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CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ESG REPORTING FROM THE YOUNG GENERATION PERSPECTIVE

Abstract: Since the adoption of the Non-Financial Reporting Directive, companies are required to report information on environmental, social, and employee matters, respect for human rights, anti-corruption, and bribery matters. These aspects represent some of the elements of socially responsible corporate behavior.
Following the adoption of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive and its gradual transposition into the European Union Member States' national legislation, the ESG reporting requirements are becoming stricter. The aim is to ensure transparency and comparability of reported sustainability information, to prevent greenwashing, and to ensure that companies behave in a socially responsible manner to the environment, society, and governance, and report this information in the Sustainability Report.
The paper aims to analyze how the young generation from four different countries perceives the socially responsible behavior of companies and what importance they give to different aspects of corporate social responsibility.
To meet the purpose of the paper, a standard methodology of legislation and literature review was performed. Afterward, a questionnaire survey was conducted in which we investigated the attitudes of the young generation to the socially responsible behavior of companies.
The results of the research showed that the young generation perceives social responsibility in companies' behavior and takes it as a competitive advantage in the market. The results, among others, showed which aspects of responsible business are the most important for the young generation, if young people can name some socially responsible companies, and if they prefer to buy products or services from companies that behave responsibly to society and the environment, etc.
The paper analyses the attitudes of the young generation which can be a limited factor in the research. More detailed analysis within all the age groups could bring different results. The number of respondents is another limitation.

Keywords: ESG reporting, Corporate social responsibility, ESRS, CSRD, Green Deal, sustainability

1. INTRODUCTION

The expansion of the world economy, which intensified after the Industrial Revolution, led to pressures on the use of natural resources, the growth in the production of consumer goods, the conversion of forests and grasslands into built-up areas, and an increase in urbanization. Such development has had (Taghvaee et al., 2022) a positive impact on the livelihoods of society, however, on the other hand, its impact and demand on natural resources have raised considerable concerns about this transition. The lack and depletion of resources, climate change, pollution, and degradation of the environment, as well as increasing amounts of greenhouse gases leading to global warming, forced governments all around the world to consider sustainable development. The future of the planet and mankind has become a priority for economies, governments, and communities. Companies are aware of the potential impact of their activities on the environment, society, or employees and are beginning to actively minimize these impacts and look for opportunities to innovate. As a result, we can see an increase in the sustainable activities of companies, and pressure on their environmental and social behavior to protect the environment and create good conditions for living.

As Kidd (1992) states, since the 1950s, six separate but related strands of thought have emerged in discussions of the interrelationships among population growth rates, resource use, and environmental pressures. They are the ecological/capacity root, the resource/environment root, the biosphere root, the technology critique root, the 'no growth'/'slow growth' root, and the ecological development root. All these roots were fully developed before the term “sustainable” itself was used. Sustainability and sustainable development have stimulated intense scientific and public debate since their international discovery in the Brundtland Commission Report in 1987 in which the overall concept of sustainable development was defined for the first time (Diaz–Sarachaga, 2021; Boyer et al., 2016). After this, the term sustainability, despite not having a specific definition, became very popular (Silva et al., 2022) and many definitions of the term sustainability have appeared (Basile et al., 2021; Ruggerio, 2021).

The aim of the paper is to analyze how the young generation from four different countries perceives the socially responsible behavior of companies and what importance they give to different aspects of corporate social responsibility.

To meet the objective of the paper we have studied relevant sources of literature, as well as the legislation related to the area of sustainability and ESG reporting. We have studied mainly academic papers obtained from the database Web of Science, SCOPUS, as well as professional papers from websites of the biggest accounting and auditing organizations, and professional bodies. Our literature review was based on the legislation as of March 31, 2024. Subsequently, we conducted a questionnaire survey in six faculties from universities in four countries to investigate, analyze, and compare the perception of sustainability among the younger generation.

2. THE TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE OF SUSTAINABILITY

IISD (1992) defines corporate sustainability as “business strategies and activities that meet the needs of the enterprise and its stakeholders today while protecting, sustaining, and enhancing the human and natural resources that will be needed in the future”. According to Basile et al. (2021), sustainability has become one of the key factors for long-term business success. The implementation of sustainability principles has been pursued by companies worldwide, not only because it is a key factor for the livelihood of companies, but also because it is essential for the survival of future generations (Silva et al., 2022). Companies are required to manage their businesses with respect for the environment, to have good relationships with their customers, suppliers, employees, and business partners, and to act in harmony with the needs of the local community. Taghvaee et al. (2022) point out that sustainability means creating the conditions for humanity and nature to coexist in productive harmony, enabling the socio-economic development of present and future generations.

Thus, sustainability is not just about environmental matters. Sustainability is based on three pillars, economic, environmental, and social which interact in harmony. According to Boyer et al. (2016), these three dimensions form what is currently known as the tripod of sustainability, or “the Triple Bottom Line” (TBL). The economic pillar has been the pillar that all companies have continuously and increasingly tried to improve before because generating profit is the main purpose of business. Nowadays, the companies show to society in general, and the market in particular, the respect they have for the social and environmental pillars of sustainability (Silva et al., 2022). If a company generates profit, it can contribute to achieving social and environmental goals. In addition to their economic goals (Maas & Boons, 2010), companies raise awareness of the environmental and social impacts resulting from their activities.

According to Estoque & Murayama (2014), the three components of the Triple Bottom Line of Sustainability (TBLS) represent a nested hierarchy because societies cannot thrive without a functioning life support system, and economies cannot thrive without functioning social structures and institutions. The economic pillar is based on running a business to generate positive financial results of a company. This is considered the essential pillar of TBL. Without profit, there would be no investments in technologies protecting the environment, and no investments into improving working conditions, quality of life, leisure, and security. The environmental pillar is based on behavior and activities that protect the environment (Santos, Gouveia, & Silva, 2017; Purvis et al., 2019; Bravi et al., 2020). Environmental protection, natural resource conservation, decreasing greenhouse gases, use of renewable sources, reduction of solid waste emissions, and recycling trash are some aspects that belong to the environmental pillar of TBL. The third pillar of TBL, the social pillar, is related to the social factors, including working conditions, equality, non-discrimination, diversity and inclusion, human rights, and the development of better policies in areas such as education, leisure, and security (Silva et al., 2022).

According to Ruggerio (2021), the concept of sustainability is often associated with the concept of sustainable development and thus both terms are used as synonyms. WCED (1987) defines sustainable development, also known as sustainable economic development, as a development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Governments in many countries are also becoming increasingly aware of their responsibility to ensure sustainability They are requiring project companies to develop strategies and action plans that will contribute to sustainable development (Aarseth et al., 2017). According to Székely and Knirsch (2005), economic growth, shareholder value, firm reputation, and customer relationships are the main attributes of corporate sustainability. Bansal (2005) defines sustainability at the corporate level as economic prosperity, social justice, and environmental protection through value creation, corporate social responsibility, and corporate environmental management. According to Rašić-Jelavić, & Pajdaković-Vulić (2021), the level of incorporating sustainability in business objectives and strategy will depend, among others, on environmental context, and external incentives (the industry type and sector, environmental legislation, market demand for environmentally friendly products, social demand, the demand of responsible investors, etc.), and internal motives (image improvement, brand improvement, marketing improvement, increase in sale of environmentally-friendly products, resource productivity improvement, risk control, better employee motivation, better competitiveness, etc.).

3. ESG REPORTING REGULATIONS

Presenting information on the social and environmental dimensions of companies plays a key role in the sustainable development of organizations (Bednárová & Bonsón, 2014). Serious concerns about the future of mankind have inspired governments, companies, and investors to make sustainability a top business priority. As part of the European Green Deal, the European Union (EU) has started the green transformation by redirecting private capital into green investments, leading organizations towards more sustainable ways of operating and financing. The aim was to foster economic growth while reducing pressure on the environment, helping to achieve the EU's climate and environmental goals, taking into account social and governance aspects. Considering the impact on the environment and society is also important for keeping businesses competitive and building their resilience to the effects of climate change (Škyrta & Semjanová, 2024). Nowadays, we can see the shift from traditional reporting based mostly on financial data to new forms of reporting based on the TBL approach that includes corporate social responsibility (CSR) disclosure.

In the beginning, and over the past three decades, CSR reporting was voluntarily based. Some organizations presented their sustainable information within annual reports where they often presented only the minimum information. Much more information was presented on the websites of companies. As the praxis proved, the companies have used to provide basic information for each of the pillars of TBL (impact on the environment, social, and employment area) but do not always provide all the information on a point-by-point basis. Companies have applied various standards and regulations regarding CSR reporting. The most popular standards in the European Union are the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB), The Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD), the EU Taxonomy, etc.

Over the past decades (Noronha et al., 2013), the importance of CSR behavior of companies and the need for CSR reporting arose as a response to many corporate scandals, financial crises, climate change, the commitment to a lower-carbon future and concern about labor rights, product safety, poverty reduction.

In 2014, *Directive 2014/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 amending Directive 2013/34/EU as regards disclosure of non-financial and diversity information by certain large undertakings and groups*, also known as Non-financial Reporting Directive (NFRD) amended the provisions of *Directive 2013/34/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on the annual financial statements, consolidated financial statements and related reports of certain types of undertakings, amending Directive 2006/43/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Directives 78/660/EEC and 86/349/EEC*. NFRD has required large companies (public-interest entities) with more than 500 employees to prepare a non-financial statement reporting non-financial information related to sustainability, environmental, social, and employee matters, and respect for human rights. The non-financial statement should contain information on the current and foreseeable impacts of the company's operations on the environment, on the health and safety of employees, information on the use of renewable and non-renewable energy, greenhouse gas emission, water use, and air pollution, information on actions taken to ensure gender equality, working conditions, respect for the right of workers to be informed, information on anti-corruption, and bribery matters, etc.

Martínez et al. (2016) state that sustainability reporting has over the years established itself as a key tool to help companies and organizations meet the growing demand for transparency from customers, investors, other stakeholders, and society at large. Through non-financial (sustainability) reports, organizations disclose information on the economic, environmental, and social impacts of their activities. This leads to increasing transparency on their sustainability performance. According to Girón et al. (2021), this increased transparency provides investors with the possibility to make more appropriate valuations and to better orient their investments towards companies with a more positive impact. According to stakeholder theory (Gray et al., 1995; Adams & Larrinaga-González, 2007), the disclosure of financial (economic), environmental, and social information is a part of the dialogue between the company and its stakeholders. It provides information on a company's activities that legitimize its behavior, and inform and change perceptions and expectations. Michelon & Parbonetti (2012) investigated the effects of good corporate governance on sustainability disclosures and claimed that sustainability reporting may be a function of board attributes.

Over the past decade, CSR reporting, or Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) reporting has gained even higher importance. The concept of ESG was first introduced by the United Nations in its 2006 Principles for Responsible Investment. According to Škyrta & Semjonová (2024), ESG sets out criteria and standards for companies' environmental and social performance and their governance and management. The ESG concept itself is based on corporate social responsibility and reflects the need for investors and other stakeholders to gain insight into the environmental, governance, and social behavior of companies.

ESG reporting is connected with CSR, which role in improving corporate financial situation, and reputation, and attracting potential investors is becoming more important (Salehi et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to remember that sustainability refers to the ability to maintain or support a process or activity over time. It is based on economic, environmental, and social pillars and considers the preservation of life and natural resources for future generations. While sustainability can be viewed primarily through various forms of reducing the negative impact of companies' actions on their surroundings, the ESG field is specific and measurable. According to KPMG (2024), ESG is a framework that helps investors evaluate a company's risk, performance, and impacts based on environmental, social, and governance criteria. Sustainability, on the other hand, is a principle that promotes responsible and ethical business practices by taking into account the interplay of environmental, social, and economic factors.

Companies' stakeholders, including customers, employees, communities, investors, policymakers, and regulators, increasingly demand better sustainability performance and disclosures from companies, greater accountability and transparency for their impacts on society and the environment (Accountancy Europe, 2023). Incorporating sustainability considerations into strategic decisions, operations, value chains, and company culture is the pragmatic approach to secure the business' future existence.

Companies that report ESG matters are more likely to gain a competitive advantage, benefit from commercial and business opportunities, improve their ESG performance, and ultimately create long-term value for stakeholders. Better ESG performance can help companies win market share, secure profitability, increase company value, develop new products and services, and attract investors, top talent, and new customers. Companies that are excellent at ESG have a better awareness of business risks, take steps to mitigate them, and are more resilient to market uncertainty. These companies have the potential to create new business models and products, opening up opportunities to enter new markets.

In November 2022, *Directive (EU) 2022/2464 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 amending Regulation No 537/2014, Directive 2004/109/EC, Directive 2006/43/EC, and Directive 2013/34/EU, as regards corporate sustainability reporting*, also known as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), was adopted by the European Parliament and the European Council. CSRD entered into force on January 6, 2023. EU member states have 18 months to transpose it into national law. The CSRD is considered a key component of the EU's sustainable finance action plan and the European Green Deal. It requires companies to report on their sustainability performance to provide investors and other stakeholders access to necessary information for assessing investment risks related to climate change and other sustainability factors and establish a transparent culture regarding a company's impact on society and the environment (Frikkee et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the European Commission has mandated the European Financial Reporting Advisory Group (EFRAG) to develop standards detailing what needs to be reported under CSRD. These standards are the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS). ESRS would be gradually applied for accounting periods beginning on/after January 1, 2024. The first companies reporting under ESRS would be the EU-large public-interest companies and non-EU companies with securities listed on a regulated market in the EU and having more than 500 employees. These are companies that already report under the NFRD. Reporting under CSRD and ESRS would further extend to other large companies, listed Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, non-EU parent companies, and small and non-complex institutions. The companies are required to present information on environmental, social, and governance matters in the sustainability report which should be prepared in a single electronic reporting format. Statutory auditors and audit firms are required to carry out the assurance of sustainability reporting in compliance with the assurance standards adopted by the Commission.

Currently, CSRD is being transposed into the Slovak accounting and auditing legislation with a likely effective date of June 1, 2024.

4. RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

As part of our research, we investigated the importance that young people, university students, give to socially responsible businesses. We were interested in how they perceive sustainability and which attributes of sustainability they consider important in terms of the companies themselves. We carried out the questionnaire survey at five faculties of economic orientation and one law faculty, namely at the Faculty of Economic Informatics, University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia; at the Faculty of Economics, VSB – Technical University of Ostrava, Czech Republic; at the Faculty of Law, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic; at the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Maribor, Slovenia; at Institute of Economics, Finance, and Management, Jagiellonian University, in Krakow, Poland; at Department of Costing, Tax Management and Controlling, Wroclaw University of Economics and Business, Poland. Altogether 296 respondents took part in the survey. The breakdown of respondents by country, age, and gender is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Breakdown of respondents according to country, age, and gender

Country (Style: SM-Table)	Number of respondents	Age	Number of respondents	Gender	Number of respondents
Slovakia	132	Up to 25 years	273	Male	107
Czech Republic	100	More than 25 years	23	Female	189
Poland	39				
Slovenia	25				

Source: own processing based on survey.

Within the survey, we were interested if the respondents thought there exist some socially responsible companies in their countries. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Answers to question: In your opinion, are there socially responsible companies in your country?

Country **column percentages*	**Slovakia**	**Czech Republic**	**Poland**	**Slovenia**	**Total**
Yes	100 / 75.76%	60 / 60.00%	29 / 74.36%	17 / 68.00%	206 / 69.59%
No	3 / 2.27%	2 / 2.00%	2 / 5.13%	2 / 8.00%	9 / 3.04%
I don't know	29 / 21.97%	38 / 38.00%	8 / 20.51%	6 / 24.00%	81 / 27.37%
Total	132 / 100%	100 / 100%	39 / 100%	25 / 100%	296 / 100%

Source: own processing based on survey.

As we can see from Table 2, up to 69.59 % of the respondents admit that there are socially responsible companies in their country, and only 3.04% think that such companies do not exist in their countries. Up to 27.36% of the respondents do not know answer this question. Up to 75.76% of young Slovaks are convinced that there are companies in Slovakia that behave in a socially responsible way. On the contrary, only 60% of young Czechs are persuaded of this fact.
Although up to 75.76% of respondents from Slovakia stated that there are socially responsible companies in Slovakia, only 56 (56.00%) of them were able to name these companies. Among young Czech respondents are more positive results. Out of 60 respondents who admitted that there are socially responsible companies in their country, up to 42 of them (70.00%) were able to name some of these companies. In Poland, 23 respondents (79.31%) named some socially responsible companies, and in Slovenia only 9 respondents (52.94%) were able to name socially responsible companies. At this place, we have to point out that not every respondent was able to name 5 responsible companies. Five socially responsible companies were named by 30 respondents from Slovakia, 20 respondents from the Czech Republic, 12 respondents from Poland, and 3 respondents from Slovenia. Most respondents mentioned only one or two socially responsible companies.
In Slovakia, the most mentioned companies (Figure 1) were Lidl (25 respondents), IKEA (25 respondents), and Tesco (12 respondents). Based on this, we can conclude that the younger generation perceives supermarkets, banks, and insurance companies, as well as mobile operators, as socially responsible companies. Other companies mentioned by respondents were Henkel, Metro, Slovenské elektrárne, dm drogerie markt, Softec, Uniqa, Kyndryl, Deloitte., Volkswagen, Anasoft, Bezobalovo, etc. Interestingly, even small local companies were mentioned by the respondents.

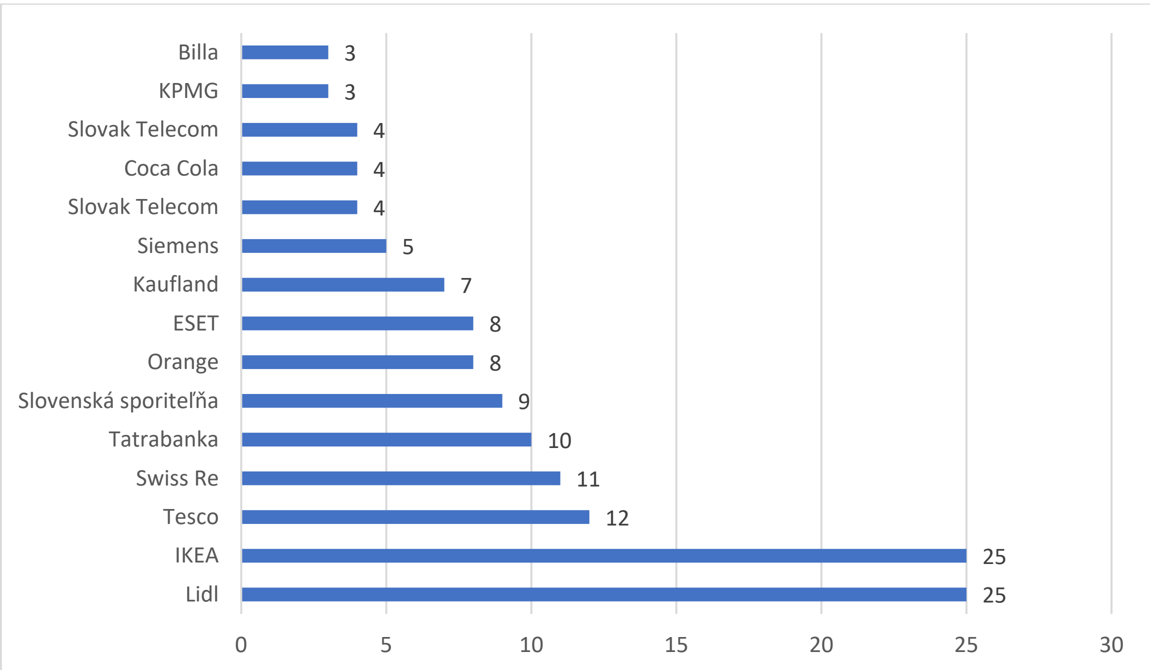

Figure 1: Socially responsible companies according to Slovak respondents
Source: own processing based on the survey

In the Czech Republic, the most mentioned companies (Figure 2) were ČEZ (12), Škoda (11), and Lidl (8). Other companies mentioned by respondents were Dermacol, Česká spořitelna, Deloitte, EY, Marlenka, Plzeňský Prazdroj, Vodafone, McDonalds, Innogy, Nestlé, Odragas, E.on, LG electronics, etc.

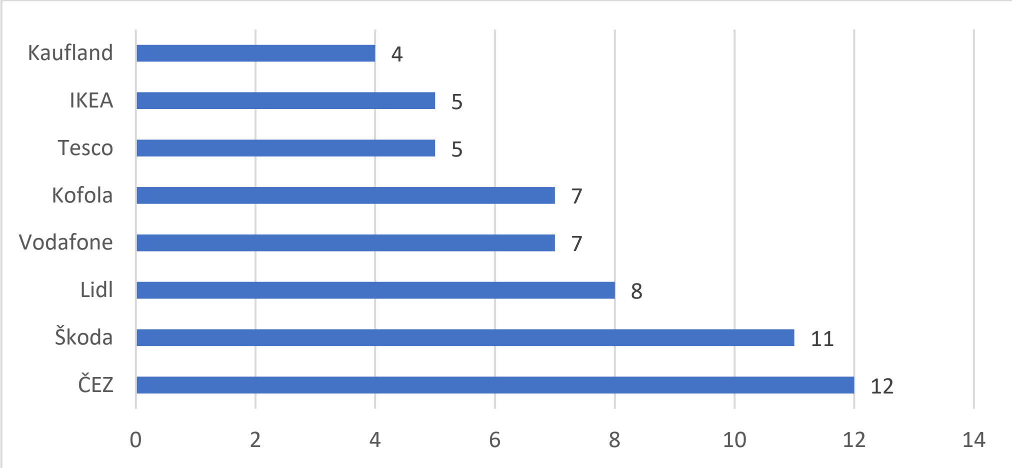

Figure 2: Socially responsible companies according to Czech respondents
Source: own processing based on the survey

The most mentioned companies by Slovenian respondents were KRKA, Gorenje, Impol, Lumar, Afrodita, Talum, Emmi, Hofer, etc. According to Polish respondents, the socially responsible companies are PGE, Orlen, CCC, Toyota, Google, PKP, Vans, Patagonia, Inglot, Roleski, Nestlé, Philip Morris, Danone, ABB, Biedronka, Tymbark, Starbucks, Colgate, Adidas, Nike, Mondi, etc.

Based on this, we can conclude that the younger generation in all four countries analyzed does not perceive only large multinational companies as socially responsible, as many small local companies were also mentioned among the aforementioned companies.

In the next question of the survey, the respondents were asked to select up to 5 attributes they consider to be the most important in the actions of responsible companies. They could select from these attributes:

- Protecting the health and safety of employees,
- Fight against corruption and bribes,
- Business ethics,
- Suitable working conditions, balance of personal and working time of employees,
- Diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunities,
- Respect for human rights,
- Impact on the local community and philanthropy, supporting the region where the company operates,
- Reducing carbon emissions,
- Use of alternative energy sources,
- Recycling, waste reduction,
- Open company communication towards customers,
- Staff development and training, up-skilling,
- Good relations with suppliers and customers,
- The company offers ecological products, and services for the socially or medically disadvantaged,
- Support for science and research, cooperation with schools.

In Slovakia, the most stated attributes were “Protecting the health and safety of employees” (75.7% of respondents), “Respect for human rights” (32.3%), and “Recycling, waste reduction” (22.00%). Czech respondents consider “Protecting the health and safety of employees” (75.00%), “Respect for human rights” (69.00%), and “Suitable working conditions, balance of personal and working time of employees” (59.00%) the most important attributes in the actions of socially responsible companies. In Poland, the most important attributes were “Respect for human rights” (66.7%), “Suitable working conditions, balance of personal and working time of employees” (61.5%), and “Protecting the health and safety of employees” (61.5%). Similar results to the previous three countries were also observed in Slovenia. The most important attributes of socially responsible behavior of companies were according to Slovenian respondents “Protecting the health and safety of employees” (84.00%), “Suitable working conditions, balance of personal and working time of employees” (72.00%), and “Respect for human rights” (56.00%).

The least important attributes are (Figure 3) “Good relations with suppliers and customers” (13.51% of all respondents), “Open company communication towards customers” (15.20%), and the fact that “The company offers ecological products, services for the socially or medically disadvantaged” (18.92%). The Slovak respondents consider “Good relations with suppliers and customers” (11.36% of the Slovak respondents), “Diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunities” (18.18%), and “Open company communication towards customers” (18.94%) the least important attributes of CSR. Similar results were obtained by the Czech respondents who considered “Good relations with suppliers and customers” (11.00%), “Open company communication towards customers” (15.00%), and “Diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunities" (16.00%) the least important attributes. In the case of Polish respondents, we observed slightly different results. According to them, the least sustainable attributes of companies are "Open company communication towards customers" (10.26%), "Good relations with suppliers and customers", "The company offers ecological products, and services for the socially or medically disadvantaged" (17.95% each), and "Support for science and research, cooperation with schools" (20.51%). In Slovenia, the young respondents consider "Open company communication towards customers" (4.00%), "Support for science and research, cooperation with schools" (12.00%), "Use of alternative energy sources", and "Diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunities" (16.00% each) the least important attributes of CSR. The overall results for all four countries are shown in Figure 3.

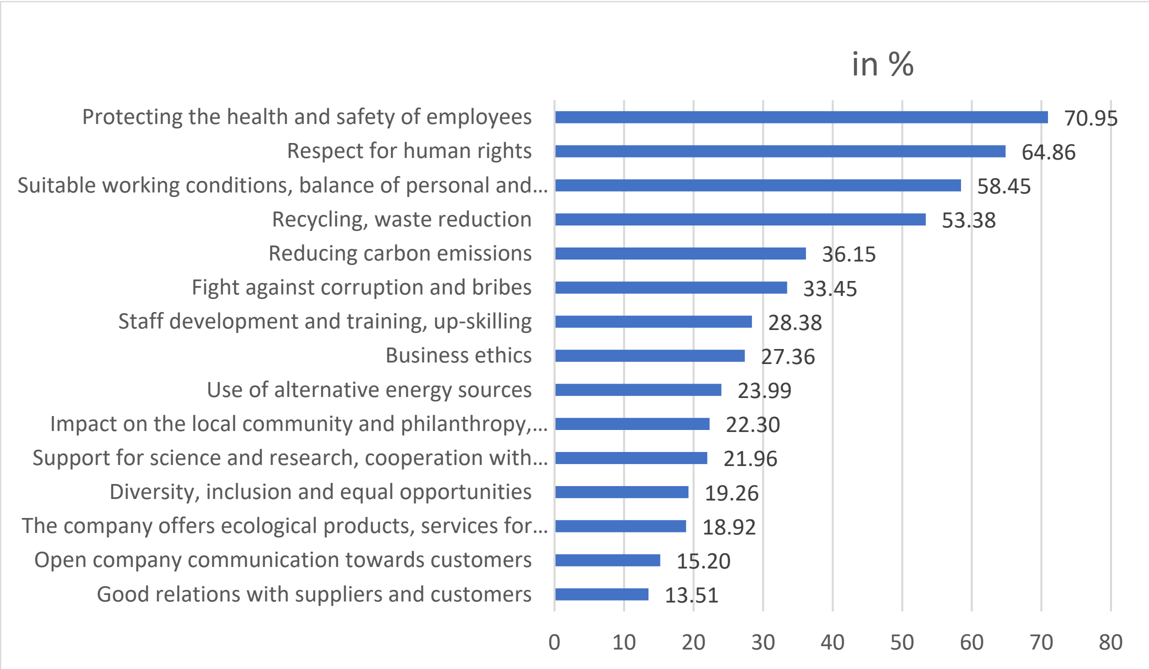

Figure 3: The most important attributes of socially responsible companies
Source: own processing based on the survey

In the next part of our analysis, we focused on preferences for sustainable attributes of companies depending on gender. The results are presented in Figure 4.

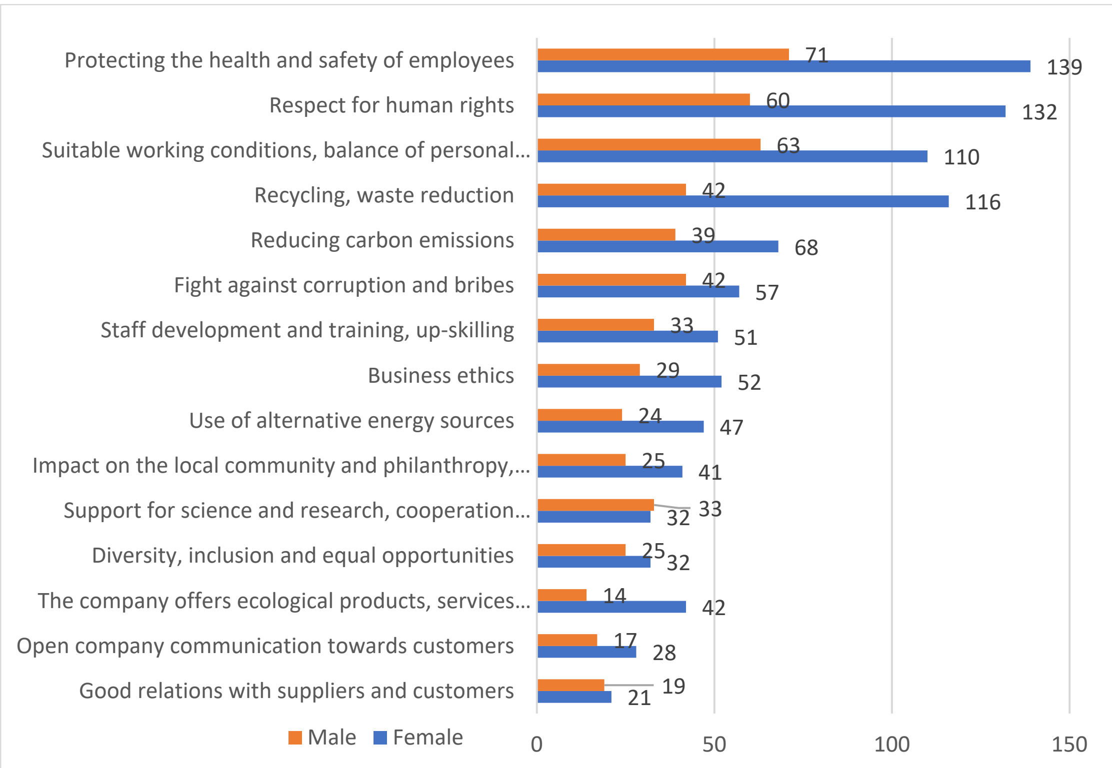

Figure 4: The most important attributes of socially responsible companies according to gender
Source: own processing based on the survey

As we can see in Figure 4, the priorities are a little bit different between women and men, as well as in comparison with the overall results. Women consider “Protecting the health and safety of employees” (73.54% of female respondents), “Respect for human rights” (69.84%), and “Recycling, waste reduction” (61.38%) as the most important attributes of socially responsible behavior of companies. On the other hand, men prefer “Protecting the health and safety of employees” (66.36% of male respondents), “Suitable working conditions, the balance of personal and working time employees” (58.88%), and “Respect for human rights” (56.07%).

The next part of our survey focused on investigating which areas related to corporate social responsibility should companies prioritize their engagement in. The respondents should select up to three areas from the following:

- Support for socially or medically disadvantaged population groups,
- Protecting the environment, mitigating the impacts of climate change,
- Supporting the education of the younger generation,
- Supporting sport and leisure activities for children and young people,
- Fight against corruption and bribes,
- Promoting digital literacy with an emphasis on children and youth,
- Humanitarian and development aid abroad.

The results of the survey showed (Figure 5) that the young generation wants primarily companies to protect the environment and mitigate the impacts of climate change (72.30% of all respondents), to support the education of the younger generation (55.41%), and to support socially or medically disadvantaged population groups (42.57%). Similar results were obtained when examining respondents' views depending on their country of origin. Only in Poland, the second most preferable area of corporate responsibility was the “Fight against corruption and bribes”.

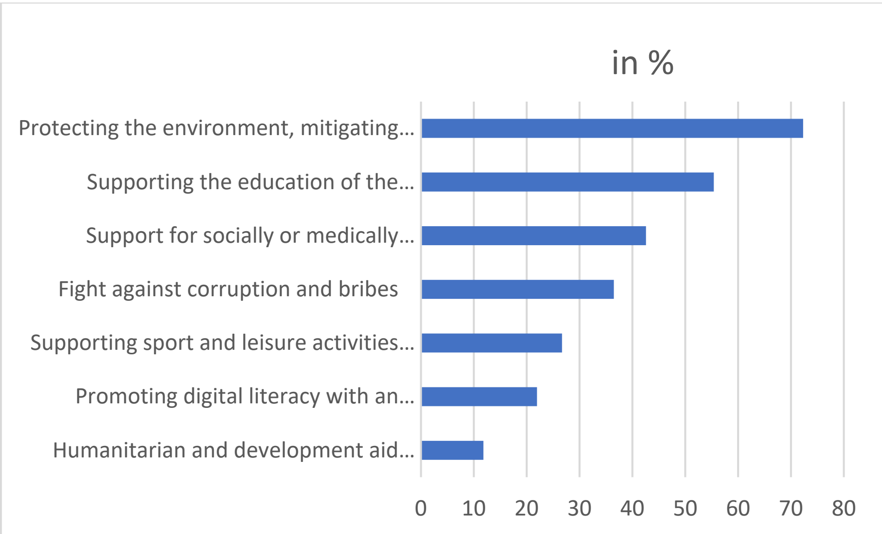

Figure 5: Areas related to CSR where companies should be the most engaged
Source: own processing based on the survey

Table 3 presents the results of the analysis of respondents' answers to the question of whether “they would prefer to buy a product or service from a company that behaves in a socially responsible way, even if they had to pay a little more”.

Table 3: Answers to the question: Would you prefer to buy a product or service from a company that behaves in a socially responsible way, even if you had to pay a little more?

Country **column percentages*	**Slovakia**	**Czech Republic**	**Poland**	**Slovenia**	**Total**
Definitely yes	25 / 18.94%	13 / 13.00%	9 / 23.08%	8 / 32.00%	**55 / 18.59%**
Rather yes	80 / 60.61%	61 / 61.00%	23 / 58.97%	15 / 60.00%	**179 / 60.47%**
Rather no	12 / 9.09%	15 / 15.00%	2 / 5.13%	2 / 8.00%	**31 / 10.47%**
Definitely no	6 / 4.54 %	4 / 4.00%	0	0	**10 / 3.38%**
I don't know	9 / 6.82%	7 / 7.00%	5 / 12.82%	0	**21 / 7.09%**
Total	**132**	**100**	**39**	**25**	**296**

Source: own processing based on survey.

According to the results presented in Table 3, we can conclude that the younger generation in all countries analyzed would buy more expensive products or services from socially responsible companies. We consider this fact to be very positive.

“Yes” or “Rather yes” stated up to 79.06% of all respondents, namely up to 79.55% of respondents from Slovakia, 74.00% of respondents from the Czech Republic, 82.05% of respondents from Poland, and 92.00% of respondents from Slovenia. In the last question of the survey, we asked respondents whether they thought companies should report information regarding their socially responsible behavior (Table 4).

Table 4: Answers to the question: Should companies report information regarding their socially responsible behavior?

Country **column percentages*	**Slovakia**	**Czech Republic**	**Poland**	**Slovenia**	**Total**
Yes	114 / 86.40%	85 / 85.00%	36 / 92.30%	23 / 92.00%	258 / 87.16%
No	5 / 3.80%	5 / 5.00%	1 / 2.60%	1 / 4.00%	12 / 4.06%
I don't know	13 / 9.80%	10 / 10.00%	2 / 5.10%	1 / 4.00%	26 / 8.78%
Total	132 / 100%	100 / 100%	39 / 100%	25 / 100%	296 / 100%

Source: own processing based on survey.

Up to 87.16% of respondents think that companies should present sustainability information. This information is important not only for their business partners, investors, and banks but also for customers, and the community in which the company operates. Information about how a company treats the environment and society, as well as what its management priorities are, builds a company's image and makes it competitive. By demonstrating its social commitment, responsibility, and sustainability in behavior, the company can gain the social recognition it needs to be successful.

4. CONCLUSION

ESG reporting will play still a more and more important role in the activities of companies. Sustainable business and reporting on environmental, social, and governance information are required not only by governments and public authorities to transform the European Union into a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy with no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2020, to protect, conserve, and enhance the Unions natural capital and protect the health and well-being of Union citizens from environment-related risks and impacts, but are also required by investors, customers, employers, and other stakeholders. ESG reporting helps companies win market share, secure profitability, increase company value, and attract investors, new customers, and responsible employees. The sustainable business of companies can positively form the image of the company and make it more competitive in comparison with its competitors. It is expected that after transposing the CSRD into the national law of EU member states, the ESG reporting will be more transparent, comparable, and understandable, the presented information will be relevant, and verifiable, and will faithfully represent the impact of the company on the environment, society, and employees.

Our research proved that the younger generation perceives the socially responsible behavior of companies. Respondents from all four countries were able to name companies that behave responsibly to the environment and society.

According to our research, “Protecting the health and safety of employees”, Respect for human rights”, “Suitable working conditions, the balance of personal and working time of employees”, and “Recycling, waste reduction” belong to attributes which more than 50.00% of respondents consider to be the most important in sustainable behavior of companies. The results showed that the younger generation prefers social aspects of CSR related to employees over those related to the company's behavior towards business partners or customers.

The results of the questionnaire confirmed that more than 50.00% of the younger respondents think that companies should be more involved in “Protecting the environment, mitigating the impacts of climate change” and “Supporting the education of the younger generation”. We positively assess the fact that the younger generation (79.06% of all respondents) is willing to pay extra for products or services offered by a socially responsible company that focuses on protecting the environment and establishing suitable working conditions for its employees. Up to 87.16% of all respondents approved that companies should report sustainability information. Companies are required to report not only on financial but also on their social and environmental performance. By applying CSRD and ESRS, companies are expected to not only report sustainable information but also to truly act responsibly towards the environment, employees, the community, and society.

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