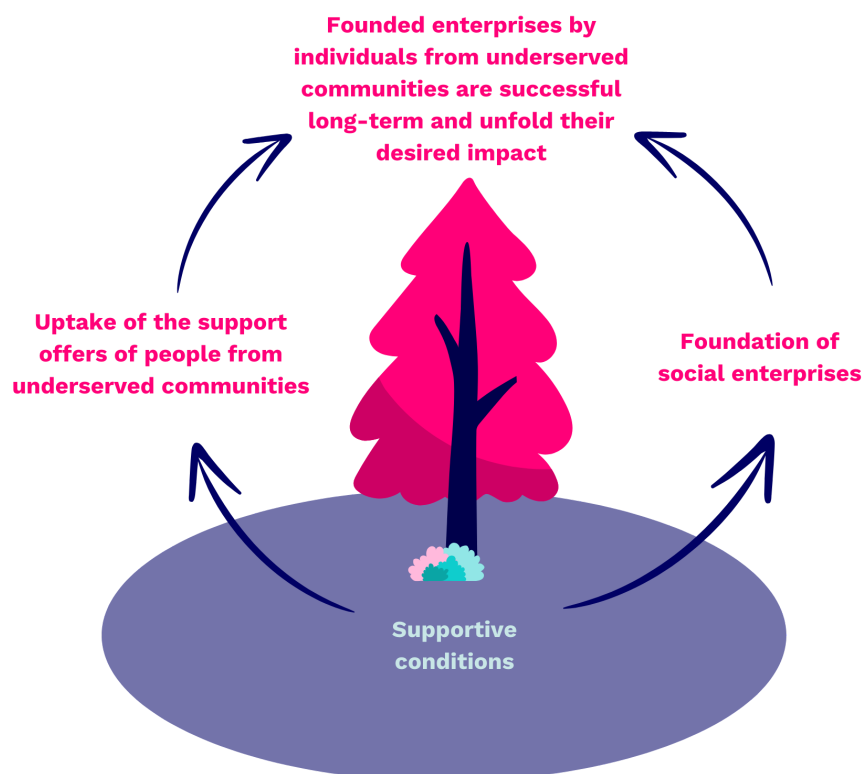
This pathway describes how the programme in general and the support offered by emp:our now enabled founders from underserved communities to be empowered and successful long-term. The impact logic to operationalise and explore the guiding question is that the programme components, especially the funding offers by emp:our now, lead to **(1)** an uptake of the support offers by people from underserved communities and **(2)** the foundation of social enterprises. **Long-term**, the ambition is that founded enterprises by individuals from underserved communities are successful long-term and unfold their desired impact.
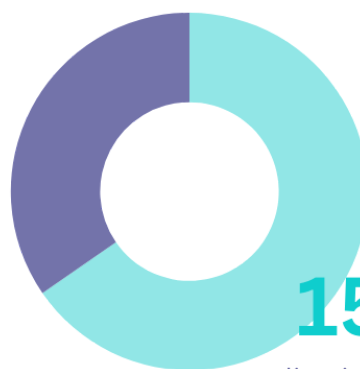
Key data at a glance

8,540,682.86€

would have been needed to respond to all applications; more than

8x

of the disposable funding

54

selected*

156
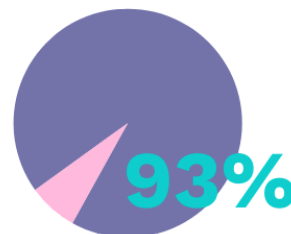
applications in total

52

workshops given during the support programmes, which lasted

18 months

on average

93%

trust rate (trusted relationship established between funding partners and supported individuals)
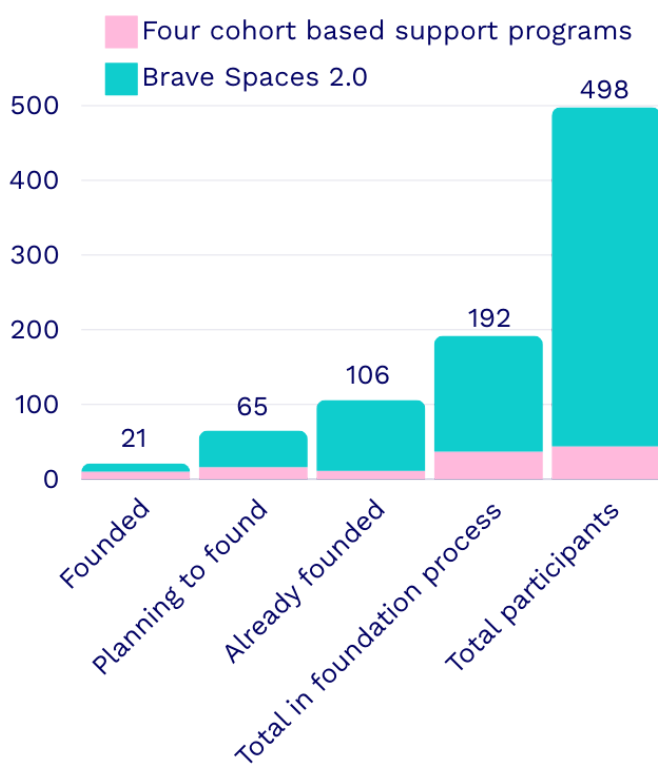
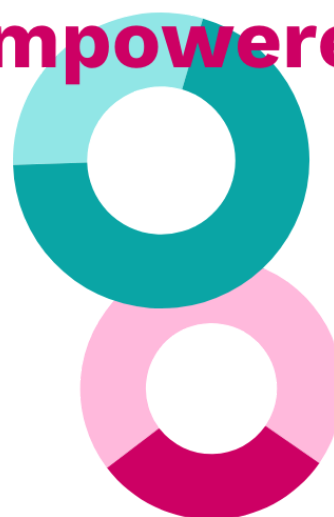**41**

public events hosted with approx.

2334 attendees,

out of which 33 events with 2249 attendees were in-person events.

*excluding Brave Spaces 2.0

Four cohort based support programs
Brave Spaces 2.0

Category	Value
Founded	21
Planning to found	65
Already founded	106
Total in foundation process	192
Total participants	498

7 out of 10 respondents feeling somewhat or much more

empowered
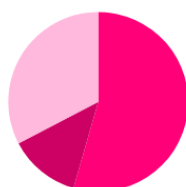
3 out of 10 staying on the same level

Enterprises whose main service is around

serving the needs

of underserved communities

No focus on discrimination
32.7%

Other form of discrimination
12.9%

The same form of discrimination
54.5%

36%

of participants in support programs received further funding

Key Systemic Enablers

Individuals from underserved communities face multiple challenges and barriers in the process of founding social enterprises. Many participants reported that their financial situation is insecure, which requires them to earn money outside of their entrepreneurial endeavours. Further challenges include caretaking responsibilities, lacking understanding from others for their initiatives and fear of official institutions such as the financial department.

To truly empower founders from underserved communities therefore demands to directly address these challenges, while also creating the wider institutional frame that encourages them. The three key systemic enablers therefore are:

1. **Financial support for founders on individual level**
2. **Creating safe(r) spaces**
3. **Longer Project Cycles and Long-term Funding**

1. Financial support for founders on individual level

Financial security emerged as a recurring challenge among participants, even among those who recognized the benefits of training and coaching. Financial safety nets are important to provide space for implementing what founders have learned in the programme and to dedicate time specifically to it. Participants expressed a growing demand for financial structures that can support them during all stages of company implementation and that would enable them to take on risks and opportunities that would otherwise be unfeasible. One participant highlighted the need for "Good long-term financing/subsidies for women who work part-time - coaching/mentoring also for mothers who work part-time."

Financial needs can be seen as a systemic blocker for founders. This is evident in the necessity for funding partners to adjust event timings, with some initiatives scheduled on weekends and early mornings. Founders often have to maintain alternative jobs to support their livelihoods, highlighting the critical need for

flexible support structures. This situation highlights the struggle of balancing their current employment with participating in the programme during their free time. One strategy therefore can be to **include financial compensation to the participation in support programmes**.

Another approach to mitigate these challenges is through seed funding. **Seed funding** can provide a level of direct financial support crucial to entrepreneurs who are starting out their journey. A successful example is the Kofi Annan Changemakers initiative, led by the Kofi Annan Foundation, and which provides a small seed grant to each participant to implement their projects and scale up their work. This access to direct initial funding oftentimes leads to further funding opportunities and to more engaged participants. An additional support factor is to not attach many requirements to seed funding, and approach it as a shared opportunity for trust building and putting ideas into practice within the general support framework.

2. Creating safe(r) spaces

Programmes should create inclusive, empathetic environments where participants feel safe to share and collaborate. One respondent highlighted the importance of "connection and being in a safer space to create together."

Funding partners that implemented solutions for safe(r) spaces highlight that the most important factors for building trust include individual and personalised support, especially during challenging moments. Shared experiences (e.g., through workshops and events) further reinforce this trust-building mechanism, **emphasising a human-centred approach rather than focusing solely on the idea or business model**. This approach ensures that participants feel valued and supported on a personal level, fostering a stronger sense of community and security. An important factor for support organisations is to assure the capacity for this personal and emotional work, which might require training and sensitisation for staff or building up a support network with mentors.

Throughout this programme, funding partners have put this into practice with a programme participant highlighting the impact of this work by stating, "Building community with people who have the same goals as I do" was a clear win for them.

Developing **networks with successful cases** can also foster trust and mutual support. It is particularly beneficial to include mentors and funders who have themselves been part of underserved communities. These mentors can provide relatable insights and encouragement, understanding the unique needs and challenges faced by current participants of support programmes. Their success stories can inspire and guide new participants, offering a powerful example of overcoming obstacles and achieving positive outcomes. This approach not only enhances the support network but also creates a cycle of empowerment and inspiration within the community.

3. Longer Project Cycles and Long-term Funding:

Extended funding periods allow for deeper engagement and sustainable development. Participants in support programmes expressed that "more coaching and longer exchange (longer funding period) would have been good!"

Unlike short-term catalytic funding, which often provides immediate but temporary relief, **systemic funding addresses the root causes** of economic instability and fosters long-term resilience. By promoting a more holistic strategy, this ensures that investments are made in areas that build economic strength and stability over time. This can support founders to not only start their venture but also prepares them to better handle future challenges. During times of crisis, the reliance on quick fixes can divert attention and resources away from more comprehensive solutions. This approach may inadvertently perpetuate cycles of dependency and underdevelopment, as it fails to tackle the systemic issues at play. Focusing on a systemic approach to funding ensures that resources are allocated towards supporting projects which can withstand future shocks and have the capability to take advantage of a dynamic world.

Extended funding periods would therefore allow potential founders to plan long-term, reducing financial uncertainties and enable sustained development of their projects. With the assurance of ongoing support, social enterprises can focus on strategic growth, thorough implementation of their ideas, and adaptation to evolving challenges. This stability encourages innovation and resilience, leading to more impactful and sustainable outcomes. Such longer support can also be assured through intermediaries such as the funding partners of emp:our now. Additional ideas include establishing a mechanism that involves granting an intermediary a specific budget, which they can then distribute or redistribute as needed.

A multi-year approach could then be designed in different phases:

1. **A more intense initial phase with content-related workshops**
2. **A tailored support phase with access to financial means to start and further develop social enterprises**
3. **An alumni community where participants can first receive insights and later become mentors themselves**

In this scheme, emp:our now could be seen as having completed the first phase. Moving forward, such programmes could transition into a tailored support phase, providing participants with access to financial resources as the next step. This approach would then ensure that participants not only have the training and coaching support they need but also the financial stability to be able to allocate more time to their project.

More about this pathway

In a journey from providing mere support to fostering genuine empowerment, a focus has been on understanding the nuanced needs and challenges faced by participants and the support capabilities and interest from partners. What is noticed is that there is a clear wish within the sector to set up and provide support programmes for people from underserved communities, and also an actual interest from people to join such programmes. This is showcased by 156 people applying for support programmes and the selection of 44 people from underserved communities to be supported through these programmes.

The pathway to empowerment is not without its challenges. Financial constraints emerged as a recurring barrier but also as an area ripe with opportunity. Both participants and funding partners emphasised the need for robust funding options that provide a safety net and long-term security. This financial foundation is crucial for allowing founders to dedicate the necessary time and effort to make their enterprises successful.

A systemic approach needs to provide targeted support that not only addresses immediate concerns but also to empower individuals to tackle long-term challenges. This pathway explores how a transition can be made from initial support to true empowerment, evidenced by tangible outcomes and transformative impacts of this programme.

Following the Theory of Change outlined above, three major themes have been identified that evidence the impact of this programme on its empowerment pathway:

1. **Uptake of support offers**
2. **Social Enterprises Founded**
3. **Long-term impact of social enterprises**

Uptake of support offers

The need for a transition from support to empowerment is evident in how participants have applied themselves for this programme as a whole. This is reflected in the number of participants that applied (156) and were selected for (44) the four small-group programmes, the demand for financial support from funding partners (more than EUR 8,5 million), and participants enabled by the funding partners (498 participants in total). Out of the selected participants, only one person had to discontinue for personal reasons. Knowing about the challenges such as financial constraints of many participants, this is quite remarkable.

The trust built between funding partners and founders from underserved communities further underscores this success **(93% trust rate)**. Both parties agree on the importance of a human-centred approach, accentuating this direction as crucial for success. A strong focus on personal encounters and exchanges has been noted as vital for building relationships and community among participants.

Examples include establishing a high-demand network that previously didn't exist, which boosted participants' self-confidence and encouraged them to pursue their ventures. The creation of a DEI ecosystem at Impact Hub Berlin provided free events, workshops, and training for over 1,000 participants, with a DEI advisory board contributing 200 consultation hours to the project. Their efforts also supported six participants with discrimination experiences in founding their ventures and this commitment of intersectional empowerment was clearly demonstrated by founding partners who adapted materials linguistically, hosted in-person programmes on weekends to accommodate founders' weekday limitations, and implemented online sessions for those with limited mobility.

As one participant noted, "Participating in the programme brought about two significant changes for me and my project: the expansion of my network and personal empowerment." These data points evidence the relevance for and interest in the programmes and also the impact that support services from funding partners can have on empowering those with genuine motivation towards becoming social entrepreneurs.

Social Enterprises Founded

The programme's success is also demonstrated by the number of social enterprises founded or in progress, with 192 of individuals from underserved communities within the funding partner's programmes who are in the process of launching ventures. These enterprises highlight the effectiveness of the empowerment strategies such as trust-building and individual support. A significant distinction is evident between the four smaller programmes and the open programme Brave Space 2.0. 84% of participants in the four smaller cohort-based programmes are in a foundation process and 10 initiatives (23%) actually founded during the programmes, compared to 34% of participants in Brave Spaces 2.0 that are in the foundation process. Given the absolute numbers, however, 11 participants (2,3%) in Brave Spaces 2.0 actually founded an enterprise. **This indicates the importance of combining more intimate programmes with more open formats.**

Another difference can be observed in the focus of the founded enterprises. In the four small-group support programmes, 80% of founders participated to establish ventures that directly benefited individuals facing similar discrimination, compared to 52% within Brave Spaces 2.0. The reason might be that the **more intimate support programmes allow for personalised and continuous support.**

Throughout the survey, participants of support programmes also reported significant business development and clarity on direction as a result of the programme. One end beneficiary noted, "We had significant business development improvement. We gained a lot of clarity on the direction and, through the program, created a great network." This metric is essential as it demonstrates the **tangible real-world impact of the programme**, moving beyond mere enablement to actively contributing to the creation and sustainability of social entrepreneurship in Germany.

Long-term impact of social enterprises

The entire programme lasted more than two years, and the emp:our now support programmes ran for 18 months on average. The data show that, at the end of the programmes, participants were either still in the foundation process or in very early stages of their entrepreneurial journeys. Measuring the long-term impact of the founded social enterprises would, therefore, need to cover a more extensive time-period. A good indicator, however, is the role founders from underserved communities play in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Data shows that, due to new connections, knowledge and support, founders are now playing more active roles in their entrepreneurial ecosystems. They feel empowered to lead their enterprises, and their ability to secure further funding and investment since participating in the programme highlights the impact of the empowerment initiatives. In fact, **36% of founders from the programmes have accessed further funding opportunities,** demonstrating the ripple effect and effectiveness of the programmes. Additionally, collaboration with economic development representatives raised awareness about the challenges and potential, fostering a shift in attitudes and emphasising the strength found in community and acceptance.

Founders from underserved communities were, furthermore, invited to speak at conferences and events, featured in podcasts and on social media, and were able to raise awareness for their projects, causes and organisations. Examples are given in the annex of this report.

These success metrics showcase the pathway to move beyond providing basic support to creating an environment where participants can apply their learnings and resources and see a clear value as they take on challenging tasks of starting and maintaining their enterprises.

7.2 From awareness to commitment

What are the reasons and challenges for funding partners and public institutions to adjust their funding offers to be more inclusive for people from underserved communities?
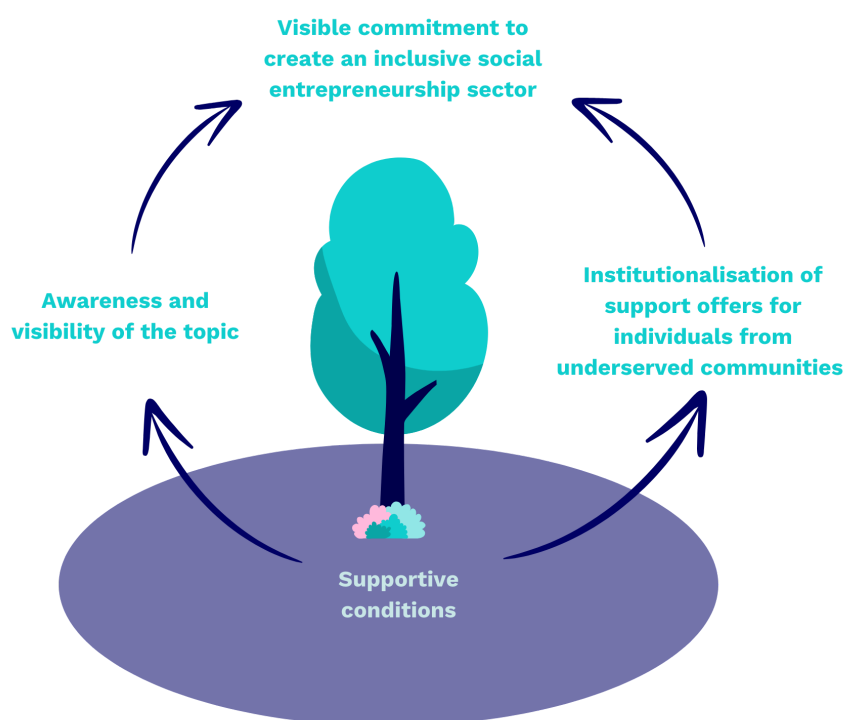
This pathway describes the steps for public institutions and organisations from the social entrepreneurship sector to strategically commit to inclusion. Awareness in public and within organisations is only valuable if it leads to sustained support and tangible results.

The impact logic to operationalise and explore the guiding question and pathway is that the programme enabled **(1)** awareness and visibility of the topic and **(2)** an institutionalisation of support offers for people from underserved communities. Both aspects are crucial for **visible and continuous commitments** of organisations and public institutions to create an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector.
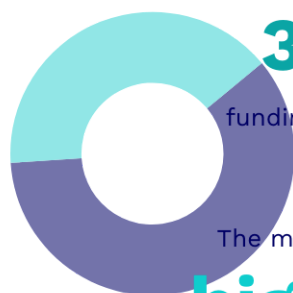
Key data at a glance

92,760

people reached through SEND e.V.'s social media channels

3 out of 5

funding partners want to continue their program.

The main reason for continuing is the

high demand

Reasons for discontinuing is for example a shift away from founders to other audiences, while continuing to contribute to a diverse and inclusive society.

12,95 FTEs

(full-time equivalent positions) financed for funding partners

3 FTEs

(full-time equivalent positions) within SEND
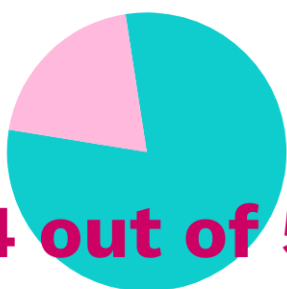
4 out of 5

funding partners took training courses themselves on DEI-related themes

4 out of 5

funding partners are planning follow up projects and have either written funding applications or are already in the implementation phase
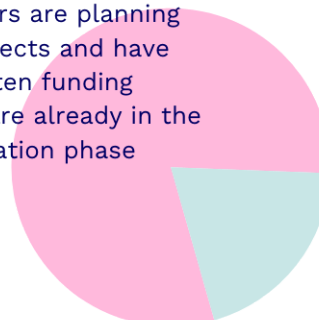
Systemic enablers

1. Walking the talk: Creating awareness within organisations

Authentically supporting an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector in Germany starts with each of us and our work environments. Emp:our now was seen by funding partners and SEND as a chance to actively engage with their own teams around the topics of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. Additionally, the Meta-Actor Network provided a platform to exchange around the topic.

Concrete actions taken throughout the programme were to

- develop internal strategies, codes of conduct or accountability protocols for diversity, equity and inclusion;
- sensitising mentors and partner organisations;
- creating internal formats to inform about the project;
- for SEND to develop guidelines for inclusive funding offers with feedback of other stakeholders.

A similar pathway can be promising in other organisations, both public, non-profit, governmental and private: linking the commitment to serving people from underserved communities with the commitment to strengthening diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging within one's own organisation.

2. It's all about the people

From a systemic perspective, any organisation is constituted by the people and how they interact with each other. The Social Innovation Fund provided both SEND and funding partners with the opportunity to employ people, adding up to 15.95 full-time equivalent positions. Yet the crucial questions are who was hired and which position people from underserved communities hold within organisations.

To institutionalise DEIB means to reflect on internal power dynamics and actively seek to represent diversity in leadership positions. This can be done through different strategies, such as developing processes and a long-term strategy for hiring or setting up an advisory board. Good practices within the project are the emp:our now jury tasked to select the projects, and the advisory board of Impact Hub Berlin that was created to support the development and implementation of their support programme and further activities. **Individuals within the advisory board and the jury were paid to acknowledge their expertise and contributions.**

Similar approaches can be applied by any organisation. A starting point can be to reflect on one's own internal processes (e.g. hiring or programme development) and decide on first steps to take. It's important to acknowledge that this is a long-term process. Yet, it's even more important to start somewhere, and committing to more diversity among staff, in leadership positions and on the advisory board are crucial steps.

3. Visibility, role models and communities

Throughout the program, more than 2,300 people attended public events hosted by funding partners. Those events, combined with additional channels such as social media, provided founders from underserved communities with the chance to present and be seen for their work. By creating space and speaking opportunities for people from underserved communities, they can inspire others and become role models. At the same time, including mentors and community building into the support programmes has shown to be essential.

This indicates that there is a positive dynamic that can unfold: giving visibility to and connecting successful founders from underserved communities encourages and inspires new founders, who then become mentors. **The support programmes within emp:our now were able to create that positive feedback loop.** It also shows a pathway to channel visibility into lasting change by embedding founders from underserved communities and their initiatives into a wider ecosystem.

More about this pathway

"From awareness to commitment" describes the pathway of anchoring diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) into key organisations of the sector. This is a crucial dimension from a systemic perspective, highlighting the importance of **including the lived experience and expertise of people from underserved communities into organisations' own working processes.**

This also yields manyfold opportunities for organisations, such as including more perspectives into programme development, attracting new talents and increasing one's innovative capacity.

The three themes to describe the pathway are:

1. **Awareness and visibility of the topic in public**
2. **Institutionalisation of support offers**
3. **Visible commitments in public towards an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector**

An assumption is that the three themes support and strengthen each other. More awareness and visibility aid the process of institutionalising support offers for underserved communities, and both themes can lead towards visible public commitments. These commitments, in turn, create additional awareness and are supportive framework conditions for institutionalisation of support offers.

The question, therefore, is how these positive and reinforcing feedback loops can be created. This is being explored in the following sections.

Awareness and visibility of the topic in public

Throughout the programme period, SEND alone reached more than **92,000 people** through social media channels, and approximately 2,334 people attended the **41 public events** hosted by funding partners. Many of those events served as platforms for founders from underserved communities to present their work, and the fact that 36% of programme participants (of the small-group programmes) acquired further funding indicates that this visibility led to tangible results.

Concrete examples of programme participants in public include:

- Pitch events such as Impact Hub Berlin's "Empower Now Community Showcase" or Migrafrika's "Inclusive Social Founders Night".
- A statement at the SIATE conference by Daniela Eneh from Adaora, which was published on YouTube.
- Panel talks and speaking opportunities and numerous events, for example Impact Hub Berlin's Impact Entrepreneurship Forum (with Aula Future), Impact Talks (Cocomoino), Reeperbahn Festival (KINDA) or the Unlearn Business Lab (Roots BLN).

Additionally, founders of underserved communities have their own activities that received additional attention, such as the podcast of the Afro Fusion Collective (part of Zukunft+).

The programme, therefore, created substantial visibility for the topic, the importance of an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector and the inspiring work of people from underserved communities. However, it was also observed and remarked by different stakeholders that the public discourse partly shifted towards other topics, such as the war in Ukraine, Artificial Intelligence or regulation of migration.

Central questions, therefore, are **how to maintain relevance and attention over a longer period of time**, and how it can be linked to other discourses.

Institutionalisation of support offers

Emp:our now can be seen as a chance for funding partners and SEND to actively engage with their own teams and working processes. Four out of five funding partners took external training offers on diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (12 different offers in total). The only funding partner that did not do so was the one whose team consists entirely of people from underserved communities.

The programme also enabled funding partners to **finance 12.95 full-time equivalent positions**, and three additional full time equivalent positions for SEND. This made it possible to anchor the theme of shaping an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector not only into the support programmes, but also own organisations and partnerships.

Two organisations developed an internal DEI strategy throughout the programme period. And most importantly: 4 out of 5 funding partners desire to or already started follow-up projects. They argued that there is a clear and high need for support offers for people from underserved communities in the social entrepreneurship space. Due to their own internal commitment, the emp:our now funding partners serve as authentic role models and service providers.

Visible commitments in public towards inclusive social entrepreneurship sector

It's difficult to track how the programme led to specific commitments. As mentioned above, another observation is that the topic of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) moved towards the background in the past years. A central question, therefore, is **how DEIB can be seen and established as a strategic and systemic topic**, also as a foundation to address all the other challenges rather than a trend to hop on?

Examples include Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the climate crisis. It's known that the biases we have as a society are reflected in the models and algorithms underpinning AI (Criado Perez, 2019). Within the social entrepreneurship sector

different people from underserved communities actively work on addressing this challenge. An example is Yana - the first AI chatbot supporting people that faced discrimination.

Similarly, when addressing the climate crisis, people from underserved communities are developing solutions and bringing in their multiple perspectives. Weaving the topic of DEIB into these discourses yields tremendous opportunities for all parties and actors. This could be done by embedding guidelines and principles on DEIB into policies and support programmes by default, and by actively seeking representation of people from underserved communities and events and in discussions.

Here, an **intersectional lens** can help to assure actual representation. This means, for example, to go beyond migrant and women empowerment and seek to understand the nuanced experiences of people and groups. A further practice and aspect to consider is not to reduce people and founders from underserved communities to their own experiences: seeing each person individually and supporting them on the path they choose.

7.3 From networking to alliances

What are good practices to develop alliances on all levels (local, state-wide and national) to support access to funding and support for founders from underserved communities?
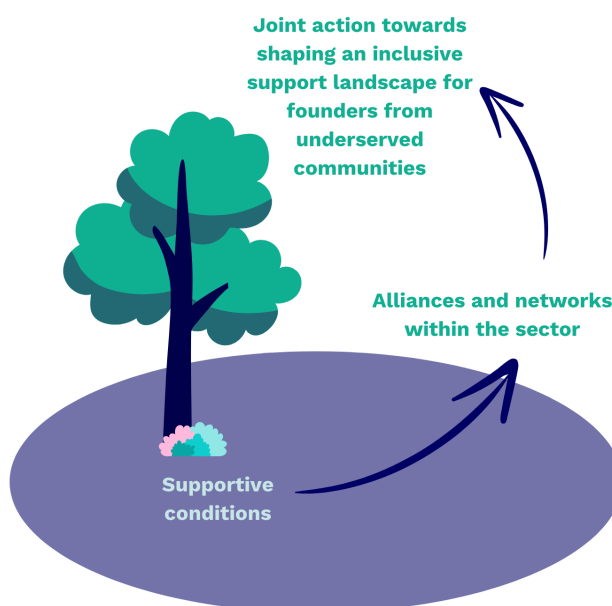
This pathway indicates how partnerships can be formed to advance the mission of an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector - integrating the local, regional and national level.

"From networking to alliances" is the most difficult pathway to describe with data, as attributions are difficult to make, e.g. how a networking event contributed to new partnership projects or influenced a policy. The impact logic to operationalise and explore the guiding question and pathway is that the programme enabled **alliances and networks within the sector** to foster an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector in Germany. Those alliances then led to **joint action towards shaping an inclusive support landscape for founders from underserved communities**.

Key systemic enablers

Founders from underserved communities faced multiple **structural challenges** throughout the programme period. Examples are legal limitations due to refugee status, lack of investor interest or fear to engage with public institutions. It was also mentioned by both funding partners and founders that many of the available public support programmes don't fit the needs and ideas of people from underserved communities.

Therefore, the following systemic enablers support access to funding and support for founders from underserved communities:

1. **Advocating for inclusive funding offers and Integration with official institutions**
2. **Using available funding offers to strengthen the existing ecosystem**
3. **Harmonising support: Aligning offers with the entrepreneurial ecosystem**

1. Advocating for inclusive funding offers and integration with official institutions

Sensitising individuals in official institutions to the potential of people from underserved communities becoming founders can be effectively achieved through direct encounters where these individuals are presented in strong, empowered roles. This approach helps to break down stereotypes, foster understanding, and highlight the capabilities and entrepreneurial spirit of underserved communities

One of the funding partners successfully integrated with official institutions by organising interviews and exchange formats that involved potential and successful founders alongside employees of the economic development agency. These initiatives facilitated direct interactions and exchanges between the founders from underserved communities and representatives from official institutions. This approach proved promising, as it avoided a confrontational stance and instead fostered **collaboration and mutual understanding** by actively involving established players in meaningful dialogue and firsthand experiences with underserved communities.

An additional mechanism can be to offer guidance and support in the development phase of new funding offers. Ideally, such support offers are done by people from underserved communities and financially compensated. This can support the uptake of offers and provide new ideas to public institutions and funders. The regional hubs can serve as a point of contact for institutions and coordinate the exchange with people from underserved communities.

2. Using available funding offers to strengthen the existing ecosystem

Emp:our now brought together already existing actors and provided a frame and motivation to join forces. Similar activities can be done with other funding offers, both on local, regional and national level. This requires, however, a convening organisation.

The theme of Google.org's Social Innovation Fund was particularly to empower people from underserved communities. The strategy to convene existing organisations can, nonetheless, also be applied to other funding programmes that don't have that specific focus. The approach could then be to **make a funding programme accessible to intermediaries reaching people from underserved communities**, and providing guidance on how to (jointly) apply.

This would have the additional effect that funding partners and intermediaries can identify how best to integrate their work within the wider ecosystem, as this builds the necessary framework to support their participants. Programmes like emp:our now offer support infrastructure for funding partners, enabling them to develop their internal processes that will then cascade to founders from underserved communities.

It is crucial to **keep the administrative effort as low as possible**. Feedback has highlighted the simplicity and ease of working with SEND during emp:our now. One funding partner stated that "the flexibility and low bureaucracy is crucial for a small organisation. The informal report is also a huge relief, as we can identify the most important points at our discretion."

3. Harmonising support: Aligning offers with the entrepreneurial ecosystem

Collaboration with existing support programmes and other organisations can significantly enhance the effectiveness of founding initiatives. The goal is to actively reach participants through a combination of channels and approaches, guiding them to resources even when one's own organisation is not the primary provider. Acting as a connector between networks, funding partners can ensure founders receive comprehensive support from a wide range of sources.

This is a demonstrated need, showcased by a programme participant who valued "the opportunity to connect with a diverse and influential network of mentors, advisors, and fellow entrepreneurs." Creating this **web of support for founders** ensures that, even after a programme concludes, participants can continue their entrepreneurial journey. This is made possible through the new partnerships they have built and access to comprehensive resources that extend beyond what the organisation can offer during the programme.

This integration can help bridge gaps, ensuring that participants receive well-rounded assistance that addresses various aspects of their entrepreneurial journey. Creating synergies with other programmes can also lead to shared learning, resource optimization, and a stronger, more resilient support infrastructure for underserved communities.

It's important to mention that spaces such as the Meta-Actor Network are crucial to convene the ecosystem, create connections and identify synergies between organisations and support offers. **This convening role requires time, energy and resourcing**. To create an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector requires this role, also called backbone organisation within the Collective Impact approach, to be filled. This can be done mostly by one well-placed and trusted organisation, or a small group of organisations working closely together.

More about this pathway

As written above, this pathway is the most challenging to assess with data from the programme itself, and attributions are difficult to make. Nonetheless, it's crucial from a systemic perspective to create spaces for networking and exchange, and move towards alliances and joint action to support access of founders from underserved communities to support programmes and offers.

To shine light on this pathway, the following two themes are explored:

- Alliances and networks formed within the sector
- Joint action towards an inclusive funding & support landscape

Alliances and networks formed within sector

Emp:our now was intentionally set up for consortia to apply, while also allowing individual applications. To support the process, SEND organised information and matching calls, and many of the incoming applications were by more than one organisation. This is also reflected in four out of the five selected projects being consortia. The Multi-Actor Network provided an additional platform for organisations to get together, have access to training offers and exchange.

Funding partners of emp:our now then had the chance to collaborate over 18 months on average. At least three out of the five projects led to follow-up projects set up and implemented in partnership. This indicates a perceived value of forming alliances with other organisations.

Actively supporting this process of partnership building is crucial. One key aspect was the availability of funding, which enabled organisations to develop partnership-based ideas and implement them. Another support factor was SEND's role to support the funding partners throughout the entire programme. Over the programme period, **SEND held at least 68 meetings with partners**. This was essential in building trust, understanding the challenges of actors and being able to advise and support.

Joint action towards an inclusive funding and support landscape

The entire programme with emp:our now, regional clusters and the Meta-Actor Network can be seen as joint action towards an inclusive funding and support landscape. This section therefore provides an overview of activities that either emerged out of the programme itself or can be seen as general opportunities for shaping an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector in Germany.

One example of the continuation is **Impact Hub Berlin's Empower Now community** and support programme. Emp:our now made it possible to develop different ideas such as a cohort-based support programme, an advisory board and active community. A partnership with Tiktok Germany now enables Impact Hub Berlin to continue their activities.

An example outside of this programme where SEND convened actors is the **DATIpilot initiative** of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). The information and matching calls hosted by SEND enabled actors within the sector to understand their eligibility and connect with others - which was a requirement for non-academic institutions. A challenge, however, was that SEND did not have any allocated budget to further support organisations during the application process.

The model to resource organisations for network and alliance building, as was the case in the Social Innovation Fund, is promising. Looking ahead, the **national strategy of the German government for social innovation and enterprises for the common good** can be seen as an opportunity to bring those experiences and insights into action. The funding offer "Nachhaltig Wirken'' is specifically addressed to ecosystem building organisations. And it can be seen as a vital change to encourage founders from underserved communities to apply and bring topics of diversity, equity and inclusion into companies.

8. Conclusion

Receiving Google.org's financial support from the Social Innovation Fund provided an enormous opportunity for SEND, the funding partners and the entire social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Germany.

This report laid out **what was achieved**: 498 people from underserved communities empowered in dedicated programmes, more than 2,300 people reached in public events and more than 92,000 through SEND's social media channels alone. Beyond visibility and general reach, the programme brought actors together, enabled new communities to be initiated and laid the foundations for follow-up projects.

Through the programme it was also possible to show the need for and interest in shaping an inclusive social entrepreneurship sector. Here, the support programmes funded through emp:our now can be seen as a crucial enabler. Moving forward, it requires the **commitment of all actors**: public and private, individuals, small organisations and large institutions.

With a systemic approach and perspective, much can be achieved in the coming 3-5 years. Key ingredients for lasting change and true inclusion will be to:

- **Build on existing knowledge and initiatives, and create visibility for founders from underserved communities,**

- **Reflect on power dynamics within our organisations and the sector as such, and adjust funding mechanisms to be more trust-based, long-term and flexible,**

- **Make use of funding opportunities such as Nachhaltig Wirken to convene and support organisations to apply.**

In the 20th legislative period in Germany (2021 - 2025), the government released a national strategy for social innovation and enterprises for the common good. This

sent a strong signal that social entrepreneurship is a viable approach to addressing the challenges of our time. At the start of the current 21st legislative period in Germany, it is unclear how the strategy will be continued. An inclusive social entrepreneurship sector should not be seen as a goal in the far future, but a **precondition to achieve results.** The different chapters lay out the enormous potential, motivation and perspectives founders from underserved communities bring with them. It is vital that this potential is utilised and that the new government declare their commitment to social entrepreneurship with explicit emphasis on inclusivity.

Yet along with the potential, this report also made the challenges visible that founders from underserved communities face - from financial insecurity to multiple commitments and a lack of integration with official institutions and structures. Directly addressing these challenges is key, and we are all responsible for creating the conditions that encourage everyone with the desire to become social entrepreneurs.

In the beginning, the report laid out different narratives it is embedded into. Now **it's time to shape our own narrative**: jointly creating a thriving and diverse social entrepreneurship sector in Germany that is capable of addressing challenges such as the climate crisis or renewing democracy. We all play a part in this narrative.

For any inquiries and questions, thoughts and reflections, ideas and collaborative aspirations, please do not hesitate to reach out to SEND e.V.: info@send-ev.de

Annex

Project-related resources

To read more about Google.org's Social Innovation Fund and the emp:our now program, have a look at:

- The official website of Google.org describing the Social Innovation Fund to support the European social economy:
  https://blog.google/around-the-globe/google-europe/20-million-to-support-the-european-social-economy/
- The emp:our now programme description on SEND's website:
  https://www.send-ev.de/projekte-items/empour-now/
- The Multi-actor Network (MAN) website:
  https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.send-ev.de/projekte-items/meta-akteursnetzwerk/

Curious to learn more about diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in the context of social entrepreneurship? The following overview provides insights into the work of funding partners and supported people from underserved communities, as well as related resources on the topic.

Websites of funding partners and funded projects
- Zusammen leben e.V. (zukunft+)
  https://zlev.de/arbeit-qualifikation#zukunftplus
- Migrafrica (WirkungsStart)
  https://www.migrafrica.org/2022/12/10/wirkungsstart-sozial-gruenden-leicht-gemacht/
- BIWOC* Rising (Brave Spaces 2.0): https://bravespaces.de/
- founded: https://www.wellfounded.de/
- Impact Hub Berlin (Empower Now):
  https://berlin.impacthub.net/program/empower-now/

Further links and resources

- Handbook of WirkungsStart "Soziale Gründungen für alle öffnen"? https://usercontent.one/wp/www.migrafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/wirkungsstart-handbuch_19022023-digital-1.pdf?media=1704281538

- A shoutout to Josephine Apraku and Dr. Hedda Ofoole Knoll as phenomenal trainers on DEIB.

- Links and examples of Impact Hub Berlin
  - DEI advisory board: https://berlin.impacthub.net/blog/introducing-impact-hub-berlins-diversity-equity-inclusion-advisory-board/
  - Empower Now programme participants: https://berlin.impacthub.net/program/empower-now/
  - Cocomoino as part of the Gift Guides: https://berlin.impacthub.net/blog/gifts-with-impact-sustainable-g

- Podcast "TMA ist Deutschlands erster Accelerator für Founder mit Migrationshintergrund (EXIST • BIPOC)": https://www.startbase.de/mediathek/startup-insider/tma-ist-deutschlands-erster-accelerator-d070266e80/

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Good practices and further resources

This section includes concepts, examples and good practices from around the world in shaping inclusive systems.

Collective Impact Approach

The collective impact approach brings people together in a structured way to achieve social change. It's centred around five conditions or guiding principles, namely:

1. Common agenda
2. Establishing shared measurement
3. Fostering mutually reinforcing activities
4. Encouraging continuous communications
5. Having a strong backbone organisation ([Collective Impact Forum](#)).

A resource to learn more about the approach is the overview from the "Community Toolbox" on Collective Impact:
https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/overview/models-for-community-health-and-development/collective-impact/main

Social Labs Approach

Social labs are "collaborative interventions that bring together diverse stakeholders to address complex societal and systemic challenges". ([ReosPartners](#)) The term goes back to Zaid Hassan's book "The Social Labs Revolution: A New Approach to Solving our Most Complex Challenges".

Social labs therefore drive political engagement and systemic change by tackling complex issues like poverty, sustainability, ageing, and radicalisation. They provide real-life settings for experiments to understand and address root causes, turning political will into actionable transformation of systems. Unlike focus groups, social labs emphasise diverse cooperation over expertise and require only shared experiences and a commitment to change. Their three-phase approach involves:

- Discussion and Diagnosis: Diverse participants examine current practices and collaboratively identify clear goals.

- Design and Implementation: Participants co-design pilot actions or interventions.
- Reflection and Feedback: Participants reflect on outcomes and overall experiences. (Shanley et al., 2021)

Regenerative Evaluation

Regenerative Evaluation is an emerging approach and lens in the field of impact evaluation. It's centred around two principles, namely:

1. Holism: valuing both inner and less visible dimensions (such as resilience, trust) as well as outer dimensions, and highlighting the importance of supportive conditions for systemic change.
2. Regeneration: the practice of measurement and evaluation gives more energy than it takes for all actors involved (e.g. in the form of additional insights, trust, clarity and pathways for shared action)

You can read more about the approach on Unity Effect's website and join the community of practice:
https://www.unityeffect.net/resources/community-of-practice-on-regenerative-evaluation

On Our Own Terms (Australia)

In Australia, there is an increase in involving people with lived experience in social sector change, especially those of historical and contemporary exclusion and marginalisation. The "On Our Own Terms" project in partnership with RMIT University has discovered some key insights (RMIT, 2023):

- **Tokenism without supportive structures**: Meaningful lived experience leadership requires practices and systems that are fit for purpose.
- **Palatability politics:** Systems have limited capacity for embracing difference and views which are considered 'radical' are not always welcomed.

- **Power and leadership:** Lived experience leaders work with and transform their own power and power within systems in order to bring about positive change for their communities

Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL)

North America's Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) is a global research centre working to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence. Leveraging their expertise in researching racial equity, J-PAL offers three key insights on centering lived experience in the research process (J-PAL, 2023):

- **Research and Policymaking Inclusion:** Often, people with relevant lived experience are excluded from research and policymaking. Including them can improve the relevance and impact of research by incorporating diverse, firsthand knowledge.
- **Ethical Research Practices:** Centering lived experience in research enhances ethical practices by addressing power imbalances and ensuring participants are respected and benefit from the study. This approach fosters trust and equitable treatment.
- **Practical Guidance for Researchers:** Define relevant lived experiences, recruit and support partners with lived experience, actively engage them throughout the process, ensure diverse representation, secure funding to compensate them, and share ownership of the research outcomes.

For these reasons, it is important to seek out the entrepreneurial communities and make genuine offers to meet up, have conversations and learn from each other. By creating these opportunities, stakeholders can collectively deepen their understanding of the challenges faced by founders and collaboratively explore innovative processes that address their unique needs and aspirations. This approach not only builds trust but also cultivates a supportive ecosystem where diverse perspectives are valued and celebrated, ultimately leading to more inclusive and impactful initiatives.