



TEDEN SREDOZEMSKJE OBALE
IN MAKROREGIONALNIH
STRATEGIJ

MEDITERRANEAN COAST
AND MACRO-REGIONAL
STRATEGIES WEEK

Izola, Slovenija
15. – 17. september 2025

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Empowering Young Entrepreneurs in Europe: What They Face and What They Need

Europe faces major challenges: economic inequality, migration pressures, and environmental risks such as climate change and biodiversity loss. Geopolitical tensions, security threats, cyberattacks, an aging population, and rapid technological change further demand innovation and policy adaptation. We need strong, competitive and responsible Europe and Macro-Regional Strategies offer the potential to address and confront these challenges by fostering regional collaboration, innovation, and economic growth. Across EUSAIR, EUSALP, EUSDR, and EUSBSR, entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in driving progress, with young people at the forefront of shaping this future. Yet, their journeys are marked by structural obstacles that require policy attention.

This document presents insights from young founders who participated in the panel discussion titled "Young Minds, Solutions for Europe – Voices from EU MRS Youth Council Members" during the Mediterranean Coast and Macro-Regional Strategies Week 2025, held in Izola, Slovenia, on 16 September 2025. It focuses on the challenges they encountered and the types of support they believe would make Europe more entrepreneurial, competitive, and socially responsible.

As a very young founder, **Elias Arndt** struggled to gain credibility and to identify the right decision-makers within companies—two barriers that slowed his startup's progress. To overcome such obstacles, he emphasizes the need for accessible mentoring resources that support prototype and product development, as well as cross-border initiatives that open collaboration opportunities. He also points to the importance of startup competitions and funding challenges that not only provide financial support but also help build visibility and networks. Finally, Arndt highlights the value of modern digital tools, such as ChatGPT, which can accelerate coding, brainstorming, and writing, allowing young entrepreneurs to compete more effectively.

~ **Elias Arndt, Founder of contags**

As a young entrepreneur from Slovenia, **Lana Rakovec** highlights the hurdles she faced in turning her idea into a viable business. Limited access to early-stage funding and grants in her region made it difficult to secure the resources needed to begin, while gaining credibility with established global players was an uphill battle for someone just starting out. Lana stresses that what would make a difference for founders like her are stage-appropriate grants and pre-seed investment tools that recognize the unique challenges of the earliest phases. To be able to apply to grants, businesses must be incorporated, and in Slovenia, founding a company comes with significant recurring monthly costs, which are a heavy burden for someone still validating an idea without revenue. To truly empower young entrepreneurs with innovative ideas, she



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urges policymakers to introduce a startup-friendly business type that lowers the barriers to incorporation and makes it easier to experiment and grow. She also calls for accessible prototype testing labs, affordable working spaces for young teams, and sector-specific accelerators—support structures that could empower Slovenian and other European startups to grow with confidence and compete in innovation on the global stage.

~ **Lana Rakovec, Founder of Peak Beats**

Pejo Bosnić, co-founder of the soon-to-launch mobile application Lipa, faces significant challenges as a young entrepreneur in Europe. Building a startup with limited resources has proven difficult, as developing a robust and user-friendly app requires considerable technical and design expertise. Together with his co-founder, he has relied on their own skills, tools, and experience to minimize costs and retain full ownership, deliberately avoiding the need to trade equity for funding. However, operating on a restricted budget makes it especially challenging to break into highly competitive markets. Pejo advocates for greater accessibility to grants and accelerator programs that do not demand majority equity, enabling founders to maintain control over their vision. He also stresses the importance of practical mentorship from fintech and edtech experts, the reduction of bureaucratic hurdles, and lower initial investment costs. According to him, young entrepreneurs often operate at a loss in the early stages and are frequently excluded from EU and similar funding opportunities. To build a more inclusive and innovation-friendly ecosystem, he calls for stronger support from local communities, national economies, and private capital. He emphasizes that entrepreneurs who mentor others should be both motivated and recognized, as this creates a positive cycle of guidance and innovation.

~ **Pejo Bosnić, Co-Founder of Verdia (Lipa) & EASTok**

As a young founder of CRCL, **Tommaso Barbesino** has experienced firsthand how difficult it is to secure the financial resources needed to develop sustainable products and projects. Beyond funding, he points out the challenge of engaging young people, many of whom remain distant from environmental issues, making it harder to build momentum for change. Limited access to cross-border networks and international opportunities further restricts the growth potential of initiatives like his. Tommaso stresses that what would truly help youth-led ventures is dedicated funding for green startups, combined with mentorship to strengthen both entrepreneurial and strategic skills. He also calls for stronger cross-border collaborations with institutions and businesses—particularly within the EUSALP region—as well as initiatives that involve schools and universities directly, ensuring that more young people can connect with sustainability efforts and see entrepreneurship as a meaningful path forward.

~ **Tommaso Barbesino, Founder of CRCL**



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Key Takeaways for Policy Makers

1. **Access to Funding:** Young entrepreneurs face consistent difficulties in early-stage financing, particularly in avoiding loss of control over their companies. Tailored grants and pre-seed instruments are essential. Special funds dedicated to youth and entrepreneurial learning processes are necessary, and should be linked to the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) post-2027.
2. **Credibility & Networks:** Youth often lack access to decision-makers, mentors, and international networks. EU and regional programs should facilitate credibility-building and cross-border ecosystems.
3. **Infrastructure for Innovation:** Testing labs, co-working spaces, and accelerators are often missing at the right stage. Providing these earlier would accelerate scaling.

The future of Europe depends on its ability to activate the potential of young entrepreneurs. Their experiences highlight where EU and macro-regional strategies must adapt—by providing smarter funding instruments, creating stronger innovation ecosystems, and enabling meaningful cross-border collaboration. By acting now, Europe can remain **united, ambitious, competitive, and socially responsible**—with its young people at the forefront of shaping a resilient future.



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