

Towards a stronger, more agile and more strategic backbone for the sector

Vision paper for Philea's mid-term strategic review

Proposal to the General Assembly, June 2025

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About this vision paper

At the mid-point of Philea's 5-year strategic framework, this paper sets out a path to ensure Philea as an organisation is strong enough, agile enough and strategic enough to carry out the ambitions set out in our 5-year strategic framework. The paper highlights progress so far, takes the pulse of members, and proposes four key pathways for the second half of the framework – and beyond – to enable Philea to better support philanthropy in meeting the unprecedented challenges facing Europe, and the world, today:

- Being clear on our positionality and role
- Connecting those for whom we bring most value
- Focusing on where we can add most value
- Setting up a funding model responsive to the challenges of our times

The paper includes a timeline for the consultation process with the full membership leading up to the 2026 General Assembly, and provides (in ANNEX) a set of “criteria for focus” while considering the way forward. It was developed based on:

- a listening tour held with members in February this year;
- a Governance & Strategy Retreat, held 3-5 March 2025 in Riga, where Philea's Board of Directors, Nominations and Governance Committee, and Executive Office gathered to reflect on the road ahead for the organisation;
- a review by the Advisory Committee;
- perspectives collected from the chairs and co-chairs of the Thematic Networks and Communities of Practice of Philea.

The vision paper is now presented to the General Assembly.

I. Philea's strategic objectives

Following the establishment of Philea in May 2022, an intensive consultation journey with the full membership led to the development of a 10-year vision and mission of the organisation, along with a clarification of our role and a 5-year strategic framework, all of which were adopted by the General Assembly in May 2023.

Vision, mission, role

Our vision is for philanthropy to use its full potential to co-shape and support a pluralistic, just and resilient society that centres people and planet. Our mission is to enable, encourage and empower the philanthropic community to build a better today and tomorrow.

Our role is to galvanise collective action and amplify the voice of European philanthropy. Together we:

- Co-create knowledge and learn from effective practices
- Collaborate around current and emerging issues
- Promote enabling environments for doing good

Strategic framework

Our 5-year strategic framework defines the overall orientation of the organisation along three impact priorities and two internal priorities:

Our impact priorities for 2023 – 2027:

- Building the community – We want members to have a sense of belonging to a mutually reinforcing community, and to come together around key agendas for people and planet
- Empowering the community – We want the community to generate collective action and impact, and we want Philea to be recognised as a reference centre for collective thought leadership
- Advocating for and connecting the sector – We want philanthropy to thrive in an enabling environment and be well connected to key partners

Our internal priorities 2023 – 2027:

- Deepening & widening the membership – We want our membership to grow strategically, and to be more actively engaged in Philea so that we can capitalise on our collective pool of knowledge
- Strengthening our organisational capacity – We want Philea to be a caring, learning and resilient organisation, and we want our resources and ambitions to be aligned

II. 2,5 years down the line: How are we doing?

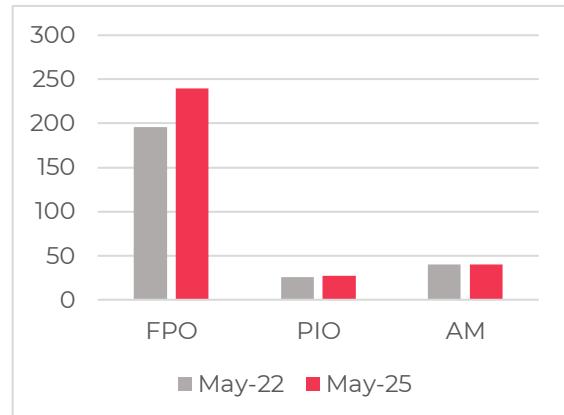
As part of the new set up for the organisation, we've made efforts to measure progress against the priorities defined in our strategic framework, as well as at a general level to capture member satisfaction with various metrics. Below are some highlights of progress at this midway point in our strategic framework. Further details on activities under each priority can be found in the 2022, 2023 and 2024 editions of our [Year in Review](#).

Growth in membership

Since 2022, Philea has grown its membership. We've seen around a 22% increase in the category of Foundations and Philanthropic Organisations (FPO).

In the Philanthropy Infrastructure Organisation (PIO) category, which by its nature has a smaller potential for growth, we've seen continued engagement of the original PIO members from 2022.

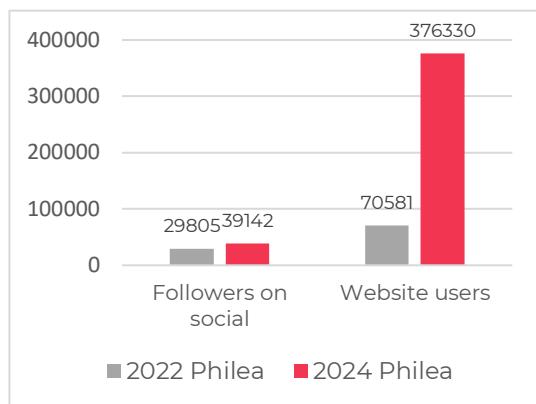
Fewer Associate Members (AM) have been onboarded, which stems from a recent decision by the NGC to adopt a more thoughtful and intentional approach to the approval of new members in this category.¹



¹ The figures shown in the membership growth graph take into account the deduction in the end of 2024 of a group of "dormant" members. While they were still included in the 2022 members count, these organisations were no longer engaging with Philea, nor paying their annual dues.

Growth in visibility

Since the creation of Philea, there has been a gradual and consistent increase in visibility, reach and engagement based on our strong brand. In 2024, we counted 5,694 subscribers to our newsletter with an above benchmark opening rate. Our virtual library "IssueLab" counted 38,296 views.



Satisfaction of our members

Annual membership satisfaction surveys² show that Philea is, overall, on a good track, with 84% of the responding PIOS and 88% of FPOs expressing satisfaction or strong satisfaction. Responding AM shared an overall lower level of satisfaction.

In addition to the annual surveys, we also capture data through evaluation forms after each event, which help us learn more about our community needs. The average ratings for events throughout 2024 show positive results:

- Learning opportunities at, 4.1/5
- Level of engagement at, 4.1/5
- Feeling of inclusivity at, 4.4/5
- Relevance of networking opportunities at, 90%

A core thread in these points of measure is that Philea's membership is diverse, and that members value different things. A striking illustration of this are the responses on advocacy: Some members consider it to be the most valuable thing we do, while an equal number of members see advocacy as the least valuable.

We can, however, draw some overarching conclusions:

What members appreciate more

- FPOs value Philea for its rich networking opportunities and diverse community. They appreciate connecting with other foundations, sharing best practices, and engaging in Philea's thematic priorities, which offer focused discussions. They feel that Philea's strategic guidance and insights into sector trends support better funding and decision-making.
- PIOS highlight the importance of community and knowledge sharing. They rely on Philea to stay updated on policy developments at all levels and value the connections with peers facing similar challenges. They appreciate Philea's inclusive, human-centred approach and its unifying role in the sector, as well as the diversity and connectivity it fosters.
- AMs are especially drawn to events that connect them with key philanthropic actors.

What members appreciate less

- FPOs are concerned about inclusivity, particularly the under-representation of smaller members and those from central and eastern Europe.
- PIOS find some thematic and normative discussions less relevant and would prefer more focus on policy, legislative and operational matters.
- AMs feel limited in their engagement, with core activities favouring funders over implementers. They want more opportunities to contribute their expertise and engage in meaningful dialogue.

² From 2024, based on 54 responses: 42 from FPOs, 6 from PIOS and 6 from Associate Members.

Limitations of our complex and rigid internal set-up

Beyond the feedback captured through these measurement points, members are increasingly sharing concerns about the complexity of the funding model of the organisation, and questioning whether it is still fit for purpose. While the overall budget of Philea has grown over the past years to increase the sustainability of the organisation, the model itself is constraining, confusing for members, resource heavy in terms of administration and challenging for the staff.³

The rigidity of the funding model furthermore limits the ability of Philea to respond to emerging issues, to invest in strategic priorities for the sector, and to strengthen the organisational development of Philea. In short, the funding model is hindering the organisation's ability to realise the ambitions set out by members in Philea's strategic framework.

III. Are we equipped to deliver on the challenges of our time?

Since the establishment of Philea and the launch of the strategic framework, we've witnessed important changes in European and global contexts, particularly around our cross-cutting themes:

- **Climate:** 2024 was the first time ever for the earth's average temperature to climb beyond 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The climate crisis affects everything philanthropy does, and every community philanthropy cares about.
- **Democracy:** The health of democracy has been on a steady downward spiral since at least 2007 globally. In Europe, too, democratic backsliding is rapidly accelerating, including in some of the continent's traditional democratic strongholds. With democracy more and more under threat, so is the space for philanthropy. In the US as well as in the EU, the freedoms to give, associate, set up foundations, express values, contribute to the common good – considered a cornerstone of civic life – are all increasingly under attack.
- **Equality:** Between 2006 and 2021, the share of people living below the poverty line increased in two-thirds of EU countries. The cost-of-living crisis has further deepened this divide: In 2022, 44% of those in the bottom income decile struggled to make ends meet, compared to just 3% in the top decile. Over the past months, serious attacks have been mounting on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programmes around the world.

Recent geopolitical changes, including the dismantling of USAID, cuts in ODA by European governments, and threats to transatlantic collaboration, seriously aggravate these issues. The polycrisis affects partners and grantees in unprecedented ways, and many philanthropic organisations are called upon to make difficult, urgent, complex and ethically challenging decisions.

While more philanthropic engagement and resources are needed, the sector itself is, at the same time, under growing scrutiny, with criticism faced from both the traditionally conservative and progressive sides of the political and social spectrum. Within increasingly polarised societies,

³ For reference: Philea's complex funding model is essentially based on:

- Membership fees covering a minimum set-up secretariat
- Earmarked funding partially covered by members engaging in activities, initiatives, communities and networks tailored specifically to their needs and interests
- Core funding used primarily to fill gaps related to the minimum set-up secretariat, and for resources needed to deliver on the specific and tailored activities, initiatives, communities and networks which are not covering real costs.

After covering the basic set up and full costs of the member-led initiatives, networks and communities, approx. 3% of the total annual budget remains available for any and all contingencies; emerging issue or priority; or unplanned strategic priorities.

philanthropy nevertheless remains one of the sectors able to build bridges, forge conversations and help restore a social contract. It can help create common ground, foster connection and rekindle much needed dialogue.

More than ever, the environment within which philanthropy operates calls for a strong, agile and strategic backbone for the sector, and Philea is asked by its community to play the role it was set up to deliver on. To be strategic means to be responsive to the external environment in which we operate as well as to proactively identify risks and opportunities on the horizon. It requires us to be focused and to invest limited resources where they can have most value. It invites us to learn from each other across the various corners of Europe, based on a sense of shared solidarity around our common space.

In these challenging and uncertain times, members are meanwhile increasingly realising the value and potential of infrastructure in the face of political and societal transformations. A growing number of members are transforming their funding practices towards more flexible, longer-term core support, recognising the role of funding organisational development in enabling processes toward mission achievement and system change. Increasingly, members are calling for this kind of funding not only for their own programmes, but also for their own infrastructure bodies, as a response to the rapidly and substantially changing context in which philanthropy operates.

More than ever, Philea needs to be equipped to respond to the challenges of our times.

IV. Making Philea more fit for an uncertain future

While Philea's overall orientation as outlined in the strategic framework still holds, a number of adjustments, confirmations and clarifications are needed to live up to the challenges of our time:

1. Being clear on our positionality and role

As a community of diverse organisations, what drives us is the vision we share of philanthropy's role in co-shaping and supporting pluralistic, just and resilient societies that centre people and planet. However, rather than being an activist organisation – which puts us at risk of creating further polarisation and hostility – Philea chooses to be an organisation that brings together diverse opinions and views.

While celebrating a plurality of perspectives, our role is to enable, encourage and empower the philanthropic community in playing its role, including around climate, democracy and equality. Amid our diversity, we share a responsibility to use our resources to tackle today's complex societal and planetary challenges, and to build a future grounded in fairness, inclusion and resilience. Thus, our vision and values serve together as a strong compass for our work and set the boundaries within which we embrace this plurality. We stand together courageously to safeguard these values.

While we celebrate philanthropy for the contributions it can make for civil society, Philea is recognised as the only actor which specifically connects and represents the European philanthropy sector at large. We wish to work with others who represent other parts of the system and invest our limited resources where we add most value.

We are, first and foremost, a European actor. While we bring together organisations that work beyond the European continent, our sphere of action and influence is first and foremost at the European level. Here as well we wish to collaborate with representatives of the various levels of the philanthropic sector by investing our limited resources where we can add the most value.

ACTION POINTS:

- Develop a narrative that helps guide the tone and intentions of our work, based on our values and with a bridging rather than activist approach.
- Gear efforts to focus primarily on philanthropy (e.g. its role, environment, capabilities, etc.), while working with those better placed to lead in other areas, e.g. representing civil society at large.
- Be the voice for philanthropy at European level, bringing our specific knowledge, perspective and position, while working with those better placed to lead in other areas, e.g. working with international bodies such as the UN, and other actors/areas at global or national level.
- Strengthen collaboration with infrastructure partners, including WINGS, Impact Europe and others, so each can maximise the impact of their own distinct role.

2. Our membership: Connecting those for whom we bring most value

In line with the above, Philea chooses to take a “broad tent” approach to its community. The contours of this broad tent are, however, firmly defined by the values and vision we share. As Philea, we wish to bring together members who believe in the core values of, i.a. solidarity, the rule of law, freedom, pluralism and equality. At the same time, we do see value in bridging together those who – within these boundaries – bring different perspectives and play different roles.

While recognising the many shapes and forms of philanthropy in Europe, Philea understands that it adds most value to those (FPOs) who “use their private resources for the public good”. Equally important players in the broader ecosystem, and in particular the more traditional grantseeking/fundraising NGOs, benefit less from what Philea has to offer.

Philea understands that philanthropy is an ever-evolving sector. In the decades ahead, the world will see the biggest ever transfer of wealth, and new forms of giving and generosity are on the horizon.

With democracies being at stake in Europe, we understand that organisations from different regions have ever more to learn from each other, and that **solidarity between members from northern and western European countries with members from central and eastern European countries** – many of which are advanced in understanding what democratic resilience looks like – is crucial.

In all areas of work, we benefit from working closely with our PIOs and building on their capacity to scale up and scale in.

ACTION POINTS:

- Approaching membership development in a way that continues to seek diversity of FPO members (including in terms of positionality), while keeping the door closed to “dark money” or those actors who do not fit within the boundaries of our fundamental values.
- Apply for EU funds to create more engagement with CEE (done), and consider setting up a European solidarity fund to allow more engagement from and connection with CEE representatives.
- Leverage the potential of PIOs in everything we do.
- For the category of AM:
 - Refrain from onboarding traditional grantseeking/fundraising NGOs, who could be offered other opportunities to engage with our community than paid membership

- fees (e.g. being expert speakers at events, visibility through Transnational Giving Europe network, etc.).
- o Explore new forms of philanthropy as possible members of our community.

3. Focusing on where we can add most value

As we face a multitude of interconnected challenges, we need to strengthen our ability to focus, investing our limited resources towards the most strategic issues for the sector, and towards those issues for which we as Philea are best placed to respond – using the specific skillsets, capabilities and tools we hold. Overwhelmed by a multitude of needs and confronted with global chaos, we are currently stretched too thinly to consistently deliver the depth and level of quality needed.

Currently, decisions over priorities for the organisation are highly decentralised, being spread over a multitude of separate programmes, initiatives, communities and networks connected to an even larger multitude of members with individual expectations, priorities and needs. What's needed is collectively owned clarity to "do less better" and what that looks like.

ACTION POINT:

- Towards 2026 – insofar as the funding model allows – start focusing the work based on a set of "criteria for focus, available in the ANNEX.

4. Setting up a funding model responsive to the challenges of our times

Philea inherited its funding model from its predecessor organisations. Two and a half years into our strategic plan, mindful of what is at stake today, we wish to **take the last leap forward to create a strong, agile and strategic organisation**. This will require us to review our funding model, which currently leaves us fragmented and ill-equipped to be strategic; to respond to the unfolding reality of our times; and to invest in a timely manner in that which serves the collective beyond the transactional needs defined by sometimes individual members or smaller groups of members with specific needs.

ACTION POINTS:

- Start a collaborative process of benchmarking, building scenarios, putting forward propositions, and engaging stakeholders to imagine a new funding model for Philea.
- At the General Assembly of 2026: Endorse the new funding model, and launch a 2.0 version of Philea, completing the ambition of the convergence to create a strong, agile and strategic backbone for the sector.

V. Process timeline

2025

February 2025	Listening tour: Board & NGC conduct interviews with diverse Philea members
3–5 March	Strategic retreat: 2.5 days with Board, NGC, and Executive Office
20 March	Advisory Committee feedback & discussion on retreat outcomes
April	Secretariat develops first draft of vision paper
30 April	Board reviews and gives feedback on draft
13 May	Discussion with Philea Ambassadors (Networks & Communities) on draft

June	Final vision paper proposed by Board to General Assembly
Summer '25	Set up governance task force for process – start benchmarking funding models, agreeing on design principles for new model, creating scenarios & developing members' consultation plan
Autumn '25	Pilot opportunities to focus activities more strategically ahead of work plan

2026

Q1 2026	Initiate plan for European solidarity mechanism
Spring 2026	Safeguard funds to support contingency to new funding model
AGA 2026	Vote on plan for new funding model Philea

VI. ANNEX: Criteria for focus

Strategic focus and impact

- Our work and efforts centre around philanthropy, the roles it plays and the unique space it holds. By building and strengthening philanthropy, we add the most value to those whom our sector serves. Our work connects to the philanthropic toolbox and practices or to the cross-cutting themes.
- We prioritise efforts that have a potential for impact at the level of the broader ecosystem, rather than focusing on work that benefits single members. Philea's impact is however understood as being indirect: Our impact as a convener occurs when our members learn, change practices, strengthen their abilities and collaborate with each other, so they can better deliver for the partners, grantees and communities they serve.
- We prioritise working at scale rather than serving individual needs, and we prioritise efforts that can be replicated for broader reach. Scalability and reach can be achieved by making resources and formats available for larger groups of members, and by working with our PIOs.
- We strive to apply a systems lens to our work, and favour working with activities that allow us to reflect the complexity and interconnectedness of issues.

European dimension and positioning

- We add most value when working at the European level, understanding Europe as defined by the CoE. This means that we respect, partner and collaborate with actors at national level as well as those at global level, but rely on others (i.e. WINGS at global level, PIOs at national level) to lead.
- We consider our work based on whether we are best and/or uniquely placed to serve. We are not the only actor in the ecosystem that represents foundations or philanthropic organisations, and we are certainly not the only organisation that represents civil society at large. We invest in our relationships with partners and contribute by leveraging our unique capabilities of convening a broad range of philanthropic actors; and enabling change through peer exchanges, collaborations, learning, knowledge building and representation. When others have more expertise or tools to deliver, we act accordingly.

Quality, adaptability and sustainability

- Our work is knowledge based and knowledge generating. We collect and share evidence and knowledge, and make sure knowledge and evidence drive our work.
- Every activity planned or initiated is undertaken with a predefined moment to reflect, reorient or wind down. Exit strategies are part of our planning process, so that we can avoid sustaining activities that have run their course.
- We only embark on an activity, initiative or project if we are organisationally equipped to deliver high-level quality. This means true costs must be calculated and covered, so that we are able to have staff time, expertise and other resources on board to deliver the quality we need.
- We consider costs and benefits. Activities that drain resources and deliver little benefit are not carried forward.

Application of these criteria

Relevant workstreams

In applying these principles, the following workstreams would be considered as relevant (NB: this list is not exhaustive):

- Efforts related specifically to the enabling environment, focusing on the European level. At global level we support WINGS, at national level we share knowledge with and empower our members.
- Spaces and formats for members to connect and engage through peer learning, collaboration and sharing (focused on toolbox and practices or on cross-cutting themes; connected uniquely to philanthropy; conceived in a way that allows us to scale and to generate knowledge; contributes to systemic approaches; and has the potential of sectoral impact). Our role remains one of inspiring and nudging, of shining a light on the best possible examples.
- Data gathering, analysis and sharing (focused on toolbox and practices or on cross-cutting themes; connected uniquely to philanthropy, etc. – see above).

In the longer term, consideration might be given to developing more direction towards what “good philanthropy” looks like, based on our values. Rather than re-inventing the wheel, models set up by ACF (Stronger Foundations) or WINGS (TPI) can help us create a stronger orientation for uniquely European philanthropy.

Areas to consider winding down or letting go of

- UNGA/COP type global engagements
- Issue-based advocacy
- Response to crises if not connected to European philanthropic space and potential European impact (narrow scope of interaction with context of crisis)
- Siloed networks that serve smaller cohort of members with no potential to scale
- Engagement on social economy outside of our enabling environment
- Inspirational activities for the sake of it

Areas to consider changing or transitioning in time to a more scalable/replicable form

- Individual boutique info requests
- Networks, communities and initiatives that do not find traction with a relevant number of members or partners, or don't have sufficient potential for impact commensurate with the effort involved