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| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document presents the key findings and policy recommendations emerging from the implementation of the Social Impact Manager (SIM) project. Drawing on research, curriculum development, pilot delivery in five European countries, and stakeholder consultation, it synthesises the main lessons learned regarding the development and institutionalisation of the Social Impact Manager professional profile.

The recommendations respond to structural gaps identified throughout the project's lifecycle, including skills mismatches in higher education, limited integration of ESG and CSR competences in mainstream curricula, weak cooperation between academia and business, and insufficient recognition of hybrid professional roles that link corporate strategy with community development. Insights were gathered through needs analyses, engagement with higher education institutions and VET providers, feedback from learners and businesses participating in the pilot phase, and transnational exchanges among consortium partners.

The policy recommendations target higher education institutions, VET providers, national policymakers and European-level decision-makers. They focus on embedding multidisciplinary ESG and social innovation competences into formal education systems, strengthening cross-sectoral partnerships, creating flexible and modular learning pathways, and ensuring long-term recognition and sustainability of the Social Impact Manager profile. Particular emphasis is placed on systemic measures at meso and macro levels, including curriculum reform, accreditation mechanisms, incentives for university–business–community cooperation, and alignment with European sustainability and regulatory frameworks.

Overall, the document outlines a coherent set of strategic actions designed to support the emergence of Social Impact Managers as key actors in advancing corporate responsibility, local development and community resilience. By translating pilot experience into concrete policy guidance, it contributes to the broader objective of fostering a more sustainable, inclusive and socially responsible European economy.

01

Introduction



01 | INTRODUCTION

Businesses across Europe are under growing pressure to reconcile economic performance with social responsibility and environmental sustainability. At the same time, many companies – particularly small and medium-sized enterprises – lack professionals who can strategically connect corporate objectives with the needs of local communities. This gap represents a missed opportunity to strengthen social cohesion, foster inclusive growth and enhance long-term competitiveness.

The Social Impact Manager (SIM) project was created to respond to this challenge by developing a new hybrid professional profile: the Social Impact Manager. This profile combines multidisciplinary competences in corporate social responsibility (CSR), environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards, and social innovation, enabling businesses to integrate social impact into their core strategies. In line with key European policy frameworks – including the European Green Deal, Agenda 2030 and the evolving EU CSR/ESG regulatory framework – SIM supports the transition towards a more sustainable and inclusive economy by strengthening the link between business performance and community development.

Through co-operation between higher education institutions, vocational education and training (VET) providers and the business sector, the project designed, tested and refined an innovative educational model tailored to emerging labour market needs. The project followed a four-phase structure: an initial research and stakeholder engagement phase to identify competence gaps and local needs; a joint curriculum design phase; a pilot implementation phase in Austria, Croatia, Greece, France and Italy; and a final evaluation and exploitation phase focused on sustainability and transferability of results. This structured approach ensured that the educational programme was both evidence-based and practically grounded.

During the implementation phase, the SIM educational programme was delivered and tested in real learning environments, building on prior research and curriculum development. The results generated practical insights into how Social Impact Managers can operate as intermediaries between companies, educational institutions and communities. The evaluation findings now provide a solid foundation for scaling up and embedding the profile at European level.

The SIM consortium brings together 14 partners from seven European countries, including universities, consulting firms, business associations and civil society organisations. This broad partnership has ensured transnational relevance, quality assurance and strong stakeholder engagement throughout the project lifecycle. By establishing a recognisable and sustainable European profile for Social Impact Managers, the SIM project contributes to strengthening corporate social responsibility practices, enhancing local resilience and supporting the transition to a more socially inclusive and environmentally responsible European economy.

02

Key Recommendations



02 | KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recognition of the Social Impact Manager profile**

Recognise and support the Social Impact Manager role in territorial ecosystems

Local, regional and national authorities should formally recognise and integrate the Social Impact Manager function within territorial development and social economy governance structures.

Institutionalise the Social Impact Manager as a defined organisational quality function

National and EU policymakers should promote the formal institutionalisation of the Social Impact Manager as a defined organisational role within CSR and ESG frameworks.

Develop an EU framework for SIM qualifications

The European Commission should integrate SIM competences into Europass and EQF frameworks and support cross-border pilot programmes.

- **Company-community-education co-operation**

Establish local SIM liaison services for SMEs

Regional or local authorities should establish or co-finance local SIM liaison functions that broker partnerships between SMEs and community actors.

Incentivise university–business–community cooperation for social impact

National and regional authorities should establish funding schemes and policy incentives that support structured, long-term cooperation between HEIs, companies and local communities.

Establish territorial coordination platforms for multi-stakeholder co-construction

Regional or national governing bodies should establish territorial coordination platforms to encourage the structured involvement of education providers, businesses, civil society organisations and public institutions.

- **Governance and stakeholder involvement**

Formalise NGOs and local representatives role in companies' governance

Accredited SIM programmes should establish multi-stakeholder governance boards, including representatives from local companies and NGOs.

- **Education system integration**

Map and systematise similar EU social impact training programmes before scaling

National and EU policymakers should conduct structured mapping and comparative analysis of social impact, ESG and CSR training programmes prior to large-scale replication of SIM.

Incorporate corporate incentive literacy into SIM training

HEIs and VET providers delivering SIM programmes should incorporate structured modules on fiscal, regulatory and strategic incentives shaping corporate CSR and ESG engagement.

Develop differentiated SIM learning pathways for students and professionals

HEIs, VET providers and accreditation bodies should formally establish two structured SIM learning pathways for students and professionals.

Formally recognise and embed the SIM profile within national education and training systems

National Ministries of Education and accreditation bodies should introduce the SIM profile into national HE and VET qualification frameworks.

- **ESG policy integration**

Integrate structured company–community cooperation into ESG and sustainability policy frameworks

National and EU policymakers should formally recognise structured company–community cooperation within ESG, sustainability and innovation policy frameworks.

03

Policy Recommendations



03 | SIM POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The SIM policy recommendations are organised across several thematic headings reflecting the different governance levels and intervention areas addressed by the project. Together, these sections cover recognition of the SIM profile, education system integration, multi-stakeholder governance, territorial cooperation and ESG policy alignment, highlighting the complementary actions required to sustainably embed the Social Impact Manager role within European systems.

| RECOGNITION OF THE SOCIAL IMPACT MANAGER PROFILE

Recognise and support the Social Impact Manager role in territorial ecosystems (medium term)

Local, regional and national authorities should formally recognise and integrate the Social Impact Manager function within territorial development and social economy governance structures.

Territorial ecosystems lack structured intermediary roles capable of aligning economic, social and institutional actors. SIM piloting demonstrated that coordination functions significantly improve cooperation quality and stakeholder mobilisation. While many territories already perform SIM-like functions informally (e.g., territorial economic cooperation clusters, business clubs, municipal initiatives), these roles remain fragmented, underfunded, and poorly recognised in public policy frameworks. Without institutional recognition, social impact coordination relies on ad hoc initiatives.

Local, regional and national authorities should formally recognise the SIM role as a key intermediary between companies, social economy actors and public authorities. The SIM role should be integrated within local governance structures and territorial development strategies, and dedicated funding lines should be allocated to support SIM positions. Institutional recognition will strengthen stakeholder coordination, improve social innovation outcomes, and promote more sustainable and strategically aligned territorial development.

Institutionalise the Social Impact Manager as a defined organisational quality function (medium-long term)

National and EU policymakers should promote the formal institutionalisation of the Social Impact Manager as a defined organisational role within CSR and ESG frameworks.

In many organisations, social impact responsibilities are distributed informally across departments without clear mandates, accountability mechanisms or measurable objectives. SIM piloting demonstrated that when coordination is assigned to a defined role, CSR and ESG strategies become more coherent and structured. As a Social Impact Manager, the role is to move beyond communication-focused CSR by embedding strategic, multi-stakeholder collaboration, engaging local communities, NGOs, and service users in structured frameworks. This shifts CSR from a reputational tool to a driver of sustainable development, aligning initiatives with long-term social and environmental goals while creating shared value for all stakeholders. Companies participating in the pilot reported improved clarity, stronger stakeholder engagement and more consistent impact outcomes when responsibilities were centralised. The absence of a recognised organisational function risks limiting social impact to symbolic commitments rather than strategic implementation.

National and EU policymakers should support the formal recognition of the Social Impact Manager as a strategic

quality function within CSR and ESG frameworks, with defined competences and performance indicators. Promoting institutionalisation within organisational governance structures will strengthen measurable impact management, improve CSR and ESG implementation and enhance trust between companies and communities. Formal recognition will also increase labour-market visibility of the SIM profession and encourage companies to invest in structured social impact capacity-building.

Develop an EU framework for SIM qualifications (long term)

The European Commission should integrate SIM competences into Europass and EQF frameworks and support cross-border pilot programmes.

During piloting, learners developed relevant competences in social impact management and stakeholder engagement, but these are not clearly positioned within national frameworks. Although the SIM pilot implementation was successful in fostering cross-sector skills, the workshops highlighted a need for more permanent university–private sector links and new forms of education. However, as long as SIM programmes are not formally recognised by European higher education institutions and VET providers, SIM programmes will be offered on a pilot, extra-curricular or ad-hoc basis. This limits accreditation possibilities and reduces labour-market transparency. Moreover, despite proven demand from diverse stakeholders, varying national curricula limit the transferability of SIM programmes.

The European Commission should support integration of SIM competences into Europass and EQF structures and fund cross-border pilot programmes delivered by HEIs and VET providers. This will standardise a social impact profile in the EU, ensuring comparability of SIM competences across education and labour-market systems and ensuring alignment with Green Deal and sustainability objectives. For SIM learners, EU-level recognition will provide credibility and facilitate mobility within the EU. For employers, this will standardise CSR and ESG competences and support the employment of trained social impact professionals. EU-level recognition will reinforce credibility of the SIM profile and support its sustainable scaling across Member States.

| COMPANY-COMMUNITY-EDUCATION COOPERATION

Establish local SIM liaison services for SMEs (short term)

Regional or local authorities should establish or co-finance local SIM liaison functions that broker partnerships between SMEs and community actors.

Effective company–community cooperation is often hindered by limited coordination capacity, particularly among SMEs. SIM research indicates that while willingness to engage exists, cooperation is constrained by lack of time, resources and intermediary support. In the absence of structured brokerage mechanisms, partnerships remain fragmented and dependent on informal networks, limiting long-term impact.

Local or regional authorities should institutionalise SIM liaison functions within development agencies, incubators, chambers, or municipal departments. These intermediary functions will reduce transaction costs, build trust, improve access to funding opportunities and institutionalise company–community collaboration beyond ad hoc initiatives, thereby strengthening demand for SIM competences and enhancing territorial cooperation sustainability.

Incentivise university–business–community cooperation for social impact (short-medium term)

National and regional authorities should establish funding schemes and policy incentives that support structured, long-term cooperation between HEIs, companies and local communities.

University–business cooperation for social impact remains largely project-based and dependent on informal partnerships. SIM piloting demonstrated the value of cooperation schemes and company engagement activities, which enabled applied social impact projects and practical learning experiences for students in CSR and ESG. However, the absence of stable funding mechanisms and institutional frameworks limits continuity and scalability of such collaborations.

National and regional authorities should introduce dedicated funding instruments and policy incentives that support long-term cooperation between HEIs, companies and local communities, integrating SIM-type cooperation models into CSR, ESG and regional development strategies. Structured support will promote sustained cross-sector partnerships, strengthen territorial development, enhance CSR implementation, and ensure that students gain applied experience aligned with sustainability and labour-market priorities.

Establish territorial coordination platforms for multi-stakeholder co-construction (medium term)

Regional or national governing bodies should establish territorial coordination platforms to encourage the structured involvement of education providers, businesses, civil society organisations and public institutions.

Territorial construction initiatives are more likely to be representative of local needs if corporate and civil society stakeholders are engaged in development and implementation processes. SIM implementation revealed that cooperation between education systems, labour markets and civil society actors is often project-driven rather than embedded within stable territorial frameworks. SIM participants proposed partnership models involving municipalities, social enterprises, private companies, and civil society actors to strengthen inclusion and local development pathways. Stakeholders consistently emphasised the need for more coherent governance mechanisms to align local economic development and skills strategies.

Regional and national authorities should integrate territorial coordination platforms into employment, education and regional development strategies, supported by dedicated funding lines for co-construction projects. These platforms will facilitate systematic mapping of local needs, foster inclusive participation, promote citizen and civil society engagement in local development and education-economy linkages, and strengthen collective ownership of territorial sustainability initiatives. By embedding cooperation within governance structures, policymakers will enhance social cohesion, improve alignment between education and economic priorities and reinforce resilient territorial ecosystems.

| GOVERNANCE AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Formalise NGOs and local representatives role in companies' governance (medium term)

Accredited SIM programmes should establish multi-stakeholder governance boards, including representatives from local companies and NGOs.

Sustainable labour-market alignment requires structured stakeholder participation in training governance. During SIM piloting, companies and NGOs were engaged primarily at implementation level but were not systematically embedded in curriculum design or programme governance. This limited structural engagement decreased ownership and reduced continuity beyond the project phase. Given that the Social Impact Manager profile operates at the intersection of corporate ESG strategy and community development, SIM training must structurally reflect this hybrid positioning. Without formal representation of companies and NGOs in decision-making bodies, SIM risks becoming academically detached from labour-market evolution and territorial realities.

Accredited SIM programmes should create governance boards with defined decision-making roles for corporate and civil society representatives. These bodies should also conduct periodic joint assessments of labour-market needs and community challenges, allowing stakeholders to reach a shared diagnosis that informs learning outcomes, module updates, applied project selection, and evaluation processes. Embedding stakeholders structurally will enhance curriculum relevance, strengthen employability outcomes, and ensure long-term stability of business–community cooperation ecosystems.

| EDUCATION SYSTEM INTEGRATION

Map and systematise similar EU social impact training programmes before scaling (short-medium term)

National and EU policymakers should conduct structured mapping and comparative analysis of social impact, ESG and CSR training programmes prior to large-scale replication of SIM.

The European sustainability training landscape is diverse but fragmented, with programmes differing significantly in scope, governance and recognition levels. SIM piloting demonstrated strong added value in fostering cross-sector collaboration, hybrid impact management skills and territorial co-operation, yet its positioning within the broader European skills ecosystem requires clarification. Without a structured mapping and comparative assessment, scaling risks duplication, inefficiencies and limited institutional recognition. A comparative overview would support evidence-based policy development and strategic positioning.

National and EU authorities should commission structured mapping and benchmarking studies before large-scale institutionalisation or replication of impact management programmes. Before scaling SIM nationally or EU-wide, responsible authorities should: Commission a European mapping study of CSR, ESG and social impact management training programmes; Analyse governance models, qualification levels, target groups and labour market integration outcomes; Identify potential integration into existing EU frameworks; Develop a positioning strategy clarifying SIM's added value and distinctiveness. This process will identify complementarities, highlight gaps, avoid duplication and facilitate integration of SIM within existing EU frameworks such as EQF and micro-credentials. A systematised approach will strengthen institutional legitimacy, promote knowledge transfer and support coordinated European-level scaling.

Incorporate corporate incentive literacy into SIM training (short term)

HEIs and VET providers delivering SIM programmes should incorporate structured modules on fiscal, regulatory and strategic incentives shaping corporate CSR and ESG engagement.

Sustainable company engagement and cooperation schemes depend on alignment between social initiatives and

concrete business incentives. The SIM programme successfully adopted a bottom-up approach, paying attention to territorial needs and community challenges, and ensuring that co-operation schemes responded to local needs and resulted in meaningful engagement from companies. However, piloting revealed that participants lacked structured understanding of the fiscal, regulatory and strategic drivers influencing corporate decision-making. This includes fiscal incentives, public funding schemes, regulatory obligations (e.g. ESG reporting), procurement advantages or reputational benefits that influence corporate decision-making.

HEIs and VET providers implementing SIM programmes should incorporate structured modules on fiscal, regulatory and strategic incentives for CSR and ESG engagement. This should include fiscal incentives, ESG regulatory frameworks, public–private partnership mechanisms, social procurement tools and access to innovation funding. Learners should be trained to map business incentives alongside territorial needs, analyse economic and regulatory drivers influencing company engagement and be aware of evolving EU ESG regulation frameworks. Strengthening corporate incentive literacy will enable future Social Impact Managers to align territorial needs with business realities, enhance the sustainability of cooperation schemes, and support companies in embedding structured and measurable ESG strategies.

Develop differentiated SIM learning pathways for students and professionals (short term)

HEIs, VET providers and accreditation bodies should formally establish two structured SIM learning pathways for students and professionals.

University students and professionals have different needs and would benefit from differentiated pathways. The SIM piloting phase revealed two clearly learner profiles: undergraduate or recent graduate students seeking employability-oriented skills, and professionals interested in integrating impact management, ESG and community engagement into business practice. A unified curriculum structure does not fully address these differing expectations, levels of experience and professional objectives. Students require foundational knowledge, career orientation and practical exposure to real-world cases, while professionals require peer exchange and advanced strategic tools applicable within organisational contexts (e.g. advanced ESG strategy, corporate–community cooperation models, impact measurement tools and organisational change management).

HEIs and VET providers should design modular, stackable SIM curricula compatible with EU micro-credential frameworks that distinguish between entry-level and professional pathways. Accreditation bodies and national education authorities should recognise these differentiated tracks within existing qualification frameworks. Differentiated pathways will improve employability outcomes, enhance the effectiveness of professional upskilling, and ensure stronger alignment between SIM competences and labour-market demand.

Formally recognise and embed the SIM profile within national education and training systems (short-medium term)

National Ministries of Education, accreditation bodies, HEIs and VET providers should formally recognise the Social Impact Manager profile within national qualification frameworks and integrate SIM competences into accredited core curricula and training pathways.

The absence of formal recognition and curricular integration currently limits labour-market transparency and professional visibility of SIM competences. The SIM piloting phase demonstrated strong interest from learners and companies, yet participants reported difficulties positioning their qualification within existing frameworks and highlighted limited access to structured, recognised training pathways in CSR, ESG and community engagement. Employers confirmed the need for clearly defined competence standards in structured social impact and ESG roles.

The lack of accreditation of SIM programmes within national HE and VET frameworks results in a lack of recognition of SIM competences in students and professionals, and companies face difficulties hiring individuals with specific CSR knowledge. Long-term sustainability of SIM programmes and labour-market recognition are constrained, and time pressures and competing academic or professional commitments further limit participation when programmes are not institutionally embedded. Without accreditation, SIM programmes risk remaining peripheral and vulnerable to discontinuation.

National Ministries of Education and relevant accreditation bodies should introduce the SIM profile into national HE and VET qualification frameworks and support HEIs and VET providers in integrating SIM modules into core degree structures and accredited short courses. Formal accreditation of SIM qualifications will allow HE/VET systems to offer updated sustainability-oriented programmes aligned with national and EU priorities, and provide SIM learners with recognised qualifications. Accreditation will enhance graduate employability, ensure institutional continuity of SIM programmes, provide companies with transparent competence benchmarks and strengthen alignment between education systems and labour-market needs. Long-term integration of SIM competences within mainstream education policy will serve to modernise higher education provision in line with national and EU sustainability priorities. In the long term, the uptake of SIM-trained professionals into local workforces will strengthen labour market ties to community development.

| ESG POLICY INTEGRATION

Integrate structured company–community cooperation into ESG and sustainability policy frameworks (medium-long term)

National and EU policymakers should formally recognise structured company–community cooperation within ESG, sustainability and innovation policy frameworks.

Corporate engagement in community initiatives remains largely informal and unevenly structured across Member States. SIM evidence indicates that structured co-operation enhances transparency, continuity and measurable impact, yet current ESG frameworks rarely explicitly reference territorial partnerships as a strategic implementation mechanism. As a result, many cooperation initiatives are informal and depend on individual motivation rather than institutional incentives. This limits strategic alignment and reduces long-term sustainability.

National and EU policymakers should integrate structured company–community cooperation into ESG guidance documents, public funding criteria and sustainability policies and strategies. Formal recognition will increase legitimacy of corporate engagement, improve accountability and strengthen territorial partnerships. Embedding cooperation within ESG frameworks will also reinforce the strategic relevance of the SIM profession and contribute to more coherent and measurable sustainability outcomes.

