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Project School

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# 01

## Introduction





## 01 | INTRODUCTION

This encompassing report is the culmination of a comprehensive analysis, research, and implementation phase, marking the successful completion of the initial stage of the Social Impact Manager (SIM) project, namely Work Package 2 – Background Analysis.

The project embarked on a deep exploration of the European landscape, meticulously examining the positioning of companies in the realm of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and their dynamic relationships with local communities.

Guided by the **Research Framework**, developed by Project School in September 2023, partner countries implemented a multifaceted data collection strategy. The employed methodologies encompassed a diverse range of approaches, including in-depth interviews, surveys, engaging focus groups, and interactive local participatory workshops. These data collection efforts yielded a treasure trove of insights and valuable data, forming the cornerstone of this comprehensive and insightful document.

This report outlines a designed mapping process aimed at unveiling a rich tapestry of possibilities. The process was guided by three fundamental concepts: desires, skills, and perceptions. These elements served as compasses to navigate the diverse landscape of aspirations, capabilities, and perspectives of each stakeholder and created the right environment to develop human relationships with the participants in the interviews, focus groups and local participatory workshops. This initial mapping exercise serves as a bridge, forging a preliminary connection between territories and companies. By capturing the unique perspectives and priorities of each region in the world of Corporate Social Responsibility, we can strategically align them with companies whose values, expertise, and resources resonate with those needs.

**This preliminary research entails a real analysis of the needs and state of the art of companies and local communities in the 5 project partner countries, which are: Greece, Croatia, France, Austria and Italy.** A framework comparable to a participatory process that comes from stakeholders and local communities capable of horizontally defining needs, critical issues and opportunities.

Through this reading of the socio-economic context as emerged from the survey, interviews and focus groups, we are now able to build the foundations for the design and implementation of the training course for future **Social Impact Managers (SIM)**.

# 02

## Methodology



## 02 | METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to carry out the preliminary research was based on the Research Framework and followed three main steps:

### Step 1: Preliminary Investigation Through One-on-One Interviews

The research began with **one-on-one interviews** targeting specific individuals from two key groups:

- **Companies:** Representatives from companies with a focus on sustainability practices and community engagement.
- **Local Communities:** Leaders or representatives from local communities with experience in fostering collaboration with businesses.

#### Objectives:

- **Identify potential partners:** These interviews helped identify potential collaborators who can facilitate further research and project implementation.
- **Gather cultural insights:** The informal nature of these interviews allowed for building trust and rapport with participants. This has aided in understanding cultural and individual perceptions of CSR and community development in each target area.
- **Inform survey development:** This initial information was used to refine and supplement the planned large-scale survey model for collecting additional data.

### Step 2: Refined Survey Development and Data Collection

Based on the insights gathered from the one-on-one interviews, the research team has finalized the **survey** instrument. This survey has been designed to:

- Investigate specific aspects of corporate sustainability practices in the target countries.
- Gather data on the relationship between companies and local communities.
- Validate the information collected during the interview stage.

### Step 3: Focus Groups for Data Validation and Contextualization

The final step, considered crucial for a comprehensive understanding, has resulted in the organization of **focus groups**. Representatives from both companies and local communities have been invited to participate.

#### Objectives:

- **Cross-reference data:** The focus groups were used to compare and contrast information gathered from previous interviews and the survey.
- **Gain deeper understanding:** Through facilitated discussions, the focus groups stimulated reflections on the collected data.

This provided an in-depth view of:

- challenges faced in relation to corporate sustainability and community engagement.

- positive aspects and existing successful collaborations in each country.

This final report provides a structure for displaying data that reflects both the context of each individual country and a comparative and collective vision of the status quo of companies with respect to CSR and the relationship with local communities.

The methodology employed for this report involved a meticulous process of data collection, processing, and analysis, drawing upon surveys administered to companies across partner countries. **This data was gathered through an interactive dashboard developed by the project's Italian partner, the University of Milan-Bicocca, which it's possible to consult through this [open page](#).**

**The interactive dashboard serves as a valuable tool for in-depth exploration of the survey responses, allowing for granular analysis based on factors such as age and country. This report will utilize a subset of this comprehensive data, contextualising it to provide meaningful insights.**

To provide an understanding of the project's impact across the five partner countries, individual **country cards** have been crafted, drawing insights from the extensive research conducted with both companies and local communities. These comprehensive country cards seamlessly integrate quantitative and qualitative data, painting a vivid picture of the social and local context within each region.

# 03

## Country Cards





## 03 | COUNTRY CARDS

In this first section of the report, the data sheets for each of the 5 Partner Countries (Italy, Greece, France, Croatia, Austria) are presented to show the results that emerged at a national level in relation to companies and local communities. The country cards include:

### Quantitative Data:

- General information on the average age of the participants; percentage of women and men, region, city;
- Aggregated survey data: from the surveys conducted in each country, data will be presented in a clear and concise format, using tables, charts, and graphs. The data cover a range of topics, including:
  - the level of awareness of CSR among businesses and stakeholders
  - the perceived importance of CSR
  - the key challenges faced by businesses in implementing CSR
  - the most effective CSR practices

### Qualitative Data:

- Country-specific insights: a reworking of the information and responses received in the interviews, focus groups, and participatory workshops conducted in each country. The insights covers a range of topics, including:
  - the unique CSR challenges and opportunities faced by businesses in each country
  - the role of government and civil society in promoting CSR
  - the most promising CSR initiatives in each country

## ITALY

The research in Italy was carried out on a sample of companies and local communities from Lombardy, a region in Northern Italy, which is a powerhouse of the Italian economy, boasting cutting-edge industrial, financial and commercial sectors. In particular, the area and the city of Milan, the regional capital, is a lively and cosmopolitan metropolis, especially for innovation and sustainability, counting over 300,000 thousand companies active in its province and over 15,000 thousand non-profit organisations.

### COMPANIES

The interviews conducted with 5 Italian companies reveals a consistent issue: a lack of qualified personnel within companies to handle CSR effectively. This expertise gap manifests in several ways:

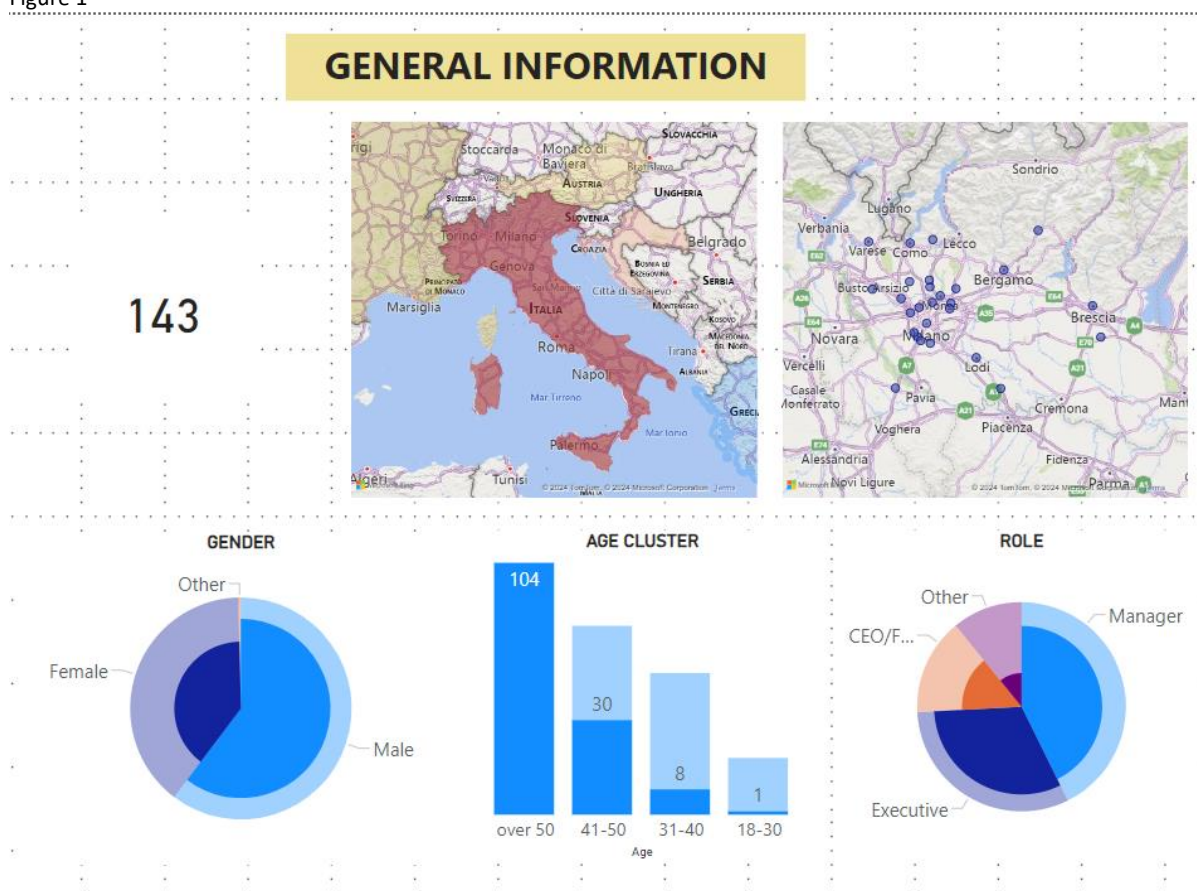
- **Limited Strategic Focus:** Without a strong understanding of CSR principles and best practices, organizations struggle to define a clear and focused CSR strategy. This can lead to scattered initiatives that lack overall impact.
- **Interaction Challenges:** Effective CSR requires engagement with diverse stakeholders like local communities, public authorities, and NGOs. The absence of relevant expertise can hinder building positive relationships and collaboration.

- **Difficult Interactions:** The interviewees have mentioned difficulties interacting with local public authorities and the territory itself. This suggests a lack of internal processes or understanding for navigating these external relationships, potentially hindering CSR projects' implementation and stakeholder buy-in.
- **Unclear Structure:** The presence of "organisational difficulties" can point to unclear reporting structures or a lack of departmental alignment regarding CSR activities. This can lead to confusion, inefficiency, and difficulty in driving CSR initiatives forward.

### Survey:

The surveys conducted with companies in Italy were concentrated in the Milan area and in the Lombardy Region. 143 responses were collected through the ManagerItalia network. 73,43% of respondents were men, over 50 in senior management or executive positions. Just 26,57% were women. ROLE 68 Managers (47.55%) 3 Other (2.1%) 13 CEOs/Founders (9.09%) 59 Executives (41.26%)

Figure 1



### Focus Group:

The meeting with five Italian companies shed light on key aspects of their approach to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and engagement with local communities. The discussion highlighted the following main points:

Companies are increasingly recognizing sustainability as a strategic imperative. This is driven by both reputational factors (as markets and consumers value companies with strong sustainability practices) and economic considerations. Financiers are demanding sustainability indicators, certifications, and compliance with European regulations as a

condition for financing. In short, sustainability is seen as a key differentiator for businesses in today's world.

However, the discussion also revealed concerns about companies' internal capacity and experience in implementing CSR initiatives, particularly those with a social impact focus. Many companies lack the necessary staff expertise to understand and engage effectively with local communities.

A significant barrier to collaboration is the perceived lack of alignment between companies and non governmental organizations (NGOs). Companies often have strict bureaucratic and compliance processes that smaller NGOs may struggle to meet. Additionally, companies may perceive a lack of organizational structure within some NGOs. This mistrust can lead companies to avoid partnering with local NGOs for CSR activities.

In the absence of strong internal CSR expertise and a perceived lack of alignment with NGOs, companies often turn to local public administrations as potential partners. However, these collaborations have yielded limited success. Public administrations may struggle to provide a clear picture of community needs, hindering effective CSR initiatives.

This combination of factors – **limited internal capacity, mistrust of NGOs, and ineffective public partnerships** – has resulted in CSR initiatives that are often superficial and lack a strategic vision. Companies described difficulties in finding suitable partners and implementing impactful activities beyond one-off actions, such as clean-up projects.

## LOCAL COMMUNITIES

From the interviews carried out with associations and local authorities in the Milan area, it was highlighted that businesses, as important players in the global economy, have a crucial role to play in guiding this transformation and are key interlocutors to support non-profit entities for the realization of their activities.

In particular, the need to trigger greater dialogue and a collaborative approach that brings together businesses, local authorities and community organisations has emerged. This collaboration is particularly important to bridge the gap between:

- Enterprises of various sizes: While multinationals have significant resources and expertise, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often lack the knowledge and capacity to implement sustainability measures. Collaboration platforms and knowledge sharing initiatives can enable SMEs to adopt sustainable practices and contribute significantly to the overall sustainability agenda.
- Local associations and municipalities: Local organizations often have a deep understanding of community needs and challenges, while municipalities possess the authority to implement policies and regulations that support sustainability goals. By working together, businesses, local associations and municipalities can create synergies that amplify the impact of sustainability initiatives.

### Local Participatory Workshop:

Approximately 25 representatives of local associations and NGOs participated in the workshop and actively participated in the discussion. The methodology involved an initial brainstorming in which the participants identified the key issues related to sustainability and the relationship with local companies. The brainstorming was followed by a World Café approach where participants were divided into groups to discuss the main social problems identified and elaborate possible solutions and good practices.

The division into groups led to the elaboration of 3 main aspects:

- **The difficulty of communicating and reaching companies.** Therefore, a lack of opportunities and resources to get in touch with companies and propose common initiatives;

- A strong **prejudice on the part of companies towards non-profit organizations**, on the one hand due to a real lack of knowledge of how third sector bodies work and what they do, on the other hand a real distrust in their professional abilities. It has been highlighted that in Italy the non profit world is very often linked to mere charity and the view that those who deal with social issues do not do something truly concrete and effective is widespread.
- The **lack of sufficient funds** for the implementation of social initiatives by associations or smaller entities at public and state level was noted. Faced with this, companies become a fundamental interlocutor for financing. However, companies are able to fund specific (often small) actions but they lack a long-term vision and continuous collaboration which could bring advantages for both parties: for the company, to have a partner solid and valid that knows the social problems and is in contact with the local community and the territory - for the non-profit organization, as collaboration would allow greater economic sustainability and a greater impact in the long term.

## GREECE

The interviews were meticulously conducted with companies based in Northern Greece, specifically within the urban and rural precincts of Thessaloniki, Serres, and Komotini. These regions are known for their diverse industrial landscape, including firms specializing in cutting-edge environmental technologies and hazardous waste management, alongside traditional agribusinesses like bakeries, dairy producers, and poultry farms. These businesses not only contribute to the regional economy but also actively engage with the community through participation in local events, forums, and various civic activities. Their involvement is geared towards fostering robust community relations and addressing pressing local needs through direct dialogue and collaboration.

Furthermore, to broaden the scope of community engagement and inter-sectoral collaboration, a participatory workshop was organized in Athens. This event was distinguished by its inclusive approach, drawing participation from a wide spectrum of stakeholders including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local government officials, private sector representatives, academic experts, community groups, social service agencies, and labour unions. The workshop served as a dynamic platform for these diverse groups to come together and deliberate on local issues, with a particular focus on addressing social challenges such as economic disparities and the lack of equitable access to healthcare.

Significant outcomes of this collaborative effort included the identification of key areas requiring intervention and the formulation of strategic solutions. These solutions encompassed innovative skills-to-work programs aimed at enhancing local employment opportunities, as well as the establishment of public-private partnerships designed to tackle environmental issues, particularly pollution control. These initiatives were aimed at creating a sustainable impact, enhancing quality of life for residents, and promoting social and economic development in the region.

## COMPANIES

From the analysis of the interviews carried out in Greece, it emerged that 80% of companies do not include a responsible CSR figure inside the organization. This emerges both due to the small size of the company and due to transversal and collective work with other departments on social and environmental issues. The initiatives carried out mainly concern environmental issues such as environmental protection, sustainability and feasibility, transparency, social issues and, of course, the economy. Structured plans and long-term CSR strategies are not in place, but rather specific initiatives emerge from companies towards local communities such as:

- Awarding prizes to firefighters for putting out fires in the wider Rhodope region and donating equipment such as masks;
- Preparation of a forum in collaboration with the Technical Chamber of Thrace and the Municipality of Komotini on energy saving;
- Continued communication with the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace to undertake initiatives to strengthen the ever-growing industrial activity of the region;



- Coordinated movements at Region and University level for the establishment of a Department;
- Organization of a forum in Komotini with 700 guests from all over Greece;
- Collaboration with the local church through donations

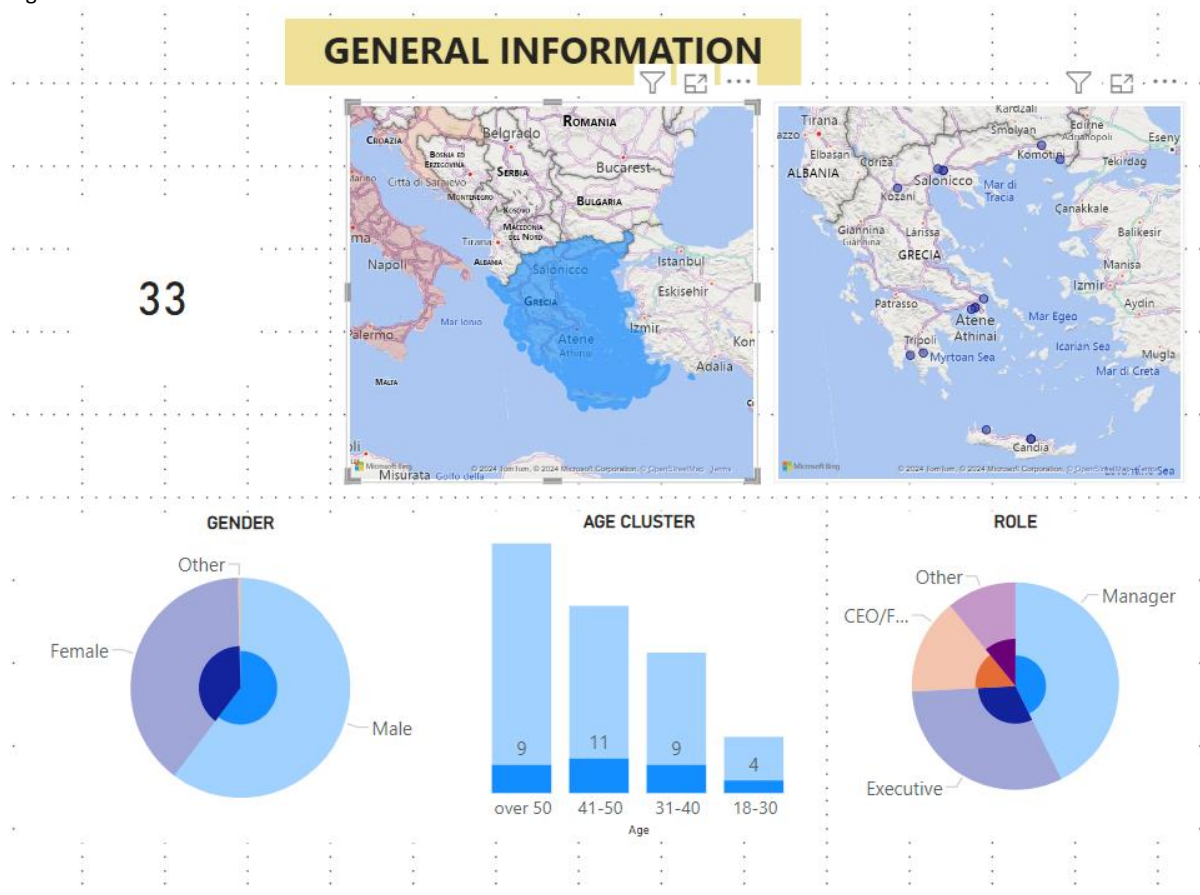
The CSR actions mainly carried out by these companies concern:

- Sponsorships to local businesses and institutions
- Donations to local institutions, especially in the main sectors of the economy, in the past and in recent years.

### Survey:

The graph identifies the survey participants by defining: GENDER: 15 males (45, 45%) 18 females (54.55%) ROLE 10 Managers (30.3%) 6 Other (18.18%) 6 CEO/Founder (18.18%) 11 Executives (33.33%). Regarding the age of the people reached, it is concentrated in a range between 40 and over 50.

Figure 2



### Focus Group:

The focus group discussed the link between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and community development with Greek executives. These executives were open to sharing ideas and actively participated by providing experiences, challenges, and successful CSR practices. The variety of viewpoints enriched the discussion.

The group also talked about the difficulties businesses face in connecting CSR efforts with community development goals. Examples of their CSR activities included donations to local groups, cultural organizations, hospitals, fire

departments, and educational institutions. They also highlighted a common trend of businesses engaging communities in activities like tree planting.

A key takeaway is that companies are increasingly responsive to community needs by using internal resources (volunteers) or empowering external stakeholders. Another commonality was that most companies employ a majority of local workforce (over 80%).

Challenges identified included bureaucracy, particularly when dealing with public entities. Examples included permit delays and excessive administrative costs that forced some initiatives to be cancelled.

Another point was that many CSR activities lack monitoring and impact measurement. The group stressed that collaboration between companies in designing and implementing CSR initiatives would increase their impact. Sharing best practices and networking were also seen as crucial for improvement. Finally, a wider campaign to change public perception of the manufacturing sector was suggested to further enhance the impact of these corporate activities.

## LOCAL COMMUNITIES

During the interviews, representatives of local communities have identified the main opportunities for collaboration with local companies, through:

- Financial support: Businesses can provide crucial funding, resources and expertise for community initiatives such as youth programs and social services.
- Real-world experience: Partnerships with companies can open doors to internships, job shadowing and mentorship programs, which benefit young people.
- Economic growth and innovation: Businesses create jobs, stimulate the local economy and drive innovation, especially in sectors such as agriculture and technology.
- Sustainable development: Companies committed to corporate social responsibility (CSR) can support social causes, environmental initiatives and education through responsible practices.

Furthermore, participants have identified challenges and expressed some necessary considerations in the relationship with companies, presented here below:

- Values alignment: Ensuring that corporate interests align with NGO values and objectives can be difficult.
- Impactful partnerships: Partnerships should truly contribute to long-term social good and sustainable development, and not just be superficial.
- Equitable growth: Economic development should not exacerbate social inequalities or environmental degradation. Finding a balance between industrial needs, environmental protection and inclusive employment opportunities requires collaboration between businesses and local governments.
- Responsible practices: Businesses, particularly in the manufacturing or technology sectors, must operate sustainably by minimizing pollution, managing waste and conserving resources.

## Recommendations for Stronger Relationships:

**Facilitation**: Local governments can act as facilitators by creating forums or networks for dialogue between businesses, social services and community organizations.

**Matching services**: Municipalities could help match businesses with appropriate social projects to their CSR efforts.

**Recognition programs**: Recognizing businesses and organizations that invest in social issues can encourage further participation.

Regulation and incentives: Municipalities can implement policies and incentives to promote environmentally responsible business practices.

### Local Participatory Workshop:

Two workshops led by KMOP brought together diverse stakeholders (non-profits, businesses, government) for productive discussions on community issues. Participants actively shared ideas and perspectives, fostering a collaborative environment to address challenges.

A wide range of social issues were identified where collaboration with companies could be very effective. They include: economic disparity, limited healthcare access, inadequate education facilities, housing affordability, and social isolation. Additionally, integrating immigrants and addressing youth mental health were pressing concerns. The workshops emphasized the importance of collaboration between businesses, government, and non profits. Examples of successful partnerships included business-funded internships and joint environmental initiatives.

### Specific Challenges and Proposed Solutions

#### Group 1: Mental Health Among Youth

- Problem: Increasing stress and mental health issues among teenagers.
- Solutions: Integrate mental health education into schools, establish community support groups, youth-led awareness campaigns, partnerships with businesses to fund initiatives.

#### Group 2: Job Opportunities for Marginalized Groups

- Problem: Lack of job opportunities for unemployed youth and marginalized adults
- Solutions: "Skills-to-work" programs funded by local businesses, improved communication and understanding between businesses and community organizations, tax incentives for businesses involved in community development.

#### Group 3: Affordable Housing

- Problem: Scarcity of affordable housing options for low-income families and immigrants.
- Solutions: Collaborative housing projects involving construction companies, real estate firms, and government, resource support for home maintenance programs, community development initiatives supported by businesses.

#### Group 4: Environmental Issues

- Problem: Inadequate management of urban pollution and inefficient recycling processes.
- Solutions: Public-private partnerships for deploying pollution control technologies, companies investing in modernizing recycling facilities, community engagement programs promoting sustainable practices.

The participants of the workshop in Greece shared some reflections and ideas regarding the relationship between local communities and companies, underlining that the success of a community depends on its ability to solve problems together. By bringing together a variety of perspectives, communities gain a deeper understanding of the complex issues they face. When businesses, government agencies and nonprofits work together, they can create positive change. Encouraging residents to participate in civic activities and get involved in their communities is essential for a society to thrive.

## FRANCE

For France, the partner professional organisation is ESS France, which is the French representative body for the social economy. As a result, most of the companies contacted for this research are part of the social and solidarity economy. Social economy companies are distinguished by their unique business model. Founded on democratic governance, strong territorial roots and limited profitability, they offer an alternative approach to that of conventional companies. Rather than maximizing profits, they place the response to social and environmental needs at the heart of their activities.

The companies and local communities that took part in the workshop and focus group belong to the capital region, Ile de France. Covering 2% of the surface area of France, the Ile-de-France region is home to around 20% of the French population and jobs (12 million inhabitants and 6 million jobs), over 25% of businesses (1 million businesses) and over 30% of the national GDP.

Our research, interviews and workshops have shown that social economy companies are systematically involved in regional cooperation dynamics. They participate in the birth and development of innovative, virtuous and in-depth partnerships with public players, traditional businesses, universities and citizens. They also create links between this diversity of players.

In Île-de-France, the Social Economy represents nearly 7% of companies and jobs, with over 26,100 structures and around 333,000 full-time equivalents. The dominant sectors include social action, the environment, education, health, leisure and culture. Company sizes vary considerably, from large cooperatives and mutual societies to small associations with a single employee.

## COMPANIES

Through the interviews in France, several companies have recognized the value of establishing dedicated CSR positions, demonstrating their commitment to formalizing CSR efforts. In the various companies involved, initiatives have been conducted aimed at reducing waste, improving energy efficiency and promoting responsible practices throughout the supply chain. Companies also express a strong desire to define and promote stakeholder involvement in order to build concrete CSR projects that have a positive impact on the community.

A common challenge faced by CSR leaders is integrating CSR seamlessly into core operations and effectively measuring the impact of their initiatives. Companies like CEVA Logistics are actively addressing this aspect by investing in training programs and developing impact indicators. CEVA Logistics recognizes the need for expertise, particularly in the areas of CO2 reduction and alternative technologies, and has initiated collaborations with external experts to support these projects.

Companies recognize the importance of engaging various stakeholders, including employees, suppliers, and communities. Adapei 35's work with regional structures exemplifies this focus, fostering collaboration to address shared CSR goals, taking a more collaborative approach to CSR leadership, establishing a cross-functional CSR group and a supplier circle to drive initiatives and foster knowledge exchange. The reports underscore the complexity of managing CSR due to diverse stakeholders, evolving regulations, and the need for continuous improvement. They highlight 2024 as a year dedicated to refining their CSR approach and obtaining relevant certifications.

Supply chain complexity poses a significant challenge, as evidenced by CEVA Logistics' efforts to monitor and manage ethical practices across its global network.

Despite the challenges, the analysis showcases positive outcomes across the companies:

- **Employee Engagement:** high interest of employees in CSR, demonstrated by the overwhelming response to their volunteers' call.

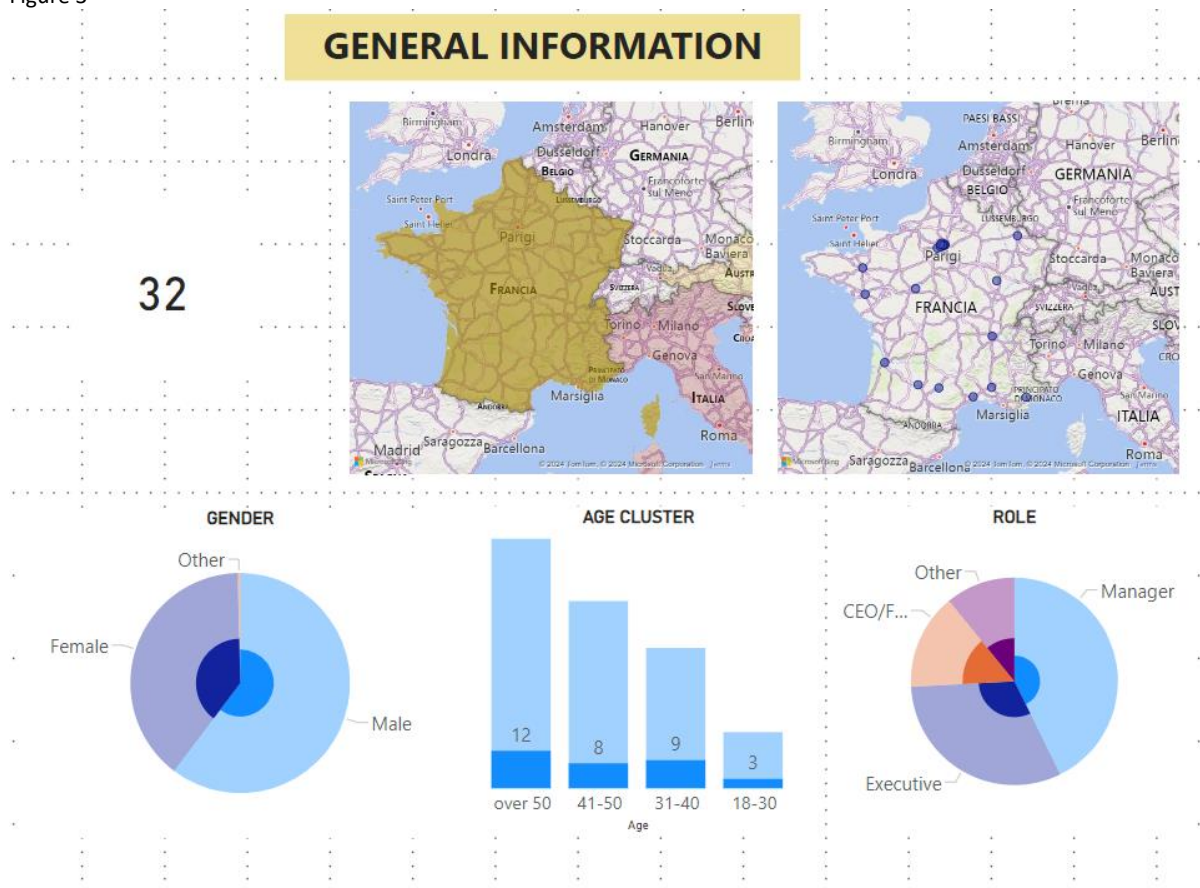


- **Supplier Commitment:** responsible supply chain practices with supplier engagement initiatives encourage ethical practices throughout their networks.
- **Community Impact:** work on ecological transition and circular economy events illustrate positive contributions to the social and environmental well-being of their communities

### Survey:

The graph identifies the survey participants by defining: GENDER 15 males (46.88%) 17 females (53.12%) ROLE 7 Managers (21.88%) 5 Other (15.62%) 10 CEOs (31.25%) 10 Executives (31.25%). Regarding the age of the people reached, there is a slight majority in people over 50, and an equivalence in the 40 - 50 year range.

Figure 3



### Focus Group:

Originally planned as a world café, the meeting format was changed to an open round table discussion due to the small number of participants (6). The group included representatives from two large social economy companies (MGEN, Groupe SOS), a regional support association (CRESS Ile-de-France), and a smaller association (Mkwaves). This diversity provided valuable insights and a dynamic discussion.

The discussion primarily focused on the CSR manager's role in ensuring legal compliance, not necessarily on specialized areas of CSR. The concept of a dedicated CSR role was more relevant for larger organizations. Smaller structures often integrate social responsibility into existing roles, with employees actively building relationships and communicating with stakeholders. In essence it emerged that small structures have little time to create links, especially because of the lack of financial and human resources.

One of the key points that came up in the discussion was the importance of citizen engagement to make the social impact/CSR projects truly work for the people they are supposed to benefit. To do that, it is crucial to identify a professional who understands the needs of the territory, someone who could be a local contact person able to build relationships with the people on the ground and to make sure everyone's voice is heard. Participants argued that the regional scale is not the good one ; it is too large to gain a deep understanding of the specific community and its needs.

Another interesting concept that emerged was the idea of the **Social Impact Manager (SIM) as an ambassador**. Participants contrasted this with the more traditional CSR role, which is often focused on ensuring compliance with regulations. They envision the SIM as someone who goes beyond just following the rules – he/she should be an innovator, someone who can build relationships and create new opportunities for collaboration.

Finally, they highlighted the importance of the SIM having a good understanding of the territory. This means mapping out all the different players in the area – businesses, social organizations, etc. By understanding who the key players are and how they interact, the SIM can identify potential partnerships and collaborations that can make a real difference. They emphasized that collecting and utilizing this information is crucial to avoid wasting resources and ensure everyone is working together effectively.

## LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Through interviews conducted with local community representatives, a discrepancy emerged between traditional companies and social economy entities. Local authorities often restrict this sector to inclusion activities (people who are far from employment, disabled people, etc.), whereas it covers all sectors of activity, which shows a lack of understanding of the social economy model. The focus is shifting towards cross-sector collaboration on projects of general interest.

The analysis shows that companies currently operate in isolation with little connection to each other or to the community. Therefore, local recruitment should be improved by having companies share job vacancies with local partners for dissemination via employment services and social media. Furthermore, resource tracking in companies should be improved even after hiring, as most support systems are implemented reactively after recruitment difficulties occur.

Common to other countries, the creation of dedicated positions for CSR managers and community liaison officers within companies becomes necessary to manage these initiatives effectively. Companies should consider focusing on soft skills development alongside technical training. Companies could further develop their CSR strategies and human resources policies to promote local integration and commitment. This may involve participating in career counselling activities and job presentations.

The key challenge lies in creating a unified approach that brings together companies and diverse community groups (employment zones, residential areas) with potentially differing political views. Community organizations often face resource limitations despite strong desire to implement initiatives in their territory. The task is to break down existing administrative boundaries to foster collaboration across communities.

Interesting initiatives deserve to be highlighted such as:

- Local training and employment platforms: support for local businesses in hiring.
- Partnership association of companies and local authorities (Plaine Commune Promotion): this network works to promote the attractiveness and the economic development of the territory by seeking to exploit synergies between local economic players.
- Development of a “business-territory charter” mobilizing businesses on concrete actions, and bringing together local economic, associative and institutional stakeholders, to create real long-term partnerships. The

signatories commit in particular to develop local employment, strengthen solidarity and act for the environment.

Companies can be engaged through various means:

- **Financial and Material Support:** Direct funding or providing necessary materials for projects.
- **Employee Participation:** Encouraging employees to volunteer or participate in association-organized activities.

### Local Participatory Workshop:

Representatives from local authorities, a regional Social Economy federation, and a job placement association participated in a workshop focused on socio-economic vulnerabilities. These organizations are all located in the north of the Ile de France. The geographical proximity of the participants facilitated open communication and collaboration.

The group identified a range of vulnerable populations, including the working poor impacted by the gig economy, unaccompanied minors, pensioners, single-parent families, youth, residents of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, migrants, people with disabilities, and victims of domestic violence. With respect to needs and priorities at local level, two fundamental aspects have emerged:

1. **Access to rights:** includes healthcare, housing, mobility, green spaces and sports facilities. Simplifying administrative procedures and providing clear information on rights was considered essential. Food and energy insecurity were also considered as a concern.
2. **Addressing internal barriers:** strengthening self-confidence and addressing feelings of exclusion from certain opportunities, particularly among young people, who may perceive certain professions or cultural activities as inaccessible to them, which creates psychological barriers.

Territorial clusters for economic cooperation (PTCE) are examples that have been cited several times. Stemming from the law on the social and solidarity economy of 31 July 2014, PTCEs provide a legal and financial framework for local solutions, devised by players on the ground, to respond to local problems and create synergies between economic players. The PTCEs help to recreate industries and jobs and revitalise areas that have suffered social and economic damages.

### Local Authorities' Proposed Actions

- Utilize their powers in economic development, regional planning, and Social and Solidarity Economy network to address needs.
- Support the voluntary sector acknowledging its key role in meeting needs.
- Encourage cooperation between associations through collaborative models and public interest groups.
- Utilize calls for projects and public procurement contracts to engage the voluntary sector and businesses, although concerns exist regarding effectiveness and resource allocation.

### Civic Engagement and Local Collaboration

- The critical role of associations in civic engagement, particularly in sports and culture, was emphasized.
- Encouraging businesses (through skills sponsorship) and neighbourhood councils to participate more actively was suggested.

- Strengthening connections between local players and promoting resource sharing were seen as key to maximize impact.

## Business-Community Cooperation

- Cooperation ranges from partnership association of companies and local authorities to economic initiatives like sponsorships.
- Public purchasers are encouraged to go beyond the simple criterion of price to include considerations of the conditions under which goods and services are produced, sourced and supplied (Socially Responsible Public Procurement).
- The goal is to refocus businesses on local areas, moving from CSR to a more Territorially-ENGaged approach (TEN) or CTR (for Corporate Territorial Responsibility). In France, CTR is an emerging concept developed in the academic world, which is beginning to influence the thinking of players in the Social Economy, companies and public authorities.

## Evaluation of Cooperation

- Evaluating cooperation is complex due to its reliance on interpersonal relationships rather than industry or size. Surveys are being conducted, but quantification remains a challenge.

## Obstacles to Cooperation

- Territorial divisions, lack of understanding, and absence of clear benefits for all parties are the main obstacles.
- Company prejudices, opportunism ("ghosting"), and lack of time, resources, and funding can also hinder cooperation.

## Strengthening Local Cooperation

- Integrating cooperation into public policies and corporate strategies is seen as crucial to avoid opportunism.
- Addressing local needs and fostering mutual understanding through meetings and feedback is essential.
- Addressing hidden barriers, such as mental and psychological blocks, is vital to encourage cooperation.
- Initiatives like PTCE (Territorial clusters for economic cooperation) are seen as potential tools to promote collaboration and strategies.

## CROATIA

The research in Croatia was carried out on a sample of companies from two regions, City of Zagreb and Primorje – Gorski Kotar County. It covered bigger cities – Zagreb, as capital, Rijeka, as a third largest city and two smaller, yet very advanced cities of Krk and Kastav. On one hand, the Zagreb area has the biggest presence of companies and industries active in different sectors, and on the other Rijeka and surrounding areas (Istria and Primorje-Gorski Kotar County) have a propulsive mindset on many levels (economic, environmental, social).

## COMPANIES

The 5 companies interviewed declared that they do not have a dedicated CSR department within the company but there are figures on different positions that contribute positively to the implementation of social impact and environmental sustainability actions. Additionally, one of the interviewed companies (a large company) has an ESG manager, who deals with relevant activities, strategies and implementation, but they don't operate as a separate department. Instead, they engage staff from other departments, depending on the topic.



In particular, interesting examples of collaboration and commitment of companies towards local communities emerged: the company E-Glas represents an example of a company that has created deep and meaningful connections with its local community. Their collaborative approach extends to various institutions, including kindergartens, schools, hospitals and other companies, fostering a spirit of innovation that addresses specific needs and challenges. Through this process, Kokolingo, a digital speech therapy notebook developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, was created for children who were unable to attend in-person therapy sessions. Furthermore, the company made a significant contribution to the Rijeka Hospital Clinical Center by donating Tobii Eye Trackers, devices that allow paralyzed patients to communicate effectively with medical personnel.

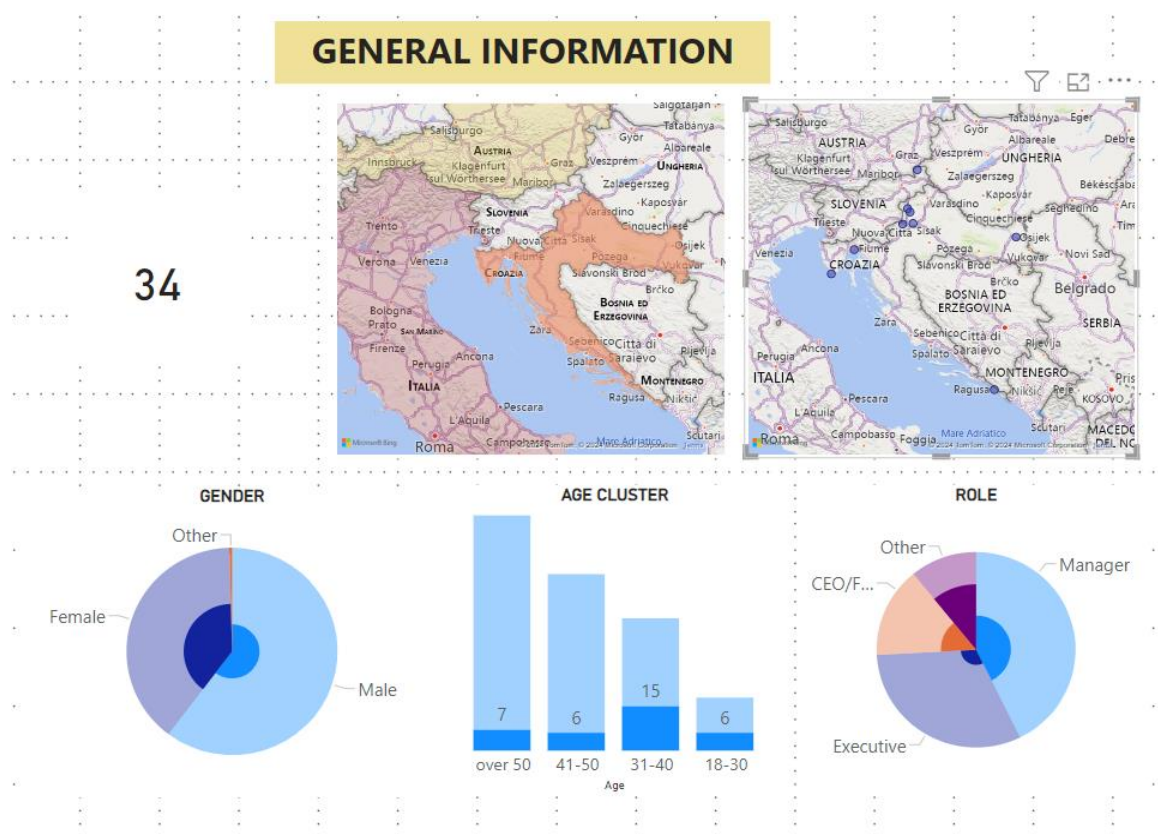
Another interesting example of collaboration and inclusion of different groups was given by the company Ponikve Eko Otok Krk. They engage tourists by gamification in waste collection. Upon the arrival to the Island of Krk, tourists can take a plastic bag for waste collection, that is made out of reused plastic waste previously collected on the beaches and packed in a recycled carton, also collected previously. Tourists are encouraged to collect waste from the beach, take photos, and dispose of it in predefined places. By sending photos to an online platform, tourists enter a contest where they can win a complimentary weekend on the island in one of the hotels nearby. Additional dimension of inclusion is the fact plastic bags are being packed in cartons by local rehabilitation centre users who are subcontracted for that service.

These successful examples demonstrate the power of a bottom-up approach to product development. Companies that actively seek input and collaboration from local communities are not only more likely to identify and address real needs, but also reap the benefits of increased customer satisfaction, improved brand reputation and increased competitiveness.

To further amplify the impact of this collaborative approach, local authorities play a key role by allocating budget resources specifically for the development and implementation of products and services that respond to community needs; they can foster a thriving innovation ecosystem that benefits all stakeholders.

## Survey:

Figure 4



The graph identifies the survey participants by defining: GENDER 11 males (32.35%) 22 females (64.71%) 1 Other (2.94%). ROLE 14 Managers (41.18%) 13 Other (38.24%) 5 CEOs (14.70%) 2 Executives (5.88%). Compared to the data from other countries, it is interesting to note the prevalence of women and the age of the people reached, which is mainly concentrated in the age group between 31 and 40, highlighting a young and dynamic leadership.

### Focus Group:

The focus group on Corporate Social Responsibility brought together a diverse group of participants from various companies, each with their unique approach to CSR initiatives. The discussion highlighted the growing importance of CSR in today's business landscape, as companies increasingly recognize the need to integrate social and environmental considerations into their operations.

One of the key takeaways was the importance of collaboration between companies, students, and local communities in developing and implementing effective CSR programs. Participants shared examples of successful collaborations that have led to positive social and environmental impacts. For instance, one company described a program that partnered with social entrepreneurs and students to brainstorm solutions for societal challenges. Another company showcased a project that involved the local community in building a solar energy plant, empowering them to participate in energy production and decision-making.

During the discussion, the participants also addressed the challenges faced by companies in implementing CSR initiatives. One challenge is the issue of trust. Participants noted that local communities often have a history of distrust towards companies, making it difficult to build relationships and engage them in CSR activities. To address this challenge, companies need to be transparent in their operations and demonstrate a genuine commitment to social and environmental responsibility.

Another challenge is the lack of resources. Companies often lack the financial and human resources to fully implement their CSR plans. This can be particularly challenging for smaller companies or those operating in developing countries. To overcome this challenge, companies can seek partnerships with other organisations, such as NGOs or government agencies.

Despite the challenges, the participants in the workshop were optimistic about the future of CSR. They believe that CSR is becoming increasingly important to consumers and investors, and that companies that are proactive in this area will be well-positioned for long-term success.

In addition to the challenges and opportunities discussed above, the workshop also generated several recommendations for future SIM education. These recommendations include:

- Mentoring: Offer guidance to students on interacting with entrepreneurs and navigating the intricacies of business collaboration.
- Direct Contact: Facilitate direct communication and collaboration between students and companies, allowing for open exchange of ideas and perspectives.
- Realistic Expectations: Set clear expectations for project outcomes for both companies and students, ensuring alignment and avoiding disappointment.
- Collaboration Benefits: Emphasise the value of collaboration for learning, knowledge exchange, and future opportunities, fostering a mindset of mutual growth and development.

The qualities of a **Social Impact Manager (SIM)** were also discussed, with participants highlighting the importance of objectivity, strong analytical skills, ethical behaviour, a genuine passion for social and environmental issues, a proactive and innovative approach, and openness to discussions and arguments.

Overall, the workshop on CSR provided valuable insights into the current landscape of CSR initiatives, the challenges

and opportunities faced by companies, and the recommendations for future SIM education. The participants' engagement and diverse perspectives contributed to a rich and informative discussion that will undoubtedly inform future CSR practices.

## LOCAL COMMUNITIES

From interviews conducted with local communities and representatives of local institutions, it emerges that a sense of apathy towards social issues prevails in Croatia, with citizens giving priority to entertainment over civic engagement. This lack of activism presents a significant challenge to addressing pressing social and environmental concerns. Furthermore, inconsistency and lack of political will regarding youth policies hinder effective youth empowerment initiatives.

Despite national challenges, the City of Krk has implemented several initiatives to promote environmental responsibility, community engagement, and sustainable tourism practices.

- **Environmental Advocacy:** The local association actively tackles climate change through research and promotes renewable energy sources, sustainable waste management, and the utilisation of protected areas.
- **Collaboration:** Strong relationships with local companies and organisations are maintained to facilitate project implementation and ensure community buy-in.
- **Balancing Tourism:** The city strives to provide year-round infrastructure and activities for residents, addressing the seasonal workforce issue and promoting a more balanced economy.
- **Youth Empowerment:** High school students actively participate in environmental protection activities, fostering a sense of civic engagement among the younger generation. A gamified waste management system using digital keys is being implemented to encourage sustainable practices among residents.
- **Business Engagement:** The Business Friendly Certification program aims to improve the services offered to companies, enhancing the overall business environment in the city.

The City of Kastav has also implemented several initiatives to address the needs of its growing population and promote sustainable development.

- **Intergenerational Needs:** The increasing number of young families and children necessitates catering to a wider age range, ensuring that the city's infrastructure and services meet the needs of all residents.
- **Justification for Investment:** Balancing immediate social needs with long-term innovative projects can be challenging. The city strives to find a balance between addressing current issues and investing in future sustainability efforts.

A common challenge faced by both cities is the lack of time available to busy entrepreneurs, which often limits their participation in networking events and meetings. This highlights the need for flexible and accessible opportunities for entrepreneurs to connect and share knowledge.

### Local Participatory Workshop:

A diverse group, including representatives from government, businesses, NGOs, students, and local communities, came together to discuss the challenges faced by migrants in Croatia. All participants were motivated to find solutions that would benefit both migrants and the region.

Based on interviews and focus groups previously conducted by the partner Mreža znanja d.o.o, (Knowledge Network), the workshop dealt with specific current problems of immigrants residing temporarily or permanently in the region.

In particular, the participants identified several categories of immigrants and reflected on the different needs of each group:

- Migrants in transit (legal and illegal)
- Labor migrants from economically less developed non-EU countries – families with children, mostly with knowledge of the Croatian language and a similar cultural background, with the intention to stay
- Labor migrants from economically less developed non-EU countries from other continents – mostly young, single men, with a lower level of education, less fluent in English, with less intention to stay permanently
- Refugees – women with children, mainly from Ukraine
- Digital nomads (mainly in the IT sector)
- Students in mobility programs and with permanent residence, for whom accommodation, work opportunities, and post-graduation options are key concerns.

Several issues affect all migrant groups to varying degrees:

- **Social Inclusion:** A lack of formal programs can lead to isolation and mental health problems. More structured support is needed.
- **Complex Regulations:** Navigation of regulations can be difficult due to their complexity and inconsistencies.
- **Limited Information Access:** Easy access to accurate and relevant information is crucial.

This vulnerable group faces with additional difficulties:

- Finding stable and affordable accommodation
- Security, stability, and continuity
- Achieving economic sustainability
- Accessing information and exercising rights (healthcare, work permits)
- Social integration and support, particularly with language and cultural differences

The workshop identified a lack of communication between different sectors as a major obstacle. Improved communication was seen as crucial to finding effective solutions.

**Group A took this head-on, proposing improved communication between public and private sectors.** This could involve streamlined processes for work permits and clearer regulations, ensuring a smoother path for migrants entering the workforce. Additionally, collaboration on the challenges faced by specific migrant communities could lead to targeted solutions. For example, a community of young, single migrants might need different support structures than a family with children.

**Group B emphasised the importance of a national immigration policy.** Lobbying for a policy that promotes inclusiveness and integration creates a welcoming environment for migrants. Furthermore, they suggested collaboration between companies and local authorities. Imagine companies investing in affordable housing projects with local governments, directly addressing the issue of accommodation for migrants. Additionally, joint social projects could encourage migrant participation in local activities, fostering a sense of belonging and breaking down cultural barriers.

**Finally, Group C focused on students in mobility programs.** Streamlined procedures for permits, affordable housing options, and healthcare access would make Croatia a more attractive destination for international students. But the vision goes beyond just attracting them. By offering opportunities to stay and work after graduation, both in the public and private sectors, Croatia could benefit from a skilled and diverse workforce.

Overall, the workshop highlighted the importance of collaboration. Improved communication between public and private sectors, a comprehensive national immigration policy, and targeted solutions for specific migrant groups are all crucial steps towards successful integration. By working together, Croatia can create a welcoming and supportive



environment that benefits both migrants and the country as a whole.

## AUSTRIA

The research in Austria was conducted in Vienna, which lies in the eastern part of Austria. Vienna is the capital of Austria and a diverse conurbation, serving as the economic centre of the country. It is characterized by a strong service sector, a rich cultural heritage, and a high quality of life. The city is also known for its significant contributions to education, science, and technology.

## COMPANIES

Despite lacking a dedicated CSR manager, the companies demonstrate a strong commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility. The Managing Directors actively champion CSR, and employees are encouraged to consider sustainability throughout the project lifecycle. However, challenges exist. Implementing CSR initiatives requires navigating complex EU regulations and occasional cost considerations. While employees are eager and continuously seek knowledge through various avenues (training, research, conferences), practical experience, particularly in areas like carbon footprint calculation, is sometimes lacking. Furthermore, collaborating with business partners can be tricky. While common goals exist, differing priorities and occasional public resistance to changes like recycling initiatives can create hurdles.

Regular communication through notice boards and word-of-mouth promotes local sustainability events. Additionally, comprehensive CSR training courses are offered, led by experienced professionals with extensive industry knowledge. These training programs facilitate open communication with diverse stakeholders and encourage the continuous integration of new ideas.

One of the company's interviewed has also established a dedicated "Hub Sustainability" with three key functions:

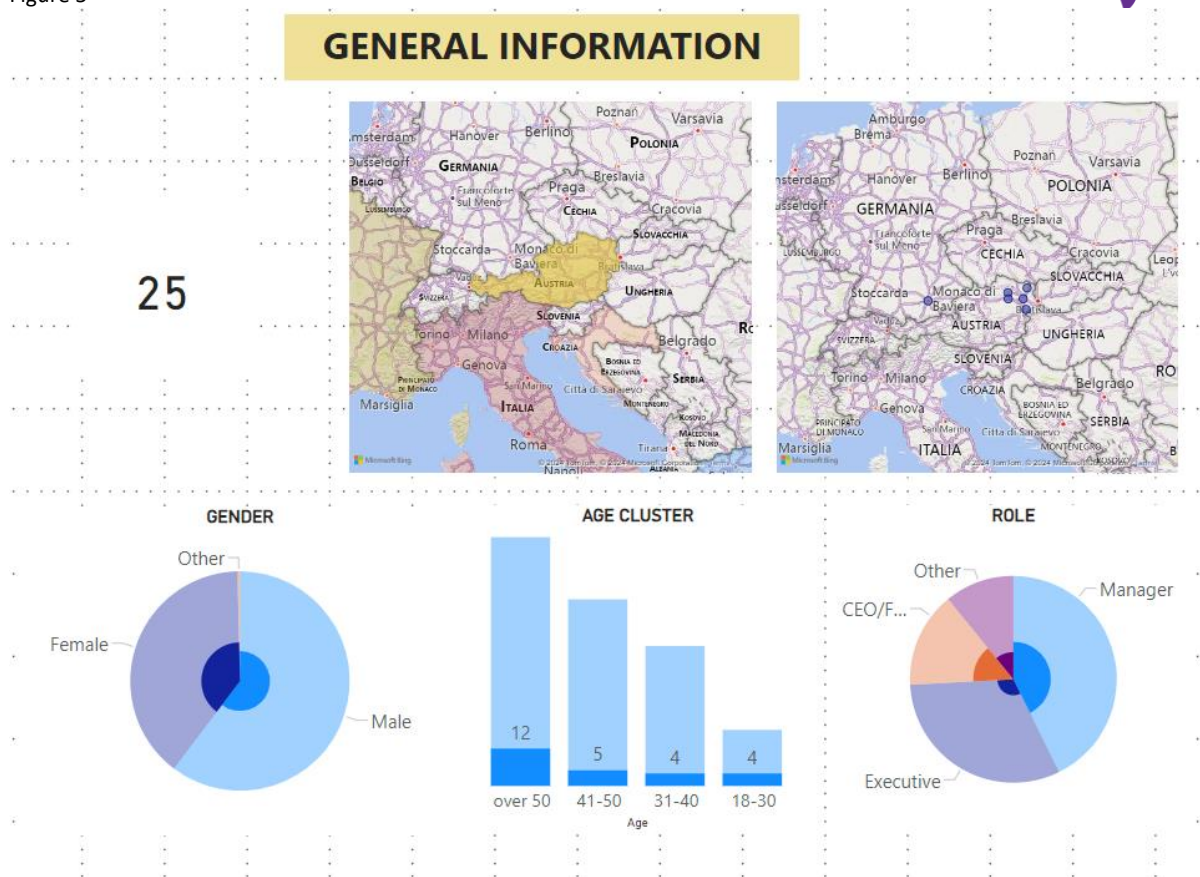
1. Project Sustainability: ensuring new projects incorporate sustainable practices.
2. Internal Sustainability: focusing on internal company practices like HR policies.
3. Company-Wide Consulting: providing sustainability expertise throughout the organization.

Among the main recommendations to improve the relationship with local communities is identified effective communication with interested parties. Transparency of actions and intent that promotes mutual trust, and empowers residents and addresses concerns. Proactive communication prevents misconceptions and builds support. Furthermore, public meetings are recommended, accessible channels and awareness programs encourage participation.

### Survey:

This graphic shows GENDER 12 males (48%) 13 females (52%) ROLE 15 managers (60%) 2 Other (8 %) 6 CEOs (24%) 2 Managers (8%). Regarding the age of the people reached, there is a majority of managers over 50.

Figure 5



### Focus Group:

In a constructive and collaborative environment, representatives from different sectors, including education, consultancy, energy and facility management, came together to discuss the growing importance of ESG (environmental, social and governance) factors compared to traditional CSR (social responsibility 'business'). Participants, some with over two decades of experience, demonstrated their ongoing commitment to their communities through a variety of initiatives, including: support to children and young people battling cancer (e.g. ECDL courses), partnerships with schools for educational and environmental projects (e.g. waste collection campaigns).

They discussed how CSR and ESG activities impact relationships with local communities and how companies can help to strengthen community resilience. The participants showed a strong commitment to their communities as they run various programs and initiatives to support disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. For example, a participant mentioned the cooperation with the Vienna Children's Cancer Aid for the ECDL course for children and young people with cancer as well as the cooperation with a Scandinavian company for the Avatar project to integrate sick young people into school lessons. Another example of cooperation was a partnership with schools to support educational initiatives and the implementation of environmental protection projects such as waste collection campaigns aimed at improving the local environment and strengthening the community.

The conversation delved into the evolving landscape of corporate responsibility, specifically the shift from CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) to ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) considerations. Participants acknowledged the challenges and opportunities associated with ESG reporting obligations and measuring social and environmental impact.

The discussion highlighted how ESG, with its emphasis on reporting, has reshaped the landscape of financing and

interest in CSR projects. However, implementing CSR initiatives can be hindered by several obstacles, including limited financial resources, challenges in gaining acceptance for healthcare programs, and the complexities of navigating various stakeholders and internal structures. The discussions suggested that closer integration of CSR and ESG practices into companies' business strategy and objectives is needed to achieve a sustainable and positive impact on local communities. It was emphasized that companies need to be more responsive to the needs and concerns of local communities in order to build long-term and meaningful relationships. Participants emphasized the importance of transparency, engagement and a holistic approach to social and environmental issues for successful collaboration between companies and communities. From the focus group with the companies, 6 main recommendations emerged to improve the relationship with local communities:

**Foster Strong Internal Alignment:** Strengthen internal communication and employee engagement to ensure everyone understands the company's CSR goals and how they can contribute.

**Build Strategic Community Partnerships:** Seek out strategic partnerships with other organizations in the community. Collaboration allows for leveraging shared resources and expertise for a greater impact.

**Embrace Stakeholder Inclusion:** Involve stakeholders in the decision-making process. This fosters a sense of ownership and increases the likelihood of successful implementation.

**Set Clear Goals and Benchmarks:** Create clear guidelines and measurable goals for CSR initiatives. This allows for tracking progress and demonstrating the impact of your efforts.

**Measure and Communicate Impact:** Measure the impact of your CSR initiatives and communicate transparently about the results. This builds trust and demonstrates the value you bring to the community.

**Continuously Improve:** Engage external stakeholders for feedback and ideas. Be aware of legal frameworks and funding opportunities to optimize your initiatives. Continuously evaluate your projects to ensure they meet the needs and expectations of the community.

## LOCAL COMMUNITIES

During the interviews, several interesting points emerged also regarding the relationship of companies with specific targets, for example people with disabilities, social and economic fragilities and young people. Respecting this last target, for local companies the challenge is to hire young people from different cultural backgrounds and help them orient themselves in the work environment. Some companies are more open to diversity and inclusion, while others struggle to adapt to different contexts and needs. There are support services available to companies, but they are often not sufficiently known or used. The main requests that emerged from local communities towards local businesses are to be open to diversity and inclusion, providing support for integration and cultural understanding, hiring and mentoring young people with a migrant background.

The interviews highlighted particular difficulties in finding a meeting point with companies, both due to the lack of correspondence of needs - financial and social impact - and due to the type and methods of activities carried out. One of the most used forms of collaboration between local communities and companies is that of volunteering, in which through corporate volunteering days the employees of a company make themselves available to the local context, for example by directly helping in concrete activities for the territory or making their skills available. However, they often provide short-term help and create more work for nonprofits to organize and manage than real benefits. We also lack the ability to create long-term partnerships that are stable and go beyond the mechanism of occasional donations, which are often simply a tax relief for companies.

Interviews with various representatives of local communities highlighted the need for companies to take on social responsibility, particularly when it comes to integrating young people from disadvantaged backgrounds into the

workforce. Identifying recommendations to improve this collaboration:

- **Mentoring and support:** Companies should be willing to invest in mentoring and support programs for these young people. This could involve providing further training to supervisors or trainers on how to effectively guide and support apprentices from disadvantaged backgrounds, who may require more assistance during their initial training period.
- **Financial investments:** Companies should invest in training and employment opportunities for disadvantaged young people.
- **Supportive culture:** Companies should cultivate a supportive work environment through mentorship and specialized training for supervisors to ensure successful integration of these young people.

### Local Participatory Workshop:

The workshop brought together NGOs, businesses, and community groups to discuss social challenges. Participants identified several vulnerable groups: migrants, people with disabilities, the unemployed, and children/youth. Each group faces specific challenges, but all need inclusion inside the society and the companies. Beyond these group-specific issues, broader challenges were identified: environment, culture, and civic engagement in the economy.

The prevailing opinion of participants from associations and NGOs is that it's very difficult to convince companies to listen, and even more difficult to convince them to act. Interest in community cooperation seems low among companies, partly because they do not find such activities useful for business success, struggling to understand the role of sustainability and CSR initiatives as a competitive advantage, as well as being a priority for the climate and society. In fact an important challenge is to raise awareness among companies of the benefits of a sustainable approach to drive the business and to involve local communities to generate social impact.

Together with this lack of vision emerges the difficulty of creating relationships between companies and local communities that involve a long-term commitment, through a process of co-planning and needs analysis. Companies prefer to focus on sporadic and casual contributions and activities which, however, do not help non-profit organizations to carry out their work in the area and which in general generate less impact.

From the discussion it emerged that, even if the specific needs of the target groups may differ substantially from the social need, there are important common points regarding possible cooperation between businesses and civil society:

- **Need for awareness:** Participants agree that there is a notable lack of awareness among companies regarding the needs of different marginalized social groups. Companies could do a lot to foster the inclusion of marginalized groups, but they don't know what their needs and requirements are. In a second phase, companies could even become ambassadors for social groups.

**Need for inclusion through cooperation:** the inclusion of different marginalized social groups cannot happen exclusively through legal means, nor through individual actions, but it is necessary that all interested parties, including public authorities, companies, civil society and members of the groups in question, to coordinate.



# 04

## Country Comparison Analysis



## 04 | COUNTRY COMPARISON ANALYSIS

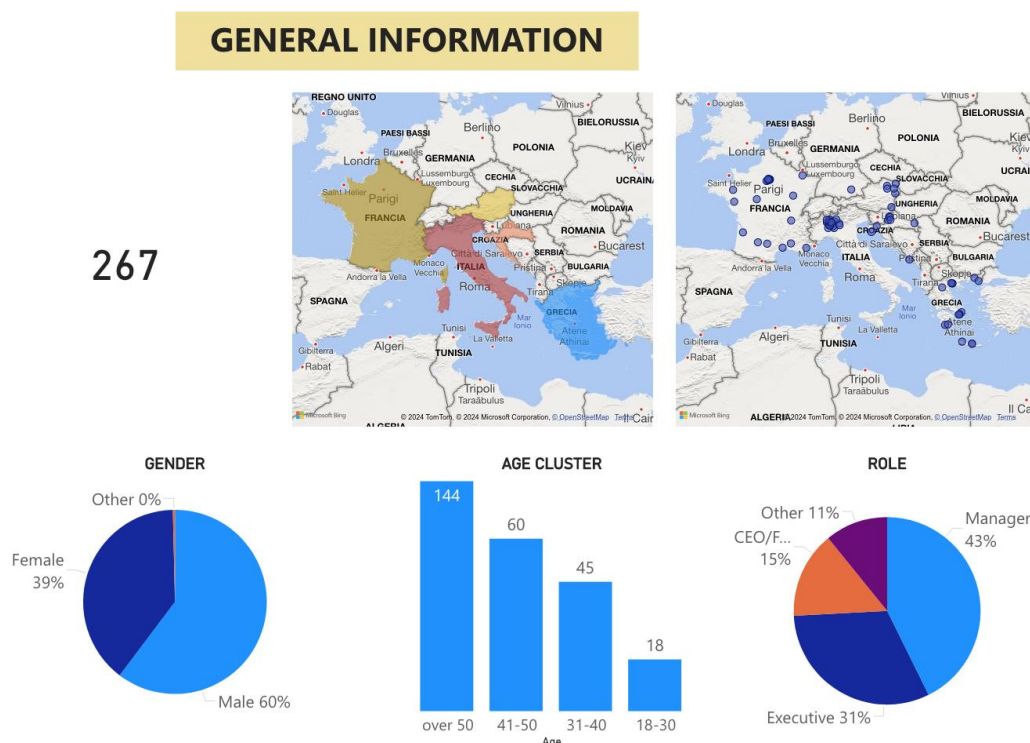
### Trends and differences between different countries on the relationship between CSR and community development

This analysis delves into the data on challenges faced by organizations in managing CSR programs across Italy, Croatia, France, Greece, and Austria. While some difficulties are common across these countries, interesting variations emerge, highlighting potential areas for improvement. The most important and enriching part of the research work was identifying similar trends within the different countries. In particular, it was highlighted in all the countries that companies often lack a figure dedicated to CSR managers and that the skills to do so exist internally. The lack of this professional reference slows down and makes difficult the research and implementation of ad hoc actions aimed at local and social development. This in turn, leads companies to single and non-contextualized actions not linked to a long-term strategy and vision.

#### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMPANIES AND CSR

This section presents a comparative and collective analysis of the data collected from the survey aimed at companies, collected in the five project countries: Austria, France, Italy, Croatia, Greece. The analysis aims to identify common themes and elaborate reflections on the state of companies on the topic of CSR, from the presence of a dedicated managerial figure to the type of initiatives undertaken and the social and environmental problems faced. This common vision will allow us to lay the foundations for the construction of the curriculum and the training path defined in the WP3 phase of the SIM project.

Figure 6



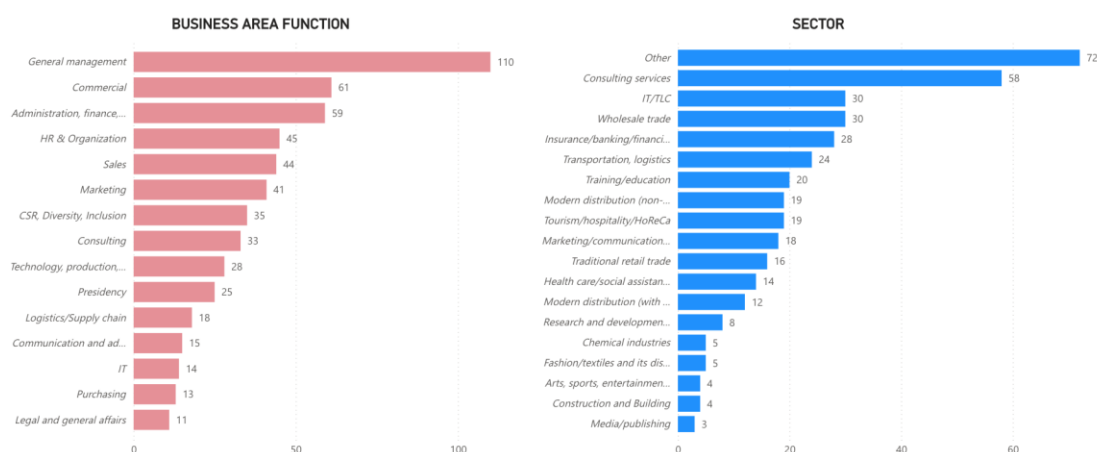
The research identified a potential correlation between the age, gender, and role of respondents involved in CSR

discussions. Notably, a significant portion (43%) of respondents held managerial positions, and within this group, 60% were men aged over 50 (144 out of 267). This raises interesting questions about leadership demographics and their influence on CSR practices, in particular about:

- **Overrepresentation of older male managers:** the data suggests that decision-making regarding CSR may be concentrated within a specific demographic – older male managers. While experience is valuable, a lack of diversity in leadership could potentially limit the scope and approach to CSR.
- **Call for generational and gender balance:** this finding highlights the potential need for a more balanced leadership structure in terms of age and gender. Integrating the perspectives of younger generations and women who often prioritize social and environmental issues could lead to more innovative and impactful CSR strategies.

Possible implications for CSR refer to the fact that a leadership dominated by older managers may prioritize traditional aspects of CSR such as philanthropy or pure charity, neglecting more recent trends such as stakeholder involvement and local sustainability practices. Precisely for this reason, including younger and more diverse voices in leadership could lead to a more holistic approach to CSR, considering the needs of various stakeholders and aligning with evolving social expectations.

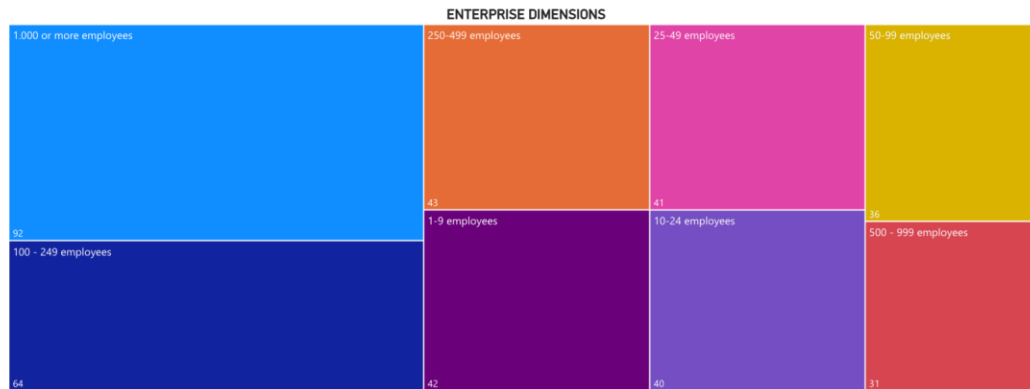
Figure 7



The data reveals interesting insights into the specific areas within companies that are most actively involved in CSR initiatives.

- **General Management at the Forefront:** A significant majority (110 out of 267) of companies have CSR activities primarily driven by general management. This suggests a strategic approach where CSR is integrated into the overall company direction and decision-making processes.
- **Commercial Considerations Play a Role:** The commercial area (sales, marketing, etc.) also plays a notable role in CSR, with 61 out of 267 companies having them lead CSR efforts. This might indicate a focus on aligning CSR initiatives with brand messaging and attracting customers who value responsible business practices.
- **Industry Focus: A Diverse Landscape:** While the specific industries involved aren't entirely clear, the data indicates a diverse range of sectors engaged in CSR. The presence of a significant number of companies in the "consultancy or other unspecified sectors" category (72 out of 267) suggests that CSR is not limited to traditional manufacturing or resource extraction industries. This trend reflects the growing importance of social responsibility across various sectors.

Figure 8



An analysis of the company size distribution reveals a twofold perspective on the prevalence and approach to CSR. Key findings:

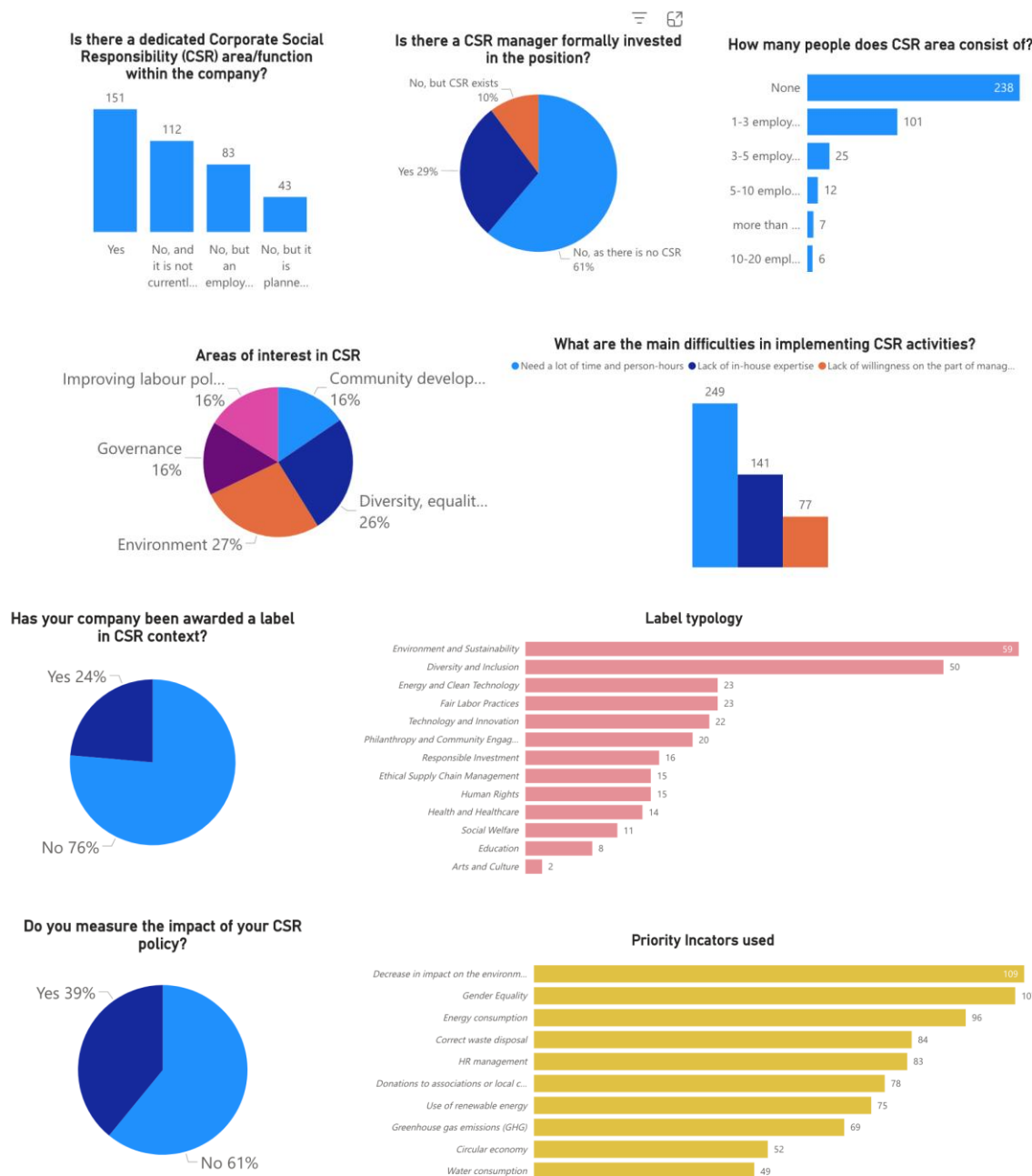
- **Large multinationals dominate:** A significant portion (92 out of 267) of the companies are multinationals with 1,000 or more employees. These large corporations often have the resources and global reach to implement comprehensive CSR programs that address social and environmental issues across their operations and supply chains.
- **Mid-sized companies show active participation:** While smaller in number, companies with 500 to 999 employees (31 companies) and 250 to 499 employees (43 companies) also demonstrate a strong commitment to CSR. These mid-sized firms may focus their CSR efforts on specific local or regional initiatives aligned with their business operations and stakeholder interests.
- **Growing presence of SMEs:** The number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) engaged in CSR is noteworthy, with 63 companies falling within the 100 to 249 employee range. This suggests that CSR is gaining traction among smaller businesses, recognizing its importance in enhancing reputation, attracting socially conscious consumers, and contributing to sustainable practices.

The company size distribution highlights the diverse landscape of CSR engagement. Large multinationals have the capacity for far-reaching CSR initiatives, while mid-sized companies and SMEs can make a significant impact through targeted and localized CSR efforts. The overall trend of increasing CSR adoption across different company sizes underscores the growing recognition of CSR as an integral part of responsible business practices. The specific CSR activities and approaches undertaken by companies of different sizes may vary depending on their industry, geographical context, and unique business strategies. It's crucial to evaluate the effectiveness of CSR programs not just by the size of the company but also by the measurable impact they have on social, environmental, and governance dimensions.



Figure 9 and 10

## CSR IN THE COMPANIES



The dashboard developed in collaboration with the University of Milan Bicocca allows the graphic and interactive re-elaboration of the data collected through the surveys for companies in all the countries of the project. This has helped to carry out an in-depth and transversal analysis of the data.

One of the most interesting data appears to be linked to the presence of a department or company area dedicated to CSR, compared to the actual presence of a CSR manager in which 10% declare that it does not exist, but a dedicated area is expected. **While 61% declare that there is neither a CSR figure nor an area.** This data confirms what emerged from the interviews, compared to the lack of time and personnel inside the companies, as well as the lack of specific skills. The absence of a CSR manager leads companies to not have a clear and strategic CSR strategy for the future.

This can lead to punctual and sporadic CSR activities that may not be in line with the company's own objectives. Furthermore, the relationship with the local community becomes difficult and the social impact that the company can generate remains low and ineffective.

In fact, **61% of survey respondents declare that they do not carry out an impact assessment of their CSR initiatives**, creating a gap in the measurement of sustainability indicators, which are increasingly necessary to comply with the new European directives in the ESG field.

On the contrary, the presence of a CSR manager can help identify and exploit opportunities to improve the company's social and environmental performance and above all to build wide-ranging strategies and respond to compliance, becoming more sustainable and more competitive in the market.

Despite this, the positive aspects of the companies are highlighted according to which 29% of the responding companies have a CSR manager and 10% indicate that they do not have a dedicated professional figure but there is an area dedicated to CSR. In relation to these companies, the main areas of social interest are identified within which the environmental theme emerges predominantly (27%), followed by the Diversity & Inclusion themes (26%), while they are tied with 16% each for the governance, local development, and improvement of work policies.

Through the overall and comparative analysis between the five different countries, 3 key points emerge regarding the presence and effectiveness of CSR within companies:

### 1. Lack of Internal Expertise: a Common Hurdle

A striking similarity is the prevalence of issues related to a lack of internal CSR expertise. This is evident in:

- Italy: Data from Italy highlights this challenge explicitly, suggesting that many companies lack qualified personnel to handle CSR effectively.
- France: Similar issues surface in France, with data pointing to a lack of internal expertise alongside complexities arising from stakeholder diversity and regulations.
- Austria: Austria also faces a gap in CSR expertise, further compounded by organizational difficulties.

This suggests a potential need for a regional focus on developing CSR expertise within organizations. Training programs, strategic hiring, and partnerships with external CSR consultants could be crucial steps.

### 2. Resource Constraints

Limited resources, particularly time and finances, pose a significant challenge across all the countries:

- Croatia: Data from Croatia explicitly mentions a lack of internal resources, including financial constraints faced by local stakeholders.
- Greece: Similar resource limitations are highlighted in Greece, acting as a barrier to effective CSR implementation.
- Austria: Austria also faces resource constraints alongside the lack of internal expertise.

This underlines the need for strategic resource allocation within organizations. Prioritizing CSR initiatives and exploring innovative financing mechanisms could be beneficial.

### 3. Country-Specific Challenges

While the lack of expertise and resource constraints are universal themes, some interesting country-specific challenges emerge:

- **Italy:** Italian companies seem to face particular difficulties in interacting with local public authorities and the territory itself. This suggests a potential need for improved stakeholder engagement strategies and better understanding of local contexts.
- **Croatia:** Support from company management appears to be a specific challenge in Croatia. This highlights the importance of leadership buy-in and integrating CSR into the overall company strategy.

- **France:** The complexities arising from stakeholder diversity and regulations are a prominent concern in France. This suggests a need for tailored CSR approaches that consider specific industry sectors and stakeholder landscapes.
- **Greece:** Difficulties interacting with the territory are consistently mentioned in the data from Greece. This could point to a need for improved communication and collaboration with local communities.
- **Austria:** the lack of awareness and knowledge on the part of companies of CSR and sustainability issues was highlighted, which makes it difficult to understand the actions necessary to generate impact in the local community.

This comparative analysis reveals both common challenges and unique difficulties faced by organizations in different countries when managing CSR programs. While a lack of internal expertise and resource constraints are universal hurdles, specific challenges related to stakeholder engagement, leadership support, and navigating regulations also emerge. By acknowledging these variations and implementing targeted solutions, companies across the region can strengthen their CSR efforts and contribute more effectively to a sustainable future.

## RELATIONSHIP WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES

With respect to the relationship with local communities, the survey administered to companies in the various countries highlighted the following data - as indicated in the graph below -:

Figure 11

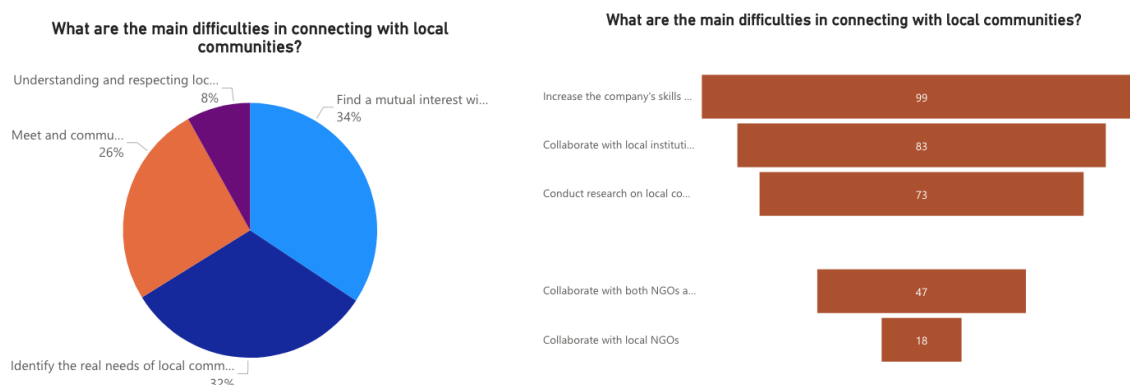


A concerning trend emerges from the analysis of companies' interactions with local communities: many engage in superficial and fleeting relationships to address social needs. The majority of participating **companies**, a staggering **160 out of 267**, indicate that **their collaborations with local communities last an average of 1 to 4 years**. Only 68 companies have sustained partnerships for over 11 years.

The areas of greatest need addressed through local community engagement are environmental protection, followed by gender equality initiatives. Target beneficiaries are predominantly the entire population or young demographics.

The short-lived nature of corporate-community partnerships highlights a need for deeper, more meaningful engagement. Companies must move beyond superficial interactions and adopt a long-term approach that fosters sustainable change. Prioritizing environmental and gender-related issues aligns with pressing societal concerns and demonstrates corporate responsibility. By focusing on broader community needs and the well-being of younger generations, companies can create a lasting positive impact.

Figure 12



A closer examination of corporate-community engagement reveals two critical challenges that hinder effective partnerships as indicated in the graph above:

## 1. Aligning Interests

Companies often face difficulties aligning their interests with those of local communities. This divergence stems from the distinct objectives of businesses, primarily focused on profit generation, and non-profit organizations, driven by social impact. As a result, companies may struggle to find common ground for collaboration, leading to a mismatch between corporate initiatives and community needs. In fact the 34% of respondents indicated a lack of mutual interest, highlighting the pervasiveness of this challenge. In particular for:

- **Misaligned Goals:** The inherent difference between business and non-profit objectives creates a fundamental barrier to alignment.
- **Limited Understanding:** Companies may lack a comprehensive understanding of community needs and priorities.
- **Ineffective Communication:** Inadequate communication between companies and communities hinders mutual understanding.

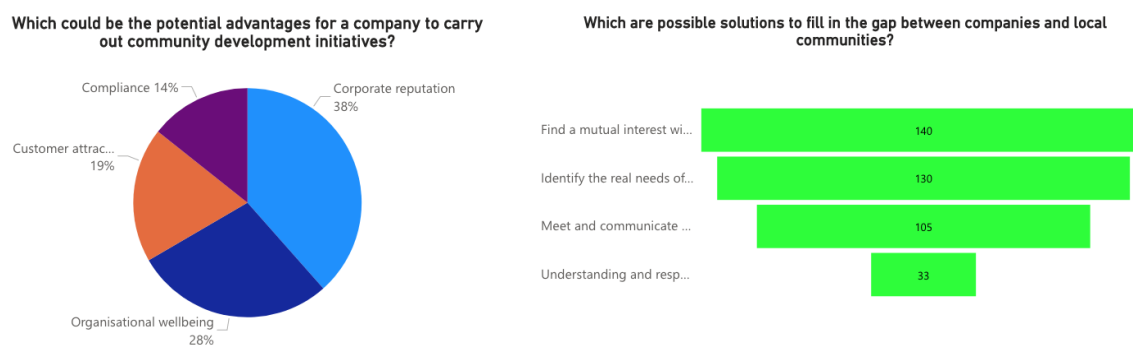
## 2. Identifying Community Needs

Companies often struggle to accurately identify the real needs of local communities. This challenge stems from a lack of specialized skills and trained personnel within corporate teams to effectively address social and territorial issues. In fact 32% of respondents cited difficulty identifying community needs, data that is linked to the vision of 99 companies out of 267 that declare they lack the necessary skills and trained personnel to address the challenges of CSR and social impact initiatives. In particular for:

- **Skills Gap:** Companies may lack in-house expertise in social impact assessment and community engagement.
- **Limited Resources:** Insufficient allocation of resources dedicated to community engagement activities.
- **Inadequate Training:** Lack of training opportunities for employees involved in community engagement.



Figure 13



The survey conducted among companies regarding CSR and their relationship with local communities revealed intriguing insights into corporate awareness of implementing social and environmental activities. Interestingly, the primary motivations for CSR initiatives stem from reputational and organizational well-being considerations, rather than mere compliance with regulations.

**A significant 38% of respondents identified enhanced corporate reputation as a major potential benefit of effective collaboration with local communities.** This highlights the growing importance of reputation management in today's business landscape, where investors and consumers are increasingly scrutinising companies' social and environmental impact. While reputation takes the lead, **organizational well-being** emerges as another compelling motivator, cited by **28% of respondents**. Engaging in CSR initiatives can foster a positive and purpose-driven work environment, boosting employee morale, engagement, and productivity.

Compliance with regulations, often perceived as the primary driver of CSR initiatives, falls behind reputation and organizational well-being, with only 14% of respondents citing it as a significant motivator. This suggests a shift in corporate mindsets, moving beyond compliance-driven CSR towards a more strategic approach that recognizes the tangible benefits of social and environmental responsibility.

As companies navigate the evolving CSR landscape, it is crucial to align their initiatives with their core values, business strategies, and community needs. By doing so, they can transform CSR from a mere obligation into a powerful driver of sustainable growth and positive societal impact.

This exploration of corporate-community engagement has revealed **key strategies for establishing impactful partnerships**. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement, companies can transform their CSR efforts from fleeting gestures to powerful drivers of positive change.

### 1. Finding Common Ground:

Seeking out community partners whose values and mission resonate with the company's own lays the foundation for successful collaborations, **140 out of 267 companies declare that the identification of mutual interests**, engaging with local communities through open dialogues and needs assessments, can ensure initiatives genuinely address the most pressing social and environmental concerns.

### 2. Building Internal Capacity:

**130 companies out of 267 identify the need to fully understand the real needs of the local community**, which becomes possible only through corporate upskilling with new managerial figures, such as the Social Impact Manager, capable of understanding these dynamics and planning impact initiatives. Investing in training and development programs empowers employees with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of social impact initiatives. Partnering with non-profit organizations and community leaders provides invaluable access to expertise and insights,

ensuring initiatives are well-aligned with community needs.

Moreover through the **vision, analysis and sharing directly from the local communities** involved, including associations, non-profit bodies and representatives of local institutions, a broad vision of the social problems linked to the territories and countries of reference emerged, identifying different aspects such as migration, youth participation and unemployment, the environmental issue. However, the analysis of the local contexts of each country allowed us to highlight common points in the relationship with the company, such as:

### Project-Based Collaboration:

A common theme across several countries is cooperation on specific projects. This is evident in:

- Italy: Companies in Italy collaborate with communities on multiple projects, suggesting a focus on addressing specific local needs.
- Croatia: Data from Croatia shows both systemic and project-based cooperation, highlighting a potentially more comprehensive approach.
- France: While cooperation is reported as limited in France, some instances of project-based collaboration exist.
- Greece: Greece also displays a mix of project-based cooperation and limited engagement models.

### Variations in Engagement:

The data also suggests some interesting variations in company-community relations:

- Sponsorship: Italy seems to utilize sponsorships as a form of community engagement, potentially indicating a less collaborative approach.
- Network Building: Austria's focus on network building suggests a more strategic and long-term approach to community relations.

### Designing Effective CSR Initiatives:

These findings inform the design of future CSR initiatives that foster stronger company-community relationships:

- Needs Assessment: Understanding specific community needs through surveys, focus groups, and community consultations is crucial.
- Project Co-Creation: Engaging communities in co-creating CSR projects can lead to more sustainable and impactful solutions.
- Long-Term Partnerships: Shifting from project-based collaboration to long-term partnerships can create deeper trust and shared benefits.
- Capacity Building: Providing training and resources to community organizations can empower them to contribute more effectively to CSR initiatives.

### Country-Specific Recommendations:

Based on the data, some tailored recommendations emerge:

- Italy: Move beyond sponsorships and increase focus on project co-creation and long-term partnerships.
- Croatia: Build upon existing models of systemic cooperation and expand them to a broader range of communities.
- France: Explore the potential for project-based collaboration, focusing on specific local needs and challenges.
- Greece: Increase the scope of project-based cooperation and explore opportunities for network building.
- Austria: Expand the network-building approach to involve more companies and communities, creating a collaborative CSR ecosystem.

# 05

## Positive Case Studies



## 05 | POSITIVE CASE STUDIES

### Profile of a socially responsible company towards its local community and the bond that can be created between these two actors - the best possible company

This section showcases a positive example of a company-community relationship in each country. In fact through the research we identify successful case studies by companies and local communities in undertaking collaboration and co-planning paths aimed at creating CSR projects that respond to territorial and social needs. The case studies are selected by the following criteria:

- The sustainability of the CSR initiative
- The effectiveness of the CSR initiative
- The scalability of the CSR initiative
- The potential for the CSR initiative to be replicated by other businesses

#### EDENRED - ITALY

[Edenred](#) is an example of innovation and social responsibility. As the pioneers of Restaurant Ticket, they have created a legacy of improving employee well-being within organizations. The commitment extends beyond individual companies as they have created a larger group with a corporate structure dedicated to sustainability. This holistic approach ensures that CSR initiatives are not simply an afterthought but rather an integral part of the company philosophy. Edenred's approach to CSR is characterized by its multi-layered structure. At the helm of this initiative is a dedicated group-wide team, charged with overseeing sustainability practices across the entire organization. This commitment is further consolidated at the national level, where the team works to implement and localize CSR strategies. In Italy, the CSR Manager reports to the Director of Human Resources and CSR, highlighting the company's integrated approach to employee well-being and social responsibility.

One of the pillars of the CSR strategy is the commitment to connecting with local communities. Despite having the largest offices in Milan and Rome, with smaller offices in Bari, Naples and Trento, the commitment to maintaining a constant presence and connection with the communities is renewed. The flagship Restaurant Ticket program goes beyond providing meal breaks; serves as a catalyst to support local organizations that assist those in need.

The company directly involves its employees through paid volunteering days at organizations such as Banco Alimentare or Caritas, to give them the opportunity to make a tangible difference in the lives of others and get to know the social reality up close.

In collaboration with a client company and the Food Bank, a pilot program called "Donate your shopping" was launched. This innovative initiative allows users of Edenred applications to purchase food which will then be donated at the Food Bank points closest to the client company. This program not only provides much-needed food assistance, but also fosters a sense of community among our users.

Edenred's commitment to employee well-being and social responsibility represents an example of a company that was born and incorporates a corporate vision that goes beyond mere profit, but is oriented towards the common good. Addressing the large companies of the future that will increasingly follow the model of benefit companies and B Corp companies, becoming examples of responsibility and social change.



## INTERPLAST - GREECE

The driving force behind the CSR initiatives of this family business - [Interplast](#) - is Ms. Zoe Rizopoulou, ably supported by her father, Mr. Rizopoulos. Together, they lead a series of activities that foster strong relationships with both the local community and the wider region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. Their commitment consists in active participation in the life of the local community; actively participating in forums, events, social gatherings and regular meetings with regional authorities. This collaborative spirit is evident in the makeup of the CSR unit itself, which is essentially a family affair: Mr Rizopoulos works alongside his son and daughter Zoe, who formally head the department.

The team takes on a significant responsibility: developing the company's CSR roadmap and implementing impactful initiatives in several areas:

Responsible Financial Management: ensuring sound core economic practices form the foundation of their approach.

- Environmental management: reducing pollutants and minimizing their environmental impact is a key priority.
- Investing in the community: Active participation in cultural and social activities demonstrates their commitment to the well-being of the local population.
- Support first responders: Their actions speak volumes: Rewarding firefighters for their courage in putting out fires and donating essential equipment like masks exemplifies their dedication to public safety.
- Promoting sustainability: The next forum, organized in collaboration with the Technical Chamber of Thrace and the Municipality of Komotini, will focus on energy saving, highlighting their commitment to a sustainable future.
- Regional collaboration: Maintain continuous communication with Eastern Macedonia and the Thrace region, supporting initiatives that strengthen the region's growing industrial sector.
- Promotion of education: Their coordinated efforts with the Region and universities to establish a new department underline their belief in the power of education.
- Community Engagement: Organizing a large-scale forum in Komotini with 700 guests from all over Greece demonstrates their commitment to promoting dialogue and collaboration.
- Partnership with local organizations: Partnering with the local church further strengthens their ties to the community and demonstrates a willingness to support diverse institutions.

In essence, the Rizopoulos family and its CSR unit are the heart and soul of the company's social responsibility efforts. Through their dedication, collaborative spirit and diverse initiatives, they are making a positive and lasting impact on their community and region.

## ADAPEI 35 - FRANCE

[Adapei 35](#) is a residential care facility for disabled adults and it is dedicated to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) with a CSR manager figure. The company does CSR efforts, defining communication strategies, managing the communications department, and overseeing initiatives like events, internal communication, and magazine publications. They collaborate with the Utopi Group on the "Produit en Utopi" brand's communication strategy and develop digital tools like websites, intranets, and social media platforms. Importantly, ensuring communication accessibility for all audiences through formats like FALC Easy to Read and Understand is a priority.

A dedicated monitoring committee actively identifies CSR issues, and a diagnostic process is employed to understand stakeholders' expectations. Adapei 35 actively works with regional authorities, collaborating with medico-social

structures and participating in the ecological transition collective (ESMS 35). Engaging with the GRAAL network further strengthens their commitment to environmental sustainability.

While internal commitment exists, some reluctance due to time constraints and budget limitations is acknowledged. The association welcomes internal and external stakeholder involvement and recognizes the potential need for additional expertise, particularly in complex areas like energy transition.

Adapei 35 actively fosters relationships with the local community. Collaborating with Rennes Métropole to create synergies within their business park is one example. They are also open to creating "third places" within their establishments, fostering further interaction. Building momentum with local associations and authorities is a key objective.

Some of the main engagement and CSR actions are:

- Network of ambassadors in each school, an ecological transition collective, and an eco-gesture guide translated into FALC demonstrate their commitment to impactful projects;
- "Zero waste challenge" and a food project tackle sustainability issues head-on, while initiatives to install renewable energy structures point towards a greener future;
- Via Silva OFF Photographic Festival: This project, in collaboration with "Les Ailes de Caïus" and photographer Elodie Guignard, documented the integration of Adapei 35 into a new neighbourhood. Showcasing employees' professional activities through photographs displayed prominently at the ViaSilva metro station fence aimed to promote inclusion and increase visibility;
- Cafet' Utopi: This catering service provides opportunities for people with disabilities by integrating them into a work environment alongside students and professionals;
- Open Days: ESAT UTOPI REDON organises open days for companies and families, offering guided tours, demonstrations, artistic experiences, and a treasure hunt for children.

## JGL - CROATIA

[Jadran-Galenski Laboratorij \(JGL\)](#) is the leading national company in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sector. It stands out as an advocate for corporate responsibility, actively promoting sustainable practices both within its operations and beyond. This commitment is evident in several key areas:

- Management Leadership: JGL's management team actively promotes CSR not only within the company but also through leadership roles in external organizations. This dedication is reflected in their award-winning sustainability performance.
- Dedicated ESG Roles: Recognizing the potential for bias in CSR reporting, JGL has established dedicated ESG positions to ensure objective reporting on various aspects of sustainability.
- Comprehensive reporting: JGL publishes annual reports that integrate financial results, sustainability efforts and audits, aligned with global standards.
- Alignment with United Nations Goals: JGL strategically integrates the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into its operations, focusing on areas such as health, gender equality and responsible consumption.

JGL aims to operate in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), thereby contributing to addressing global climate and social challenges and ensuring a better future for upcoming generations. In 2021, the company established a long-term business strategy supported by three pillars, one of which is directly related to the impact of climate change. In 2023, a corporate project was implemented specifically tied to ESG goals, along with a system to monitor their implementation – the Group ESG Manager.

Through their Code of Ethics, relief efforts in Ukraine, and the use of renewable energy sources. JGL's commitment to ESG principles demonstrates that companies can integrate sustainability into their core business practices, contributing to a more responsible future.

## TELE - AUSTRIA

[TELE Haase Steuergeräte Ges.m.b.H.](#) is a company from Vienna that has been working in the technology sector for over 60 years. This company represents a peculiar case as, although there is no specific CSR Manager figure within the company, there are around 4-5 employees who work regularly and guide Corporate Social Responsibility issues. In fact, working groups have been regularly set up for specific projects in which employees also consider and address issues relating to sustainability and social responsibility, as well as resource saving operations.

Precisely for this reason the company maintains a strong commitment to supporting local communities. There are no predetermined partnerships, but rather collaborations adapted to the specific objectives and needs identified by parts of the local communities and the target audience of each project. Here are some examples of their diverse community engagement:

- Green Up Your Life: This ongoing project focuses on apprentices and supposedly promotes environmental responsibility or skills development.
- Christkindbriefaktion: In collaboration with Caritas Österreich, the company helps make the holiday wishes of children, young people and adults with disabilities or in need come true.
- Collaboration with other local organizations: Past projects have involved Fond Soziales Wien (social fund) and SOS Kinderdorf (children's villages), highlighting their involvement in various social causes.
- Clothing collection campaigns: By collaborating with local humanitarian organizations, the company actively participates in collecting donations and clothing for those in need.
- Next initiative: Apprentices will be encouraged to volunteer during working hours, likely supporting local causes such as Vienna's retirement homes.

There is a dedicated workforce focused on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This team discusses CSR activities with local communities, actively seeking ideas and solutions for positive impact. Furthermore, a new collaboration project is underway with "Lichtblickerhof", a local community centre that supports children facing serious illnesses, disabilities or traumas.

In essence, the company demonstrates a flexible and impactful approach to community engagement, tailoring its support to different needs and partnering with various local organizations for maximum reach.

**Through the vision, the experience, the articulation of different types of companies, from family ones to multinationals, with the presence or absence of a CSR manager, positive cases emerge of companies that are increasingly committed to reconciling the business objective of profit by building bridges, initiatives and projects that collaboratively generate actions of social impact, understanding that the common benefit concerns everyone, that society and the environment are not simply issues or guidelines to follow, but are an integral part of collective well-being.**

## The ideal company for driving social change

In the heart of a thriving community, the ideal "social impact" company stands as a testament to the transformative power of social responsibility. This exemplary company seamlessly integrates its business operations with the well-being of the community it serves, forging an unbreakable bond of mutual growth and prosperity.

The commitment to social responsibility manifests in every aspect of its operations, beginning with its unwavering dedication to its local workforce. Recognizing the community's rich talent pool, prioritizing local hiring, investing in training and development programs that empower individuals to reach their full potential. This approach not only strengthens the local economy but also fosters a sense of loyalty and pride among employees, who see themselves as integral contributors to the company's success.

Beyond its workforce, the company actively engages with the community, recognizing it as an invaluable partner in shaping a brighter future. Through open communication and genuine collaboration, the company works alongside local organizations, institutions, and residents to identify and address pressing community needs. Together, they embark on impactful initiatives that range from infrastructure development and educational programs to environmental cleanups and disaster relief efforts.

**The company recognizes that environmental stewardship is an integral part of social responsibility.** As such, it meticulously integrates environmentally friendly practices into its operations, minimizing its carbon footprint, promoting responsible waste management, and embracing renewable energy sources. This dedication to environmental protection ensures a healthier planet for future generations, safeguarding the very community in which the company thrives.

Furthermore, the company extends its ethical principles to its global supply chain. Recognizing the interconnectedness of the world, the company ensures that its sourcing practices align with its values of fair labor and sustainable resource extraction. This commitment to ethical sourcing not only protects the well-being of workers worldwide but also minimizes the company's environmental impact across its global operations.

The culmination of social responsibility efforts is a flourishing community bond, characterized by unwavering trust and transparency.

**Local communities see the company not merely as a business entity but as an integral part of the social fabric, a trusted partner committed to their well-being.** This symbiotic relationship extends beyond trust to encompass shared prosperity. Success directly translates into economic benefits for the community, creating a virtuous cycle of growth and development. Residents enjoy employment opportunities, access to quality education, and a thriving local economy, all fuelled by the company's presence.

As a result of unwavering commitment to social responsibility, the community it serves basks in a sense of local pride. Residents take ownership of the company's achievements, recognizing their contributions to its success story. This shared pride strengthens the community's identity and fosters a collective spirit of resilience and determination.

**The bond between the company and the community extends to collaborative problem-solving. When challenges arise, the company and the community approach them as partners, working together to identify effective solutions.** This collaborative approach ensures that solutions are tailored to the community's unique needs and reflect the perspectives of all stakeholders. By prioritizing environmental responsibility, the company safeguards the planet's natural resources, preserving the community's pristine environment and ensuring a healthy legacy for generations to come.

The company's unwavering commitment to social responsibility, coupled with its deep engagement with the community, serves as an inspiration to all, demonstrating the transformative power of a shared vision for a sustainable and prosperous future.

In conclusion successful company involvement hinges on three key considerations:

- **Human Connection:** Clearly identifying the role of human interaction in their partnership, valuing both employee engagement and interpersonal relationships with the association.

- **Target Audience Needs:** Prioritizing the initial situation of the beneficiaries (transportation access, schedules) and the potential consequences of their involvement in any action.
- **Long-Term Commitment:** Moving beyond isolated tasks and committing to the overall success of the initiative, potentially including long-term support for beneficiaries such as internship opportunities.

The main recommendations identified in improving CSR and the relationship between the company and the local community are:

1. The need to introduce **specific CSR managerial figures** within companies with knowledge of social impact and sustainability, it is essential that more and more companies include a CSR manager at the head of a dedicated area to plan the long-term strategy of CSR actions, maximizing their impact and also responding to the necessary compliance required by the various European directives in the field of sustainability (CSRD - CSDD);
2. Promote and stimulate **mutual dialogue between local companies and communities** with a view to trust and complementarity. Also through the creation of space, events, meetings and places capable of bringing these two stakeholders together to get to know each other and co-plan together;
3. The creation of a **database or a shared platform** capable of creating a match between non-profit entities, identified according to different social and territorial needs, and companies. In this way there would be a virtual archive in which, in particular, companies can identify non-profit entities in line with their values and strategy, guaranteeing a standard of reliability and transparency of the same;
4. Raise **awareness on CSR issues for companies**: we have seen how a company's commitment to being socially responsible offers various opportunities, from improving reputation and corporate image to competitive advantage and attracting greater investments. However, there are still too few companies that implement such actions and are prepared to do so. It is therefore necessary to increase awareness and information initiatives towards companies to help them understand the urgency of acting on climate change and the importance of becoming not only economic but also social actors to generate collective well-being. In this sense, we recommend the organization of more events, online communications campaigns and opportunities to spread CSR issues.
5. The identification and promotion of **intermediaries** - professionals or specialized companies - capable of guiding companies in consultancy and co-planning processes with local communities. That is, facilitators of dialogue and the implementation of initiatives, bypassing the difficulties and obstacles that normally encounter in establishing a collaboration.



# 06

## Conclusion and Recommendations



## 06 | CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Take up the topic of skills again - which ones are needed - the basis of training and educational paths

The overall background analysis work on the context of the five countries involved has laid important foundations for the development of the project, in particular for co-design and construction of the curriculum, which is the main objective of WP3.

#### The figure of the Social Impact Manager

Through the research conducted, the interviews and in particular the focus groups it was possible to dialogue on the figure of the **Social Impact Manager**, described by the majority of stakeholders as the professional figure capable of filling the identified needs. In particular, he is seen as a hybrid professional figure capable of bringing the corporate world into dialogue with the non profit world and in general with the local community of reference.

The Social Impact Manager becomes a strategic reference within the company, including strictly managerial, business, organizational and team management skills and complex processes that respond to the company vision. On the other hand, he is a professional who knows how to interpret the needs of the social fabric and is capable of implementing the necessary actions to initiate a selection, dialogue and collaboration with local community bodies (non-profit organizations and public administration).

An innovative, transversal and dynamic figure who responds to the constantly changing job market and who opens up scenarios on the so-called "green jobs", all those professions that face the challenges of sustainability in the present and in the future.

The entire research, data processing, exchange with stakeholders and with different countries has led to the identification of skills necessary for the role of Social Impact Manager capable of combining the corporate and business world with that of non-profit and the social fabric of reference. Below is a preliminary list of the skills identified and emerged during the research:

- a. **Managerial skills:** These skills encompass a broad range of competencies, including strategic thinking, decision-making, communication, motivation, delegation, adaptability, emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, continuous learning, and ethical leadership. It also requires training and experience gained in the corporate and business environment to know the dynamics, needs, requests and language.
- b. **Social impact skills:** encompass understanding community needs, building collaborations, designing impactful programs, evaluating outcomes, and demonstrating cultural sensitivity. It also requires previous experience in contact with non-profit organizations. Highlighting the ability to analyze needs and evaluate the social problems of a given territory by applying participatory, facilitation and dialogue processes with the community.
- c. **Soft skills:** these transversal skills increasingly characterize professional figures and make them more effective. A Social Impact Manager must make these characteristics his own and integrate them into his own work approach. In particular, Effective Communication - the ability to clearly convey ideas and information, both verbally and in writing, is essential for building relationships, promoting collaboration and ensuring everyone is on the same page along with the ability to actively listen to enable people to truly understand perspectives and the concerns of others, adapting language and style to the context; Teamwork - the ability to work effectively with others, contributing to a shared goal while respecting individual strengths and

- d. perspectives, is essential to achieving common goals; Problem solving - the ability to identify problems, analyse information, and develop creative solutions. Together to adaptability, the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and embrace new ideas; Time management - the ability to prioritize tasks, manage deadlines, and work efficiently is essential to productivity and success; Decision making - the ability to gather information, evaluate options, and make sound decisions, is a critical skill for leaders and individuals alike; Interpersonal skills - which include empathy, emotional intelligence and the ability to build relationships, are crucial to fostering positive relationships and creating a supportive work environment. Individuals with strong interpersonal skills can understand the perspectives and feelings of others, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts constructively; Leadership - the ability to inspire and motivate others, delegate tasks effectively, and create a positive work environment—is essential to achieving organizational goals; Creativity - the ability to generate new ideas, approach problems from different angles and think outside the box, is a valuable asset in today's competitive landscape.
- e. **Technical skills:** very specific skills inherent to the reference sector, in particular: Sustainability and ESG skills, to understand the sustainability principles, ESG frameworks and the relevant European directives; Territorial research and analysis: Conduct in-depth research and analysis on local and regional sustainability issues; Stakeholder Engagement Skills: Cultivate strong relationships with diverse stakeholders, fostering collaboration; Impact assessment, develop and implement comprehensive sustainability reporting systems.

***“A Social Impact Manager should be objective, possess strong analytical skills, demonstrate ethical behaviour, and have both personal and professional interest in social and environmental topics. A SIM should be proactive, innovative, open to discussions, and even prepared for arguments.”***

*Participant in focus group, Croatia*

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SIM TRAINING PROGRAM

As regards the future training program and the SIM methodology, through the analysis of the information collected, in particular through the focus groups and interviews conducted in the 5 countries, some key points emerge to define the boundaries of the co-planning and the implementation of the training course within the partner universities:

### **Mentorship: Guiding and Empowering**

One of the cornerstones of such a program is mentorship. Pairing experienced SIMs with aspiring students allows for invaluable knowledge transfer and skill development. Here's how mentoring can be optimized: students may not have extensive experience working directly with entrepreneurs. Mentors can play a crucial role in helping them navigate this relationship. This includes providing guidance on communication strategies, understanding entrepreneurial mindsets, and effectively presenting ideas. Role-playing exercises and case studies can further equip students for these interactions. It's therefore important to identify and assign to the class and students a professional mentor/coach capable of guiding the students in this path and in the relationship with local companies and communities. So during the program it's important to provide one-to-one paths between students and mentor.

### **Direct Collaboration**

While mentors offer valuable insights, it's equally important to facilitate direct engagement between students and entrepreneurs. Generating a real process of co-planning and bottom-up participation on students' needs.

This could involve:

- Joint Brainstorming Sessions: Bringing students and entrepreneurs together to brainstorm solutions and co-create innovative approaches to social challenges.
- Shadowing Opportunities: Allowing students to shadow entrepreneurs during meetings or site visits, providing them with a firsthand understanding of business operations and decision-making processes.
- Joint Project Management: Assigning students and entrepreneurs collaborative projects, fostering a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for achieving impactful results.

## Informal Education

Informal education, often contrasted with its formal counterpart, encompasses a broad spectrum of learning experiences that normally take place outside of structured academic contexts. This ongoing process of acquiring knowledge, skills and values through interactions and experiences should be integrated into the curriculum and training path of future Social Impact Managers. Stimulating an informal learning process guided by personal interests, curiosity and uniqueness.

The need is therefore identified to include laboratory, artistic and learning by doing experiences in relation to local communities and companies within the training path. This approach nurtures passion and creativity, providing a space for exploration, experimentation and passion-driven activities.

The benefits of informal education go beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills, also improving social and emotional intelligence. Through collaboration, communication and empathy, informal learning promotes valuable life skills essential for personal and professional success. Defining all those soft skills necessary for the new SIM figure capable of quickly adapting to changes and contexts.

## Setting Realistic Expectations

Transparency and realistic expectations are crucial for a successful mentoring program and ultimately, successful SIM projects. Here's how to ensure everyone is on the same page:

- Managing Corporate Expectations: Mentors should guide students in crafting realistic proposals for companies. It's essential to communicate upfront that students are not seasoned consultants offering a one-size-fits-all solution. Companies should view these collaborations as opportunities for exploration, knowledge exchange, and potential co-creation.
- Managing Student Expectations: Mentors can help students manage their own expectations. Students' initial ideas might not be readily embraced by companies. However, the program should emphasize the value of the entire experience – fostering connections, learning from diverse perspectives, and gaining practical exposure to the field.

**By actively encouraging open communication and collaboration between students, entrepreneurs, and mentors, a well-designed program can foster a win-win situation for all stakeholders.** Companies gain fresh perspectives and potential solutions, while students gain valuable skills and connections.

The design of this program will not be a top-down directive but rather an outcome of a collaborative and participatory process. Partners from diverse backgrounds will come together, bringing their wealth of experiences and perspectives to the table. This bottom-up approach ensures that the program is grounded in the realities of the field, reflecting the needs and aspirations of both aspiring SIMs and the organizations they will serve.

The program will not merely impart knowledge but also leverage the rich experiences of those involved. By incorporating case studies, real-world examples, and opportunities for mentorship, the program will create a dynamic

learning environment where participants can learn from each other and from experienced practitioners.

**At the heart of the program lies the goal of positioning the SIM role as a truly innovative, competitive, and attractive career option for young people. The program will showcase the transformative power of SIMs, highlighting their ability to make a tangible difference in the world while also enjoying rewarding career growth and development opportunities.**

To attract and engage young talent, the program will be designed with their interests and aspirations in mind. It will emphasize the impact they can make as SIMs, the opportunity to contribute to meaningful social and environmental change, and the potential for personal and professional fulfillment.

As the world grapples with complex social and environmental challenges, SIMs are uniquely positioned to lead the way towards a more sustainable future. The training program will equip them with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to navigate these challenges effectively. They will learn to identify and analyze social and environmental issues, develop innovative solutions, and collaborate with diverse stakeholders to drive positive change.

In conclusion, this transformative training program will not only empower aspiring SIMs but also contribute to the recognition and advancement of this crucial role. By fostering a collaborative and participatory design process, leveraging the wealth of experiences of those involved, and positioning the SIM role as an attractive career option for young talent, **this program will play a vital role in nurturing the next generation of future-ready Social Impact Managers, equipped to create a more just and sustainable world.**



All SIM project partners provided invaluable support in collecting data and providing evidence to ensure the high quality of the publication.



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