



White paper on responsible and sustainable practices in self-employed entrepreneurship

DRAFT



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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS SURE ?

The 2022-2024 European project SURE (Sustainable and Responsible Entrepreneurship), led by actors from France, Bulgaria, Italy and Belgium, **offers tools adapted to self-employed entrepreneurs to help them contribute to the just transition.** Indeed, the partners have identified a lack of CSR training resources for self-employed people, even though their commitment to implementing sustainable development is essential to achieve a just transition, in line with the European Union's objectives. Three tools have been developed; the first one aims to help each self-employed entrepreneur assess its sustainable practices. The second tool provides key elements for trainers to integrate sustainable development into their training. The final tool, this white paper, offers a **set of recommendations for self-employed entrepreneurs and political decision-makers** to enable the former to integrate a Corporate and Social Responsibility policy on the theme of green and social skills.



FIVE PARTNERS FROM FOUR DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

CO-ACTIONS (France) – Cooperative of entrepreneurs

Co-actions is a cooperative of entrepreneurs (Cooperative d'Activité et d'Emploi) based in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region. The cooperative aims to develop projects, support individual entrepreneurs and works with public and private organizations as partners in local development.

Agence LUCIE (France) – Sustainable development certification label

Agence LUCIE, based in Paris, promotes Positive Corporate Social Responsibility, and develops pioneering solutions for progress in CSR, accessible to all levels, sizes and means of organisations. Its tools are based on major international standards (ISO 26000, ODD, ISO 14001, etc.).

POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ (Belgium) – European think Tank on Social and Solidarity Economy

POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ (PLS) is an independent European think & do tank active in Brussels. PLS is committed to a Europe of solidarity and sustainability and focuses its activities on five thematic areas: Social Affairs, Social and Environmental Responsibility and Diversity, Citizen Participation, Sustainable Development, Social Economy.

CCI VRATSA (Bulgaria) – Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Vratsa

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) in Vratsa oversees establishing the most favourable business environment for Bulgarian companies and facilitating their activity, working closely with public authorities and other non-governmental organisations, SMEs, academic and research bodies, as well as with other business support structures and foreign Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

ARIS FORMAZIONE E RICERCA (Italy) – Training and Research Centre

Aris Formazione e Ricerca (Aris – Vocational Training and Research) is an organisation providing and designing integrated projects in the field of vocational training, advanced research and consultancy located in Perugia. ARIS associates 36 social enterprises and cooperatives and acts to share the knowledge and know-how acquired by each of them.

THE NEED TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN EUROPE

It is imperative to promote sustainable and responsible entrepreneurship in Europe, particularly in the light of the **different policies put in place by the European Union**. One of these key initiatives is the **Green Pact for Europe**, which aims to make the continent the first to achieve **climate neutrality by 2050**. This initiative aims to turn environmental and climate challenges into drivers for sustainable growth and innovation.

At the same time, the **GreenComp** is a reference framework for sustainability competences. It provides a common ground to learners and guidance to educators, advancing a consensual definition of what sustainability as a competence entails. The framework seeks to adjust existing accounting rules to reflect environmental and social issues more fully and aims to **enable companies to report transparently on their environmental and social performance**, which may also stimulate the adoption of sustainable practices.

On the social side, the **European Pillar of Social Rights** was officially proclaimed by the European Union institutions in 2017. It represents a **set of social principles and rights designed to guarantee fair and decent working conditions for all European workers [1]**.

In line with these European policies/guidelines, and to enable a just transition to a more sustainable and social economy, it is crucial to **actively involve all players in society**. This includes large companies, small and medium-sized enterprises, government bodies, non-governmental organizations, consumers and **microenterprises**. These latter **have an essential role to play in implementing a just transition towards a sustainable economic model** and training them in the issues of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the Green Pact, the Green Deal Accounting and the European Social Rights Framework is of vital importance. This training will enable them to **adjust their practices to new environmental and social standards, remain competitive in a constantly changing market, and actively contribute to the transition towards a sustainable and equitable economy**.

[1] European charter of fundamental rights, available online : https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/default_en.htm



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SELF-EMPLOYED ENTREPRENEURS

Why self-employed entrepreneurs should be part of a CSR approach ?

The project SURE concerns self-employed entrepreneurs, individual entrepreneurs, self-employed workers and the smallest micro enterprises. It is important to note that local green initiatives are increasingly valued by all stakeholders in society, from the European Union, which has established a favourable framework for them, to consumers, who are trying to change their habits in order to limit their carbon footprint. Over time, incorporating CSR practices can become a core part of the individual worker practice and benefit both the business and society at large.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Position the self-employed entrepreneurs as agents of change: this is essential, on the one hand because self-employed people represent a large part of companies in Europe and on the other because they operate on a local scale that directly affects citizens.
- Assess the level of CSR in the self-employed entrepreneurs: this is possible with result 1 of the SURE project. This will enable the self-employed entrepreneur to think about which areas of CSR it wishes to develop as a priority, and how to go about it.
- Train in CSR issues: several training courses are available to help self-employed people integrate this issue into their project. More and more trainers will be empowered to help self-employed entrepreneurs achieve this objective.

A training toolbox for trainers on sustainable development

In 2023, SURE partners published a CSR and green skills training toolkit that can be used to :

- Train entrepreneurship trainers on the ecological transition and sustainable practices so that they can support individual entrepreneurs.
 - Train trainers in the digital skills of multimodal training.
 - Develop content to help self-employed entrepreneurs combine the development of their commercial activity with the social and ecological transition.
- Promote ethical corporate governance: this means encouraging transparency, accountability and informed decision-making within the self-employed entrepreneurship.
 - Involve employees: because all stakeholders in the CSR reflection process can help identify practical and innovative solutions.
 - Reduce the environmental impact of the self-employed entrepreneurship : by encouraging eco-responsible practices, such as efficient waste management, reduced energy consumption and the use of sustainable materials.

- Promote social commitment: for example, self-employed entrepreneurs can get involved in their local communities by supporting social, cultural or educational initiatives.
- Use responsible sourcing: by encouraging the purchase of local, sustainable and ethical products and services to contribute to a more sustainable supply chain.

Good to know : challenges for self-employed entrepreneurs in adopting sustainable practices :

- **Financial constraints** : self-employed entrepreneurs do not always have the financial resources to invest in sustainable and responsible practices, even if this investment can be profitable in the long term.
- **Lack of knowledge and awareness**
- **Lack of time**
- **Legislative complexity** : the legislative framework for sustainability and social responsibility can be complicated to navigate, particularly for self-employed entrepreneurs that have few resources to comply with these regulations.
- **Lack of successful experiences** : this can discourage the adoption of sustainable and responsible practices.
- **Competitive pressures** : in some sectors, self-employed entrepreneurs may perceive the adoption of sustainable practices as a competitive disadvantage if their competitors do not adopt the same measures.

In order to overcome these difficulties, it is important that government players, business support organisations and stakeholders work together to provide the right resources, incentives and advice for self-employed entrepreneurs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS

- **Support a cooperative framework to provide support for self-employed entrepreneurs:** Coopératives d'Activités et d'Emplois (CAEs), like the Coopérative Co-actions in France, bring together autonomous entrepreneurs and microenterprises and provide them with economic and human support to develop a sustainable local economy. Similarly, it's worth encouraging the creation of partnerships between self-employed entrepreneurs and other players in society, such as NGOs, academic institutions and businesses, to promote collaborative CSR projects and initiatives.
- **Inform and raise awareness of responsibility and sustainability issues:** sustainable and responsible entrepreneurship is a key European issue. Every decision-maker, at local, regional, national and European level, can draw on GreenComp which lists 12 competences that form the basis of sustainability for all. By developing these skills, decision-makers will automatically create a more favourable framework for all structures, including self-employed entrepreneurs, wishing to integrate sustainable practices into their projects.
- **Develop standards and regulations specific to the issue of responsibility and sustainability in self-employed entrepreneurship:** this could include various standards and regulations such as tax incentives for sustainable practices, reporting requirements on social and environmental impacts...
- **Facilitate access to CSR financing for self-employed entrepreneurs:** for example, the creation of specific funds to support sustainable and responsible initiatives will encourage self-employed entrepreneurs to move towards this type of practice.
- **Promote best practices:** highlight sustainable and responsible enterprises by publicly recognizing its players through awards or distinctions.



PERSPECTIVES

The territorial impact of self-employed entrepreneurship is a powerful lever for transforming local communities. It is imperative to recognise the fundamental role of self-employed entrepreneurship in achieving a just transition^[1] towards an economic society that respects the environment and social rights. To make this transition a success, we need to guide and direct these players in the right way, through policies and initiatives that promote sustainable innovation, social inclusion and environmental responsibility. By providing self-employed entrepreneurs with the necessary resources, encouraging cross-sectoral cooperation and promoting responsible business practices, we can shape a future where economic prosperity goes hand in hand with social equity and the preservation of our planet

[1] Léa RENARD, Aëla MOCAER , *La Transition Juste : introduction à un concept de solidarité*, 2023, available online : <https://tinyurl.com/4wrjhe8a>





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