

JA Bulgaria Communication on Engagement for 2021-2023

Statement of continued support to the UN Global Compact

23.12.2023



Dear stakeholders,

It is our pleasure and privilege to reaffirm the continuing support of Junior Achievement Bulgaria to the United Nations Global Compact and its Ten Principles in the areas of Human Rights, Labour, Environment and Anti-Corruption. This is our Communication on Engagement with the United Nations Global Compact. We welcome feedback on its contents.

In this Communication of Engagement, we describe the actions that our organization has taken to support the UN Global Compact and its Principles as suggested for an organization like ours. We also commit to sharing this information with our stakeholders using our primary channels of communication.

With appreciation for all the good work you do for the betterment of our world,



Irina Ilieva

(Chief Executive Officer)



Boni Bonev

(Chairman, Board of Directors)

Description of actions

Having been an official and avid supporter of the UNGC since 2015, JA Bulgaria has been applying and promoting the ten principles in all its activities in the fields of education, public policy, corporate partnerships, and elsewhere where we are active. We regularly conduct internal meetings, workshops, and trainings where the principles are often reintroduced and discussed among the members of our team and external guests, lecturers, facilitators. In our B2B communications – including pitching new partnerships, strategizing, and negotiating with organizations and institutions, training teachers, etc. – the ten principles are often established as common ground in finding joint ventures, mutual missions, common goals. We work with likeminded partners who share our philosophy in terms of principles in the areas of human rights, labor practices, environmental protection, and anti-corruption. In our public activities and communications, we proudly display our affiliation with the UNGC, and find our position and reputation that much stronger for it.

Our core activity is education. Through the educational programs we create and teach, we systematically instill the ten principles into the fertile minds of the thousands of students we reach and impact each year.

Actions to promote the UNGC and its principles

The organization's representatives have integrated the promotion the UNGC in their work processes:

- JA Bulgaria's Board Chairman and the CEO frequently emphasize the organization's commitment to the UNGC principles in public appearances, as well as during meetings and discussions with prospective business, NGO and public authorities' partners.
- Our support for the UNGC is prominent on the [homepage of our website](#) (the UNGC logo is incorporated). In a separate page ([Policies & Responsibility](#)) dedicated to JA Bulgaria's social responsibility credentials, our support for the UNGC is prominently addressed.
- The organization's affiliation with the UNGC is prominent in JA Bulgaria's general presentation and is a point of elaboration in all our initial meetings when introducing the organization to new partners.

Partnership projects promoting corporate sustainability

The essence of our approach is to forge partnerships between the corporate sector and educational institutions. To that end, JA Bulgaria is introducing the word and spirit of the UNGC principles in both directions. Some of the strongest corporate partnerships we have maintained over the years are with Coca Cola HBC, MetLife, and UniCredit. All those global conglomerates have very robust corporate sustainability codes, whether spelled out in their ESG policies or prompted by the world's fast transition to more humane and customer centric ways of doing business.

In collaborating with such partners, JA Bulgaria underscores its commitment – which is also the mandate of the 10 UNGC principles – to a responsible and sustainable

development. Those are the lessons we want to teach the young, we tell those corporations, and in turn they always respond with enthusiasm.

JA Bulgaria's partnership with Coca Cola HBC resulted in the Youth Empowered program. The program was launched in 2017. The need for such a program was evidenced in a UNICEF-conducted national study of Bulgarian youth which showed that one-fifth of them were not involved in either the educational, labor or welfare systems. Over the last two years the focus of Youth Empowered was the digitalization of educational content and teaching it via a blended learning model in order to minimize the environmental impact of producing and distributing massive quantities of textbooks and materials, as well as fostering a more interactive and practice-based learning process that would elevate the personal and business skills of high school students and raise the work skill level of Bulgarian youths.



WE BELIEVE THAT YOUTH IS OUR TOMORROW. THAT IS WHY WE INVEST IN YOUTH FOR A BETTER FUTURE



In 2017 we launched the Youth Empowered Programme with our partners from Junior Achievement Bulgaria. The Programme aims to reduce the number of economically inactive young people in Bulgaria. This includes all those who do not continue their education, are not looking for a job and are not even registered with employment offices, known as NEETs. More than 500 young people from seven Bulgarian cities will take part in the first edition of the Programme.



JA Bulgaria's collaboration with MetLife and several national banks results in empowering Bulgarian youths through financial literacy and work skills. Most young people in this country are totally dependent on adults (mostly their parents, in the best-case scenario), on welfare systems, or social institutions. It potentially leads to falling through the cracks of society, exploitation, discrimination, inequality. It hampers their education and their self-perception.

By providing them access to the expertise, advice, guidance of professionals in the fields of economics, personal finance, work readiness, JA's programs stimulate invaluable skills and competencies, provide role models and behavioral patterns that lift them out of dependencies and give them direction in life.

In the spirit of encouraging the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies, we started a new program, EcoUskoritel (EcoAccelerator). Its focus over the last two years has been the problem of plastic waste. It is a comprehensive program that continues over the course of the school year and involves teams of school children to invent business solutions to environmental problems and attempt to produce a working prototype of their product.



We have been presenting the program to our corporate partners and, understandably, they receive it with enthusiasm. We are looking for a long-term sponsor to support the project over the upcoming years, and we have a number of viable candidates. Businesses in Bulgaria are easily won over by such enterprises that make both business and social and educational sense. EcoAccelerator will be subject to incremental scaling up in the coming years.

Educational and training practices advanced by JA Bulgaria to promote the UNGC principles

The three main fields of education and training where JA specializes in are entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and work skills.

Over the last two years, within the entrepreneurship field we concentrated on three thematic divisions:

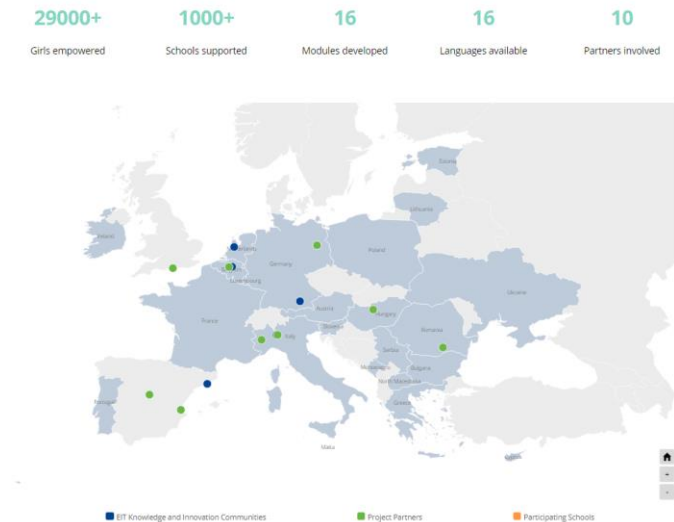
- Green entrepreneurship and circular economy
- Digital solutions for cities and communities
- STEAM entrepreneurship
- Culture and Sustainable Tourism

Within the framework of Green Entrepreneurship and Circular Economy, the participants in JA Bulgaria's educational programs develop solutions in sustainable agriculture, biodiversity preservation, and the transition from linear to circular economy. Part of this division is the Girls Go Circular project, the first digital content in Bulgaria for circular economy encouraging female entrepreneurship.



In our activities fighting discrimination and inequality, in 2023 JA Bulgaria participated in the EU-wide Girls Go Circular project. According to the European Commission's Women in Digital Scoreboard 2021, women represent only 41% of STEM graduates (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and 19% of ICT specialists.

Under the coordination of EIT Raw Materials, the Girls Go Circular project is doing its share in contributing to reducing the digital gender gap by empowering girls aged 14-19 in Europe to develop their digital and entrepreneurial competencies while acquiring knowledge on the circular economy.



JA Bulgaria implemented in this country the online learning platform developed in the framework of the project, the “Circular Learning Space.” It offers students the option of choosing between different learning modules on topics like e-waste, climate change, food, or robotics. These modules are based on a learning-by-doing approach, transferring knowledge and skills through an interactive, challenge-based structure.

Within the framework of Digital Solutions for Cities and Communities, the students and teachers work on alternative means of transportation, as well as high-tech and environmental solutions for cities and communities, in collaboration with the European Institute of Innovation and Technology.

Collaboration with UNICEF, 2022 – 2023 and beyond

UNICEF and Junior Achievement Europe launched a partnership to support young Ukrainian refugees across Europe. The partnership, called UPLIFT Youth, aims to equip the most vulnerable youth and adolescents who arrived from Ukraine to neighboring countries, with the skillset and mindset to build thriving communities. The local youths are also part of the project, to foster integration and social cohesion among young people, while also giving them a chance to transition from learning to earning.

By combining their expertise and experience, UNICEF and JA Europe aim at increased youth engagement, participation, and resilience, contributing to improved youth employability, a competitive labor force, sustained economic growth, improved governance, and vibrant civil societies in Europe.

With the invasion of the Russian army in 2022, all colleagues from JA Europe immediately started looking for solutions on ways to help, whom we could evacuate, what should be the first steps of assistance. JA Bulgaria led the initiative and, with the development of the project and the events, radically transformed the approach and impact of Uplift.

In the spirit of JA, we managed to support and empower children and young people at a turning point in their lives. It was a pleasure and privilege for us to include in our team two Ukrainian ladies, who continue to contribute to our work even beyond the duration of the project. With the tragic intervention of history, this project grew in its impact, including emotional support and alternative activities for youth to overcome trauma.

For the purposes of this collaboration, JA Bulgaria expanded the scope of its activities to facilitate the refugees' integration in the labor market of the country. Our colleagues worked not only with children and students following the JA model. In addition, we welcomed their parents, teachers, the Ukrainian organizations doing humanitarian work, and we involved all of them in an expanded tutorial process for the Bulgarian economy and labor market. We invited experts from our network to share knowledge, practices, legal framework that would allow the Ukrainian families to run away from their country to integrate smoothly into Bulgarian society.



Throughout 2023, several seminars, webinars, and open class sessions took place at the JA Bulgaria office or online, for the benefit of the entire refugee community. We saw it as an extension of our mission of inclusiveness, solidarity, and empowerment. We believe those activities contributed to shielding a vulnerable community from exploitation, corruption, and discrimination. The feedback we received from its beneficiaries has been tremendously satisfying, positive and gracious.

Initiatives with state and public institutions on the national level

As a pioneer in the field of financial literacy education in the country, JA Bulgaria has been acting as a host for Bulgaria of the Global Money Week - an annual financial awareness campaign built to inspire children and young people to learn about money matters, livelihoods, and entrepreneurship. Every year as a virtual host of the campaign, JA Bulgaria not only provides ideas, competitions, and materials to help initiate local small-scale financial literacy-related activities, but also serves as a bridge between schools and mentors from the private sector who engage in activities with young learners within the course of the week. During [Global Money Week 2023](#), Junior Achievement

Bulgaria, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education and Science along with partners organized high-level discussions, seminars, and other educational sessions.



JA Bulgaria is also an active member of the working group to the Ministry of Finance, working on the development and implementation of a National Strategy on Financial Literacy in partnership with the OECD and the Ministry of Finance of the Netherlands. In line with this work, in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science we initiated the first nationwide competition on financial literacy for high school students which became part of the nationwide competitions that are recognized for university entry. We engage representatives from our business partners as members of the national commission appointed for the purpose of the competition.

JA Bulgaria internal practices promoting UNGC principles

[JA Bulgaria's activities](#) have had seismic impact on the national educational landscape. In a country of 7 million citizens, our programs over the years have reached over 500,000 students, have trained over 12,000 teachers, and have provided over 25,000 hours of volunteer work.



That massive reach bears serious responsibility. The good practices we seek to foster with our partners apply doubly to our own internal processes and structures. JA Bulgaria has successfully passed ISO 9001:2015 certification for excellence in business standards. But even more importantly, in 2023 we adopted two very important documents concerning our work with minors.

As an educational institution – part of a global network and based on our 25+ years of practice in Bulgaria – we have been adhering to strict ethical standards in our interactions with children and young adults and have trained teachers and mentors accordingly. In 2023, we completed formal drafts of JA Bulgaria Children Safeguarding Policy and JA Bulgaria Ethical Behavior Code.

From the introductory passage of the Children Safeguarding Policy:

‘We at Junior Achievement Bulgaria believe that all forms of physical and sexual violence, exploitation, emotional abuse, or harassment are inexcusable and unacceptable. Any suspicion of such must be checked, registered and/or referred to the relevant responsible persons, institutions, and judicial authorities.

‘We are convinced that child protection represents both an organizational and a personal responsibility. That is why it is important for us that every one of our employees, partners or contractors is aware of their responsibility in working and communicating with children and young people, and that our task is to build a safe, secure, and stimulating environment in which children can grow and develop.

‘Junior Achievement Bulgaria is committed to implementing a child protection policy through the three pillars of protection – prevention, reporting and response.

‘Junior Achievement Bulgaria's child protection policy is based on the child protection standards of Keeping Children Safe, the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (as well as its protocols), the UN Statement on the elimination of sexual abuse and exploitation of children, and all other UN-related conventions, the national legislation of the Republic of Bulgaria and international good practices.’



Measurement of outcomes

The adequate measurement of outcomes is a crucial element in the delivery of each of our activities, including our support for the UNGC. We regularly keep track of basic metrics related to our educational programs/projects such as number of students, number of teachers, number of schools, cost of program delivery per student, number of real startups created, etc. We are also focused on measuring the impact of our programs through tools such as self-assessment pre- and post-tests and satisfaction surveys. We are committed to developing better ways of measuring more adequately the social impact of what we do in terms of mindset fostering, skills development, etc.