

CASE STUDY

Asociación Conciencia, Argentina

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 learnt 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 interviews conducted in 2025 with Asociación Conciencia¹.

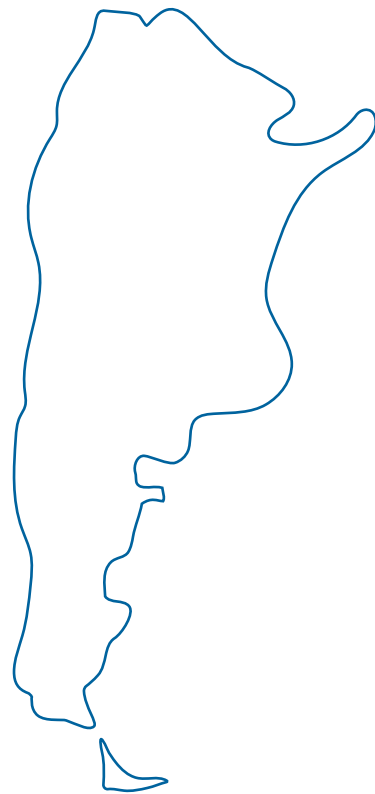
Context

In Argentina, recurring cycles of economic instability, institutional volatility — including frequent changes in government structures, youth-policy institutions and public funding priorities — and rising poverty and inequality levels have contributed to precarious livelihoods among the country's youth population. Approximately 7.5% of the economically active population (aged 14 and over) was unemployed in Argentina by the end of 2025, the highest fourth quarter reading since the COVID-19 pandemic.² These dynamics contribute to interrupted educational and employment pathways, making it difficult for many young people to complete their education and transition into stable livelihoods. While the country has not experienced any recent armed conflicts, the country faces challenges in sustaining social cohesion and democratic participation amid economic and sociopolitical uncertainty. Recent fiscal austerity measures and institutional restructuring have for example increased pressure on civil society organisations (CSOs) to find new ways to sustain their work.

Asociación Conciencia and their engagement with the private sector

Asociación Conciencia, a CSO founded in 1982 during Argentina's democratic transition, has developed a multi-dimensional approach to youth development focused on supporting the completion of secondary education, enhancing employability and fostering civic participation and democratic leadership. The organisation has built collaborative partnerships with companies and public actors in which partners contribute expertise and networks, in addition to financial support, and become co-designers and -implementers of projects. This approach contributes to the long-term sustainability of these initiatives.

One example of this type of partnership is *El Agua en Debate*, an initiative jointly developed with three companies: Agua y



Saneamientos Argentinos (AySA), the public water and sanitation service in Buenos Aires; Sinteplast/Silent, a water piping company; and Rotoplas, a water storage company. The initiative adapted Asociación Conciencia's interschool debate methodology to engage youth in discussions around water governance, pollution, industrial development and household consumption. Through iterative planning meetings, partners collectively designed locally-grounded debate topics connected to territorial realities, including industrial pollution in the Río Reconquista and water tariff systems. The debates were intended to strengthen civic participation and democratic dialogue by enabling young people to research competing policy perspectives, engage with complex public issues and develop informed positions on challenges affecting their communities. For private-sector partners, the initiative provided an opportunity to engage with community perspectives and contribute to the co-design of locally-relevant responses to water-related challenges.

The organisation also incorporated practical learning components within *El Agua en Debate*. In some cases, technical secondary schools complemented debate preparation with basic water-quality analysis, allowing students to connect public policy discussions with applied environmental knowledge. The project prioritised schools located in municipalities connected to each company's territorial presence, including areas near Rotoplas' operations, strengthening local legitimacy and reducing coordination barriers. Asociación Conciencia describes its interventions as 'micro-public policies', combining theory-of-change frameworks with mixed-method evaluation systems to maintain accountability and long-term partner confidence.

Exploring approaches to youth-private partnerships

Asociación Conciencia has developed partnerships in which

companies are not only donors, but also active collaborators in designing and implementing projects that aim to advance youth civic engagement and social development. Through these partnerships, companies contribute funding, technical expertise, networks and contacts in the various territories, as well as operational support.

At the same time, the organisation applies explicit ethical and reputational safeguards when selecting partners, recognising that sustainability depends not only on financial support, but also on maintaining public trust and organisational legitimacy. Once partnerships are established, Asociación Conciencia places particular emphasis on continuous communication, partner engagement, transparent accountability and the generation of qualitative and quantitative evidence of impact. These practices help sustain long-term relationships while ensuring that partnerships remain aligned with the organisation's mission and values.

Results

Over the past 5 years, the organisation has:

- Established sustained partnerships with companies operating in the water and employment sector;
- Created collaborative spaces where companies, schools, and communities jointly explore local environmental and development challenges;
- Strengthened youth participation, civic engagement and educational trajectories through peer-learning methodologies;
- Strengthened monitoring, evaluation and accountability systems, enabling the organisation to meet partner requirements while generating evidence to sustain long-term collaborations;
- Developed project models — such as *El Agua en Debate* — conceived as 'micro-public policies' or local initiatives designed to address public challenges while generating evidence and lessons for broader policy discussions.

Key challenges in engaging with private-sector actors

Despite its overall engagement with the private sector described as positive in terms of impact in local communities and project implementation, Asociación Conciencia identified several challenges associated with sustaining long-term engagement with private-sector partners while operating in a context of economic and institutional uncertainty:

- Maintaining the technical and administrative standards required by corporate partners can be difficult. The organisation noted that fulfilling reporting, monitoring, compliance and accountability requirements can be resource-intensive, requiring dedicated staff, systems and organisational capacity.
- Economic instability affected both participating communities and partner institutions, creating uncertainty around long-term planning and project continuity and making it more difficult to sustain engagement over time.
- While long-term corporate partnerships provided important support, reliance on just a few sponsors could create vulnerabilities if corporate priorities, budgets or leadership changed.

- Managing reputational risks and ensuring ethical alignment with private-sector partners. The organisation emphasised the importance of working with partners whose values and practices align with project objectives, while maintaining transparency and public trust.
- Institutional restructuring and shifting public priorities — including changes to national youth institutions and programmes — created uncertainty around coordination mechanisms, and the long-term continuity of youth policies.

Key lessons looking ahead

The experience of Asociación Conciencia contributes to the evidence that sustainable youth-private partnerships depend on strong organisational systems, governance and long-term trust-building rather than short-term philanthropy alone. In volatile institutional and economic contexts, organisations capable of maintaining technical rigour, accountability and evidence-based implementation are better positioned to sustain collaboration over time.

The case also highlights the importance of partnerships based on co-design and implementation and rooted in local realities and shared ownership. By combining youth participation, corporate engagement and public-interest objectives, initiatives such as *El Agua en Debate* illustrate how multi-sectoral collaboration can contribute to social cohesion while generating practical learning opportunities for young people. Asociación Conciencia aims to continue strengthening scalable partnership models capable of connecting youth development, civic participation and long-term institutional sustainability.

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- ¹ While researchers reached out to both youth-led organisations and private sector partners, private sector actors did not respond to interview requests. Findings therefore reflect the perspectives of youth-led organisations and peacebuilding actors only, which should be noted as a limitation of this study.
- ² Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INDEC) and Ministry of Economy, Argentina (EPH). Mercado de trabajo - Tasas e indicadores socioeconómicos (EPH): Cuarto trimestre de 2025. *Trabajo e ingresos* 10:3 (2026).