CASE STUDY

Perspectives from Sweden

This case study informs a broader initiative by Investing and Partnering with Youth for Peace (IPYP) seeking to explore how youth-led organisations engage with private-sector actors to advance peacebuilding and social cohesion in diverse contexts. Drawing on case studies from across Latin America, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, Sweden and the United States, the project identifies common partnership models, enabling factors, challenges and lessons learned emerging from youth–private sector collaboration. Across the cases, the research highlights the importance of sustainable partnerships, locally grounded approaches, trust-building and moving beyond transactional funding towards genuine co-creation.

This case study is based on semi-structured interviews conducted in 2025 with representatives from four Swedish civil society organisations, complemented by a multi-stakeholder workshop that brought together representatives from youth-led and civil society organisations and private-sector actors.

Context

Sweden provides a useful perspective on youth–private sector engagement in a comparatively stable institutional context. The transposition of the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) into national law, requiring large companies to report on environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance, human rights and anti-corruption measures, further strengthened this position. However, this enabling environment does not automatically translate into meaningful partnerships with civil society. Youth-led and youth-focused organisations continue to face barriers to private sector engagement, and gaps remain in developing long-term, equitable and youth-centred partnerships.

Although children and youth rank among the leading causes supported through philanthropic giving in Sweden, corporate engagement remains largely financial. At the same time, some businesses are already exploring these broader forms of engagement, offering examples of how partnerships can move beyond financial support towards shared expertise, co-creation and mutual benefit.



Exploring approaches to youth–private partnerships

The organisations consulted in Sweden demonstrate that private-sector engagement can take multiple forms beyond traditional funding. These include flexible grant-making, mentorship and employee volunteering, access to professional networks, and non-financial partnerships based on platform-sharing and communication. Across these models, private-sector actors can contribute resources and capabilities that youth organisations may struggle to access independently.

TOGETHER in Södertälje

The long-running partnership between War Child Sweden, Scania and Södertälje Municipality illustrates this broader potential. Through the TOGETHER programme, Scania provides employee mentorship and access to professional environments alongside financial and in-kind support for young people newly arrived to Sweden who are transitioning into adulthood. Mentors support participants with career planning, developing CVs, and navigating everyday life in Sweden. The involvement of Södertälje Municipality strengthens the programme's local anchoring and legitimacy in a community where Scania is a major employer, while also helping to reduce risks for private-sector engagement. Sustained through multiple renewal cycles over eight years, the partnership has increasingly involved young people in shaping the programme and has since been replicated in other contexts, including Colombia and Brazil.

War Child Sweden's collaboration with Scania shows how public, private and civil society actors can work together to support young people. Södertälje Municipality strengthened local anchoring and helped mitigate risks, while Scania saw value in supporting a safer community, strengthening employee engagement and contributing to a potential future workforce.

In its partnership with KFUM (part of the global YMCA and YWCA movements), Skandia, through its foundation Idéer för livet, provided flexible, trust-based funding, as well as access to networks and learning spaces. This support helped capture experiences, methods and concrete examples of how KFUM's local associations contribute to safety, trust and long-term prevention among children and young people in Sweden.
Tik Tok and Dagens Industri supported the National Council of Swedish Children and Youth (LSU) providing platforms to amplify youth voices, expand outreach and contribute to public debate. Fryshuset partnered with Spotify, combining financial support with employee expertise, engaging young people in music programmes and masterclasses while enabling them to shape the collaboration based on the skills and expertise most relevant to them.

Together, these cases show that there is no single model for private-sector engagement: partnerships must reflect organisational needs, capacities and priorities.

Results

Across these examples in Sweden, private-sector partnerships have:

- Expanded opportunities for young people through mentorship, career guidance, skills development and exposure to professional environments;
- Provided non-financial value through professional networks, communication platforms, expertise and increased visibility;
- Enabled greater flexibility and continuity, with some private partners offering more adaptable timelines and reporting arrangements than traditional public funding mechanisms;
- Supported youth autonomy and participation, particularly where partnerships are based on clear value exchange and young people have opportunities to influence their design and implementation; and
- Strengthened cross-sector learning, exposing companies to youth realities, while connecting civil society with resources and networks beyond the non-profit sector.

Key challenges in engaging with private-sector actors

Despite these benefits, organisations identified persistent challenges:

- **Mismatch between corporate expectations and youth realities.** Private-sector partners may prioritise employability, innovation and measurable short-term outcomes, while overlooking longer-term social and structural barriers affecting young people.
- **Difficulty demonstrating long-term impact.** Outcomes such as belonging, trust and social cohesion develop gradually and can be difficult to capture through conventional reporting frameworks.
- **Power asymmetries and risks to autonomy.** Financial dependency and unclear value exchange can create imbalanced relationships. Youth washing can arise when brand visibility or reputational benefits take precedence over meaningful youth impact.
- **Operational demands.** Mentorship and employee-volunteering programmes require considerable coordination, staff time and resources, which corporate partners may underestimate.

Key lessons looking ahead

Experiences in Sweden suggest that the main challenge in this context is not finding private-sector actors with whom to partner, but ensuring that the partnerships responds to young people's needs while protecting organisational authonomy and creating value for both sides. The examples examined suggest that private-sector engagement is moving beyond financial support to include mentorship, professional networks, expertise, communication platforms and other resources that young people may struggle to access independently.

As in other contexts examined by the wider study, young people continue to face barriers to networks, opportunities and decision-making spaces, as well as unequal power dynamics in relationships with funders and partners. Meaningful partnerships therefore require co-creation, youth participation and organisational autonomy, alongside value alignment, trust, clearly defined roles and long-term commitment. They also depend on creating reciprocal value for young people, youth organisations and private-sector partners.

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