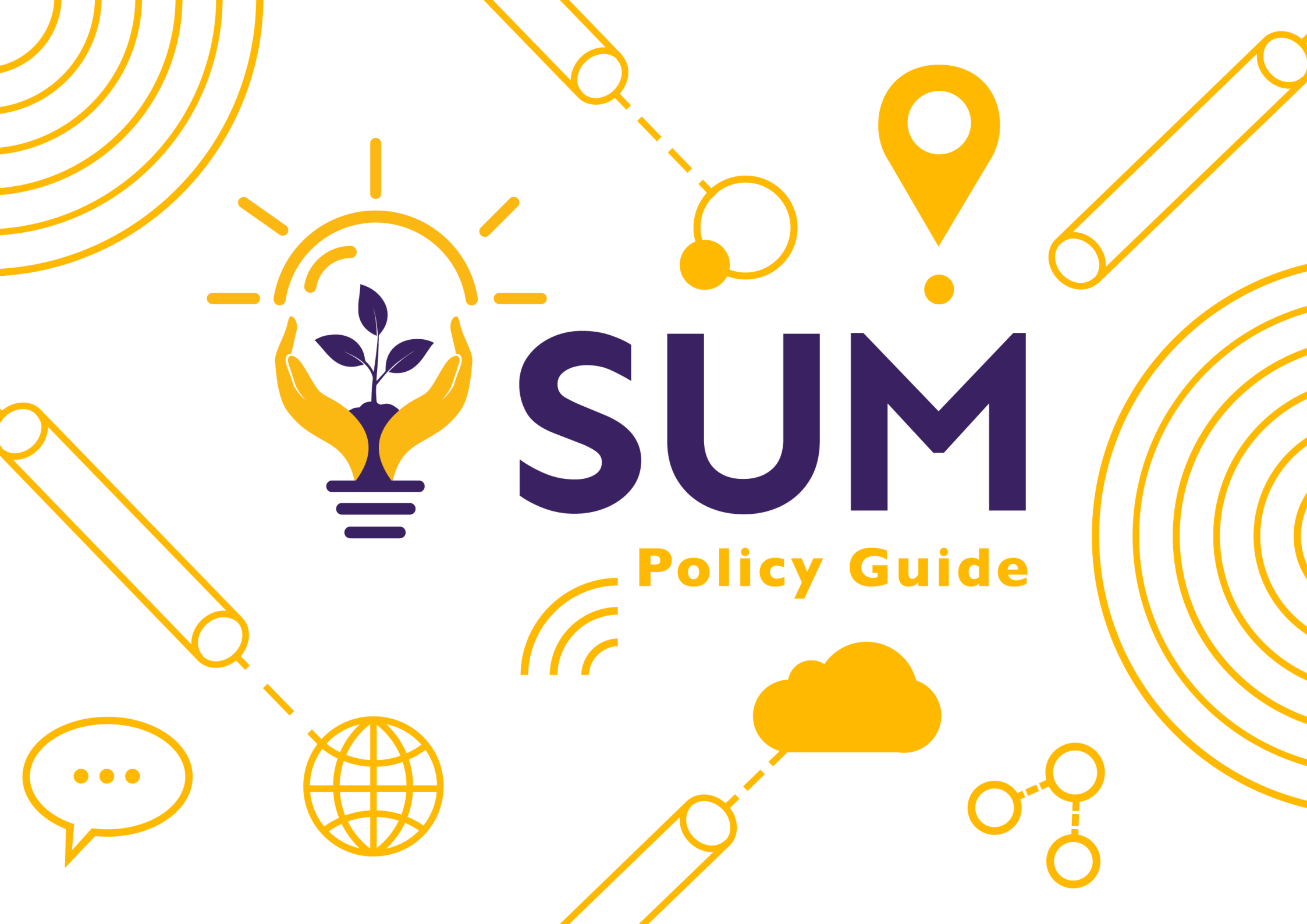




# SUM

## Policy Guide





Designing and Implementing a Corporate Social Responsibility Framework for  
Start-Ups as a Visibility, Growth and Multiplication Tool-SUM  
IO3 Training and Policy Adaptation Guide (Interactive eBook)

### **O3.A2 – Policy Guide**

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# About the SUM Project

The “Designing and Implementing a Corporate Social Responsibility Framework for Start-Ups as a Visibility, Growth and Multiplication Tool-SUM” is an Erasmus+, KA202 project for Strategic Partnerships for Vocational Education and Training, implemented between November 2020 and October 2022, by a consortium of seven partners from six European countries<sup>1</sup>.

SUM project aims to establish a concrete and supportive framework for the incorporation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in start-ups, by developing key skills that advance and cultivate CSR culture and EU sustainable development, ensuring that the rights of EU citizens, their employability, accountability, civil participation, social justice, and environmental issues are addressed. It thus intends to strengthen sustainability on an EU level.

More specifically, SUM project aims to facilitate a better understanding of what CSR actually is among start-up companies' head administrators and employees, to improve the existing status and policies for start-ups, whilst emphasizing the issue of corporate transparency which is so crucial for start-ups in maintaining reliable and trustworthy organizations. The project consists of three Intellectual Outputs:

1. A Curriculum & Open Resource Toolbox;
2. An Interactive Online Learning Environment, and
3. A Training and Policy Adaptation Guide.

For IO1, following focus groups and desk research in each participating country with regards to the general context of collective CSR, partners produced reports and established the educational material, with modular format based on the ECTS framework.

The educational piece comprises 5 modules:

1. General Awareness-raising of CSR
2. Integrating CSR into the Overall Business Strategy
3. Impact Evaluation Mechanisms and Analytical Tools for Sustainability Practices
4. CSR-related Marketing and Communication
5. Stakeholder Management.

This educational material, translated into 5 languages<sup>5</sup>, 2 was then transferred to an online learning platform, within the framework of IO2.

The functionality and usability of this platform have been tested, and all interested parties are able to visit the free e-learning environment with interactive resources, or even download the material of each module, whilst after completing all modules and the pertinent assessment quizzes are able to get a certificate.

The Training and Policy Adaptation Guide, falling under IO3, aims to assist trainers, learning organisations and policy makers in integrating the educational material/online tool in their training practices.

The project's outputs and activities have the objective to shape benchmarking and governance tools that help develop open and inclusive education and training resources, tools, and policies. Several short, medium and long-term results are expected. In particular:

- Short-term results
- Medium-term results
- Long-term results

1. CSR Cyprus – Cyprus Network for Corporate Social Responsibility, 2. CSI Center for Social Innovation Ltd [Cyprus]; 3. Xwhy – MB Homo Eminens [Lithuania]; 4. Die Berater Unternehmensberatungs Gesellschaft MbH [Austria]; 5. HIGGS – Higher Incubator Giving Growth and Sustainability [Greece]; 6. CESUR – Centro Superior de Formacion Europe SUR [Spain]; 7. CESCOT Veneto – Centro Sviluppo Commercio Turismo e Terziario [Italy].

2. Greek, Lithuanian, German, Spanish, Italian.

### SHORT-TERM RESULTS

- Empowerment of trainers and educators, target groups and stakeholders to better understand how to improve their structures and institutional culture in reference to CSR methods in start-ups through interactive resources and detailed guidance;
- Strengthening partner networks both internally within the project and on a local level;
- Provision of new insights into the current challenges, strengths, weaknesses etc. of incorporating a CSR culture in start-ups.

### MEDIUM-TERM RESULTS

- Improvement of the knowledge of all professionals about CSR culture in start-ups;
- Development of a common governance approach to CSR in start-ups, through the sharing of best practices and high-quality resources;
- Highlighting new organisational structures to promote CSR in start-ups through a European skills profile.

### LONG-TERM RESULTS

- Provision of an innovative example of how education and training governance can be improved by embracing new technologies and online platforms;
- Provision of a freely accessible, permanent bank of resources and tools for the continuous development of education and training institutions' approach to CSR culture;
- Increase of participation rate of start-ups in the CSR process through more welcoming services and improved institutional culture;
- Feed project results into wider (non-VET) services through the recognition of how project outputs can be transferred into other activities targeting start-ups.

## Guidelines for training implementation

**S**UM project is addressed to start-up entrepreneurs and relevant employees, trainers and educators, counselors, researchers, academics and political actors and decision-makers, as well as other relevant stakeholders. It provides a freely accessible online toolbox and training in CSR.

SUM Online Learning Platform is divided into 5 different modules, the different topics that are collected are: General Awareness Raising of Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility, Integrating CSR into

the Overall Business Strategy, Impact evaluation mechanisms and analytical tools for sustainability practices, CSR related Marketing and Communication and Stakeholder Management.

The different modules are established in a strategic way to provide the best step by step training. In the first module you will learn about start-up culture and the importance of CSR. It is recommended to follow the order already established between

the different modules as a steep learning curve. Each module contains different units, where you can find the content related to the different topics. By the end of each unit there are activities to put into practice the knowledge acquired regarding CSR. The activities of the platform are interactive, and you will find from writing exercises to articles, videos, quizzes, etc.

# Accreditation system applied to the platform

The accreditation is based on the workload, which allows different systems to be applied if needed. Each module is allocated with possible credits in respect to workload estimation:

MODULE	WORKLOAD	ECTS
General awareness raising and understanding of corporate sustainability and responsibility	13 hrs. 30 min	0,5 credit based on ECTS
Finding ways to integrate CSR with overall business strategy	13 hrs. 30 min	0,5 credit based on ECTS
Learning about impact evaluation mechanisms and analytical tools for sustainability practices	13 hrs. 30 min	0,5 credit based on ECTS
CSR related marketing and communication aspects	13 hrs. 30 min	0,5 credit based on ECTS
Stakeholder management	13 hrs. 30 min	0,5 credit based on ECTS

The process of awarding credit to non-formal or informal learning has four main stages:

1. Initial advice and guidance (what does the process involve for the learner, the credit limits for non-formal/informal learning; what are the costs, roles and responsibilities of learner and tutor/advisor; and different learning pathways to a qualification).
2. Support (reflective process; understanding learning outcomes; identifying own learning outcomes; evidence gathering and selection).
3. Recognition/assessment (assessment of evidence of achievement of learning outcomes and assessment criteria).
4. Award of credit (credit awarded through this process is of the same value as credit gained through formal learning).

Thus, SUM platform is flexible for various accreditation systems, i.e. it could be applied to ECVET if one adds additional activities to SUM training.

# Policy recommendations and exploitations

**T**his section of the Guide is dedicated to providing recommendations for the exploitation of project results. In particular, it provides indications on the different fields of application of its results. Thus, it is addressed to training providers, advisors, entrepreneurs, start-uppers and wannabe start-uppers and to those who are interested in acquiring knowledge about CSR.

Given that all the resources regarding the project can be easily and freely accessed, anyone can decide to integrate the platform content in its everyday training activity. Given that accessibility to knowledge regarding CSR resulted to be very difficult by the Initial Research on which the project outputs lie, the content is accessible both online and offline, and through a mobile application. The idea is to allow individuals to benefit from the content autonomously wherever and whenever they want, both in formal and non-formal learning contexts. Since the goal of the project is to foster CSR uptake by start-ups at all stages of life, partners aim to promote the integration of SUM's contents among all relevant stakeholders, such as:

- Training providers;
- Organizations supporting the development of start-ups;
- Self-employment services;
- Institutions providing work-related training;
- Training centers and training facilities;
- Chambers of commerce;
- Local and regional agencies providing self employment and start-up support.

Hence, the content developed by SUM can be integrated in already existing training courses and activities aiming at accompanying start-uppers in growing their business or even before elaborating their business plan to include CSR from the beginning.

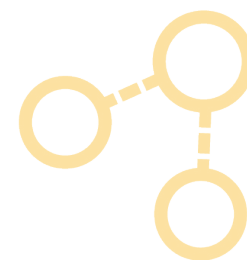
Also, it can be included in training activities related to employees to allow them to become actors of change within their organizations. Also, it can be included in training addressed to counselors and future counselors, or advisors, to give them the cognitive instruments to accompany their client in changing their approach to CSR.

SUM contents and activities can be used as tool within strategic consulting activities in the field of business development and marketing. Contents can be easily introduced in counseling activities to promote the integration of CSR within start-ups or to accompany them in acquiring the certifications regarding international standards, for instance: SA 8000:2008; sustainability report according to GRI 3.0, 3.1, 4.0; ISO 26000; ONR 192500; SR 10; Work and Family Audit; PEFC and FSC; SEDEX with SMETA; GRASP; EICC; UN Global compact; BSCI; ISO 14000 and EMAS; OECD principles; EFQM CSR; Austrian Corporate Governance Code, etc.

As per in-house training activities, it can be used by employers to identify (and change) the values that are considered fundamental to employees and to evaluate the sustainability of their business.

Modules can be used as training materials to support change within businesses, to integrate a CSR approach to internal processes and external communication. Thus, helping businesses have a positive impact on their surroundings.

Finally, it can be provided to institutions at local, regional and national level that promote CSR and sustainability within businesses. The platform could be included as an e-learning tool for universities, chambers of commerce in order to be used as a tool for dissemination of issues related to CSR. At policy level the improvement of general knowledge on CSR can help increase innovation and foster a more equal and just economy at local, regional, national and European level, also contributing to the Agenda 2030 goals and to the Sustainable Development Goals.





# Conclusions

**T**he present handbook, in addition to the “Adaptation, Skills Assessment, Validation and Recognition Guidelines” (accessible on SUM website and platform > [LINK](#)), intends to provide guidelines to relevant stakeholders for the integration of the learning material developed by the consortium in their training activities.

The handbook provides an insight on the methodology used for the development of the content and its relation to validation systems such as ECTS, to allow its uptake within formal and non-formal training environments. These guidelines are expected to attract stakeholders and to promote the use of the material, both as it is or after adapting it to their specific context.

Sustainability, CSR and the SDGs are becoming more and more important in the political agenda of the Member States, thus the tool developed by the project could help inform policies at local and regional level to improve the knowledge of these issues and to foster a more sustainable approach within the economy.

Also, the learning material could help businesses gain awareness on specific issues regarding CSR and its social impact, fostering change in their approach to economic growth.

Also, the material developed in the project could be integrated in training activities related to self-employment and start-ups to help individuals develop their business around CSR, and not introducing it along the way. CSR should become the cornerstone of business development, not just a marginal part of it.

By the end of the project, the Consortium expects to have contributed developing high quality learning material regarding CSR for training institutions, VET institutions and networks, business organizations, development centers and public agencies, and to having promoted its principle among businesses, stakeholders and individuals. Afterwards, it hopes for the project’s material to be included in training activities and day-to-day activities developed by relevant stakeholders and target groups, in order for its capitalization to be sustainable in time.





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