

## SME EnterPRIZE 2026: Resilience is the key competitive advantage for Europe's SMEs

- Generali unveils the 5th anniversary edition of its flagship SME EnterPRIZE initiative: “Fostering Climate Resilience for European SMEs”, recognising 11 “Sustainability Heroes”, selected from more than 8,500 European SMEs, for their leadership in sustainable and resilient business practices
- Generali also publishes the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of its White Paper developed with SDA Bocconi, exploring how sustainability adoption among European SMEs is reshaping long-term competitiveness and resilience
- While sustainability adoption among SMEs has risen steadily since 2020, reaching 41%, a major climate protection gap remains, with 59% of SMEs uninsured against extreme events

Brussels – Sustainability is no longer a temporary response to external pressure, but an increasingly embedded element of how European small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) manage risk, build resilience and shape competitive long-term strategies. The 5<sup>th</sup> edition of **SME EnterPRIZE**, Generali’s flagship initiative to promote sustainability among European SMEs, and the related 5-year anniversary edition of the **White Paper developed with SDA Bocconi – Sustainability Lab**, presented today in Brussels, highlight that despite economic volatility, regulatory complexity and growing climate impacts, more than **40%** of SMEs continue to integrate sustainability into business decision-making while **68% view it as a competitive advantage**.

The event also recognises excellence in action, celebrating the **11 “Sustainability Heroes”** selected from over 8,500 SMEs across Europe for their ability to turn sustainability into measurable impact and long-term value.

**Philippe Donnet, Generali Group CEO**, said: *“Five years on, SME EnterPRIZE reflects Generali’s long-term conviction that small and medium-sized enterprises are essential to Europe’s sustainable growth and economic resilience. At Generali, we are firmly committed to standing alongside SMEs as they navigate the impacts of climate change and the broader sustainability transition. In an increasingly uncertain global context, strengthening SME resilience is not only a necessity – it is a strategic priority for our economies and our societies. SME EnterPRIZE was created to foster dialogue and shared responsibility between businesses, policymakers and financial institutions because long-term competitiveness can only be built together. This transformation will take time, but the direction is clear, and we remain determined to support the resilience and sustainability of SMEs as a collective investment in the prosperity and well-being of us all.”*



**Marco Sesana, Generali Group General Manager**, commented: *“European SMEs are maintaining their commitment to sustainability, even in a challenging economic and regulatory environment. At the same time, the findings highlight where support is most needed – particularly in strengthening climate resilience and addressing the still-significant protection gap as 59% of SMEs remain uninsured for extreme events. These insights confirm the importance of an integrated approach that combines awareness, financial solutions and risk protection. At Generali, we aim to act as true transition partners for SMEs, providing tailored advice, dedicated support, financing and insurance solutions to help them turn sustainability into a driver of resilience and long-term competitiveness.”*

In addition to the recognition of the SME EnterPRIZE “Sustainability Heroes”, the event programme will include speeches from **Martin Hojsík, Vice-President of the European Parliament, Jessika Roswall, EU Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy, Roberto Viola, Director General of DG CONNECT (Directorate General of Communication, Networks, Content and Technology) at the European Commission and Stijn Vermoote, Head of Partnerships and Engagement Section at European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts** as well as Generali’s senior management team.

### **A Mature Sustainability Landscape and a Strengthening Business Case**

The White Paper, based on a survey of 1,100 SMEs from across Europe, confirms that **sustainability has become a stable feature of the European SME landscape**, while highlighting areas that require targeted support, including information gaps and institutional obstacles. The combined share of SMEs that have implemented or are implementing sustainability strategies – Heroes and Soon-to-be – stands at 41% in 2026. This represents a durable increase from 34% in 2020, demonstrating that sustainability adoption has held firm despite economic and geopolitical volatility over the past years.

While the rate of expansion has slowed slightly in the five years, **the core of committed SMEs remains structurally resilient**. Nationally, long-run convergence continues with stand-out movers: Italy (+27 pp since 2020), Spain (+13 pp), France (+10 pp), and Hungary (+8 pp) demonstrate the strongest improvements since 2020. Meanwhile size is underlined as a significant factor for sustainability implementation with larger SMEs (50–249 employees) in the lead with a 56% combined implementation rate (Heroes + Soon to be) versus 37% for smaller cohorts (10-19 employees).

For SMEs that have embraced sustainability, **the benefits are increasingly clear**. The business case for sustainability has matured and competitive advantage is now seen as the fastest-rising payoff at 68% (+18 pp since 2022). Better insurance/credit conditions have also climbed, respectively at 62% and 57% (+14 and +15 pp since 2022), showing the growing perception that sustainability brings concrete financial benefits for SMEs.

### **Institutional Barriers as the Main Constraint**

One of the most significant findings from the White Paper is the shift in barriers to sustainability adoption. For the first time since 2020, **institutional barriers – not financial ones – are the main constraint** to SME sustainability adoption. Lack of institutional support, incentives and legislative clarity are highlighted as the key perceived obstacles (53-56%) while economic and internal constraints have eased from their 2025 peaks. This challenge is felt most strongly by companies that are actively trying to implement sustainability strategies. During the transition phase, firms are confronted with fragmented rules, unclear requirements and overlapping obligations that slow down execution and increase uncertainty. By contrast, once sustainability practices are consolidated, perceived barriers tend to decrease.



## Climate Risk: Growing Awareness, Limited Protection

**Climate change has moved from a long-term concern to a direct business risk** for many European SMEs. While climate risk awareness rises from 50 to 55% since last year, the protection gap remains wide with 59% of SMEs still uninsured for extreme events and 74% lacking business interruption coverage. Construction, industry and the trade sectors show the highest awareness while Services had no year-on-year progress. Traditional climate covers are rising (damage insurance has grown +10 pp to 41%; business interruption +10 pp to 26%) yet a protection gap remains, and innovative mechanisms start from a low base.

### What SMEs Need to Move Forward

SMEs clearly signal what would help them accelerate the transition. **Financial incentives, public funding and regulatory simplification** are consistently identified as the most effective enablers. The White Paper highlights that progress is increasingly constrained by institutional friction, with 53–56% of SMEs citing barriers such as insufficient public incentives (56%), lack of institutional support (56%) and the absence of a clear legislative framework (53%) – challenges felt most acutely by “Soon-to-be” firms.

To unlock momentum, the findings point to the **need for sustained tax incentives and EU and national subsidised funds, combined with favourable credit conditions** linked to sustainability targets, to reinforce the financial business case for the transition. At the same time, accelerating sustainability progress for many SMEs requires capacity-building and guidance-through strengthened support from regional knowledge hubs, trade associations and chambers of commerce.

Overall, the White Paper concludes that faster progress depends on coordinated action, with policymakers reducing complexity and providing proportionate frameworks, and financial institutions acting as effective transition partners by combining finance, risk protection and expertise.

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

### Celebrating the Sustainability Heroes

Generali’s 5<sup>th</sup> SME EnterPRIZE event celebrates the 11 “**Sustainability Heroes**”, selected from over 8,500 SMEs across Europe as true leaders in developing sustainable business models. Together with an **expert advisory board** with members from academia, businesses and think-tanks, Generali assessed applicants on the grounds of their **social and environmental commitments**, including the implementation of notable sustainability initiatives in their business activities.

The companies presented in Brussels are from the 11 European countries that have joined the initiative, including Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain:

- **MyAbility (Austria)**, a leading Austrian social enterprise dedicated to advancing the inclusion of people with disabilities in business—both as employees and as customers.
- **Monatex (Bulgaria)**, a producer of sustainable yarns and a trader of textile materials, specialising in transforming PET plastic bottles into filaments and fibers for use in fabrics, garments, and accessories



- **Linteo (Croatia)**, which produces high-quality Fair-Trade promotional textiles from recycled fabrics, employing local talent and marginalized groups to preserve regional textile traditions and revitalise the local economy.
- **Tierra Verde (Czech Republic)**, which produces sustainable cleaning and cosmetic products guided by its “True Eco” philosophy, championing circular economy principles.
- **Neocem (France)**, a low-carbon cement producer that transforms excavated clay from construction sites into a sustainable alternative to traditional cement.
- **Elschukom (Germany)**, specialised in high-quality fine wire made from recycled materials for industries ranging from sensor and medical technology to high-tech textile.
- **Medencebag (Hungary)**, transforming discarded billboards and surplus industrial materials into handcrafted bags, applying creative design and skilled craftsmanship.
- **Diemmebi (Italy)**, a design-driven manufacturer recognised for its commitment to circularity and contemporary Italian craftsmanship.
- **Get2C (Portugal)**, an e-consulting firm built on more than 20 years of experience in climate change, energy, carbon markets, climate finance, and sustainable development.
- **Wild Green MAGIC Hub (Slovenia)**, an innovative concept within the Pohorje Village Wellbeing Resort in Slovenia, promoting eco-conscious experiences for businesses and travellers.
- **Uraphex (Spain)**, that designs, manufactures, and installs its patented technology for chemical-free water regeneration in industrial processes and cooling towers.

In addition, one “Special Mention” will be awarded recognising innovation on sustainability and industrial climate resilience:

- **Procedes, (Germany)**, leading company in large-format printing that is redefining the advertising and exhibition sector through a strong circular approach—leveraging recyclable textiles, reusable aluminum systems, and solvent-free production processes.

All 2026 “Sustainability Heroes” and ones from the previous editions are featured [here](#).

#### THE GENERALI GROUP

Generali is one of the largest integrated insurance and asset management groups worldwide, with a total premium income of € 98.1 billion and € 900 billion AUM in 2025. Established in 1831, with over 88,000 employees and 163,000 advisors serving 75 million customers, the Group has a leading position in Europe and a growing presence in Asia and 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.