

## **ROLE OF CSR ON THE DIGITAL SINGLE MARKET FROM THE STANDPOINT OF ROMANIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *In recent years CSR has become a fundamental tool of society, by means of which the business world interacts with society, and undertakings help provide consumers with an easy and real-time access to goods and services, as well as to achieve a level playing field for the development and deployment of digital networks. The purpose of this research is to analyse, from Romania's standpoint, the areas of action and the operational objectives which shall provide the mechanisms in order to bring the digital single market into being, as well as the way in which the undertakings in Romania perceive the role of CSR in the adoption of the digital single market. Based on CSR reports published by undertakings in Romania, we have highlighted the ways in which undertakings get involved in the adoption of the digital single market and have determined a few objectives to be considered by the Romanian government.*

**KEY WORDS:** *corporate social responsibility, digital market, European Union, information and communication technology.*

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** *L21, M14, M15, O52.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the third millennium, the information and communication technology is starting to become the most significant agent of economic and social change as instant access to information allows people, undertakings and public institutions to be in constant interaction with everything that is happening across the planet. Thus, remote communication and interaction have become an essential feature of life, considering the fact that life is supported and boosted by digital technology through the services and products it offers. In this regard, we shall point out the necessity and importance of

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digital inclusion, which determines the need to remove any drawbacks that may restrict access to knowledge, culture and education.

The digital single market is the newest concept that enables the development of the single market at EU level and which, in the future, shall provide more opportunities for people and businesses. The main focus is to boost economic growth and to create new job opportunities while removing certain obstacles, such as geo-blocking or inefficiency in cross-border delivery of parcels, the impossibility to connect to various services available on-line or the digital services containment based on national borders.

The main responsibility of the digital single market refers to the recognition of the rights of all people to be citizens of the digital society. This includes ensuring and expanding accessibility to communication technologies, namely removing technical obstacles and providing the necessary resources and tools so that all citizens can use and benefit from the advantages of digital technology. By means of information technology, corporate social responsibility (CSR) shall have a **major impact on the creation of a digital single market**. Social responsibility on the digital market is a burning issue given the fact that the current digital single market is one of the greatest achievements of Europe, as it opens up new opportunities to undertakings, consumers and communities, as well. Considering the legislative framework adopted the European single market gives consumers access to a wider range of products at competitive prices and provides a higher degree of protection, whereas large and small undertakings shall be able to perform trading operations much more easily and a lower cost outside their national territory and shall be able to compete globally.

The purpose of the research that we intend to perform is to analyse, from Romania's standpoint, the areas of action and the operational objectives which shall provide the mechanisms in order to bring the digital single market into being, as well as the way in which the undertakings in Romania perceive the need for corporate social responsibility in terms of creating the digital single market. Thus, given the fact that until now neither the undertakings nor the public at large have been familiar with the concepts of digital single market and corporate social responsibility, our first goal is to try to provide an overview of the definitions available for these concepts. For this purpose, we shall highlight a first feature of this paper which proves its authenticity and genuine nature: the analysis of the concept of corporate social responsibility considering the adoption of the Digital Single Market Strategy. Upon defining the theoretical concepts, we shall study the impact of CSR activities both on undertakings and the communities to which they belong, in terms of the digital single market. Based on the study conducted by "The Azores" consulting agency on the top 100 largest undertakings by size in Romania, we aim to perform an analysis of the CSR reports published in order to determine the ways in which undertakings are involved in the adopting of the digital single market.

The necessity to create a digital single market addresses the need of the single market to benefit from a new direction for its development and modernization that shall turn it into a new architecture that shall improve the functioning of markets for products and services and shall guarantee an adequate degree of protection for citizens.

The laws and all actions promoted by the EU at the level of the digital market focus on the following areas: access to digital goods and services, an environment in

which digital services will escalate, and economic growth ensured by the use of technology. The need for a digital single market is triggered by the fact that all 28 Member States of the European Union have different legal provisions for digital technology (adevarul.ro, 2015). The need to involve companies in social responsibility activities is mainly based on the fact that the negative aspects of globalization are increasingly coming through, as well as the steep rise in the actions taken by NGOs and the increasing number of those supporting the sustainable development of the socio-economic system (Tanimoto, 2007).

Even though the digital single market is only just emerging, in the field of social responsibility, on the other hand, the literature is rich enough, given the fact that an increasingly large number of articles published by researchers and specialists, especially from developed countries, focus on the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The concept of CSR is taught to have first appeared in the literature as a reference to the social aspect of affairs ever since the 1930s-1940s (Chester Barnard, 1938, *The Functions of the Executive*, J. M. Clark, 1939, *Social Control of Business*, Theodore Kreps, 1940, *Measurement of the Social Performance of Business*), but only started to be used widely in the 1950s. After the 1990s, once an extremely fast evolution of information and communication technology (ICT) takes place, a series of issues related to corporate governance and its strategic competitive benefits emerge, whereas globalization boosts the interest towards corporate social responsibility, by addressing a series of issues concerning human rights, climate change and poverty. The transition towards the digital single market translates into a focus on running CSR campaigns and projects due to the new opportunities offered both to undertakings, consumers and communities, as well.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The concept of digital single market is relatively recent, having been adopted for the first time on May 6, 2015 by the European Commission in the Digital Single Market Strategy (the European Commission's Digital Single Market Strategy, 2015). In this regard, we can talk about a new stage in the development of the European single market which has a history of nearly 60 years. The concept of the Common Market first appeared in 1957, as a major objective of the European Economic Community intended to create a single market and eliminate trade barriers between Member States. The concept of the Single European Market is introduced by the Maastricht Treaty which was signed in 1992 and entered into force in 1993.

The digital single market can be regarded as a digital infrastructure providing market and governmental services, evolving from fixed to mobile platforms and becoming increasingly ubiquitous, granting access to information and content anywhere, anytime and on any device. This market opens up new opportunities to boost the economy through e-commerce, while at the same time facilitating administrative and financial compliance for the business environment and empowering customers through e-government services. The mechanisms specifically designed for the digital market calls for a regulatory framework that is conducive to the

development of cloud computing, borderless mobile data connectivity and simplified access to information and content, while safeguarding privacy, personal data, cyber security and net neutrality.

The digital single market can be regarded as a digital infrastructure of services that has the potential to improve access to information, to bring efficiency gains in terms of reduced transaction costs, to provide dematerialized consumption and reduced environmental footprint, and to introduce improved business and administrative models. This leads to the development of e-commerce which generates tangible benefits for consumers, such as rapidly evolving products, lower prices, more choice and better quality of goods and services as a result of cross-border trade and easier comparison of tenders. At the same time, it determines the development of e-government services that facilitate online compliance and access to jobs and business opportunities for both citizens and undertakings. Basically, the deployment of the new concept of digital single market is intended to ensure the integration of all European processes. By means of CSR activities undertakings can help provide consumers with an easy and real-time access to goods and services, as well as to achieve a level playing field for the development and deployment of digital networks and services, thereby maximizing the growth potential of digital economy (Dobre-Baron, 2014).

Bowen (1953, p. 6), regarded as the father of corporate social responsibility (Schwartz, 2011), dealt with the social responsibility of businesses to society, defining CSR as "the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of objectives and values of our society". Carroll (1979, p. 500) thought that the corporation is the foundation of any economic system, and that its role consisted of making profits by selling products and services demanded by the market, considering that corporate social responsibility can be defined as "all economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time". John Elkington (2004) believes that there are three stages that can be identified in the evolution of the concept of corporate social responsibility: the first stage relates to the period 1960-1978, which is characterized by the fact that, for the first time, companies were required minimum standards of environmental protection and Western governments sought to limit through legislation, the impact of economic activities on the environment and the rational exploitation of natural resources; the second phase starts with the beginning of the 1980s, when the focus moves from environmental protection to sustainable development; the main feature of the third stage which starts around 1999 is the rapid development of information and communications technology (ICT), and a series of issues related to corporate governance and strategic competitive advantages are reflected, while globalization increases the level of corporate social responsibility approach. In recent years, the concept of social responsibility continues to expand, including issues related to human rights, climate change and poverty.

In a paper published in 2002 by Ogrizek (2002, p. 216), he defines the scope of CSR as being "not only the engagement in charitable, philanthropic or social activities, but also business practices that include environmental management systems, human resources policy and strategic investment to ensure a sustainable future".

According to the EU Commission (2011, p. 6) CSR is "the responsibility of companies for the impact they have on society", considering that the development of certain measures in order to regulate these activities shall create a favorable environment for companies that voluntarily engage and perform social responsibility activities. An increasingly large number of companies (90% of the companies listed in the Fortune 500) have revealed significant investments (millions of dollars) in corporate social responsibility initiatives as they seem to act on the premise that CSR is not just the best thing to do, but also the most inspired (Luo and Bhattacharya, 2006).

In Romania, the first signs of corporate social responsibility (CSR) only appeared in the early 2000s, but given the changes and pressures that occur at an international level, this type of practices are increasingly common. Multinational companies were the first to have given a boost to the development of CSR projects in Romania, by means of publishing the first CSR reports (the mobile service provider Orange, in February 2004 or the cement and concrete manufacturer Holcim). Within this favourable environment created by multinational companies, Dragos Tuta, Dragos Dehelean and Marius Balaci have launched in 2005 a platform called [www.responsabilitatesociala.ro](http://www.responsabilitatesociala.ro), which was "*the first public source of information that gave a definition of CSR in Romania and created a database with information*" (The CSR Report, 2016).

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The aim of this paper is to determine the way in which undertakings in Romania perceive the need for CSR in terms of creating the digital single market. Therefore, we shall start our research by taking into consideration the actions targeted by the Digital Single Market Strategy, we shall determine what exactly means for a business to be responsible, and based on the UN Global Compact and on the Romania CSR Index Report of 2015, conducted by "The Azores" consulting agency, we shall perform an analysis in order to determine the way in which undertakings in Romania could facilitate, through CSR activities, the transition towards the digital single market.

Our research focuses on the Digital Single Market Strategy for Romania, developed based on the Digital Agenda for Europe 2020 programme, stressing the fact that, in order to transform and boost its economy, Romania shall have to put a high priority on ICT investments. The main pillar of the Digital Agenda for Europe 2020 is to create a digital single market, and as far as Romania is concerned, this shall be performed in several areas of action and shall consist of a number of operational objectives which are presented in Table 1 (the National Strategy on Digital Agenda for Romania 2020): *E-government* and interoperability in Romania mainly focus on increasing efficiency and reducing costs by modernizing public central and local administration, so as to provide integrated, transparent and secure services to citizens and businesses. In Romania, only 5% of all citizens use e-government services, as compared to the EU, where the average use rate is 40%, and this has a huge influence on the target set up by Romania to reach 35% by 2020 (the Digital Agenda for Romania 2014-2020).

**Table 1. Romania's fields of action for 2014-2020 regarding the digital single market**

Field of action	Operational objectives	Indicators
e-Governance and Interoperability, Cyber security, Cloud Computing, Open Data, Big Data, Social media	Increasing transparency of the government documents through the public services computerization	The population buys online The population buys online to cross border The public that uses eGovernment Return completed forms Key cross-border public services in online mode Public investment in information and communications technology Lighting energy consumption (%)
eCommerce	e-Commerce support for achieving economic growth and development in the European digital single market Building on the comparative advantages of regional Romania	The population buys online The population buying online cross border SMEs that sell in online mode Key cross-border public services online Public investment in information and communications technology Power consumption for lighting (%)

Source: Processing of Romania's Strategy on the Digital Agenda 2014-2020

*Cyber security* in Romania provides the general framework so as to ensure the cooperation of public authorities and institutions with responsibilities in this area.

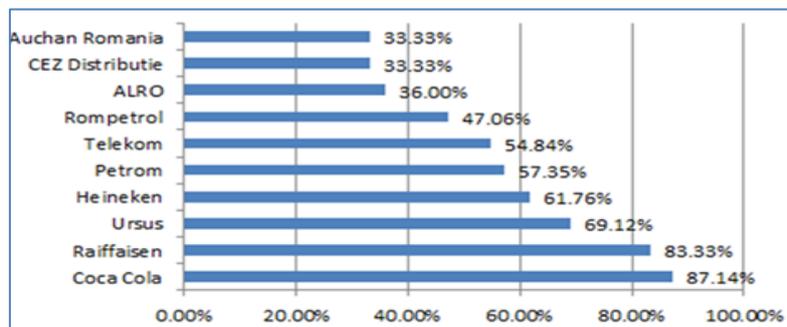
*Cloud computing* can bring more benefits to the public sector in Romania, as the role it plays is twofold, namely to ensure a link between the government and the citizens (public cloud) and to achieve interoperability between governmental organizations (private cloud). In Romania, there are equally as many types of *social media* like anywhere else, commonly known as new forms of media 2.0: blogs, forums, social networks, media sharing, social news. According to the data provided by Global Web Index ([www.globalwebindex.net](http://www.globalwebindex.net)), Romania had 7 million social network users in February 2014. Nowadays, the Romanian public institutions have low visibility on online social platforms, and most of them settle for a few specific reports and information made available on the platform, thus turning down any opportunity to get a real-time feedback.

*Open Data* refers to the idea that public institutions should grant citizens unrestricted access to certain information so that they can reuse and share it, as this type of practices could be possible with scientific information and government data. In this regard, Romania has adopted the National Action Plan for 2012-2014 consisting of measures designed to increase the public access to open data that have resulted in: standardising procedures and compressing Open Data in a single national platform and establishing a legal framework on free access to Open Data. At national level, *Big Data* analysis could improve the efficiency of a series of governmental responsibilities, particularly in terms of health care, culture, commerce and national security.

*E-commerce* is another field of action that plays a significant role in the creation of the digital single market in Romania. According to the data provided by the EU Commission in the 2014 Scoreboard, in 2013, only 8% of the Romanian population aged 16 to 74 years had used e-commerce services. As far as the business environment is concerned, only 9% of SMEs in Romania had sold goods and services online in 2013, whereas large companies had reached a percentage of 13%.

In the digital age, all companies are concerned with CSR and are aware of the fact that in 2016, not being sustainable equals zero credibility. Corporate sustainability starts with a company’s value system and a principled approach to doing business and operating in ways that meet fundamental responsibilities in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption (Dura, C., 2014). Considering the need to obey these principles, The Azores Consulting Agency, specialising in Corporate Sustainability and CSR, has conducted a study on the largest 100 companies in Romania (by turnover) and has performed an analysis to determine their involvement in CSR projects and the trends that companies in Romania embrace.

The study (Romania CSR Index, 2015) reveals that Coca Cola is the company that is mostly involved in CSR actions and that publishes all the necessary information related to this on its website, scoring a percentage of 87.14% (see Figure 1).



Source: Processing of Romania CSR Index, 2015

**Figure 1. Top 10 socially responsible companies in 2015**

It is followed by Raiffeisen Bank with a score of 83.33% and Ursus, with a score of 69.12%, as the third company that made this list. There are other socially responsible companies that have made the top 10, such as Heineken, Petrom, Telekom, Rompetrol, ALRO, CEZ Distribution and Auchan Romania. The Azores agency processed the data comprised in the financial statements and CSR reports of the companies, in view of European and international references (Directive 2014/95/EU, the Global Reporting Initiative G4 Standard and Dow Jones Sustainability Index).

The analysis performed consisted in the study of 36 quantitative indicators classified into nine categories: Corporate governance and transparency; Diversity; Economic impact; Environment; Human rights and anti-corruption policy; Employees; Consumers; Community and Philanthropy and Supply chain.

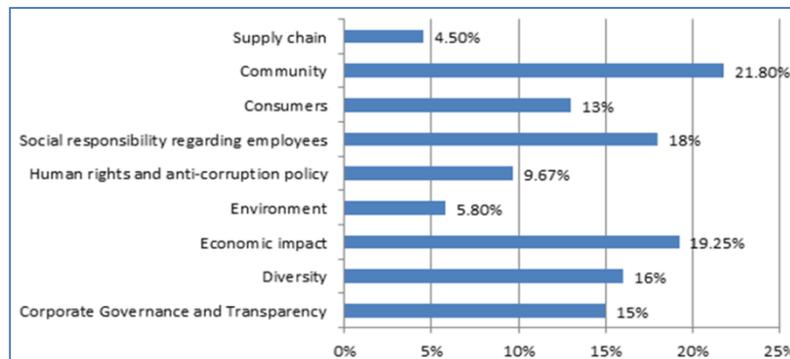
Depending on the 9 categories of indicators analysed, the 100 companies included in the study are classified as follows in Figure 2. As shown in both Table 2 and Figure 2, we can point out that most companies publish CSR-related information specifically designed to develop the community in which these companies perform their activity (21.8%), followed by information related to their economic impact (19.25%), care towards their employees (18%), the degree of diversity (16%),

corporate governance and transparency (15%), consumers (13%), human rights and anti-corruption policy (9.67%), the environment (5.8%), and supply chain (4.5%).

**Table 2. Analysis of companies according to quantitative indicators classified into categories**

Indicators category/ Companies numbers (%)	Indicators name	Companies (%)
1. Corporate Governance and Transparency - 15%	Relevant Issues on Corporate Social Responsibility	31
	Stakeholder engagement	13
	Disclosure on Management Approach (DMA)	26
	The processes of "Due Diligence"	12
	Sustainability Report / CSR	8
	CSR information audit	0
2. Diversity - 16%	Diversity Policy	16
3. Economic impact - 19.25%	The amount invested in local communities	23
	Information about medium salary of the employees	2
	Information about board members	42
	Local acquisitions policy	10
4. Environment - 5.8%	Total energy consumption in 2014	9
	Renewable energy	4
	The total amount of GHG released: Scope 1	8
	The total amount of GHG released: Scope 2	4
	The amount of water used	6
	The amount of water recycled or used	2
	The amount of waste produced	7
	The amount of waste reused or recycled	12
	Responsible use of raw materials	3
Responsible use of soil	3	
5. Human rights and anti-corruption policy - 9.67%	Abuses prevention in human rights	11
	Training on human rights policies	3
	Combating corruption and give bribery	15
6. Social responsibility regarding employees - 18%	Health and safety at work	25
	Professional development of employees	18
	Freedom of association and collective bargaining	11
7. Consumers - 13%	Responsible products / services	24
	Responsible marketing	9
	Customer satisfaction degree	6
8. Community -21.8%	Dialogue with local community members	7
	Development and protection programs from local community	43
	Social Impact Assessment	6
	Total hours of volunteering	22
	Skills development of members of local communities	31
9. Chain of suppliers - 4.5%	The process of identifying social risks in the supply chain	2
	The process of identifying environmental risks in the supply chain	2
	Measures of social risk management in the supply chain	7
	Measures of environmental risk management in the supply chain	7

Source: Processing of Romania CSR Index, 2015



Source: Processing of Romania CSR Index, 2015

Figure 2. Percentage of companies that publish data on social responsibility, by category

#### 4. OUTCOMES AND DISCUSSIONS

The research carried out on the digital single market points out that Romania has less optimal results in the field related to the digitization process of public services, namely in terms of digital literacy of citizens, but at least the quality of the online infrastructure and the level of connectivity is close to the EU average. The analysis of the concept of CSR on the digital single market reveals the fact that a significant change is linked to transparency, which is an irreversible force, and a *higher degree of transparency* equals information dissemination and proactive attitude. Companies can no longer hide information, as it travels in real time and is widespread all over the world. The force of digital globalization has turned into an essential pillar that links corporations, citizens and consumers. Nowadays, an increasingly number of companies in Romania get involved in the development and deployment of social responsibility and sustainability programmes and projects which translated into an institutional quality of the business environment, balance and long-term stringent rules. Thus, Romania needs responsible public policies that can generate economic growth and that are able to transform its economy into a strong market economy.

The study conducted has allowed us to find out that companies in Romania are still not quite interested in CRS and sustainable development and that few companies, mostly multinational companies, publish relevant data related to this topic on their websites. We were able to notice that out of the 100 large companies surveyed, only 6 of them achieved a score over the threshold of 50%, whereas 30 of these companies did not have any CSR-related information published on their websites, not even in Romanian. We were also able to notice that the majority of the companies surveyed were mostly involved in the development of local communities (22%), followed by the responsibility towards their employees (18%).

Thus, we were able to determine that companies aligning their strategy towards sustainable development play a significant role in CSR. Moreover, the European Council adopted a directive (Directive 2014/95/EU on disclosure of non-financial and

diversity information), which clearly states that all large-interest entities that are so designated by Member States with more than 500 employees are required as of 2017 to disclose non-financial statements which will increase the transparency of corporate impact on society.

Senior personnel in organizations (whether public or private) shall be hired based on fundamental elements such as their competences and equal opportunities (according to gender, ethnicity, culture, etc.). The researches carried on, however, point out that 78% of all companies surveyed are led by a male manager and only 22% by a female manager, and that 33% of the CEOs of these companies are expatriates (87% male employees) and 67% are Romanian citizens. In most companies in which the general manager is a female, it is almost certainly that she is Romanian. The proportion of women's representation in CEO positions remains significantly lower regardless of the type of share capital used by the company (The CSR Report, 2016). Based on their strategy for sustainable development, companies must show strong responsibility towards the environment and must adopt a preventive attitude towards all activities that have a negative impact on the environment, and must also encourage the development and promotion of modern, clean technologies. In recent years, companies have played a major role in reducing impacts on resource use and the environment by encouraging change in people's behaviour and changing the way in which they are taught to act, by adopting good case practices set out by multinational companies, namely by promoting a cleaner production cycle.

Corruption is a global phenomenon and the impact of major international scandals concerning business ethics of companies, consumers and markets in general is catastrophic. Therefore, the fight to stem corruption has become a priority and in the last few years Romania has witnessed a series of visible changes related to the fight against corruption, state institutions with responsibilities in this field have been strengthened and well established and therefore have started to adopt specific policies in order to identify and monitor risks.

According to the GSK analysis on the enforcement of anti-corruption rules in companies performing their activity on Romanian territory, we can clearly state that some of the greatest issues related to the enforcement of these rules are triggered by the Romanian mentality, namely the reluctance and resistance to change of individuals and society as well, to which it adds up the structure and culture of the organization. Thus, although the Romanian business environment is open and willing to comply with global standards of ethical conduct, more effort is needed in order to inform and educate people. Based on the empirical research conducted, we established that the companies concerned with sustainable development, namely Coca Cola, Ursus and Heineken, are part of the Soft drinks and Brewing industries, addressing issues such as the protection and conservation of water resources, achieving energy efficiency, developing the skills of employees and community members. These top three companies are followed by other companies such as Carpatcement, LafargeHolcim (Building materials), OMV Petrom and Rompetrol (Oil and Gas), which stand out by their concern to minimise the negative impact on the environment and for employee health and safety at work, as well as for the development of local communities. The one thing that is obvious is the fact that the number of Romanian-owned companies

concerned with CSR is still very low, and therefore, multinational companies are still the best performing companies in terms of CSR policies.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES**

The progress towards the digital single market involves paying special attention to education and research, fields that badly need to be stimulated and developed and in which ICT can make a big difference and can have a long-term influence over the achievements of all individuals. So far, digital processes and technologies have been integrated into a wide range of sectors of the Romanian economy. Therefore, digital opportunities must be exploited to the maximum by the business environment so that it can gradually increase its competitiveness both at European level and worldwide. In the years to come, it is extremely important for Romania to take all necessary steps and make all necessary arrangements in order to create and develop its digital single market.

We believe that as far as Romania is concerned, the benefits of the digital world that is accessible to all individuals should be considered, and this enables us to outline some of the goals that should be reached when following the main directions of the strategy for sustainable development: providing on-going reporting on specific CSR initiatives undertaken by businesses in Romania; digital literacy has a role to play in the CSR strategy; speeding up the digital development of businesses both internally and locally, at the community level; developing and implementing an e-learning module that provides comprehensive anti-corruption training, so as to be able to monitor, by means of specialized departments, the compliance with legal regulations and internal regulations on customer knowledge, to prevent and to combat money laundering and the financing of terrorism, fraud, corruption and insider-law; ensuring an on-going dialogue between the private sector, policy makers, civil society and social partners in order to contribute to the improvement of the business environment and the sustainable development of communities; making sure that an increasingly larger number of company employees get involved in volunteer actions, so as to generate positive changes within local communities; promoting compliance with responsible business principles and practices related to the respect for human rights, employees' rights, environmental protection and the fight against corruption; promoting CSR; achieving digital inclusion and promoting the exchange of digital know-how; paying particular attention to environmental responsibility through sustainable development, encouraging the use of sustainable means of transportation, reducing the impact on the local environment, optimizing resource consumption, recycling of waste, supporting the development of green and environment-friendly innovative solutions, particularly in terms of building sustainable cities and smart homes.

In recent years an increasingly large number of companies have been involved in developing CSR campaigns and projects that support society and focus on repairing a series of abnormalities and shortcomings of the Romanian society, thus creating a natural and favourable environment for citizens.

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