

Generali boosts a culture of sustainability for Europe's SMEs and calls for more action from policymakers

- At the 2023 SME EnterPRIZE event, Generali unveiled the 10 'Sustainability Heroes', selected among more than 7,000 European SMEs, as leaders in developing sustainable business
- Generali also presented the third edition of the White Paper on sustainable SMEs, developed in collaboration with SDA Bocconi
- The research confirms the robust growth of SMEs engaged in a sustainable transformation and underlines the benefits of adopting sustainable business practices, and identifies that more can be done to support SMEs that are falling behind
- This study also voices SMEs' call to policymakers and financial institutions for a clear legislative sustainability framework as a boost to increase resilience and innovation

Brussels – Generali on Tuesday hosted the closing event of the third edition of SME EnterPRIZE, the Group's flagship initiative, to celebrate the 10 "Sustainability Heroes" selected from over 7,000 small and medium-sized businesses across Europe and to unveil the new edition of the [White Paper](#), the research developed in collaboration with SDA Bocconi – School of Management Sustainability Lab.

The event drew the attendance of senior European policymakers, including **Valdis Dombrovskis** – European Commission Executive Vice President for An Economy that Works for People and European Commissioner for Trade; **Paolo Gentiloni** - European Commissioner for Economy; **Martina Dlabajová** - European Parliament Member and Co-chair of the Parliament's SME Intergroup; and **Pina Picierno** - European Parliament Vice-President. Academic leaders as well as Generali's senior leadership participated. The 2023 edition also hosted a message from **Marcos Neto** – Assistant Secretary General and Director of UNDP's Bureau of Policy and Programme Support.

Europe's SMEs call for more from policymakers and financial institutions

The White Paper, built on the basis of discussions with over 1,000 SMEs from across Europe, has captured the challenges and opportunities that SMEs are facing and has suggested policy initiatives for Europe's decision makers. The key priority identified by the research is to build a greater culture of awareness for SMEs on the benefits that bringing sustainable business practices can have to their overall performance. This was followed by ideas to build a sustainability framework to help guide SMEs on their journey and strengthen regional innovation centres and partnerships to maximise best practices.



Overall, the sustainable transition of SMEs in Europe has remained robust, despite the many challenges the companies need to overcome. 44% of SMEs said they are adopting, or are soon to adopt, sustainable business practices — an increase of 3 percentage points from the 2022's survey.

However, many SMEs continue to face challenges. SMEs reporting a lack of institutional support, with sustainability barriers coming from excessive regulation and bureaucracy, have almost doubled to 48% from 25% year to year. Reports of a lack of public incentives also rose significantly to 48% in 2023 from 17% in 2022. SMEs further cited a lack of sustainable finance initiatives, which also rose to 47% from 26%.

The White Paper has also called for financial institutions to engage with and empower SMEs by explaining and raising awareness about financial instruments and opportunities to boost their transition. Financial institutions can further support European SMEs by designing sustainable finance initiatives and reaching more SMEs through partnerships and collaboration.

The full White Paper, which includes deep dives on each country taking part in Generali's SME EnterPRIZE initiative, can also be downloaded [here](#).

Celebrating the Sustainability Heroes

Generali's third SME EnterPRIZE event celebrated the 10 "Sustainability Heroes" drawn from across Europe among over 7,000 SMEs, at an event featuring senior policymakers, leading academics and thought leaders, as well as SMEs themselves.

Generali, together with an expert advisory board with members from academia, business and think-tanks, assessed applicants on the grounds of their social and environmental commitments, including the implementation of notable sustainability initiatives in their business activities. The SME EnterPRIZE winners can become inspirational models for fellow entrepreneurs and be ambassadors of sustainability. The companies selected in the areas of environment and social come from the 10 European countries that have joined the initiative: Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain.

Philippe Donnet, Generali Group CEO, said: *"Much has happened since 2021, when Generali launched SME EnterPRIZE, its flagship project to promote a culture of sustainability among European small-and medium-sized enterprises and support them as they integrate it into their businesses. While these companies had to endure significant challenges related to the energy crisis, supply chain disruptions, the inflation and the economic and geopolitical uncertainties, the third White Paper issued by Generali and SDA Bocconi underlines that the number of European SMEs that are embracing sustainable business models keeps increasing, and that the business case for doing so remains very strong. However, there are still substantial obstacles and barriers preventing more companies from following the same path. Therefore, it is key that policymakers act to reduce bureaucracy and raise awareness, while larger private enterprises must offer not only products or services but also their know-how.*

It is a complex process that will take time, and we are not there yet. But we must spare no effort – as it is in the interest of all of us to build a stronger, safer, more prosperous and sustainable Europe."



Generali Group General Manager, Marco Sesana said: *“Our ‘Lifetime Partner 24: Driving Growth’ strategy has sustainability as its originator. It is a lens for how we see our business and our relationship with the communities that we are part of. As Europe’s leading insurer we have been raising awareness on the challenges that SMEs face for three years and have reached thousands of SMEs across Europe to find the most sustainable ways of working, highlighting businesses that are doing well by doing good. At the same time, we have championed research to understand the challenges and opportunities SMEs face. The three years of SME EnterPRIZE have underlined that there is still a strong commitment from SMEs to make their business more sustainable, despite a challenging environment. We will continue to support their journey to build an inclusive, green and sustainable European economy.”*

Stefano Pogutz, Professor of Practice of Corporate Sustainability and Director full-time MBA program, SDA Bocconi, said: *“Our research highlights that the approach of European SMEs to sustainability remains solid, even during the challenging past years. In 2023, 44% of European SMEs adopted a more formalized approach to sustainability or are in the process of adopting one, up 3% from the previous year, and up 10% from a similar 2020 pan-European investigation. We consider these findings positive. Despite the challenges faced in recent years by SMEs, such as the pandemic and the recovery, the inflation and raw materials and energy costs increase, and the war in Ukraine, we observe a significant resilience. Anyhow, for the sustainability transition to happen, we need to onboard the remaining companies, still undecided or reluctant to embrace the evolution. In order to do so, we must work on alleviating the barriers still faced by these companies, such as lack of institutional support or lack of resources, and, on the other hand, explain the benefits gained by SMEs that embraced the transition.*

Positive benefits, in fact, are obtained in all the areas: organizational, relational, market and competitive domains. Just a couple of examples: 76% of SMEs experienced either resource or energy efficiency increase. This goes straight to the bottom line, in terms of reduced costs. And 68% accessed new markets, with positive results in terms of revenues. In order to onboard undecided and laggards, we must explain and convince them, through these results, that sustainability is not just a cost, but an investment with positive returns.”

Get to know the Sustainability Heroes

- **Dorfplatz STAW (Austria)**, which offers co-working spaces and the chance to organise events, workshops, and cultural and social initiatives for the local community.
- **Humana Nova (Croatia)**, a social cooperative that offers employment opportunities to people with disabilities, involving them in the upcycling of clothing through repair and alteration, and the recovery of yarn from clothes that are no longer usable, to create new garments without resorting to virgin yarn.
- **Biopekárna Zemanka (Czech Republic)**, a bread and cake shop that uses residual raw materials from other food production, recyclable packaging, and electricity from renewable sources.
- **La Conciergerie Solidaire (France)**, which promotes employability and social integration by offering concierge services to companies, neighbourhood communities and other meeting places.



- **Pervormance International (Germany)**, which has designed a zero-emission cooling system suitable not only for buildings and vehicles but also for clothing, to prevent overheating for athletes, for health needs, and for workplace safety.
- **Sudár Birtok (Hungary)**, a family-run business specialising in the cultivation and processing of organic spices and herbs.
- **Planetek Italia (Italy)**, which offers solutions for the use of geospatial data while contributing to the sustainable development of the aerospace industry.
- **Miranda Bike (Portugal)**, an original equipment manufacturer that contributes to sustainable mobility by supplying customized components for bicycle manufacturers, using renewable electricity and recycled materials.
- **Lumar (Slovenia)**, a family-owned business with 30 years of experience in prefabricated wooden buildings and developing solutions for “passive houses” (i.e., energy-efficient buildings).
- **Maximiliana (Spain)**, which has developed smartphones with an operating system designed for use by elderly people that can be managed remotely by family members through a special app, allowing relatives to stay in touch and combat loneliness and isolation in the elderly.

The 2023 Sustainability Heroes and the ones of the previous edition are featured on www.sme-enterprize.com.

THE GENERALI GROUP

Generali is one of the largest global insurance and asset management providers. Established in 1831, it is present in over 50 countries in the world, with a total premium income of € 81.5 billion in 2022. With 82,000 employees serving 68 million customers, the Group has a leading position in Europe and a growing presence in Asia and Latin America. At the heart of Generali's strategy is its Lifetime Partner commitment to customers, achieved through innovative and personalised solutions, best-in-class customer experience and its digitalised global distribution capabilities. The Group has fully embedded sustainability into all strategic choices, with the aim to create value for all stakeholders while building a fairer and more resilient society.