

SME EnterPRIZE: Generali celebrates 9 Sustainability Heroes in Brussels

- Generali and leading experts assessed over 6,600 SMEs drawn from across Europe to find 9 'Sustainability Heroes'
- SDA Bocconi – School of Management Sustainability Lab launches the second edition of a dedicated White Paper exploring the challenges Europe's SMEs face in their sustainability journey

Brussels – The second edition of Generali's SME EnterPRIZE, a flagship initiative designed to promote a culture of sustainability among European SMEs, was brought to a close today in Brussels after a one year-long search for Europe's most sustainable SMEs.

Generali crowned the 9 'Sustainability Heroes' drawn from over 6,600 small and medium-sized businesses from across Europe, at an event featuring senior policymakers, leading academics and thought leaders, as well as SMEs themselves.

Generali, together with an expert scientific committee with members from academia, business and think-tanks assessed applicants on the grounds of their social, environmental and community commitments, including the implementation of notable sustainability initiatives in their business activities. The aim is that they can become an inspirational model for fellow entrepreneurs and be ambassadors of sustainability.

The event also saw the presentation of a dedicated White Paper produced by SDA Bocconi – School of Management Sustainability Lab. The research, which interviewed over 1,000 European SMEs, highlighted that while more of Europe's SMEs had implemented sustainable business models, others were falling behind - a worrying polarisation. It also explained that while NRRP plans were boosting efforts from small and medium businesses on their sustainability journey, barriers to progress, such as access to sustainable finance remain.

The research explores the progress small and medium-sized businesses have made in implementing sustainable business models, the challenges they face, and what the wider policy-making and financial communities can do to create a greener and more inclusive economy.

Generali is marking the second edition of its SME EnterPRIZE project by calling for Europe to show the courage and vision needed to harness the potential of small and medium-sized businesses. SMEs collectively represent more than half of Europe's GDP and 99% of companies in the EU, they are the foundation of the European economy and are essential drivers of sustainable transition. However, with businesses under strain, now is the time for Europe to double down on keeping on a sustainable path. That means keeping environmental and societal goals, and SMEs, at the heart of major policy initiatives, from the Capital Markets



Union, to the EU recovery plan, to the recently announced SME Relief Package and upcoming energy market reforms.

Generali Group CEO Philippe Donnet commented: *“It is a very challenging time for many small and medium-sized businesses that have had to face crises impacting the entire world over recent years. Europe has made great strides in putting environmental goals and social commitments at the heart of the economy. We must continue to push forward, now more than ever. We have to keep SMEs front and center in all major policy initiatives in order to meet the EU’s green and economic ambitions that are at the heart of building a sustainable and resilient future for all.”*

Generali Group General Manager, Marco Sesana stated: *“This project is part of our ‘Lifetime Partner 24: Driving Growth’ strategy. Our commitment as a responsible insurer is to foster the sustainable transition and SME EnterPrize is a flagship project to help achieve this goal. Today in Brussels, at the heart of the European Union – we have brought together experts, policymakers and the SMEs themselves for a discussion on the road ahead while celebrating success. We simply cannot achieve the inclusive and green future that all of us in Europe share, without SMEs.”*

The 2022 ‘Sustainability Heroes’ – “doing well by doing good”

Drawn from the over 6,600 SMEs that participated, Generali has recognized the ‘Sustainability Heroes’: companies selected in the areas of welfare, environment and community, and coming from the nine European countries that have joined the initiative: Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

Generali Group Head of Sustainability and Social Responsibility Lucia Silva commented: *“To build a more inclusive and greener future, SMEs will be essential. As a responsible insurer, Generali is actively engaged in fostering the sustainable transition and SME EnterPRIZE is our flagship initiative to achieve this goal. The companies that we have recognised today are shining examples that show there’s a way to do business that can contribute to commercial success while being better for the environment and the community. They’re doing well by doing good.”*

R.U.S.Z. GmbH (Austria), offers repair services for electrical and electronic equipment in Vienna, and lobbies for the recycling industry and for the sustainable production and consumption of such goods. The committee praised R.U.S.Z. for being “an important initiative, as electrical waste is a significant concern.”

Callidus Group Ltd (Croatia), an IT services and consulting company with a specialism in sustainability projects, in particular it has been highlighted a project to optimize the electric grid transmission, reducing the need for new high voltage lines and enabling the connection of new renewable energy sources to the grid. The committee praised Callidus Group’s “innovative use of digital technologies in the energy sector, leading to smart grids and savings in the use of energy and materials used to construct energy grids.”

Sady sv. Prokopa s.r.o (Czechia), (Orchards of St Prokopa) a fruit farm near Temelin that focuses on ecological farming practices and offers employment to people with disabilities in the neighbourhood. The committee called the company “an amazing local farm project, which is sustainable and replicable.”



Cycle Terre (France), a company that helps limit the carbon impact of the construction sector with eco-responsible materials made from excavated soil. The committee awarded the company extra points “for making use of the vast available resource, normally regarded as waste.”

Mint Future GmbH (Germany), a platform that connects electric-car drivers to greenhouse gas emissions trading, allowing them to market their CO₂ savings to high carbon-dioxide emitters, and reinvest in climate-protection projects. The committee called it “a transformative idea, as many electric vehicle owners either do not know they are owed this compensation or know how to re-invest it in sustainability projects.”

Manual Divat Kft. (Hungary), a family-run glove making business committed to slow fashion and circular economy. The committee singled out the project’s focus on “donating waste leather cuts to be used for other items, and branding their gloves so consumers can track the product lifecycle.”

Agrimad srl (Italy), a Calabrian producer of local specialties, which has made itself self-sufficient in green energy and has put in place initiatives to support the local community. The company, which operates under the Madeo family name, was singled out for “offering employment opportunities in a region where emigration is high”, and its “focus on youth employment and community involvement.”

ALGApplus (Portugal), a seaweed farm with an innovative and environmentally responsible approach to cultivating their produce, itself a sustainable resource with applications across sectors such as food, cosmetics, biomaterials and packaging. The committee said about the initiative that “the potential for contributing to a more sustainable future is deemed to be great.”

Nuevos Sistemas Tecnológicos S.L. (Spain), developers of the NaviLens project, which helps visually-impaired people to find their way around in unfamiliar environments, using their mobile device to detect and communicate information from dedicated QR codes. The committee called it a “ground-breaking innovation to make our societies more inclusive.”

SDA Bocconi White Paper

The SDA Bocconi – School of Management Sustainability Lab White Paper publishes results from a wide-ranging survey of SME business owners on their approach to sustainability. It also analyses how the EU’s National Recovery and Resilience Plans may include initiatives that can provide SMEs with support, and how financial products are evolving that may also benefit SMEs in their sustainability efforts.

Key highlights

SME Survey:

- There’s a “growing polarization” between companies with sustainability plans and those without.
- 41 percent of SME owners surveyed said they have put in place a sustainability strategy or they will in the near future.
- 43 percent said they had no plan at all to put in place green and social business practices, up from 20 percent two years ago.



- A majority of survey respondents reported that having an environmental and social business strategy in place resulted in better customer satisfaction, better reputation, more efficiency and even increased market share.

NRRPs:

- Member states are exceeding the target set for initiatives geared towards a transition to a greener economy.
- SMEs may benefit indirectly from infrastructure and sector-specific initiatives.
- SMEs may benefit directly from initiatives intended to support individual companies in their transition.

Access to sustainable finance:

- The world of finance is developing an unprecedented number of ESG products.
- The number of SMEs involved is still limited, although there are examples of good practices.
- Credit Guarantee Schemes, Basket Bonds, and insurance products have the potential to offer financing options for SMEs.

[Here](#) you can download the White Paper.

THE GENERALI GROUP

Generali is one of the largest global insurance and asset management providers. Established in 1831, it is present in 50 countries in the world, with a total premium income of € 75.8 billion in 2021. With around 75,000 employees serving 67 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.