

PARTNERING^{FOR}IMPACT

NEWSLETTER JULY 2026



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Dear readers,

As NEF approaches its 50th anniversary in 2027, this is a moment to celebrate what we have built together: dozens of projects incubated and supported over the years in the field of social cohesion and democracy across Europe; hundreds of foundations mobilised upstream to support field-building, alongside an even greater number of NGOs and other influential actors engaged downstream as grantee partners. Over time, NEF has worked continuously to strengthen the conditions surrounding its collaborative funds and to expand its thought leadership in collaborative funding and regranteeing capacity.

Intermediaries like NEF play an increasingly vital role in today's philanthropic landscape. The sharp reduction in government funding worldwide is leaving a gap that no single foundation can fill alone - and mounting challenges to our democracies, civic space, and multilateral solidarity make it more necessary than ever to pool our strengths and resources.

As part of its next chapter, NEF will continue to foster mutual support between foundations, projects, and grantee partners, while cultivating a culture of learning and adaptation. The case for collaborative philanthropy has never been stronger.

This edition highlights the European Fund for the Balkans (EFB), one of our longest-standing initiatives. While Europe faces growing pressure on its democratic foundations, EFB's mission - strengthening democracy, peace, and regional solidarity while affirming the Western Balkans' role in addressing Europe's shared challenges -

feels more urgent than ever.

Last May, our 2026 Collaborative Day brought our network together around donor learning. In a funding environment that demands greater accountability and adaptability, strengthening knowledge and know-how on how to engage with funders is essential - especially as donor profiles become more diverse, along with their expectations and needs.

Below, you will find updates from across our collaborative projects. As always, we welcome your reflections.

Warm regards,

Peggy Saïller

NEF Executive Director

Highlights- - - - -



Pictures of the NEF Collaborative Day in May 2026

Donors learning: reflections from our 2026 Collaborative Day

This year's Collaborative Day, held on 12 May 2026 in Brussels, tackled a question at the heart of NEF's work: what does funder learning within a collaborative actually look like, what enables it, and how can it be intentionally supported?

Working with Isis Krause of Philanthropy Together, participants co-developed a Funder Engagement & Learning Framework - a practical tool purpose-built for collaborative funds. Built around three levels of funder transformation - personal mindset shifts, institutional change, and field-level impact, it offers both a common language and a clear roadmap. Whether a fund is just starting out or looking to go deeper, the framework helps teams evaluate their engagement approaches against intended outcomes and set realistic objectives accordingly. A key takeaway: rather than multiplying initiatives, funds should identify the few approaches that are genuinely moving the needle, and invest in those. The framework is designed to serve the wider philanthropic community well beyond this room.

The day also included a guest session on engaging high net worth individual donors - a growing area of interest as collaborative funds look to diversify beyond institutional philanthropy. Cultivating these relationships calls for clear-eyed preparation: the time and relational investment is considerable, but the potential rewards are significant.

Across the day, one theme recurred: as the donor landscape evolves, so must the ways collaborative funds learn, engage, and grow alongside their funders.

Opening a new chapter for the European Fund for the Balkans



Veton Zekolli - Executive Director of the European Fund for the Balkans

The European Fund for the Balkans (EFB) is a unique organization in the Western Balkans landscape – a distinctive regional platform dedicated to supporting democratic transformation, regional cooperation, and European integration from a genuinely regional, independent perspective. As it approaches its 20th anniversary, it has become a trusted platform connecting local realities with European policy debates and actors.

Since September 2025, as Executive Director, I have had the privilege of contributing to EFB's work to build bridges across societies, institutions, and ideas.

What I have found upon joining is a strong, committed, and experienced team that

has recently been further strengthened and expanded, with a clear shared motivation to enhance the organization's impact. Going forward, our focus will be on further strengthening internal coherence and integration across EFB's work. While our programs have always been impactful and relevant, we are now working to ensure they are even more connected, mutually reinforcing, and aligned with a shared strategic direction. This is a natural step forward that builds on existing strengths and reflects a strong collective will to evolve further. In line with this direction, we will introduce a new system to better track change, strengthen a results-driven approach, and support evidence-based decision-making.

I will bring to this endeavor all the knowledge and experience I have gained through my work in governance, institutional reform, and international development, leading cross-sectoral programs from concept to implementation across international organizations and government institutions.

At its core, EFB remains committed to strengthening democracy, fostering regional cooperation, and supporting the European perspective of the Western Balkans. Looking ahead, our work will span different formats, including capacity development, policy dialogue, advocacy, and cultural exchange.

In times of change, our role as a connector and facilitator of dialogue is more important than ever. This strength lies not only in our mandate, but also in our credibility as a non-partisan platform that builds trust and enables meaningful exchange across the region.

Project Updates - - - - -

Alliance for Gender Equality in Europe

In April, the Alliance for Gender Equality published its annual Impact Report, proudly highlighting our impact, lessons learned and the work of our grantee partners. The report outlines how we chose ambition in a year of unprecedented pressures by increasing our philanthropic advocacy for more and better gender funding; adopting trust-based practices to meet the moment; supporting the resilience of grassroots organisations; and expanding access to rights and opportunities for marginalised communities when it mattered most.

On 30 June, the Alliance launched its Movement Strengthening Fund, with a call for proposals for €2.7 million. The fund will foster collaboration and solidarity within European intersectional and grassroots movements, so that they can collectively advance gender equality in Europe in the long-term.

Finally, the Alliance published the first-ever mapping of movements for gender equality across Europe. It pinpoints how civil society networks and movements make change and what kind of resourcing enables them to thrive.

Civitates

Civitates hosted its inaugural Forum in Bruges in March. Over the course of three days, the 150+ participants (grantee and foundation partners) held strategic

conversations, built new partnerships and engaged in a foresight exercise that explored how democracy in Europe might evolve over the next 15 years, including more challenging and fragmented futures. The message was clear: civil society and philanthropy must become more agile, more collaborative, and more willing to rethink existing models. This includes investing in grassroots organising, strengthening transnational solidarity, and preparing for scenarios where traditional structures and funding mechanisms may no longer hold.

Meanwhile, we are renewing 25 grantees across our three sub funds (civic power; tech and democracy; media) with a total of €3.5M this year. As a highlight, our special grant making programme "The Future of Europe" continues to support 7 organisations advocating for an increase in the AgoraEU budget (MFF) for the next 7 years, with a view of securing at least €8 billion for civic space, independent journalism and culture in the EU.

Our [2025 Annual Report](#) reflects on a year marked by growing urgency, but also by collective action and renewed solidarity.

European AI & Society Fund

In January, the European AI & Society Fund launched its new [five-year strategy](#) to break the stranglehold of tech corporations and reclaim the direction of AI so that it serves people, society and planet. We are exploring how to operationalise the strategy with a focus on two opportunities. First supporting the community of grantees focused on accountability to adapt to the changed political context; and second, addressing the narrative power that the tech industry wields.

The Fund's [2025 annual report](#) celebrates our grantees work holding governments and Big Tech to account for AI harms, in an increasingly hostile geopolitical context as US tech corporations lobby the EU to weaken its AI legislation.

We continue our regular funders' briefings. Firstly looking at how public interest organisations are [resisting European tech legislation rollbacks](#), and most recently exploring AI's climate impacts with a [focus on data centres](#). The next funders' briefing will be on children's rights and tech regulation.

The Alliance for Socially Engaged Arts

Earlier this year, the Alliance for Socially Engaged Arts launched its inaugural [Annual Report](#), capturing the momentum of its first year since its founding in 2025.

Alongside this, the Alliance published its [Stories of Impact](#) series, spotlighting its first cohort of Fellows and showcasing how socially engaged arts organisations across Europe are addressing pressing challenges, from climate change and migration to inequality and social division, through collaborative, community-driven approaches.

As EU priorities evolve and discussions around the next Multiannual Financial Framework shape future investment, the Alliance has strengthened its advocacy efforts by partnering with Culture Action Europe, engaging at EU level, and supporting six BEYOND Satellite events held across key regions earlier this spring.

On 9 July, the Alliance will host a [free webinar](#) to launch Constellations of Change, one of the most comprehensive mappings of socially engaged arts to date. The report

explores how organisations across Europe operate, the impact they create, and the pathways towards more connected and resilient futures.

EPIM

In April, EPIM and Migration Matters kicked off a new Community of Practice (CoP) on Narrative Change in Labour Mobility. This brought together 18 actors across Europe to explore why existing migration narratives are failing and how labour mobility reopens a stalled conversation across Europe.

In May, EPIM and MigAct co-organised the fourth CEE Network for Migration and Inclusion meeting in Prague, bringing together 40 practitioners to ask how civil society builds resilience when the political ground keeps shifting.

Later in May, EPIM and Philea organised two sessions at the Philea Forum in Copenhagen through the Migration and Belonging Network. The first explored how funders can move beyond seeing labour mobility as simply filling labour gaps to recognising migrants' contributions to climate, healthcare and food system change. The second session examined why migrant workers are rarely seen as active drivers of a just food transition.

Read EPIM's Annual Report 2025 [\[here\]](#)

Jafowa

JAFOWA now supports twelve projects led by farmers' organisations committed to the agroecological transition, six in Burkina Faso and six in Senegal. These projects directly involve about thirty local partner organisations and institutions, including NGOs, other farmers' organisations, vocational schools, decentralized state services, and local authorities.

Drawing on the rich experience of this community, the programme has organised four workshops during the first half of 2026 on the contribution of farmers' organisations to Sustainable Food Systems.

These exchanges, held in both countries and subsequently online, led to the development of an innovative method for characterizing the contribution of farmers' organisations to Sustainable Food Systems. The resulting will be further refined in the coming months for regular use by partner organizations and for integration within the programme's monitoring and evaluation systems.