

UniCredit Foundation renews partnerships with Teach For All and JA Europe to tackle Europe's growing education challenge

New three-year partnerships aim to reach hundreds of thousands of young people across Europe, backed by more than €16 million in investment, as OECD data highlight declining learning outcomes and persistent inequalities

Rome, 13 October 2026 – As Europe faces mounting challenges in equipping young people with the skills they need to thrive, UniCredit Foundation is renewing its partnerships with Teach For All and JA Europe, committing more than €16 million over the next three years, up from more than €14 million under the previous agreements, and expanding the reach of the programmes across Europe.

The renewals were announced during *Beyond Academic Performance. A European Dialogue on the Future of Education*, held at the Foreign Press Association in Rome and bringing together UniCredit Foundation, OECD, Teach For All and JA Europe, alongside education leaders and experts, including Andreas Schleicher, OECD Director for Education and Skills, to discuss the state of education in Europe and the action needed to equip the next generation for the future.

The announcement comes at a critical moment for European education. The latest OECD PISA 2025 results show that average performance across OECD countries has reached its lowest level ever recorded in science, reading and mathematics. Reading has experienced the steepest decline, falling by 28 points between 2015 and 2025, while mathematics declined by 22 points, equivalent to just over one year of learning.

But academic performance tells only part of the story. PISA 2025 also highlights the close relationship between students' sense of opportunity, growth mindset and academic resilience. Across OECD countries, nearly four out of five academically resilient students (those who succeed academically despite socio-economic disadvantage) report a growth mindset. More than seven in ten also believe their position in society can change over the course of their lives. While these associations do not establish causality, they point to the importance of creating learning environments that help young people develop not only knowledge and skills, but also the confidence, agency and belief in their own potential to overcome challenges and shape their future. This reinforces the value of approaches that look beyond academic attainment alone and invest in young people's broader development, particularly for those facing the greatest barriers to opportunity.

Technology is adding a further dimension to this challenge. Artificial intelligence is already becoming part of students' everyday learning, with 46% of students across OECD countries using AI chatbots at least weekly to support their learning. Yet PISA suggests that access to technology alone is not enough: how young people learn to use it, and whether they develop the skills and confidence to navigate a rapidly changing environment, will increasingly matter.

The OECD's *Education at a Glance 2026* adds another dimension, highlighting growing pressures on the teaching profession. Across OECD countries, 9.1% of primary and secondary teachers were not fully qualified in 2024/25, as education systems increasingly recruit staff without standard teaching qualifications to fill open positions. With 25% of secondary teachers aged 55 or older, these pressures could intensify as large numbers approach retirement. The report also points to the importance of factors beyond pay in attracting and retaining teachers, including school climate, professional autonomy and recognition of the profession.

"The evidence before us is clear: ensuring that every young person has access to a quality education, regardless of their background, is not only a social imperative, but an investment in Europe's future. At a time when technology is reshaping how we learn, work and participate in society, we need to make sure that no young person is left behind. Through UniCredit Foundation, we want to play our part by supporting organisations with the expertise, ambition and reach to create lasting change, helping the next generation develop not only the knowledge and skills they need, but also the confidence in their ability to learn, adapt and shape their own future", said **Andrea Orcel, Chairman of UniCredit Foundation and CEO of UniCredit.**

Turning evidence into action

Against this backdrop, UniCredit Foundation will invest more than **€16 million over the next three years** through its renewed partnerships with Teach For All and JA Europe, building on more than €14 million invested under the previous three-year agreements. The new phase will combine direct support for young people with investment in educators, mentoring, career readiness and stronger systems to measure long-term impact, while expanding the partnerships' geographical reach.

Teach For All will operate across eight countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia. While JA Europe will span 11: Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

The need for targeted action is particularly visible in some of the countries where the partnerships operate. In Bulgaria, for example, one of the countries supported through both partnerships, just 42% of 15-year-olds reached at least baseline proficiency in reading in PISA 2025, compared with an OECD average of 69%. The share of low-performing students in reading has increased by 17 percentage points since 2015.

The renewed partnerships build on three years of collaboration and significant reach across Europe. Over this period, Teach For All programmes supported by UniCredit Foundation reached more than 180,000 students across over 3,100 schools. Evidence from the partnership also points to outcomes that go beyond academic performance: 73% of students reported a highly positive learning experience, while students taught by Teach For All fellows demonstrated meaningful gains in social and emotional learning (wellbeing, agency, purpose and connectiveness). The partnership is also building a long-term pipeline of education leaders, with 86% of alumni continuing to work in education.

“Three years ago, we began this partnership with a shared belief that where a young person is born should never determine the opportunities they have to learn, lead and shape their future. What has stayed with me is how much can become possible when that belief is backed by sustained commitment and investment. This renewed partnership is not simply a continuation, it is an opportunity to go further, reaching more communities across Europe while investing in the educators, innovators and local leaders who are working to strengthen our public education systems. As well as learning more rigorously about what is working and what creates true, lasting change. For me, that combination of greater ambition, deeper community impact and a real commitment to evidence is what will allow us to contribute to educational change in 8 countries across Europe”, said **Andrea Pastorelli Head of Europe Region for Teach For All**

Through Re-Power Your Future, the partnership with JA Europe has reached more than 390,000 students and 5,900 schools over the past three years, with a deliberate focus on those facing the greatest barriers to education. 86% of participating schools are classified as being at high risk of dropout, while evidence from the programme points to impact beyond academic attainment: in Romania, a pilot randomised controlled trial found a 24% increase in school engagement among participating students, and 22% of students across the programme successfully developed a concrete entrepreneurial idea.

“Young people rarely leave school in a single day; they drift away when learning stops feeling relevant to their lives and future. The latest PISA results make clear that Europe must act earlier. At JA Europe, we see that hands-on learning, real-world challenges and an entrepreneurial mindset can re-engage students, strengthen their sense of belonging and help them believe in what they can achieve. Together with UniCredit Foundation, we are focusing on the areas where dropout risk is highest, turning proven experience into evidence and making early prevention standard practice across Europe,” said **Salvatore Nigro, CEO of JA Europe**.

The new phase significantly raises that ambition. Through Teach For All, the partnership aims to reach more than 220,000 new students, engage over 2,700 new schools and develop more than 2,300 Teaching Fellows and 5,400 alumni. Through JA Europe, it aims to deliver more than 500,000 additional learning experiences and reach over 2,000 additional schools. Both programmes will continue to be independently evaluated, reinforcing a shared focus on understanding not only how many young people are reached, but what changes as a result.

Together, the partnerships reflect UniCredit Foundation's ambition to translate the challenges highlighted by PISA and Education at a Glance 2026 into concrete action: addressing educational inequality through sustained investment in young people and in the educators, organisations and systems that can help them succeed.

About UniCredit Foundation:

UniCredit Foundation is the corporate foundation of UniCredit Group whose purpose is to unlock the potential of Europe's next generation. Its mission is to empower young people across Europe by creating equal opportunities in education and to support them in making their way in life and the professional world. The Foundation's initiatives aim at combating school drop-out, enhancing employability, encouraging university attainment and promoting study and research. The Foundation is committed to supporting communities in all countries where UniCredit Group operates.

About JA Europe

JA Europe is the largest and leading organisation in Europe dedicated to inspiring and preparing young people to succeed. For over 100 years, JA Worldwide has delivered hands-on, experiential learning in entrepreneurship, work readiness and financial health. In the last school year, the JA Europe network, active in over 40 countries, provided more than 7.5 million learning experiences for youth in online, in-person and blended formats, and delivered over 95,000 teaching experiences and 86,000 volunteering and mentoring experiences.

About Teach For All

Teach For All is a global network of 60+ independent, locally led organizations and a global organization united by a commitment to developing collective leadership to ensure all children can fulfill their potential. Each network partner recruits and develops promising leaders to teach in their nations' under-resourced schools and communities and, with this foundation, to work with others, inside and outside of education, towards a world where all children have the education, support, and opportunity to shape a better future.