

# CSR Ready

green, fair & competitive businesses



## CSR-Ready

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# ABOUT THE PROJECT

Nowadays, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) constitute more than half of the businesses of the European Union (EU). Although their environmental footprint is relatively limited, SMEs aggregate environmental impact accounts for roughly 70% of the total EU environmental footprint (Quintás et al. 2018). Nonetheless, SMEs struggle to get a business approach to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). They mistakenly believe that CSR is an area reserved only for large businesses, that dispose of greater human and economic capital, and they are generally unaware of the direct economic benefits of CSR.

Our Erasmus+ funded Interactive Corporate Social Responsibility SME Readiness Project (CSR-Ready) has been created with a clear goal: to enhance implementation of CSR strategies in SMEs, by showing SME decision-makers the specific effects and benefits. The CSR-Ready Project will equip SME owners/managers with the knowledge and tools to understand the impact and importance of CSR, to develop CSR strategies and to increase comparative advantages deriving from CSR transition. Additionally, The CSR-Ready Project aims to create a lifelong environmental impact, by disseminating scientific knowledge amongst HEIs and VET. In this way, HEI students and (future) entrepreneurs will be more aware of the environmental and economic benefits of CSR. At the same time, future Entrepreneurs and StartUps are trained to implement CSR Strategies directly from the start – helping them to avoid future transition costs and allowing them to directly create CSR based competitive advantages.

In doing so, this project is in line with the goals of the European Green Deal and will have an impact on the achievement of its objectives by increasing the implementation rate of CSR in SMEs and thus improving the social, ecologic and economic footprint of the SME sector in Europe.



# OUR APPROACH

- 1. Collaborative approach:** CSR ready uses novel collaborative techniques, that allows cross-border collaborations, knowledge exchange and learning experiences amongst SMEs.
- 2. Science-to-business focus:** The project brings together SME owners & managers, HEIs and public authorities around the table to investigate problems, generate solutions, and implement findings, based on a sound analysis of individual companies.
- 3. Design thinking:** CSR ready takes a human-centred management process basing its methodology on the following design thinking principles: Attention to User Needs (CSR implementation challenges); In-depth assessment (score board & action toolkit); a strong focus on information sharing (VET training packages, knowledge platform and OERs).



# OUR OBJECTIVES



Enable SMEs to analyse the impact of CSR on their company and to implement concrete actions



Increase the Social impact of VET and SMEs by increasing the awareness for CSR



Professionalise training and advisory support structures and increase the CSR impact of their services



Provide policy makers with up-to-date in-depth knowledge



# THE CONSORTIUM

The CSR-Ready project unites 5 partners from universities, businesses, start-ups, and networks from 5 EU Member States, whose experience and expertise provide an ideal foundation to achieve the project's objectives.



The Vision Works GmbH – Project Coordinator  
Haale (Saale), Germany



European E-learning Institute  
Copenhagen, Denmark



Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Services  
and Shipping of Spain  
Madrid, Spain



University Industry Innovation Network  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands



Momentum Marketing Services Limited  
Leitrim, Ireland



# WELCOME TO OUR NEWSLETTER

The global challenges of the 21st century are manifold. Neither politics, business nor civil society will be able to solve climate change, poverty reduction or human rights protection on their own.

As companies or organisations, we do not act in a vacuum - through our actions we influence the living conditions of a large number of people in a direct or indirect way and on many levels. This applies to international corporations as well as to small and medium-sized companies. Those have, due to their resources, capacities and competences, but also due to their political and social influence on regional level, a great potential, but also a great responsibility to contribute effectively to society.

Even though a large number of small and medium-sized companies is aware of this responsibility, too few currently implement it professionally and comprehensively within the framework of holistic corporate social responsibility strategies (CSR). As a result, not only is potential lost for society - the companies also give away potential competitive advantages. Small companies in particular can, for example, make their production more efficient, gain reputation among customers and employees or increase their innovative strength.

With the CSR-READY project, we want to make a contribution so that more and more small and medium-sized companies understand social responsibility as part of their corporate strategy and develop and implement comprehensive CSR strategies - thereby gaining innovative strength and competitiveness and at the same time making an important contribution to solving the current challenges.

*We hope you enjoying reading our first CSR-Ready newsletter!*





# News from the project



# An Opportunity to Promote CSR among SMEs

Companies are key players in economic and social terms, a role and responsibility of which they are increasingly aware. The selection by consumers of certain products or services and not others, the choice of one company and not another, that workers perform their tasks effectively, that people want to be part of the company, that sustainability is given greater prominence in the company's actions, not only in the environmental sphere but also in the social and governance aspects, is no longer an objective of large corporations alone. All this makes up Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), an area in which SMEs have much to contribute.

Now more than ever, the COVID-19 health crisis and the resulting economic and social crisis have exposed the fragility of a globalised economy and the need and importance of collective security, the protection of human rights and the environment, and ultimately the preservation of the common good.

However, SMEs still do not have a clear vision of CSR, its content and its true dimension. There is little awareness of the implementation of CSR policies among these companies, while this attitude is justified by the scarcity of resources and the difficulty of accessing instruments created for larger companies. This results in a lack of CSR implementation in SMEs, which are far removed from the practices developed by larger companies. In fact, SMEs consider CSR as an abstract term that they do not integrate into their internal or management policies. Sometimes, even small companies carry out specific actions in the field of CSR, but they are not part of any strategy or are not aware of it.

The Chambers of Commerce believe that CSR should be an opportunity for companies to take

advantage of in order to become increasingly competitive, and should not result in the imposition of new obligations and burdens. In short, it is about adding value to the company through an analysis of the social and environmental aspects that affect its activity.

Therefore, in order for SMEs to approach CSR in a decisive manner, it is essential that local, regional and national governments and other organisations provide information, stimulus and awareness-raising, which, through awareness-raising, information and training programmes and actions, help to promote CSR in SMEs. In this sense, the recently launched CSR-READY project is a very important instrument.

CSR-READY aims to encourage SMEs to implement CSR in their operations and strategy. To this end, it aims to provide information on the impact of the implementation of CSR, so that



# Intellectual Output 1: Analysis of CSR among SMEs Internationally

The analysis of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) among SMEs at international level is the starting point of the CSR-READY project. This exercise will provide information on the benefits derived from CSR for the activity of SMEs and their environment, the challenges faced by SMEs that implement CSR, whether SMEs that specifically apply CSR tools have any special or different characteristics, etc. The aim is therefore to obtain in-depth knowledge on the state of CSR in SMEs in the different countries participating in the project, from which to create a tool that facilitates the self-diagnosis of CSR in SMEs and its promotion.

This analysis will provide information to fill the research gaps that still exist on CSR today. Although CSR in general has already been extensively researched, there are still important gaps with regard to the specific challenges and benefits for SMEs, which leads to a low implementation rate of CSR strategies and measures, especially in smaller companies.

On the other hand, with this activity the CSR-READY project will contribute to raise awareness of the importance of CSR in SMEs (internal and impact perspective). The publication and dissemination of the research results to the scientific community and to the target groups (especially VET trainers, experts, SMEs, entrepreneurs and StartUps) and other stakeholders (public institutions, intermediate entities, etc.) will also help to create a sustainable awareness of the importance of the topic.

Finally, the work of the partners in the elaboration of the initial study will be a key input for the subsequent phases of the planned work. Thus, the level of CSR preparedness, the specific benefits for the company, as well as the individual impact areas identified in the CSR impact study on SMEs, among others, will be used for the structure of both the curricula and learning resources of IO2, as well as for the self-assessment and individual solution approaches of IO3.



# CSR in Germany - Highlights

A prerequisite for the successful implementation of a project is comprehensive research. This is exactly what we are currently doing – we identify and analyse existing academic and practical work on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in SMEs.

We would like to learn more about the status quo of CSR in SMEs and find out what obstacles SMEs face when implementing CSR. Furthermore, we are looking for best practices that can provide inspiration and motivation for a successful implementation of a CSR strategy. We, thevisionworks, have a particular focus on IO3, the development of a self-assessment for SMEs on CSR readiness. By analysing the literature, we hope to get some clues for the structure and content of the assessment. The assessment should support SMEs in developing company-specific strategies and measures based on a sound analysis of their specific impact areas and benefits.

There is a lot of information in the literature on the benefits of CSR - in addition to future security, competitive advantages, cost reduction, and the contribution to solving ecological, social and economic problems, reputation enhancement and image are also repeatedly mentioned in the context. Many may not be aware that this also entails a risk for companies: the accusation of so-called greenwashing. Greenwashing companies merely pretend to operate sustainably. If greenwashing becomes public, the loss of reputation for the company concerned can also damage the reputation of ambitious CSR actors. The success of CSR policy therefore depends to a large extent on creating credibility and preventing the suspicion of greenwashing from arising in the first place. We find this question of what SMEs can concretely do to clearly distinguish themselves from greenwashing a particularly exciting point in the context of our research and look forward to further findings as well as the research results of our European project partners.



# CSR in the Netherlands - Highlights

Within the CSR-Ready project, UIIN has conducted a comprehensive literature review over businesses Corporate & Social Responsibility (CSR) practices. First, the literature review started with the identification of perceived benefits and barriers for businesses in the CSR application. Most relevantly, in terms of benefits, the literature often identifies cost and risk reduction, competitive advantage, legitimacy and reputation as the main drivers for CSR implementation. Barriers are more sector-specific and also appear differently depending on the country.

Further, the review zeroed in on the drivers for the implementation of CSR in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups. Nonetheless, it has been difficult to clearly articulate what the drivers and benefits of CSR for SMEs are. It seems that the CSR scope and activities change depending on the size of the firm, its sector, its ecosystem, its country, and the current political, technological, and economic situation. Thirdly, UIIN focussed on the Dutch CSR national context for SMEs. The Netherlands is often identified as one of the most progressive and leading country for CSR practices for businesses and CSR legislations. Indeed, several initiatives exist both in the private and public sector. Similarly, the Dutch Sustainable Growth Coalition consists of eight Dutch multinational companies which aim to drive promote sustainable growth business models that combine economic profitability with environmental and social progress. At the public level, the government provides a basic framework for CSR in business and several instruments to help businesses taking into account CSR practices.

Yet, although several instruments and initiatives exist in the country, CSR practices remain marginal both for large, medium, and small businesses. In 2013, the Dutch government set a goal that by 2023, 90 per cent of the large companies in the Netherlands will explicitly endorse the OECD Guidelines and UN Guiding Principles for CSR as a reference framework for their international activities. However, the year 2019 provides a very different picture. It appears that only 35 per cent of large companies engage in CSR practices and that only 12 companies fulfilled all six steps of the OECD guidelines.



Photo by [Guillaume de Germain](#) on [Unsplash](#)

# Be kind

Our  
partners'

# Walking the Walk - A Small Organisation's Experience of CSR

EUEI offices are located in a modern new build with the highest levels of insulation and efficient heating, powered by on-site solar energy panels. Resource use is kept to an absolute minimum with no photocopier, use of recycled printer and toner for printing and a limit of 1 ream of paper per month strongly encourages judicious printing and maximises paper reuse.

For local and international travel, use of public transport is prioritised. We endeavour to minimise international travel as part of our project delivery and are trialling a unique "one meeting" project approach, which if successful will be rolled out on a widescale basis.

We are working towards being carbon neutral in our website servers. Our main data centre is iomart.com in London and they are not Carbon Neutral but they do have a strong environmental policy as a stock market listed company. They have hot/cold aisles in the data centre so hot air from the servers is recycled to heat offices in winter and help extract hot air to save on cooling in summer. Servers in our fleet are all less than 2 years old so have power supplies that are intelligent and ramp up power when needed and ramp down to minimum when not needed.

Our 3 month roadmap for our new local data centre has us installing solar panels on the roof so we can have 6 months of day running from the panels (late spring, all summer and early Autumn) and we enhancing our UPS batteries to charge from the excess power from the cells to give overnight runtime from stored solar energy.

We have not and will not buy, trade or accept Bitcoin until such times as its exorbitant energy consumption is curtailed.

As an organisation, we calculate our carbon footprint using [Leading Online Carbon Calculation Tools](#) to measure our Greenhouse Gas emissions and are implementing a variety of measures to offset this at 110% by investing in high quality international carbon reduction projects including:

- Tree Planting reducing deforestation in Brazil and an
- Efficient household cookstove project in Kenya



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## CONTACT US

David Blunck  
Project Director, tww GmbH  
[blunck@thevisionworks.de](mailto:blunck@thevisionworks.de)

Jose Villagran Polo  
Dissemination & Outreach, UIIN  
[villagranpolo@uiin.org](mailto:villagranpolo@uiin.org)

[CSRready.eu](http://CSRready.eu)



[CSR\\_Ready](https://www.linkedin.com/company/CSR_Ready)



[@ReadyCSR](https://twitter.com/ReadyCSR)