

CORPORATE SOCIAL  
RESPONSIBILITY  
IN BUSINESS PRACTICE  
OF THE VISEGRAD REGION  
(CZECHIA, POLAND, SLOVAKIA)



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ERIK JANŠTO – DARIUSZ PIEŃKOWSKI

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## **Corporate Social Responsibility in Business Practice of the Visegrad Region (Czechia, Poland, Slovakia)**

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# Preface

Dear Reader,

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become increasingly important in the business world, and this monograph explores its significance in the Visegrad region (Czechia, Poland, Slovakia). By going beyond legal requirements, businesses can address social, environmental, and ethical concerns, building trust and enhance own reputation. Efforts of businesses are reflected not only in their outcomes but also contribute to the collective endeavour to build a 21st century society. In this endeavour, not only individuals, irrespective of their origin and nationality, but also business entities have an indispensable role as good citizens who contribute to the public welfare. These entities utilize factors, of production including the human factor, and therefore have a social responsibility not only towards their shareholders who provided capital but also towards all other stakeholders who are affected by their activities, whether positively or negatively. As a result, business entities have an irreplaceable position in building a prosperous society. The obligation to contribute to this development is voluntary and not mandated by legislation, but the activities associated with it incur costs not solely for the companies. It has been repeatedly confirmed that implementing responsible activities aimed at promoting the common good brings numerous positive effects on businesses, reflected in cost savings, improved market share, brand building, and increased attractiveness to investors. Therefore, the implementation of socially responsible activities holds an indispensable place in the management of modern enterprises. Number, character, and focus of these activities may vary across businesses, but in general, they can be observed based on the Triple Bottom Line approach, encompassing social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Recently, these corporate activities have attracted the attention of policymakers, and at the European Commission level, centralized efforts are being made to introduce mandatory reporting of these activities, which will gradually come into effect for different size categories of businesses. Furthermore, just like other aspects of everyday life and business, the field of corporate social responsibility has been significantly influenced by global crises, starting with the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by military conflict in Ukraine, and the ensuing energy crisis. This scientific monograph maps the socially responsible activities of business entities in the Visegrad region, specifically in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. It examines their implementation and readiness of companies for mandatory reporting of CSR activities, while describing socially responsible initiatives taken by businesses to contribute to alleviating global crises.

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We anticipate that this monograph will act as a catalyst, encouraging other scientific research in the realm of CSR in the Visegrad region. We wholeheartedly invite feedback, suggestions, and comments from our readers to enhance the quality and impact of our scholarly work. We extend our sincere gratitude to the reviewers for their invaluable advice and suggestions, which have greatly contributed to the refinement of this monograph. With an open mindset and a commitment to continuous improvement, we aspire to foster meaningful dialogue and collaboration in the field of corporate social responsibility, ultimately promoting business practices within the Visegrad region and beyond.

Sincerely,  
Jana Kozáková  
Nitra 2023

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# 1 Corporate Social Responsibility in the Visegrad region

A company strategy known as corporate social responsibility (CSR) places an emphasis on giving back something to society while still making a profit. Globally, it is becoming a more crucial component of company plans, and the Visegrad area shouldn't fall behind. The Visegrad nations have really taken action to safeguard their citizens amid market upheaval and foster social cohesion especially in the current situation of global crises marked by the COVID-19 pandemic which has affected society globally, conflict in Ukraine bordering the researched countries, and in the „energy crisis“ as an accompanying phenomenon.

## 1.1 Corporate Social Responsibility in Business Practice of V3 Region (Jana Kozáková)

The day when making a profit was the only objective of conducting business is long gone. Today, a company's capacity for fostering social and environmental responsibility is one of the indicators of success (Gallardo-Vázquez and Sanchez-Hernandez, 2014). CSR initiatives improve a company's reputation, boost employee morale and job satisfaction, encourage cost savings through resource efficiency, foster innovation, and draw in an increasing number of customers who value ethical and sustainable business practices (Bauman and Skitka, 2012; Tangngisalu, et al., 2020). Additionally, CSR may help narrow inequality gaps by supporting the promotion of inclusive and diverse behaviours (Gond, et al., 2012). Companies that engage in CSR are required to conduct their operations in a way that considers a larger impact of their activities on society and the environment as well as merely maximizing profits (Marín, et al., 2012; Gazzola and Mella, 2012). This may entail making investments in sustainability programme, lowering their carbon footprint, encouraging diversity and inclusion in the workplace, aiding the local community through charitable giving and volunteer work, and upholding strict ethical standards in the company conduct.

The term „corporate social responsibility“ (CSR) refers to a company's obligation to conduct itself in a way that is moral, sustainable, and advantageous to society (Eberhard-Harribey, 2006; Farcane, et al., 2019). It is a voluntary project that focuses on providing social and environmental benefits to the communities and stakeholders that a business serves rather than the typical corporate purpose of earning profits (Hiller, 2013; Kumar, 2019). Corporate social responsibility is a broad term that refers to a variety of activities and projects (Carrol, 1991), such as lowering a company's carbon footprint, putting money into employee training and development, fostering



diversity and inclusion at work, helping in the community through charitable giving and volunteer work, and upholding high ethical standards in business practices (McLennan and Banks, 2019). As customers and stakeholders have become more conscious of the potential effects that corporations may have on society and the environment, the notion of CSR has grown significantly in popularity in recent years (Onkila and Sarna, 2022). Many businesses today see CSR as a crucial component of their entire strategy and goal, and therefore they have put programs and policies in place to make sure that their activities are carried out morally and sustainably (Morea, et al., 2021; DalMas, et al., 2022). Moreover, through CSR, businesses may show their dedication to principles like accountability, transparency, and sustainability, which helps them win over stakeholders' confidence (Bolaños, et al., 2022). This may contribute to corporate success by increasing stakeholders' participation, brand reputation, and consumer loyalty (Contini, et al., 2020). Additionally, by increasing operational effectiveness and recognizing possible social, environmental, and financial risks CSR may assist businesses in managing risks and lowering costs (Rangam, et al., 2015; Barauskaite and Streimikiene, 2021). Companies may lessen their impact on the environment, preserve resources, and cut costs by adopting sustainable practices. This helps not just the business itself, but also the broader community and the environment in which it operates (Želazna, et al., 2020). CSR may also aid resolving social and environmental problems that are now plaguing the planet. Companies may help solving the problems like social injustice, poverty, and climate change by sponsoring projects, programs, and alliances that benefit local areas and the environment (Ritala, et al., 2021; Singh, et al, 2021).

Because it enables businesses to address and respond to the demands of society and the environment in a more comprehensive way, corporate social responsibility (CSR) is significant in the current period of global crises (Ashraf, et al., 2022). Due to the global financial crisis, businesses are under enormous pressure to behave morally and responsibly, satisfy their stakeholders and make a beneficial impact on the communities in which they operate (Berkman, et al., 2021). CSR is crucial in the current climate of global crises since it aids businesses establishing and preserving a favourable reputation. Companies may improve their reputation and gain trust of their customers, workers, investors, and other stakeholders by doing deeds that benefit society and the environment. This may result in attracting more customers. (Mbanyele and Muchenje, 2022; Ozkan, et al., 2022). Additionally, CSR may aid businesses with risk management and cost cutting (Manuel and Herron, 2020). For instance, businesses may lessen their influence on the environment and cut expenses by embracing sustainable practices. This benefits the business while simultaneously preserving resources and environment (Shahzad et al., 2021). In current times of global crises, CSR may also assist businesses in meeting the requirements of crisis-affected communities (Chen, Z., and Hang, 2021). Companies may support local companies, aid disadvantaged people, and donate to disaster relief efforts. This serves to strengthen ties with the community while also demonstrating the company's commitment to social responsibility.

In general, corporate social responsibility is significant in the current global economic crisis because it helps businesses to act morally, establish a good reputation,

manage risks, cut costs, and give back to the communities and environments in which they operate. Companies may accomplish this by adding value for their stakeholders and the larger community in addition to themselves.

The Visegrad area, which comprises Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, places a growing emphasis on corporate social responsibility (CSR). There are certain universal patterns and trends that may be seen, even though every nation has its own CSR difficulties and strategies (Przytuła et al., 2019). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) holds significant importance in the whole Visegrad region, but this study encompasses the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. These countries have experienced dynamic economic and social transformations over the years, making CSR an essential aspect of their business practices (Hąbek, 2019).

The Visegrad region has witnessed a transition from centrally planned economies to market-oriented systems since the 1990s (Bański, 2019). This transition brought about new challenges and opportunities to businesses, including the need to address social and environmental concerns alongside economic growth. As a response to these challenges, the concept of CSR gained recognition and became increasingly integrated into business strategies (Hąbek, 2019; Przytuła, et al., 2019). In the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, CSR has evolved from being a voluntary initiative to a more structured approach. Initially, CSR activities were driven primarily by multinational corporations, which adopted CSR practices as part of their global operations. However, with the growing awareness of social and environmental issues, local businesses in the Visegrad region have also embraced CSR to demonstrate their commitment to sustainable development and social well-being (Skýpalová, et al., 2023). The importance of CSR in the Visegrad region lies in its potential to contribute to the overall economic, social, and environmental sustainability of these countries. By integrating CSR principles into their operations, businesses can enhance their reputation, strengthen stakeholder relationships, attract investment, and foster long-term competitiveness. Moreover, CSR practices play a crucial role in addressing societal challenges, such as environmental degradation, inequality, and social exclusion. (Hąbek, 2019; Nagy, et al., 2022).

In recent years, CSR initiatives in the Visegrad region have expanded beyond traditional philanthropy to encompass a broader range of activities. These include ethical sourcing, responsible supply chain management, employee well-being, environmental conservation, community engagement, and corporate governance (Lentner and Nagy, 2020; Nagy et al., 2022). Additionally, CSR reporting and transparency have gained prominence, enabling businesses to communicate their social and environmental impact to stakeholders (Przytuła et al., 2019). The governments of the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia have also recognized the significance of CSR and have introduced policies and frameworks to encourage responsible business practices. These initiatives aim to create an environment enabling CSR, promote dialogue between businesses and stakeholders, and align national development strategies with sustainable goals. (Hąbek, 2019; Zemanová and Druláková, 2020). While progress is being made, challenges remain present in the implementation and measurement of CSR in the Visegrad region. These include limited awareness and understanding of CSR concepts among businesses, varying levels of commitment

and resources, and need for standardized reporting frameworks. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts by businesses, governments, civil society organizations, and academia to foster culture of CSR, and drive sustainable development in the region. (Lentner and Nagy, 2020; Gajdošová and Nagyová, 2020; Metzker and Suler, 2022).

In the Visegrad region, encompassing the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has assumed significant importance during the recent crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict in Ukraine, and energy crisis. Businesses in these countries demonstrated remarkable responsiveness in swiftly adapting their operations to the crises. Their prompt actions focused on ensuring the safety and well-being of employees, customers, and communities, and reflecting a strong sense of responsibility. (Pelikánová et al., 2021; Černá et al., 2022; Gajdošíková et al., 2022). Moreover, philanthropic initiatives played a crucial role in addressing the immediate needs. Companies extended support to the affected communities through financial aid, provision of medical supplies, food, and other essential resources. These initiatives showed the commitment of businesses to contribute actively during times of crisis. Recognizing the impact on their workforce, companies in the region prioritized the employee support measures. They implemented flexible work arrangements, remote working options, and enhanced health and safety protocols to safeguard employees' physical and mental well-being. Collaboration emerged as another vital aspect of CSR in the Visegrad region. Businesses have partnered with governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as other stakeholders, to pool resources and expertise. This collaborative approach facilitated the sharing of best practices, knowledge, and resources, leading to more effective crisis response. (Durana et al., 2020; Us et al., 2020; Alzahrani, 2022). Furthermore, businesses in the region remained mindful of the environmental sustainability. In this endeavour, „energy crisis“ plays a significant role. Companies integrated eco-friendly practices and resource conservation measures into their operations, aiming to minimize their ecological footprint and contribute to long-term sustainability. (Sulich and Sołoducho-Pelc, 2021; Streimikiene, 2022; Supeková, et al., 2023). In regard to crises, businesses in Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia emphasized the importance of long-term resilience. Crises served as a catalyst for integrating CSR practices into their core strategies. Crisis preparedness, risk management, and contingency plans were incorporated to ensure the ability to withstand and respond effectively to future challenges.

In summary, CSR plays a vital role in the Visegrad region, comprising the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. It has evolved from a voluntary initiative to an integral part of business strategies, contributing to sustainable development, and addressing societal challenges. By embracing CSR, businesses in the region can enhance their competitiveness, reputation, and stakeholder relationships while contributing to the well-being of society and the environment. Continued efforts and collaboration are necessary to overcome challenges, and promote responsible business practices in the Visegrad region. During times of crises, businesses in Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia encompassed several key aspects, including responsiveness, philanthropy, employee support, collaboration, sustainability considerations, and

focus on long-term resilience. These practices not only enabled businesses to navigate during crises but also contributed to the well-being of employees, communities, and the environment.

### **1.1.1 Corporate Social Responsibility in Czechia (Renata Skýpalová)**

In the 1990s, the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) was introduced to the Czech environment, mainly through multinational companies opening offices in the country (Kaňoková, 2009). On 1 May 2004, the Czech Republic became a full member of the European Union. Its accession resulted in paying more attention to the issues involved in CSR. Up to and including 2012, CSR was under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA). The main reason for this was the fact that in the European Commission Communication COM (2006) 136, which was valid at that time, most of the discussion questions were devoted to issues that fell under the social pillar. While acting as a CSR coordinator, the MoLSA monitored the situation and development in the field at the EU level, commented on documents prepared by the European Commission in the CSR working group, and actively participated in meetings and discussions organised by the non-profit organisation Business Leaders Forum.

Since 1 January 2013, the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MIT) has been responsible for CSR. This transfer of responsibility was initiated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), as Commission Communication COM (2011) 681, valid for the period 2011–2014, contained topics that fell predominantly under the economic pillar. In 2013, MIT carried out a familiarisation exercise on CSR through its staff. As a consequence, a number of meetings were held, mainly attended by the representatives of MoLSA, MIT, MoF (Ministry of Finance), and the expert panel of the Quality Council for Social Responsibility. The aim was to draft National CSR Strategy, and submit it to the government for approval in autumn 2013. This deadline was met. However, the political situation in the Czech Republic (early elections) disrupted the planned adoption of the National CSR Strategy before the end of 2013. The government eventually adopted the document by Government Decree No. 199 of 2 April 2014.

According to the available research, during the period of adoption of the National CSR Strategy for the Czech Republic, SMEs in the Czech Republic were found to behave in a socially responsible manner, although “they often apply a less formal approach than large enterprises. SMEs act rather intuitively with regard to CSR, lacking a comprehensive overview of and assistance with CSR concepts.” (Kunz, 2012). During the preparation of the National CSR Strategy, the prevailing view was that the document should be prepared by the relevant ministries and then presented to NGOs, academia and corporate representatives. It was considered inappropriate for CSR organisations to expect that only NGOs and similar initiatives or multinational corporations doing business in the country should be responsible for the development and extension of this concept into mainstream business practice in the country. Within this context, the government was seen to be the best one to incorporate

CSR principles into policy, whereby “a strategy to promote CSR could also be based on the so-called ,CSR strategy” (Pavlík, 2010). The growing importance of the activities of NGOs in promoting CSR activities was also recognised, with some of them directly participating in the development of the National CSR Strategy, in particular the Business Leaders Forum, and the Association for Social Responsibility.

In the period 2013–2014, under the leadership of Renata Skýpalová, an extensive questionnaire survey was conducted on CSR among 1,013 companies in the Czech Republic. The results revealed that the awareness of CSR is low among the Czech SMEs, with the greatest knowledge thereof being in large Czech enterprises and multinational companies operating in the Czech Republic. At the same time, it was shown that knowledge of the concept of CSR has an impact on the number of activities implemented in the CSR pillars (economic, social and environmental). The resulting recommendations from the survey were passed onto the Government of the Czech Republic. The advice was i) to encourage more SMEs to adopt the concept of CSR, with the goal of matching the situation in large enterprises, i.e., at least a two-thirds uptake, and ii) that the Czech government should use the National Action Plan (NAP) primarily to support activities that are not in the spotlight, and focus on relevant issues outside organisations. When taking into account voluntary involvement in the concept and the performance of activities beyond those required by law – both of which are important points related to the essence of the concept of CSR –, the authors of this paper propose the involvement of the state in a form of positive voluntary incentives and information promotion (Skýpalová et al., 2016).

Prior to the adoption of the strategic document National Action Plan for Corporate Social Responsibility in the Czech Republic, the state had already implemented some activities to further develop the concept. These activities continue to this day. Firstly, through the activities of the Quality Council of the Czech Republic, which took on the role of ensuring a permanent, systematic dialogue on CSR between all interested parties (employers’ associations, social partners, public administration bodies, non-profit organisations, and academia). The Quality Council, through its CSR Section, brings together most of the more prominent non-profit organisations and associations active in the field of CSR in the Czech Republic. They organise conferences, roundtables and other events promoting CSR (Skýpalová & Kučerová, 2014a). Furthermore, support is provided to organisations that are significantly involved in CSR in the Czech Republic, for which they are publicly recognised, for example, through the National CSR awards. These have been awarded annually in the Czech Republic for both the private and the public sector since 2009. The awards are announced by the Quality Council under the auspices of the Ministry of Industry and Trade, which is also the CSR coordinator for the EU (Skýpalová & Kučerová, 2014).

As stated by Sojka (1996), the main problem in establishing a free society is to ensure that the power vested in the government does not become a threat or a constraint. Within this context, it is essential that government representatives, when creating strategic document on the development of social responsibility in the Czech Republic, choose measures that will be motivating and not burdensome for all stakeholders (especially in the area of filling out statements, reports, etc.).

The importance of corporate sustainability, which has been addressed by academia (Gray, 2007; Lee et al., 2012) and in business practice (Roca & Searcy, 2012; Searcy & Buslovich, 2014), is growing. Implementation of CSR activities and their reporting still varies, with the greatest convergence observed between Eastern Europe and Western Europe (Petera et al., 2019). According to the survey by KPMG (2017), the Czech Republic and Slovakia rank below the global average in reporting CSR activities, and the overall culture of sustainable behaviour has not yet fully developed in the Eastern European region. Overall, the importance of reporting corporate CSR activities is growing, and although sustainability reporting and sustainability management are not the same activities, they are strongly linked and communication as such is of great importance for corporate sustainability (Petera et al., 2019). The overall role of corporations in business practice is growing rapidly, as is people's interest in socially responsible behaviour on the part of companies (Krajnakova et al., 2018).

In addition, the Europe 2020 Strategy for the period 2010–2020, which is the EU's main economic strategy, the main objective of which is to achieve economic growth and higher employment, provides for the creation of conditions for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, which has contributed to the increased importance of reporting CSR activities in the individual EU Member States. However, targets set by the EU strategies are not legally enforceable, and it is up to the goodwill of the individual countries to decide how to approach the targets (Hosnedlova, 2021). Almost every country and every market have its own specificities in a form of habits and reactions to different subjects. Based on these specific characteristics of different countries, companies are forced to create different strategies for a given market, and this affects also the application of CSR (Contini, 2019).

Multinational companies, by their very size and accessibility make up a large part of the global economy. Their operations encompass a large number of financial flows involving large amounts of money, as well as a lot of bureaucracy and administration. Multinationals from abroad provide employment (jobs) for more than a million people in the Czech Republic and account for up to 43% of total (or economic) value added. Even in terms of labour productivity, foreign firms perform better than the Czech ones, with value added per worker being twice as high for foreign firms than for firms controlled by Czech entities (Zeman, 2020). A major advantage that multinationals have is their level of influence. By reaching out over a wide area, multinationals can direct their projects with varying degrees of influence. There is therefore nothing to prevent multinationals from having their positive impacts not only at a global level, but also on specific communities, which can again increase the attractiveness of the company in question (Aguilera-Caracuel, 2017). Multinational companies have an unquestionable influence on suppliers through their size and consumption rates. Due to this influence, states have begun to implement the need to control interactions between suppliers and multinationals (Melo, 2019). Research by Degie and Kebede (2017) demonstrates that the application of CSR principles in developed countries contributes to the economic well-being of the people through new employment opportunities, sources of income, and financial support (Setiawan, 2016).

New Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) has been in force in the Czech Republic since this year. One of the main objectives of the CSRD is to increase transparency of companies and their value chains, but also to put non-financial reporting on an equal footing with financial reporting so that it becomes an equal priority for company managements. In the first wave, in 2025 (reporting for the 2024 financial year), the regulation will apply to companies that are already required to report under the Non-Financial Reporting Directive (NFRD), i.e., all the listed companies and large companies with more than 500 employees, of which there are dozens in the Czech Republic. One year later (in 2026, reporting for the 2025 financial year), the Directive will be extended to all large companies that meet at least two of the following criteria: more than 250 employees; turnover of at least €40 million; total assets of at least €20 million. In subsequent waves, the reporting obligation will also apply to small and medium-sized listed companies.

Among the major multinational companies with operations in the Czech Republic that currently perform their CSR activities belong Lidl, Tesco Stores, Billa, IKEA, MAKRO, and Ahold. An example of good practice in the field of CSR activities in the Czech Republic is, for example, the multinational company 3M Česko s.r.o., which employs around 100 people in the Czech Republic. The company focuses on production and sale of office supplies, commercial graphics, electrical and telecommunications equipment, healthcare products, automotive components, and safety and security devices. Already in 2009, 3M implemented one of the first campaigns to raise awareness of eco-friendly alternatives when purchasing common office supplies. Through targeted advertising, consumer sampling, promotion and other advertising channels, the company actively promoted a green range of office products. Focus was on eco-friendly products, such as adhesive papers, adhesive tapes, and glue sticks. The target groups consisted of customers (office supply distributors) and end consumers (individual companies – office operations). Moreover, 3M employees comprised the secondary target group. The campaign succeeded in increasing the sales of green products by 20% compared to the previous year. In addition, for every green product sold between October and December 2009, a portion of the profits went to the Brontosaurus Movement, and environmental projects. Internal dimension of the project results was also important. Employees were able to make suggestions for greening the company's operations, some of which were implemented: installation of bins for sorting waste in several places in the offices, abolition of the use of plastic cups for coffee vending machines, and increased use of „green“ office supplies produced by the company (3M, 2009).

The multinational company Ahold, better known in the Czech Republic for its chain of Albert supermarkets, also makes a long-standing commitment to social responsibility. Its strategy is based on four main pillars: healthy living, sustainable business, climate protection, and community involvement. It pursues these activities through the Albert Endowment Fund which was established in 2009. The main objectives of this fund have been fulfilled: long-term support for healthy lifestyle; support for projects focused on education; integration and development of socially disadvantaged children and adults.

Czech Savings Bank (Česká spořitelna) has been implementing projects to support employment and career growth of women for a long time in the Czech Republic. The aim is to improve integration of mothers back into the workplace after maternity leave through preferential conditions for parents caring for young children. Women account for 74% of the company's employees, and up to 85% in the branch network. In the coming years, the company is committed to continue supporting women in management, expand the Mentoring for Women programme, as well as special development programmes for branch managers, and offer training workshops on female leadership development. Activities for a 50+ group and active employment of people with disabilities are also in the pipeline. Czech Savings Bank assists employees in their professional and personal development, we enable flexible forms of work and working from home. We create conditions for a balanced work-life balanced. (Česká spořitelna, 2023)

CEZ Group supports intergenerational contact between current employees and retirees who worked in the energy industry for a long time. Through the Pensioners Club and the Senior Citizens Foundation, it offers former employee's various opportunities to spend their free time actively and maintain contacts within the industry. CEZ Group supports hospices, homes and activation projects for the elderly in the Czech Republic, while also involving its employees and professionals in the assistance (CEZ, 2020).

*Kofola says that CSR and sustainable activities have not been a matter of concern just for the last few years. In this regard, the company's activities go back to the times long before they became vogue. Locally action and circular economy in its purest form are the values they believe in and are important elements of Kofola's future business.*

In addition to the basic goal of making profit, companies should voluntarily focus on responsible behaviour towards both the environment and the society in which they operate. This means taking social and environmental factors into account within the activities they undertake with the aim of generating profit. CSR principles have become a part of the corporate culture of multinational and domestic companies in the Czech Republic. Recently, companies have also been focusing on the secondary impacts of their activities on the environment in which they operate (Wrana & Diez, 2018; Tian, 2020), with many Czech companies also identifying with this concept in their daily business practices. As follows from the study by Du et al. (2010), a significant role in promoting CSR activities is played by the manner of presentation (communication) of these activities to stakeholders, i.e., to all entities that are somehow involved and influenced, or they themselves influence the activities of the organisation. According to Gordon (2017), not only the ability to implement CSR activities is important, but also to present them correctly to stakeholders. When these activities are not properly communicated by management to stakeholders, stakeholders may react sceptically or even negatively to the company's CSR activities, which can damage the overall image of the company (Latif, 2022; Yang, 2020). Companies in the Czech environment which are subject to the new CSRD legislation aimed at non-financial reporting are already preparing themselves for mandatory reporting. However, other companies that have not yet fallen under this obligation are also



indirectly engaged in reporting on their activities, whether through information on their websites, in annual reports or in separate CSR reports. Appropriate and comprehensible disclosure of information about CSR activities in a form of mandatory non-financial reporting can significantly help to connect and establish transparent relationships between a company and its stakeholders. Examples of 3M, Ahold, CEZ, Kofola, and Czech Savings Bank show that sustainable behaviour and responsibility towards society is a topical issue in the Czech business environment.

### **1.1.2 Corporate Social Responsibility in Poland (Alina Nowotarska)**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Poland gained prominence in the 1990s when the foundation for socially responsible business was laid after the political (political and economic) changes associated with the overthrow of the communist system (Kondraciuk, 2015). Democratically elected government took part in UN discussions on a socially based economy (Majchrzak, 2021). However, as far as the social activities in Poland is concerned, already in the Middle Ages as well as during the difficult history in Poland, such activities were undertaken in a form of charitable and philanthropic actions, which was particularly manifested during the great boom of Polish enterprises in the interwar period (K. Marcinkowski, H. Cegielski, Lodz factory owners, the so-called „kings of cotton“), after which Poland regained its independence (Les, 2001). They established, among other things, schools, foundations, and system medical care for the poor population. After World War II, during the existence of the communist system, it was also possible to record social activity through the establishment of cooperatives. Unfortunately, the number of them, especially those related to the countryside, such as agricultural cooperatives, decreased drastically after the political changes (Kata, 2016). Some have survived to the present day, such as housing cooperatives, cooperative banks and others.

One of the main ideas of CSR after the political changes, as a result of which the economic system changed to a market economy, was Business Ethics, but changes in social, legal and political dimensions were put aside. Business ethics is an element of organizational culture, as well as influencing social innovation and greater stability during crises, which contributes to minimizing risks in the company by, among other things, offsetting losses due to internal fraud, as well as meeting the expectations of external stakeholders (Gasparski at al., 2016). At the same time, an individual's value system and accepted morality, which influence how he or she views business norms and standards, „should be deeply rooted in the value system of a given society“ (Potocki, 2015, [in:] Gasparski, 1999). One of the first academic centres that began to deal with this topic was Kozminski University, where the Center for Business Ethics was established in 1999; even earlier, in 1989, the Research Team for the Ethics of Economic Life of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IFiS PAN) began to promote it under the direction of Professor W. Gasparski, when contacts were made with business leaders in Poland (Rok, 2004). One of the first grassroots CSR initiatives through which CSR was disseminated in Poland was founding an association called The Responsible Business

Forum (RBF) in 2000, a think-and-do-tank organization that has been a partner of CSR Europe since 2002 (Grabara et al., 2016). Through supportive activities for companies, through cooperation with business, academia, NGOs, government administration, and international cooperation, they have created a community of socially committed companies, as well as a space for the exchange of experience through numerous initiatives, such as programmes, charity events and competitions. Of great importance in promoting the idea of CSR in Poland there was also the Academy for the Development of Philanthropy in Poland, which was founded in 1998, as well as the Social Communication Foundation, and the Polish branch of the Business Leaders Forum. These initiatives launched meetings and conferences with the executives of the Polish largest companies and corporations, aimed at conveying both theoretical and practical aspects of applying CSR in a form of the so-called „good practices“.

A great role in the implementation of CSR principles in Poland was also played by the state administration through the implementation of the EU directives related to the social business activity, as well as large multinational corporations, which, through their commitment to environmental and social issues, became pioneers in promoting the idea of CSR. Implementation into Polish law of Directive 2014/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council (EC, 2014) on the disclosure of non-financial and diverse information also played a very important role. Areas mentioned in the directive concern environmental, social, and labour issues, respect for human rights, and anti-corruption and anti-bribery. The Directive provided non-binding guidance to help companies prepare relevant, useful and concise non-financial statements in accordance with the new EU requirements (Krasodomska, Michalak, Świetla, 2020). Corporations having the support of the parent company had adequate resources to implement the idea of CSR in subsidiaries, as well as appropriate legal and financial instruments to reduce the negative impact of the company's activities on the environment as well as to improve the image and care for relations with the local community and other stakeholders (among others, e.g., employees, management, customers, shareholders, government entities) (Drzymala, 2016). Companies from the food industry, such as Danone Poland, Coca Cola, Kompania Piwowarska, from the fuel and mining industry, and energy industry, such as KGHM, PKN Orlen, Enea, Tauron, from the financial industry, such as Bank Śląski ING, Santander Bank, or the automotive industry, of which Volkswagen Polska is one of the most involved in social activities, were the pioneers in this activity. For example, Danone was one of the first companies in Poland publishing CSR report. In their case it was under the title „CSR Review for 2003–2006,“ and they received the award for the best CSR report from the companies operating in the Polish market. In order to reduce its impact in economic, social and environmental areas, the corporation has taken a number of measures in this regard, including reducing the amount of materials and raw materials used, while increasing the share of recycled materials used in the production process as well as implementing the so-called „good practices“ in which internal and external stakeholders are involved (including Share a Meal, Sustainable Transport Day, Be Green, Don't Print the Page, Safely to the Destination), as well as the action to improve occupational safety through training (Nowotarska, 2020). Another example is PKN Orlen from the fuel industry, which is a state-owned company,

and which is involved in many pro-social and environmental, as well as employee actions, and it carries out a number of social activities, and invests in projects in the area of zero- and low-carbon economy. The implementation results from the internal acts adopted by the company, such as the „CSR Strategy to 2022“, „Code of Ethics“, and the „ORLEN Group Development Strategy to 2030“ announced in 2020, but also from the international initiatives for sustainable development, to which they are a signatory (ORLEN Group Integrated Report 2020). In most cases in the fuel industry on the basis of WIG 20 (WGPW) surveys, companies have been publishing social, environmental or integrated reports for a short time. LOTOS (reporting since 2006) and PKN Orlen (reporting since 2002) should be considered leaders in this area (Aluchna, Roszkowska-Menkes, 2018).

Regarding the development of CSR activities within companies in the energy industry, back in 2009, PGNiG in cooperation with PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers) organized the Responsible Energy Conference for the first time, which addressed CSR and sustainable development issues relevant to the energy industry. The result was seen in signing the Declaration on Sustainable Development in the Energy Sector in Poland by seven energy companies. The Responsible Energy Conference is the most important CSR and sustainability event in the industry, and 20 companies have already signed the Declarations (SMG, M., PwC, K. R. C., 2011).

Harmonization of CSR norms and standards across industries was to be developed by the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) of the European Parliament and Council (EU) 2022/2464, dated December 14, 2022. The purpose of introducing this directive is to provide quantitative and qualitative information about the current and anticipated impact of sustainability risks and opportunities on an entity's financial position, financial performance and cash flow (Świdarska, Krysik, 2023), also the number of entities required to report CSR issues annually will increase.

A very important factor in the development of CSR in Poland was the launch of the RESPECT Index on the functioning Warsaw Stock Exchange in 2009. RESPECT Index was the first stock market index in Central and Eastern Europe, based on socially responsible companies. Through it, companies are evaluated in terms of compliance with corporate governance principles, as well as social and environmental standards (Kowalska, 2015). As of 2019, the RESPECT Index has evolved into the WIG ESG Index. The ESG Ratings were formulated on the basis of the analysis of reports prepared within the framework of the ESG Risk Rating by the company Sustainalytics B.V., an independent scoring agency. At the same time as the implementation of the WIG ESG index, cooperation with NN Investment Partners TFI, an investment product that facilitates investments in the spirit of sustainable finance operating in accordance with the principle Socially Responsible Investing (SRI), commenced (Kuźniarska at al., 2021), which consists not only in achieving specific financial returns, but also social goals. WIG-ESG is at the same time a basic instrument for financial instruments available on the market (GPW Group ESG Strategy 2025). The idea behind the creation of the index in the ESG area was to motivate large companies with liquid assets to take ESG factors into account in their investment decision-making process, regardless of the type of the business. The purpose of creating

the index was also to attract foreign individual and institutional investors for whom ESG factors are increasingly important (Zaremba, 2023). The WIG-ESG is an income index, which means that both the prices of the transactions included in it and dividend income are taken into account in its calculation. The number of companies in the index is variable, nevertheless, many leading Polish companies and also those with foreign capital operating in the Polish market are in the index, including PKO BP, PEKAO, PZU, DINOPL, KGHM, WIRTUALNA, PKNORLEN, PKPCARGO, KRUK, Allegro, ENEA, Grupa Azoty, COMARCH, CIECH, BOGDANKA, BUDIMEX, and others (WIG-ESG Index).

The implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Poland is now becoming not a voluntary practice, but a necessity when it comes to multinational corporations, and local companies and suppliers. Cooperation between multinational corporations and local business triggers adaptation processes among suppliers also in the area of CSR. It also encompasses redistribution of skills and knowledge towards contractors, which in practice has a positive impact on the competitive position. A very important role in this process is played by mitigation of reputation risks, which means the need for integrated supply chain activities as well as building lasting relationships with co-operators based on CSR and standards that apply to both sides of the transaction (Jastrzebska, 2013). Poland has made tremendous progress in implementing ethical business practices as well as promoting the idea of CSR, since the political changes. All the regulations and institutions that have been created to improve not only the economic situation, but above all to sensitise people to social and environmental goals, have yielded very good results and made it clear that business has a key role to play in this issue. There is still a lot of work to be done, because in addition to regulation, it is the awareness of all stakeholders that is of great importance in promoting and implementing CSR.

### **1.1.3 Corporate Social Responsibility in Slovakia (Jana Kozáková)**

Over the past few decades, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has grown in importance as a component of business practice in Slovakia. Even though Slovakia has experienced substantial political and economic changes since communism was overthrown in 1989 (Harris and Henderson, 1989), there have been several significant historical turning points that have influenced the way CSR is currently practiced in Slovakia. Founding the Slovak Donors Forum in 1995 (DeHoog and Racanska, 2003), which brought officials from the government, corporate community, and civil society together to encourage philanthropy and social responsibility, was one of the first significant steps. The Forum was crucial in promoting best practices and increasing CSR awareness among firms in Slovakia (CAF Centrum, 2021). At the same time, it promoted philanthropy and social responsibility, which resulted in the effort of regional businesses in Slovakia to start to embrace CSR (Przytuła et al., 2019). Another key turning point was the acceptance of the UN Global Compact by many Slovak businesses in 2001 (UN, 2023), which vowed to incorporate environmentally friendly and socially accountable practices into their operations. The Global

Compact promoted responsible corporate practices and helped CSR become more popular in Slovakia (Hąbek et al., 2018). Slovakia launched a CSR policy in 2007 with the Action Plan of the National Reform Programme of the SR 2017 (EC, 2017), in which the intention of enticing businesses to embrace sustainable practices, and advance social responsibility was incorporated. In the field of application of the principles of social responsibility in Slovakia, multinational companies (MNCs) also had an irreplaceable position (Hąbek et al., 2018; Przytuła et al., 2019; Rumanko et al., 2021). After communism was overthrown, Slovakia faced enormous political and economic upheavals in the early 1990s. Many multinational corporations (MNEs) joined the Slovak market at this time, bringing with them fresh business strategies and a stronger emphasis on responsible business. These MNEs were crucial in advancing CSR in Slovakia, increasing public awareness of the value of ethical business conduct, and offering tools and assistance to regional businesses (Schmid, 2003). MNCs were practically the first to apply the concept of CSR as a practical tool in conditions of Slovakia. The CSR concept was practically unknown in here until then (Kozakova, 2021). However, it is necessary to point out that the implementation of socially responsible activities after 1990 was not new. In Slovakia, responsible business has strong roots, primarily through the implementation of activities for the benefit of employees and the local community, and strongly promoted agricultural cooperatives that had an irreplaceable position in the creation of society and the country before 1989 (Svitacova, 2021). However, the activities implemented at that time were not given a specific name, and usually they were not even reported. With many businesses embracing sustainability plans and initiatives, CSR has grown more and more ingrained in Slovak business practices in recent years (Pongraczova, 2013; Antosova and Csikosova, 2016; Kádekóvá et al., 2020). The carmaker Volkswagen Slovakia, which has implemented several environmental and social initiatives like waste management, energy efficiency, and assisting local communities, is an example of Slovak businesses that have shown a strong commitment to CSR. Another example is the energy provider Slovenské elektrárne, which has created a comprehensive CSR programme centred on environmental sustainability, employee engagement, and community development (Marchevská and Mitríková, 2020).

In Slovakia, CSR is nowadays being progressively incorporated into company operations by both local and global corporations. MNEs continue to play a significant role in Slovak CSR promotion, but local businesses are increasingly conducting sustainability and ethical business practices (Kádekóvá et al., 2020). Slovakia is home to many international corporations that have implemented CSR guidelines and best practices. For example, Coca-Cola HBC Slovakia makes a strong commitment to sustainability. It has launched several programmes aimed at lessening its environmental effect, encouraging sustainable agriculture, and helping the community (Coca-Cola, 2022). Local Slovak businesses have also made considerable strides in incorporating CSR into their daily operations in recent years. A good illustration of Slovak company with long history of responsible business is the retail chain COOP Jednota, which is strongly committed to sustainability and ethical business practices. The business has put in place several programmes aimed at lessening its

environmental effect, boosting sustainable sourcing, and helping regional communities (COOP Jednota, 2023).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), which many businesses now incorporate into their operations, has grown in significance as a component of business practice in Slovak business sector. Involved are multinationals operating here, as well as local companies. Moreover, some subsidiaries operating in Slovakia developed own approaches and implement CSR activities independently of their foreign mother companies (Čera et al., 2020). For example, one of the biggest banks in Slovakia, Tatra Banka, makes a significant commitment to CSR. The bank has put in place a variety of environmental sustainability efforts, including lowering its carbon footprint, utilizing renewable energy sources, and supporting environmentally friendly transportation. Tatra Banka also helps local communities through a few social programmes, including financial assistance for sports, culture, and education (TB, 2023). The largest electricity generator in Slovakia, Slovenské elektrárne, has created a comprehensive CSR programme that focuses on environmental sustainability, employee involvement, and community development. The business has put in place several steps to lessen its impact on the environment, including improving energy efficiency, utilizing renewable energy sources, and cutting waste. Slovenské elektrárne also aids neighbourhood communities through social programs that promote underprivileged people and advance education (SE, 2020; Marchevská and Mitříková, 2020; SE, 2023). The major paper and packaging business in Slovakia, Mondi SCP, is dedicated to sustainability and CSR. To lessen its influence on the environment, the corporation has put in place several measures, including improving energy efficiency, reducing waste, and adopting sustainable products. Additionally, Mondi SCP helps regional communities through social initiatives, such as providing support for education, health, and cultural activities (Mondi Group, 2022). Volkswagen Slovakia – one of the biggest employers in Slovakia – has put in place several programmes aimed at social responsibility and environmental sustainability. The business conducted a significant step to lessen its impact on the environment, including the use of renewable energy sources, waste reduction efforts, and the promotion of environmentally friendly transportation. Volkswagen Slovakia also helps local communities through social programmes that promote areas like education and helping those in need (Volswagen, 2021).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a crucial component of corporate strategy in Slovakia, influencing both international corporations and regional businesses. In Slovakia, both local and multinational businesses are rapidly implementing the value of CSR, and taking action to incorporate ethical business practices into their daily operations. While MNEs have been instrumental in advancing CSR in Slovakia, local businesses are also playing a crucial role in advancing sustainability and ethical business conduct in the state. During the last 30 years, Slovakia has made strides in encouraging CSR and ethical corporate practices, even if there is still space for improvement. Historic milestones, such as creation of the Slovak Donors Forum, acceptance of the UN Global Compact, and adoption of a national CSR strategy have played an important role in raising awareness of CSR, and promoting best practices among Slovak businesses. These are becoming more

aware of the value of CSR, and are taking action to incorporate ethical business practices into their daily operations. The examples of Tatra Banka, Slovenské elektrárne, Mondi SCP, and Volkswagen Slovakia show that many Slovak businesses are dedicated to sustainability and social responsibility.

## **1.2 Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework in CSR implementation (Dariusz Pieńkowski)**

Cambridge Dictionary defines Triple Bottom Line (TBL) as „the idea that a company’s performance must be measured not only in relation to profits, but also to its effect on the environment and society as a whole“ (The Triple Bottom Line, 2023). The idea was originally elaborated by (Elkington” (1997; 1999) as principle based on economic prosperity, environmental quality, and social justice. He describes the sustainable corporate policy as a win-win-win strategy (Elkington, 1994).

The triple bottom line was an idea of a new corporate governance paradigm (Table 1), which replaced the idea of a financial bottom line typically developed by business. The paradigm also pointed out the shift from physical and financial capitals to economic, human, social, and natural capitals, as well as described such sustainability characteristics as intangible and borrowed assets, innovation, inclusive governance, or focus on stakeholders (Elkington, 1997). TBL was a core concept of the new paradigm of business and sustainable capitalism. He described eight dimensions of business activities, offering a new approach to the transition with a new role of business in social development. Many of the new business characteristics have developed into business standards and references for corporate governance.

New approaches go even further, calling for a new leadership for business due to the fact that a sustainable enterprise should „rather than maximizing profitability while reducing harm [...] maximizes societal and environmental well-being through a profitable, viable business model designed for the long term“ (Szekely & Dossa, 2017, p. 16). The authors drawing on the experience of positive psychology and positive organizational ethics pointed out a model of continual transition into a sustainable business. At one extreme, there were noncompliant or harmful business practices and negative ethical deviance, such as dishonesty and unethical behaviour. As the normal, middle stage was seen a socially responsible business with ethics and dutiful business ethics. Finally, the positive extreme was characterised by positive deviance (benevolent and virtuous) and sustainable business practices.

Szekely and Dossa (2017) proposed an eight-step business model as a cyclic constantly reassessed process that starts with a sustainable mission realized in stages, such as long-term vision, sustainability strategy, implementation, measuring performance, transparency, and accountability; and ends with calculating. The last stage differs from the traditional model in the fact that growth is not only viewed through the lens of profits, but „have two competing agendas: sustainability mission and profitability“ (p. 18). In this way, the cycle closes by the stage referring to the mission, and the following stages.

**Table 1** – Old and new business paradigms

| <b>Dimension</b>            | <b>Old business paradigm</b>   | <b>New business paradigm</b>  |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Corporate governance        | financial bottom line<br>physical and financial capital<br>tangible, owned assets<br>downsizing<br>exclusive governance<br>shareholders  | triple bottom line<br>economic, human, social, natural capital<br>intangible, borrowed assets<br>innovation<br>inclusive governance<br>stakeholders     |
| Time                        | wider<br>extraction<br>tactics<br>plans<br>bandits   | longer<br>restoration<br>strategy<br>scenarios<br>guardians   |
| Partners                    | deregulation<br>enemies<br>subversion<br>unconditional loyalty<br>rights<br>green business networks                                      | reregulation<br>complementors<br>symbiosis<br>conditional loyalty<br>responsibilities<br>sustainability networking                                      |
| Life-cycle technology (LCA) | responsibility to factory gate<br>sales<br>product and waste<br>environmental LCAs<br>product<br>trial and error                         | stewardship throughout life cycle<br>lifetime customer value<br>co-products<br>triple bottom line LCAs<br>function<br>biomimetics                       |
| Transparency                | closed, except financial reports<br>need to know<br>facts and science<br>one-way, passive communication<br>promises                      | open, triple bottom line reports<br>right to know<br>emotions and perceptions<br>multi-way, active dialogue<br>targets                                  |
| Values                      | careless, uncaring<br>control<br>me<br>monocultures<br>growth  | careful, caring<br>stewardship<br>we<br>diversity<br>sustainability   |
| Markets                     | externalization of costs<br>compliance<br>country-by-country standards<br>adding volume<br>production growth<br>disruptive NGO campaigns | internalization of costs<br>competitive advantage<br>global consistency<br>adding value<br>sustainable consumption<br>disruption as commercial strategy |

Source: Authors' work from Elkington, 1997

Business approaches refer to the concept of sustainability created in the 1980s in the international debates. Purvis et al. (2019) reported that the concept of three pillars has been originally brought into the global policy by the Brundtland Report in



1987, and it followed international conferences and events of the United Nations. The well-known report calls on the industry to „accept a broad sense of social responsibility and ensure awareness of environmental considerations at all levels“. Based on this all industrial enterprises, trade associations, and labour unions should establish company-wide or industry-wide policies concerning resource and environmental management, including compliance with the laws and requirements of the country in which they operate (UN WCED, 1987, p. 222). That is because „Industry’s response to pollution and resource degradation has not been and should not be limited to compliance with regulations“ (UN WCED, 1987, p. 222). The report claimed that a new era of economic growth that is „at the same time socially and environmentally sustainable“ (UN WCED, 1987, p. 14) will be needed in the future.

The concept of CSR refers to these three inseparable and interwoven pillars of business responsibility, sometimes referred to as people, planet, and profits (Pereira & Martins, 2021). A significant contribution to the identification of these new development strategies was made by the Caux Round Table principles in 1994 (Carroll, 2013). These documents refer to seven principles of new strategies for business. The Round Table pointed out the following rules: 1) respect stakeholders beyond shareholders, 2) contribute to economic, social, and environmental development, 3) build trust by going beyond the letter of the law, 4) respect rules and conventions, 5) support responsible globalization, 6) respect the environment, and 7) avoid illicit activities. Similarly, the norm ISO 26000 of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) created in 2010 calls for accountability, transparency, ethical behaviour, respect for stakeholders’ interests, the rule of law, international norms of behaviour, and human rights (ISO, 2018, 2019).

Specific indices and recommendations for the reporting of sustainable business activities were presented by Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) (GRI, 2018), and the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) (IFRS, n.d.). For example, GRI described 6 top-specific economic, 8 environmental, and 19 social standards. ISSB builds on many reporting initiatives developed by different organizations with some specific standards, including the Climate Disclosure Standards Board (CDSB), Task Force for Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), Value Reporting Foundation’s Integrated Reporting Framework, and industry-based SASB Standards, or the World Economic Forum’s Stakeholder Capitalism Metrics.

The European Union corporate sustainability reporting directive (Directive (EU) 2022/2464) and the mandatory reporting on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) (COM(2023) 314 final) aspects both refer to the sustainability pillars of CSR. The directive is a part of The European Green Deal, a new growth strategy aimed at the transformation into a resource-efficient, competitive, and net zero emission economy by 2050. At the same time, the deal ensures “that all regions and Union citizens participate in a socially just transition to a sustainable economic system, whereby no person and no place is left behind” (Directive (EU) 2022/2464, p. 15). Consequently, the three pillars and the deal also define responsible business activities and standards of good practices in the Visegrad Region.

### **1.2.1 Social Pillar of CSR using the TBL approach (Dariusz Pieńkowski)**

The United Nations (UN) defined social sustainability as “identifying and managing business impacts, both positive and negative, on people” (UN Global Compact, n.d.-a). The policy of the UN emphasised that the relationships and engagement with all companies’ stakeholders are crucial. Therefore, the social pillar encompasses employees and workers of all stages of value chains, customers as well as local communities. Six out of ten UN Global Compact principles refer to the social issues, pointing out the following business responsibilities (UN Global Compact, n.d.-b):

- I. Human Rights: 1) businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and 2) businesses should make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuse.
- II. Labour: 3) businesses should uphold the freedom of association, and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; 4) businesses should eliminate all forms of forced and compulsory labour; 5) businesses should effectively abolish child labour; and 6) businesses should eliminate discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

The UN Global Compact emphasises that businesses have an important complementary role to the governmental policy in respecting and supporting the social principles.

Murphy (2012), when analysing the key documents on sustainable development, described four general concepts of the social pillar: equity, awareness of sustainability, participation, and social cohesion. Equity “refers to the distribution of welfare goods and life chances on the basis of fairness, and it applies to national, international, and intergenerational contexts” (Murphy, 2012, p. 20). The social policy area emphasises equity in the distribution of resources for all citizens and equal opportunities for their development. In turn, awareness of sustainability focuses on raising awareness, and the change towards sustainable consumption and citizenship. Finally, participation is about inclusion of all citizens in decision-making processes, while cohesion refers to community coexistence in terms of social networks and interactions.

In turn, Boström (2012) divided social responsibility aspects into substantive and procedural. The former are described in terms of goals, while the latter in terms of ways of achieving the goals. Substantive social aspects consist of issues, such as fulfilment of the basic needs, fair distribution, equality, social cohesion and inclusion, or health. Procedural aspects focus on access to information, participation, or empowerment in terms of networking, education or awareness. The classification distinguishes between means and goals of the social pillar, and the means can be generally applied to all sustainability goals in other pillars, too.

The EU directive (Directive (EU) 2022/2464) on corporate sustainability reporting mentioned three general groups of social objectives: “equal treatment and opportunities for all in terms of equal pay for work of equal value and equal training

and skills development, diversity, inclusion of people with disabilities, and measures against harassment in the workplace; working conditions (e.g., working time, social dialogue and collective bargaining, health and safety, or work-life balance); and respect for the human rights, fundamental freedoms, and democratic principles and standards”.

The latter objective is usually referred to by internationally recognized documents and principles, such as Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UN Human Rights, 2011). This document defines two general principles of business impacts related to its operations or products and services. Due to these principles, business should avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts, and seek preventing or mitigating adverse human rights impacts.

Detailed recommendations and descriptions of the social pillar are provided by international organizations that developed standards, such as those mentioned above – GRI and ISO. There are also some other organizations with the example of the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB), which offer industry-based standards for 77 industries (SASB Standards, n.d.). The standards are presently managed by the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB), which also consolidated many other standards developed by other non-profit organizations. All the standards are developed in the context of the frameworks proposed by the debates about the concept of sustainable development and CSR. Table 2 shows the comparison of the GRI social sustainability standards and the ISO 26000 standard classifications particularly focused on social sustainability. Regardless of each organisation’s specific ways of classifying social activities, all the standards refer to human roles, such as workers, consumers, or citizens.

In conclusion, the TBL strategy includes the social pillar of corporate social responsibility as one of the three key components of development. Businesses that pay attention to social responsibility may provide their workers, clients, suppliers, and communities with benefits, while still being successful and ecologically sustainable. Companies may foster culture of social responsibility that helps society as well as their own bottom line by engaging themselves in activities like fostering employee well-being, sponsoring regional charities, and putting responsible sourcing methods in place.

### **1.2.2 Environmental Pillar of CSR using the TBL approach (Dariusz Pieńkowski)**

Concerned with a company’s effect on the environment, corporate social responsibility has an environmental pillar. This “planet” pillar is just as significant as the economic and social aspect. Environmental issues have been widely addressed in debates about sustainable development from the perspective of the environmental risks and burdens generated by business. Therefore, environmental standards have been widely developed by many organizations. For example, the European Commission developed the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) in 1993 (Commission Decision (EU) 2017/2285), and ISO declared its ISO 14001 environmental

**Table 2** – Comparison of GRI and ISO 26000 standards of social responsibility

| GRI social sustainability standards  | ISO 26000 social sustainability standards  |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Employment</li> <li>2. Labour/management relations</li> <li>3. Occupational health and safety</li> <li>4. Training and education</li> <li>5. Diversity and equal opportunity</li> <li>6. Non-discrimination</li> <li>7. Freedom of association and collective bargaining</li> <li>8. Child labour</li> <li>9. Forced or compulsory labour</li> <li>10. Security practices</li> <li>11. Rights of indigenous peoples</li> <li>12. Human rights assessment</li> <li>13. Local communities</li> <li>14. Supplier social assessment</li> <li>15. Public policy</li> <li>16. Customer health and safety</li> <li>17. Marketing and labelling</li> <li>18. Customer privacy</li> <li>19. Socioeconomic compliance</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Human rights:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• due diligence</li> <li>• human rights risk situations</li> <li>• avoidance of complicity</li> <li>• resolving grievances</li> <li>• discrimination and vulnerable groups</li> <li>• civil and political rights</li> <li>• economic, social, and cultural rights</li> <li>• fundamental principles and rights at work</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Employment and labour practices               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• employment and employment relationships</li> <li>• conditions of work and social protection</li> <li>• social dialogue</li> <li>• health and safety at work</li> <li>• human development and training in the workplace</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Consumer rights               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fair marketing and contractual practices, factual and unbiased information</li> <li>• protecting consumers' health and safety</li> <li>• sustainable consumption</li> <li>• consumer service, support, and complaint and dispute resolution</li> <li>• consumer data protection and privacy</li> <li>• access to essential services</li> <li>• education and awareness</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Community involvement and development               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• education and culture</li> <li>• employment creation and skills development</li> <li>• technology development and access</li> <li>• wealth and income creation (including tax responsibilities)</li> <li>• health</li> <li>• social investment</li> </ul> </li> </ol> |

Source: Authors' works from GRI, 2018; ISO, 2018.

management standards in 1996 (Blokdyk, 2020; Morris, 2003). In general, EMAS covers most of the ISO 14001 standards, and it is perceived as more advanced, inter alia, in terms of the continual improvement of environmental performance or involvement of employees in the process of improvement (Elkington, 1997; German EMAS Advisory Board, 2014).

The EMAS Decision from 2017 (Commission Decision (EU) 2017/2285) defined the criteria of significant environmental impacts and the key areas of environmental policy. The policy areas were divided into six categories: energy, materials, water,

waste, land use with regard to biodiversity, and emissions. The GRI standards also largely overlap with these groups of environmental issues (GRI, 2018).

The European Union environmental activities are defined by the set of conditions that an economic activity must meet (European Commission, 2023):

- Making a substantial contribution to at least one of the below environmental objectives:
  - climate change mitigation in terms of greenhouse gas emissions,
  - climate change adaptation, which is usually referred to as climate resilience (i.e., a capacity to cope with disturbances and hazardous events),
  - sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources,
  - transition to a circular economy, pollution prevention and control (i.e., recycling, waste prevention, resource efficiency, or avoiding waste that may cause long-term and significant environmental harms),
  - protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems (i.e., conservation or good conditions and resilience of ecosystems).
- Doing no significant harm to other environmental objectives defined by five following criteria of an business impact: potential to cause environmental harm, fragility of the local, regional or global environment, size, number, frequency and reversibility, existence and requirements of relevant environmental legislation, and importance to stakeholders (Commission Decision (EU) 2017/2285);
- Complying with minimum safeguards defined by the OECD (2023) and the UN (UN Human Rights, 2011) that encompass the following topics: human rights (including labour and consumer rights), corruption/bribery, taxation, and fair competition (Platform on Sustainable Finance, 2022);
- Complying with technical screening criteria set out in the Taxonomy.

Climate-related activities are of great importance in the present green transition of the EU economies. The EU Communication (C/2019/4490, n.d.) described climate-related risks, dependence, and opportunities. Risks refer to the negative impact on the company and climate, while opportunities to climate change adaptation (i.e., anticipation of adverse effects and prevention or minimisation of the damage resulted from climate change) and mitigation (i.e., reduction and prevention of greenhouse gas emissions). Finally, dependence is defined as companies' dependence on natural, social, and human capitals. The role and extent of such dependence should be considered in the context of the climate-related risks.

The OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (OECD, 2023) also offer a set of environmental recommendations for companies. In line with the guidelines, companies should create a system of environmental management for monitoring and evaluating their environmental impact over their full life cycle. The information about the potential impact should be accessible to the public, including communities and workers. The latter should be educated and trained in environmental health and safety matters, while the company should contribute to the development of environmentally meaningful and economically efficient public policy. Additionally,

businesses should apply cost-effective measures to prevent or minimize environmental damage, and maintain contingency plans for preventing, mitigating, and controlling serious damage. Finally, the recommendations call for the continuous improvement and long-term strategies of corporate environmental performance by adoption of green technologies, provision of goods and services, and promotion of environmental awareness of their customers.

In turn, the environmental pillar in ISO 26000 was defined by four general environmental aspects: prevention of pollution (emissions to air, discharges to water, waste management, use and disposal of toxic and hazardous chemicals, and other identifiable forms of pollution, such as noise, odour, or light pollution), sustainable resource use (energy efficiency, water conservation, use and access to water, efficiency in the use of materials, and minimised resource requirements of a product), climate change mitigation and adaptation, and restoration of natural habitats (ISO, 2018, 2019). The standards additionally refer to the principles typical of the environmental policies, such as environmental responsibility, precautionary principle, environmental risk management, and polluter pays principle (Beder, 2013; ISO, 2019).

All the measures and standards presented in this section are not only viewed through the prism of corporate responsibility, but also translated into financial benefits. For example, the analysis offered by the EU Decision shows that the organizations certified with EMAS benefited from energy and resource savings, as well as reduction in negative incidents, and better relations with stakeholders (Commission Decision (EU) 2017/2285). Park and Jang (2021) added some detailed benefits, such as positive effects on employees' work engagement, customer loyalty, or improvement in the risk and opportunity management. All these outcomes directly or indirectly translate into company profits and competitiveness in domestic and foreign markets.

### **1.2.3 Economic Pillar of CSR using the TBL approach (Dariusz Pieńkowski)**

The financial influence that companies have on society is the focus of the economic pillar of CSR. This includes their influence on national and international economies as well as their function in fostering employment growth, wealth creation, and economic development. Economic growth and profits were originally seen as the main and overriding objective of business activities. Debates associated with the concept of sustainable development questioned the approach from the perspective of its social and environmental burdens (Purvis et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the economic pillar has never been neglected and became a solid part of sustainable development and the TBL approach to business responsibility. The TBL paradigm emphasised complex interrelation of the economic pillar with the two other pillars, and consequently, the need for sustainable development of all three pillars to the same extent.

Profits are a necessary part of market operation and economic growth. However, the economic pillar broadly points out the responsibilities of a company as a market entity and an economic organization. The UN Global Compact in its *value driven*

*model* described three key areas of the following economic activities (UN Global Compact Lead, 2013):

1. Sustainability-advantaged growth (i.e., revenue growth from sustainability-advantaged products, services and/or strategies):
  - new markets and regions,
  - new consumers and market share,
  - product and service innovation,
  - long-term strategy;
2. Sustainability-driven productivity (i.e., cost savings and cost avoidance from sustainability-driven productivity initiatives):
  - operational efficiency,
  - human capital management,
  - reputation pricing power;
3. Sustainability-related risk management (i.e., reduced sustainability-related risk exposure that could materially impair a company's performance):
  - operational and regulatory risk,
  - reputational risk,
  - supply chain risk,
  - leadership and adaptability.

The ISO 26000 (ISO, 2018, 2019) standards of the economic area can particularly be seen in fair operating practices, which refer to business ethics and fair relationships with all business stakeholders. These areas encompass issues, such as anti-corruption (bribery, fraud, money laundering, embezzlement, or concealment and obstruction of justice), responsible political involvement (use of undue influence and behaviour that can undermine public political processes, such as manipulation, intimidation, and coercion) fair competition (price fixing, bid rigging, or predatory pricing), promoting social responsibility in value chain through its procurement and purchasing decisions, and respect for property rights.

The OECD guidelines (OECD, 2023) also refer to many of the above issues. For example, due to the competition, businesses should “carry out their activities in a manner consistent with all applicable competition laws and regulations, taking into account the competition laws of all jurisdictions in which the activities may have anti-competitive effects”. Similar to the ISO 26000, this is referred to as unfair practices, which were mentioned above, such as price fixing, and bid rigging, but also establishment of output restrictions or any forms of sharing markets, such as allocation of customers, suppliers, or territories. The key category of the economic pillar recommendations also refers to combating bribery and other forms of corruption.

The GRI (2018) standards similarly depicted the key areas of the economic pillar. The classification divided all the standards into six categories, such as economic performance, market presence, indirect market impacts, procurement practices, anti-corruption, and anti-competitive behaviour. For example, due to the standards of the economic performance, business is not exclusively seen from the perspective of the size of profits, but from the way of sharing those profits between operating costs,

employees, capital providers, government and communities, as well as by the size of the retained economic value. Additionally, there are financial implications and other risks and opportunities due to climate change, benefit plan obligations, and other retirement plans analysed; and financial assistance received from the government. The market presence refers to remuneration policy from the perspective of gender or senior groups and a local minimum wage, while the indirect market impacts refer to the size and impact of the company infrastructure investments and their role in the development of local communities.

ESG reporting divided all the responsibilities into five areas of business activities (Directive (EU) 2022/2464, 2022). The reporting covers expertise and skills of corporate administrative, management, and supervisory bodies (corporate governance), as well as internal control and risk management systems due to sustainability issues and decision-making process. The third area refers to business ethics and corporate culture with the problems of corruption, bribery, animal welfare, and protection of whistleblowers. Finally, the last two areas define political influence and lobbying activities, and management and quality of relationships with stakeholders, including payment practices.

### **1.3 Reporting on CSR activities (Alina Nowotarska)**

CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) reporting is a key element of business strategies that allows companies to monitor, report, and improve their activities related to social and environmental responsibility and corporate governance (respect for labour rights, respect for human rights and against corruption and bribery). Adherence to these issues causes companies to feel, as it were, compelled to consider compliance with the law in all these spheres, and focus on the common good of society in general, and stakeholders in particular (Rodríguez-Fernandez, 2016). This helps companies monitor progress, communicate goals and achievements, and identify areas for improvement.

The main purpose of reporting on CSR activities is to provide the necessary information that influences public and stakeholders' perceptions of the company and its management (Surroca, Tribó, Waddock, 2010). The challenge for the company is not only to report on CSR activities, but also to manage stakeholders' perceptions of CSR reporting (Cahan, De Villiers, Jeter, Naiker, Van Staden, 2016). Regardless of where a company's headquarters was located, usually the motivation was to maximise the profit (Jensen, Meckling, 2019, cit per: Sial, Zheng, Khuong, Khan, Usman, 2018), while ignoring the factors, such as environmental impact. However, today's business has many stakeholders with social and environmental expectations for social and environmental activities. Stakeholder theory assumes that companies must take stakeholders' expectations into account (Donaldson, Preston, 1995; cit per: Sial et al., 2018). However, adequate financial resources are needed to meet stakeholders' expectations. Loose resource theory emphasises that companies with higher profitability undertake more CSR activities and reports (Price, Sun, 2017).



CSR reporting is a management strategy, and a social perception of social and environmental impact (Gray, R., Javad, Power, Sinclair, 2001). Stakeholder theory assumes that a company's long-term survival depends on taking care of stakeholder issues, which involves CSR reporting that takes into account business obligations to society and stakeholders (Donaldson, Preston, 1995; cit per: Sial et al., 2018).

Many studies in literature prove a positive relationship between the application of CSR principles and their reporting and company performance. Thus, it is more likely to lead to a surplus of financial resources (Amato, Amato, 2007), which may provide the company with an opportunity to invest more in CSR activities, while lower economic performance may lead to reduction in CSR activities (Price, Sun, 2017), and reluctance to report them. Companies with good performance provide more CSR-related information to legitimise their existence (Haniffa, Cooke, 2005). Positive relationship between company's performance and CSR reporting is achieved due to the management ability and flexibility to perform more CSR activities for the benefit of shareholders. According to the study (Gamerschlag, Möller, Verbeeten, 2011), a positive relationship has been shown between the company's performance and environmental disclosure. Many research papers prove the point that if a company has a good financial performance, there is a positive relationship between the CSR reporting and the company's financial performance ([GRI, Report or Explain, 2013], cit per: Oncioiu, Petrescu, Bilcan, Petrescu, Popescu, Anghel, 2020), and such company can bear the cost of the CSR reporting (Jiang, Fu, 2019). There is also a significant positive correlation between the quality of the CSR disclosure and the sustainability opportunities of highly polluting companies (Dhar, Sarkar, Ayittey, 2022).

According to the survey by experts from the consulting firm PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers), only 31% of investors draw up a policy on engagement in the area of monitoring companies for ESG risk exposure, and only 11% of them apply. The level of those considering the non-financial factors as one of their main investment criteria is also relatively low – the ESG factors are currently recognized (but not considered critical) by nearly half of them. However, nearly 30% of those surveyed would be willing to lower their valuation or revise their investment if the ESG risk exposure was too high [PwC, 2021]. As investors point out, the above situation occurred partly due to the unsatisfactory quality of information reported in the area of sustainability by Polish companies (62% of them said that domestic entities are moderately or poorly prepared to provide investors with information anticipated by the SFDR regulation) ([PwC, 2021], cit per: Rogowski, Lipski, M. 2022). This indicates that there is still ample room for improvement in this regard. From the factors considered key by investors, the indicators related to carbon footprint, greenhouse gas emissions, having and adhering to a pro-climate environmental policy, and reducing the amount of energy consumed ([PwC, 2021], cit per: Idem) are the most notable. It should also be noted that 43% of the banks surveyed by PwC plan to incorporate the quantitative impact of the ESG factors into the lending process in the coming year ([PwC, 2022], cit per: Idem).

Unfortunately, there is still a large proportion of companies that do not publish non-financial reports on CSR (a.k.a. sustainability reporting, social reporting, or reporting on ESG factors – i.e., environmental protection, social responsibility, and

corporate governance), which is caused greatly by the constantly low prevalence of reporting (Aluchna, Roszkowska-Menkes, 2018), as well as the fact that there is no reporting obligation, except for large companies, which is regulated by the new Directive 2014/95/EU of The European Parliament and The Council ([EC, 2014], cit per: Idem)] on disclosure of non-financial and diverse information. According to the directive, large public-interest entities with more than 500 employees and meeting one of the two criteria of balance sheet total and net turnover were required to disclose certain non-financial information in their management report. The areas mentioned in the directive are related to environmental, social, and the aforementioned corporate governance. Large companies were obliged to report their social activities. Nonetheless, organizations still have a lot of freedom to report on CSR information, albeit they should be within a certain framework. There are studies that indicate that this is the case for about 30% of large companies [Mikulska, Michalczuk, 2014]. This has led numerous organizations to develop standards, norms, guidelines, and recommendations for social responsibility reporting. Among the most important of these belong:

- United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) 10 principles,
- Sustainability Global Reporters Program (United Nations Environmental Program),
- International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) – Sustainability Framework,
- European Federation of Financial Analysts' Associations (EFFAS) – ESG Framework,
- AA1000 AccountAbility standards of 1999,
- Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) – G4 Framework,
- OECD Guidelines,
- SA 8000 (Social Accountability) standard of 1998,
- ISO 26000, which comprehensively covered CSR in 2010 as „Guidance on social responsibility“ (Dyląg, Puchalska 2014; Adamczyk, 2011)
- GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) guidelines (GRI standards for sustainability impacts).

As far as the CSR reporting guidelines are concerned, the most popular are the GRI guidelines, which place the greatest emphasis on an organization's responsibility for the social and environmental impact of its decisions and actions in the areas of organizational governance, human rights, labour practices, environment, fair operating practices, consumer issues, community involvement and community development (Ortiz, Marín, 2014). Based on the fact that there was a lot of freedom in the CSR reporting, many methods and assessment tools were developed such as:

- socially responsible company indices, reputation indices, social rankings (Hopkins, 2005; Marquez, Fombrun, 2005; 2007);
- certification and accreditation, referring to the application of international standards: SA 8000, ISO26000, and ISO14001; analysis of the CSR content in annual reports, financial statements (according to GRI or AccountAbility1000Standard

guidelines) and websites; and measurement of individuals' attitudes and value system using rating scales (Maignan, Ferrell, 2000).

Publicly traded companies that want to mark their social responsibility, mainly in the direction of investors place their funds in socially responsible indices. One of the first responsible stock market indices were the Dow Jones Sustainability Index, Domini Social Index, and the FTSE4Good, which was created to objectively measure the performance of companies that meet the recognized corporate criteria in the areas of investment, research, transparent policies, and benchmarking to track the performance of investment portfolios (Buglewicz, 2017; [FTSE4Good Index Series]). The Dow Jones Sustainability Index, established in 1999, has been focused on social and environmental issues, pursuing sustainability goals, and bringing together companies and investors for whom cooperation is a source of benefit and long-term value creation that will provide shareholders with benefits (López, Garcia, Rodriguez, 2007; Buglewicz, 2017). Currently, sustainable stock market indices are focusing on making the companies concentrate on their indices that report and comply with ESG (Environmental Social Government). In Central Europe, this is the WIG-ESG Index, whose main goal was to attract foreign investors for whom the ESG factors are not indifferent (Zaremba, 2023).

Although many concepts and solutions have been developed, development of uniform and widely accepted methods and tools in this field has been the biggest problem (Frost, Jones, Lee, 2012; Crane, Henriques, Husted, Matten, 2017; Ehsan, Nazir, Nurunnabi, Raza Khan, Tahir, Ahmed, 2018). Among the difficulties in evaluation, there are the multidimensionality of CSR, and the qualitative nature of many of its aspects and activities (Capelle-Blancard, Petit, 2017). Moreover, information disclosed by the reports is not standardised – it varies greatly in content, scope, and form (Nawrocki, Szwajca, 2021).

As a response to the unification of the CSR norms and standards, and in particular for the need to compare the results of these activities across industries, new Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) of the European Parliament and of the Council (EU) 2022/2464 of December 14, 2022 amending Regulation (EU) No. 537/2014, Directive 2004/109/EC, Directive 2006/43/EC and Directive 2013/34/EU [EC, 2022] was created with regard to corporate sustainability reporting, which requires companies to submit annual reports. These must include data on their impact on the environment, society, human rights, and corporate governance. The EU countries must embody into their national laws before July 6, 2024 (Stolowy, Paugam, 2023). The obligation extends not only to large entities, but also to small and medium-sized entities, and only micro entities as the public interest ones are excluded. This will therefore require changes in the national laws with regard to reporting, particularly the Accounting Law (Trocka, 2023). The entry into force of this regulation will require a lot of revolutionary organizational changes and financial outlays for the entities that were not yet required to report on their CSR activities. After all, according to the study by PwC experts, only 31% of investors draw up a policy on engagement in the area of monitoring companies for the ESG risk exposure, and only 11% of them publish it (Rogowski, Lipski, M. 2022).

Reporting and disclosing high-quality financial information to the public attracts the attention of investors and the media, and any irregularities in managers' decision-making processes are more likely to be detected and punished. This prevents profit manipulation by managers, as well as reduces the asymmetry between actual and disclosed information (Wang, Cao, Ye, 2018). The problem with voluntary CSR disclosure is that both voluntary CSR disclosure and earnings management are done endogenously by managers. Hung et al. (2013) suggest that mandatory CSR reporting mitigates information asymmetry by providing more CSR-related information (the more information effect of more information).

CSR reporting is not only an obligation, but also an opportunity to create value for companies and society. It is crucial to continuously improve reporting processes to respond better to the changing challenges and stakeholders' expectations, while contributing to a sustainable and responsible future.

## **1.4 The Role of Socially Responsible Business in Times of Global Crisis (Rafał Baum)**

In recent years, the concept of sustainable development and the related idea of CSR have evolved from an innovative trend to one of the main determinants of the direction of economic transformation. The main vision that guides the implementation of these new solutions encompasses stable development of economy, climate neutrality, and care for the natural environment, as well as creating favourable conditions for social development. Taking synchronised actions in these three pillars is important for the functioning of the current as well as future generations. These ideas developed in a relatively stable economic and geopolitical environment. The current development conditions, including the pandemic, war in Ukraine, and the raw material crisis, have resulted in the emergence of a scientific discourse on the further approach to the issues of socio-economic development and ecological issues (Waliszewski, 2020; Pieloch-Babiarz et al., 2021; Costa et al., 2022; Misztal, 2023).

This chapter is an attempt to supplement the literature of the subject with this research problem, very current and important not only from the point of view of the theory, but also from the point of view of practical implications. Implementation of such research objective required using the method of retrospective and critical review of the selected literature on the subject (the literature review was based on Internet databases such as: Scopus, Web of Science, Researchgate and BazEkon).

The Covid-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, and global „energy crisis“ have brought to light the vital importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) during difficult times. Enterprises contact and cooperate with stakeholders, such as staff members, clients, suppliers, and the larger society in crisis situations. They also have a duty to support the global response to these crises. CSR is now a commonplace feature of the business scene, but it should be verified to what extent companies remain committed to the implementation of their CSR programmes in the face of serious crises. The question whether business companies continue engaging themselves

in their ethical and philanthropic discretionary activities despite the multiplicity of economic, health, or social challenges is of great importance. A crisis puts morality and determination of both individuals and their organizations to test and verifies sincerity of the previously declared CSR intentions<sup>1</sup> (Maon et al., 2010; Boons and Lüdeke-Freund F., 2013; Schaltegger et al., 2015; Smith and Rhiney, 2020; Schwartz and Kay, 2023).

A crisis may be an excuse for companies to abandon CSR. On the other hand, social responsibility of every organization is related to the fact that it considers what impact it has on the environment. And the crisis does not change this impact. On the contrary, in a crisis, this responsibility is even greater, because companies are responsible for their employees who help run this business, and are responsible to customers who have new problems in a crisis. It should also be remembered that, for example, the climate crisis that affects us today is largely the fault of business, so the responsibility of enterprises increases despite subsequent crises (Jastrzębska, 2023).

A review of the literature reveals increased interest in possible links between the crisis and CSR (Lins et al., 2017; Claeys, 2020; Li et al. 2021; Bae et al., 2021; Pieloch-Babiarz et al., 2021; Baatwah et al., 2022; Alsheyab et al. 2023). There has long been speculation that the CSR factors can affect the risks faced by firms, and ultimately firms' cost of capital (Gillan et al., 2021). The relationship between corporate social performance and financial performance has been examined, too (Ju Tsai and Wu, 2022), as well as the relation between banks' corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the financial performance in a context of the financial crisis in 2008. It has revealed that banks in general appear to be rewarded for being socially responsible, as financial performance is positively and significantly related to the CSR scores. Cornett et al. (2016) found out that the biggest banks pursued socially responsible activities to a significantly greater extent than the smaller banks. Furthermore, the largest banks recorded a steep increase in CSR strengths and a steep drop in CSR concerns after 2009. At the same time, it should be noted that the bibliography does not provide adequate and final answers regarding care and various manifestations of CSR in organizations in crisis times (Maritz, 2020; Batten et al., 2022; Ursic and Cestar 2022). However, the studies (García-Sánchez and García-Sánchez 2020; Zhang, 2021) have shown that in times of global crisis, Socially Responsible Business (SRB) plays several key roles such as:

- Providing Support;
- Protecting Employees;
- Upholding Ethical Business Practices;
- Advocacy;
- Innovation;

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<sup>1</sup> It must be remembered that the problems of environmental protection, support for employees and local communities, etc., although they are ones of the competitive advantages, are associated with the need to give up part of the profits (Ožėlienė, 2017; Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2021; Gillan et.al. 2021; Zhou et al. 2022).

- Collaboration;
- Long-term Sustainability;
- Building Trust.

SRBs can provide support to communities in various ways, such as funds, products or services to those in need. This could include providing the hungry with food, healthcare workers with medical supplies, or students learning from home with technology. SRBs also take responsibility for protecting their employees. This could involve provision of necessary personal protective equipment, enabling remote work, ensuring job security, or offering mental health resources. Literature research confirms that even in times of crisis, SRBs must uphold ethical business practices. This includes fair treatment of employees, transparency in business operations, and maintaining commitments to sustainability. SRBs can use their influence to advocate policies and practices that address the crisis at hand. They can also raise awareness of the crisis and the needs of the affected communities. SRBs can contribute to solving global crises by innovating new products, services or business models. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, some businesses pivoted to produce hand sanitizers, masks or even respirators (Volkswagen, 2020). SRBs can collaborate with other businesses, non-profit organizations, and governments to coordinate responses and maximise the impact of their efforts. SRBs also play a key role in ensuring long-term sustainability. They need to balance the immediate response with strategies which ensure that the business can continue to operate and support its stakeholders in the long term. Finally, by responding effectively and ethically to a crisis, SRBs can build trust with their stakeholders, including employees, customers, investors, and the broader community. This trust is crucial to business success in the long term.

The crisis caused firstly by the COVID-19 pandemic and then by the war in Ukraine meant that activities in the field of corporate social responsibility gained in importance. As the last edition of the study „CSR in practice – the Barometer of the French-Polish Chamber of Commerce“ showed, some companies even intensified their CSR activities at that time. As many as 81% of the surveyed enterprises declared their involvement in the activities addressed to their employees; 72% directly to customers, and a slightly smaller percentage (71%) indicated activities in the area of environmental protection or targeted at local communities (CCIFP, 2022).

#### **1.4.1 CSR activities of a business related to the COVID-19 Pandemic (Rafal Baum)**

Businesses have been instrumental in helping communities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic by providing support and addressing the situation. Global economies and cultures have been significantly impacted by the pandemic, and corporations have been asked to play a key role in addressing the problem, as they did in similar emergencies before (Johnson et al. 2011; Monachino and Moreira, 2014; Droppert and Bennett, 2015; Gardberg et al., 2019).

The study of literature (Boccia and Sarnacchiaro, 2020; Deng et al., 2020; Mahmud et al., 2020; Bapuji et al., 2020; García-Sánchez and García-Sánchez, 2020; Lopata and Rogatka, 2021; Mahmud et al., 2021; Zhang, 2021; Panagiotopoulos, 2021; Carroll, 2021; Ahmed et al., 2021; Schwartz and Kay, 2023) showed that Corporate Social Responsibility activities related to the COVID-19 pandemic have varied across businesses, but a few common, major examples have been identified:

- Financial Donations: many businesses have provided funding to organizations working in the front line during the pandemic, such as healthcare institutions, research facilities, and non-profit organizations;<sup>2</sup>
- Product Donations: companies have donated products that were in high demand during the pandemic, such as masks, sanitizers, ventilators, and personal protective equipment (PPE);
- Employee Support: businesses have offered support to their employees in various ways, such as providing paid sick leave, mental health resources, flexible working hours, and work-from-home options;
- Community Support: companies have supported their local communities by donating food to food banks, offering free or discounted services to healthcare workers and other frontline workers, and supporting small businesses;
- Research and Development: some businesses, particularly those in the pharmaceutical and biotech industries, have focused their efforts on researching and developing treatment or vaccines for COVID-19;
- Shifting Production: some businesses have shifted their manufacturing processes to producing items that were in high demand during the pandemic, for examples, ventilators and masks;<sup>3</sup>
- Awareness Campaigns: many companies have launched campaigns to educate the public about the virus, and promote behaviours that help preventing its spread;
- Support to Governments: some businesses have provided governments with support when responding to the pandemic, e.g., by offering logistical support, technical skills or resources;
- Virtual Volunteering: companies have facilitated and encouraged their employees to participate in virtual volunteering efforts, related to the pandemic;
- Environmental Impact: some businesses have taken steps to minimise the environmental impact of the pandemic, for example, by promoting remote work to reduce carbon emissions.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the report by Candid and the Center for Disaster Philanthropy (2021), in 2020 alone, over \$20 billion was given to philanthropic activities related to Covid-19 worldwide, with 44% of the funds coming from corporations (Maurrasse, 2021). In 2021, the companies that donated the largest sums of money to fight Covid-19 included: Google, Chinese technology company ByteDance, Wells Fargo, and MasterCard (for more examples of corporate philanthropy see: Olphert, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> It has been observed that particularly family businesses were philanthropic during the pandemic. For example, coat manufacturer Canada Goose began immediately producing and distributing medical equipment free of charge to hospitals in Canada; French company Decathlon provided carers with snorkelling masks; Italian clothing company Miroglio Group has started production of protective masks; Hamilton Medical, the market leader in medical ventilators, increased its production by amazing 50% (Le Breton-Miller and Miller, 2021).

By the literature research, it was discovered that many businesses in the Visegrad Region (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary) have undertaken a variety of Corporate Social Responsibility activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For example, in Poland, the largest fuel retailer (PKN Orlen and the Orlen Foundation) provided hospitals, social welfare homes, police, sanitary services, etc., with financial and material support. In 2020, the total value of the transferred funds amounted to PLN 115 million (including PLN 10 million to help hospitals purchase necessary equipment and medical supplies).<sup>4</sup> The shoe company CCC S.A. has donated over PLN 1 million to hospitals, and has also produced and provided medical professionals with protective footwear. In turn, LPP (a Polish retail company) donated PLN 2 million to the Pomeranian Medical University in Szczecin to help funding the purchase of necessary medical equipment.<sup>5</sup>

In the Czech Republic, PPF Group (a Czech investment company) donated CZK 100 million to the Ministry of Health to support the fight against COVID-19.<sup>6</sup> Similarly Avast, a cybersecurity firm, donated \$25 million to research initiatives aimed at combating the pandemic.<sup>7</sup> Czech carmaker Škoda Auto has turned its prototype lab into a factory for respirators. The idea to use 3D printers to make respirator parts came from the firm's scientists and technicians. There was a critical shortage of high-quality respirators for medical and emergency staff in the front line during the coronavirus crisis. The Czech carmaker was turning out parts for 60 respirators a day for doctors (Škoda Auto used its 3D printers to make respirators instead of prototype parts, 2020).

In Slovakia, the oil refinery Slovnaft donated €1 million to the Slovak Academy of Sciences for research and development related to COVID-19.<sup>8</sup> ESET (an IT security company) donated €300,000 to support the purchase of a PCR testing device for National Health Center.<sup>9</sup>

In Hungary, similarly to the countries mentioned above, MOL Group (an oil and gas company) reconfigured one of its plants to produce hand sanitizer, which was then donated to hospitals and other institutions.<sup>10</sup> OTP Bank launched a HUF 1 billion relief fund to support health care institutions and social organizations.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.money.pl/gielda/pkn-orken-zwiekszy-pomoc-zw-z-koronawirusem-o-kolejne-4-mln-zl-6493073343403650a.html> and <https://fundacja.orken.pl/content/dam/internet/fundacja-orken/pl/pl/o-fundacji/nasz-standardy/dokumenty-i-certyfikaty/sprawozdania-z-dzia%C5%82alno%C5%9B-ci/2020/SPRAWOZDANIE%20Z%20DZIA%C5%81ALNO%C5%9ACI%20FUNDACJI%20ORKEN%202020.pdf.coredownload.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/miliony-dla-szpitali-strazakow-i-hospicjow-polscy-przedsiobiorcy-calkowicie-pro-bono-walcza-z-koronawirusem-6500902819579521a> or <https://ccc.eu/pl/ccc-pomaga>

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.ppf.eu/en/press-release/ppf-hands-over-promised-medical-aid-worth-czk-100-million-to-czech-government>

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://blog.avast.com/avast-supports-covid-19-response-initiatives>

<sup>8</sup> See: [https://slovnaft.sk/images/slovnaft/pdf/about\\_us/our\\_company/financial\\_reports/Slovnaft\\_AR\\_2021.pdf](https://slovnaft.sk/images/slovnaft/pdf/about_us/our_company/financial_reports/Slovnaft_AR_2021.pdf) and [https://slovnaft.sk/images/slovnaft/pdf/about\\_us/our\\_company/financial\\_reports/Slovnaft\\_AR\\_2020\\_v3.pdf](https://slovnaft.sk/images/slovnaft/pdf/about_us/our_company/financial_reports/Slovnaft_AR_2020_v3.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> See: <https://www.eset.com/fileadmin/ESET/SK/Docs/Vyrocne-spravy/vyrocna-sprava-2020-eng.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> See: <https://www.chemicalprocessing.com/environmental-health-safety/news/11301303/mol-converts-hungarian-facility-into-sanitizer-plant-to-fight-coronavirus>

<sup>11</sup> See: [https://www.otpgroup.info/static/sw/file/210416\\_Annual\\_report\\_032\\_e.pdf](https://www.otpgroup.info/static/sw/file/210416_Annual_report_032_e.pdf)



These CSR activities are just a few examples of how businesses in these countries have stepped up to support their communities during the pandemic. Many other companies have also contributed by allocating funds, providing resources, or adapting their operations to meet new needs. The above-mentioned philanthropic CSR activities further confirmed that business and society are interconnected (McLennan and Banks, 2019), and that companies are the best neighbours of the community and vice versa (Idemudia and Ite, 2006).

The pandemic has had a severe impact on supply chains and businesses across all industries, which has led several authors to evaluate the impact of CSR and ESG strategies on a company's ability to overcome difficulties. For example, Mattera et al. (2021) showed that the use of these models helped companies create sustainable business models that improved resilience, and an organization's ability to adapt to change, and minimise negative impact on its market performance.

#### **1.4.2 CSR activities of the business related to the conflict in Ukraine (Rafał Baum)**

Businesses also played a key role in a country's response to another crisis that had a huge impact on the economy and society – the crisis related to the war in Ukraine.

Because of the outbreak of war beyond the eastern border in 2022, most companies operating in the Polish market (84%) started to carry out also the activities for refugees from Ukraine. The most often they involved transfer of money and other material assets, although some companies offered refugees shelter in buildings they owned or rented. More than a half of the surveyed enterprises (57%) also helped their employees from Ukraine. Importantly, the CCIFP survey has shown that many of these activities (55%) are still being conducted, and the involvement related to the war in Ukraine did not prevent companies from implementing the planned CSR strategy. More than a half of them (51%) still carry out all the planned projects, and every third of them has even introduced additional activities (CCIFP, 2022; Jastrzębska, 2023).

As the above research shows, in times of crisis, CSR activities of enterprises are more valuable than usual. Paradoxically, they can also help the company survive difficult times, because social responsibility is related to the fact that employees and stakeholders build long-term relationships with the company. So, if a company has loyal employees in a crisis (also thanks to CSR), they will help the company survive it.

Research also shows that employees themselves expect employers to engage in the CSR activities. In the Dailyfruits survey (2022) entitled "Help for Ukraine from the perspective of employees", as much as 87% of respondents declared that they expected their employer to help Ukraine and refugees in connection with the crisis caused by the war; almost half of the respondents believed that such initiative showed where they worked; and 39% of them said that it was very important to them.

Businesses have used corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a strategy to support their communities and address the issues of the conflict. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities of businesses related to the conflict in Ukraine

can vary greatly, depending on the industry and specific company. However, some general examples might include (Nwaoboli et al., 2022; Pajuste and Toniolo, 2022; Smorzewska-Mickiewicz, 2022; Raconteur, 2022; ACCP, 2022; OECD, 2023; Mattera and Soto, 2023):

- **Withdrawal of Western companies from Russia:** companies that decided to stay in Russia started to face mounting pressure from many stakeholders.
- **Financial Support:** companies may donate money to humanitarian organizations working in Ukraine, such as the Red Cross. They might also establish funds to directly support employees or business partners affected by the conflict;<sup>12</sup>
- **Product or Service Donations:** companies may donate goods or services to support relief efforts. This could include food, clothing, medical supplies, or transportation services.
- **Employee Support:** companies may offer additional support to employees affected by the conflict. This could include flexible work arrangements, mental health support, or financial assistance.
- **Advocacy:** companies may use their influence to advocate for peace and resolution of the conflict. This could involve public statements, lobbying efforts, or partnerships with advocacy organizations.
- **Supply Chain Management:** companies may take steps to ensure that their supply chains do not contribute to the conflict or human rights abuses in Ukraine. This could involve auditing suppliers, implementing stricter procurement policies, or divesting of problematic suppliers.
- **Sustainability Initiatives:** companies may implement or expand sustainability initiatives in Ukraine to support long-term recovery and resilience. This could include investments in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, or community development projects.
- **Educational Initiatives:** companies may support educational initiatives for children and adults affected by the conflict, providing resources for displaced students, or funding educational programmes in refugee camps.
- **Infrastructure Development:** companies may contribute to rebuilding efforts, and helping to restore damaged infrastructure like roads, schools, and hospitals.
- It's important to note that these CSR activities should be conducted in a way that respects and upholds human rights, and companies should strive to avoid any actions that could exacerbate the conflict or contribute to human rights abuses (UNHR, 2011).

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<sup>12</sup> For more information about the companies working on CSR initiatives related to the war in Ukraine (e.g., companies donating to Ukraine) see: BCCCC (2022) and Foundations, corporations providing support for Ukraine (2022).

### 1.4.3 CSR activities of a business related to „energy crisis“ (Rafal Baum)

A scarcity of energy resources, such as oil, gas, or power, is known as an „energy crisis“ (Coyle and Simmons, 2014, Chakraborty et al., 2021). Energy markets began to tighten in 2021 because of a variety of factors, including an extraordinarily rapid economic rebound following the pandemic. But the situation escalated dramatically to a full-blown global „energy crisis“ following Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The price of natural gas reached record highs, and as a result so did electricity in some markets. Oil prices hit their highest level since 2008 (IEA, 2023).

The report of the international advisory group Ayming (2023) shows that in times of a sharp increase in energy prices, entrepreneurs in Poland face the challenge of how to protect their companies from losing financial liquidity. Up to 64% of them claim that the „energy crisis“ will negatively affect the profitability of their businesses. On the other hand, it becomes an opportunity to search for new solutions, and implement innovations. Already about 76% of respondents plan to introduce changes, including, e.g., the use of alternative energy sources (41%), and increasing energy efficiency (40%), etc. Considering the global context,<sup>13</sup> pharmaceutical and automotive industries are the readiest for radical changes in the face of the „energy crisis“ – so declared 35% of the surveyed companies. In the other extreme, there are construction, civil engineering, IT, and technology industries, within which only 15% of the respondents anticipate significant changes due to rising energy prices.

The conducted literature research confirmed that businesses are crucial in responding to difficulties and helping their communities during a crisis. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities are actions that businesses take to improve their impact on society and the environment. In the context of the current energy crisis, businesses can engage in a variety of CSR activities to promote sustainable energy use, and help mitigating the effects of the crisis. Here are some examples of these initiatives (Basil et al., 2011; Skrzypek, 2015; Mattera and Baena, 2015; Samhita Social Ventures, 2017; Odongo et al., 2019; El-Kassar and Singh, 2019; Hiswåls et al., 2020; Boubaker et al., 2020; Choudhury et al., 2021; Digital Marketing Institute, 2022; Stanislawska, 2022; Karagiannopoulou et al., 2023; Mattera and Soto, 2023):

- Investing in Renewable Energy: companies can invest in renewable energy sources like solar, wind, hydro, and geothermal power for their operations. This reduces reliance on non-renewable energy sources as well as carbon emissions.

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<sup>13</sup> This concerns a in-depth survey of 846 senior R&D professionals, CFOs, senior executives and business owners from 17 countries as Belgium, China, Czech Republic, France, Spain, Netherlands, Ireland, Canada, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Singapore, Slovakia, Hungary, Great Britain, Italy, and the United States. See also: European Commission (2023). European innovation scoreboard, online: [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/statistics/performance-indicators/european-innovation-scoreboard\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/statistics/performance-indicators/european-innovation-scoreboard_en)

- **Energy Efficiency:** businesses can improve their energy efficiency by using energy-saving appliances and equipment, improving insulation, and implementing energy management systems. This reduces energy consumption and helps conserving energy resources.
- **Education and Awareness:** companies can conduct education and awareness campaigns to inform employees, customers, and the public about the importance of energy conservation and the use of renewable energy.
- **Carbon Offsetting:** some companies choose to offset their carbon emissions by investing in projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as reforestation or clean energy projects.
- **Sustainable Supply Chain Management:** businesses can also work with their suppliers to implement sustainable practices, such as using renewable energy and reducing waste.
- **Supporting Research and Development:** companies can support research and development of new technologies and solutions to renewable energy and energy efficiency.
- **Community Initiatives:** businesses can undertake initiatives in local communities to promote energy conservation and the use of renewable energy. This could include installing solar panels on community buildings or sponsoring energy-saving competitions.
- **Advocacy:** companies can use their influence to advocate for policies that promote renewable energy and energy conservation.
- **Partnering with Non-Profits:** businesses can partner with non-profit organizations that are trying to address the energy crisis, by providing their work with funding and other resources.
- **Employee Engagement:** businesses can engage employees in energy conservation efforts, such as offering incentives for carpooling or using public transportation and encouraging energy-saving behaviours in the workplace.
- **Reporting and Informing Stakeholders:** such transparent and accurate communication proves to be a key element for communicating the firm's CSR engagement and specific sustainable strategies. Therefore, strategies that specifically address a company's CSR, together with proper and transparent communication of these initiatives and actions, become essential in helping organisations with achieving a sustainable business model (Brunton et al. 2015).

A Socially Responsible Business plays a crucial role in times of global crisis, such as pandemics, military conflicts, economic downturns, and environmental disasters. Bibliographic research has shown that these businesses not only focus on their profit margins, but also consider the impact of their operations on society, the environment, and the world at large.

In times of global crisis, the SRBs undertake several activities that focus on protecting employee well-being. SRBs prioritize health and safety of their employees, adapt their working conditions according to the crisis, such as enabling remote work during a pandemic or providing necessary safety equipment. SBRs actively support local communities: SRBs often contribute to local communities by providing

resources, financial support, or other forms of aid. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many businesses donated to food banks, provided healthcare workers with free services, or produced essential supplies. In times of environmental crisis, many companies promote sustainability, e.g., SRBs focus on sustainable practices to mitigate their impact on the environment. They implement strategies to reduce their carbon footprint, conserve resources, or promote recycling. Companies are also focusing more on making ethical decisions: SRBs ensure that their decisions during a crisis are ethical, and consider the impact on all stakeholders, not just shareholders.

Comparing the approaches globally and in Europe, it has been observed that Europe has a more structured approach towards corporate social responsibility. The European Union has a robust CSR policy that encourages companies to adhere to international guidelines and principles. European companies often lead the way in CSR reporting and sustainable business practices. Globally, the approach can vary significantly. In some regions, CSR is still in its nascent stages with businesses just beginning to understand its importance. However, in other, like North America, many companies have robust CSR programmes, too. This is evidenced by huge financial resources that companies allocated to the implementation of CSR programmes for the benefit of various stakeholder groups – by 2019, corporate giving in the USA had reached over \$21 billion (Charityvest, 2021).

Nevertheless, in both cases, the trend heads towards more transparency, accountability, and sustainability. The COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasised the importance of CSR, with companies worldwide stepping up their efforts to support employees, communities, and the environment.

In conclusion, SRBs play a vital role in times of global crisis. Their actions can help mitigating the impact of the crisis, support recovery efforts, and build resilience for the future. The approach may vary globally, but the underlying principles remain the same.

Study of the literature confirms that there is a connection between profits, people, and the planet, which is the basis of the well-known triple bottom line (TBL) theory (Elkington, 1994), as well as the stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1994). Both frameworks concern the relevance of considering a company's stakeholders in the strategic decision-making process, as they have a significant impact on the business' operations. In addition, as Mattera & Soto (2023; p. 123) has written: "considering the effect of a firm's operations in the socio-economic and environmental context where they operate can be crucial to the organisation's long-term sustainability. By considering these two elements, firms can create a holistic approach to ensuring not only a successful business in the present, but also a flourishing company in the future. This win-win context is created thanks to the combination of a focus on obtaining profits, while preserving the planet and ensuring there is a positive impact on people".

## 2 Methodology of Examining CSR activities of Businesses in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia (Jana Kozáková, Erik Janšto)

Examination and research of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) hold significant importance. Currently, it occurs particularly in cases of considering the Triple Bottom Line approach and researching selected CSR activities (Venkatraman and Nayak, 2015; Hussain et al., 2018), and CSR reporting (Moravcikova et al., 2015; Shabana et al., 2017; Hąbek, 2017) mainly in terms of upcoming mandatory reporting (Hoffmann et al., 2018; Bhattacharyya, 2022) and connection of CSR activities of businesses with the current crisis of COVID-19 (García-Sánchez and García-Sánchez, 2020; Carroll, 2021), conflict in Ukraine (Clancey-Shang and Fu, 2022; Ligorio et al., 2023), and „energy crisis“ (Bae et al., 2021). This significance is particularly heightened in the V4 region, specifically in Czechia (CZ), Slovakia (SK), and Poland (PL), who have gotten into the centre of these global challenges (Stanislawska, 2022; López, 2022). By advancing our understanding of CSR through research, we can foster positive societal change, improve organizational performance, and contribute to the overall well-being of communities and the planet.

The Triple Bottom Line approach, which encompasses social, environmental, and economic dimensions of CSR, provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating the impact of businesses on multiple stakeholders (Księżak and FischBach, 2017; Farooq et al., 2021). By examining CSR practices from this viewpoint, we can better understand how companies in the V4 region address social issues, promote environmental sustainability, and contribute to economic development (Metzker et al., 2021). This knowledge enables policymakers, businesses, and researchers to identify best practices, assess the effectiveness of CSR initiatives, and guide future decision-making. Selected CSR activities within the V4 region deserve examination because they reflect on unique social and cultural contexts of these countries. By studying these activities, we gain insights into the specific challenges, priorities, and opportunities that businesses face in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. This knowledge can inform about the development of the CSR strategies that align with local needs, foster social cohesion, and contribute to sustainable development. In connection with this, it must be mentioned that CSR reporting and mandatory reporting mechanisms play a crucial role in promoting transparency and accountability

among businesses (Aureli et al., 2021; Mahmood and Uddin, 2021). By studying these reporting frameworks within the V4 region, we can evaluate the extent to which companies disclose their CSR practices, impacts, and future commitments. This information empowers stakeholders, including investors, consumers, and civil society organizations to make informed decisions and hold businesses accountable for their social and environmental performance. Furthermore, the examination of CSR in connection with the current crises of COVID-19, conflict in Ukraine, and „energy crisis,, is essential (Stanislawska, 2022; López, 2022). These crises have had far-reaching social, economic, and environmental consequences, and it is crucial to understand how businesses in the V4 region have responded to these challenges. By analyzing CSR initiatives implemented during these crises, we can assess their effectiveness in mitigating negative impacts, supporting communities, and building resilience. This knowledge can be used for future crisis preparedness and response efforts, fostering adaptive and responsible business practices.

In the V4 region, CSR research is of particular importance due to its potential to drive positive social and economic transformation. By examining and promoting CSR practices, policymakers and businesses can enhance the region's reputation, attract investments, and foster sustainable growth. Moreover, given the interconnectedness of the V4 countries, collaboration and knowledge shared in the realm of CSR can lead to a collective advancement of responsible business practices, contributing to the overall development and well-being of the region and its inhabitants.

## **2.1 Data collection and sampling**

Within the methodology of this scientific monograph, the research is founded on an analysis of data, requiring its collection in the preliminary stages of the study. The process of gathering empirical data, often referred to as a „data collection technique,“ must comply with the requirements of reliability and validity specific to the empirical research, which is being conducted (Bártlová and Hnilicová, 2000). Various techniques can be employed for data collection (Morgan and Harmon, 2001; Chaleunvong, 2009), including observation, questioning (such as interviews, questionnaires, and surveys), document analysis, secondary data analysis, content analysis, and experimentation.

Questionnaire survey is a scientific data collection method commonly employed in research studies (Roopa and Rani, 2012). It involves systematic administration of a structured set of questions given to a targeted sample of participants (Martin, 2006). Questionnaires are designed to gather information and insights into specific variables, attitudes, opinions, behaviours, or experiences related to the research objectives (Rowley, 2014; Nardi, 2018). The questionnaire survey offers several advantages. It allows for the collection of large amounts of data from a relatively large sample, providing a broader representation of the population under investigation. It facilitates generalization of the findings and allows researchers to examine patterns and relationships between the variables (Wright, 2005; Malhotra, 2006; Rice et al.,

2017). Questionnaires can be administered through various channels, including on-line platforms, paper-based formats, or face-to-face interviews (Regmi et al., 2016; Mutepfa and Tapera, 2019). They offer flexibility in terms of data collection, enabling researchers to reach geographically dispersed participants or specific target groups.

Online questionnaire surveys are a convenient and accessible method of data collection in scientific research (Wood et al., 2004; Chang and Vowles, 2013). They offer advantages, such as increased reach, cost-effectiveness, and faster data collection and analysis compared to traditional paper-based surveys. Online surveys provide a higher level of participant anonymity, fostering honest and unbiased responses. They also allow for the implementation of skip-logic and branching, enhancing the survey relevance and data quality (Wright, 2005; Nayak and Narayan, 2019). The collected data can be easily exported for statistical analysis, enabling researchers to perform various quantitative and qualitative analyses.

To ensure the scientific rigor of a questionnaire survey, careful attention must be paid to its design (Brace, 2018). This includes formulating clear and concise questions, using appropriate response formats (such as Likert scales, multiple-choice questions, or open-ended questions), and considering the order and structure of the questions (Regmi et al., 2016; Vehovar and Manfreda, 2017). Researchers should also pay attention to sampling techniques, ensuring that the sample represents the target population to enhance validity and generalizability of the results (Fife-Schaw, 1995). Additionally, questionnaire surveys can be enhanced by pre-testing the questionnaire with a pilot group to identify any ambiguities or issues, and to refine the instrument for improved data collection (Ng et al., 2014). Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality should also be taken into account to protect rights and privacy of the participants (Smith et al., 2018).

Once the data is collected, researchers may employ various statistical analyses and techniques to interpret the responses and derive meaningful insights (Kaplan and Maxwell, 2005; Treiman, 2014). These analyses may include descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, or other advanced statistical methods, depending on the research objectives and the nature of the data collected (Myers et al., 2010; Mertler and Vannatta, 2016).

Overall, the questionnaire survey method serves as a valuable tool in scientific research, enabling researchers to gather quantitative and qualitative data to explore, describe, and understand various phenomena, attitudes, and behaviours within a specific population or a target group.

**Data collection:** This study was conducted within the project „Corporate Social Responsibility in Business Practice of the Visegrad Region“ (Visegrad grant no. 22220149). The study was conducted in a form of questionnaire survey (Roopa and Rani, 2012), using a structured set of questions (Martin, 2006) designed to gather information and insights into attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and experiences (Rowley, 2014; Nardi, 2018) of businesses from three Visegrad countries (Czechia, Poland, and Slovakia) with the application of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in their business practice. Questions were aimed at selected aspects of CSR including CSR reporting and activities related to recent crises. Questionnaire was created based on previous work and research of the project leader Jana Kozáková. Within this project,



new geographical areas were added, and previous research was enriched by new aspects and topics. The questionnaire method was chosen, considering the collection of large amounts of data from a relatively large sample, and because it allows examining patterns and relationships between variables (Wright, 2005; Malhotra, 2006; Rice et al., 2017). Out of possible channels (Regmi et al., 2016; Mutepefa and Tapera, 2019), the online questionnaire survey (Wood et al., 2004; Chang and Vowles, 2013) was considered to be the most suitable, since it provides a higher level of participant anonymity, and allows the implementation of skip-logic and branching (Wright, 2005; Nayak and Narayan, 2019), which were necessary considering that different types of monitored companies were included. The study was designed (Brace, 2018) using Likert scales, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended questions when necessary, considering also the order and structure of the questions (Regmi et al., 2016; Vehovar and Manfreda, 2017), with respect to the topics included in the study. Considerable attention was paid to the sampling technique, too, ensuring that the sample includes companies of various sizes from the monitored countries (Czechia, Poland, Slovakia), with respect to balancing other characteristics to enhance validity and generalizability of the results (Fife-Schaw, 1995).

**Time course:** Questionnaire survey was pre-tested in November 2022, using a pilot group of 10 companies in each country to identify ambiguities or issues, and to refine the instrument for improved data collection (Ng et al., 2014). After adjustments and further using of skip-logic and branching, the final version of questionnaire was distributed using various channels (partner organizations and universities, university vice-deans for cooperation with practice and other responsible persons, professional organizations, associations of entrepreneurs, student groups, and policymakers for the business sector), respecting ethical considerations protecting privacy of the participants (Smith et al., 2018). Since the goal was to address the largest possible number of potential respondents, it is very difficult to estimate the number of subjects addressed due to the used channels (direct and indirect addressing). Therefore, it is not even possible to calculate the return rate of the questionnaire (Ritter et al., 2004). Most of the respondents filled in the questionnaire independently, but some of the questionnaires were filled in with the help of team members who were trained researchers (Goddard and Villanova, 2006) familiar with the topic of CSR, and the implemented project and questionnaire itself. In total, data collection process was carried out from November 2022 to June 2023.

**Sample structure:** The subjects under investigation were chosen randomly included in the research. The condition for being included in the study was to be a business entity operating in one of the monitored Visegrad countries (Czechia, Poland, Slovakia). The objective was to obtain a balanced sample of 100 companies from each country with equal representation of microenterprises (0–9 employees); small enterprises (10–49 employees); medium size enterprises (50–249 employees); large enterprises (250+ employees) and extra-large enterprises (500 and more employees). Gradual implementation of the obligation to report socially responsible activities introduced by the European Commission based in the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) (EC, 2022) and Non-Financial Reporting Directive (NFRD) (EC, 2014) was the reason for choosing such size categories.

Random sampling (Acharya et al., 2013) used in the first phase of data collecting was later changed to stratified randomization (Suresh, 2011). As a result of the size structure of the business sector in the monitored countries where most of the companies are SMEs, the biggest number of respondents was represented by SMEs. To achieve the desired composition of the monitored subjects, in the later phase of data collection (from March 2023), we proceeded to directly address subjects from those size categories that were less represented in the data collected so far for the given country. These entities were selected on the basis of information from the Commercial Register of the given country.

The final sample used in this research consists of 100 business entities from each monitored Visegrad country (the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia) in the following composition according to size categories: 20 companies from category – 1. Microenterprise (0–9 employees), 20 companies from category – 2. Small enterprise (10–49 employees), 20 companies from category – 3. Medium size enterprise (50–249 employees), 20 companies from category – 4. Large enterprise (250+ employees) and 20 companies from category –5. (Extra) Large enterprise (500 and more employees). This sample size corresponds to the possibilities of the project within which the research was carried out, and to the possibilities of obtaining the data by the chosen method. Given that the project monitors several aspects of the implementation of social responsibility in the business practice of the monitored subjects, the used questionnaire was quite extensive, and we encountered low willingness of business subjects to participate in the research. Therefore, we consider the used sample to be representative, and believe that the results achieved by us will properly describe the situation in the monitored companies and provide sufficient information for generalizations. In addition, the carried-out research is unique in conditions of the monitored countries, and we have no information that any similar and similarly complex research has ever been carried out.

## 2.2 Research design

**Aim of the study:** The aim of this study is to describe selected aspects of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in business practice of business entities from the monitored Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia). Moreover, formulation of generalizations of the monitored countries, comparison of the achieved results between the monitored countries, and findings of the statistically significant differences in the selected categories are also part of the study.

**Research context:** As it was already mentioned, data used in this monograph are part of an extensive study focused on various aspects of corporate social responsibility in business practice of business entities in the monitored Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia). This monograph provides just an introduction to the obtained results concerning various aspects of CSR. Despite the complexity of the used questionnaire, only some questions were included in this study.

Detailed studies will be published separately. Full data used in this monograph is available online as the outcome of the Visegrad project.

**Variables:** Since the research includes various aspect of corporate social responsibility (SCR) in business practice of the monitored entities, several groups of variables were included. Sorting characteristics of the monitored companies were included as General Characteristics (GCH 1 – GCH5); CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) Characteristics (CSRCH 1 – CSRCH 3); Triple Bottom Line Characteristics – CSR Activities (TBL 1 – TBL 9); Characteristics of CSR Reporting (REPA 1 – REPA 4); and Characteristics of the CSR activities connected with global crises (CSR COV 1 – CSR COV 3; CSR UKR 1 – CSR UKR 3; CSR ENG 1 – CSR ENG 3). All these were selected considering commonly used sorting characteristics in similarly oriented research of business entities. Previous scientific experience of the main author of the research was also taken into account. The final set of the used characteristics is provided in Table 3.

**Table 3** – Operationalization of variables

| <b>Variable</b>  | <b>Answers from the questionnaire</b>   |
|--|---|
| <b>General Characteristics (GCH 1 – GCH7)</b>                                    |   |
| GCH 1 – Localness of Company   | 1. Part of MNC – Multinational company;<br>2. Local company with no connection with foreign MNC   |
| GCH 2 – Legal Form   | 1. Joint-stock company; 2. Limited Liability Company; 3. Limited Partnership; 4. Public company; 5. Sole Proprietorship   |
| GCH 3 – Regional Coverage in the Monitored Country                               | 1. Only the region where it is located;<br>2. More regions; 3. Whole country  |
| GCH 4 – Primary Area of Operation  | 1. Trade; 2. Services; 3. Production  |
| GCH 5 – Company Size Metric  | 1. Microenterprise (0–9 employees), 2. Small enterprise (10–49 employees), 3. Medium size enterprise (50–249 employees), 4. Large enterprise (250+ employees), 5. (Extra) Large enterprise (500 and more employees) |
| <b>CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) Characteristics (CSRCH 1 – CSRCH 3)</b> |   |
| CSRCH 1 – Incorporation of CSR in Organizational Governance Structure            | 1. Separate CSR department; 2. Under Compliance department; 3. Under Marketing department; 4. Under Human Resources (HR) department; 5. CSR is not organizationally integrated                                      |
| CSRCH 2 – CSR Strategic Planning   | 1. Lack of time; 2. Misunderstanding of CSR concept; 3. Lack of human capital; 4. High implementation costs; 5. No obligation (we do not have to do it); 6. CSR is planned  |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| CSRCH 3 – Motivation for CSR Engagement   | 1. Effort to follow current trends; 2. Effort to compete with the competitor's effort out these activities; 3. Effort to contribute to the "public good"; 4. Effort to strengthen marketing activities; 5. Pressure from the parent company; 6. CSR is not purposeful, there is no effort |
| <b>Triple Bottom Line – CSR Activities (TBL 1 – TBL 9)</b>  |   |
| TBL 1 – Social CSR activities – Employee-Driven Volunteerism and Social Impact Initiatives  | 1. Very strongly; 2. Strongly; 3. Averagely; 4. Negligibly; 5. Not at all   |
| TBL 2 – Social CSR activities – Philanthropy and Sponsorship for Social Causes  |   |
| TBL 3 – Social CSR activities – Community Engagement and Collaboration (Partnerships with Schools, Non-profit Organizations, Local Authorities) |   |
| TBL 4 – Environmental CSR activities – Waste Minimization Strategies and Sustainable Waste Management   |   |
| TBL 5 – Environmental CSR activities – Circular Resource Utilization and Material Efficiency  |   |
| TBL6 – Environmental CSR activities – Green Technology Investments for Environmental Progress   |   |
| TBL 7 – Economic CSR activities – Ethical Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures   |   |
| TBL 8 – Economic CSR activities – Stakeholder Engagement and Transparent Business Performance Reporting   |   |
| TBL 9 – Economic CSR activities – Inclusive Employment Practices and Diversity Integration  |   |
| <b>CSR Reporting (REPA 1 – REPA 4)</b>  |   |
| REP 1 – Formalization of the CSR Reporting Mechanisms   | Regular reporting; 2. Occasional reporting (once per 3 years); 3. Limited reporting (over three-year periods); 4. No formal CSR reporting   |
| REP 2 – CSR Disclosure in Reports   | 1. Fully; 2. Largely; 3. Partially; 4. Briefly; 5. Not at all   |
| REP 3 – CSR Reporting Preparedness  | 1. Very well prepared; 2 Well prepared; 3. Averagely prepared; 4. Poorly prepared; 5. Completely unprepared   |
| REP 4 – CSR Reporting Processing Organizational Unit  | 1. CSR department; 2. Compliance / Law department; 3. Other department; 4. External specialist (Outsourcing), 5. No one (No reports)  |

| <b>CSR activities connected with global crises (CSR COV 1 – CSR COV 3; CSR UKR 1 – CSR UKR 3; CSR ENG 1 – CSR ENG 3)</b>                                |  |
|---|--|
| CSR COV 1 – COVID-19 and CSR: Provision of Personal Protective Equipment for Employee Safety  | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework;<br>2. Minimum above the normal framework;<br>3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework; 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework; 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework |
| CSR COV 2 – COVID-19 and CSR: Contribution to the Public and Local Community Support (Sponsorship, Participation in Testing and Vaccine Research, etc.) |  |
| CSR COV 3 – COVID-19 and CSR: Extra Employee Benefits during the Pandemic (On-site Testing, Voluntary Quarantine with Income Compensation, etc.)        |  |
| CSR UKR 1 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Financial Mobilization for Humanitarian Support  |  |
| CSR UKR 2 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Refugee Assistance and Integration Efforts   |  |
| CSR UKR 3 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Employment Opportunities for Displaced Individuals   |  |
| CSR ENG 1 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Investments in Energy-Efficient Technologies for Sustainable Operations  |  |
| CSR ENG 2 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Optimizing Building Temperature for Energy Conservation  |  |
| CSR ENG 3 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Restricting Electrical Appliance Use to Conserve Energy  |  |

Source: own processing

“General Characteristics (GCH 1 – GCH5)” were selected considering usual sorting characteristics used in this type of research focused on business entities. Specifically, following general characteristics were included: GCH 1 – Localness of Company; GCH 2 – Legal Form; GCH 3 – Regional Coverage in the Monitored Country; GCH 4 – Primary Area of Operation; and GCH 5 – Company Size Metric.

The second group of variables included characteristics of CSR implementation in the monitored companies, i.e., “CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) Characteristics (CSRCH 1 – CSRCH 3)”. These were aimed at general managerial characteristics of the CSR practical incorporation in business process and included specifically: CSRCH 1 – Incorporation of CSR in Organizational Governance Structure; CSRCH 2 – CSR Strategic Planning; CSRCH 3 – Motivation for CSR Engagement.

The third group was aimed at the realization of specific CSR activities divided according to the Triple Bottom Line theory (Norman and MacDonald, 2004; Alhaddi, 2015; Książka and FischBach, 2017; Farooq et al., 2021) as one of the key CSR

theories. “Triple Bottom Line – CSR Activities (TBL 1 – TBL 9)” included in the study encompassed three from each of these groups (Social, Environmental, Economic): TBL 1 – Social CSR activities – Employee-Driven Volunteerism and Social Impact Initiatives; TBL 2 – Social CSR activities – Philanthropy and Sponsorship for Social Causes; TBL 3 – Social CSR activities – Community Engagement and Collaboration (Partnerships with Schools, Non-profit Organizations, Local Authorities); TBL 4 – Environmental CSR activities – Waste Minimization Strategies and Sustainable Waste Management; TBL 5 – Environmental CSR activities – Circular Resource Utilization and Material Efficiency; TBL6 – Environmental CSR activities – Green Technology Investments for Environmental Progress; TBL 7 – Economic CSR activities – Ethical Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures; TBL 8 – Economic CSR activities – Stakeholder Engagement and Transparent Business Performance Reporting; TBL 9 – Economic CSR activities – Inclusive Employment Practices and Diversity Integration.

The fourth group of variables was aimed at the problem of CSR reporting being highly influenced by the gradual implementation of the obligation to report socially responsible activities, introduced by the European Commission based on the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) (EC, 2022) and Non-Financial Reporting Directive (NFRD) (EC, 2014). Under the category of “CSR Reporting (REPA 1 – REPA 4)”, these variables were included: REP 1 – Formalization of CSR Reporting Mechanisms; REP 2 – CSR Disclosure in Reports; REP 3 – CSR Reporting Preparedness; REP 4 – CSR Reporting Processing Organizational Unit.

The last used group of variables was called “CSR activities connected with global crises (CSR COV 1 – CSR COV 3; CSR UKR 1 – CSR UKR 3; CSR ENG 1 – CSR ENG 3)”. It includes three specific variables from three groups of actual global crises affecting the business sector (not just) in the monitored countries: COVID-19 connected with the CSR activities, conflict in Ukraine connected with the CSR activities, and „energy crisis“ connected with the CSR activities. Specifically, the following activities were included in this study: CSR COV 1 – COVID-19 and CSR: Provision of Personal Protective Equipment for Employee Safety; CSR COV 2 – COVID-19 and CSR: Contribution to Public and Local Community Support (Sponsorship, Participation in Testing and Vaccine Research, etc.); CSR COV 3 – COVID-19 and CSR: Extra Employee Benefits during the Pandemic (On-site Testing, Voluntary Quarantine with Income Compensation, etc.); CSR UKR 1 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Financial Mobilization for Humanitarian Support; CSR UKR 2 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Refugee Assistance and Integration Efforts; CSR UKR 3 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Employment Opportunities for Displaced Individuals; CSR ENG 1 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Investments in Energy-Efficient Technologies for Sustainable Operations; CSR ENG 2 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Optimizing Building Temperature for Energy Conservation; CSR ENG 3 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Restricting Electrical Appliance Use to Conserve Energy.

**Scientific Hypothesis:** In respect of the main aim of this study which includes description of the selected aspects of CSR in business practices of entities from the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, and comparison between the monitored countries, hypothesis and further methodological procedure must be set. Therefore, the analysis of differences in the implementation of the selected aspects of

corporate social responsibility (CSR) between the examined countries was considered as the main problem. With regard of this, the general hypothesis H0, as well as the set of alternative hypotheses Ha derived from it were established:

- H0: There is no statistically significant difference in the CSR implementation between the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia.
- Ha: There is a statistically significant difference in the CSR implementation between the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia.

For the purposes of our research, the alternative hypothesis Ha was extended to a series of derived hypotheses respecting differences in specific variables. Considering the limits of this study, only “CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) Characteristics (CSRCH 1 – CSRCH 6)” will be examined in further statistical analysis (Table 4). The rest of the variables displayed in this study will be used for description of the situation in the monitored countries. Statistically significant differences in the implementation will be examined in separate studies.

**Table 4** – Research design – construction of alternative hypotheses

| <b>Ha</b> |  | <b>Factors – CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) Characteristics (CSRCH 1 – CSRCH 6)</b> |   | <b>Country</b>    |             |
|-----------|--|--|---|-------------------|-------------|
| Ha1       | There is a statistically significant difference in the CSR implementation .. | CSRCH 1 – Incorporation of CSR in Organizational Governance Structure                      | ..between the monitored Visegrad countries. | 1. Czech Republic |             |
| Ha2       |  | CSRCH 2 – CSR Strategic Planning   |   |                   |             |
| Ha3       |  | CSRCH 3 – Motivation for CSR Engagement  |   |                   | 2. Poland   |
| Ha4       |  |  |   |                   |             |
| Ha5       |  |  |   |                   |             |
| Ha6       |  |  |   |                   | 3. Slovakia |

Source: own processing

In the assessment of the formulated hypotheses, when the computed p-value falls below the predetermined significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ , it signifies the rejection of the null hypothesis H0 and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis Ha, and conversely.

## 2.3 Methodological procedure

The primary stage of the mathematical-statistical analysis is based on computing of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the examined model, which serving as an indicator of test reliability. The findings revealed the Cronbach's alpha value of 0.710. Consequently, these results suggest that the test is well-suited for subsequent statistical inquiries.

The subsequent procedure involved conducting the Shapiro-Wilk normality test (Shapiro and Francia, 1972) on all characteristics (i.e., the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) Characteristics (CSRCH 1 – CSRCH 6). The obtained results indicated a significance value (Sig.) of 0.000 for each level of independent variables, confirming non-normal distribution of the data. Consequently, it can be inferred that the utilized data significantly deviate from the assumptions of normality, necessitating the adoption of specific statistical methods for further analysis.

Furthermore, the Durbin-Watson autocorrelation test (Watson and Durbin, 1951) was performed on the research model (i.e., the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) Characteristics (CSRCH 1 – CSRCH 6). The results revealed values ranging from 1.5 to 2.5 for each variable, thereby failing to confirm the presence of autocorrelation among them.

Due to the non-normal distribution of the data, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test (Kruskal and Wallis, 1952) was applied, assuming no statistically significant differences in the CSR implementation display thorough variables: CSRCH 1 – CSR Strategic Planning; CSRCH 2 – CSR in Organizational Structure; CSRCH 3 – CSR Planning in the Company; CSRCH 4 – Motive for CSR; CSRCH 5 – CSR Award; CSRCH 6 – CSR Certification between the monitored Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia).

Subsequently, the identified statistically significant differences underwent a post hoc analysis using the Bonferroni post hoc test (Lee and Lee, 2018), assuming that the data represents a random sample from a normally distributed population. The post hoc analysis employed estimated cut-off averages, considering a mean difference that is significant at the 0.05 level, and utilizing Bonferroni-corrected p-values.

In some instances, the post hoc test did not detect significant differences, as indicated by the Kruskal-Wallis test. This could be attributed to the limitations of the obtained data, suggesting a weaker robustness in certain parameters compared to others. The lack of significance in the Kruskal-Wallis test, which was not corroborated by the post hoc testing, could also contribute to this outcome.

Hence, the displayed tables present the results of the post hoc Bonferroni test, based on the estimated marginal means with a significant mean difference at the 0.05 level, or based on the observed means with the calculated Mean Square Error. The application of Bonferroni testing is contingent on the presence of significant differences. Furthermore, the differences identified were further elucidated by examining their frequency through cross tabulations. The post hoc test was solely applied to the variables that were identified as statistically significant by the preceding Kruskal-Wallis test. Application of the post hoc testing helped refining the set of statistically significant results, yielding a more accurate analysis.



Multiple regressions were employed to predict a continuous dependent variable based on multiple independent variables (Kelly-Coto et al., 2022). It also allowed for determining the overall fit (explained variance) of the regression model and the relative contribution of each predictor to the explained variance. Multiple regressions necessitated the satisfaction of six assumptions, concerning how the data fit into the multiple regression model:

- A linear relationship exists between variables and the dependent variable.
- Residuals exhibit homoscedasticity.
- No multicollinearity is present among the independent variables.
- No significant outliers, leverage points, or influential points are present.
- Errors (residuals) approximately follow normal distribution (Kutner et al., 1983)

In correlation analysis, it is crucial to interpret:

- The correlation coefficient, which quantifies the strength of the relationship. It is based on the sum of deviations of individual values of both correlated variables from their means.
- The coefficient of determination represents the value multiplied by 100 and informs of how much percent the regression line explains the variability of the model; the remaining part represents unexplained variability due to random factors or other unspecified influences.
- ANOVA tests the adequacy of the chosen model, specifically testing the null hypothesis concerning the intercept and regression coefficient. The null hypothesis suggests that the selected model is not appropriate. The alternative hypothesis suggests otherwise. To evaluate this assertion, the p-value is used and compared to the significance level alpha.
- Regression analysis accurately captures the nature of the dependence between the dependent and independent variables. The form of simple linear regression is expressed as  $y = a_0 + a_1x$ , where  $y$  represents the dependent variable,  $x$  is the independent variable,  $a_0$  is the y-intercept, and  $a_1$  is the slope of the regression line.

**Software:** IBM SPSS Statistics Subscription 1.0.0.1447 software was used for statistical analysis and frequency calculation.

## 2.4 Methodological Considerations and Study Limitations

In this part of the methodology, methodological considerations such as study bias and generalizability are described, and limitations of the study are presented.

**Limitations of the study:** The final sample consists of only 100 business entities from each monitored Visegrad country. This sample size may not be sufficient to capture diversity and complexity of corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices across all types of businesses within these countries. Therefore, the limited sample size could affect generalizability of the findings extend the entire number of businesses in the Visegrad countries. Also, the study focuses on specific aspects of the CSR implementation, primarily examining CSR characteristics and activities. Other important factors that could influence the CSR practices, such as industry-specific considerations, cultural factors, or regional differences, are not explicitly mentioned. This limited scope may overlook important variables that could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the CSR practices in the monitored countries.

The study acknowledges that only a subset of questions from the larger questionnaire was included in this monograph. Exclusion of certain variables and questions may limit the comprehensive understanding of the CSR practices in the monitored countries.

**Bias of the study:** The research team faced a low willingness of business subjects to participate in the research. This could introduce the sampling bias, as those who chose to participate may have had different CSR practices or attitudes compared to those who declined to participate. The sample may not accurately represent the broader population of businesses in the monitored countries, leading to potential limitations in generalizing the findings. Also, the data collection relied on a questionnaire, which is a self-reporting method. Participants' responses may be subject to biases, such as social desirability bias, where participants may provide responses they perceive as socially desirable rather than reflecting their actual CSR practices. This bias could affect accuracy and reliability of the collected data.

**Generalizability of the findings:** The study focuses on the selected aspects of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the business practices of entities from the monitored Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia). The findings may not be applicable or representative of other regions or countries, limiting the generalizability of the results.

While the findings of this study provide valuable insights into the selected aspects of CSR in the business practices of entities from the monitored Visegrad countries, the generalizability of these findings is limited to the specific sample and variables included in the study. Caution should be exercised when applying these findings to the broader population of business entities or to different geographical contexts.

**Utilization of the findings:** The findings of this study can be useful to various stakeholders who are interested in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and its implementation in the business practices of entities in the Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia). The findings of this study have the potential to inform and guide businesses, policymakers, NGOs, researchers, investors, consumers, and international organizations. Companies operating in the Visegrad countries

can gain insights into the current state of the CSR practices and compare their own practices with the findings of the study. The study may help them identify areas for improvement and provide benchmarks for the CSR implementation. Investors and financial institutions increasingly consider CSR practices when making investment decisions. The findings of the study can help investors with assessing the CSR performance of companies in the Visegrad countries, and incorporating CSR factors into their investment strategies. The findings can also provide policymakers and government entities responsible for developing regulations and guidelines related to CSR with useful information. The results can assist in shaping policies that promote and enhance CSR practices within the Visegrad countries. International organizations and networks focused on CSR, sustainability, and responsible business conduct can benefit from the findings and gain insights into the regional context of the CSR implementation. The findings can support collaborative efforts and knowledge sharing among different countries and regions. NGOs and advocacy groups focused on CSR and sustainable business practices can utilize the findings of the study to support their initiatives. The results can provide evidence and data to advocate for the adoption of responsible business practices, and encourage companies to prioritize CSR efforts. Consumers are becoming more conscious of corporate social responsibility, and their purchasing decisions are often influenced by a company's ethical and sustainable practices. The findings of the study can empower consumers to make informed choices, and support companies that prioritize CSR. The findings also contribute to the existing body of knowledge of CSR, and they can be used as reference for further research in the field, too. Researchers and academics can build on the findings to conduct more in-depth analyses, explore additional variables, or expand the geographical scope of the research.

## 2.5 Structure of the study and Authorship

Scientific monograph is structured and prepared as follows:

**Chapter 1 Corporate Social Responsibility in the Visegrad Region** – The literature review on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the Visegrad region provides an overview of existing research and studies related to the CSR practices in the Visegrad region, including the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia.

1.1 Corporate Social Responsibility in Business Practice of V3 Region – Jana Kozáková explores the corporate social responsibility practices in the business sector of the V3 region, which includes the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. This section focuses on understanding the general CSR trends and approaches adopted by businesses in this region.

1.1.1 Corporate Social Responsibility in Czechia – Renata Skýpalová prepared this section, which examines corporate social responsibility practices specifically in Czechia. It delves into the CSR initiatives undertaken by Czech businesses, including their commitment to social

- and environmental responsibility, stakeholder engagement, and community development.
- 1.1.2 Corporate Social Responsibility in Poland – Exploration of corporate social responsibility practices in Poland was conducted by Alina Nowotarska. This section examines how Polish businesses integrate CSR into their operations, and highlights specific examples of CSR activities, such as environmental sustainability efforts, community involvement, and responsible business practices.
  - 1.1.3 Corporate Social Responsibility in Slovakia – Jana Kozáková investigates also corporate social responsibility practices in Slovakia. This section discusses the CSR approaches adopted by Slovak businesses, including their focus on social impact, ethical business conduct, and contributions to local communities.
- 1.2 Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Framework in CSR Implementation – Dariusz Pienkowsky prepared this section, which explores the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework in the implementation of CSR. It examines how businesses consider social, environmental, and economic pillars of CSR, and strive for a balanced approach to sustainability and responsible business practices.
    - 1.2.1 Social Pillar of CSR using the TBL Approach – Dariusz Pienkowsky further examines the social pillar of CSR within the TBL approach. This section focuses on how businesses address social issues, including employee welfare, diversity and inclusion, and community engagement as part of their CSR strategies.
    - 1.2.2 Environmental Pillar of CSR using the TBL Approach – Within the TBL framework, Dariusz Pienkowsky also analyses the environmental pillar of CSR. This section explores the environmental initiatives and practices adopted by businesses to minimise their ecological footprint, conserve resources, and promote sustainability.
    - 1.2.3 Economic Pillar of CSR using the TBL Approach – Dariusz Pienkowsky further investigates also the economic pillar of CSR within the TBL framework. This section examines how businesses strive for financial sustainability, ethical business conduct, and economic contributions to society as part of their CSR efforts.
  - 1.3 Reporting on CSR Activities – Alina Nowotarska's contribution to this monograph is also seen in the section focused on reporting practices of the CSR activities. It explores various methods, standards, and frameworks employed by businesses to report and communicate their CSR initiatives and impacts to stakeholders.
  - 1.4 The Role of Socially Responsible Business in Times of Global Crisis – Rafał Baum investigates also the role of socially responsible business during global crises. This section examines how businesses respond to challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, and energy crises, emphasising their CSR activities and contributions in these critical situations.
    - 1.4.1 CSR Activities of the Business Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic – Rafał Baum's section focuses specifically on the CSR activities of

businesses, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlights initiatives undertaken by companies to support their employees, communities, and healthcare systems during this global health crisis.

1.4.2 CSR Activities of the Business Related to the Conflict in Ukraine – Rafał Baum explores the CSR activities of businesses related to the conflict in Ukraine. This section examines how companies engage in peacebuilding efforts, provide humanitarian aid, and support affected communities as part of their social responsibility commitments.

1.4.3 CSR Activities of the Business Related to „energy crisis“ – Within the context of an energy crisis, Rafał Baum discusses the CSR activities of businesses. This section explores how companies contribute to energy conservation, explore renewable energy sources, and support initiatives aimed at mitigating the impacts of the „energy crisis“ on communities and the environment.

**Chapter 2 Methodology of Examining CSR Activities of Businesses in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia** – Jana Kozáková provides an overview of the methodology employed to examine CSR activities of businesses in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. This section discusses the data collection and sampling methods, research design, and methodological procedures used to gather insights into the CSR practices in the region.

2.1 Data Collection and Sampling – In this subsection, the process of data collection and sampling is discussed. It outlines sources of data used for the study, such as surveys, interviews, and corporate reports, as well as the criteria for selecting representative samples of businesses in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia.

2.2 Research Design – The research design section elaborates the overall structure and approach of the study. It highlights objectives, research questions, and analytical frameworks employed to investigate CSR activities in the business sectors of the three countries.

2.3 Methodological Procedure – Jana Kozáková in cooperation with Erik Janšto further describes the specific steps and procedures employed during the research process. This section outlines how the data was collected, organised, and analysed to generate meaningful insights into the CSR practices.

2.4 Methodological Considerations and Study Limitations – Acknowledging the importance of methodological considerations, this section describes potential limitations and challenges faced during the study. It discusses factors that may have influenced the results, and offers insights into the scope and generalizability of the findings.

2.5 Structure of the Study – The structure of the study is presented, providing an outline of the subsequent sections and their respective focuses. It offers readers a road map and authorship of the monograph, as well as the logical progression of topics related to the CSR practices in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia.

### **Chapter 3 Corporate Social Responsibility in Business Practice in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia**

– This section delves into the results and discussion of the CSR practices in the business sectors of the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. It presents an in-depth analysis of the selected aspects of CSR in each country, and offers comparisons and summaries of key findings. Tables and calculations displayed in the subchapters 3.1 Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice of the Czech Republic, 3.2 Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice of Poland, and 3.3 Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice of Slovakia were prepared by Jana Kozáková, and text parts were prepared by the co-authors.

3.1 Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice in the Czech Republic – Renata Skýpalová prepared this section, which focuses on the selected aspects of CSR in the business practice of the Czech Republic. It examines the corporate social responsibility initiatives undertaken by Czech businesses, including their strategies, activities, reporting practices, and responses to global crises.

3.1.1 Corporate Social Responsibility of Czech Businesses – This subsection highlights the overall corporate social responsibility approach adopted by businesses in the Czech Republic. It explores values, motivations, and frameworks that guide Czech companies in their CSR endeavours, emphasising their commitment to social and environmental responsibility.

3.1.2 CSR Activities of Czech Businesses – Renata Skýpalová discusses the specific CSR activities carried out by Czech businesses. This section provides examples of initiatives related to employee well-being, community engagement, philanthropy, environmental sustainability, and ethical business practices.

3.1.3 CSR Reporting in the Czech Republic – This subsection focused on CSR reporting in the Czech Republic examines practices and frameworks employed by businesses to communicate their CSR efforts. It explores the use of sustainability reports, disclosure standards, and stakeholder engagement in enhancing transparency and accountability.

3.1.4 CSR Activities of Czech Businesses in Times of Global Crises – Renata Skýpalová analyses how Czech businesses responded to global crises and examines their CSR contributions during these challenging periods. This section discusses their efforts in supporting local communities, healthcare systems, and vulnerable populations, and in addressing social and economic impacts.

3.1.5 Summary of the Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice in the Czech Republic – This section summarises the key aspects of CSR in business practice of the Czech Republic, highlighting the main findings, trends, and challenges identified by the study.

3.2 Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice in Poland – Alina Nowotarska and Rafal Baum explore the selected aspects of CSR in business practice in Poland. This section examines the CSR strategies, activities, and reporting practices of Polish companies, as well as their responses to global crises.

- 3.2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility of Polish Businesses – This subsection focuses on the corporate social responsibility approaches adopted by Polish businesses. It discusses values, frameworks, and guiding principles that shape their CSR practices, highlighting their commitment to sustainable development.
  - 3.2.2 CSR Activities of Polish Businesses – Authors delve into the CSR activities carried out by Polish businesses. They present examples of initiatives related to environmental conservation, social welfare, employee engagement, supply chain responsibility, and community development.
  - 3.2.3 CSR Reporting in Poland – This subsection explores practices and methodologies employed by Polish companies in reporting their CSR activities. It examines the use of CSR reports and certifications as means of ensuring transparency and accountability.
  - 3.2.4 CSR Activities of Polish Businesses in Times of Global Crises – This section highlights the CSR contributions of Polish businesses during global crises. It explores their support to healthcare systems, humanitarian aid, socio-economic recovery, and efforts to mitigate the adverse effects of crises on communities.
  - 3.2.5 Summary of the Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice in Poland – Alina Nowotarska and Rafał Baum provide a summary of the key aspects of CSR in business practice of Poland, consolidating the main findings and insights from their analysis.
- 3.3 Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice in Slovakia – Mária Urbánová focuses on the selected aspects of CSR in business practice in Slovakia. This section examines the CSR strategies, activities, reporting practices, and responses of Slovak businesses to crises.
- 3.3.1 Corporate Social Responsibility of Slovak Businesses – This subsection highlights the corporate social responsibility approaches adopted by businesses in Slovakia. It explores their commitment to ethical business practices, environmental sustainability, social well-being, and community engagement.
  - 3.3.2 CSR Activities of Slovak Businesses – Mária Urbánová discusses the specific CSR activities employed by Slovak businesses. The section presents examples of initiatives related to education, cultural preservation, environmental stewardship, responsible supply chains, and support to local communities.
  - 3.3.3 CSR Reporting in Slovakia – This subsection explores the CSR reporting practices in Slovakia, and analyses how Slovak businesses communicate their CSR efforts. It examines the use of reporting frameworks, disclosure standards, and stakeholder engagement to enhance transparency and accountability.
  - 3.3.4 CSR Activities of Slovak Businesses in Times of Global Crises – Mária Urbánová investigates the CSR activities of Slovak businesses during global crises, focusing on their responses and contributions. The section explores their efforts in supporting healthcare systems, addressing

socio-economic challenges, promoting social cohesion, and providing aid to the affected communities.

- 3.3.5 Summary of the Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice in Slovakia – This section summarises the key aspects of CSR in business practice in Slovakia, highlighting the main findings, trends, and challenges identified by the research conducted by Mária Urbánová.
- 3.4 Comparative Analysis of the Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia – Erik Janšto conducts a comparative analysis of the CSR practices in the business environments in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. This section examines similarities, differences, and trends observed in the corporate social responsibility approaches, activities, reporting, and responses to crises among these three Visegrad countries.
  - 3.4.1 Corporate Social Responsibility of Czech, Polish, and Slovak Businesses – This subsection explores commonalities and distinctions in the corporate social responsibility practices of businesses in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. It highlights the shared values and goals, as well as the unique approaches and contextual factors that shape the CSR implementation in each country.
  - 3.4.2 CSR Activities of Czech, Polish, and Slovak Businesses – Erik Janšto analyses the CSR activities employed by businesses in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, drawing upon the previous sections prepared by Renata Skýpalová, Rafał Baum, Alina Nowotarska, and Mária Urbánová. It provides a comprehensive overview of diverse initiatives across various CSR dimensions, such as environmental sustainability, social impact, employee well-being, and community engagement.
  - 3.4.3 CSR Reporting in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia – This subsection examines the CSR reporting practices in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, comparing the frameworks, standards, and levels of transparency adopted by businesses in these countries. It explores challenges and opportunities associated with the CSR reporting and identifies areas for improvement.
  - 3.4.4 CSR Activities of Czech, Polish, and Slovak Businesses in Times of Global Crises – Erik Janšto assesses responses of businesses in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia during global crises, and examines their CSR activities in the face of such challenges. The section highlights the collective efforts, innovative approaches, and impact of the CSR initiatives on mitigating the adverse effects of crises and supporting the affected stakeholders.
  - 3.4.5 Summary of the Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice of Czech, Polish, and Slovak Businesses – This section summarises the comparative analysis of the CSR practices in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, providing a comprehensive overview of the main findings, trends, and recommendations identified by Erik Janšto.



**Chapter 4 Summary of Results** – This chapter includes summary of the research results of all co-authors presented throughout the monograph. This section summarized by Jana Kozáková highlights the key insights, conclusions, and contributions of the study to understanding and promoting corporate social responsibility in the Visegrad region.

**Chapter 5 Suggestions and Recommendations** – Jana Kozáková provides suggestions and recommendations based on the findings of the research. This section offers practical insights for businesses, policymakers, and stakeholders to enhance the CSR practices, reporting, and responses to crises in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia.

**Conclusion** – Chapter provides a comprehensive synthesis of the monograph's content and research findings. Jana Kozáková reflects on the significance of the study and its implications for corporate social responsibility in the Visegrad region. Conclusion highlights the key takeaways, identifies gaps in knowledge, and suggests avenues for future research and action.

**Literary Sources** – The monograph concludes with a list of literary sources used by all co-authors. It includes academic papers, books, reports, and other relevant publications that have informed and supported the study's analysis and arguments.

This monograph offers a comprehensive examination of corporate social responsibility practices in the Visegrad region, specifically focusing on the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. It explores diverse aspects of the CSR implementation, reporting, and response to crises within the business sectors of these countries. By combining the expertise of multiple authors, the monograph provides valuable insights, comparative analysis, and recommendations for businesses, policymakers, and stakeholders, seeking to promote sustainable and socially responsible practices in the region.

# 3 Corporate social responsibility in Business Practice in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a critical aspect of contemporary business practices, with companies increasingly recognizing their responsibility towards society and the environment. This holds true for the Visegrad countries as the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, where the CSR implementation has gained prominence. Understanding the current state of CSR in these countries is essential for assessing commitment to sustainable and responsible business conduct. This part of the study aims to provide insights into the CSR practices of companies in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, shedding light on their approaches, challenges, and achievements. By exploring various aspects of CSR, including general implementation of CSR, selected activities based on the Triple Bottom Line theory, CSR reporting and CSR activities of businesses connected with the actual crises of COVID-19, conflict in Ukraine, and energy crisis, this study offers a comprehensive analysis of the CSR practices in these countries. Findings will contribute to the existing knowledge of CSR, and serve as a valuable resource for businesses, policymakers, researchers, investors, consumers, and international organizations interested in fostering responsible and sustainable business practices in the Visegrad region.

## 3.1 Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice in the Czech Republic (Renata Skýpalová; Jana Kozáková)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been gaining traction in recent decades, both in the scientific community and corporate practice. According to the findings of Slaba (2020), CSR in SMEs is still lacking. The study was conducted on a sample of 312 SMEs based in the Czech Republic. CSR is a valuable tool for better management of businesses, and the benefit of society. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been facing this challenge for a shorter period of time than large enterprises. A survey was conducted using a questionnaire survey on a sample of 1,585 SMEs. The results show that knowledge of the concept of CSR and its application in business is the most important factor to have a positive impact on the sustainability of SMEs (Belas, 2021).

Multinational companies in the Czech Republic provide more than one million people with employment (total population in 2022 was 10.533 million people, CSU, 2023), and contribute 43% of the total value added. Zeman (2020) reports that in terms of labour productivity, multinationals performed better than domestic companies, because the value added per employee was twice as high for multinationals than for purely Czech companies. Multinationals are also among those companies that will have to report their activities on a mandatory basis soon; many of them already do so voluntarily. Communicating information about the CSR activities to stakeholders is an important aspect of CSR in corporate practice in the Czech Republic. Important stakeholders include customers. According to the results of a survey conducted on a sample of 227 respondents (Hinčica, Režánková & Břečková, 2022), consumers in the Czech Republic distinguish between four pillars of CSR: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. It was also confirmed that the value placed on the „economic“ factor depends on the respondent's place of residence, with higher values achieved among consumers living in the capital or a neighbouring region.

Cera et al. (2020) examined CSR in a sample of 822 SMEs (454 Czech enterprises and 368 Slovak enterprises). The results showed that CSR was not perceived in the same way in these countries, which could have been reasonably expected given the very similar historical development of both countries. Relationship between the selected company characteristics (company age, size, performance, and CSR activities) was also tested within Czech enterprises. A statistically significant relationship was found between the company size, financial performance, and CSR activities. In contrast to that, company age and gender diversity of employees were not found to be the factors that influence the CSR activities in Czech enterprises (Činčalová & Hedija, 2020).

The sample set that forms the basis for the presented study includes limited liability companies (66), joint-stock companies (22), limited partnerships (4), and public companies (3), thereby providing a clear delineation of the represented entities within it.

Information about the regional coverage sheds light on how businesses are dispersed geographically within the country under observation. They are divided into three groups based on their regional reach: a) those with a focus in their own area; b) those with a presence in several areas; and c) those with broad national reach. This data is not only useful for examining the aforementioned, but also market penetration, scope of operations, which is important for stakeholders, and identification of opportunities for market expansion. From the sample set, 39 enterprises conduct business only in the area in which they are physically situated, 29 enterprises conduct business in several areas across the country through branch offices, and 32 enterprises have established operations and coverage over most of or the entire country (included in the „whole country“ category).

The following apply to the other company characteristics examined. The sample set includes 69 local companies without direct links with foreign capital, and 31 companies that are part of multinationals. In terms of the number of employees, the distribution is evenly spread, with 20 microenterprises (having 0–9 employees),

20 small enterprises (having 10–49 employees), 20 medium-sized enterprises (having 50–249 employees), 20 large enterprises (having 250+ employees), and 20 extra-large enterprises (having 500+ employees). In terms of the field of business activity, there were 51 service companies, 23 companies engaged in trade, and 26 companies from the manufacturing sector.

### **3.1.1 Corporate Social Responsibility of Czech Businesses**

The concept of CSR has been the subject of discussion and research in the Czech Republic since the early 1990s. CSR has been transmitted to Czech society mainly through Czech subsidiaries of multinational corporations (MNC's) (Dvorakova, Legnerova & Quigley, 2014). CSR can be understood as a strategy through which corporations take responsibility for the economic, social and environmental consequences of their business activities (Lu et al., 2019). An increasing number of companies in the Czech Republic are characterised by their CSR strategies and projects, the quality of which is constantly improving. Projects of Czech companies are mainly focused on disadvantaged communities, sustainability of CSR activities, and quantifying the benefits for the business, as well as for society as a whole (Dvorakova, Legnerova & Quigley, 2014). Philanthropy continues to occupy a prominent place in CSR projects. The Millennial generation, which is a large group of workers in the Czech market, perceives CSR as a challenging part of their lives, especially in terms of the requirement of work-life balance, as well as when choosing their employer; they evaluate whether the company behaves in a socially responsible manner. Research conducted in the academic year 2018–2019 at Czech universities among 1,073 students from the Millennial generation showed that 57% of the respondents were willing to sacrifice part of their return on investment in socially responsible tools (Frománková et al., 2019). Sun et al. (2021) stated that CSR competence was a key driver of corporate competitiveness and that companies with stronger core competence had the ability and motivation to perform more socially responsible activities. For comprehensiveness, of a company it is advisable to establish a separate department in a company that would be dedicated to CSR activities and CSR projects, their implementation, and reporting towards stakeholders. In the sample set, 16 businesses emphasised their commitment to CSR as a key component of their business operations by having a dedicated CSR department, 17 have integrated CSR functions into their compliance department, thereby seeking to coordinate CSR initiatives with the efforts to comply with legal and regulatory requirements, 13 have assigned CSR duties to their marketing department, thereby placing emphasis on CSR as a strategy for improving brand reputation and image. CSR is heavily emphasised as part of employee engagement and workplace culture, as evidenced by the fact that 26 companies have integrated CSR within their HR departments. A decentralised or less formal approach to CSR management is demonstrated by the fact that 28 companies have not fully integrated CSR into their organizational structure (see Table 5).

**Table 5** – Frequency of CSRCH 1 – Incorporation of CSR in Organizational Governance Structure

|       |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Separate department dedicated to CSR      | 16        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 16.0               |
|       | 2. Under the Compliance department           | 17        | 17.0    | 17.0          | 33.0               |
|       | 3. Under the Marketing department            | 13        | 13.0    | 13.0          | 46.0               |
|       | 4. Under the Human Resources (HR) department | 26        | 26.0    | 26.0          | 72.0               |
|       | 5. CSR is not organizationally integrated    | 28        | 28.0    | 28.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total  | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Problems with CSR strategy planning was put down to lack of time (2 companies), and shortage of human capital (7 companies). 20 organisations stated they did not know they were required by law or regulations to engage in CSR initiatives. This implies that these businesses might consider CSR as optional rather than required. Only one organisation stated that it still did not understand the essence of the CSR concept, which corresponds with the findings of Stanislavská et al. (2020) that the concept of CSR is now well established for companies in Western countries, including the Czech Republic, and the topic is becoming increasingly popular for developing countries. In total (Table 6), 70 organisations, i.e., the majority of them, stated that they had a strategic plan for CSR. This suggests a proactive attitude to CSR, with these businesses actively organising and carrying out programmes that match their objectives of social responsibility. McGregor & Pelikánová (2019) proved in their study that at least large Czech companies developed their strategic plans in the field of CSR, and subsequently published information about the implemented activities, but the most lacking is the information about social activities in the field of CSR. The competitive advantage of enterprises in a market economy is not only created by providing high quality products and services. Therefore, they need to include elements such as CSR in their strategies (Marakova, Wolak-Tuzimek & Tučková, 2021).

**Table 6** – Frequency of CSRCH 2 – CSR Strategic Planning

|       |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Lack of time                            | 2         | 2.0     | 2.0           | 2.0                |
|       | 2. Misunderstanding of the CSR concept     | 1         | 1.0     | 1.0           | 3.0                |
|       | 3. Lack of human capital                   | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 10.0               |
|       | 5. No obligation (we do not have to do it) | 20        | 20.0    | 20.0          | 30.0               |
|       | 6. CSR is planned                          | 70        | 70.0    | 70.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total                                      | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

The intention with which companies enter CSR activities may differ. Kim and Sculion (2013) pointed out that in many cases, efforts to introduce CSR activities started as an incentive for employees. In the sample set, 12 companies participated in the CSR initiatives because they believed that in doing so they were keeping up with societal and corporate developments. They believed that implementing CSR principles was necessary to remain topic and satisfy changing stakeholder and customer needs. In a similar vein, 15 companies stated that they were driven to participate in CSR because they wanted to compete with other businesses that were already doing so. Wu, Dluhošová & Zmeškal (2021) pointed out that CSR was one of the most important ways of representing a company's competitiveness and success in the marketplace. The reason for this is seen in the fact that the increased profitability has positive influence on the implementation of CSR in a given company. This shows that they perceive CSR as means to remain competitive and meet industry standards. Furthermore (Table 7), 26 companies participated in CSR with the primary goal to advance the „public good“ or social well-being, 19 companies employed CSR as a tool to improve their marketing initiatives, and 6 companies participated in CSR initiatives because they felt required doing so by their parent company. The latter suggests that a higher-level institution has included CSR in a bigger corporate strategy. According to 22 companies, there is no clear goal or effort driving their CSR activities, which may be caused due to an unclear strategy within the Czech Republic, regarding the obligation to report and inform about the CSR activities. In particular, small enterprises in the Czech Republic implement CSR activities subconsciously, without the need to categorise them into different pillars of CSR, i.e., into economic, environmental, or social activities (Cera et al., 2020).

**Table 7** – Frequency of CSRCH 3 – Motivation for CSR Engagement

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Effort to follow current trends                                    | 12        | 12.0    | 12.0          | 12.0               |
|       | 2. Effort to compete with competitors that carry out these activities | 15        | 15.0    | 15.0          | 27.0               |
|       | 3. Effort to contribute to the „public good“                          | 26        | 26.0    | 26.0          | 53.0               |
|       | 4. Effort to strengthen marketing activities                          | 19        | 19.0    | 19.0          | 72.0               |
|       | 5. Pressure from the parent company                                   | 6         | 6.0     | 6.0           | 78.0               |
|       | 6. CSR is not purposeful, there is no effort                          | 22        | 22.0    | 22.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

### 3.1.2 CSR Activities of Czech Businesses

The link between the importance of organisational culture, which includes employee volunteerism and the success of an organisation, has been proven. Urbancová & Vrabcová (2022) focused on the role of organisational culture in Czech organisations within the context of human resource management. Results of their study showed that the HR activities that influenced the organisational culture and employee motivation in the chosen Czech organizations the most included: internal and external communication, friendly relationships, and human resource planning. However, only 40% of the organisations surveyed address the organisational culture in relation to employee motivation in the area of CSR.

Workforce sustainability is becoming a major issue, not only in the Czech Republic. Necessity to reduce employee turnover, which is closely related to the need to improve employee job satisfaction, is now a key issue (Yang, Lin & Maresova, 2021). In the sample set, 12 companies maintain a significant commitment to employee-led CSR initiatives (see Table 8). In other words, they have almost certainly established initiatives and a solid corporate social responsibility culture. Furthermore, 23 companies stated that they were strongly committed to employee-driven volunteerism and social impact projects whereby they actively encouraged and supported participation. 33 companies stated that they were engaged in employee-driven CSR initiatives. Although their programmes may not be as strong or extensive, they are aware of the significance of such activities. 18 companies stated that there was very little employee-driven volunteerism, and very few social impact projects in their structure. This may imply that other corporate goals or restrictions got in the way, with only a small amount of time or resources devoted to such activities left. 14 companies stated that they took absolutely no part in employee-driven volunteerism or social

impact projects. This suggests that either they do not support CSR programmes, or do not recognise such necessity as part of their business culture or strategy.

Sustainable development is a concept that is constantly evolving and being discussed at the global, national, and local level. Importance of this concept lies in its complexity. Basic factors of a company’s competitiveness therefore encompass quality relationships with stakeholders (including employees) and implementation of an integrated CSR management system in corporate practice (Vrabcová & Urbancová, 2021).

**Table 8** – Frequency of TBL 1 – Social CSR activities – Employee-Driven Volunteerism and Social Impact Initiatives

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 12        | 12.0    | 12.0          | 12.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 23        | 23.0    | 23.0          | 35.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 33        | 33.0    | 33.0          | 68.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 18        | 18.0    | 18.0          | 86.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 14        | 14.0    | 14.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

The idea of CSR has attracted interest of both practitioners and academics as it has evolved into a managerial phenomenon (Janowski, 2020). Corporate philanthropy, as part of the social pillar of CSR, is multidimensional, varies across sectors, and involves individual and organisational decision-making to achieve business and societal goals (Breeze & Wiepking, 2020). In the sample set, 5 companies (see Table 9) led the way in terms of social responsibility. Their dedication to charitable giving and supporting social issues is unwavering. They also look actively for opportunities to significantly improve society. This degree of commitment frequently includes large monetary contributions, collaborations with organisations, and assistance within a broad range of social initiatives. In addition, 23 companies stated that they were „strongly“ committed to charitable giving and social sponsorship. Although most of the companies (34) are aware of the value of philanthropy and sponsorship for social issues, they may not always be performed to the same degree. Furthermore, 23 companies gave a „negligible“ response, and 15 companies stated that they were not involved in philanthropy and sponsorship for social issues at all. Companies have different interests, so what works for one company may not work for another. Some companies may have philanthropic programmes as part of their corporate model, while others may opt for other forms of social responsibility. According to Young et al. (2022), in order to engage in philanthropic and sponsorship activities, it is



essential that corporate managers view CSR and the expenses associated with philanthropy and sponsorship as capital investments rather than operating expenses.

**Table 9** – Frequency of TBL 2 – Social CSR activities – Philanthropy and Sponsorship for Social Causes

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 5         | 5.0     | 5.0           | 5.0                |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 23        | 23.0    | 23.0          | 28.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 34        | 34.0    | 34.0          | 62.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 23        | 23.0    | 23.0          | 85.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 15        | 15.0    | 15.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

As part of CSR and cooperation with schools, companies can engage in various activities and initiatives that have a positive impact on education and the community. Companies often provide schools, students and educational programmes with financial grants or scholarships. These funds can be used to purchase teaching materials and technology, undertake research, and fulfil other needs. Many companies provide schools with technological equipment, such as computers, software, tablets, and internet connection to help modernise schooling, and improve access to information. Some companies allow their employees to participate in volunteer activities at schools or use their working time to support educational projects. Some companies focus on promoting science, technology, engineering and maths education by a variety of activities, such as competitions, educational materials, and mentoring. Companies can promote environmental education and sustainability by providing schools with information and resources about environmental protection. Companies can organise fundraisers, volunteer programmes, and charitable events to provide local schools and communities with benefits. These activities depend on goals and values of the specific company, as well as the needs of local communities and schools. Cooperation between companies and schools can bring many benefits to all the parties involved, and contribute to better education and social development. University-company cooperation can therefore strengthen their competitiveness (Chládková, Skýpalová & Blašková, 2021). Table 10 shows a range of levels of company-community collaboration in terms of CSR activities, with 24 companies stating they are not involved in any such activity at all, 20 stating their commitment is negligible, 25 stating they maintain an average level of engagement, 21 stating strong commitment, and 10 revealing a very strong commitment

to establishing partnerships with local authorities, non-profit organisations, and educational institutions. Most of the companies responded that their commitment was average, and they understood the importance of community involvement and collaboration. Moreover, they actively look for chances to collaborate with local authorities, non-profit organisations, and educational institutions to address regional problems and promote community well-being. Within this context, it is important to note that CSR strategies can vary from company to company, and can change over time. Many companies try to find balance between different aspects of CSR, and choose those that fit their values and long-term goals the best. Collaboration with schools, non-profit organisations, and authorities is still an important part of CSR, but each company may have its own reasons and priorities (Kumi, 2019) that influence how it engages in this area. On the other hand, schools may also find it interesting to work with companies to recruit external collaborators, such as experts from the field for teaching at secondary schools or universities, which can help with the problematic issue of providing employees with appropriate qualifications for the field (Šafránková, Šikýř & Skýpalová, 2021).

**Table 10** – Frequency of TBL 3 – Social CSR activities – Community Engagement and Collaboration (Partnerships with Schools, Non-profit Organizations, and Local Authorities)

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 10        | 10.0    | 10.0          | 10.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 31.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 25        | 25.0    | 25.0          | 56.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 20        | 20.0    | 20.0          | 76.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 24        | 24.0    | 24.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

A CSR strategy aimed at minimising waste in companies, i.e., at reducing the negative impact of businesses on the environment, can also have positive effects on society and a company's image. Companies can work with suppliers, and improve the entire supply chain to minimise waste and improve sustainability. A CSR strategy that focuses on waste minimisation can help companies achieve long-term sustainability, reduce waste-related costs, and improve relationships with customers, employees, and the general public. This strategy can also bring benefits to the environment and society as a whole. Many organisations are struggling with environmental issues, and learning how to improve green behaviour among employees.

It is important to see the need for corporate leadership in achieving environmental sustainability. Engaging employees in environmental work may be the best way to proactively set a sustainable waste management strategy (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Klyuchnikov, 2023). Nisar et al. (2022) also described the key role of green human resource management practices whereby the non-profits contribute to the environmental performance of the company by pro-environmental psychological capital, psychological green climate, and pro-environmental behaviours. There is still space for improvement in promoting awareness and encouraging more companies to include waste-related efforts in their CSR strategy, as evidenced by companies responding with „not at all“ (18) or „negligibly“ (13) (see Table 11). Higher proportion of businesses that responded with „averagely“ (32), „strongly“ (25), and „very strongly“ (12) suggests an upward trend in corporate commitment to environmental responsibility. These companies actively promote sustainable waste management techniques, and work to lower waste production. They may put cutting-edge waste minimisation techniques into practice, make investments in long-term waste infrastructure, and actively take part in circular economy activities. Schaefer, Terlutter & Diehl (2021) pointed out the importance of employee job satisfaction, organisational pride in employees' perception of the importance of CSR activities, and their support for the implementation thereof in a company.

**Table 11** – Frequency of TBL 4 – Environmental CSR activities – Waste Minimization Strategies and Sustainable Waste Management

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 12        | 12.0    | 12.0          | 12.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 25        | 25.0    | 25.0          | 37.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 32        | 32.0    | 32.0          | 69.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 13        | 13.0    | 13.0          | 82.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 18        | 18.0    | 18.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

In literature, Circular Economy (CE) and CSR are becoming increasingly linked concepts. Turon et al. (2016) considered the circular economy to be a behavioural guideline for the design and development of goods within a CSR strategy. In particular, the corporate governance philosophy needs to be translated into binding CSR as it better frames the goals of the circular economy by identifying and communicating actions to achieve sustainable development goals (Fortunati, Martiniello & Morea, 2020). CSR and CE are two key areas that can reinforce each other and work

**Table 12** – Frequency of TBL 5 – Environmental CSR activities – Circular Resource Utilization and Material Efficiency

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 7.0                |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 28.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 30        | 30.0    | 30.0          | 58.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 79.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

together to achieve a more sustainable business and reduce negative environmental impacts. The circular economy focuses on minimising waste and extending the life cycle of products. Companies can actively work to reduce waste and wasteful production processes and products as part of their CSR strategy. This includes recycling, repurposing, repairing, and reusing products and materials. CSR can promote sustainable product design and packaging, which is a key element of the circular economy. Companies can develop and manufacture products with a view to reducing their negative environmental impact and making them easily recyclable. The circular economy emphasises the importance of responsible consumption, and the way consumers dispose of products. Companies can use CSR to encourage their customers to adopt more sustainable behaviours such as recycling, repairing, and using products over the long term. Companies can work with suppliers and partners to create closed-loop systems and facilitate circulation of materials and products within the economy. This can include taking back products and materials from customers and reusing or recycling them. A sizeable percentage (21%) of the companies in the sample set claim they do not prioritise material efficiency or engage in circular resource consumption within their CSR initiatives (see Table 12). This shows that the business models or CSR plans of these companies may not have taken environmental sustainability approaches into account. Only minimal activity in this CSR component was reported by 21 companies. Even though they aren't completely disengaged, many of these companies only begin to embrace sustainable practices or provide low-level funding for them. By far the largest group of companies used „averagely“ as their response. These 30 companies undoubtedly use some sustainable methods, but have not yet, in all likelihood, incorporated them into their main business processes. A sizeable number of companies (21) actively prioritise the efficient use of circular resources and material resources, which may entail comprehensive recycling programmes, supply chain optimisation, and waste reduction activities. CSR efforts of 7 companies are exemplary in their commitment to the environment.

They give a high priority to the efficient use of materials and circular resources, probably using cutting-edge sustainability techniques and tactics to reduce waste. The collaboration between CSR and CE can therefore help companies to achieve their sustainability goals, while contributing to the protection of the environment and society as a whole. This synergistic interaction can lead to a more sustainable and responsible business in the long term. Promoting the concept and principles of sustainability at the micro level requires industrial enterprises to understand and improve approaches to managing corporate sustainability (Blinova, Ponomarenko & Knysh, 2022).

Companies can invest in marketing that highlights their green initiatives, and customer communication about the benefits of their green products and services. Investing in education and training for employees on sustainability and green technologies can increase employee awareness and engagement in these areas. Companies can allocate funds to research and development (R&D) to develop new green technologies. This may include development of environmentally friendly materials, efficient energy systems, clean production methods, and other innovative solutions. With economic globalisation, sustainable development has become the preferred choice of businesses facing fierce competition. Innovation is the main driver of development (Chen & Jin, 2023). Conservation of natural resources, reduction of waste, and minimisation of energy consumption are the current topics for innovation in green technology (Nasanni, 2023). 18 companies don't appear to be actively pursuing investments in green technology as part of their CSR programmes. 7 companies with the "negligibly" response show low influence (see Table 13). 25 businesses with the "averagely" response make some efforts to use green technologies as part of their CSR initiatives because they understand how important it is to do so. 26 companies used "strongly" for their response. 24 companies see green technologies as the foundation of their attempts to perform environmental responsibility. In an effort to set the pace for environmental advancement, they may make large investments in green technology research, development, adoption, and promotion. Investing in green technologies can help companies reduce costs, increase competitiveness, improve customer relations, and at the same time reduce their environmental footprint. This investment not only protects the environment, but can also bring long-term economic benefits and contribute to sustainable development. Wicki & Hansen (2023) recommend that to increase their chances of success in green technology adoption, companies can foster a failure-friendly organisational culture, experiment deliberately, and learn from failures purposefully.

**Table 13** – Frequency of TBL6 – Environmental CSR activities – Green Technology Investments for Environmental Progress

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 24        | 24.0    | 24.0          | 24.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 26        | 26.0    | 26.0          | 50.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 25        | 25.0    | 25.0          | 75.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 82.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 18        | 18.0    | 18.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Corporate social responsibility is a common part of corporate practice and an established topic of scientific research. Foreign studies have repeatedly concluded that the consistent integration of social responsibility into corporate strategy and the strategic management of all dimensions of CSR enhance corporate growth, bring competitive advantage, and contribute to sustainable development of the company (Fuchsová, 2022). Czech companies would therefore be well advised to include the principles of transparency and the public disclosure of information relating to their business operations and finances in their CSR policies. This includes the regular publication of annual reports and financial statements. To combat corruption, companies can use a code of ethics that sets out clear principles and values regarding anti-corruption behaviour (Caha, Urban & Mrhálek, 2022). This code should be made available to all (new) employees accompanied by appropriate training and education about how to comply with it. Within this context, the company should have a mechanism for reporting the suspected corrupt activities. Employees should be able to anonymously report any corrupt behaviour they observe. The company should ensure that sponsorship and charitable donations are made transparently and are not used as a means of bribery or to gain undue advantage. Table 14 shows the wide range of company responses to economic CSR initiatives linked to moral leadership and anti-corruption efforts. The results reveal that there is space for increased awareness and improvement in the implementation of effective anti-corruption and ethical governance measures within the CSR strategies. Although a notable number of companies demonstrate a strong (27 companies) and very strong (18 companies) commitment to these principles, a significant number remains only moderately engaged (25 companies), with smaller numbers showing negligible (15 companies) or no engagement at all (15 companies). This highlights the growing understanding mechanism of the value of promoting ethical standards and reducing corruption by companies. Within the framework of CSR, companies can play an important role in promoting ethical business and fighting corruption in the Czech Republic.

Cooperation between companies, government and NGOs can lead to a more sustainable business environment where corruption prevention and transparency play a key role. Policies and procedures focused on anti-corruption conduct should be regularly reviewed and updated to take into account new challenges and trends from the field of corruption. Corruption is one of the main variables that needs to be considered within the concept of CSR in order to guarantee long-term well-being of society.

**Table 14** – Frequency of TBL 7 – Economic CSR activities – Ethical Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 18        | 18.0    | 18.0          | 18.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 27        | 27.0    | 27.0          | 45.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 25        | 25.0    | 25.0          | 70.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 15        | 15.0    | 15.0          | 85.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 15        | 15.0    | 15.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Stakeholders play an important role in CSR because they are groups, individuals or entities that have an impact on and are impacted by a company's activities (Viveros, 2016). Stakeholders are interested in how a company conducts its business activities, and the impact it has on society and the environment. Stakeholders can monitor and evaluate a company's CSR performance. This may include checking compliance with ethical and environmental standards, assessing community and environmental impact, and monitoring transparency. Stakeholders can help a company with developing and implementing strategies and policies that enhance long-term sustainability. This can include reducing environmental impact, promoting social development, and ethical business practices. Parcha (2017) points out the importance of reflecting on the extent to which organisations should communicate their CSR, as over-communication of CSR may make stakeholders more likely to doubt the credibility of the information disclosed. Results of the study by Zárate-Rueda, Bautista-Zárate & Beltrán-Villamizar (2021) show that companies need to find balance between their profit interests and socially responsible practices by socially, economically and environmentally sustainable processes. In the sample set, 18 out of 100 companies claim (see Table 15) that their CSR initiatives do not include transparent performance reporting or stakeholder engagement. This is implied by the fact that these companies may not value open communication with stakeholders or

transparent reporting. 21 companies reported negligible participation in CSR initiatives. These firms may be in the early stages of incorporating stakeholder engagement and transparent reporting into their business models. While not completely disengaged, they may only have a limited budget to devote themselves to such initiatives. Most of the companies (39) used „averagely“ as their response to their degree of commitment to commercial CSR initiatives. Furthermore, 15 companies stated they performed a strong level of commitment to such initiatives, thereby actively promoting open communication with stakeholders and giving by transparent reporting on their performance across different dimensions. Lastly, 7 companies stand out due to their very strong commitment to commercial CSR initiatives. Stakeholders therefore play a key role in the CSR processes, helping the companies to better understand the needs and expectations of wider society, and contributing to the development of sustainable and responsible corporate strategies. The premise here is that conscious stakeholder engagement increases trust in a company and helps it achieve its sustainability goals.

**Table 15** – Frequency of TBL 8 – Economic CSR activities – Stakeholder Engagement and Transparent Business Performance Reporting

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 7.0                |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 15        | 15.0    | 15.0          | 22.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 39        | 39.0    | 39.0          | 61.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 82.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 18        | 18.0    | 18.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Inclusive employment practices and diversity integration are important parts of CSR both in the Czech Republic and around the world. These practices and initiatives focus on ensuring equality and inclusiveness in the workplace, not only in terms of gender, but also in terms of race and ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability, and other factors. CSR has gradually assumed a strategic role in corporate business. In this sense, the Board of Directors (Board) has a predominant role, as it determines corporate strategy. An interesting and often discussed issue is the gender diversity of the Board. The reason for this discussion is that women differ from men in terms of personality, communication style, and values (Gaió & Gonçalves, 2022). Table 16 shows that there is a heterogeneous environment when it comes to economic CSR initiatives, involving diverse hiring practices and inclusion. While



a sizeable number of companies (7) do not engage in such practices at all, a smaller subset of organisations (10) indicates very little activity. The latter may only begin to understand the value of inclusivity and diversity in the workplace, or just direct a small portion of their limited resources at such efforts. 29 companies indicate an average degree of commitment. These companies may have started some diversity-related initiatives but may not have fully incorporated them into their core HR and CSR strategies. Furthermore, 25 companies indicate a strong commitment, and 19 companies a very strong commitment to developing inclusivity and diversity in their workforce. They give these measures a high priority and are perhaps pioneers in developing diverse and welcoming workplaces. Based on the social role theory and feminist ethics, Boukattaya & Omri (2021) reported that gender diversity was positively associated with CSR and negatively associated with corporate social irresponsibility (CSI). According to the results of this study, women in boards of companies have a greater impact on reducing CSI than increasing CSR. Similarly, Peng et al. (2021) also concluded that it was possible to create criteria for improving CSR strategy by board diversity in multinationals.

**Table 16** – Frequency of TBL 9 – Economic CSR activities – Inclusive Employment Practices and Diversity Integration

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 19        | 19.0    | 19.0          | 19.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 25        | 25.0    | 25.0          | 44.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 29        | 29.0    | 29.0          | 73.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 20        | 20.0    | 20.0          | 93.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

### 3.1.3 CSR Reporting in the Czech Republic

Non-financial reporting can be understood as a way of providing information in the form of reports intended for external users, through which an enterprise provides non-financial information about its activities and their impacts on stakeholders. The term “non-financial information” is very broad and can generally mean any information that is not of a financial nature. In order for companies and stakeholders operating in a market environment to be able to assess the extent or quality of corporate social responsibility in a specific company, it is necessary to find a way of assessing these aspects. Non-financial reporting can be seen in two dimensions: 1) as an output of the company’s activities, i.e., as an output of the company’s socially responsible behaviour with an impact on society (i.e., the company itself and its stakeholders); 2) as an input for other activities of the company (such as ethical management, code of ethics, strategic development, and human resource management). Non-financial reports can be helpful in discerning potential future threats, and supporting competitiveness both in the goods and services market and in the labour market (supporting the employer branding of the company). Table 17 shows that only 21 companies in the sample set have adopted a rigorous CSR reporting methodology. They often provide annual reports that are in-depth. This demonstrates a strong commitment to openness and integration of CSR into their corporate strategy. 12 companies indicate that they report on CSR, but do so less frequently – about once every three years. Furthermore, 5 companies indicate that they report on CSR, but that their reports are produced over a longer time frame, usually more than three years. The largest group, comprising 62 companies, indicates that they lack a systematic CSR reporting system. This may indicate that these companies do not focus on or place that much emphasis on transparent reporting of their CSR activities. This year, the Corporate Social Responsibility Directive (CSRD) has come into force in the Czech Republic. The Directive is based on the environment, and social and governance (ESG) elements of a sustainable approach to investment and business (Jin, 2022). Investors are increasingly reflecting on the issues of climate change, water loss, waste accumulation in nature, unfair treatment of employees, need for transparent reporting, and compliance with anti-corruption measures, etc. (DasGupta, 2022). At the same time, investors are aware that they can contribute to the pressure placed on companies to address particular issues through their actions (Li et al., 2021). CSRD reporting based on the concept of CSR follows the triple-bottom-line principle, i.e., the division of reporting into three basic areas, namely: economic, environmental, and social (Wheeler & Elkington, 2001; Sahin et al., 2022). Moreover, decision of banks and investors to provide companies with financial resources is also influenced by the demonstration of socially responsible behaviour in the Czech Republic (Nguyen, 2022). Kamal (2021) highlights that in the absence of formal mechanisms and policies by which stakeholders are provided with information about how an organisation is addressing sustainability issues, it could be contributed to the issue that stakeholders do not properly understand the true position of the company, thereby incurring implicit costs to the organisation.

**Table 17** – Frequency of REP 1 – Formalization of the CSR Reporting Mechanisms

|       |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Regular reporting                           | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 21.0               |
|       | 2. Occasional reporting (once per 3 years)     | 12        | 12.0    | 12.0          | 33.0               |
|       | 3. Limited reporting (over three-year periods) | 5         | 5.0     | 5.0           | 38.0               |
|       | 4. No formal CSR reporting                     | 62        | 62.0    | 62.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total  | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

A major shortcoming of the reporting is represented by the fact that the legal norms in the Czech Republic related to this area define this obligation in very general terms, which often leaves companies in doubt as what such reporting should look like and contain. In addition to the environmental area, attention should be paid to the social area, especially to information concerning employees, a particularly important group of stakeholders. This may include gender equality, employment of people with disabilities, workplace conditions, work-life balance, information related to the management of the company, such as the company’s corporate culture, how the company deals with its suppliers or how the company combats corruption (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive: a provisional agreement, 2022). Absence of a uniform format for non-financial reporting leads to the impossibility of assessing the impact of responsible corporate behaviour on the development of a given country (Chyzh & Sakhno, 2020). In the survey we conducted among companies in the Czech Republic, a relatively wide range of possible answers was obtained. Significant commitment to openness and ethical business practices is evidenced by the fact that 19 of the companies either fully or largely include CSR material in their reports (see Table 18). In contrast, a significant number of companies (56 of them) do not attach any importance to the need for disclosing or normalising their CSR activities. 27 companies place average or lesser emphasis on consistent CSR disclosure. While some companies place a strong emphasis on thorough and open reporting as a key part of their CSR strategy, others either disclose little or perform no CSR disclosure. CSR disclosure in reporting is essential to promote credibility and demonstrate commitment to ethical, social, and environmental responsibility at the time when stakeholders, including investors and customers, are demanding transparency and responsible business practices more than ever. A major advantage that multinationals have over domestic companies is their level of influence. By reaching farther afield, multinationals can target their projects at different scopes of action. There is therefore nothing to prevent multinationals from publishing their positive impacts not only at a global level, but also on specific communities, which can again increase the attractiveness of the company in question (Aguilera-Caracuel, 2017).

Multinationals have unquestionable influence on suppliers by their size and consumption rates. Due to this influence, countries have begun to realise the need to control the interactions between suppliers and multinationals (Melo, 2019).

**Table 18** – Frequency of REP 2 – CSR Disclosure in Reports

|       |               | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Fully      | 3         | 3.0     | 3.0           | 3.0                |
|       | 2. Largely    | 16        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 19.0               |
|       | 3. Partially  | 16        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 35.0               |
|       | 4. Briefly    | 9         | 9.0     | 9.0           | 44.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all | 56        | 56.0    | 56.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total         | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

According to Pavlík (2010), non-financial reports in a company can play an important role as: a) a communication tool designed to communicate the company's socially responsible activities to internal and external stakeholders; b) a management tool used to measure progress and identify new strategic characteristics and objectives. KPMG, the global network of consultancies, identified the benefits of non-financial reporting as: demonstrating transparency and dialogue with stakeholders; creating competitive position and market differentiation, creating goodwill, motivating employees, and attracting new talents, strengthening risk management, improving management systems, and promoting innovation (Kašparová, 2011). According to Kašparová & Kunz (2013), the two most common drivers for voluntarily initiating non-financial reporting are: a) ethical reasons – responding to the change in stakeholders' expectations caused by financial, environmental, social, or other scandals that occurred in previous years, b) reputation and brand enhancement – activities of large companies affect a larger range of stakeholders, therefore they come under closer scrutiny. They are often subject to much higher demands than smaller companies, and therefore look harder for different ways to protect and enhance their reputation (García-Sánchez, 2019). Non-financial reporting is a tool used to measure, report and evaluate the performance of companies in their strategic pursuit of sustainable development (Business Leaders Forum, 2021). Corporate social responsibility can be measured by methods that can be divided into two groups: a) exact methods – Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), Social Accountability, London Benchmarking Group, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, Dow Jones Sustainability Index; b) indices and benchmarking methods – measurement based on the analysis of annual reports, insights obtained from questionnaires, pollution

indices and information obtained from rating agencies. The most important and comprehensive initiatives governing the non-financial reporting worldwide to date are the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. In corporate practice, companies report their CSR activities mainly in a free format or using GRI, the use of which is not limited to within the EU (Koseoglu et al., 2021). The scope of reporting is voluntary, with organisations choosing which areas to report on (David et al., 2013). In the sample set, 9 companies (see Table 19) indicated they were very well prepared for the CSR reporting, which is a sizeable number and reveals their strong commitment to openness and ethical corporate conduct, and 19 companies believed they were well prepared to disclose the CSR data. 34 companies indicated they were averagely prepared to report on CSR. The breadth and efficiency of these organisations' reporting processes may still need to be improved, despite their awareness of the value of reporting. Furthermore, 19 companies indicated they were not adequately ready to report on CSR, which shows that they are unable to effectively report on their efforts due to difficulties or constraints with their resources or operational procedures, and 19 companies made up a group that said they were totally unprepared for the CSR reporting. The latter shows that CSR reporting is not prioritised or that the value of open communication is not understood, which may be due to the fact that while financial reporting has been known in the Czech Republic and the world for several hundred years, non-financial reporting has only been discussed in the past few decades. While financial reporting is mainly covered by the generally accepted accounting principles in individual countries or the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), non-financial reporting is not subject to precise legal requirements (Gazdar, 2007).

**Table 19** – Frequency of REP 3 – CSR Reporting Preparedness

|       |                          | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very well prepared    | 9         | 9.0     | 9.0           | 9.0                |
|       | 2 Well prepared          | 19        | 19.0    | 19.0          | 28.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely prepared    | 34        | 34.0    | 34.0          | 62.0               |
|       | 4. Poorly prepared       | 19        | 19.0    | 19.0          | 81.0               |
|       | 5. Completely unprepared | 19        | 19.0    | 19.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total                    | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

### 3.1.4 CSR Activities of Czech Businesses in Times of Global Crises

The COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly represents a generational challenge for public health and global economy. Moreover, the pandemic has revived some old, as well as brought many new threats that today's business leaders will have to face in the years ahead. (Freze et al., 2023) Czech businesses were engaged in several CSR activities during the Covid-19 pandemic, primarily to provide the public with support and assistance, and to manage challenges the pandemic caused. Companies in the Czech Republic provided hospitals and healthcare workers with funds or donated medical supplies, including masks, respirators, and disinfectants. Other companies switched their business to the production of protective equipment and materials, or financially supported research projects and laboratories working on the development of vaccines against Covid-19. Companies also provided cultural institutions and artists who were affected by closures and restrictions with financial support. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies, especially technology companies, donated or temporarily discounted their core products, thus gaining public support and gratitude; this happened primarily in the field of education (Reikosky, 2023). Some companies introduced measures beneficial for their employees, such as home office, additional time off for childcare, and increased hygiene measures in the work environment. Jilkova's (2021) survey showed that since most employees worked from home during the Covid-19 pandemic, it was necessary to promote more flexible work benefits as an integral part of developing a sustainable strategy, since the benefit structure is an essential part of employees' job satisfaction and can promote employees' loyalty to the company. In a number of jobs in the Czech Republic, the home office benefit remained in place after the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, too. It is therefore crucial to reflect not only on the situation and CSR activities in the pre-Covid-19 era, but also on CSR activities and approaches in the post-Covid-19 era. Freze et al. (2023) in their study focusing on SMEs (the sample included SMEs also from the Czech Republic) concluded that the type of business, as well as the ownership structure positively influenced the principles of sustainable development and CSR in the SMEs concerned, while the age of the company had a negative impact. These findings may be crucial for stakeholders and business owners who want to improve CSR in their businesses in the post-COVID-19 era. While a significant percentage of businesses demonstrate a strong (37 companies) and a very strong (15 companies) commitment to employee safety during the pandemic, some continue to place only a minimal (11 firms) or weak (20 firms) emphasis on measures beyond the normal framework, with a minority offering nothing beyond the norm (17 firms), suggesting space for improvement in their CSR responses to the particular challenges posed by COVID-19 (see Table 20).

**Table 20** – Frequency of CSR COV 1 – COVID-19 and CSR: Provision of Personal Protective Equipment for Employee Safety

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 17        | 17.0    | 17.0          | 17.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 11        | 11.0    | 11.0          | 28.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 20        | 20.0    | 20.0          | 48.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 37        | 37.0    | 37.0          | 85.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 15        | 15.0    | 15.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

The COVID-19 pandemic offers an excellent opportunity for businesses to move towards a more genuine type of corporate social responsibility (Chua et al., 2020) and contribute to solving pressing global social and environmental challenges (Carroll, 2021). Strielkowski et al. (2021) identified three main lessons that SMEs have learned over the past two years of the pandemic: Firstly, the pandemic has undefined the interconnectedness of business, society and the environment. SMEs that operate in a socially responsible and sustainable manner are more likely to have strong relationships with their stakeholders, including customers, employees, suppliers, and communities, which can help them weather the storm of the pandemic. Secondly, the pandemic has exposed vulnerability of global supply chains and the need for resilience and flexibility. SMEs that adopt sustainable and ethical practices are more likely to have transparent and resilient supply chains that can help them manage risks and disruptions. Finally, the pandemic has brought to the fore the importance of employee health and safety, as well as the need for remote working and digitalisation. SMEs that prioritise well-being of their employees and embrace technology are more likely to adapt and thrive in the post-COVID era. Academic researchers and stakeholders therefore need to support the CSR agenda for business leadership in these difficult times. It can be seen from the table 21 that most of the businesses (36), which appear to be continuing their CSR activities within the established framework, may not have materially changed their community support initiatives in response to the pandemic. A lesser number of companies (14) have made the barest changes, showing a mediocre level of dedication to addressing the pandemic-related community needs. The „weak emphasis“ category (31) is made up of businesses that have done more to aid their local communities uring the pandemic. Businesses with a „strong emphasis“ (15) on community support exhibit a high level

of dedication and have made a significant contribution to the pandemic-related issues. Selection of businesses which have gone above and beyond and demonstrated remarkable dedication to the public and local community support throughout the COVID-19 pandemic are highlighted in the „very strong emphasis“ category (4).

**Table 21** – Frequency of CSR COV 2 – COVID-19 and CSR: Contribution to the Public and Local Community Support (Sponsorship, Participation in Testing and Vaccine Research, etc.)

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 36        | 36.0    | 36.0          | 36.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 14        | 14.0    | 14.0          | 50.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 31        | 31.0    | 31.0          | 81.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 15        | 15.0    | 15.0          | 96.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 4         | 4.0     | 4.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Zheng et al. (2022) pointed out that employee care in the form of provision of protective aid during the Covid-19 period was important, but subsequently, it was appropriate to focus on the benefits which included suggestions for solutions to alleviate employee psychological fatigue from the perspective of human resource management principles, both during and after the pandemic, i.e., in the current post-Covid-19 era. Appropriately designed extra employee benefits in the post-Covid-19 era can help attracting potential employees, retaining them after hiring, maintaining their self-esteem and performance, and protecting them from „mental fatigue“ (Branco and Rodrigues, 2006). According to Jilkov (2021), the role of human capital is crucial to support a sustainable corporate strategy and CSR likewise the benefit structure is an essential part of employees' job satisfaction and can promote employees' loyalty to the company. Most companies in our survey (31) had their typical employee benefits in place during the pandemic, suggesting that they may not have made significant changes in their employee assistance programmes in response to the crisis (Table 22). A smaller number of firms (11) made modest additions to their standard benefits, indicating a substantial level of commitment to helping their employees throughout the pandemic. Businesses with a „weak emphasis“ (23) demonstrated a stronger level of commitment by providing more employee



benefits tailored specifically to the pandemic businesses with a „strong emphasis“ on employee well-being during the pandemic (21) demonstrated their commitment by extensive and specialized benefits designed to address the specific difficulties presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. A limited set of companies that went above and beyond and paid remarkable attention to offering comprehensive employee benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic was represented by the „very strong emphasis“ category (14). While some companies, as shown in the survey presented here, paid attention to employee benefits on a routine basis, other companies went above and beyond.

**Table 22** – Frequency of CSR COV 3 – COVID-19 and CSR: Extra Employee Benefits during the Pandemic (On-site Testing, Voluntary Quarantine with Income Compensation, etc.)

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 31        | 31.0    | 31.0          | 31.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 11        | 11.0    | 11.0          | 42.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 23        | 23.0    | 23.0          | 65.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 86.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 14        | 14.0    | 14.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

According to Jain et al. (2022), international organisations, such as WHO, UN, and IFRC should create a strong communication network among themselves to provide a unified and holistic response to the humanitarian assistance needed in Ukraine. As stated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, „The Czech Republic’s assistance to Ukraine is currently for the most part humanitarian in nature. The assistance is conducted mostly in the form of supplies of essential resources – mobile homes generators, ambulances, fire-fighting equipment, food, and medicine, etc. Of course, it is also in the form of supplies of military materials. In addition to the state, a huge wave of solidarity has also been generated by citizens, who have already contributed almost CZK 4 billion in various collections to help the embattled and war-torn country. Municipalities and regions are also helping, allocating significant portions of their funds in the form of material and financial aid. In addition to the civic initiative, altruism of Czech companies should also be highlighted, as their

help in Ukraine is highly appreciated not only for its immediate effect, but also with a view to supporting future cooperation in the reconstruction of the country.“ The United Nations has warned that the combination of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine crisis has led to the largest food crisis since World War II, i.e., up to 1.7 billion people are suffering from hunger and poverty, the rate of which is currently at a new high (Lin et al., 2023). Corporations' engagement in CSR activities also includes financial support for aid to foreign countries, and they have been doing so for a long time (Waniak-Michalak, Sapkauskiene & Leitonienė, 2018). Most of the companies (47) in Table 23 continued to follow the norm in CSR, suggesting that they may not have made any significant changes in their CSR-related financial donations or their humanitarian support in response to the crisis. Only a smaller number of companies (13) made small financial or humanitarian donations beyond their typical CSR activities. Companies with a “strong emphasis answer (18) demonstrated a strong level of engagement by making significant financial contributions in response to the conflict or taking on projects that went beyond their typical CSR activities. A small set of companies that went above and beyond and demonstrated a remarkable commitment to humanitarian aid related to the war in Ukraine is represented by the “very strong emphasis” category (17), most likely through significant monetary contributions.

**Table 23** – Frequency of CSR UKR 1 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Financial Mobilization for Humanitarian Support

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 47        | 47.0    | 47.0          | 47.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 13        | 13.0    | 13.0          | 60.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 18        | 18.0    | 18.0          | 78.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 17        | 17.0    | 17.0          | 95.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 5         | 5.0     | 5.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

The war in Ukraine became a test for many foreign companies in terms of implementing the principles of corporate social responsibility, which they had previously announced (Reshetnikova & Sanak-Kosmowska, 2023). Helping refugees can be implemented as one of the philanthropic CSR activities of a company. As Tetreva (2015)

stated, corporate volunteering was a good way in human resource management to involve employees in CSR activities, allow them to co-determine the projects and activities that would be supported, as well as to allow them to be personally actively involved. It is possible to help not only refugees, but also other people who have not left Ukraine, for example, the Coca-Cola company's support system in Ukraine, where as part of their CSR activities, they have become part of the community and actively addressed community issues; such company provides employee development, research of the consumer needs, and empowering women and youth in society (Drewniak, 2023). Data in Table 24 highlights the range of CSR initiatives used by businesses to help integration and refugee relief efforts in the context of the situation in Ukraine. While the vast majority (44 companies) confirmed standard CSR practices, a sizeable portion (18 companies) made small efforts beyond their regular CSR practices, and a smaller but incredibly committed group (10 companies) demonstrated a significant commitment by engaging in significant initiatives beyond their typical CSR activities. An even more committed segment (6 companies) demonstrated exceptional dedication to refugee assistance and integration during the conflict. A large influx of refugees can completely overwhelm local services, and lead to a complex humanitarian crisis. Initial priorities in refugee assistance are to address basic human needs such as shelter, infectious disease issues and access to healthcare, gradually moving towards mental health assistance as well, according to Lee et al. (2023).

**Table 24** – Frequency of CSR UKR 2 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Refugee Assistance and Integration Efforts

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 44        | 44.0    | 44.0          | 44.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 18        | 18.0    | 18.0          | 62.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 22        | 22.0    | 22.0          | 84.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 10        | 10.0    | 10.0          | 94.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 6         | 6.0     | 6.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Ukraine has long been characterised by insecurity, which has already prompted large waves of emigration from the country. As Lloyd & Sirkeci (2022) argued, the latest phase of Ukrainian emigration should be seen as a continuation of the persistent tendency of those residing in the country to seek escape from the prevailing conditions of insecurity. Earlier migrations from Ukraine have also created a culture of migration that has caused the outflow of Ukrainians during the current crisis. Ukrainians who were already inclined to leave the country and who possessed the necessary skills (i.e., social capital, financial capital, human capital, and physical skills) began to move at the onset of the February 2022 invasion, while many others remained in country. A significant number of 32 companies in the Table 25 show that their CSR initiatives focused on job opportunities for displaced people did not go above and beyond the standard procedures. They have not made any significant changes in response to the conflict and have maintained their standard hiring practices. 22 companies went above and beyond their normal CSR obligations and did to help displaced people with finding work. They recognize the value of providing employment opportunities, even though their efforts may be minimal. 10 companies showed a strong commitment to helping displaced people with finding work and were also engaged in significant initiatives that went beyond their typical CSR activities. 10 companies in the category “very strong focus beyond the ordinary” stood out for their extraordinary commitment to providing employment opportunities to IDPs.

**Table 25** – Frequency of CSR UKR 3 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Employment Opportunities for Displaced Individuals

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 32        | 32.0    | 32.0          | 32.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 22        | 22.0    | 22.0          | 54.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 26        | 26.0    | 26.0          | 80.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 10        | 10.0    | 10.0          | 90.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 10        | 10.0    | 10.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

In the Czech Republic, the public debate on energy poverty is still in its infancy. In the Czech Republic, the assessment of energy poverty relies mainly on traditional indicators. Although they performed well compared to other countries in the region, there is a risk that people suffering from energy poverty are poorly recognised and do not receive sufficient support (David & Kořoušková, 2023). Despite controversies, use of primary and secondary sources of woody biomass is promoted to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and because of the need to diversify energy sources and ensure energy security in European Union countries. Firewood extraction in Europe shows generally an upward trend, especially in the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Denmark, and the UK. Downward trends were recorded in France, Spain, Greece, and Cyprus. In terms of sustainability and energy efficiency (see Table 26), 28 businesses upheld industry standards, indicating that they may not have drastically altered their CSR-related sustainability initiatives in response to the energy crisis. A significant number of companies (43) that have shown a minimal level of commitment to addressing sustainability issues in the context of the „energy crisis“ have provided little support for energy efficiency. Only one company that answered with a „weak emphasis“ concerning sustainability demonstrated some level of commitment to sustainability during the energy crisis. Companies with a “strong emphasis” (26) demonstrated a high commitment to sustainability and energy efficiency by taking significant action beyond their normal CSR activities. The “very strong emphasis category (2) consists of the smallest but extremely committed group of companies that went above and beyond in addressing energy and sustainability issues during the conflicting energy crisis.

**Table 26** – Frequency of CSR ENG 1 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Investments in Energy-Efficient Technologies for Sustainable Operations

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 28        | 28.0    | 28.0          | 28.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 43        | 43.0    | 43.0          | 71.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 1         | 1.0     | 1.0           | 72.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 26        | 26.0    | 26.0          | 98.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 2         | 2.0     | 2.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

„Energy crisis“ is recognised as one of the main causes of inflation. In 2022, inflation has become a global phenomenon. According to the World Bank, inflation has affected developed countries (100%), as well as emerging market/developing economies (87%). Approximately two-thirds of the developed economies and slightly more than a half of the emerging markets have exceeded the projected inflation for 2021 (Kozuch et al, 2023). The fact that many companies (22) continued to use industry standard techniques to control building temperatures suggests that they may not have significantly changed their CSR energy conservation actions in response to the „energy crisis“ (see Table 27). Considering the current energy crisis, they are at least partially committed to conducting energy conservation, as evidenced by the fact that a large number of them (50) have gone beyond their typical CSR operations and provided slightly more assistance. Companies with a „weak focus“ (3) showed a higher level of commitment by adopting more substantial initiatives, thus demonstrating a bigger commitment to saving energy in times of crisis. Companies with a “strong emphasis” on energy efficiency (18) demonstrated a high level of commitment by acting beyond their normal practices. Companies that went beyond optimising building temperatures to saving energy during the „energy crisis“ fell into the “very strong emphasis” category, which is made up of a small number of exceptionally committed companies (7).

**Table 27** – Frequency of CSR ENG 2 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Optimizing Building Temperature for Energy Conservation

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 22        | 22.0    | 22.0          | 22.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 50        | 50.0    | 50.0          | 72.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 3         | 3.0     | 3.0           | 75.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 18        | 18.0    | 18.0          | 93.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Geissdoerfer et al. (2017) advocated that firms could use the idea of circularity in CSR by discussing how the SDGs could be achieved through the application of circular economy principles. Most studies consider the concept of circular economy to be particularly important due to the international efforts at macro, as well as micro level to focus on sustainability elements. The priority for company management should be to promote favourable attitudes of employees towards sustainable behaviour, including energy savings with a positive impact on the environment. CSR initiatives did not go beyond the routine procedures in 40 companies, as seen in the Table 28. A significant percentage (46 companies) offered some minimal assistance. Only 3 companies used the answer „weak emphasis“, showing a higher level of commitment by taking more significant actions, thus implying a greater commitment to conducting energy saving during the crisis. “Strong emphasis above the normal framework“ was placed by 7 companies. These businesses showed a strong commitment to limiting the use of electrical appliances to save energy. 4 companies in this category stood out for their outstanding commitment to limiting the use of electrical appliances for energy conservation during the energy crisis, and likely implemented extensive initiatives that went well beyond their typical CSR efforts, demonstrating a very strong commitment to energy conservation.

**Table 28** – Frequency of CSR ENG 3 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Restricting Electrical Appliance Use to Conserve Energy

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 40        | 40.0    | 40.0          | 40.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 46        | 46.0    | 46.0          | 86.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 3         | 3.0     | 3.0           | 89.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 96.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 4         | 4.0     | 4.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

### 3.1.5 Summary of the Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice in the Czech Republic

Development to date has negatively affected the environment of the planet. This impact has significantly increased since the 1950s due to intensifying human interference and business activities. The drive for economic growth has resulted in health issues, air pollution, water management problems, reduced biodiversity, depletion of limited natural resources, and climate change due to global warming. These changes have given rise to an interest in global sustainability of development within the context of corporate social responsibility (Sarkar & Searcy, 2016). Companies are now no longer purely perceived as profit-driven entities, with stakeholders expecting to be informed about their sustainable behaviour, i.e., their efforts to reach other areas beyond their statutory obligations. Results of our study for the Czech Republic show that there is still space for greater involvement of stakeholders in the conceptualisation of CSR in organisations, with only 33 of the 100 respondents indicating that they are currently very strongly or strongly seeking to actively involve stakeholders in CSR. Sustainable development focuses on social, natural resource, and economic growth sectors. According to Machado & Davim (2016), sustainability management is a process by which an organisation seeks to use all its resources and improve organisational and technological development to respond not only to current but also future human and social needs. Only in this way the quality of life can be improved. Today's organisations can no longer develop their practices based on the existing paradigms. On the contrary, it is necessary to break away from these paradigms completely and achieve a total change of mentality in the way the organisational activities are being managed. With this in mind, sustainability management appears to be a philosophy aimed at increasing productivity with respect to different types of objectives, such as environmental, economic or social (Corazza & Saluto, 2021). Results of the study for the Czech Republic show that companies operating in the Czech market actively integrate CSR issues into the organisational structure of corporate management, with CSR most often being the responsibility of the HR department. In 16 cases, it was noted that the organisation had its own CSR department dedicated to the strategic integration of CSR principles into the company's internal strategy for further development. On the other hand there is a large group (28) of companies that do not have CSR embedded in their organisational structure. CSR has had its supporters and critics. A very well-known statement by Milton Friedman, who considered the inclusion of CSR activities in corporate practice to be an unjustified increase in costs and a distraction from the basic mission of a company, is that „the only social responsibility of a company is to increase profits“ (Kašparová & Kunz, 2013). In recent years, belief in the positive impact of the adoption of the concept of CSR has prevailed, with discussions now centring on specific areas of CSR, their impact on society, and ethical management of companies (Buchholtz, 2020). However, there is still no clear definition of CSR, including a list of areas and activities it covers. Carroll (1999) identified four pillars: economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility, and philanthropic responsibility. Tetreva et al. (2017) defined five areas of responsible corporate behaviour: 1) economic (sufficient



quantities of necessary products for whole society, at an affordable price, and taking into account the generation of profit); 2) social (respect for the needs and interests of society); 3) environmental responsibility (prevention of negative ecological impacts, and implementation of proactive ecological measures); 4) ethical responsibility (creation, application, and promotion of ethical standards); 5) philanthropic responsibility (volunteering and donating). No matter how many CSR dimensions a company accepts, focusing on only one has a detrimental knock-on effect on the others (Hahn et al., 2018). Respondents in the presented study cited lack of human capital (7), lack of time (2), and lack of understanding of the concept of CSR (1) as barriers to strategically addressing the CSR issues, including a balanced focus on all pillars and associated activities. However, 70 companies reported that they had incorporated CSR activities into their strategic plan. In addition to the basic goal of making profit, companies should voluntarily focus on responsible behaviour towards both the environment and the society in which they operate. This means taking social and environmental aspects into account in all their business activities that are focused on generating profit. In the research conducted so far focused on corporate behaviour, there has been focus mainly on the economic area (Mazé & Chailan, 2020), as well as on the foreign direct investment (Eren et al., 2019), and human resource management (Obara Peattie, 2018). More recently, a number of studies have also focused on the spillover effects of companies' activities on the environment in which they carry out their activities, i.e., on corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Wrana & Diez, 2018; Tian, 2020). Within CSR, there is then a strong focus on the environmental impacts of corporate operations (Mahadevan & Sun, 2020; Adeel-Farooq et al., 2021), as well as social sustainability (Bubicz et al., 2021), and responsible behaviour within the customer-supply chain (Tian et al. 2020). In the presented study, attention was paid to the selected aspects of social, environmental, and economic pillars of CSR. In the area of philanthropy, 35 companies indicated that this activity was very strongly or strongly supported by the management. An almost identically large group of respondents (33) indicated that they paid average attention to this activity within the social pillar. Another social pillar activity we observed was the cooperation with the local community (schools, NGOs, local authorities). This activity is quite strongly implemented in business practice among companies on the Czech market, with almost half of the respondents (46) stating that they pay very strong, strong or at least average attention to it. Within the environmental pillar, there is strong interest among the companies in impact minimisation and sustainable waste management, with only one-third of the respondents (32) paying only negligible or no attention to this issue. Even stronger attention is paid by companies operating on the Czech market to green technologies for environmental progress, with only 25 companies stating that they pay negligible or no attention to it. Within the economic pillar, inclusive employment and diversity integration are also important topics, with 19 companies being very strongly engaged, 25 strongly engaged, and 29 moderately engaged. Topics such as age management, gender equality, and work-life balance are also supported in the Czech Republic in the form of projects implemented by companies through their own resources or with the financial participation of the state or EU funds.

CSR is a broad concept that can be understood and expressed in different ways. At its core, however, it is about the actual activities that provide customers with benefits, and create value for society. CSR contributes to long-term development of a community (Zhou et al., 2021; Mahmood et al., 2021). As customers are increasingly becoming aware and appreciative of the role of companies in the development of society/community, companies have come to realise the importance of incorporating CSR into their corporate strategies in order to improve customer satisfaction, gain a long-term competitive advantage, and grow (Rhou, Singal & Koh, 2016; Martínez & Bosque, 2013). According to the results of our study, a major motivation for Czech companies to implement CSR activities is the desire to contribute to the public good (26 companies), followed by the possibility of linking the benefits of CSR activities to the company's marketing (19 companies).

According to the study by Du, Bhattacharya & Sen (2010), a significant role in the promotion of CSR activities is played by the way in which these activities are communicated to stakeholders, i.e., to all entities that are somehow involved and influenced or they themselves influence the activities of the organisation. Likewise, Gordon (2017) stated that it was not only the ability to implement CSR activities that was important, but also the ability to present them correctly to stakeholders. When these activities are not properly communicated by management to stakeholders, stakeholders may also react sceptically or even negatively to the company's CSR activities, which can damage the company's overall image (Latif et al., 2022; Wu et al, 2020). Companies should therefore consider not only their objectives, especially in the economic sphere, but also the impact of their activities on the surrounding environment. This includes building the relationships between the company and its stakeholders, and the way these are presented, especially to external stakeholders who are interested in the company's activities (Chetty et al., 2020). Appropriate and comprehensible disclosure of information about the socially responsible activities in the form of mandatory non-financial reporting can significantly help to connect and establish transparent relationships between companies and stakeholders. To this end, Directive 2014/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council (NFRD), amending Directive 2013/34/EU as regards the disclosure of non-financial and diversity information by certain large companies and groups, was adopted in 2014, and on 21 April 2021 the European Commission adopted a proposal for a Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) that would amend the existing reporting requirements under NFRD 2014/95/EU. The proposal: a) extends the scope to all large companies and all companies listed in regulated markets (except the listed micro companies); b) requires auditing (assurance) of the reported information; c) introduces more detailed reporting requirements, as well as a requirement to report mandatory EU sustainability reporting standards; and d) requires companies to digitally „tag“ the reported information to make it machine-readable, and record it into the European Single Point of Access represented by the Capital Markets Union Action Plan. The main objective is to help investors, consumers, policymakers, and other stakeholders to assess the non-financial performance of large companies. It should encourage these companies to develop more responsible approaches to business.

In the EU, this will affect approximately 49,000 companies, which according to Kreuch (2022) represents 75% of the turnover of companies operating in the Czech Republic, the obligation to disclose non-financial information will expand from the current tens of companies to more than 1,000 companies, as it will apply to companies that meet at least two of the following three criteria: number of employees over 250, turnover over € 40 million, and balance sheet total over € 20 million. Although the EC published a proposal for the CSRD in April 2021 and the European Parliament and the Council have reached a preliminary agreement on the CSRD, and the first phase of effectiveness is expected to be for the 2023 accounts, i.e., the first use in the fiscal year 2024, the final form has not yet been agreed. Under the CSRD proposal (2021), a phased approach to CSRD reporting is presented: 1 January 2024 for companies already subject to the NFRD; 1 January 2025 for companies not currently subject to the NFRD; and 1 January 2026 for the listed SMEs, small and non-complex credit institutions, and captive insurance companies. The main objective is to assist investors, consumers, policymakers, and other stakeholders in assessing the non-financial performance of large companies. It should encourage these companies to develop more responsible approaches to doing business. CSR reporting has been a strong topic of discussion among companies operating in the Czech market this year. Reporting is becoming crucial not only for those companies that will be under this legal obligation, but also for all other companies in the market, as they are also likely to be called upon to make the reporting of CSR activities in the supply and demand chains more transparent. Our study found out that 62 companies in the Czech Republic have not yet formally reported on their CSR activities, while 21 companies report on a regular basis, either by a separate report or as part of their annual report. In terms of readiness for CSR reporting, only 9 companies responded that they felt prepared, while 38 companies assessed themselves as poorly prepared or even completely unprepared. As shown by the studies of Orbaningsih et al. (2021), Valdez-Juárez et al. (2021), and Ortiz-Avram et al. (2018), disclosure of CSR activities is very important in terms of: achieving corporate objectives and satisfying stakeholder interests; protecting interests of employees; clarifying the extent of a company's contribution to CSR activities; and assisting in appropriate investment decisions. This all increases public confidence in a company's operational activities. According to Chijoke-Mgbame et al. (2020), importance of the issues that companies address by CSR varies primarily in relation to the sector in which they operate. Based on the assessment of the importance of non-financial reporting, Chijoke-Mgbame et al. (2020) and Ling & Sultana (2015) concluded that non-financial reporting should be viewed and given equal weight as is given to financial reporting, since it has been shown to have positive impacts on the performance of companies that present this information (voluntarily or mandatorily).

### **3.2 Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice in Poland (Alina Nowotarska, Rafał Baum; Jana Kozáková)**

Diversity of businesses in Poland is based primarily on division into foreign-owned companies, those owned by foreign entities in a host country, and local entities that operate completely independently, without ties to a multinational corporation, relying on their own capital. Foreign entities often play a big role in the local business environment on national, regional or even smaller scale. Such enterprises sometimes compete with local entities, and sometimes cooperate with them (Różanski, Kuzel, 2017). By analysing the results of the survey, we obtained 25 companies out of 100 surveyed that are part of a multinational corporation, most often as subsidiaries, less often as branches of a parent company. These companies most often have some autonomy in their management processes, but when it comes to compliance with the law, they are subject to the Polish law and directives of the multinational parent company, which has strategic importance in key decision-making processes. The second group of enterprises examined are local companies with domestic capital, and there are 75 enterprises in the group. The report „Annual CSR Outlook in Poland 2017“ analysed by Fijałkowska and Macuda (2019) shows that less than a half (46%) of large and medium-sized companies in Poland currently conduct CSR activities. Another 15% say that they are considering being engaged in CSR. The proportion of companies engaged in CSR is higher among those with foreign capital, while the highest value (61%) applies to companies with foreign capital only.

Sagan (2021) depicts in his research that institutional conditions are among the key ones for business operation in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. Any attempt to implement the concept of sustainability requires a change in institutional management if pro-social or pro-environmental activities have not previously been carried out and incorporated into corporate strategies (Mueller, Mueller, 2011). In the surveyed sample of 100 entities, the most represented category of companies in Poland is a limited liability company in the number of 60. Another large group is represented by joint-stock companies in the number of 22, while micro-enterprises (8), public companies (6), and limited partnerships (4) represent less numerous groups in the distribution of business entities in Poland.

The research focused on Regional Coverage in the Monitored Country (regional coverage in monitored country) was based on the distribution of enterprises' activities in terms of the area of their activities, and it was divided into 3 areas: area of the whole country, conducted in several regions (provinces), and activities only in one province. Poland is divided into 16 geographical areas (provinces) and this information contributes to the evaluation of the scale of activities of companies operating in Poland and the possibility for their expansion. Thus, the largest number of companies (66%) includes those that operate throughout the country, while 18% operate in several provinces, and the smallest (16%) conduct their business in only 1 region (province).

Considering the distribution of enterprises by the primary area of their operation (Primary Area of Operation), the largest group of the surveyed companies represents services (up to 43% of the respondents), followed by enterprises related to

production (36%), and trade (21%). This distribution coincides with the report of the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP), whose goal is to implement programmes for the development of the economy, supporting innovation and research activities of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well as regional development, export growth, human resource development, and use of new technologies in business. The latest survey for 2022 shows similar distribution of enterprises by the sector: 52.9% – service activities; 21.6% – commercial activities; 15.4% – construction activities; and 10.0% – industrial activities. Since 99.8% of companies are SMEs, in practice, the industry structure of SMEs corresponds to the structure of the entire sector (including large ones) (PARP, 2022).

The available literature most often describes CSR activities by tier form in large business entities, where a separate CSR unit is most often created (Vázquez-Carrasco, López-Pérez 2013, Soundararajan et al. 2018, Britel, Cherkaoui 2022, [in:] Sieminski, 2023). On the other hand, SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises), as it can also be seen from the PARP report, are the dominant form of economic entities not only in Poland, but also in most countries around the world. For the research of this monograph, 20 enterprises were selected from each of five groups, representing the size of the company – starting with micro entrepreneurs, and followed by small, medium-sized, large, and lastly very large enterprises with more than 500 employees. Due to different CSR-related legal requirements for each of these groups of companies, the need for studying each of them, as well as examining how the CSR policies are perceived and implemented, and how they are interrelated, is raised.

### **3.2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility of Polish Businesses**

For CSR to be effectively implemented in a company, it is very important for both management and lower-level employees to understand the nature of corporate social responsibility. It is crucial to understand that it is a tool aimed not only at improving the company's image, but also on conscious and systematic action focused on social and environmental issues often beyond the mandatory tasks of a given organization, while monitoring the benefits, both for the company itself and its stakeholders (Zychlewicz, 2015). Development of CSR in Poland owes much to the very subsidiaries of large transnational corporations operating in our market, as well as to parent companies with the relevant know-how. Who were pioneers of CSR in Poland, as they transferred many responsible solutions from their home countries to Poland (Jastrzębska, 2016). It is thanks to the proven practices of large multinational companies that CSR has become part of the organizational structure and has entered the management strategy. Implementation of CSR may proceed differently in different companies, since it depends on external factors (domestic and international legal and political conditions, consumer, and civic awareness of society, etc.), and internal factors of the company, such as organizational culture (Jastrzębska, 2016). Firley (2021) is inclined to conclude that socially responsible activities lead to the formation of sustainable development, as well as a source of competitive advantage for companies. Whether or not, the issue of implementing CSR activities

in a company is important to it, and it can be evidenced by having a separate unit responsible for implementing these activities. 12 out of 100 surveyed companies met this condition, 20 of them implemented the CSR policies under the Marketing department, 10 under the Human Resources (HR) department, and only 2 under the Compliance department. In contrast to that, the largest group, accounting for 56%, had no structure related to CSR (Table 29). This may reflect a less formal and decentralized approach to these issues, as well as lack of CSR reporting obligations related to legislative issues. Such small number of stand-alone CSR units can cause additional costs when creating an appropriate structure, and ensuring the responsibility of the designated person for the implementation of the adopted strategy.

**Table 29** – Frequency of CSRCH 1 – Incorporation of CSR in Organizational Governance Structure

|       |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Separate CSR Department                   | 12        | 12.0    | 12.0          | 12.0               |
|       | 2. Under the Compliance department           | 2         | 2.0     | 2.0           | 15.0               |
|       | 3. Under the Marketing department            | 20        | 20.0    | 20.0          | 34.0               |
|       | 4. Under the Human Resources (HR) department | 10        | 10.0    | 10.0          | 44.0               |
|       | 5. CSR is not organizationally integrated    | 56        | 56.0    | 56.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total  | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Planning CSR activities in an enterprise is a process that requires a lot of knowledge, commitment, and adequate financial resources. This mainly applies to large companies that allocate significant financial resources to the concept (Leoński (a), 2015). Before this can even happen, it is necessary to identify the CSR entities. This is duty of management, which also includes organizing, shaping, and then controlling CSR (Sokolowska, 2009). However, high implementation costs of CSR concepts were the reason for lack of planning in 3% of Polish enterprises. In 5% of the surveyed Polish enterprises, the main reason for not implementing the CSR activities was the lack of time, and in 2% of them it was lack of understanding of the CSR issues. In 4% of the companies surveyed, lack of human capital was the reason for the lack of planning of the CSR issues, and 7% of the companies do not implement these issues at all, as it is not mandatory. It may be comforting to know that as many as 79% of the companies plan the CSR issues (Table 30). This proves that the issue of implementing the CSR activities is becoming more and more popular, and that

many entrepreneurs understand that this issue is no longer just a matter of choice, but a requirement to increase their competitiveness in the market. Moreover, the activities related to the entry into force of the law of the European Parliament from 2024 [EU, 2022] will also oblige them to do so. Many companies realize that large corporations will cooperate with those stakeholders who also meet such requirements and carry out appropriate socially responsible activities, in order to meet the obligation to implement CSR activities.

**Table 30** – Frequencies of CSRCH 2 – CSR Strategic Planning

|       |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Lack of time                            | 5         | 5.0     | 5.0           | 5.0                |
|       | 2. Misunderstanding of the CSR concept     | 2         | 2.0     | 2.0           | 7.0                |
|       | 3. Lack of human capital                   | 4         | 4.0     | 4.0           | 11.0               |
|       | 4. High implementation costs               | 3         | 3.0     | 3.0           | 14.0               |
|       | 5. No obligation (we do not have to do it) | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 21.0               |
|       | 6. CSR is planned                          | 79        | 79.0    | 79.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total                                      | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Entrepreneurs are realizing more and more that CSR should have a strategic status, since the topic of social responsibility is becoming important also for business environment institutions, government, and investors. Companies with a CSR strategy get a lot of benefits from socially responsible activities, many of which were the motivation for implementing a CSR strategy (Skrzypek, Saadi, 2014). Motivations for conducting socially responsible activities can be evaluated in terms of a self-benefit that a company wants to achieve, as well as of a positive impact on the company's environment (Szot-Gabryś, 2013). In addition, the authors Grimstad, Glavee-Geo, and Fjærtøft (2020) emphasise that the thing that drives companies to implement CSR activities the most is the intrinsic motivation which motivates employees to perform CSR of their own accord more than the extrinsic one, since it is normal and desirable part of the company's strategy. In the survey conducted, the largest number of the surveyed companies (48%) did not have any targeted CSR activities, doing so only occasionally and without a specific plan in this regard (Table 31). For 38% of the companies, the motivation for CSR activities lies in the need to contribute to the so-called „public good“, while only for 7% of the surveyed companies these activities are the result of following the current trends or the so-called fashion, which can be related to marketing campaigns implemented by other entities. The same

applies to responses to undertaking CSR activities due to competition with other entities who already carry out such activities, but this concerns only a small number of entities (3%). The same result was noted for companies due to the pressure from the parent company that has already carried out such activities and thus expects its subsidiaries to also implement such strategy, in which CSR has already been included. Studying motivations that drive CSR and CSR activities is important because corporate social responsibility depends on the people who make decisions, that is, mainly managers and executives, and a lot depends on their intrinsic motivation (Graafland, van de Ven, (2006). Therefore, the issue of a positive attitude towards CSR activities can be crucial in implementing CSR activities. Major organizations, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the UN, and the EU consider CSR a development priority. However, these organizations are concerned that many companies consider CSR relevant only to large multinational enterprises (MNEs) (United Nations Industrial Development Report 2002/2003 [UNIDO, 2002]; [EC, 2002]. This may be the reason why CSR activities are implemented primarily by large corporations.

**Table 31** – Frequency of CSRCH 3 – Motivation for CSR Engagement

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Effort to follow current trends                                    | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 7.0                |
|       | 2. Effort to compete with competitors that carry out these activities | 3         | 3.0     | 3.0           | 10.0               |
|       | 3. Effort to contribute to the „public good“                          | 38        | 38.0    | 38.0          | 48.0               |
|       | 5. Pressure from the parent company                                   | 3         | 3.0     | 3.0           | 51.0               |
|       | 6. CSR is not purposeful, there is no effort                          | 49        | 49.0    | 49.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

### 3.2.2 CSR Activities of Polish Businesses

Employee volunteerism and social impact initiatives are crucial elements of CSR activities. However, they are not that popular among employees as it may be thought. They consist mainly of a business entity supporting its employees who work for various NGOs (Leoński (b), 2015). The author states that volunteering has a positive impact on the company, employees, as well as the local communities. Banaś’ (2019) research in the SMEs sector, based on an analysis of reports on employee volunteering in Poland and CSR strategies, shows that in the SME sector, familiarity with



the term „employee volunteering“ is limited. Employees have also often difficulties in recognising its forms.

In the surveyed group of Polish enterprises, 29% of them have employees who are very strongly involved in volunteering activities, as well as engaged in other social initiatives (Table 32). 15% of the enterprises reports that their employees are strongly involved in these initiatives, while in 18% of the enterprises employees are involved to a moderate (average) degree, and for 6% of them these activities are not important. Unfortunately, up to 32% of the enterprises declared that their employees did not show involvement in such initiatives, which may prove that entrepreneurs themselves are not interested in this type of activity. This may also point to the fact that those companies that do not engage in CSR activities are also inactive in volunteering and social initiatives. On the other hand, if these activities are embedded in the organizational culture of the company and are part of the strategy, too, such activities are willingly undertaken, often as cyclical events. Employee volunteering as a corporate social responsibility practice helps corporations by increasing employee satisfaction and retention, and by enhancing the company’s reputation and connections with stakeholders externally (Cycyota et al., 2016). Awareness of the benefits to the wide public is also very important, which can lead to intrinsic motivation of employees, and thus play a key role in the context of volunteering activities.

**Table 32** – Frequency of TBL 1 – Social CSR activities – Employee-Driven Volunteerism and Social Impact Initiatives

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 29        | 29.0    | 29.0          | 29.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 15        | 15.0    | 15.0          | 44.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 18        | 18.0    | 18.0          | 62.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 6         | 6.0     | 6.0           | 68.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 32        | 32.0    | 32.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Increased awareness in society means that there will be more and more entrepreneurs who realize that although short-term goals are often in conflict with so-called values, lack of social responsibility involves the risk of losing a good reputation (Jagielska, 2020). The survey of enterprises focused on agribusiness in Poland by Ratajczak and Woloszyn (2014) shows that the commitment of the surveyed enterprises to the local environment is at a significant level (83% of companies). Nature of these activities mainly revolves around issues of philanthropy and sponsorship.

Entrepreneurs often engage in charitable activities through donations or other forms of assistance, responding to the needs of others, the largest percentage of which was allocated to local charity events or to support for orphanages, schools, and kindergartens.

The entrepreneurs analysed in the monograph (Table 33) showed, on one hand, a strong commitment to social CSR activities – philanthropy and sponsorship for social issues (25%), on the other hand, 26% of them did not conduct such activities at all. This may reflect the difference in the size of the analysed companies from very large to micro-entrepreneurs, and therefore their different financial capabilities, as well as the issue of incorporating these activities into a company’s strategy. Very strong involvement was shown by 19% of the enterprises, which corresponds to a similar number of very large companies participating in the survey (20%). 19% of the entrepreneurs showed medium involvement in activities related to sponsorship and philanthropy, and the least, 11% of them showed no such activity at all. This proves that even the smallest Polish business entities are engaged in activities related to the issue described above, which coincides with research of other researchers. This is a good prognosis for increasing number of activities of this type, and for achieving greater sensitivity to social goals, as well as for these activities to be not only an image element, but also one of the elements of a company’s CSR strategy.

**Table 33** – Frequency of TBL 2 – Social CSR activities – Philanthropy and Sponsorship for Social Causes

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 19        | 19.0    | 19.0          | 19.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 25        | 25.0    | 25.0          | 44.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 19        | 19.0    | 19.0          | 63.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 11        | 11.0    | 11.0          | 74.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 26        | 26.0    | 26.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

In the realm of community engagement and collaboration, our focus primarily lies with local communities, non-profit organizations, local authorities, and partnerships with public administration entities, notably educational units. Here, we engage in activities including social investment, philanthropy, social dialogue, and social programs tied to business. Additionally, we concentrate on establishing long-term partnerships and evaluating our own involvement (Buczowski et al., 2016). A company can also run social campaigns to influence public attitudes through the media.

Such campaigns are aimed at helping those in need or raising public awareness of a specific topic, e.g., education related to environmental protection. Companies often establish foundations to share their experience and help those in need (Klosa et al., 2013). Proceed from our surveys, we can see a high level of involvement of companies in social initiatives, and cooperation with the local community. 21% of the companies show very high involvement in this type of activity, and 29% show high involvement, which comprises 50% of the total of the surveyed companies (Table 34). On the other part of the Likert scale, we have companies that do not show involvement in this direction at all, and there are 25% of them. The remaining entities show „average“ involvement (16%), and 9% of the entities showed slight involvement in this topic. This research suggests that most of the surveyed companies are undertaking social activism, unfortunately, there is still a quarter of those surveyed who do not show it at all. However, to be competitive nowadays, conscious companies undertake various activities in this field, e.g., partnerships and financial support, and establishment of foundations. This is evidenced by various rankings of community organizations oriented towards educating business entities, such as the FOB (Forum for Responsible Business). Companies wishing to be competitive participate in, among other things, competitions and rankings, and enter into partnership agreements, thus communication with consumers and other stakeholders is carried out. Research by Lii et al. (2013) confirms that sponsorship and philanthropy is in the opinion of consumers more effective than marketing, and they respond more favourably to companies that donate large amounts of money to a community or non-profit organization.

**Table 34** – TBL 3 – Social CSR activities – Community Engagement and Collaboration (Partnerships with Schools, Non-profit Organizations, and Local Authorities)

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 21.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 29        | 29.0    | 29.0          | 50.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 16        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 66.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 9         | 9.0     | 9.0           | 75.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 25        | 25.0    | 25.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

The environmental area in the CSR concept plays a very important role and contributes to sustainable development. One of the seven areas of the ISO 26000 standard is environmental concern, which includes minimizing of the negative environmental

impacts and sustainable waste management. Today, CSR and innovation are at the core of business competencies, emphasizing the importance of environmental innovation to describe products and processes that contribute to sustainable development (Rexhepi et al., 2013; [in:] Spyra, 2017) In social terms, the CSR concept presented and the company’s development strategy built on it can have a positive impact on the environment and safety of food products and consumers (Baum et al., 2013) This is why sustainable waste management, as well as Circular Resource Utilization and Material Efficiency are so important, and in our research focused on the environmental issue, these activities were brought to the attention of businesses. 22% of the companies surveyed stated that they dedicated very high importance to sustainable waste management and were striving to reduce production waste and be more and more efficient in this regard, and 24% of them adhered to this with a great commitment (Table 35). This issue is particularly important for companies that directly affect the environment, large corporations, especially in the manufacturing industry. Nowotarska (2020) examining the impact of Danone Poland through an analysis of the company’s report noted the company’s attention to high standards related to recycling and waste segregation, especially recycling. Products unsuitable for consumption were recycled. The same applied to plastic waste, which was collected by machines and transferred to third-party recipients for recycling, and this also applied to other products, such as paper and cardboard, scrap metal and hazardous waste [Danone Report, 2003–2006]. 21% of the companies surveyed in this study have a moderate approach to waste management, for 6% of them this management is unimportant, and 27% of them do not apply or have no connection with waste management. This may be related to the lack of awareness linked to waste management and the related CSR strategy, which is closely connected with the zero-waste concept that includes a hierarchy of waste reduction methods, including waste prevention, reuse, recycling, composting, incineration, and landfilling (Song et al., 2015).

**Table 35** – Frequency of TBL 4 – Environmental CSR activities – Waste Minimization Strategies and Sustainable Waste Management

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 22        | 22.0    | 22.0          | 22.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 24        | 24.0    | 24.0          | 46.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 67.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 6         | 6.0     | 6.0           | 73.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 27        | 27.0    | 27.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

More recent concept of the European Commission's Circular Economy (CE): an EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy [EU, 2015] is related to this concept, and it is based on the idea that waste in nature is regenerative, as it is naturally designed to restore natural material to the biosphere and use it indefinitely in a closed loop (Veleva et al., 2017). The studied material has shown that Circular Resource Utilization and Material Circular Resource Utilization is used by much fewer companies. However,, much more companies use waste management, and, in this case, there is 14% of the companies that are very strongly involved in this strategy, and 17% involved strongly (Table 36). A moderate approach to the topic has been adopted by 27% of the surveyed companies, while a negligible one is shown by 11% of them. The largest number of companies (31%) does not use the presented strategy. The concept of a circular economy contributes to sustainable development by reducing consumption of resources and impact on ecological systems. More and more companies are applying the theory in design strategies and business models to close, slow down, and narrow material loops (Brändström, et al., 2022). Reusing and extending the life cycle of goods are the most profitable and resource-efficient business models of the closed loop economy (Stahel, 2013). Closed-loop supply chain is an idea that is becoming a mandatory part of management in Polish companies aware of their role in protecting environmental resources (Kaczorowski et al., 2020). The companies described present different approaches to Circular Resource Utilization and Material Efficiency. Depending on the industry and size, companies are trying to respond to current challenges by adapting solutions to their own capabilities. Nevertheless, there is great potential in closing the matter and energy cycle, related to increasing efficiency and optimizing production.

**Table 36** – Frequency of TBL 5 – Environmental CSR activities – Circular Resource Utilization and Material Efficiency

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 14        | 14.0    | 14.0          | 14.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 17        | 17.0    | 17.0          | 31.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 27        | 27.0    | 27.0          | 58.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 11        | 11.0    | 11.0          | 69.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 31        | 31.0    | 31.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

**Table 37** – Frequency of TBL6 – Environmental CSR activities – Green Technology Investments for Environmental Progress

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 16        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 16.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 13        | 13.0    | 13.0          | 29.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 25        | 25.0    | 25.0          | 54.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 15        | 15.0    | 15.0          | 69.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 31        | 31.0    | 31.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Eco-innovations based on their design lead to reduction in material and energy inputs, while improving the quality of products or services. They can be implemented in technology, products and services, as well as institutional solutions (Rzeńca, 2015). Green technology companies in Poland have distinctive knowledge and competencies, the sources of which are both inside the organization and in its environment. Internal sources of knowledge can include current and former employees, as well as specialists and experts representing various fields of science who are constantly working with the company. External sources of knowledge are provided to the company by participants in the green technology market and government offices and institutions, company and industry associations, international organizations, as well as scientific research centres and universities. In the study conducted by Marczevska et al. (2018), it was found that among the most significant sources of knowledge regarding the green technology market and environment, Polish companies primarily consider customers and end-users. Nowadays, a new trend related to the concept of CSR and the environmental area is becoming the introduction of environmental criteria is being implemented into production processes, investments, and consumption, resulting in the expansion of the green economy sector, green economic growth expressed by the growing share of green economy sectors in the creation of GDP, as well as in the creation of green jobs (Ryszawska, 2013). Concerning the approach to green technology investment in the environmental progress, only 16% of the surveyed companies approach green technology with a very high level of commitment, and 13% of them with a slightly lower level of commitment, but they are also serious about it (Table 37). 25% of the surveyed companies approach these issues moderately, which may indicate that they do not fully trust the return on investment in new and especially green technologies. It may also be the question of the ability to take advantage of additional funds offered to this type of investment. 15% of the companies are reluctant to do so, and up to 31% of them do not realize or think about introducing them in their businesses at all. The reason may be the lack

of understanding the decision-making process and economic attractiveness underlying the introduction of green technologies. An entrepreneur, who understands what effects the implementation of a given solution will bring, will be able to take effective measures to apply the right means to implement them, thus will be more competitive in the market, which will significantly increase his attractiveness among suppliers, as well as customers.

From a business perspective, there are rational reasons why ethical management, as part of a CSR strategy, is so important and worth investing in. These are the first and foremost expectations and influence of external stakeholders (customers, regulators, regulatory bodies), and the levelling of losses from internal abuses (Gasparski et al., 2016), including corrupt abuses, mobbing, or discrimination. These issues are perfectly addressed in a company by a code of ethics, which according to Gasparski (2012), is understood as the sum of activities and material artefacts that lead within the organization to the existence and consolidation of the expected ethical standards of behaviour. It can be effective if it is properly constructed, addressed, and utilized. Relatively speaking, in Polish companies it was common to report information of the adopted anti-corruption policy, and anti-corruption and anti-competitive activities because of disclosures of GRI standards (GRI 2016: GRI 205 and 206) [in:] Karwowski et al., 2020). Our research shows that 29% of entrepreneurs declared a very strong commitment to the creation of a code of ethics and the introduction of Anti-Corruption Measures, while 15% showed a strong commitment to the issues outlined above (Table 38). A moderate approach to these topics was declared by 20% of the respondents, while only 6% of them found these activities unimportant. However, up to 30% of the respondents do not apply such activities at all. This may indicate the need to promote such activities among entrepreneurs and make them aware of the high importance of these activities for work efficiency and employee involvement, as well as for creating value for the organization. Whether codes of ethics will fulfil their role and be effective depends on whether the following elements are considered during their formulation: compatibility with the organizational culture and the values professed by employees and external stakeholders. A very important role in the formulation of codes of ethics is played by consultation with employees of the organization (Oleksiak, 2020), and this can be a guarantee of greater involvement of employees in the content of the code and consistent compliance with it.

**Table 38** – Frequency of TBL 7 – Economic CSR activities – Ethical Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 29        | 29.0    | 29.0          | 29.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 15        | 15.0    | 15.0          | 44.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 20        | 20.0    | 20.0          | 64.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 6         | 6.0     | 6.0           | 70.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 30        | 30.0    | 30.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Visser’s 2.0 model considers the voices of stakeholders and gives new meaning to social responsibility terms, such as collaboration, creativity, innovation, and interactivity (Visser, 2010). Freeman, the main developer of the stakeholder theory along with other researchers as Velamuri and Moriarty, stated that the main goal of CSR activities is to create value for key stakeholders, considering ethical values (Freeman et al., 2006). In the survey analysed (Table 39), the largest percentage of businesses (28%) indicated a very strong stakeholder engagement and transparent business performance, and not much smaller group (25%) indicated a strong commitment to this issue. 20% of the companies surveyed noted a medium engagement in these issues, while for 4% they were unimportant, and for 23% they were of no importance. The latter result may indicate lack of understanding of the term stakeholder, especially among micro and small businesses, and a misunderstanding of the concept of CSR. This proved the great role of educational campaigns and a greater willingness to cooperate, especially among small entrepreneurs. Deng, Kang and Low (2013), conducting the research focused on, among other things, the benefits brought to the company by undertaking the CSR activities, found out that companies that integrated interests of various stakeholders into their business activities not only increased their long-term profitability and efficiency, but also headed towards shareholder wealth and increase in corporate values, thereby supporting the enhancement of stakeholder value. Bizoń-Pożyczka (2022), in her study of the impact of stakeholders on environmental protection, recommends the necessity of communicating to stakeholders the organization’s actions leading to the reduction of the company’s negative impact on the environment or actions supporting nature conservation, while involving internal, as well as external stakeholders.



Table 39 – Frequency of TBL 8 – Economic CSR activities – Stakeholder Engagement and Transparent Business Performance Reporting

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 28        | 28.0    | 28.0          | 28.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 25        | 25.0    | 25.0          | 53.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 20        | 20.0    | 20.0          | 73.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 4         | 4.0     | 4.0           | 77.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 23        | 23.0    | 23.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Corporate social responsibility to employees means acting in accordance with ethical principles, caring for the well-being of employees, respecting diversity, and promoting equal opportunity and inclusion in the workplace regardless of age, gender, religion or disability. Promotion of employee involvement and internal communication, which allows employees to become socially responsible as well, is also very important. Such activities help to increase employee loyalty to the company, which strengthens their motivation to act, creativity and innovation, which indirectly leads to better results achieved by the organization (Jaworska, 2015). Based on the survey, it can be concluded that entrepreneurs operating in the Polish market have a moderate approach to Employment Practices and Diversity Integration, as the largest number of respondents (35%) opted to do so (Table 40). 12% of the respondents confirmed a very strong commitment to these issues, and 18% of them a strong commitment. For 8% of the entrepreneurs, these issues are negligible, and 27% of them do not adhere to diversity issues nor are they strangers to employee engagement and resolution. According to the study of Jaworska (2015), companies should consider professional development opportunities and motivation, employment and working conditions, as well as employee engagement or volunteering. According to Mazur-Wierzbicka (2018) and based on the study of hotel chains operating in the Polish market, measures taken towards employees and appreciation of human capital reduce turnover, strengthen employee engagement, which translates into increase in productivity and work efficiency, and has a tangible financial dimension. Unfortunately, still a large group of Polish entrepreneurs do not see tangible benefits of investing in human capital.

**Table 40** – Frequency of TBL 9 – Economic CSR activities – Inclusive Employment Practices and Diversity Integration

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 12        | 12.0    | 12.0          | 12.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 18        | 18.0    | 18.0          | 30.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 35        | 35.0    | 35.0          | 65.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 8         | 8.0     | 8.0           | 73.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 27        | 27.0    | 27.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

### 3.2.3 CSR Reporting in Poland

CSR reports are used to communicate between a company and its stakeholders. They are intended to provide information of the company’s application of socially responsible standards to employees, contractors, business partners, competitors, local communities, local authorities, NGOs, consumer organizations, shareholders, the media, and the university community (Rubik et al., 2016). They serve their function if they are a sincere form of dialogue with stakeholders and not just an image issue. Rubik et al. (2016) analyses in his article social responsibility monitoring report of the largest Polish companies compiled in 2015 by the CSR.pl Center Foundation, and it reveals that only 15% of the companies decided to report on CSR. After the entry of the EU directives obliging large business entities with more than 500 employees to perform CSR reporting (EC, 2014) to Poland in 2017, our research showed that only 19% of Polish companies reported on CSR, and 9% of them did it occasionally in the last 3 years, while 5% of them did it in a period longer than 3 years (Table 41). Unfortunately, up to 72% of businesses did not report on their CSR activities at all. Firstly, this may be caused because they are companies that report on social responsibility and have a reporting obligation related to the entry into force of the law, and these are the large companies that did so previously, too. This was often dictated by the fact that they were part of multinational corporations that required their foreign subsidiaries to do so, because it was part of their strategy, which included CSR activities. Other companies that were not required to do so, either did so occasionally or not at all, or did not even publish their socially responsible activities, as they did not associate them with the fact that they fell within the scope of such activities. According to the study by Krasodomska (2017), companies did not prepare CSR reports, as it was associated with a very large financial and time outlay, which was disproportionate to their effects due to the low interest in reports among stakeholders. The conclusion is that Polish companies need education about the subject, as well

as awareness of the necessity of these activities due to the increasing awareness of stakeholders, and in the situation of cooperation with companies that will use such reporting, it will become necessary. The year 2024 will be crucial, when another law [EU, 2022] comes into force, making reporting mandatory for smaller entities, too, and standardizes the requirements in this regard, making it easy to compare companies among themselves, also in terms of intra-sector comparison.

**Table 41** – Frequency of REP 1 – Formalization of the CSR Reporting Mechanisms

|       |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Regular reporting                           | 19        | 19.0    | 19.0          | 19.0               |
|       | 2. Occasional reporting (once per 3 years)     | 4         | 4.0     | 4.0           | 23.0               |
|       | 3. Limited reporting (over three-year periods) | 5         | 5.0     | 5.0           | 28.0               |
|       | 4. No formal CSR reporting                     | 72        | 72.0    | 72.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total  | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

CSR disclosure and reporting practices play an important role in the legitimacy process, as they may (or may not) be useful for increasing stakeholder knowledge of corporate activities and performance (Michelon et al., 2015). Voluntary reporting is increasing in number every year, although in Poland it is a rather slow process and mainly concerns large entities. The reason may be the awareness of the necessity of this type of activity in the future, and that it is inevitable. However, sometimes these voluntary disclosures do not reflect the actual activity. Bebbington and Larrinaga (2014) examine to what extent the company provides reliable information. Aluchna et al. (2019) emphasize that non-financial reporting has evolved from CSR and environmental communication to sustainability disclosure to integrated reporting. According to the authors, non-financial reporting is slowly becoming a mainstream practice in Poland, but only 6% of the surveyed Polish companies have published a CSR or environmental report. This places Poland far behind the rest of Europe. This is confirmed by our research (Table 42), according to which, up to 72% of the companies do not disclose their non-financial data at all. Partial disclosure of non-financial information occurs in 7% of the companies, and only brief and perfunctory information appears in case of 2% of the respondents. However, already 10% of the surveyed companies fully disclose information about CSR activities, and 9% of them disclose most of this data. Based on this, it can be said that this is a positive result, which highlights a slow upward trend. Unfortunately, when it comes to the quality of disclosures regarding reporting practices and disclosure of

non-financial information, according to the recent study by Matuszak and Różanska (2017), in most cases, companies' CSR disclosures did not comply with the new requirements. Therefore, the new reporting obligation should increase the scope and quality of non-financial disclosures among Polish companies.

**Table 42** – Frequency of REP 2 – CSR Disclosure in Reports

|       |               | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Fully      | 10        | 10.0    | 10.0          | 10.0               |
|       | 2. Largely    | 9         | 9.0     | 9.0           | 19.0               |
|       | 3. Partially  | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 26.0               |
|       | 4. Briefly    | 2         | 2.0     | 2.0           | 28.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all | 72        | 72.0    | 72.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total         | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

The CSR Directive (EU, 2014) requires that annual CSR reports, at a minimum, present information about policies, key risks, and their performance related to environmental, social, and labour issues, and respect for human rights, anti-corruption issues, and board diversity. Companies can prepare their non-financial reports using the existing national or international reporting frameworks, such as the standards developed by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) (Fiechter et al., 2022). However, there is a lot of latitude here in terms of different groups of companies or sectoral variation. Thus, for example, according to the study by Wojcik-Jurkiewicz (2020), banks operating in Poland continue to make different choices about the social issues presented – where and how they are published, and even which measurement procedures are used, while meeting socially responsible criteria. Our research shows that only 7% of the surveyed companies are very well prepared for reporting on CSR activities, 22% of the surveyed companies are already well prepared, and most of them (30%) are averagely prepared (Table 43). Companies realize that the reporting obligation is only a matter of time, and many of them are already preparing for it or at least taking some steps in this direction. Unfortunately, 17% of the companies are poorly prepared to report on CSR issues, and 24% of them are not prepared to do so at all. It is difficult to deduce what is the reason for this situation. Nevertheless, the absence of mandatory reporting, as observed in most companies, may indeed confirm this result. Therefore, the previously mentioned issue of unifying and standardizing the approach to non-financial reporting becomes necessary, and introduces greater transparency and comparability, which businesses have been expecting, and which was answered by the introduction of the latest CSR Directive [EU, 2022].

EU companies covered by the earlier directive [EU, 2014] have had plenty of time to prepare themselves for the reporting mandate. In preparation for reporting, these companies are likely to have begun collecting data, processing additional information, improved their internal reporting systems, reviewed CSR or established CSR governance or reporting committees. (Roychowdhury et al., 2019).

**Table 43** – Frequency of REP 3 – CSR Reporting Preparedness

|       |                          | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very well prepared    | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 7.0                |
|       | 2 Well prepared          | 22        | 22.0    | 22.0          | 29.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely prepared    | 30        | 30.0    | 30.0          | 59.0               |
|       | 4. Poorly prepared       | 17        | 17.0    | 17.0          | 76.0               |
|       | 5. Completely unprepared | 24        | 24.0    | 24.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total                    | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Reporting on CSR activities in companies often takes place without any plan and occurs occasionally. However, in companies for which CSR is important and such activities are regularly reported, there are specific procedures related to it, the outline of which is usually included in the organization's strategy. The resources that can be allocated by companies and regulatory agencies to procedures for implementing a system of CSR indicators are limited, depending on the type of business, and size of the organization or sector. It is important that, to the extent possible, new procedures for implementing CSR be synergistic with the existing management and reporting activities (O'Connor et al., 2008). Report preparation is a process that requires involvement of all stakeholders in the companies that prepare reports; in some of them a special CSR Department has been created, which handles issues beyond report preparation and all the CSR-related activities in the company. In our survey, only 9% of the companies declare having such a department, and in 5% of the companies CSR-related procedures are carried out under Law or Compliance department (Table 44). In 21% of the companies, procedures related to CSR activities are carried out under other departments. Only 2% of the companies use an external company that specializes in such activities, while as many as 63% of the companies do not prepare CSR reports at all, conduct such activities, nor do they have a specially designated unit or responsible person for such purpose.

**Table 44** – Frequency of REP 4 – CSR Reporting Processing Organizational Unit

|       |                                      | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--------------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. CSR department                    | 9         | 9.0     | 9.0           | 9.0                |
|       | 2. Compliance / Law department       | 5         | 5.0     | 5.0           | 14.0               |
|       | 3. Other department                  | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 35.0               |
|       | 4. External specialist (Outsourcing) | 2         | 2.0     | 2.0           | 37.0               |
|       | 5. No one (No reports)               | 63        | 63.0    | 63.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total                                | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

### 3.2.4 CSR Activities of Polish Businesses in Times of Global Crises

The COVID-19 pandemic has strongly affected the global economy. Closure of borders caused decline in international economic exchange and private consumption. Businesses in the entertainment, restaurant, tourism, and transportation industries, among others, suffered the most [wGospodarka.pl, 2020]. It has also been a very difficult time for citizens of many countries, primarily due to isolation and difficulties related to, among other things, access to health care, as well as fear and anxiety about the future, and fear of the possibility of contracting the virus. Despite the difficulties piling up, the public was quick to join in charity and help those in need. Also, for many entrepreneurs it was an opportunity to implement corporate social responsibility activities and create a positive image (Czajkowska, 2020). During a crisis, companies should strive to turn existing threats into opportunities. In the model of CSR implementation under crisis conditions developed by J. Jonker and M. De Witte, the organization's market position, stakeholder position, and investor confidence are implemented. Moreover, good atmosphere, appropriate corporate strategy, deep internal reflection, and implementation of innovations are other key elements (Gadomska-Lila, 2012).

Companies undertook several dedicated to citizens and institutions in need, including donating personal protective equipment to clinics, as well as disinfectant fluids, and arranging transport of the purchased medical equipment (Czajkowska, 2020). In addition to providing free drinks to the military, border guards and customs, fuel companies (including Orlen) also supported drivers waiting at selected border crossings by distributing both drinks and food. Orlen reduced fuel prices as much as possible, supported transport of masks to Poland (which were given to medical and uniformed services, among others), and provided nursing homes with protective masks, gloves, overalls, goggles and hand and surface disinfectant

fluids. BP provided hospitals with free fuel and Castrol oils, while Shell prepared fuel vouchers for hospital vehicles in Warsaw and filter masks for ambulance units in several cities in Poland. Circle K financed food parcels and necessities for seniors across the country. The companies also engaged in sewing masks for needy institutions. These brands included: John Cotton Europe, Motive & More, Krosno Len Men, KGHM, 4F, and Regioszulki. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Lotos Group volunteers produced masks for employees and their families, while the Reserved brand pledged to donate 1 million PLN for buying masks for infectious diseases hospitals. These actions represent just a small portion of the initiatives undertaken by Polish companies during this period. According to our survey, 46% of the responding companies were highly engaged in procuring protective measures for employee safety. In contrast, 33% showed deep involvement in protective measures specifically for employees, and 11% reported a minimal emphasis beyond the usual framework (Table 45). Only a small percentage of companies were involved to a degree below the minimum (7%), and 3% of them showed no involvement in these issues at all. As part of the so-called CSR “best practices”, companies have adapted office spaces, organized remote work, and taken care of ensuring the safety and health of employees (Jastrzebska, 2021).

**Table 45** – Frequency of CSR COV 1 – COVID-19 and CSR: Provision of Personal Protective Equipment for Employee Safety

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 3         | 3,0     | 3,0           | 3,0                |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 7         | 7,0     | 7,0           | 10,0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 11        | 11,0    | 11,0          | 21,0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 33        | 33,0    | 33,0          | 54,0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 46        | 46,0    | 46,0          | 100,0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

Source: own processing

During the COVID-19 pandemic, representatives of social welfare institutions often turned to local entrepreneurs for assistance, which made it possible to jointly engage in local communities. Necel’s research (2022) showed that the cooperation involved mainly organizing food aid. Entrepreneurs were also involved in helping purchase tests to diagnose COVID-19 infection, as well as purchasing and

organizing vaccinations for their employees, and in case of the financial sector, for example, supporting nationwide social campaigns: Zostanwdomu, Komputerdla ucznia, Bankwdomu, and organizing fundraisers for testing. Despite the drastic deterioration of income, banks continued providing cyclical social programmes, and also prepared special programmes related to pandemic mitigation for customers, employees, and local communities (Waliszewski, 2022). Among our surveyed entrepreneurs, we recorded 16% (32% in total) in cases of very strong emphasis increase over the normal framework, and strong emphasis within positive responses to the question of involvement in community outreach, and participation in the purchase of tests or vaccines for both employees and local communities, including hospitals and other health facilities (Table 46). 27% of the businesses responded that they showed weak emphasis, 12% of them minimal engagement above the normal framework, and 29% of the businesses showed no activity in this regard. This can be explained by the fact that many entrepreneurs fared very badly during the crisis, and despite the crisis shields being put in place, they barely survived the hard times, especially those in the most vulnerable industries during the pandemic.

**Table 46** – Frequency of CSR COV 2 – COVID-19 and CSR: Contribution to the Public and Local Community Support (Sponsorship, Participation in Testing and Vaccine Research, etc.)

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 29        | 29.0    | 29.0          | 29.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 12        | 12.0    | 12.0          | 41.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 27        | 27.0    | 27.0          | 68.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 16        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 84.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 16        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Remote work during the pandemic was one of the most common options for this type of work to minimize the risk of viral infection. Employers offered this solution to their employees, both for taking care of their children, minimizing the risk of infection, and completing work tasks. This was one of the benefits for employees, which indirectly contributed to generating savings for the employer and reducing environmental degradation. According to the surveys (Table 47), 16% and 22% of the



companies showed very strong and strong commitment, respectively, to providing additional benefits to employees during a pandemic, related to employee testing or the possibility of voluntary quarantine, while retaining the existing income. 24% of the surveyed entrepreneurs showed a weak commitment to such activities, and 16% of them performed only necessary (minimal) activities in this respect. A large group of entrepreneurs (22%) did not show any involvement in these activities. The reason may have been the lack of resources due to difficult financial situation associated with the crisis, as well as the lack of a clear CSR policy, or the absence of CSR activities in general, mainly in case of small and medium-sized enterprises, especially tourism and air traffic companies (Rababah et al., 2020). Research in the hotel industry in Poland has shown that CSR played a positive role during the pandemic and contributed to maintaining employment during the crisis, as well as offsetting employees' stress associated with the situation (Golembki, 2021). The pandemic made it extremely difficult for companies to fulfil their most fundamental CSR commitments, represented as the base of Carroll's CSR pyramid: maintaining „economic performance and sustainability“ (Carroll, 2021). This was particularly evident in behaving fairly, regardless of legal conduct, and engaging in activities that promote prosperity and friendly company behaviour toward stakeholders (Zhang, Xie, and Morrison, 2021). It is difficult to predict the possible long-term impact of the general CSR behaviours that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as their effect in future attitudes towards the business world. In any case, the fact that many companies not only continued with but even strengthened their CSR efforts further during the COVID-19 pandemic is a good predictor of business community engagement, and also of the future of CSR (Schwartz et al., 2023).

**Table 47** – Frequency of CSR COV 3 – COVID-19 and CSR: Extra Employee Benefits during the Pandemic (On-site Testing, Voluntary Quarantine with Income Compensation, etc.)

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 22        | 22.0    | 22.0          | 22.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 16        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 38.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 24        | 24.0    | 24.0          | 62.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 22        | 22.0    | 22.0          | 84.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 16        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

After arising the conflict in Ukraine, Poland unequivocally side with Ukraine, providing material, political and diplomatic support. The assistance was multifaceted, including advocacy and support for Ukraine in international forums, enabling transit of military aid and humanitarian assistance to refugees, as well as providing its own equipment, armaments, and ammunition (Dojwa-Turczyńska, 2023; Gromek, 2022). Companies also helped their Ukrainian employees, who often needed this support as well, thus supporting the families of those affected by the conflict. Many of these activities are continuing, and involvement related to the war in Ukraine did not prevent companies from implementing their planned CSR strategy, which is continuing to carry out all the planned projects (Smorzewska-Mickiewicz, 2022). Help from Poles and Poland resonated in other societies, as well. In the survey of the Euroskopia project conducted in nine EU countries in November/December 2022, Europeans most often identified Poland (29%) as the country that helped Ukrainian refugees the most (Lewicki, elaborated, 16.01.2023), followed by Germany (13.4%), and Italy (11.2%) ([in:] Dojwa-Turczynska, (2023). According to our survey, 14% of the entrepreneurs were very strongly committed to financial mobilization for humanitarian support in the face of the conflict in Ukraine, and 26% of them showed strong commitment to these activities (Table 48). 32% of the surveyed businesses indicated weak involvement, i.e., weak emphasis over the normal framework, 7% of them offered minimal financial and humanitarian assistance, and 32% of the entrepreneurs did not engage in this type of assistance at all. This may be indicative of the financial capacity of Polish enterprises, and the fact that companies, which had a plan within their CSR strategy to help those in need in the face of the crisis, really engaged in such activities. This applies primarily to large and very large enterprises.

**Table 48** – Frequency of CSR UKR 1 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Financial Mobilization for Humanitarian Support

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 21.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 28.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 32        | 32.0    | 32.0          | 60.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 26        | 26.0    | 26.0          | 86.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 14        | 14.0    | 14.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

War in Ukraine triggered a migration in Europe with the largest scale since post-war Europe. The largest number of refugees crossed the border with Poland, and they were met with massive, spontaneous and all-around support and assistance from Poles. According to the Border Guard [Straż Graniczna, 2022] [in:] Staniszewski (2022), 8.254 million people entered Poland through the border crossings with Ukraine, including 6.427 million who returned back to Ukraine (December 7, 2022). By the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine, almost 1.4 million citizens of Ukraine were registered in Poland by the end of September 2022 (Staniszewski, 2022). In the survey in question, a greater number of entrepreneurs were involved in helping refugees and the efforts to integrate them. Very strong involvement was shown by 21% of them, 25% showed strong involvement in helping refugees, and the same number showed little more than obligatory involvement in such assistance (Table 49). On the other hand, the percentage of entrepreneurs with minimal or no involvement was at a similar level as in the previous statement: 7% and 22%, respectively. This confirms our observations of the close relationship between the CSR policies and involvement in aid activities, concerning entrepreneurs.

**Table 49** – Frequency of CSR UKR 2 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Refugee Assistance and Integration Efforts

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 22        | 22.0    | 22.0          | 22.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 29.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 25        | 25.0    | 25.0          | 54.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 25        | 25.0    | 25.0          | 79.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

With the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Poland introduced regulations containing several facilitations for Ukrainian citizens, including full access to the labour market and the labour market services and instruments. Arrival of Ukrainian citizens in the territory of Poland may provide Polish labour market with positive impulses, among other things, by filling the currently existing shortages of workers in certain professions and industries (Flaszyńska, 2022). The scale of foreign employment, as indicated by the number of work permits issued annually, has seen a significant

increase, approximately tenfold, reaching 420,000 in 2020. Additionally, statements regarding the assignment of work rose about sevenfold to over 1.5 million in the same year. Ukrainian citizens most often work in industries, such as industrial processing (33%), construction (18%), activities in the field of administrative and support services (including temporary work agencies) (16%), transport and warehouse management (14%), and agriculture (7%) (CeSAR [in:] Flaszyńska, 2022). On March 12, 2022, the Polish government introduced additional facilitation for employers and Ukrainian citizens when it comes to employment opportunities, introducing an Act by which Ukrainian citizens, who have crossed the Polish borders by February 24, 2022, can perform work in Poland without the additional obligation to obtain a work permit for a foreigner or a declaration on entrusting work to a foreigner in the register of statements (Law of March 12, 2022). Therefore, Polish entrepreneurs, thanks to the assistance of the Polish government, undertook easier procedures when employing refugees, especially since they were eager to hire them, especially in the above-mentioned industries. Our research (Table 50) shows that 12% of the entrepreneurs were very strongly involved in hiring refugees from Ukraine, and 16% of them showed strong involvement in these issues, while 37% of them showed weak rise emphasis over the normal framework, which indicates that there is goodwill in many companies and willingness to hire refugees, supported through the Polish government. Some companies are cautious or need more time to change their approach, which is why 9% of them showed minimal involvement in the employment issues, while 26% of them were not interested in hiring refugees from Ukraine at all. Nevertheless, great credit should be given to entrepreneurs, as we are among the top countries in Europe most committed to helping Ukrainian citizens.

**Table 50** – Frequency of CSR UKR 3 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Employment Opportunities for Displaced Individuals

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 26        | 26.0    | 26.0          | 26.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 9         | 9.0     | 9.0           | 35.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 37        | 37.0    | 37.0          | 72.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 16        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 88.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 12        | 12.0    | 12.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Corporate social responsibility is not a goal for doing business, but rather a way of doing business in a way that considers the company's spheres of influence on the environment (Matten et al., 2004). This has been particularly evident during the ongoing energy crisis, which has been a real test of corporate social responsibility. Saving energy and improving energy efficiency remain the most important issues that companies must face today, especially evident in the construction sector. Energy-saving technologies have proven to be important tools for improving company efficiency and cost management (Iqbal et al., 2021). Based on the study of Polish transport companies during the energy crisis, Stanislawska (2022), we have found out that despite the difficult market situation, each of the surveyed companies tried to support their contractors during the crisis, seeking favourable solutions to protect them from severe effects of the ongoing energy crisis, using, for example, accelerated payment methods for suppliers. Each of the surveyed companies noted the need to conduct investments in renewable energy sources, focusing on green solutions in transport and transit centres or offices they manage. In the survey in question, 17% of the companies showed very strong emphasis on investments in energy-efficient technologies, and the largest number of those surveyed (35%) showed strong emphasis on the same issue (Table 51). In contrast, 25% of the companies declared little involvement above normal, by activities concerning new technologies, regardless of the energy crisis, and 12% of the surveyed companies showed only minimal involvement in this area. Only 11% of the companies declared that they had not made any additional activities related to the energy crisis, in terms of investments in energy-efficient technologies for sustainable operations. This may be related to the type of business of the companies, where the introduction of new technologies did not have much impact on the environment and operational cost savings of operations.

**Table 51** – Frequency of CSR ENG 1 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Investments in Energy-Efficient Technologies for Sustainable Operations

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 11        | 11.0    | 11.0          | 11.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 12        | 12.0    | 12.0          | 23.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 25        | 25.0    | 25.0          | 48.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 35        | 35.0    | 35.0          | 83.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 17        | 17.0    | 17.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

The „energy crisis“ has caused that companies look not only for new technological solutions to reduce energy consumption, but also the issue of lowering the temperature in buildings has been one of the key measures, which has a relative effect on energy savings, thus lowering costs for the company. The measures that have been taken in Poland in connection with the „energy crisis“ include, thanks to new technologies, not only intelligent adjustment of temperature to the needs of users, but also, among other things, the control of outdoor lighting with an astronomical clock and motion sensors, solar panels for heating water, and replacement of internal combustion forklifts with electric and battery-powered ones. All these measures have reduced the company’s average electricity consumption by 20%, compared to the previous year (Stanislawska, 2022). In our survey, 13% of the companies had intensified efforts to optimize building temperature for energy conservation, and 26% of the companies showed a strong commitment to lowering building temperature (Table 52). The largest number of the companies (40%) showed initiative in this area, but the commitment was not as strong as in the previous companies. 12% of the companies declared only minimal involvement in these issues, and 9% of them undertook no action at all in this respect. The overall balance indicates a trend towards saving energy by lowering the temperature in company premises, and only a small percentage of the companies did not attach importance to this, perhaps due to the lack of capacity in this area, or micro-enterprises that operated on a small scale. Some companies opted for an automatic control system so that indoor temperature and humidity would reach a set value (Qin et al., 2022, [in:] Wu et al., 2022). This not only made them save energy, but also improved the comfort of employees indoors (Wu et al., 2022).

**Table 52** – Frequency of CSR ENG 2 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Optimizing Building Temperature for Energy Conservation

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 9         | 9.0     | 9.0           | 9.0                |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 12        | 12.0    | 12.0          | 21.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 40        | 40.0    | 40.0          | 61.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 26        | 26.0    | 26.0          | 87.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 13        | 13.0    | 13.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Ru et al. (2018), as cited in Corbos et al. (2023), propose that to secure the commitment of employees and enterprises in reducing the use of electrical appliances for energy conservation, it is crucial to foster a belief that their approach to saving energy has both cost-saving and environmental benefits. They suggest that in the context of energy conservation, individuals are more likely to act if they believe that their efforts will have a significant impact on cost savings and the environment. In our survey focused on restrictive use of electrical equipment to reduce energy consumption, only 6% of the respondents were very strongly in favour of such measures (Table 53). 15% of the companies showed a strong commitment to these measures. In contrast, the largest number (35%) showed that their activities focused on the issue of the use of electrical equipment were within the average framework of slight commitment above the applicable standards. 15% of the companies showed minimal commitment, and 29% of them declared no action in this respect. This may indicate the lack of commitment to conserve energy, especially among employees. Energy conservation is an activity that helps solving environmental problems. Therefore, it is important to involve stakeholders in action to promote and raise awareness of the role of each use of electrical equipment to care for the environment which we live in, as well as appropriate communication through reporting on and communication of CSR activities related to a sustainability environmental action strategy. This can have the desired effect and reinforce a sustainable business model (Brunton et al. 2015).

**Table 53** – Frequency of CSR ENG 3 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Restricting Electrical Appliance Use to Conserve Energy

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 29        | 29.0    | 29.0          | 29.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 15        | 15.0    | 15.0          | 44.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 35        | 35.0    | 35.0          | 79.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 15        | 15.0    | 15.0          | 94.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 6         | 6.0     | 6.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

### 3.2.5 Summary of the Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice in Poland

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is an important aspect of corporate management, requiring involvement of all stakeholders. It is a tool that not only improves a company's image, but also engages it in social and environmental activities. Subsidiaries of multinational corporations have played a key role in the development of CSR in Poland, transferring solutions from their home countries, and making CSR an element of management strategy and organizational structure (Zychlewicz, 2015).

We conducted our research based on a diverse group of companies in Poland, especially those with foreign capital, those created by foreign entities in the country, and local companies independent of multinational corporations. The research was based on a sample of 100 Polish companies, of which 25 were subsidiaries of multinational corporations, and 75 were companies with domestic capital. The results indicate that companies with foreign capital are more likely to engage in activities than domestic companies. The survey shows that the largest number of companies (66%) operates nationwide. The remaining companies operate in 3 or fewer provinces. Institutional conditions play a key role in the sustainable development of enterprises. Research has shown that only 46% of large and medium-sized companies in Poland conduct CSR activities, with 61% of the foreign-owned companies engaging in this issue (Sagan, 2021). In the surveys conducted, limited liability companies dominated (60), together with joint-stock companies (22), and the rest included micro-enterprises (8), public companies (6), and limited partnerships (4). As for the area of their focus, companies involved in services (43) were surveyed, followed by manufacturing (34) and trade (21) sector. Since Poland is a country with diverse distribution of companies, in terms of capital and area of activity, it requires adjusting CSR strategies and considering institutional conditions.

Few of the companies surveyed have separate CSR structures, which can involve additional costs and responsibilities. High implementation costs can sometimes be an obstacle, but most companies plan CSR activities. Our research indicates that about 56% of the companies do not have a CSR-related structure, and only 12% of the companies have a separate unit responsible for these activities. For many companies, the cost of implementation is a challenge, and 79% of them are planning CSR activities that promote formation of sustainable development, as well as those that can be a source of competitive advantage for companies. (Firley, 2021).

Motivations for CSR activities can stem from the need to contribute to the public good or to follow trends (Skrzypek, Saadi, 2014). The implementation of CSR depends on the motivation of managers, and a positive attitude is crucial in the process of implementing CSR. It is noteworthy that the concept of CSR is becoming increasingly popular, and the introduction of the European Parliament Act (EU, 2022) will further popularize CSR activities. Motivations for conducting CSR activities vary, but more and more companies are finding out that they are the key to increasing their competitiveness in the market.

Employee volunteering and community initiatives are still not very popular among employees, despite the potential of these activities. Surveys indicate that many



small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Poland have insufficient knowledge of the subject. Only 29% of the companies have employees who are very involved in volunteering, and 32% of them do not engage in these initiatives at all, which may be due to the lack of interest among entrepreneurs. However, companies that integrate these activities into their organizational culture reap the benefits of employee satisfaction, enhanced reputation, and relationships with external stakeholders. There is a need for increased awareness of the social benefits of CSR and greater sensitivity to social goals. In addition, philanthropy and sponsorship are important elements of CSR, and most companies engage in community outreach. However, there are still companies that do not show commitment in this area, which can affect their reputation. Social activities and partnerships with local communities are an important aspect of CSR, helping companies build good relations with the community and influence public attitudes. Awareness of the term „employee volunteering“ is still limited in many companies, with some companies showing no interest in such activities (Banas, 2019). Employee volunteering can increase employee satisfaction, and strengthen a company’s reputation and connections with external stakeholders (Cycyota et al., 2016).

CSR incorporates concern about the environment, aiming at minimising negative ecological impacts and managing waste efficiently. The research underscores that CSR and eco-innovation are becoming key elements of business competencies, particularly relevant to describing products and processes that contribute to sustainable development. Companies that implement CSR into their strategy can positively affect the environment and product safety. The results of the survey indicate that 22% of the companies surveyed are fully focused on sustainable waste management, and 24% of them are engaged in this area with a strong commitment. However, some companies, especially small ones, may take a moderate or negligible approach to waste management. Concepts of „zero waste“ and „circular economy“ and the need for adapting these ideas in business strategies are increasingly important. For many companies, a closed-loop supply chain and efficient use of resources are important elements of management and environmental protection. Baum et al. (2013) highlight the positive impact of CSR on the environment, and product and consumer safety, as well as the commitment of Polish companies to recycling, segregation and waste recovery (Nowotarska, 2020), and an increasing number of companies refer to the „circular economy“ in their business strategies (Brändström et al., 2022). Eco-innovation, as one of the elements of environmental protection, aims at reducing material and energy inputs, while improving the quality of products and services (Rzeńca, 2015). Green technology companies in Poland benefit from both internal knowledge, coming from employees and experts in various fields, and external knowledge, provided by customers, state institutions and scientific research centres (Marczewska et al., 2018). The trend is to introduce environmental criteria into production processes and investments, which supports the development of the green economy sector and job creation (Ryszawska, 2013). However, only 16% of the companies are investing in green technologies with a very high level of commitment, which may be due to the lack of understanding of the benefits and availability of funds.

Ethical management, including the fight against corruption and discrimination, is important for both social and business reasons, in line with stakeholder expectations (Gasparski et al., 2016). A code of ethics can be effective when it is properly structured and includes consultation with employees (Oleksiak, 2020). However, 30% of the companies do not take anti-corruption measures, which suggests the need for greater promotion of such measures. Stakeholder engagement and transparent business performance is the key to create value for key stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2006), as evidenced by Polish companies. More than 50% of them approach it with a high and very high level of commitment, but 23% of the surveyed companies do not attach importance to this, indicating the need for education and encouraging collaboration, especially among small entrepreneurs. Research suggests that companies that consider the needs of various stakeholders achieve long-term profitability and corporate value, which contributes to stakeholder value (Deng et al., 2013). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) means to employees adhering to ethics, looking out for their well-being, respecting diversity, and promoting equality in the workplace. Fostering employee engagement and effective communication contribute to greater loyalty and motivation, which strengthens company performance (Jaworska, 2015). Research shows that Polish entrepreneurs have a moderate approach to these issues, with 35% showing a moderate commitment, 12% showing a very strong commitment, 18% showing a strong commitment, and 8% of them considering these issues unimportant. This suggests the need for a greater commitment to CSR, especially in human capital aspects. Research indicates that investing in employees translates into increased productivity and efficiency (Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2018). However, many companies still fail to recognize these benefits.

Social reports are a tool for companies to communicate with their stakeholders and inform them about the application of socially responsible standards (Rubik et al., 2016). In Poland, the CSR reporting obligation applies mainly to large companies, but only 19% of them report on their activities (Rubik et al., 2016), and 72% of the companies do not report on CSR activities at all. This may be due to the lack of understanding of the necessity of these activities and the need for education in this area (Krasodomska, 2017). The entry into force of the 2022 EU directive will also make it mandatory for smaller companies to report on CSR, which may increase awareness and engagement (EU, 2022). However, the quality of the existing reports may be questioned, but harmonization of the reporting standards is important (Bebbington, Larrinaga, 2014). Non-financial reporting has been developing slowly in Poland, and only 7% of the surveyed companies are very well prepared for CSR reporting (Fiechter et al., 2022). CSR activities are often implemented without a plan, but companies that report regularly have specific procedures in place (O'Connor et al., 2008).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the global economy suffered, leading to a decline in international trade and consumption, with the entertainment, restaurant, tourism, and transportation industries particularly affected. Citizens experienced isolation and difficulty with accessing health care, which created fear and uncertainty (Lesniewicz 2020). However, the public became involved in charitable activities, and entrepreneurs saw an opportunity to implement CSR activities (Czajkowska, 2020).

In a crisis, companies should turn threats into opportunities, using market position, investor confidence and strategy (Gadomska-Lila, 2012). Czajkowska's (2020) research showed that companies took initiatives, such as providing medical facilities with personal protective equipment, and ensuring transport of medical equipment. COVID-19 also prompted companies to support local communities by organizing food supplies and testing. In the survey analysis, 46% of the companies showed commitment to purchasing protective equipment, 33% of them to protective measures for employees, and 11% reached a minimum level. Only 7% of the companies were not engaged in these activities. Companies took care of employee safety by adjusting office spaces and organizing remote work (Jastrzebska, 2021). During the pandemic, 16% of the companies showed a strong commitment to providing benefits to employees, such as testing and voluntary quarantine with pay. 24% of the companies acted in a limited way, 16% minimally, and 22% took no action in this regard. The pandemic has caused that companies have maintained their CSR commitments, but many of them have strengthened their CSR activities (Schwartz et al., 2023). This is a good forecast for the future of CSR, despite the difficulties posed by the pandemic (Carroll, 2021; Zhang, Xie and Morrison, 2021).

In the context of the conflict in Ukraine and companies pursuing social responsibility (CSR), Poland has been multifaceted in its involvement in helping Ukraine, offering material, political and diplomatic support. The Polish market was involved in efforts to help Ukrainian refugees, offer money, material goods and shelter, as well as military assistance (Dojwa-Turczyńska, 2023). Among the companies surveyed, 14% of them showed a very strong commitment to financial mobilization for humanitarian support, and 26% of them showed a strong commitment. In contrast, 32% of the companies engaged weakly, 7% minimally, and 32% did not support it at all. In the context of refugee assistance and integration, 21% of the companies showed very strong commitment, 25% strong commitment, and 25% little commitment beyond the existing framework. In contrast, 7% of the companies offered minimal support, and 22% did not engage in such activities. Refugees from Ukraine had plenty of employment opportunities at Polish companies, with 12% of the companies very strongly involved in this issue, and 16% of them showing strong involvement. However, up to 37% of the companies engaged in this area were slightly above the standard framework, 9% minimally, and 26% showed no interest in hiring refugees. Polish companies have shown willingness to help refugees, whether through financial support, integration activities or employment opportunities, although some companies needed time to change their approach in this regard. Compared to other European countries, Poland was one of the countries most involved in helping Ukrainian citizens. Many of these activities are continuing, the war in Ukraine did not prevent companies from implementing their planned CSR strategy, and they continued to carry out the planned projects.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is not a goal of business itself, but the way of doing business and having impact on the environment (Matten et al., 2004). The „energy crisis“ has underscored the importance of CSR as a business management tool. Saving energy and improving energy efficiency are now priorities, as evidenced by the research focused on Polish transportation companies, which showed that

these companies sought to support contractors during the „energy crisis“ by investing in renewable energy sources (Stanislawska, 2021). Survey results indicate that many companies have been committed to investing in energy-saving technologies, with 35% of them declaring a strong commitment, and 17% of them showing a very strong commitment to such investments. The „energy crisis“ has also prompted companies to lower temperatures in buildings to save energy. These measures include smart temperature adjustments, lighting controls, solar panels, and converting forklifts to electric (Stanislawska, 2022). The survey results show that 39% of the companies have taken initiatives in lowering temperatures in buildings, with 26% of them declaring a strong commitment. Finally, restrictions on the use of electric appliances to save energy were only weakly supported by companies, with only 6% of them declaring a very strong commitment, and 15% of them strongly committed. Energy conservation is a key component of CSR activities that helps solving environmental problems and promoting a sustainable business model (Brunton et al., 2015).

CSR is not only a matter of corporate image by building ethical capital, but above all improves the flow of resources in a company in many forms, including financial, human, and technological, which ultimately affects the long-term growth of the company's value, prompting further research in this area.

### **3.3 Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice in Slovakia (Mária Urbánová, Jana Kozáková)**

Understanding diversity of businesses within a region or country requires being able to distinguish between a local firm that is a subsidiary of a multinational company and a local company that operates entirely independently. Localness of company as a part of global company: 48 small businesses that are individual components of a larger global firm are included in this category. These businesses frequently have an intricate organizational structure where the local unit retains some autonomy, while abiding by more general strategies and directives established by the multinational parent company. The international parent firm may have a word in the decision-making process. 52 companies that are completely autonomous and unrelated to any foreign multinational corporation are on the opposite side of the coin. Most often, local people or organizations own and run these businesses. These businesses may create CSR programmes that are specific to the requirements of the local community and may not be required to follow international CSR guidelines unless they voluntarily do so. Similar results are seen in the article by Kádeková et al. (2020), which indicates almost 86% of food companies with foreign ownership engage in CSR initiatives, compared to only 40% of companies without foreign ownership. On the other hand, study of Pakšiová (2016) shows that most businesses are owned by foreign investors, more than 24 out of 50 businesses (which equals 48%) have a production orientation towards international markets, and only 10 businesses (20%) are focused on the domestic market.

Empirical results based on 896 various Slovak companies in the research of Chebeň et al. (2015) demonstrate that, when a company establishes a marketing strategy and incorporates it into its corporate strategy, the legal form of the business organization is a significant influence of the sustainability philosophy. Number of companies and the percentage of each legal form's representation for each of the multiple company legal forms in the dataset of the monograph showed that limited liability corporations (LLCs) are the most common (74), followed by joint-stock companies (20), sole proprietorships (4), and limited partnerships and public companies, with the lowest representation of 1 per each. This provides a clear summary of the distribution of business entity types within the sample.

The information about the regional coverage sheds light on how businesses are dispersed geographically within the community under observation. It divides them into three groups based on their regional reach: those with a focus on their own area, those with a presence in several areas, and those with broad national reach. This data is useful for examining the geographic reach and market penetration of businesses operating in the country under observation, assisting stakeholders in understanding the scope of their operations and possible opportunities for market expansion. 46 companies represent a group of businesses that only conduct business in the area in which they are physically situated. 34 businesses falling under this category are spread across the country. They have branch offices and expand their business beyond their original area. 20 companies which have established operations and coverage over the entire monitored country are included in the „Whole Country“ category. These businesses operate across the country and are present in several areas, encompassing most of or whole country's area.

The category „Primary Area of Operation“ shows that 33 businesses focus largely on activities connected with trade. 28 companies have main business in the service industry. Other 39 businesses are largely engaged in activities associated with production. These businesses focus on producing, processing, or developing tangible goods. According to Gavurova et al. (2022), construction, retail, manufacturing, and services used the CSR idea less frequently than agricultural and tourism industries, and whether a corporation may be considered as a CSR-oriented depends on its size. Micro-enterprises are 45% less likely than medium-sized businesses to be seen as CSR-oriented, and tiny businesses are 33.5% less likely. The five categories representing different company sizes include the same 20 organizations, demonstrating a balanced distribution of businesses across various size ranges. These categories are specifically chosen to list metrics corresponding to each company size. This balance indicates that the dataset intends to represent a varied spectrum of businesses, from tiny micro-enterprises to huge conglomerates. According to Tešovičová and Krchová (2022), large companies are the ones that are the most involved in CSR initiatives in ecology. This raises the need for additional research of potential legislative changes, including the possibility of extending the requirement of CSR activity reports to small and medium-sized businesses.

### 3.3.1 Corporate Social Responsibility of Slovak Businesses

Interrelationships between governance systems and CSR seem to be flexible, depending on the institutional and national framework, state of the economy, and impact of the industry (Young and Thyl, 2014). Practitioners view corporate governance as encompassing both structural and behavioural elements, as well as obligations and deeds beneficial to shareholders and stakeholders. Krajnakova et al. (2022) discovered that various economic factors may have had an impact on how different CSR aspects evolved. Due to the long-term advantages of CSR, businesses continue to engage in socially responsible activities even in unfavourable macro-economic times. Different methods by which businesses integrate CSR into their governance models reflect the variety of perspectives and considerations within the field of corporate social responsibility. A company's strategic orientation and dedication to tackling social and environmental issues can be inferred from the decision of where to place CSR within a corporation.

**Table 54** – Frequency of CSRCH 1 – Incorporation of CSR in Organizational Governance Structure

|       |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Separate CSR Department                   | 31        | 31.0    | 31.0          | 31.0               |
|       | 2. Under the Compliance department           | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 38.0               |
|       | 3. Under the Marketing Department            | 24        | 24.0    | 24.0          | 62.0               |
|       | 4. Under the Human Resources (HR) department | 20        | 20.0    | 20.0          | 82.0               |
|       | 5. CSR is not organizationally integrated    | 18        | 18.0    | 18.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total  | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Managers and business owners are aware of the connection of CSR and increasing brand recognition, commercial prospects, and competitive advantage (Gavurova et al., 2022). 31 businesses emphasize their commitment to CSR as a key component of their business operations by having a dedicated CSR department. 7 businesses have integrated CSR functions into their compliance division; coordinating CSR initiatives with efforts to comply with legal and regulatory requirements. 24 businesses have assigned CSR duties to their marketing divisions, demonstrating an emphasis on CSR as a strategy for improving their brand's reputation and image. CSR is also heavily emphasized as part of employee engagement and workplace culture, as

evidenced by the fact that 20 corporations have integrated CSR within their HR departments. Decentralized or less formal approach to CSR management is shown by the fact that 18 organizations have not fully integrated CSR into their organizational structure (Table 54).

**Table 55** – Frequency of CSRCH 2 – CSR Strategic Planning

|       |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Lack of time                            | 1         | 1.0     | 1.0           | 1.0                |
|       | 3. Lack of human capital                   | 1         | 1.0     | 1.0           | 2.0                |
|       | 4. High implementation costs               | 1         | 1.0     | 1.0           | 3.0                |
|       | 5. No obligation (we do not have to do it) | 6         | 6.0     | 6.0           | 9.0                |
|       | 6. CSR is planned                          | 91        | 91.0    | 91.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total                                      | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Recognizing the importance of internal communication and its ability to enhance business performance is essential. Equally critical is the practical implementation of internal communication in management processes, including corporate social responsibility, as highlighted by Bednárík, J. (2019). Regarding the issues that the corporation and the targeted stakeholder groups have in common, the argument is made that stakeholders should be involved in the strategic planning process from the beginning in the context of CSR communication (Walter, B. L., 2014). Lack of time was mentioned by one organization as a problem with CSR strategy planning. A different organization identified shortage of human capital as a problem. High implementation costs were marked as a barrier by another organization. Six organizations said they did not know they were required by law or a regulation to engage in CSR initiatives. This implies that these businesses might consider CSR as optional rather than required. Out of the surveyed companies, 91 organizations, which constitute the majority, reported having a strategic plan for CSR. This suggests a proactive attitude to CSR, with these businesses actively organizing and carrying out programmes that go along with their objectives for social responsibility. Halagová and Hricová (2009) highly advise businesses to concentrate on developing a comprehensive CSR strategy that outlines objectives and procedures for execution and assessment (measuring). A strategy like this is essential for enhancing CSR initiatives because it enables businesses to integrate CSR into their core operations, which is essential for CSR success.

**Table 56** – Frequency of CSRCH 3 – Motivation for CSR Engagement

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Effort to follow current trends  | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 7.0                |
|       | 2. Effort to compete with the competitors that carry out these activities | 13        | 13.0    | 13.0          | 20.0               |
|       | 3. Effort to contribute to the „public good“                              | 50        | 50.0    | 50.0          | 70.0               |
|       | 4. Effort to strengthen marketing activities                              | 20        | 20.0    | 20.0          | 90.0               |
|       | 5. Pressure from the parent company                                       | 4         | 4.0     | 4.0           | 94.0               |
|       | 6. CSR is not purposeful, there is no effort                              | 6         | 6.0     | 6.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

For organizations pursuing sustainability, management actions based on these various ethical motivations for CSR and sustainability lead to distinct operational activities, which in turn have very different impacts on the company's financial performance (Schaltegger, S. and Burritt, R. 2018). The findings of Kim, C. H., and Scullion, H., (2013) reveal that although companies rarely implement SR primarily with the intention of boosting employee motivation, when companies assess the outcomes, the issue of individual motivation emerges as one of the key advantages of doing so. More significantly, their empirical analysis highlights the significance of diverse cultural, institutional, and political issues that affect how motivation and CSR are linked internationally. 7 businesses participate in CSR initiatives, because they perceive it useful to keep up with societal and corporate development. They possibly think that implementing CSR principles is necessary to remain up to date and satisfy ever-changing stakeholder and customer needs. 13 businesses are driven to participate in CSR because they want to compete with other businesses. This shows that they see CSR necessary for remaining competitive and meeting industry standards. 50 companies, or a sizable share, participate in CSR with the primary goal to advance the „public good“ or social well-being. 20 businesses employ CSR as a tool to improve their marketing initiatives, and 4 businesses participate in CSR initiatives because they feel required to do so by their parent corporation. This suggests that a higher-level institution has included CSR in a bigger corporate strategy. According to 6 companies, there is no clear goal or effort to drive their CSR activity (Table 56). According to Graafland (2012), executives that attach intrinsic value to CSR will be prepared to trade off some income for attaining a higher level of CSR. Therefore, it might be expected that executives that are intrinsically motivated for CSR will be more involved in CSR, too.



### 3.3.2 CSR Activities of Slovak Businesses

Many employees throughout the world lack a deeper purpose in their work, which has an alarmingly low motivation and engagement level. The strategy aims to actively engage employees in sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) concerns in order to foster a sense of purpose in their work. Increased participation is therefore anticipated, which in turn has a favourable impact on the effectiveness and profitability of businesses. This study suggests an employee-centred model that businesses can adopt as a roadmap for increasing sustainability, CSR, and engagement (Casey, D., and Sieber, S. 2016).

**Table 57** – Frequency of TBL 1 – Social CSR activities – Employee-Driven Volunteerism and Social Impact Initiatives

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 14        | 14.0    | 14.0          | 14.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 27        | 27.0    | 27.0          | 41.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 31        | 31.0    | 31.0          | 72.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 17        | 17.0    | 17.0          | 89.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 11        | 11.0    | 11.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

In our research, 14 businesses have made a significant commitment to employee-led social CSR initiatives (Table 57). They almost certainly have established initiatives and a solid corporate social responsibility culture. 27 businesses are firmly committed to employee-driven volunteerism and social impact projects. They show a strong commitment to CSR-related initiatives by actively encouraging and supporting their employees' participation in such events. Employee-driven CSR initiatives are implemented by 31 enterprises on average. Even if their programmes are not as strong or extensive, they are aware of the significance of such activities. There is very little employee-driven volunteerism and social impact projects in 17 organizations. Because of other corporate goals or restrictions, they may only devote a small amount of time or resources to these activities. 11 businesses take absolutely no part in employee-driven volunteerism or social impact activities. This may suggest that either they do not support CSR programmes or do not recognize them necessary for being a part of their business culture or strategy. According to the study of Cook, G., and Geldenhuys, D. J. (2018), love serves as the main motivator for employees to engage in CSR. Compassion is sparked by romantic love. Generosity is stimulated by

compassion in an atmosphere that supports it. Being kind inspires both the giver and the receiver with a sense of optimism and motivation. Volunteering by employees has proven to be beneficial for both the firm and the community (Mohanty, J., 2022).

**Table 58** – Frequency of TBL 2 – Social CSR activities – Philanthropy and Sponsorship for Social Causes

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 12        | 12.0    | 12.0          | 12.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 27        | 27.0    | 27.0          | 39.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 34        | 34.0    | 34.0          | 73.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 20        | 20.0    | 20.0          | 93.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Companies are now expected to contribute to their communities through charity. According to Kotler and Lee (2015), in definition of corporate social responsibility in their research, this commitment involves using corporate resources and discretionary business practices to enhance community well-being. 12 businesses from our research (Table 58) are leading the way in social responsibility. Their dedication to charitable giving and supporting social issues is unwavering, and they actively look for opportunities to significantly improve society. This degree of commitment frequently includes large monetary contributions, collaborations with organizations, and assistance with a broad range of social initiatives. 27 businesses that responded „strongly“ are strongly dedicated to charity and social sponsoring. Majority of the companies (34) are aware of the value of philanthropy and sponsorship for social issues albeit some may not give it the same priority as the others. 20 companies provided a „negligibly“ response. When it comes to charity, executives increasingly perceive themselves as trapped between critics calling for ever-higher levels of „corporate social responsibility“ and investors pressuring them to maximize short-term profits, according to Porter and Kramer (2002). Many businesses have also attempted to respond by increasing the strategic nature of their giving, but what passes for strategic philanthropy is frequently neither strategic nor particularly effective as philanthropy. Menon, S., and Kahn, B. E., (2003) found out that only if the sponsorship action is elaborated on, will higher congruence between the sponsoring and social issue boost positive ratings of CSR for the issue promotion. If the ability to elaborate on the sponsorship is unrestricted, however, lower congruence raises favourable ratings of CSR for advocacy advertising.

**Table 59** – Frequency of TBL 3 – Social CSR activities – Community Engagement and Collaboration (Partnerships with Schools, Non-profit Organizations, and Local Authorities)

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 22        | 22.0    | 22.0          | 22.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 43.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 31        | 31.0    | 31.0          | 74.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 14        | 14.0    | 14.0          | 88.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 12        | 12.0    | 12.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

In an environment where distrust is mutually escalating among society, government institutions, and commercial entities, constructing a relationship model based on responsibility proves challenging. It is necessary to come to understanding that corporate social responsibility (CSR) of business will allow reaching a qualitatively new level of relations with society and partners (Ralko, et al., 2022). Table 59 shows a range of levels of community collaboration based on CSR activities within companies, with 12 of them showing no involvement, 14 having negligible commitment, 31 maintaining an average level of engagement, 21 demonstrating strong dedication, and 22 exhibiting a very strong commitment to establishing partnerships with local authorities, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions. Majority of the businesses gave an “average” response, and they understand the importance of community involvement and collaboration. They boldly look for chances to collaborate with local governments, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions to address regional problems and promote community well-being. Their involvement often involves funding educational initiatives, neighbourhood gatherings, or neighbourhood improvement initiatives. Research of Njapha, Z., and Lekhanya, L. M., (2017) shows that most of their respondents think they do benefit from a local business in a variety of ways. The results also show that the benefits include employment growth, capacity building, technology, contracting, economic possibilities, and social investment.

**Table 60** – Frequency of TBL 4 – Environmental CSR activities – Waste Minimization Strategies and Sustainable Waste Management

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 24        | 24.0    | 24.0          | 24.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 27        | 27.0    | 27.0          | 51.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 22        | 22.0    | 22.0          | 73.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 16        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 89.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 11        | 11.0    | 11.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Employees and customers want businesses to act responsibly and show corporate social responsibility (CSR) by sponsoring their communities and providing labour opportunities and equipment for specific initiatives. When non-profits ask for food donations, they should try to work with nearby businesses, riding the CSR wave and rewarding the contributors with positive pressure (Finn, S. M., 2011). There is space for improvement in promoting awareness and encouraging more companies to include waste-related efforts in their CSR strategy, as seen by the existence of businesses responding with „not at all“ (11) or „negligible“ (16) answers (Table 60). The higher proportion of businesses responding with „averagely“ (22), „strongly“ (27), and „very strongly“ (24) suggests an upward trend in environmental responsibility commitment. These businesses actively promote sustainable waste management techniques, and work on lowering waste creation. They might put into practice cutting-edge waste minimization techniques, make investments in long-term waste infrastructure, and actively take part in circular economy activities. Results of the study of Tudor et al., (2008) indicate that CSR and environmental citizenship principles can be successfully applied to the efficient management of medical waste. For instance, this study showed that each of the case study trusts was able to realize cost savings for waste management as a result of more precise material diversion from disposal.

**Table 61** – Frequency of TBL 5 – Environmental CSR activities – Circular Resource Utilization and Material Efficiency

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 15        | 15.0    | 15.0          | 15.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 25        | 25.0    | 25.0          | 40.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 29        | 29.0    | 29.0          | 69.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 14        | 14.0    | 14.0          | 83.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 17        | 17.0    | 17.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

The concept of a circular economy, which integrates Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to attain sustainable development, is a significant framework. Fortunati et al. (2020) note that the ideas of circular economy and CSR are increasingly becoming intertwined. Good CSR strategies can be conducted, designed, and developed using circular economy methodologies. A sizeable percentage of businesses (17%), while not a majority, claimed they did not prioritize material efficiency or engage in circular resource consumption within their CSR initiatives (Table 61). This shows that the business models or CSR plans of these firms may not have taken environmental sustainability approaches into account. Only minimal activity provides them with concerning this CSR component was reported by 14 companies. Even though they aren't completely disengaged, many organizations might only be beginning to embrace sustainable practices or them little funding. The „average“ category includes the largest proportion of respondents. These 29 businesses show efficient material use and circular resource utilization. They undoubtedly use some sustainable methods, but it's possible that they haven't properly incorporated them into their main business processes yet. A sizable number of businesses (25) actively prioritize efficient use of circular resources and material resources, which may entail extensive recycling programmes, supply chain optimizations, and waste reduction activities. CSR efforts of 15 businesses are exemplary in their dedication to the environment. They give a high priority to the efficient use of materials and circular resource utilization and they probably use cutting-edge sustainability techniques and tactics to reduce waste and increase resource efficiency. The assessment findings (by Niyommaneerat, W., 2023) demonstrated that the CSR projects in the case study were compatible with the CE model because the majority of the CE concepts assessed by the performance indicators were already in place. This study aims to identify key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure and monitor CSR projects in terms of their CE ideas, and promote development of CSR projects that contribute to adopting a CE business model.

**Table 62** – Frequencies of TBL6 – Environmental CSR activities – Green Technology Investments for Environmental Progress

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 37        | 37.0    | 37.0          | 37.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 14        | 14.0    | 14.0          | 51.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 23        | 23.0    | 23.0          | 74.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 10        | 10.0    | 10.0          | 84.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 16        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Through CSR practices and accreditation of environmental management systems, many businesses anticipate their revenues will grow (Dubravská, et al., 2020) results imply that a connection between adoption of these two management techniques and adoption of CSR influences business profit. Green technology innovation, more in need of excellent comprehensive competence, good environmental protection consciousness, strong sense of social responsibility, continuous innovation, and risk-taking spirit of TMT, represents a high-risk, high-investment and long-cycle economic activity with double positive externalities (Wang et al., 2022). 16 businesses don't appear to be actively pursuing investments in green technology as part of their CSR programmes. 10 companies with a „negligibly“ response show low influence on green technology (Table 62). 23 businesses with an “averagely” response is making some efforts to use green technologies as part of their CSR initiatives because they understand how important it is to do so. Only 14 companies used „strongly“ as response. 37 businesses consider green technologies as foundation for their attempts to practise environmental responsibility. In an effort to set the pace for environmental advancement, they might make large investments in green technology research, development, adoption, and promotion. In Slovakia, both CSR ideals and green marketing practices are frequently misrepresented in annual reports or absent, as Supeková and Sz wajca (2018) states.

Findings by Xue et al. (2022) reveal that corporations generally engage in greater CSR after following the campaign, and are subject to the level of firm corruption-related expenses, which supports the value relevance purpose of CSR. Companies could be persuaded to enhance their accountability processes in those nations where press freedom empowers accountability because doing so enhances their disclosure of the tools used to prevent corrupt activity. When global investment portfolio managers incorporate risk assessment into their evaluation and decision-making processes, these findings offer intriguing information (Aldaz Odriozola, M., and Álvarez Etxeberria, I., 2021). The Table 63 shows a wide range of firm responses

**Table 63** – Frequency of TBL 7 – Economic CSR activities – Ethical Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 19        | 19.0    | 19.0          | 19.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 29        | 29.0    | 29.0          | 48.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 31        | 31.0    | 31.0          | 79.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 8         | 8.0     | 8.0           | 87.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 13        | 13.0    | 13.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

to economic CSR initiatives linked to moral leadership and anti-corruption efforts. There is space for increased awareness and improvement in the implementation of effective anti-corruption and ethical governance measures within CSR strategies, as a notable number of companies demonstrate strong (29 companies) and very strong (19 companies) commitment to these principles, but a significant portion still remains moderately engaged (31 companies), with a smaller number showing negligible (8 companies) or no engagement at all (13 companies). It highlights growing understanding among businesses of the value of promoting ethical standards and reducing corruption concerns. This dedication to ethical governance and anti-corruption measures in CSR projects is essential for fostering an environment that is fair and transparent for business, as firms play a critical role in promoting moral standards and responsible economic behaviour.

Tate, Ellram, and Kirchoff (2010) claim that stakeholders are putting more and more pressure on businesses to integrate the triple bottom line of social, environmental, and economic responsibility into their operations and supply chain management strategies. According to Nadanyiova et al., (2021), more than 50% of businesses actively engage in CSR initiatives and demonstrate social responsibility to stakeholders. A CSR report can be (Habek, 2017) a useful tool for communicating both with internal and external stakeholders, but to serve its purpose, it must contain the information that the interested parties will be looking for. In Table 64 we can see that 18 out of 100 businesses claimed that their CSR initiatives did not include transparent performance reporting or stakeholder involvement. The implication is that these companies may not value open communication with stakeholders or transparent reporting. 23 businesses reported a very low level of participation in CSR initiatives. These firms may be in the early stages of incorporating stakeholder engagement and transparent reporting into their business models, although they are not completely disengaged, or they may only have a limited budget to devote to these initiatives. Majority of the respondents falls into the „average“ category,

with 25 businesses exhibiting a mediocre degree of dedication to commercial CSR initiatives. 21 firms in total demonstrate a substantial level of commitment, actively promote open communication with stakeholders, and give thorough and transparent reporting on their performance across different dimensions. With their remarkable dedication to commercial CSR initiatives, 13 firms stand out. Companies play a crucial role in establishing trust and displaying their commitment to stakeholders and society at large in an era where transparency, accountability, and ethical behaviour are vital. More businesses are anticipated to step up their efforts in these areas as awareness of the value of the economic CSR initiatives continues to rise, helping to create a more ethical and sustainable corporate environment.

**Table 64** – Frequency of TBL 8 – Economic CSR activities – Stakeholder Engagement and Transparent Business Performance Reporting

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 13        | 13,0    | 13,0          | 13,0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 21        | 21,0    | 21,0          | 34,0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 25        | 25,0    | 25,0          | 59,0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 23        | 23,0    | 23,0          | 82,0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 18        | 18,0    | 18,0          | 100,0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100,0   | 100,0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Findings of Pfajfar et al., (2022) support the hypothesis that employee-oriented CSR is positively correlated with perceptions of the value of CSR initiatives for society, customers, and employees. CSR initiatives should focus on specific stakeholders (customers and employees) rather than society as a whole, in order to maximize the quality of relationships. Young, S., and Thyl, V. (2009) conclude that there are discrepancies between publicly expressed claims on CSR and how they are operationalized within an organization, making status of labour a stakeholder problem. The emphasis appears to be on financial and environmental sustainability, with employee relations strategies and related workplace management aspects receiving less attention. The Table 65 shows a heterogeneous environment when it comes to economic CSR initiatives, involving diverse hiring practices and inclusion. While a sizeable fraction of businesses (10 in total) does not engage in these practices at all, a smaller subset of businesses (9 in total) indicates very few activities. They might only be beginning to understand the value of inclusivity and diversity in the workplace, or they might just be giving these efforts a small portion of their limited resources. 30 organizations show a moderate degree of commitment. These



companies may have started some diversity-related initiatives, but they might not have fully incorporated them into their core HR and CSR strategies. The majority (31 companies) has a strong commitment. 20 companies pay an extraordinary level of attention to developing inclusivity and diversity within their workforce. They give these measures a high priority, and are perhaps pioneers in developing diverse and welcoming workplaces.

**Table 65** – Frequency of TBL 9 – Economic CSR activities – Inclusive Employment Practices and Diversity Integration

|       |                  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very strongly | 20        | 20.0    | 20.0          | 20.0               |
|       | 2. Strongly      | 31        | 31.0    | 31.0          | 51.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely     | 30        | 30.0    | 30.0          | 81.0               |
|       | 4. Negligibly    | 9         | 9.0     | 9.0           | 90.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all    | 10        | 10.0    | 10.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total            | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

### 3.3.3 CSR Reporting in Slovakia

Stefanikova, Moravcikova & Nadanyiova (2015) define CSR reporting as a process of communicating social and environmental impacts resulting from economic activities of an organization which implemented the concept of corporate social responsibility to its business model. Incorporation of CSR data into yearly reports of businesses is the newest trend; these reports are referred to as integrated reports. 59% of the Slovak respondents of the study by Moravcikova et al., (2015) indicated knowledge of the CSR idea. These companies firstly learned about the idea from company campaigns and CSR reports, and then from television, radio, and print advertisements. Table 66 shows that only 21 businesses out of all the enterprises have adopted a strict CSR reporting methodology. They frequently provide annual reports that are in-depth.

**Table 66** – Frequency of REP 1 – Formalization of the CSR Reporting Mechanisms

|       |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Regular reporting                           | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 21.0               |
|       | 2. Occasional reporting (once per 3 years)     | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 42.0               |
|       | 3. Limited reporting (over three-year periods) | 16        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 58.0               |
|       | 4. No formal CSR reporting                     | 42        | 42.0    | 42.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total  | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

This shows a firm dedication to openness and incorporation of CSR into their corporate strategy. The same number of businesses also submits CSR reports; however, they do so less frequently – roughly once every three years. 16 businesses report on CSR, but their reports are produced over longer time frames, usually lasting longer than three years. The largest group, which included 42 companies, stated that they lacked a systematic CSR reporting system. This may indicate that these companies do not focus or place a strong emphasis on transparent reporting of their CSR actions.

**Table 67** – Frequency of REP 2 – CSR Disclosure in Reports

|       |               | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Fully      | 22        | 22.0    | 22.0          | 22.0               |
|       | 2. Largely    | 22        | 22.0    | 22.0          | 44.0               |
|       | 3. Partially  | 16        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 60.0               |
|       | 4. Briefly    | 11        | 11.0    | 11.0          | 71.0               |
|       | 5. Not at all | 29        | 29.0    | 29.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total         | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

The majority of previous studies have concluded that the practice of CSR disclosure quality is preferable to CSR disclosure quantity. Furthermore, the study of Lubis et al., (2019) discovered that firm factors, including firm age, firm size, shareholder power, investors, and board of directors had an impact on the degree of CSR disclosure. The survey firms' responses to the question of CSR disclosure reflect a wide range of areas. A considerable commitment to openness and ethical business practices can be seen in the fact that 44 of them, or around half of them, either fully or largely integrate CSR-related material into their reports (Table 67). Contrarily, a sizable number of businesses (56 in total) either participate in partial or scant CSR disclosure or do not prioritize it at all, indicating different degrees of importance placed on informing stakeholders about their CSR programmes and impacts. While some businesses place a strong emphasis on thorough and open reporting as a key component of their CSR strategy, others either disclose a small amount of information or may not give CSR disclosure any attention at all. CSR disclosure in reports is essential for establishing credibility and displaying a commitment to ethical, social, and environmental responsibilities in times when stakeholders, including investors and customers, seek transparency and responsible business practices more than ever. Michelon et al., (2015) discovered that businesses using three main practices in relation to disclosure proxies don't offer information of higher calibre, which we interpret as proof of a symbolic application of these practices. Overall, their research indicates that there is growing scepticism regarding effectiveness of CSR reporting methods, perceived as accountability instruments. The study of Cho et al., (2015) that focuses on environmental disclosure shows that, except for the weighted disclosure score, industry membership is less strongly connected with disparities in reporting. Finally, the findings suggest that investors do not favour CSR disclosure, in apparent contradiction to the claims set by more recent mainstream investigations.

Companies that submit CSR reports have greater audit quality, better audit committee quality, longer tenure for auditors, and fewer dismissals of auditors than companies that do so. Stakeholder theory is supported by data (Chan et al., 2021). 19 businesses of our research (Table 68) reported being particularly well prepared for CSR reporting, which is a sizable number. This reveals a strong dedication to openness and ethical corporate conduct. 21 companies, which is nearly equal numbers, believe they are ready to disclose CSR data. 41 organizations, as the largest group, said they were averagely ready to report on CSR. The breadth and efficiency of these organizations' reporting processes may still need to be improved, despite their awareness of the value of reporting. 11 businesses said they were not adequately ready to report on CSR. This shows that they are unable to effectively report on their CSR efforts due to difficulties or constraints on their resources or operational procedures. 8 businesses made up a small group that said they were totally unprepared for CSR reporting. This shows that CSR reporting is not prioritized or that the value of open communication is not understood.

**Table 68** – Frequency of REP 3 – CSR Reporting Preparedness

|       |                          | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Very well prepared    | 19        | 19.0    | 19.0          | 19.0               |
|       | 2 Well prepared          | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 40.0               |
|       | 3. Averagely prepared    | 41        | 41.0    | 41.0          | 81.0               |
|       | 4. Poorly prepared       | 11        | 11.0    | 11.0          | 92.0               |
|       | 5. Completely unprepared | 8         | 8.0     | 8.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total                    | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

### 3.3.4 CSR Activities of Slovak Businesses in Times of Global Crises

Companies that go beyond what is required or expected when assisting their laid off employees will be remembered and rewarded with improved loyalty, increased productivity, and a lasting reputational benefit for many years (Kramer, M. R., 2020).

**Table 69** – Frequency of CSR COV 1 – COVID-19 and CSR: Provision of Personal Protective Equipment for Employee Safety

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 14        | 14.0    | 14.0          | 14.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 10        | 10.0    | 10.0          | 24.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 15        | 15.0    | 15.0          | 39.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 36        | 36.0    | 36.0          | 75.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 25        | 25.0    | 25.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

While a significant percentage of businesses demonstrate a strong (36 firms) and very strong (25 firms) commitment to employee safety during the pandemic, some continue to place only a minimal (10 firms) or weak (15 firms) emphasis on measures beyond the normal framework, with a minority offering nothing beyond the norm (14 firms), suggesting space for improvement in their CSR responses to the particular challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic (Table 69). To ensure everyone's health, it appears crucial to standardize claims, achieve global labelling, and employ equipment that has been uniformly approved by all nations (Cambien et al., 2021).

**Table 70** – Frequency of CSR COV 2 – COVID-19 and CSR: Contribution to the Public and Local Community Support (Sponsorship, Participation in Testing and Vaccine Research, etc.)

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 36        | 36.0    | 36.0          | 36.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 14        | 14.0    | 14.0          | 50.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 22        | 22.0    | 22.0          | 72.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 16        | 16.0    | 16.0          | 88.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 12        | 12.0    | 12.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

According to the study results (Farmaki et al., 2022), international companies' CSR responses to COVID-19 are motivated by adherence to organizational values, achieving recognition for prompt response to COVID-19, altruistic motives to combat COVID-19, and congruence with social movements that create expectations from customers to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most businesses employ a response plan to CSR communication by alerting clients to their COVID-19 responses regarding a variety of concerns, such as changes in business procedures and the pandemic's effects on health. Enterprises have a moral obligation (Asante Antwi et al., 2021) to update their risk assessments, and work more closely with government organizations to fund global health and safety inspections. To withstand subsequent unidentified pandemics that would have the same potential to interrupt business operations, CSR initiatives must be proactive. It can be seen from the Table 70 that most businesses (36), which appear to be continuing performing their CSR activities within the established framework, may not have materially changed their community

support initiatives in reaction to the pandemic. Lesser number of companies (14) has made the barest of changes, showing a mediocre level of dedication to addressing pandemic-related community needs. The „weak emphasis“ category (22) is made up of businesses that have done more to aid their local populations during the pandemic. Businesses with a „strong emphasis“ (16) on community support exhibit a high level of dedication and make a significant contribution to the pandemic-related issues. Set of businesses that have gone above and beyond and demonstrated remarkable dedication to the public and local community support during the COVID-19 pandemic is listed in the „very strong emphasis“ category (12).

**Table 71** – Frequency of CSR COV 3 – COVID-19 and CSR: Extra Employee Benefits during the Pandemic (On-site Testing, Voluntary Quarantine with Income Compensation, etc.)

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 21.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 15        | 15.0    | 15.0          | 36.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 22        | 22.0    | 22.0          | 58.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 32        | 32.0    | 32.0          | 90.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 10        | 10.0    | 10.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

According to the findings of Wampole, A. A. (2022), structural equation modelling (SEM), there is a substantial positive correlation between internal CSR related to the pandemic and employee motivation, and a significant negative correlation between external CSR related to the pandemic and employee motivation. Analysis showed that the connections between these two categories of the pandemic-related CSR and employee motivation were competitively mediated by both the satisfaction of the basic and non-basic needs. However, there were no discernible differences between the overall effects of the pandemic-related internal and external CSR on employee motivation. Asante Antwi et al., (2021) state that to diagnose, protect, treat, and rehabilitate victims and those threatened by pandemics and other emergencies that affect the stability of an organization, companies must develop creative and consistent activities to educate their stakeholders and increase their commitment to safeguarding future enterprise-based defence mechanisms. Majority of businesses

(21) had their typical employee benefits in place during the pandemic, indicating that they may not have made significant changes to their employee assistance programmes in reaction to the crisis (Table 71). A smaller number (15) made modest additions to standard benefits, demonstrating a fundamental level of commitment to helping their employees throughout the pandemic. Businesses with the response „weak emphasis“ (22) showed a stronger level of dedication by providing greater employee benefits tailored specifically to the pandemic. Companies that put a „strong emphasis“ on employee well-being during the epidemic (32) demonstrated this commitment with extensive and specialized benefits created to handle the difficulties posed by COVID-19. A limited set of businesses that have gone above and beyond and shown remarkable attention to offering comprehensive employee benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic are represented by the „very strong emphasis“ category (10). While some businesses kept their standard perks or only made minor changes, other showed a strong commitment to promoting employee well-being, and highlighting the changing role of CSR in resolving difficulties brought on by COVID-19.

**Table 72** – Frequency of CSR UKR 1 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Financial Mobilization for Humanitarian Support

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 37        | 37.0    | 37.0          | 37.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 35        | 35.0    | 35.0          | 72.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 93.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Significant international protection troops that can guarantee security of humanitarian operations in Ukraine are crucial and urgently required (Southall et al., 2022). International organizations like WHO, UN agencies, IFRC, NGOs, etc., should establish communication networks amongst themselves and other players to unitedly respond to calls for humanitarian assistance. Governments should have worked towards an early resolution of the conflict and immediate cessation of hostilities from both sides. Appropriate training and resources should be made available to local volunteers and good Samaritans, along with the establishment of hotlines and mobile medical teams and aiding other organizations (Jain, N., et al., 2022). Most businesses (37) in Table 72 continued to follow the norm when it came to CSR, indicating

that they may not have made any significant changes in reaction to the crisis in terms of their financial CSR-related donations or their humanitarian support. Only a smaller number of companies (35) made little financial or humanitarian donations besides their typical CSR activities. Companies with a „strong emphasis“ (21) demonstrated a strong level of dedication by making major financial contributions or taking on projects that went above and beyond their typical CSR activities in response to the conflict. A small set of businesses that have gone above and beyond and shown remarkable dedication to humanitarian aid relating to the war in Ukraine is represented by the „very strong emphasis“ category (7), most likely by significant monetary contributions. The data highlights the variety of ways in which businesses have responded to humanitarian needs arising from the situation in Ukraine, through CSR projects. Other showed a substantial commitment to humanitarian aid, demonstrating the changing role of CSR in tackling humanitarian crises and conflicts, while some businesses maintained conventional processes or made small adjustment. Aid washing methods, according to Martin, A. (2023), involve the use of CSR programmes and other public-private partnerships with assisting actors to enhance the image of surveillance corporations and divert the public’s attention from business misconduct, unethical behaviours, and questionable data practices.

**Table 73** – Frequency of CSR UKR 2 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Refugee Assistance and Integration Efforts

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 48        | 48.0    | 48.0          | 48.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 30        | 30.0    | 30.0          | 78.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 14        | 14.0    | 14.0          | 92.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 8         | 8.0     | 8.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Concerning the entire population of Ukrainian refugees, the international community must support them with humanitarian help, access to healthcare, social security, food security, and education (Jankowski, M. And Gujski, M., 2022). Even though several European nations have welcomed many migrants, the psychological limbo of experiencing war and fleeing from war persists. In the light of our findings, it is imperative to address the experience and consequences of this limbo on a variety of levels, including the physical, psychological, social, and institutional



(Anjum, G et al., 2023). The data in Table 73 highlights the range of CSR initiatives used by businesses to help integration and refugee relief efforts in the context of the situation in Ukraine. While the vast majority (48 companies) confirmed standard CSR practices, a sizeable portion (30 companies) made small efforts above their regular CSR practices, and a smaller but incredibly committed group (14 companies) demonstrated a significant commitment by engaging in significant initiatives beyond their typical CSR activities. An even more committed segment (8 companies) demonstrated an exceptional dedication to refugee assistance and integration during the conflict.

**Table 74** – Frequency of CSR UKR 3 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Employment Opportunities for Displaced Individuals

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 36        | 36.0    | 36.0          | 36.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 43        | 43.0    | 43.0          | 79.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 18        | 18.0    | 18.0          | 97.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 3         | 3.0     | 3.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

The process of creating a sustainable path to employment, obtaining work, and integrating into society at large in the workplace is referred to as immigrant labour market integration. Ukrainian immigrants may not have access to adequate information and counselling about the opportunities and circumstances on the labour market in the country they arrived in. Employers are confident about the ability of the national labour market to absorb new workers, and labour shortages in the private sector may give some people prospects for speedy employment, too. But it is likely that many will encounter difficulties, when trying to enter the workforce (Yilmaz, F. and Coban, S., 2022). A significant number of 36 businesses in Table 74 show that their CSR initiatives focused on job opportunities for displaced people did not go above and beyond the standard procedures. They most likely didn't make any significant changes in reaction to the conflict and kept their standard hiring practices. 43 businesses have gone above and beyond their usual CSR duties in a little way to help displaced people find work. They realize the value of providing employment opportunities although their efforts might be minimal. 18 businesses show a great commitment to assisting those who have been displaced in finding

work and are involved in significant initiatives that go above and beyond their typical CSR activities. Companies categorized as having a „very strong emphasis over the normal framework“ (comprising 3 businesses) are distinguished by their exceptional commitment to providing employment opportunities for displaced people. They most likely undertook extensive measures that are considerably above their regular CSR efforts, exhibiting a great commitment to alleviating the employment difficulties experienced by those who were displaced during the crisis. The analysis of new trends in labour migration both in Ukraine and in Transcarpathian region requires intensification of the international cooperation with the member countries of the European Union in creating favourable conditions for the legalization of Ukrainian labour migrants, cooperation in the field of border control, promotion of reverse migration, and raising the socio-economic standard of living in Ukraine, because the risks of labour migration are assessed alarming (Habchak, N. F., & Dubis, L. F. (2019).

**Table 75** – Frequency of CSR ENG 1 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Investments in Energy-Efficient Technologies for Sustainable Operations

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 17        | 17.0    | 17.0          | 17.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 23        | 23.0    | 23.0          | 40.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 24        | 24.0    | 24.0          | 64.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 29        | 29.0    | 29.0          | 93.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 7         | 7.0     | 7.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Because of the unjustifiable energy price increase during the 2021–2023 energy crisis, there has been an increase in European inflation, rise in family and business energy costs, worsening of energy poverty, and closures and layoffs of businesses. These are the results of the rise in gas prices during the invasion of Ukraine, but the power market structure has amplified the ensuing rise in electricity prices (Fabra, N. 2023). In the background of the accelerating climate change, conflict in Ukraine, and previous COVID-19 pandemic, new technologies, systems, societal organization, and policies for energy conservation are urgently needed. Decarbonization efforts may be hampered, for instance, by worries about the market and governmental reactions that could result in additional lock-ins, and investing in liquefied natural gas

infrastructure, and using all available fossil fuels to make up for the Russian gas supply restrictions (Farghali, M., et al., 2023). Business emphasized the necessity of investments in renewable energy sources, focusing on green mobility options and operating green transit centres and workplaces. Despite being affected by the economic crisis, all of the surveyed entities are currently able to carry out their social and sustainability duties (Stanislawska, M., 2022). In terms of sustainability and energy efficiency (Table 75), 17 businesses upheld industry standards, indicating that they may not have drastically altered their CSR-related sustainability initiatives in response to the energy crisis. A sizeable number of companies (23), demonstrating a minimum degree of commitment to tackling sustainability issues in the context of the energy crisis, dedicated some little support to energy efficiency. Businesses that responded with „weak emphasis“ (24) on sustainability demonstrated some level of commitment to sustainability during the energy crisis. Companies with a „strong emphasis“ response (29) showed a high commitment to sustainability and energy efficiency by taking major measures outside their normal CSR activities. The „very strong emphasis“ category (7) is made up of the smallest but extremely committed group of businesses that went above and beyond to solve energy issues and sustainability throughout the energy crisis.

**Table 76** – Frequency of CSR ENG 2 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Optimizing Building Temperature for Energy Conservation

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 19        | 19.0    | 19.0          | 19.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 26        | 26.0    | 26.0          | 45.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 29        | 29.0    | 29.0          | 74.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 95.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 5         | 5.0     | 5.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Although the post-pandemic economic rebound has increased energy prices globally, Russian reduced supply has been the main driver of increasing prices of natural gas in Europe. Russian Gazprom delayed filling its European gas storages during 2021 even before Russia invaded Ukraine, and in fall of that same year, it stopped supplying the spot market. Long-term agreements with certain nations and

businesses were also no longer provided, began in winter (Ruhnau, O., et al., 2023).

The observation that numerous companies (19 in total) continued to employ industry-standard methods for regulating building temperatures indicates that they might not have substantially modified their CSR-related energy-saving measures in reaction to the „energy crisis“ (Table 76). They are at least partially devoted to energy conservation considering the present energy crisis, as evidenced by the fact that many companies (26) went above and beyond their typical CSR operations to provide a bit more assistance. Businesses with a „weak emphasis“ (29) showed a higher level of dedication by adopting more substantial initiatives, demonstrating a higher commitment to energy conservation during the crisis. Businesses that put „strong emphasis“ on energy efficiency (21) demonstrated a high level of dedication by taking actions above their regular practices. Businesses that went above to optimize building temperature for energy saving during the „energy crisis“ fall into the „very strong emphasis“ category, which is comprised of a small number of exceptionally committed companies (5).

**Table 77** – Frequency of CSR ENG 3 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Restricting Electrical Appliance Use to Conserve Energy

|       |   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1. Nothing beyond the normal framework            | 45        | 45.0    | 45.0          | 45.0               |
|       | 2. Minimum above the normal framework             | 24        | 24.0    | 24.0          | 69.0               |
|       | 3. Weak emphasis over the normal framework        | 21        | 21.0    | 21.0          | 90.0               |
|       | 4. Strong emphasis over the normal framework      | 9         | 9.0     | 9.0           | 99.0               |
|       | 5. Very strong emphasis over the normal framework | 1         | 1.0     | 1.0           | 100.0              |
|       | Total   | 100       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: own processing

Promotion of favourable attitudes regarding the effects of energy saving on the environment and dissemination of information about energy-saving techniques must be given top priority by managers. By concentrating on these factors, businesses can increase their energy efficiency and lower the fixed expenses related to energy consumption. To ensure that workers, particularly young consumers, have the skills and attitudes needed to adopt energy-saving practices, managers should put in place training programmes and awareness campaigns. Companies can support their commitment to economic sustainability and environmental responsibility by

integrating these practices into their company cultures (Corbos, R. A., et al., 2023). CSR initiatives did not go beyond routine procedures in 45 companies, as seen in Table 77. A significant percentage (24) offered some minimal assistance. Businesses with a „weak emphasis“ (21) showed a higher level of commitment by taking more significant actions, implying a greater commitment to energy saving during the crisis. In 9 companies, strong emphasis was placed above the usual framework. These businesses show a strong commitment to limiting the use of electrical appliances to save energy. One business in this category stands out for its outstanding commitment to limiting the use of electrical appliances for energy conservation during the „energy crisis“ and implemented extensive initiatives that went well beyond its typical CSR efforts, demonstrating a very strong commitment to energy conservation.

### **3.3.5 Summary of the Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice in Slovakia**

The study demonstrates a complicated interrelationship between CSR and governance systems that is driven by institutional and economic considerations, industry effect, and national frameworks (Young and Thyil, 2014). According to Krajnakova et al. 2022, the concept of corporate governance encompasses both structural and behavioural elements, with responsibilities emerged both shareholders and stakeholders. Different opinions are reflected by the diversity of CSR integration within businesses. While 18 corporations take a less formal approach, businesses prioritize CSR through specific departments (31), compliance divisions (7), marketing departments (24), and HR departments (20). According to Gavurova et al. (2022), a company's commitment to social and environmental issues may be shown through the strategic positioning of CSR throughout the organization. Stakeholders should be involved from the beginning of CSR planning, and internal communication is essential to CSR management (Bednárík, J., 2019). Some businesses encounter difficulties including time restraints, lack of human resources, or significant implementation costs, and some may not believe that CSR is required by the law (6 businesses). The reasons why corporations participate in CSR vary; some want to remain on top of societal and corporate trends (7), compete with their counterparts in the sector (13), or advance the public good (50). While 6 businesses lack a distinct driving force, others (20) integrate CSR into marketing (20) or do so as a result of corporate mandates (4). According to Casey and Sieber (2016), employee participation in CSR can boost employee enthusiasm and organizational performance. While some organizations support employee-driven volunteerism (27), others show a significant commitment to employee-led CSR efforts (14). However, 11 businesses abstain from such operations. Another component of CSR is represented by charitable giving, with 12 companies leading the way in this area (Kotler and Lee, 2015). Others demonstrate strong (27) or moderate (34) philanthropic commitment, while 20 gave a „negligible“ response, indicating space for development. According to Fortunati et al. (2020), the implementation of a circular economy and environmental responsibility are key components of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). While some

businesses place a higher priority on resource efficiency and circularity (25), others have „average“ (29) or „strong“ (27) commitments. 17% of the companies do not prioritize these factors, showing space for improvement. 37 businesses support green technology investment, but 16 don't go out of their way to do so (Wang et al., 2022). 29 corporations prioritize ethical governance and anti-corruption initiatives, while 13 don't participate at all (Porter and Kramer, 2002). 18 organizations lack transparent performance reporting, which thus hampers stakeholder dialogue through CSR reporting (Habek, 2017). 20 organizations value inclusivity and diversity in hiring procedures, while 10 companies do not (Pfajfar et al., 2022). Overall, the study highlights the variety of CSR strategies used by Slovak companies, and identifies areas for development in governance, stakeholder communication, employee engagement, environmental responsibility, and ethical governance. When a corporation integrates CSR into its business model, CSR reporting is the process of conveying social and environmental repercussions that result from those economic operations. The most recent development is the incorporation of CSR data into yearly reports, or integrated reports. According to the survey by Moravcikova et al. (2015), 59% of Slovak respondents were aware of corporate social responsibility (CSR), mostly thanks to company marketing, CSR reports, and television, radio, and print advertisements. Only 21 out of all organizations that participated in the survey have established a stringent CSR reporting process, frequently delivering comprehensive yearly reports that demonstrate a strong commitment to transparency and CSR integration. 21 other businesses also create CSR reports, but they do so less frequently, usually every three years. 16 companies submit CSR reports, but at intervals greater than three years. Notably, 42 businesses don't have a formalized CSR reporting structure, which may point to the lack of emphasis on open CSR reporting. According to earlier studies, quality of CSR disclosures matters more than their quantity. The level of CSR disclosure is influenced by firm-related variables, such as shareholder power, board of directors, shareholder size, and age (Lubis et al., 2019). 44 corporations gladly incorporate CSR-related content into their reports, with an emphasis on transparency and moral conduct. 56 companies, in comparison, only disclose a portion of their CSR activities, if at all, demonstrating different levels of importance ascribed to sharing information with stakeholders regarding CSR initiatives and their results. Establishing credibility and displaying a dedication to moral, social, and environmental obligations need CSR disclosure. According to Michelon et al. (2015), some CSR reporting procedures might not always produce higher-quality data, raising doubts about the usefulness of CSR reporting as a tool for holding companies accountable. According to the study on environmental disclosure (Cho et al., 2015), association with an industry had a less correlation with reporting inequalities. The results go against assertions claimed in more recent analyses and show that investors may not support CSR disclosure. Stakeholder theory is supported by Chan et al.'s (2021) discovery that organizations that submit CSR reports typically have greater audit quality, better audit committee quality, longer auditor tenure, and fewer auditor dismissals. 19 businesses believe they are well-prepared to submit CSR reports, highlighting their dedication to transparency and moral business practices. Other 21 businesses think they are prepared to reveal CSR information. The

majority (41) of the organizations expressed willingness to report on CSR, however, it's possible that their reporting procedures may be more effective. 8 organizations were completely unprepared, which may indicate lack of prioritizing or ignorance of the benefits of open communication through CSR reporting. 11 companies reported inadequate readiness, owing to resource limitations or operational challenges, while the other 11 identified insufficient readiness.

Companies that go above and beyond to support laid-off workers during times of need might profit in the long run with increased loyalty, productivity, and reputation (Kramer, 2020). There is still space for improvement, though, as some businesses still place a strong emphasis on puny CSR initiatives. It's essential to have equipment that has been approved globally to safeguard public health during emergencies like the pandemic. Organizational values, recognition, benevolence, and alignment with social movements are the driving forces behind the companies' CSR reactions to crises like COVID-19 (Farmaki et al., 2022). While some businesses continue to perform their CSR initiatives within the predetermined parameters, others have demonstrated a strong commitment by making sizeable contributions to community needs associated with the pandemic. Internal CSR related to the pandemic and employee motivation are positively correlated, however, external CSR has a detrimental effect (Wampole, 2022). Satisfying both basic and non-basic demands mediates these effects. Businesses in Ukraine have responded to the humanitarian crisis in different ways, with some providing major financial and humanitarian aid. CSR programmes relating to refugee relief efforts vary, with some businesses going further to encourage integration and refugee assistance. It can be difficult for displaced individuals to find employment. Some businesses have made only a small commitment to this issues while others have made significant efforts. EU governments mobilized 10 times more funds for new domestic energy subsidies, compared to what they mobilized for Ukraine. Thus, in the bigger picture, the international support for Ukraine so far has been rather limited (Trebesch, C., et al., 2023). Throughout the energy crisis, businesses have demonstrated varied degrees of dedication to sustainability and energy efficiency, with some going above and beyond their typical CSR initiatives. During the energy crisis, CSR efforts connected to energy conservation varied as well, with some businesses making just minor adjustments and others displaying a significant commitment.

### **3.4 A Comparative Analysis on the Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia (Erik Janšto)**

Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become a significant aspect of modern business practices, reflecting a changing paradigm within the corporate sector. Companies try to identify a competitive edge that is hard for their competitors to copy and follow (Kolb, 2018). Moreover, given the three key pillars of sustainable development, namely social, environmental, and economic dimension, we will proceed to identify and analyse CSR practices within these domains and selected countries.

In the context of CSR, the economic dimension refers to creating value not only for shareholders but also for communities, as well as loyalty in businesses. Social CSR activities focus on employee-driven volunteerism, philanthropy, sponsorship for social causes, community engagement, and improvement of working and living conditions for employees (Turcotte & Lachance, 2023). The environmental pillar of the supply chain holds significant relevance for customers. This analysis highlights the environmental pillar through three elements: waste minimization and sustainable waste management (Debnath et al., 2023), circular resource utilization and material efficiency (Niyommaneerat et al., 2023), and investments in green technology to promote environmental progress (Zaid et al., 2018).

Another part of the analysis involves examination of CSR reports that serve as a medium for disseminating essential organizational information related to CSR and sustainability concerns to its various stakeholders. Since a worldwide standardized criterion for CSR reporting has not been yet established (Lee et al., 2021), our analysis will focus on the activities associated with CSR reporting in each country. It is also necessary to address a key research gap, which includes challenges or uncertainties that organizations face in achieving sustainability levels, such as pandemics like COVID-19 (Waheed et al., 2022), situations in Europe like the conflict in Ukraine (Ayoub & Qadan, 2023), and energy crises (Agudelo et al., 2020). Comparative analysis examines specific aspects of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the business practices in three Central European countries: the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia.

As an initial step preceding the application of any statistical procedures, we conducted a reliability analysis on the provided dataset. The results indicate a satisfactory level of reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.719 (Table 78), signifying reasonably strong internal consistency among the measured items. It is worth noting that this analysis was performed on a dataset comprising a total of 26 items. We also assessed reliability of each individual component, as presented in Appendix 1, which revealed that each component had a Cronbach's Alpha value exceeding 0.6, which can be considered acceptable (Taber, 2018).



**Table 78** – Cronbach's alpha results

| Reliability Statistics |  |            |
|------------------------|--|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha       | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
| .719                   | .692   | 26         |

Source: own calculation

In our analysis, we conducted the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality, which confirmed a non-normal data distribution. Furthermore, we conducted the Durbin-Watson test to evaluate the presence of autocorrelation in the dataset. The results of the test revealed no evidence of autocorrelation.

### 3.4.1 Corporate Social Responsibility of Czech, Polish, and Slovak Businesses

After characterizing organizational structures, strategic planning, and motivation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in one of the previous chapters (Section 3.1), our research aimed at exploring potential differences in the implemented variables among specific countries. The Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted on the data shown in Table 79, which provided findings that supported the presence of significant differences among the observed variables.

**Table 79** – Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary – CSR Characteristics Within Individual Countries

| Hypothesis Test Summary   |   |  |      |                             |
|---|---|--|------|-----------------------------|
|   | Null Hypothesis   | Test                                     | Sig. | Decision                    |
| 1   | Distribution of CSRCH 1 – Incorporation of CSR in Organizational Governance Structure is the same across categories of the Country. | Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test  | .000 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| 2   | The distribution of CSRCH 2 – CSR Strategic Planning is the same across categories of the Country.                                  | Independent Samples. Kruskal-Wallis Test | .001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| 3   | The distribution of CSRCH 3 – Motivation for CSR Engagement is the same across categories of the Country.                           | Independent Samples. Kruskal-Wallis Test | .000 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .050. |   |  |      |                             |

Source: own calculation

More specific information was obtained using the Dunn's test, which uses pairwise comparisons. The findings indicate the presence of significant differences among various categories, as demonstrated in Table 80. These results indicate variations in how organizations in Poland, Czechia, and Slovakia choose to incorporate CSR within their governance structures. The structure that a company chooses to operate under can have an effect on how CSR activities are managed, coordinated, and incorporated into the company's broader operations.

**Table 80** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on CSRCH 1 – Incorporation of CSR in Organizational Governance Structure and the Country

| Pairwise Comparisons of Country – CSRCH 1 – Incorporation of CSR in Organizational Governance Structure  |                |            |                     |      |                        |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------------------|
| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig. <sup>a</sup> |
| 3-1  | 25.390         | 11.888     | 2.136               | .033 | .098                   |
| 3-2  | 63.875         | 11.888     | 5.373               | .000 | .000                   |
| 1-2  | -38.485        | 11.888     | -3.237              | .001 | .004                   |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05. |                |            |                     |      |                        |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |                        |

Source: own calculation

The differences observed (Table 81) here provide valuable insights into the strategies and priorities of companies in these countries concerning CSR governance. In the context of Slovakia, current approaches to integrating corporate social responsibility (CSR) into the governance framework of organizations involve establishment of a separate CSR department and its placement inside the Marketing department. In Poland, CSR is mostly practised within the Human Resources (HR) department, or in other cases, it may not be incorporated into the overall organizational structure at all. It's also worth noting that in the Czech Republic, CSR is also the under the responsibility of the Compliance department. In contrast, the organizational structure in Poland does not embrace CSR in a similar manner.

The comparisons of the Czech Republic (1) and Slovakia (3), as well as Poland (2) and Slovakia (3) show a highly significant difference (Sig. = 0.000) in their approaches to CSR Strategic Planning. These results suggest that the three countries have different strategies and priorities when it comes to CSR Strategic Planning. The Czech Republic and Poland share some similarities in this regard, while Slovakia appears to have distinct practices. These characteristics can include cultural norms, legislative frameworks, business attitudes to CSR, and other contextual elements that are unique to each country. These findings emphasise the importance of

considering local and regional contexts when developing CSR strategies, and highlight the need for tailored approaches to CSR based on the unique characteristics of each country or region.

**Table 81** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on CSRCH 2 – CSR Strategic Planning and the Country

| Pairwise Comparisons of Country – CSRCH 2 – CSR Strategic Planning   |                |            |                     |      |            |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------|
| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig.a |
| 1-2  | -11.000        | 8.558      | -1.285              | .199 | .596       |
| 1-3  | -30.805        | 8.558      | -3.600              | .000 | .001       |
| 2-3  | -19.805        | 8.558      | -2.314              | .021 | .062       |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is ,05. |                |            |                     |      |            |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |            |

Source: own calculation

The results from Table 82 reveal significant insights regarding the motivations for CSR involvement in the Czech Republic (1), Poland (2), and Slovakia (3). The analysis indicates a statistically significant difference (Sig. = 0.000) between Slovakia (3) and Poland (2), underscoring clear variations in their motivations for engaging in CSR activities. Additionally, a comparison of the Czech Republic (1) and Poland (2) demonstrates a statistically significant difference ( $p = 0.002$ ).

**Table 82** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on CSRCH 3 – Motivation for CSR Engagement and the Country

| Pairwise Comparisons of Country – CSRCH 3 – Motivation for CSR Engagement  |                |            |                     |      |            |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------|
| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig.a |
| 3-1  | 18.385         | 11.794     | 1.559               | .119 | .357       |
| 3-2  | 54.350         | 11.794     | 4.608               | .000 | .000       |
| 1-2  | -35.965        | 11.794     | -3.050              | .002 | .007       |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is ,05. |                |            |                     |      |            |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |            |

Source: own calculation

In contrast, there exists a notable distinction between Slovakia (3) and the Czech Republic (1), which is demonstrated by the value ( $p = 0.119$ ), but it doesn't reach a highly significant level. Based on these findings, it looks like the three countries have different reasons for performing, CSR activities. It seems that the Czech Republic (a balanced motivation for the CSR engagement) and Poland (the public good, CSR is not purposeful) have different motivations than Slovakia (the public good and marketing activities). The Czech Republic and Poland also have motivations different from each other. Understanding the different factors that drive CSR involvement in different situations can lead to more effective and meaningful CSR projects that are important to stakeholders and help companies reach their sustainability goals.

### 3.4.2 CSR Activities of Czech, Polish and Slovak Businesses

The hypothesis test summary derived from Table 83 presents the outcomes of tests conducted to determine whether there are significant differences in the distribution of various social CSR activities across the countries.

**Table 83** – Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary on TBL – Social CSR Activities Within Individual Countries

|   | Null Hypothesis   | Test                                     | Sig. | Decision                    |
|---|---|--|------|-----------------------------|
| 1   | The distribution of TBL 1 – Social CSR activities – Employee-Driven Volunteerism and Social Impact Initiatives is the same across categories of the Country.  | Independent Samples .Kruskal-Wallis Test | .728 | Retain the null hypothesis. |
| 2   | The distribution of TBL 2 – Social CSR activities – Philanthropy and Sponsorship for Social Causes is the same across categories of the Country.  | Independent Samples .Kruskal-Wallis Test | .113 | Retain the null hypothesis. |
| 3   | The distribution of TBL 3 – Social CSR activities – Community Engagement and Collaboration (Partnerships with Schools, Non-profit Organizations, Local Authorities) is the same across categories of the Country. | Independent Samples .Kruskal-Wallis Test | .017 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .050. |   |  |      |                             |

Source: own calculation

For TBL 1 – Social CSR activities related to Employee-Driven Volunteerism and Social Impact Initiatives, there is no significant difference in distribution among the countries, as the null hypothesis is retained. Similarly, for TBL 2, encompassing social CSR activities associated with Philanthropy and sponsorship for social

causes, the results also indicate no significant difference in distribution among the countries.

However, for TBL 3 – Social CSR activities related to Community Engagement and Collaboration, it becomes evident that a notable difference in distribution among the countries exists there, as the null hypothesis is rejected.

In summary, the examination of social CSR activities reveals distinct patterns within the Czech Republic (CZ), Poland (PL), and Slovakia (SK). In CZ, most responses indicate a moderate level of engagement, suggesting a balanced approach to CSR initiatives. In contrast, Poland exhibits a mixture of strong interest and areas of limited engagement. In Slovakia, a spectrum of responses from active participation to more measured involvement and instances of minimal engagement are shown. Responses in the “negligibly” and “not at all” categories show that organizations in all three countries might be able to do more to improve their CSR through employee-driven volunteerism and social impact initiatives.

Like the second hypothesis, the distribution of responses demonstrates a balanced mean of different levels of engagement in philanthropy and Sponsorship for social causes. across all three countries, there is balance between strong CSR engagement (“very strongly” and “strongly”) and less engagement (“negligibly” and “not at all”).

On the other hand, distribution of responses from each country concerning the level of engagement in social CSR activities related to community Engagement and collaboration reflects the diversity in how organizations collaborate with schools, non-profit organizations, and local authorities. Each country exhibits a unique pattern of engagement, reflecting the impact of local factors and strategies. The comparisons of Slovakia (SK) and the Czech Republic (CZ) (3-1), and Poland (PL) and the Czech Republic (CZ) (2-1) indicate statistically significant differences in engagement levels (Table 84).

**Table 84** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on TBL 3 – Social CSR activities – Community Engagement and Collaboration (Partnerships with Schools, Non-profit Organizations, Local Authorities) – and the Country

| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig.a |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------|
| 3-2  | 6.975          | 11.995     | .581                | .561 | 1.000      |
| 3-1  | 32.610         | 11.995     | 2.719               | .007 | .020       |
| 2-1  | 25.635         | 11.995     | 2.137               | .033 | .098       |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is ,05. |                |            |                     |      |            |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |            |

Source: own calculation

In the presented summary of the Kruskal-Wallis H test regarding Environmental Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities across different countries (Table 85), some notable observations can be identified.

- In the context of waste minimization strategies and sustainable waste management (TBL 4), an assessment of responses regarding distributions across countries did not reveal any statistically significant differences.
- Similarly, when considering circular resource utilization and material efficiency (TBL 5), the analysis showed no statistically significant differences regarding the responses in countries.
- Conversely, concerning the Environmental CSR activity related to the adoption of green technology, a statistically significant difference in distributions was observed across the countries.

**Table 85** – Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary on TBL – Environmental CSR Activities Within Individual Countries

|   | Null Hypothesis   | Test                                     | Sig. | Decision                    |
|---|---|--|------|-----------------------------|
| 1   | The distribution of TBL 4 – Environmental CSR activities – Waste Minimization Strategies and Sustainable Waste Management is the same across categories of the Country. | Independent Samples .Kruskal-Wallis Test | .126 | Retain the null hypothesis. |
| 2   | The distribution of TBL 5 – Environmental CSR activities – Circular Resource Utilization and Material Efficiency is the same across categories of the Country.          | Independent Samples .Kruskal-Wallis Test | .095 | Retain the null hypothesis. |
| 3   | The distribution of TBL6 – Environmental CSR activities – Green Technology Investments for Environmental Progress is the same across categories of the Country.         | Independent Samples .Kruskal-Wallis Test | .000 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .050. |   |  |      |                             |

Source: own calculation

Nevertheless, there were noticeable differences in the levels of engagement found in green technology investments regarding the objective of promoting environmental progress. Specifically, the Czech Republic demonstrates the highest level of engagement, while Poland shows a greater proportion of companies that claim no engagement in this domain. The results of the pairwise comparisons reveal that Slovakia does not significantly differ from the Czech Republic in terms of engagement in green technology investments for environmental progress. However, both Slovakia and the Czech Republic significantly differ from Poland in this aspect. Poland appears to have lower engagement in green technology investments compared to

the other two countries. These differences may reflect variations in environmental policies, industry practices, and corporate strategies within the studied countries.

The observed differences in sustainability strategies and priorities throughout the countries might be attributed to factors, such as local regulations, industry practices, and corporate culture (Table 86).

**Table 86** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on TBL6 – Environmental CSR activities – Green Technology Investments for Environmental Progress Within Individual Countries

| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig. <sup>a</sup> |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------------------|
| 3-1  | 9.525          | 11.969     | .796                | .426 | 1.000                  |
| 3-2  | 45.285         | 11.969     | 3.784               | .000 | .000                   |
| 1-2  | -35.760        | 11.969     | -2.988              | .003 | .008                   |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is ,05. |                |            |                     |      |                        |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |                        |

Source: own calculation

Economic CSR activities were chosen for their potential to reflect different economic responsibilities of companies in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, as well as their relevance to stakeholders and alignment with global standards.

The Kruskal-Wallis H Test Summary (Table 87) provides an overview of the outcomes of three distinct hypotheses, each addressing specific economic CSR categories: Ethical Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures (TBL 7), Stakeholder Engagement and Transparent Business Performance Reporting (TBL 8), and Inclusive Employment Practices and Diversity Integration (TBL 9).

The findings of the Kruskal-Wallis test indicate that there is no significant difference in the distribution of responses related to ethical governance and anti-corruption measures between countries ( $p = 0.614$ ). According to the aforementioned finding, there do not appear to be any major discrepancies between how different businesses approach and execute these procedures. Companies might want to consider participating in collaborative initiatives for the purpose of sharing best practices and resources in order to prevent corruption and encourage ethical behaviour.

Additionally, the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test ( $p = 0.003$ ) suggest that there are statistically significant differences in the distribution of responses among countries with regard to stakeholder involvement and transparent business performance reporting.

The findings also indicate that there are statistically significant differences in the distribution of responses between countries within terms of inclusive employment practices and diversity integration (Sig. = 0.002).

**Table 87** – Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary on TBL – Economic CSR Activities Within Individual Countries

|   | Null Hypothesis   | Test                                     | Sig. | Decision                    |
|---|---|--|------|-----------------------------|
| 1   | The distribution of TBL 7 – Economic CSR activities – Ethical Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures is the same across categories of the Country.                       | Independent Samples .Kruskal-Wallis Test | .614 | Retain the null hypothesis. |
| 2   | The distribution of TBL 8 – Economic CSR activities – Stakeholder Engagement and Transparent Business Performance Reporting is the same across categories of the Country. | Independent Samples .Kruskal-Wallis Test | .003 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| 3   | The distribution of TBL 9 – Economic CSR activities – Inclusive Employment Practices and Diversity Integration is the same across categories of the Country.              | Independent Samples .Kruskal-Wallis Test | .002 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is ,050. |   |  |      |                             |

Source: own calculation

**Table 88** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on TBL 8 – Economic CSR activities – Stakeholder Engagement and Transparent Business Performance Reporting and the Country

| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig.a |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------|
| 2-3  | -28.515        | 11.981     | -2.380              | .017 | .052       |
| 2-1  | 39.165         | 11.981     | 3.269               | .001 | .003       |
| 3-1  | 10.650         | 11.981     | .889                | .374 | 1.000      |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is ,05. |                |            |                     |      |            |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |            |

Source: own calculation

Approach to stakeholder engagement (Table 88) showed in Poland a statistically significant difference compared to both the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This suggests that Polish companies may have a more robust approach to engaging with



stakeholders and transparently reporting on their business performance. This can be seen as a positive aspect, indicating that Polish companies prioritize transparency and stakeholder involvement. When compared to Poland (PL), the Czech Republic (CZ) might suggest that Czech companies might fall behind Polish rivals in terms of engaging stakeholders and transparent reporting, which may be considered a negative aspect.

**Table 89** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on TBL 9 – Economic CSR activities – Inclusive Employment Practices and Diversity Integration and the Country

| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig. <sup>a</sup> |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------------------|
| 3-1  | 10.530         | 11.921     | .883                | .377 | 1,000                  |
| 3-2  | 40.005         | 11.921     | 3.356               | .001 | ,002                   |
| 1-2  | -29.475        | 11.921     | -2.472              | .013 | ,040                   |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05. |                |            |                     |      |                        |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |                        |

Source: own calculation

Slovakia (SK) exhibits a statistically significant difference when compared to both the Czech Republic (CZ) and Poland (PL). This implies that Slovak companies may be more dedicated to promoting inclusive employment practices and diversity integration. This is a positive indication of commitment of Slovak business to diversity and inclusivity in the workplace.

### 3.4.3 CSR Reporting in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia

The present research undertakes an analysis of CSR reporting procedures, providing important findings which clarify the observed variances among the examined countries. The findings of the tests indicate significant differences in CSR reporting, which can be attributed to historical, cultural, and institutional factors.

The analysis of CSR reporting uncovers significant differences across various important aspects. Firstly, with regard to the formalization of CSR reporting mechanisms (REP 1), a statistically significant difference occurs among the three countries, as indicated by p-value of 0.003. The aforementioned result highlights a noticeable discrepancy in the level of formality that characterizes CSR reporting standards across the countries (Table 90).

**Table 90** – Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary on REP – CSR Reporting Within Individual Countries

|   | Null Hypothesis   | Test                                     | Sig. | Decision                    |
|---|---|--|------|-----------------------------|
| 1   | The distribution of REP 1 – Formalization of CSR Reporting Mechanisms is the same across categories of the Country. | Independent Samples. Kruskal-Wallis Test | .003 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| 2   | The distribution of REP 2 – CSR Disclosure in Reports is the same across categories of the Country.                 | Independent Samples. Kruskal-Wallis Test | .000 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| 3   | The distribution of REP 3 – CSR Reporting Preparedness is the same across categories of the Country.                | Independent Samples. Kruskal-Wallis Test | .001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| 4   | The distribution of REP 4 – CSR Reporting Processing Procedures is the same across categories of the Country.       | Independent Samples. Kruskal-Wallis Test | .000 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .050. |   |  |      |                             |

Source: own calculation

Secondly, in the context of CSR disclosure in reports (REP 2), a pronounced and highly significant variance is evident across these countries, as indicated by a p-value 0.001. This outcome underscores substantial dissimilarities in the extent to which CSR-related information is disclosed within corporate reports, signalling varying levels of transparency and commitment to CSR principles.

Thirdly, with respect to CSR reporting preparedness (REP 3), a similar pattern of significant disparities is discerned ( $p = 0.001$ ). This outcome underscores notable variations in the degree to which companies in these respective countries are equipped and prepared for the complexities associated with CSR reporting, thus reflecting nuanced levels of readiness and commitment to CSR engagement.

Fourthly, in the case of CSR reporting processing procedures (REP 4), a statistically significant result with a p-value of 0.000 was shown. This outcome indicates substantial differences in the distribution of CSR reporting processing procedures among the examined countries. Practical implications of this finding suggest that companies in these nations vary significantly in their approaches to handling the CSR reporting.

**Table 91** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on REP 1 – Formalization of CSR Reporting Mechanisms and the Country

| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig.a |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------|
| 3-1  | 23.035         | 10.884     | 2.116               | .034 | .103       |
| 3-2  | 37.265         | 10.884     | 3.424               | .001 | .002       |
| 1-2  | -14.230        | 10.884     | -1.307              | .191 | .573       |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05. |                |            |                     |      |            |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |            |

Source: own calculation

In terms of CSR reporting formalization (REP 1), Slovakia stands out with the highest level, followed by Poland, and the Czech Republic. This variation suggests that Slovak companies have embraced more structured and formalized CSR reporting practices compared to their counterparts. Poland and the Czech Republic exhibit a degree of similarity in this aspect.

**Table 92** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on REP 2 – CSR Disclosure in Reports and the Country

| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig.a |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------|
| 3-1  | 50.330         | 11.301     | 4.453               | .000 | .000       |
| 3-2  | 64.525         | 11.301     | 5.709               | .000 | .000       |
| 1-2  | -14.195        | 11.301     | -1.256              | .209 | .627       |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05. |                |            |                     |      |            |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |            |

Source: own calculation

Moving on to CSR disclosure in reports (REP 2), a significant distinction is apparent, with Slovakia once again leading in a comprehensive disclosure, followed by Poland and the Czech Republic. This disparity highlights a noteworthy divergence in the extent to which companies in SK, PL, and CZ is transparent in their CSR reporting efforts. This may be indicative of varying levels of commitment to CSR principles and practices, with SK-based companies demonstrating a greater commitment to transparency (Table 92).

**Table 93** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on REP 3 – CSR Reporting Preparedness and the Country

| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig. <sup>a</sup> |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------------------|
| 3-1  | 34.700         | 11.881     | 2.921               | .003 | .010                   |
| 3-2  | 39.565         | 11.881     | 3.330               | .001 | .003                   |
| 1-2  | -4.865         | 11.881     | -.409               | .682 | 1.000                  |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05. |                |            |                     |      |                        |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |                        |

Source: own calculation

The results of the pairwise comparisons on CSR reporting preparedness (REP 3) reveal significant variations in the distribution of responses. In the case of the Slovakia – the Czech Republic comparison, the test statistic of 2.921 ( $p = 0.003$ ) highlights substantial variations in the CSR reporting preparedness between these two countries. Similarly, in the Slovakia – Poland comparison, the test statistic of 3.330 ( $p = 0.001$ ) underscores significant differences in the degree of readiness for CSR reporting. Upon closer examination of the comparison between the Czech Republic and Poland, the obtained test result -0.409 ( $p = 0.682$ ) suggests no statistically significant distinctions in the CSR reporting preparedness (Table 93).

These findings hold practical significance, as they indicate varying levels of preparedness among companies in these countries. When it comes to CSR reporting, Slovakia demonstrates a higher level of preparedness in terms of CSR reporting, indicating that enterprises in the country may possess enhanced capabilities to effectively manage the complexity connected with CSR activities. In contrast, it can be observed that both the Czech Republic and Poland demonstrate different levels of readiness, indicating that there is a need for adapted, approaches to improve CSR reporting methods and ensure their alignment with the specific circumstances of every country in question.

The results gathered from the pairwise comparisons related to the CSR reporting processing procedures (REP 4) show significant variations in the distribution of responses. Significant differences in the CSR reporting methods are evident when comparing Slovakia (3) to both the Czech Republic (1) and Poland (2). The test statistic of 2.558 ( $p = 0.011$ ) highlights significant differences in the approaches adopted by Slovakia and the Czech Republic regarding the administration of the CSR reporting processes. In the similar vein, the comparison of Slovakia and Poland reveals a test statistic of 5.344 ( $p < 0.001$ ), highlighting significant differences. However, upon examining the comparison of the Czech Republic and Poland, the test result of -2.785 ( $p = 0.005$ ) indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the processing methods of CSR reporting (Table 94).

**Table 94** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on REP 4 – CSR Reporting Processing Procedures and the Country

| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig. <sup>a</sup> |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------------------|
| 3-1  | 29.555         | 11.553     | 2.558               | .011 | .032                   |
| 3-2  | 61.735         | 11.553     | 5.344               | .000 | .000                   |
| 1-2  | -32.180        | 11.553     | -2.785              | .005 | .016                   |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05. |                |            |                     |      |                        |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |                        |

Source: own calculation

These findings are practically significant as companies in these countries utilize a diverse range of strategies for managing their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reporting processes. Slovakia stands out for its more clearly defined and structured procedures, potentially leading to more efficient and effective CSR reporting practices. Conversely, the Czech Republic and Poland exhibit different levels of formality and structure in their approaches to CSR reporting.

### 3.4.4 CSR Activities of Czech, Polish, and Slovak Businesses in Times of Global Crises

In the subsequent chapter, we delve into a comprehensive analysis of the CSR activities undertaken by businesses in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia during a critical period of global crises.

Based on the data from Table 95, test summary gives an in-depth overview of the statistical analyses carried out to identify differences in the distribution of CSR initiatives connected with the COVID-19 pandemic across countries. Firstly, for CSR COV 1, relating to the provision of personal protective equipment for employee safety, they were significantly rejected ( $p < 0.001$ ). This observation indicates that there are significant differences in the strategies employed by companies in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia to ensure employee safety during the pandemic. Furthermore, in the context of CSR towards COVID-19 (COV-2), regarding contributions to the public and local community support, the null hypothesis was retained ( $p = 0.139$ ). Lastly, for CSR COV 3, related to extra employee benefits during the pandemic, the null hypothesis was once again retained ( $p = 0.549$ ).

**Table 95** – Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary on CSR COVID Crisis – CSR Reporting Within Individual Countries

|   | Null Hypothesis   | Test                                     | Sig. | Decision                    |
|---|---|--|------|-----------------------------|
| 1   | The distribution of CSR COV 1 – COVID-19 and CSR: Provision of Personal Protective Equipment for Employee Safety is the same across categories of the Country.  | Independent Samples. Kruskal-Wallis Test | .000 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| 2   | The distribution of CSR COV 2 – COVID-19 and CSR: Contribution to the Public and Local Community Support (Sponsorship, Participation in Testing and Vaccine Research, etc.) is the same across categories of the Country. | Independent Samples. Kruskal-Wallis Test | .139 | Retain the null hypothesis. |
| 3   | The distribution of CSR COV 3 – COVID-19 and CSR: Extra Employee Benefits during the Pandemic (On-site Testing, Voluntary Quarantine with Income Compensation, etc.) is the same across categories of the Country.        | Independent Samples. Kruskal-Wallis Test | .549 | Retain the null hypothesis. |
| Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .050. |   |  |      |                             |

Source: own calculation

**Table 96** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on CSR COV 1 – COVID-19 and CSR: Provision of Personal Protective Equipment for Employee Safety and the Country

| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig.a |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------|
| 1-3  | -18.850        | 11.808     | -1.596              | .110 | .331       |
| 1-2  | -61.280        | 11.808     | -5.190              | .000 | .000       |
| 3-2  | 42.430         | 11.808     | 3.593               | .000 | .001       |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05. |                |            |                     |      |            |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |            |

Source: own calculation

The comparative analysis conducted on the Czech Republic and Slovakia did not reveal any statistically significant disparities, indicating a certain level of closeness in their approaches to ensuring employee safety. In contrast, Poland showed an important difference due to its considerably different approach, characterized by a robust focus on the provision of personal protection equipment for its employees. The observed result has practical significance, suggesting that Polish companies utilizing CSR strategies have demonstrated a clear emphasis on protecting health

and well-being of their employees during the pandemic. These findings underline the significance of adapting CSR programmes to effectively tackle the unique problems presented by global crises (Table 96).

Shifting our attention towards the Ukrainian situation, it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of analysing this specific issue and its correlation with the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. The Ukrainian crisis presents a complex geopolitical challenge that has not only regional but also global implications, making it vital to understand how businesses in these countries respond to such crises.

**Table 97** – Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary on CSR UKR – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR Within Individual Countries

|   | Null Hypothesis   | Test                                     | Sig. | Decision                    |
|---|---|--|------|-----------------------------|
| 1   | The distribution of CSR UKR 1 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Financial Mobilization for Humanitarian Support is the same across categories of the Country.    | Independent Samples. Kruskal-Wallis Test | .000 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| 2   | The distribution of CSR UKR 2 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Refugee Assistance and Integration Efforts is the same across categories of the Country.         | Independent Samples. Kruskal-Wallis Test | .000 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| 3   | The distribution of CSR UKR 3 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Employment Opportunities for Displaced Individuals is the same across categories of the Country. | Independent Samples. Kruskal-Wallis Test | .001 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .050. |   |  |      |                             |

Source: own calculation

In the context of CSR in relation to the Ukrainian crisis, our examination via the Kruskal-Wallis test has provided significant insights. The null hypotheses, positing that the distribution of CSR activities related to financial mobilization for humanitarian aid (CSR UKR 1), refugee assistance and integration efforts (CSR UKR 2), and employment opportunities for displaced individuals (CSR UKR 3) is the same across the countries, have all been clearly rejected with a significant level of statistical confidence ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 98** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on CSR UKR 1 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Financial Mobilization for Humanitarian Support and the Country

| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig.a |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------|
| 1-3  | -6.020         | 11.869     | -.507               | .612 | 1.000      |
| 1-2  | -51.910        | 11.869     | -4.374              | .000 | .000       |
| 3-2  | 45.890         | 11.869     | 3.866               | .000 | .000       |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05. |                |            |                     |      |            |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |            |

Source: own calculation

In the case of financial mobilization for humanitarian support, the Czech Republic (CZ) exhibits a significantly higher emphasis ( $p < 0.001$ ) compared to Poland (PL), and Slovakia (SK). This implies that Czech businesses demonstrate a higher level of engagement in financial support activities to address the Ukrainian crisis. On the other hand, Poland also shows a notable focus on this activity, though not that strong emphasis as the Czech Republic. In contrast, engagement of Slovak businesses in financial mobilization is noticeably weaker, compared to both its neighbours (Table 98).

**Table 99** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on CSR UKR 2 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Refugee Assistance and Integration Efforts and the Country

| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig.a |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------|
| 3-1  | 7.820          | 11.825     | .661                | .508 | 1.000      |
| 3-2  | 63.940         | 11.825     | 5.407               | .000 | .000       |
| 1-2  | -56.120        | 11.825     | -4.746              | .000 | .000       |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05. |                |            |                     |      |            |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |            |

Source: own calculation



Examining the pairwise comparisons provide valuable insights into CSR activities related to refugee assistance and integration efforts concerning the Ukrainian crisis (CSR UKR 2). Slovakia (SK) stands out considerably ( $p < 0.001$ ), compared to the Czech Republic (CZ), and Poland (PL), in terms of refugee support and integration efforts. This shows that Slovak companies have increased their focus on initiatives to help and integrate refugees because of the crisis in Ukraine. In contrast, the Czech Republic and Poland show significantly lower engagement in this CSR area (Table 99).

**Table 100** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on CSR UKR 3 – Conflict in Ukraine and CSR: Employment Opportunities for Displaced Individuals and the Country

| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig. <sup>a</sup> |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------------------|
| 3-1  | 22.365         | 11.902     | 1.879               | .060 | .181                   |
| 3-2  | 45.390         | 11.902     | 3.814               | .000 | .000                   |
| 1-2  | -23.025        | 11.902     | -1.935              | .053 | .159                   |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05. |                |            |                     |      |                        |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |                        |

Source: own calculation

In relation to employment prospects for those who have been relocated, Slovakia (SK) emerges as the most distinctive from the three countries, showing a significantly different approach ( $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that Slovak enterprises have demonstrated an admirable amount of proactivity for those affected by the Ukrainian crisis. In contrast, the Czech Republic (CZ) and Poland (PL) demonstrate comparatively lower levels of involvement. Slovak proactive stance suggests a potential model for the Czech Republic and Poland, with opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration (Table 100).

**Table 101** – Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary on CSR ENG – „energy crisis“ and CSR Within Individual Countries

|   | Null Hypothesis  | Test                                     | Sig. | Decision                    |
|---|--|--|------|-----------------------------|
| 1   | The distribution of CSR ENG 1 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Investments in Energy-Efficient Technologies for Sustainable Operations is the same across categories of the Country. | Independent Samples. Kruskal-Wallis Test | .000 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| 2   | The distribution of CSR ENG 2 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Optimizing Building Temperature for Energy Conservation is the same across categories of the Country.                 | Independent Samples. Kruskal-Wallis Test | .000 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| 3   | The distribution of CSR ENG 3 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Restricting Electrical Appliance Use to Conserve Energy is the same across categories of the Country.                 | Independent Samples. Kruskal-Wallis Test | .000 | Reject the null hypothesis. |
| Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .050. |  |  |      |                             |

Source: own calculation

The analysis of CSR activities related to the „energy crisis“ (CSR ENG) within the framework of investments in energy-efficient technologies for sustainable operations (CSR ENG 1), optimizing building temperature for energy conservation (CSR ENG 2), and restricting electrical appliance use to conserve energy (CSR ENG 3) across the three countries reveals significant differences in their approaches. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis tests indicate statistically significant differences in the distribution of responses ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 102** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on CSR ENG 1 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Investments in Energy-Efficient Technologies for Sustainable Operations and the Country

| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig.a |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------|
| 1-3  | -35.710        | 11.917     | -2.997              | .003 | .008       |
| 1-2  | -67.610        | 11.917     | -5.673              | .000 | .000       |
| 3-2  | 31.900         | 11.917     | 2.677               | .007 | .022       |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05. |                |            |                     |      |            |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |            |

Source: own calculation

The analysis of Czech and Slovak companies reveals a statistically significant divergence in their strategies regarding investments in energy-efficient technologies during the energy crisis. Czech enterprises exhibit a higher degree of commitment to sustainability, compared to their Slovak counterparts. The comparison of the Czech Republic (CZ) and Poland (PL) reveals a notable disparity, whereby companies in the Czech Republic demonstrate a more pronounced commitment to sustainable energy solutions. A statistically significant difference was observed when comparing SK with PL companies, showing a higher level of prioritization towards sustainable energy solutions in Poland, in contrast to Slovakia. On the other hand, investments in renewable energy have the potential to grow in Slovakia. Companies in SK can learn from the experiences of companies in CZ and PL to enhance their own sustainability practices and contribute to energy conservation during the times of crisis.

**Table 103** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on CSR ENG 2 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Optimizing Building Temperature for Energy Conservation and the Country

| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig. <sup>a</sup> |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------------------|
| 1-3  | -23.455        | 11.929     | -1.966              | .049 | .148                   |
| 1-2  | -62.060        | 11.929     | -5.202              | .000 | .000                   |
| 3-2  | 38.605         | 11.929     | 3.236               | .001 | .004                   |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05. |                |            |                     |      |                        |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |                        |

Source: own calculation

To begin with, a comparative analysis of CZ and SK reveals (Table 103) a statistically significant difference (Sig. = 0.049), suggesting that enterprises in CZ have a higher level of dedication towards implementing energy-efficient building temperature practices, compared to their counterparts in SK. Furthermore, when comparing CZ and PL, a statistically significant difference is evident ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that CZ enterprises prioritize energy conservation through building temperature optimization more than PL businesses. Lastly, when comparing Slovak and Polish enterprises, a statistically significant difference exists there (Sig. = 0.001), indicating that the latter are more dedicated to optimizing building temperatures for energy conservation.

**Table 104** – Results of Pairwise Comparisons on CSR ENG 3 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Restricting Electrical Appliance Use to Conserve Energy and the Country

| Sample 1-Sample 2  | Test Statistic | Std. Error | Std. Test Statistic | Sig. | Adj. Sig. <sup>a</sup> |
|--|----------------|------------|---------------------|------|------------------------|
| 1-3  | -6.185         | 11.726     | -.527               | .598 | 1.000                  |
| 1-2  | -46.105        | 11.726     | -3.932              | .000 | .000                   |
| 3-2  | 39.920         | 11.726     | 3.404               | .001 | .002                   |
| Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05. |                |            |                     |      |                        |
| a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.   |                |            |                     |      |                        |

Source: own calculation

Unique approaches of the three countries to maintaining energy by limiting the electrical appliance use are shown through pairwise comparisons on CSR ENG 3 – „energy crisis“ and CSR: Restricting Electrical Appliance Use to Conserve Energy. To begin, there is no statistically significant difference (Sig. = 0.598) between CZ and SK, suggesting that both countries are equally dedicated to reducing energy waste by cutting back on appliance use. Secondly, when comparing companies in CZ and PL, we have found a statistically significant difference (Sig. 0.001), with CZ companies giving more weight to this CSR activity. Thirdly, a statistically significant difference (Sig. = 0.001) can be seen when comparing SK and PL, suggesting that Polish companies are more dedicated to limiting the use of electrical appliances for energy conservation than their Slovak counterparts (Table 104).

### **Comparative analysis of the selected aspects of CSR**

A comparative analysis was undertaken to examine selected aspects of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the business practices in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. The analysis was conducted using the method of multiple linear regression (MLR). Within independent variables, we considered CSR activities across three dimensions (social, economic, and environmental), CSR reporting, company size, regional coverage, and localness of the company and country. On the other hand, dependent variables were represented by the average results from various CSR business activities related to the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict in Ukraine, and energy crisis.

Before interpreting the results of the model, we verified the fulfilment of six assumptions of multiple regression:

- Independence from random errors.
- Existence of a linear relationship of independent and dependent variables and dependent variable.

- Residuals exhibiting homoscedasticity.
- Absence of multicollinearity.
- No significant outliers, leverage points, and influential points.
- Errors (residuals) approximately following a normal distribution.

Hypothesis 1: CSR activities would have an influence on COVID-19 support. To analyse this hypothesis, multiple linear regression was employed at 95% confidence intervals. The analysis showed a significant model summary:

**Table 105** – Model Summary for CSR and COVID-19 Related Activities

| Model  | R     | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|--|-------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1  | .473a | .224     | .203              | 1.001579766689270          |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), AVG_REP 1, GCH 3 – Regional Coverage in the Monitored Country, Country, AVG_TBL 7,8,9 – Economic CSR activities, GCH 5 – Company Size Metric, GCH 1 – Localness of Company, AVG_TBL 4,5,6 – Environmental CSR activities, AVG_TBL 1,2,3 – Social CSR activities |       |          |                   |                            |

Source: own calculation

Table 105 represents the values in the model of the COVID-19 related activities. The proposed model explains the relationship of the variables at a moderate level of 47%, which signifies mild dependence. The regression model explains around 22% of the variability in the dependent variable, suggesting a rather low level of explanatory power. Consequently, the dependency was validated by means of a correlation matrix.

The standardized coefficients (Table 106) provide insight into various predictors by highlighting numerous interesting patterns. The Localness of Company (GCH 1) shows a negative and insignificant relationship with CSR coverage (Beta = -0.042, p = 0.508), suggesting that a company's localization has no effect on its reporting on CSR activities. Similarly, CSR coverage is unaffected either by Company Size (GCH 5) or Economic CSR activities (AVG\_TBL 7,8,9). Conversely, the analysis reveals a significant and inverse relationship (Beta = -0.227, p = 0.007) of the level of attention that firms give to Social CSR activities (AVG\_TBL 1,2,3) and their CSR coverage in the context of the COVID-19 related activities. This finding indicates that companies that prioritize social CSR programmes during the pandemic are more likely to have reduced levels of the CSR coverage specifically associated with COVID-19. Furthermore, the analysis of Environmental Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, as shown in AVG\_TBL 4, 5, and 6, reveals a downward trajectory (Beta = -0.140, p = 0.080). Nevertheless, it is important to mention that this pattern does not reach statistical significance according to the standard significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ).

**Table 106** – Coefficients for Model 1 – CSR and COVID-19 Related Activities

| Model  |  | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t      | Sig. |
|--|--|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
|  |  | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |        |      |
| 1  | (Constant)   | 4.582                       | .449       |                           | 10.213 | .000 |
|  | Country  | .022                        | .074       | .016                      | .303   | .762 |
|  | GCH 1 – Localness of Company                       | -.099                       | .149       | -.042                     | -.662  | .508 |
|  | GCH 3 – Regional Coverage in the Monitored Country | .029                        | .069       | .022                      | .418   | .676 |
|  | GCH 5 – Company Size Metric                        | .000                        | .049       | .000                      | -.007  | .994 |
|  | AVG_TBL 1,2,3 – Social CSR activities              | -.221                       | .082       | -.227                     | -2.697 | .007 |
|  | AVG_TBL 4,5,6 – Environmental CSR activities       | -.134                       | .076       | -.140                     | -1.760 | .080 |
|  | AVG_TBL 7,8,9 – Economic CSR activities            | -.127                       | .092       | -.123                     | -1.382 | .168 |
|  | AVG_REPORTING CSR activities                       | -.026                       | .068       | -.027                     | -.382  | .703 |
| a. Dependent Variable: AVG_CSR COVID 19 activities |  |                             |            |                           |        |      |

Source: own calculation

The findings provide insight into the complex relationships of factors that affect the level of corporate social responsibility (CSR) coverage, and a specific focus on the context of the COVID-19 related activities. Although criteria, such as company size and economic CSR activities appear to have a limited effect. it is crucial for organizations to consider the potential trade-off between prioritizing social CSR activities and obtaining wider CSR coverage during the pandemic. These results highlight the significance of adopting a well-balanced approach. when developing CSR policies.

**Table 107** – Model Summary for CSR and the Ukrainian Crisis Related Activities

| Model  | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|--|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1  | .397 <sup>a</sup> | .157     | .134              | 1.087456358403183          |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), AVG_REP 1, GCH 3 – Regional Coverage in the Monitored Country, Country, AVG_TBL 7,8,9 – Economic CSR activities, GCH 5 – Company Size Metric, GCH 1 – Localness of Company, AVG_TBL 4,5,6 – Environmental CSR activities, AVG_TBL 1,2,3 – Social CSR activities |                   |          |                   |                            |

Source: own calculation

The summary of the model (Table 107) gives important insights into the factors that determine CSR support for activities related to the Ukrainian crisis. The model has a satisfactory level of fit, with an R-squared value of 0.157; this indicates that the included predictors can account for about 15.7% of the variance in CSR activities.

**Table 108** – Coefficients for Model 2- CSR and the Ukrainian Crisis Related Activities

| Model  |  | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t      | Sig. |
|--|--|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
|  |  | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |        |      |
| 1  | (Constant)   | 3.261                       | .487       |                           | 6.693  | .000 |
|  | Country  | -.122                       | .080       | -.086                     | -1.532 | .127 |
|  | GCH 1 – Localness of Company                       | -.136                       | .162       | -.055                     | -.836  | .404 |
|  | GCH 3 – Regional Coverage in the Monitored Country | .266                        | .075       | .194                      | 3.529  | .000 |
|  | GCH 5 – Company Size Metric                        | .038                        | .053       | .046                      | .721   | .471 |
|  | AVG_TBL 1,2,3 – Social CSR activities              | -.218                       | .089       | -.214                     | -2.444 | .015 |
|  | AVG_TBL 4,5,6 – Environmental CSR activities       | -.107                       | .082       | -.107                     | -1.295 | .196 |
|  | AVG_TBL 7,8,9 – Economic CSR activities            | .065                        | .100       | .061                      | .654   | .513 |
|  | AVG_REPORTING CSR activities                       | -.064                       | .074       | -.065                     | -.871  | .384 |
| a. Dependent Variable: AVG_CSR UKRAINE CRISIS activities |  |                             |            |                           |        |      |

Source: own calculation

Notably, there is a considerable positive connection (Beta = 0.194, p = 0.000) between the regional coverage of the monitored country (GCH 3) and the CSR support for Ukrainian crisis operations. This shows that companies that operate in wider areas are more likely to participate in CSR initiatives that are focused on the crisis in Ukraine. On the other hand, social CSR activities (AVG\_TBL 1,2,3) have a significant negative connection (Beta = -0.214, p = 0.015) with the CSR support. This indicates that organizations that give a higher priority to social CSR activities typically allocate fewer funds to the Ukrainian crisis related CSR initiatives. The findings underscore the significance of taking the geographical context and the potential trade-offs, which arise when establishing corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies related to actions associated with the Ukrainian crisis, into account. While other factors, such as company size, localness of company, and specific economic

or environmental CSR activities exhibit relatively modest effects, these findings highlight the importance of considering the regional context. To achieve a balanced and context-aware CSR strategy, companies should modify their approaches to corporate social responsibility (CSR) in line with their strategic objectives and specific needs of regions affected by the situation in Ukraine.

**Table 109** – Model Summary for CSR and the „energy crisis“ Related Activities

| Model  | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|--|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1  | .336 <sup>a</sup> | .113     | .089              | .938818232062425           |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), AVG_REP 1, GCH 3 – Regional Coverage in the Monitored Country, Country, AVG_TBL 7,8,9 – Economic CSR activities, GCH 5 – Company Size Metric, GCH 1 – Localness of Company, AVG_TBL 4,5,6 – Environmental CSR activities, AVG_TBL 1,2,3 – Social CSR activities |                   |          |                   |                            |

Source: own calculation

The proposed model explains the connection of variables at a moderate level of 39%, which signifies moderate dependence. The model summary sheds light on the factors affecting the CSR support for „energy crisis“ related activities. Within this regression model that encompasses diverse predictors – country, company characteristics, and specific CSR activities – a notable portion of the variance in CSR support ( $R^2 = 0.113$ ) is elucidated.

In particular, the regional coverage in the country that was being investigated (GCH 3) reveals a substantial positive link (Beta = 0.181,  $p = 0.002$ ) with CSR support for the „energy crisis“ related activities. This leads one to believe that companies that operate in regions that have a wider coverage are more likely to participate in the CSR efforts that relate to the energy issue. On the other hand, social CSR activities (AVG\_TBL 1, 2, 3) display a strong negative association (Beta = -0.195,  $p = 0.031$ ) with the CSR support. This indicates that organizations that give a higher priority to social CSR activities tend to give fewer support to the „energy crisis“ related CSR actions (Table 110).

Even though factors, such as the size of a firm, its location, and the economic or environmental CSR activities, have very low impacts, these discoveries highlight how important it is to take dynamics of regional environments and potential trade-offs that may arise into account. Companies should adjust their approaches to corporate social responsibility (CSR) in a way that is consistent with their strategic goals and specific requirements of regions that are currently dealing with energy shortages to build a CSR strategy that is both balanced and sensitive to the situation. CSR strategies are crucial not just for addressing energy shortages, but also for fostering sustainable development, complying with international commitments, and satisfying the expectations of local stakeholders. It is not only important to



**Table 110** – Coefficients for Model 3 – CSR and the „energy crisis“ Related Activities

| Model   |  | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t      | Sig. |
|---|--|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------|
|   |  | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |        |      |
| 1   | (Constant)   | 2.555                       | .421       |                           | 6.075  | .000 |
|   | Country  | .124                        | .069       | .103                      | 1.797  | .073 |
|   | GCH 1 – Localness of Company                       | .180                        | .140       | .087                      | 1.287  | .199 |
|   | GCH 3 – Regional Coverage in the Monitored Country | .208                        | .065       | .181                      | 3.198  | .002 |
|   | GCH 5 – Company Size Metric                        | -.032                       | .046       | -.046                     | -.700  | .485 |
|   | AVG_TBL 1,2,3 – Social CSR activities              | -.167                       | .077       | -.195                     | -2.168 | .031 |
|   | AVG_TBL 4,5,6 – Environmental CSR activities       | -.127                       | .071       | -.152                     | -1.788 | .075 |
|   | AVG_TBL 7,8,9 – Economic CSR activities            | .099                        | .086       | .110                      | 1.154  | .250 |
|   | REPORTING CSR activities                           | -.081                       | .064       | -.098                     | -1.280 | .202 |
| a. Dependent Variable: AVG_CSR „ENERGY CRISIS“ activities |  |                             |            |                           |        |      |

Source: own calculation

handle energy shortages, but it is also important to foster sustainable development. Therefore, businesses in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland should modify their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives so that they are in line with the specific regional dynamics and energy challenges that they must deal with.

### 3.4.5 Summary of the Selected Aspects of CSR in Business Practice of Czech, Polish, and Slovak Businesses

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a crucial aspect of modern business practices, reflecting a changing paradigm within the corporate sector. It focuses on three key pillars of sustainable development: social, environmental, and economic. The economic dimension involves creating value for shareholders, and communities, and loyalty in businesses. Social CSR activities focus on employee-driven volunteerism, philanthropy, and community engagement. The environmental pillar of the supply chain is significant for customers, waste minimization, sustainable waste management, circular resource utilization, and green technology investments. CSR reports are essential for disseminating organizational information related to CSR

and sustainability concerns. A comparative analysis examines specific aspects of CSR in business practices in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. The analysis shows a satisfactory level of reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.719, indicating strong internal consistency among the measured items.

The research explores the differences in CSR implementation among Czech, Polish, and Slovak businesses. The Kruskal-Wallis's test and Dunn's test were used to analyse the data. The results showed significant differences in the distribution of CSR in organizational governance structures, CSR strategic planning, and motivation for CSR engagement across countries. The structure of a company can affect how CSR activities are managed, coordinated, and incorporated into its broader operations. In Slovakia, a separate CSR department is established and placed within the Marketing department, while in Poland, CSR is mostly practiced within the Human Resources department or may not be incorporated into the overall organizational structure, at all. In the Czech Republic, CSR is under the responsibility of the Compliance department. In contrast, the organizational structure of Polish businesses does not embrace CSR in a similar manner. The findings provide valuable insights into the strategies and priorities of companies in these countries, concerning CSR governance.

According to the findings of Aldama et al. (2009), the CSR structure is a driver of organizational transformation. In addition, the researchers also discovered that there is a positive connection of the size of the company and the possibility that it will integrate CSR into structures. This suggests that larger companies are more likely to embrace such frameworks.

What should be emphasized is the fact that harmonizing the planning and implementation of CSR projects are the ways to ensure strategic consistency across all CSR activities. Schultz & Wehmeier (2010) believe that creating an individual CSR department within a company is one of the possible ways for achieving this duty. When a company establishes a CSR department, it conveys that it is serious about the practice and also ready to allocate resources to it. However, academics in the field of corporate communication have stated that merging CSR and communication departments was necessary to effectively respond to PR criticism, as well as spread information about CSR (Pollach et al., 2012).

Lock and Seele's (2016) study examined the current state of organizational CSR governance and operational structures in a practical view, looking at how the most sustainable global companies report on their activities. The first alternative, characterized by an integrated leadership structure, is represented by a clear and direct approach that requires significant funds. This approach involves development of a dedicated CSR department that continues employing direct communication with the executive board. Consequently, this option is particularly suitable for large-scale enterprises. The dual-headed organizational structure, which is likewise characterized by its high resource requirements, is particularly suitable for well-established companies. The integrated CSR approach is designed to harmonize with standard company operations, resulting in cost-efficiency and adaptability for organizations of various sizes, including large companies, as well as small and medium-sized enterprises.

The research shows that there is a major difference in how CSR strategic planning is handled in the three countries. CSR strategic planning appears to be similar in the Czech Republic and Poland, but different in Slovakia. These results highlight the significance of local and regional contexts in the development of CSR strategies, as well as the necessity of the tailored approaches based on the unique characteristics of each country or region.

According to the research of Russo & Perrini (2010), organizations decide to implement CSR as a strategic approach to incorporate economic, social, and environmental considerations into their business strategies, management practices, and operations. This goes beyond mere compliance, and involves greater investment in human, social, and environmental resources. Based on the outcomes of Cao et al. (2023), it is recommended that managers adopt a more effective CSR strategy by thoroughly evaluating different aspects of CSR.

The results have revealed significant insights into the factors that motivate companies to engage in CSR initiatives in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. In the present context, it can be observed that Slovakia and Poland demonstrate contrasting motivations for their engagement in CSR activities. In the context of the Czech Republic, it is evident that CSR engagement is influenced by a diverse range of motivations. This suggests a comprehensive approach that encompasses multiple factors, including ethical considerations, achieving business sustainability, and active participation in the community. The study conducted by Hansen et al. (2023) shows that more market-oriented companies are more likely to engage in CSR activities. This preference can be attributed to motivations grounded in beneficence, which emphasizes the ethical responsibility for doing what is right, as well as effectiveness-related motivations that focus on building positive relationships with employees and customers and gaining a competitive edge. However, it is important to consider that these motivations may not contribute to effective outcomes if a company's ethical position is already widely known, even in situations where the focus is on serving the public. The findings of Karaosmanoglu et al., (2016) indicate that it may be beneficial for companies operating in the emerging markets to communicate their ethical principles before engaging in CSR activities.

In contrast, engagement of CSR in Poland is primarily driven by considerations of public image rather than a distinct and well-defined purpose. This observation indicates that Polish companies might place a higher emphasis on the perception of responsible business practices rather than the inherent value of their CSR initiatives. The findings of the research conducted by Harjoto et al. [101] demonstrated that CSR had a positive impact on the company's image and the value of its brand. Conversely, when a company engages in irresponsible CSR activities, it can negatively affect the reputation of the brand.

Understanding different factors that drive CSR involvement in different situations can lead to more effective and meaningful CSR projects that are important to stakeholders, and help companies reach their sustainability goals.

In the next section of this summary, we will be shifting our attention to CSR practices, and carrying out an examination of social, environmental, and economic activities.

Based on most responses, it can be concluded that there is an evident degree of moderate engagement, indicating a tendency towards adopting a holistic approach to CSR activities. Poland demonstrates a combination of significant interest and certain areas of limited involvement, whereas Slovakia presents a range of reactions, from active participation to more conservative engagement. The observed distribution of responses exhibits a tendency towards achieving a harmonious average across different levels of involvement in philanthropy and sponsorship for social issues. Diversity in organizational collaboration with schools, non-profit organizations, and local authorities is evident in the distribution of responses from each country, regarding the level of engagement in social CSR activities related to community engagement and collaboration. Each country demonstrates a distinct pattern of involvement, which is shaped by various local factors and strategic objectives.

The Kruskal-Wallis H test shows that there are not any statistically significant differences in the response distributions between countries, when it comes to strategies with respect to waste minimization, sustainable waste management, circular resource utilization, and material efficiency. Nevertheless, significant differences in levels of engagement were observed in investments related to green technology, which aim to foster improvements in environmental sustainability. The observed gaps could potentially be attributed to differences in environmental regulations, industrial norms, and corporate approaches within the countries under examination.

This study aim was to analyse the effect of economic CSR activities operating in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. The findings have shown that there is not a statistically significant difference in the distribution of responses, regarding ethical governance and anti-corruption measures across these three countries. However, it is worth noting that statistically significant variations in the distribution of responses exist across different countries, regarding stakeholder engagement and transparency of business performance reporting. The results also demonstrate notable differences in the allocation of responses across countries with an emphasis on inclusive employment practices and diversity integration. The study suggests that organizations do understand the benefits associated with establishing a robust ethical organizational culture and are thus actively engaged in efforts to nurture it.

In developed economies, companies embrace socially responsible practices, and allocate resources towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the light of the objective of maximizing the shareholder value and reducing environmental risks, numerous firms seek prioritizing social responsibility, as evidenced by Boubaker et al. (2022). CSR practices are strategically implemented, and contain implications for marketing activities, particularly in relation to building loyalty, enhancing brand reputation, and building brand equity (Porter & Kramer, 2006).

This study examines the corporate social responsibility (CSR) reporting strategies employed by companies in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. It reveals significant differences that highlight the unique goals and levels of preparedness within these countries. It is interesting to note that Polish companies demonstrate a significant focus on being connected with stakeholders, which signifies a strong dedication to transparency and proactive engagement with relevant parties. On the

other hand, Slovakia sets itself aside by demonstrating a notable commitment to diversity and inclusive employment practices, which displays a solid attitude towards the promotion of diversity in the professional environment. In addition to the disparities in the CSR goals, important differences occur with the establishment of the CSR reporting methods. Slovakia stands out as a leader in terms of implementing organized and stipulated processes, while Poland and the Czech Republic demonstrate similarities in this aspect. Moreover, the research findings indicate significant variations in the level of preparedness for the CSR reporting, with Slovakia emerging as the frontrunner, followed by Poland, and the Czech Republic. The previously mentioned differences highlight the diverse levels of preparedness and attention shown by companies in these countries, when it comes to participating in the CSR reporting, especially in times of significant global crises. Therefore, the discoveries contain practical implications, underscoring the necessity of designed strategies that enhance CSR reporting techniques, while considering the specific circumstances prevailing in every country.

This section of the study entails a comprehensive examination of CSR activities implemented by companies of the selected countries throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, it investigates how they responded to the Ukrainian crisis, and efforts related to energy conservation. The study reveals significant differences in CSR strategies and priorities across these countries, as well as provides insights into their unique methods of ensuring employee safety, offering humanitarian assistance, and implementing sustainable practices.

One interesting discovery concerns different approaches adopted for ensuring employee safety throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Poland stood out for its large offering of personal protective equipment to employees, while the Czech Republic and Slovakia had policies that were comparable but not identical. This demonstrates Polish priority in safeguarding the well-being of its workforce during the pandemic. Chen et al. (2018) and Nave and Ferreira (2019) observed a notable emphasis on CSR initiatives with a focus on humanitarian and philanthropic activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. These initiatives covered corporate activities that sought enhancing society, prioritizing other objectives than financial profit for the company.

Analysis of the Ukrainian conflict and its effects on CSR activities in the individual countries also emphasized. The study's findings, proven feasible by the Kruskal-Wallis test, provide insights into how companies in these countries deal with complex geopolitical difficulties like the Ukrainian conflict. In terms of CSR activities related to the Ukrainian crisis, substantial differences emerge. Particularly compared with other countries, the Czech Republic places a considerably greater focus on financial support efforts. In contrast, Slovakia stands out for its proactive attitude to helping refugees during the crisis in Ukraine. Furthermore, Slovakia shows itself as the most different from all three countries in terms of employment opportunities for those affected by the crisis, demonstrating a significant commitment to helping displaced individuals. In the research by Asemah-Ibrahim et al., (2020), multinational corporations demonstrate a stronger tendency towards supporting Ukraine rather than Russia in the ongoing conflict between the two nations. Because of this, a significant amount of the corporate social responsibility (CSR)

initiatives carried out in these countries focus on offering assistance to Ukraine and the people who live there.

Differences occur when social responsibility efforts addressing the energy problem are compared to one another. The data shows that there are notable differences between how these countries go about their business. Companies in the Czech Republic show a stronger commitment to sustainability, especially in the field of energy-efficient technologies. Sustainable energy solutions have become a top priority in Poland, while businesses in Slovakia might benefit from discovering the methods used by their Czech and Polish competitors. In addition, compared to their Slovak counterparts, Czech businesses show greater commitment to optimizing building temperatures for energy conservation within the context of energy-saving initiatives. Companies place a premium on sustainability, and this policy reflects it. Polish businesses adopt a broader approach to energy saving than their Slovak counterparts, with a focus on reducing the use of electrical appliances.

In sum, this section places emphasis on various CSR approaches and priorities of firms in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. It highlights the significance of adopting CSR programmes to address regional concerns such as pandemics, geopolitical crises, and energy conservation.

Using multiple linear regression (MLR), the current research compares the CSR activities of companies in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. The main purpose is to clarify how CSR efforts due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ukrainian crisis, and the „energy crisis“ were affected by different CSR dimensions, CSR reporting, company characteristics, and country-related factors.

Model 1: CSR and the COVID-19 Related Activities: We have explored the impact of CSR activities and selected categories on CSR actions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The model shows a moderate association ( $R^2 = 0.224$ ), indicating mild dependence. The predictors collectively explain approximately 22% of the variability in the CSR activities related to COVID-19. In the light of the notable negative correlation shown between the social CSR initiatives and the extent of CSR coverage during the pandemic, it is recommended that companies focus on achieving a harmonious equilibrium in their CSR agenda. Although the social initiatives are of the highest priority, too much emphasis laid on them could potentially result in lack of focus on the CSR efforts associated with the global pandemic. It is recommended to implement a comprehensive CSR plan that efficiently allocates resources that cover both social programmes and those specifically targeted at addressing the pandemic.

Model 2: CSR and the Ukrainian Crisis Related Activities: The model demonstrates a satisfactory level of fit, as indicated by a  $R^2$  value of 0.157. This value suggests that the model can explain approximately 15.7% of the variance in the CSR activities related to the Ukrainian situation. The study reveals a significant positive connection of the regional coverage of the monitored country (GCH 3) and the CSR support for Ukrainian crisis related operations. Companies that have a broader geographical presence tend to exhibit greater engagement in corporate social responsibility initiatives related to the Ukrainian crisis. To improve their CSR impacts under such circumstances, it is advisable for companies to think about the expansion of their geographical reach or involvement in areas that have been adversely affected

by crises. Nevertheless, it is crucial to maintain equilibrium in resource allocation, as dedicating an excessive number of resources to social CSR activities might limit their capacity to contribute to the crisis-related CSR initiatives.

Model 3: CSR and the „energy crisis“ related activities: The objective of this section is to analyse the impact of the CSR activities and the selected categories on the CSR support for addressing the energy crisis. The model reveals a moderate association ( $R^2 = 0.113$ ), indicating moderate dependence.

Regional coverage within the country emerges as a significant driver of the CSR support for „energy crisis“ related activities. Companies operating in areas with wider coverage are better positioned to contribute to the „energy crisis“ related CSR efforts. However, organizations should also be cautious about allocating an excessive number of resources to social CSR activities, as this might limit their ability to resolve critical problems, such as energy crisis. Effective CSR strategies require that the CSR priorities are balanced and in accordance with the regional dynamics. Baumann-Pauly et al. (2013) also identified „distinct implementation patterns of CSR,“ confirming the importance of the company size in the CSR frameworks. Even though large corporations are better at advertising their CSR frameworks, small businesses are more adept at integrating CSR into their day-to-day operations.

CSR strategies are crucial not only for addressing energy crises, but also for fostering achievement of a balanced CSR agenda, allocating resources efficiently, expanding geographical reach in critical situations, and maintaining equilibrium in resource allocation to effectively address these critical challenges.

## 4 Summary of Results (Jana Kozáková)

Recently, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained significant prominence in the Visegrad region, indicating a notable shift in businesses' priorities. It is increasingly known as a vital component of business operations, marking a departure from a sole focus on economic growth towards a more comprehensive approach that comprehends addressing social and environmental concerns. CSR initiatives in the Visegrad region have evolved beyond traditional philanthropic activities, covering a broader spectrum of endeavours. These involve ethical sourcing, responsible supply chain management, employee well-being, environmental stewardship, active community engagement, and strengthening corporate governance. Furthermore, the practice of CSR reporting and transparency has become more widespread, aiding companies in communicating their social and environmental impacts to stakeholders effectively. Governments in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia have also recognized significance of CSR and have implemented policies and frameworks to promote responsible business practices. These initiatives aim to create an environment helpful to CSR, foster dialogue between businesses and stakeholders, and align national development strategies with sustainable goals. However, challenges persist in the implementation and assessment of CSR within the Visegrad region, including limited awareness and understanding of the CSR principles among businesses, varying levels of commitment and resources, and the need for more robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Even so, the increasing momentum behind CSR in the Visegrad region indicates a positive transformation and is poised to play an increasingly dominant role in shaping the direction of business practices in the region.

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework is a widely adopted method for evaluating CSR performance. It analyses how a company operates in three key dimensions: economic, social, and environmental. The economic dimension explains how a company's operations affect the economy. This encompasses areas like economic growth, employment practices, and adherence to equitable business standards. Companies can meet these goals by investing in sustainable technologies, generating job opportunities, ensuring equitable compensation, and responsibly managing own taxes. Social dimension gauges a company's societal impact, covering aspects like human rights, labour practices, consumer rights, and community engagement. Companies can contribute within this dimension by championing diversity and inclusivity in their workforce, ensuring safe and healthy working conditions, upholding human rights, and actively supporting local communities. The environmental dimension casts light on the ecological ramifications of a company's actions, including



concerns like climate change, pollution, resource utilization, and biodiversity. Companies can subsidise within this dimension by cutting down on energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, transitioning to sustainable energy sources, conserving resources, minimizing waste, and embracing eco-friendly materials and packaging. The TBL as a framework serves as an invaluable resource for companies deeply dedicated to CSR. It empowers them to make a positive impact on the world, while advancing sustainability. However, it's vital to grasp that this framework is complex and in a constant state of evolution, with no universal blueprint. Companies should tailor their approaches to their unique circumstances, using the framework as a sturdy foundation for their CSR endeavours.

CSR reporting symbolizes a strategic management strategy that enables companies to oversee, document, and improve their efforts concerning social responsibility, environmental sustainability, and corporate governance. It acts as a means for companies to convey their CSR initiatives to stakeholders, while pinpointing areas for development. A noticeable correlation exists between the CSR reporting and a company's financial performance. Companies with a robust financial performance are more likely to report on their CSR activities, as they possess the resources for investing in CSR initiatives and aiming to affirm their presence in the market. However, a substantial portion of companies refrains from publishing non-financial CSR reports, mainly due to the limited prevalence of reporting principles and the absence of regulatory mandates for most firms. Various standards and guidelines, including the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) guidelines and the AA1000 Accountability standards, provide companies with structured frameworks to report on their CSR endeavours consistently and openly. The importance of CSR reporting is growing for companies, driven by the increasing demands from investors, financial institutions, and other stakeholders on comprehensive insights into a company's social and environmental performance. CSR reporting serves as a tool to attract and retain investors, customers, and employees, while enhancing transparency, accountability, operational efficiency, and innovation. It contributes to sustainable development, aiding companies in managing their social and environmental impacts, while enhancing their financial performance.

CSR serves as a mechanism through which businesses can demonstrate their commitment to social and environmental responsibility, particularly during times of crisis. Extensive literature on CSR and crises highlights the crucial roles played by socially responsible businesses (SRBs) under such challenging circumstances. The Visegrad region has recently faced not only the COVID-19 crisis but also the conflict in Ukraine, and an ongoing energy crisis. It's crucial to highlight the occurrences of CSR activities implemented by businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. These initiatives included financial support to organizations on the pandemic's front lines, donations of essential items like masks, sanitizers, ventilators, and personal protective equipment (PPE), various forms of support for employees, assistance to local communities, research and development efforts focused on COVID-19 treatment or vaccines, adjustments in manufacturing to produce essential pandemic-related supplies, awareness campaigns to educate the public about the virus, and a clear emphasis on the increasing importance of CSR during challenging times. In the

monitored countries, CSR also played a vital role in responding to the Ukrainian conflict, with activities mainly aimed at supporting Ukrainian refugees. These initiatives included financial aid, material donations, and even shelter provision. CSR responses to the conflict ranged from financial support and advocacy to the supply chain management and sustainability initiatives, all aiming at upholding human rights and aiding in recovery. CSR has become a fundamental strategy during the energy crisis, with businesses engaging in various CSR activities to promote sustainable energy use and mitigate its effects. These initiatives encompass investing in renewable energy sources, improving energy efficiency, educating stakeholders about energy conservation, carbon offsetting, sustainable supply chain management, supporting research and development, community engagement, advocacy, partnerships with non-profits, employee engagement, and transparent reporting. On a global scale, Europe has adopted a more structured approach to CSR, with the EU encouraging adherence to the international guidelines. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the significance of CSR, prompting companies worldwide to support employees, communities, and the environment. CSR plays a crucial role in times of global crisis by mitigating impacts, aiding recovery, and promoting resilience, all while maintaining a commitment to balancing profits, people, and the planet.

The research findings on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the Czech Republic highlight the growing environmental challenges resulting from development and economic growth since the 1950s. These challenges include health issues, air pollution, water management problems, biodiversity loss, natural resource depletion, and climate change. The study highlights the increasing interest in global sustainability and CSR as a response to these challenges. In Czechia, companies are no longer viewed solely as profit-driven entities. Stakeholders now expect them to go beyond legal obligations and actively engage in sustainable practices. However, the study reveals that there is space for greater stakeholder involvement in shaping CSR within Czech organizations, with only 33 out of 100 respondents indicating strong commitment to involving stakeholders in CSR initiatives. Sustainable development, encompassing social, natural resource, and economic growth aspects, is crucial in the Czech Republic. Sustainability management is here viewed as a way for organizations to address current and future societal needs, possibly improving the quality of life. Many Czech companies actively integrate CSR into their organizational management structures, often incorporating responsibility into human resources departments or establishing dedicated CSR departments. Companies here are increasingly recognizing the importance of responsible behaviour towards the environment and society, not just generating profit. CSR activities are seen in the Czech Republic to improve customer satisfaction, secure competitive advantages, and foster growth. Effective communication of CSR activities to stakeholders is crucial for their success. Transparent disclosure of the CSR activities through non-financial reporting is becoming essential, driven by the EU directives and the ever-changing regulations. In the Czech Republic, only a fraction of companies formally reports on CSR activities, with many of them feeling unprepared for this responsibility. Disclosure of CSR activities is deemed important for achieving corporate objectives, satisfying stakeholder interests, protecting employee interests, clarifying a company's

CSR contributions, and aiding investment decisions. Generally, CSR in the Czech Republic is gaining prominence as a response to environmental and societal challenges. Companies are beginning to recognize the value of CSR in improving their relationships with stakeholders and enhancing their overall performance. However, there is still a need for greater stakeholder involvement, improved CSR reporting, and increased awareness of CSR concepts among organizations in the region.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) holds significant importance in the management of businesses also in Poland. It is viewed as a tool that not only enhances a company's reputation but also actively engages it in social and environmental initiatives. Multinational corporations' subsidiaries have played an essential role in introducing and incorporating CSR practices in Poland, and strategies from their home countries. A research study was conducted on a diverse group of Polish companies, including those with foreign capital, local companies, and subsidiaries of foreign entities. While a few companies have been dedicated CSR structures, many cite high implementation costs as a challenge. However, most companies have CSR activities incorporated in their strategic plans, as CSR is increasingly seen as a source of competitive advantage. Motivations for CSR activities vary, ranging from contributing to the public good to aligning with market trends, with a growing focus on enhancing competitiveness. Despite the potential benefits, employee volunteering and community initiatives are not widespread among Polish companies, especially SMEs. Lack of awareness may contribute to it, but companies that incorporate these activities into their culture benefit from improved employee satisfaction, reputation, and stakeholder relationships. CSR encompasses environmental concerns, with a focus on minimizing negative ecological impacts and efficient waste management. Eco-innovation is becoming integral part of the businesses, with an emphasis on sustainable waste management, recycling, and adopting circular economy principles. However, only a limited number of companies invest significantly in green technologies, often due to lack of understanding or available resources. Ethical management, including combating corruption and discrimination, is deemed important, driven by stakeholder expectations. Transparency and stakeholder engagement are crucial for creating the value. While more than a half of the surveyed companies prioritize these aspects, a significant percentage still does not attach importance to them. CSR reporting is not widespread in Poland, especially among smaller companies. Awareness of the benefits and harmonization of the reporting standards are the identified challenges. The 2022 EU directive is expected to expand CSR reporting requirements and increase awareness. During the COVID-19 pandemic, companies in Poland demonstrated commitment to CSR by supporting healthcare facilities, providing protective equipment, and contributing to humanitarian projects. CSR activities remained a priority despite the crisis, strengthening the belief in CSR's importance. In the context of the Ukrainian conflict, Polish companies engaged in humanitarian aid, offering financial aid and support for refugees. While many companies actively participated, some showed limited commitment, highlighting the need for greater awareness and engagement. The „energy crisis“ has heightened the importance of CSR, with companies investing in energy-saving technologies, adjusting building temperatures, and conserving energy. Energy conservation has become

a crucial aspect of CSR activities, contributing to sustainability. In conclusion, CSR in Poland is evolving and becoming increasingly integrated into business strategies, driven by various motivations. While challenges remain, such as the limited CSR reporting and varying commitment levels, there is awareness growing of the benefits of CSR for both businesses and society, making it a prominent area of research and focus for companies in Poland.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Slovakia reflects a complex relationship influenced by institutional, economic, and industry-specific factors. The integration of CSR within businesses varies significantly, indicating diverse approaches and priorities. Corporate governance in Slovakia encompasses both structural and behavioural aspects, focusing on responsibilities for both shareholders and stakeholders. This diversity in governance is reflected in the varied approaches to CSR integration among companies. Some corporations adopt a less formal approach, while others prioritize CSR through dedicated departments, compliance divisions, marketing, or HR departments. Strategic positioning of CSR within organizations is essential to demonstrating a company's commitment to social and environmental issues. Stakeholder involvement in the planning stage and effective internal communication are emphasized in the CSR management. Challenges in the CSR implementation include time constraints, limited resources, high costs, and some corporations not recognizing the legal requirement of CSR. Motivations for engaging in CSR differ, with some companies aligning with societal and corporate trends, competing with their counterparts, or contributing to the public good. Employee participation in CSR is seen to boost enthusiasm and organizational performance, with varying levels of support for employee-driven volunteerism. Charitable donation is another component of CSR, with differing levels of commitment among companies. Circular economy and environmental responsibility are deemed crucial CSR components, with varying degrees of commitment to resource efficiency and circularity. Ethical governance and anti-corruption initiatives are important CSR aspects, too, although some companies do not conduct them. Transparent performance reporting is lacking in several organizations, affecting stakeholder communication through CSR reporting. Inclusivity and diversity in hiring procedures are valued by some companies but not by all. The study highlights diverse CSR strategies employed by Slovak companies, and identifies areas for improvement in governance, stakeholder communication, employee engagement, environmental responsibility, and ethical governance. CSR reporting is seen as a means of conveying the social and environmental impact of economic operations. While awareness of CSR exists among Slovak respondents, formalized CSR reporting structures vary among companies. Some produce comprehensive yearly reports demonstrating a strong commitment to transparency, while others do so less frequently or at irregular intervals. Some companies do not have formalized CSR reporting structures. Quality of CSR disclosures is considered more important than the quantity, and variables, such as shareholder power, board of directors, and firm-related factors affect CSR disclosure levels. Some companies incorporate CSR content into their reports heavily, emphasizing transparency and moral conduct, while others disclose limited or no CSR activities. Preparation for CSR reporting varies, with some companies feeling well-prepared, while others

believing they can improve their reporting procedures. Some companies lack preparedness, citing resource limitations or operational challenges. CSR initiatives during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic vary in scale and focus, with some businesses prioritizing support for laid-off workers, demonstrating potential long-term benefits in terms of loyalty, productivity, and reputation. However, some companies still prioritize minimal CSR initiatives. The response to humanitarian crises, such as the situation in Ukraine, varies among businesses, with some providing substantial financial and humanitarian support. CSR programmes related to refugee relief efforts also differ, with some companies actively promoting integration and assistance to refugees. Employment opportunities for displaced individuals vary among companies. During the energy crisis, CSR efforts related to sustainability and energy efficiency showed variation, with some companies making significant commitments to energy conservation, while others implemented minor adjustments. Overall, the study underscores diverse CSR landscape in Slovakia, and highlights opportunities for improvement in various CSR dimensions.

Comparative analysis has revealed differences in CSR practices among the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, showing strong internal consistency among the measured items. The research examines distinctions in CSR implementation across these countries, revealing disparities in organizational governance structures, CSR strategic planning, and motivations for CSR engagement. Organizational structure plays a serious role in managing CSR activities, with separate CSR departments established in Slovakia, but not in Poland. Harmonizing CSR planning and implementation is a key for achieving strategic consistency, either by creating a dedicated CSR department or merging CSR with communication departments. Different motivations drive CSR engagement. In the Czech Republic, a broad approach includes ethical considerations, business sustainability, and community involvement. Poland focuses on public image, while Slovakia displays a diverse range of motivations. Understanding these motivations is essential for effective CSR project design. The study also highlights CSR practices during crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, Ukrainian conflict, and energy crisis. Companies in Poland prioritize employee safety, while the Czech Republic and Slovakia demonstrate similar policies. Significant differences exist in CSR activities related to the Ukrainian crisis, with the Czech Republic offering more financial support, and Slovakia actively aiding refugees. Regarding the energy crisis, Czech companies prioritize sustainability and green technologies, while Poland emphasizes energy-efficient solutions. Statistical analyses provide insights into how CSR activities during these crises are influenced by CSR dimensions, reporting, company characteristics, and country-related factors. The findings emphasize the importance of achieving a balanced CSR agenda, allocating resources effectively, expanding geographical reach, and maintaining equilibrium in resource allocation to address critical challenges.

# 5 Suggestions and Recommendations (Jana Kozáková)

Based on the performed analysis, in this section, we summarize recommendations for business practice, responsible authorities, institutions operating in the field, pedagogical practice, and for further research in this area.

## **Recommendations for Businesses in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia:**

- 1. Integration of CSR into Business Strategy:** Companies should prioritize the integration of CSR into their core business strategies. This should include dedicating resources, establishing dedicated CSR departments or roles, and aligning CSR initiatives with long-term business goals.
- 2. Stakeholder Engagement:** Companies should involve stakeholders in shaping CSR initiatives. They should engage more in transparent communication with stakeholders, both internal and external, to understand their expectations and needs.
- 3. Employee Involvement:** Companies should encourage employee participation in CSR activities, including volunteerism. Engaged employees can be valuable ambassadors for CSR efforts and boost overall organizational performance.
- 4. Environmental Responsibility:** Companies should embrace environmental responsibility by investing in sustainable technologies, resource conservation, and adopting circular economy principles. These efforts can help minimizing negative ecological impacts of their activities.
- 5. Ethical Governance:** Companies should promote wider ethical governance within the organization by implementing anti-corruption initiatives and fostering a culture of transparency and accountability.
- 6. CSR Reporting:** Companies should consider adopting structured CSR reporting frameworks, such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) guidelines, or the AA1000 Accountability standards. Transparent CSR reporting enhances communication with stakeholders and indicates commitment to social and environmental responsibility.
- 7. CSR During Crises:** Companies in V3 region should maintain their commitment to CSR during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or other humanitarian crises. CSR activities during crises can positively affect employee loyalty, reputation, and long-term relationships with stakeholders.

## **Recommendations for Responsible Authorities and Institutions in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia:**

- 1. Promote CSR Awareness:** Authorities and institutions in the monitored countries should actively promote awareness and understanding of the CSR principles among businesses, especially SMEs. Provide resources, training, and guidance to facilitate CSR adoption.
- 2. Regulatory Frameworks:** Companies must consider implementing regulatory mandates or incentives to encourage CSR reporting and responsible business practices and align policies with international guidelines for consistency.
- 3. Support Research:** Companies should allocate resources for research on CSR practices and their impact within the region. This research can provide valuable insights for policymakers and businesses alike.
- 4. Encourage Stakeholder Collaboration:** Companies in the region should foster dialogue and collaboration of businesses, government bodies, NGOs, and local communities to address social and environmental concerns collectively.
- 5. CSR Education:** Companies in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia should integrate CSR education into pedagogical practices. Therefore, they will be able to equip future business leaders with knowledge and skills necessary for responsible business practices.

## **Recommendations for Further Research in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia:**

- 1. Cross-Regional Comparative Studies:** Researchers should conduct further comparative studies on CSR practices in other regions to identify trends, challenges, and best practices. This will contribute to broader understanding of CSR's impacts on businesses and society.
- 2. Long-Term Impact Assessment:** Researchers should investigate the long-term impact of CSR initiatives on business performance, employee satisfaction, and stakeholder relationships. This will provide empirical evidence of the benefits of CSR in the region.
- 3. CSR Reporting Frameworks:** Research should explore more the evolution and effectiveness of CSR reporting frameworks over time. It is essential to analyse their impact on transparency, accountability, and stakeholder engagement.
- 4. CSR in Different Industries:** Investigate how CSR practices vary across different industries within the Visegrad region. Industry-specific studies can provide tailored recommendations.
- 5. CSR During Different Types of Crises:** Research should further analyse how businesses' CSR responses differ during various types of crises (e.g., economic, environmental, social). This will assess the effectiveness of CSR strategies in mitigating crisis impacts.
- 6. Employee Perspectives:** Researchers should examine perspectives and experiences of employees engaged in CSR activities. Using this strategy, they can understand how CSR affects their job satisfaction and overall well-being.

These recommendations aim to promote responsible integration of CSR into business practices in the monitored countries, as the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, foster collaboration among stakeholders in the region, enhance awareness and education, and encourage further research to advance CSR initiatives within the Visegrad region.



# Conclusion

The study aimed to describe selected aspects of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the business practices of companies from the Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia), and compare the results of these countries. The study used various groups of variables related to general characteristics, CSR characteristics, Triple Bottom Line activities, CSR reporting, and CSR activities connected with global crises. Based on the research findings presented in this scientific monograph named „Corporate Social Responsibility in Business Practice of the Visegrad Region (Czechia, Poland, Slovakia),“ the following key conclusions can be outlined:

- 1. Increasing Prominence of CSR:** Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained significant prominence in the Visegrad region (the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia), signifying a notable shift in businesses' priorities in the region. It has evolved from traditional philanthropic activities to a broader spectrum of endeavours, including ethical sourcing, responsible supply chain management, employee well-being, environmental stewardship, community engagement, and corporate governance.
- 2. CSR Reporting and Transparency:** The practice of CSR reporting and transparency in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia has become more widespread, enabling companies in these countries to effectively communicate their social and environmental impacts to stakeholders. This trend in the region is driven by increasing demands from investors, financial institutions, and other stakeholders on comprehensive insights into a company's CSR efforts.
- 3. Government Recognition:** Governments in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia have recognized the significance of CSR, and have implemented policies and frameworks to promote responsible business practices among business entities in the region. These initiatives aim to create an environment supporting to CSR, foster dialogue between businesses and stakeholders, and align national development strategies with sustainable goals of global, not just regional importance.
- 4. Persisting Challenges:** Despite the positive momentum, challenges persist in the implementation and assessment of CSR within the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. These challenges include limited awareness and understanding of the CSR principles among businesses, varying levels of commitment and resources, and the need for more robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in the region.
- 5. Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Framework:** The TBL framework analysing economic, social, and environmental dimensions is widely adopted for evaluating

CSR performance in the monitored countries. In the region, it provides companies committed to CSR with valuable resources, allowing them to have a positive impact on the world, while advancing sustainability.

- 6. CSR in Times of Crisis:** CSR plays a crucial role during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which has increased its importance in the Visegrad region during the Ukrainian conflict, and the ongoing energy crisis. Socially responsible businesses (SRBs) have actively contributed to relief efforts, demonstrating a company's commitment to social and environmental responsibility.
- 7. Environmental Challenges:** The research findings highlight growing environmental challenges in the region (especially in the Czech Republic), including health issues, air pollution, water management problems, biodiversity loss, natural resource depletion, and climate change. CSR is seen to address these challenges and improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of the Visegrad region.
- 8. CSR Reporting and Transparency:** Transparent disclosure of CSR activities through non-financial reporting is considered essential in the Visegrad region, driven by the EU directives and ever-changing regulations. However, there is still space for improvement in CSR reporting and awareness among organizations in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia.
- 9. Diverse CSR Landscape:** The CSR landscape in the Visegrad region, notably Poland, is diverse, with various motivations driving the CSR engagement. While challenges like the limited CSR reporting and varying commitment levels exist, there is also growing awareness of the benefits of CSR for businesses and society of the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia.
- 10. Unique Slovak CSR Approaches:** CSR practices in the Visegrad region, especially in Slovakia, reflect a complex relationship influenced by institutional, economic, and industry-specific factors. The integration of CSR varies among companies, as they have diverse approaches and priorities.
- 11. Comparative Analysis:** The comparative analysis across the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia highlights differences in the CSR implementation, governance structures, strategic planning, and motivations among the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. Understanding these distinctions is crucial for designing an effective CSR project in the region.

In summary, CSR has become a prominent aspect of business practice in the Visegrad region, driven by increasing awareness of social and environmental concerns. While challenges still exist, the commitment to CSR is expected to continue shaping the direction of business practices in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and responsible business environment.

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