

Development of a National Action Plan for CSR in Slovenia

Maruša Babnik

on behalf of Etri Community, Slovenia¹

marusababnik@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is based on the process of first proposal drafting of a National Action Plan for Corporate Social Responsibility (hereinafter CSR) in Slovenia. The process is facilitated by the Road-CSR project, implemented in Slovenia by E-institute and funded by INTERREG EUROPE programme. The paper offers a short overview of the concept of CSR as an approach to be implemented in order to reach the sustainable development goals, and thus a further development of a social state. While CSR is being more widely recognised as such among various international organisations and the EU, it is still relatively poorly known among companies and countries in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. In the region, EU plays an important role in implementing the approach by encouraging the development of national public policies for encouraging the implementation of CSR in the region's companies.

Building on the draft of the National (corporate) social responsibility strategy in Slovenia (for the period of 2018 to 2030), developed by the Government of Republic of Slovenia and representatives of the civil society, business and public sector, the co-creators of the first 2017 CSR strategy consultation and other stakeholders, as well as on the existing policies and measures taken by Slovenia to introduce and promote CSR among Slovenian companies, the author of this paper is coordinating the development of a proposal of National Action Plan for CSR in Slovenia (NAP). This paper further presents the process of NAP development and its first results.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR Strategy, National Action Plan, INTERREG EUROPE ROAD-CSR, E-zavod, Etri Community

Priprava nacionalnega akcijskega načrta za DOP v Sloveniji

Povzetek

Pričujoči prispevek temelji na postopku priprave prvega predloga nacionalnega akcijskega načrta za družbeno odgovornost podjetij (v nadaljevanju DOP) v Sloveniji. Proces podpira projekt Road-CSR, ki ga v Sloveniji izvaja E-institut in ga financira evropski program INTERREG EUROPE. Prispevek ponuja kratek pregled koncepta družbene odgovornosti podjetij kot pristopa za doseganje ciljev trajnostnega razvoja in s tem nadaljnega razvoja socialne države. Medtem ko je DOP splošno prepoznana med različnimi mednarodnimi



organizacijami in EU, je še vedno relativno slabo znana med podjetji in državami v regiji srednje in vzhodne Evrope. V regiji igra EU pomembno vlogo pri uvajanju koncepta s spodbujanjem razvoja nacionalnih javnih politik za spodbujanje izvajanja družbene odgovornosti v podjetjih v regiji.

Na podlagi osnutka nacionalne strategije družbene odgovornosti (podjetij) v Sloveniji (za obdobje 2018-2030), ki so jo razvili Vlada Republike Slovenije in predstavniki civilne družbe, gospodarstva in javnega sektorja, soustvarjalci prvega posvetovanja o strategiji DOP iz leta 2017 in drugi deležniki, pa tudi na podlagi obstoječih politik in ukrepov, ki jih je Slovenija sprejela za uveljavljanje in spodbujanje družbene odgovornosti podjetij med slovenskimi podjetji, avtorica tega prispevka so-koordinira razvoj predloga nacionalnega akcijskega načrta za družbeno odgovornost podjetij Slovenija. V tem prispevku je predstavljen proces razvoja NAP in njegovi prvi rezultati.

Ključne besede: družbeno odgovornost podjetij, strategija družbene odgovornosti podjetij, nacionalni akcijski načrt, INTERREG Europe Road-CSR, E-zavod, Etri Skupnost



1 Introduction

The European Commission's (hereinafter EC) Communication on a renewed EU CSR Strategy (October 2011)² is defining CSR as »the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on Society«, which can be achieved by enterprises following the applicable laws and integrating social, environmental, ethical, consumer, and human rights concerns into their business strategy and operations in close collaboration with their stakeholders. It is EC's position that CSR should be company led, however that Member States (hereinafter MSs) can and should play »a supporting role through a smart mix of voluntary policy measures and, where necessary, complementary regulation«.³ On the other hand, many authors highlight the utmost importance of the role of the state in the implementation of CSR through the promotion of social justice, environmental protection and social development, as research also confirms that business managers mostly miss government incentives in designing and adopting CSR practices. Despite numerous international guidelines and frameworks, it could be argued that the biggest obstacle in CSR becoming a higher priority is their non-binding approach.⁴ On the other hand, making it binding would be contrary to the belief that CSR activities should go beyond the compliance with national and international regulations.

In 2011 through above mentioned communication EC invited all MSs to develop or to update their own action plans to promote CSR in support of the Europe 2020 strategy by mid 2012.⁵ That year Slovenia started a multi-stakeholder discussion for the preparation of the National strategy on Social Responsibility in Slovenia, which would become the basis for the NAP, however the process stalled shortly after. In 2017, Slovenia re-started the development of National strategy on Social Responsibility in Slovenia.⁶ The Government opened a multi stakeholder discussion by establishing an inter-sectorial work group composed of the government, business and civil society representatives to prepare the base for the Strategy.⁷ Its development stage is yet to be completed; consequently, Slovenia is running behind the EC's (non-binding) invitation by almost 6 years. However, the first draft proposal of the Strategy also includes the first outline of a National Action Plan for CSR, indicating both documents could be adopted simultaneously when prepared.

2 State of the National CSR Strategy in Slovenia

CSR in CEE region is a new approach, which quickly spread with the European integrational processes and under the influence of large foreign companies, which have strong corporate influence on the development of social activities and foreign investors. However, in 2012 many CEE countries could not build sufficient political support to move forward with the EU agenda on CSR, including Slovenia.⁸

The understanding of the CSR in Slovenia among companies is connected mainly to donations, volunteering, and compliance of legislation, which is different from the understanding in the western countries, where CSR is considered and promoted as behaviour that exceeds the compliance with the national regulations. Even the public in Slovenia limits the role of the businesses in the society to mainly a job creator, taxpayer, contributor to economic growth, and as a developer of innovative products and services. Almost 60% of surveyed Slovenians thinks that the impacts companies have on society are negative.⁹ Globally, the Edelman Trust Barometer, a global online survey investigating trust in institutions across 28 countries, found in 2017 that more than half of the over 33,000 respondents did not consider business a trustworthy institution and that only 37% considered



global business leaders to be trustworthy individuals. The all-time low trust level was due to CEO credibility plummeting in every country studied. 75% of respondents agreed that a company should take specific actions to both increase the profits as well as improve the economic and social conditions in the countries where it operates.¹⁰ In 2018, the Barometer showed fast recovery of the trust in CEOs, rising up to 44% as they were rewarded for “speaking out on issues”. Also, “nearly two-thirds say they want CEOs to take the lead on policy change instead of waiting for government, which now ranks significantly below business in trust in most markets”.¹¹

Due to the historic development, Slovenia is often compared to Czech Republic in terms of economic development and growth. In both countries, the implementation of CSR field started developing with the start of accession negotiations and the entry of both countries into the EU. In comparison to Slovenia, the first civil initiatives in the field of CSR in Czech Republic formed almost 10 years before the first initiative in Slovenia (in 1992 vs 2004). Proprs¹² attributes this fact to the lack of perceived need within Slovenian society 10 years ago, as the biggest Slovenian companies kept their socialist inheritance of providing certain social goods. This, she states, is also reflected in the public opinion in Slovenia, where almost 70% of people believe that the companies devote less attention to their impact on society now than they did 10 years ago. Also, Czech Republic started the systematic regulation of this field at the national level in 2012, following EC’s communication on CSR in 2011. Two years later it adopted the national CSR strategy, although non-binding. In 2016 it adopted the updated NAP¹³, and in 2018 already drafted NAP CSR for the period 2019–2023¹⁴), while Slovenia is yet to progress from non-governmental initiatives and ministries' positions on the matter.¹⁵

The story of the development of CSR strategy in Slovenia has been opened, closed and re-opened again multiple times since 2005, mainly on the initiative of civil society.¹⁶ Steurer and others argue that the lack of initiative from the states is what affects the gap in the level of implementation of CSR between CEE and other countries. EU, its institutions and the governments of MS play a crucial role in the development and implementation of socially responsible practice in the operation of companies of all sizes, as they set the frameworks to address ethical dilemmas that arise in all sectors.¹⁷ The civil society in Slovenia on the other hand remains engaged trying to fill the gap as it has long before recognized social responsibility as a useful instrument of competitiveness and as an important tool for achieving sustainable development.¹⁸

The current attempt to develop a national strategy on CSR is from 2017, when the Government of the Republic of Slovenia re-started a multi-stakeholder debate on the topic of drafting the strategy. It has created a cross-sectoral working group (representatives of the government, the economy and civil society) and tasked them to prepare the basics for the strategy. By discussing and finalizing the strategy, the stakeholders involved were hoping to have the strategy confirmed by December 2017¹⁹, however the Strategy is still on the level of a draft at the time of writing this article.

The draft proposal of the strategy of (C)SR and SD in Slovenia includes the mission and vision, goals and indicators by areas: Human rights, Fair business practices, Care for the environment, Working practices, Ethics, Governance, Suppliers and buyers, Responsible investment, Green public procurement, sustainable procurement, CSR in education, Climate change, early draft of National Action Plan for CSR, and chapters on Reporting on social



responsibility, Strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation, CSR for small and medium-sized enterprises and Introduction of novelties into the strategy.²⁰

3 Development of a National Action Plan on CSR in Slovenia

3.1 The importance of a National Action Plan

A National Action Plan is “a nationwide initiative which sets out proposed work in a certain area”²¹, a “sequence of steps that must be taken, or activities that must be performed well, for a strategy to succeed”²², or a “tool in social planning, an organisational strategy to identify necessary steps towards a goal”²³. One of the best ways to describe the importance of the implementation of a National Action Plan on any topic is much inspired by the Inclusive Security’s article²⁴:

NAP’s role is to inspire immediate action as a vehicle for the implementation of international and national commitments. NAPs are one of the most powerful tools governments, multilateral organisations, and civil society, as well as businesses, have to increase the chances to achieve the outlined goals by providing a structure. The structure - a sequence of actions – is agreed on to achieve the goals outlined in the topic related strategic document by helping implementers set country specific priorities, coordinate actions, simplify decision-making, and track progress. NAPs by creating space for all stakeholders to work together, prompt meaningful changes in behaviour, policies and funding as well as provide civil society and other stakeholders with a mechanism through which they can hold governments accountable.

It is vital that every action plan identifies specific tasks or activities and for each of them a responsible person, institution or organisation, timelines or deadlines, and finally, allocation of resources. Therefore, when prepared properly and followed through, NAPs allow coordinating and responsible persons/institutions to approach the goals efficiently and to monitor their progress. The same as with the development and implementation of the strategy, the development of NAP requires a commitment from the government and a sustained political throughout its implementation process.²⁵

3.2 Current NAPs on CSR in European Union

In 2014, EC published an update on the actions taken by EU MSs since the publication of the 2011 Communication on CSR. In it, it highlights some of the most common approaches, good practices relating to different parts of CSR policy, as well as the state of the development of NAPs on CSR in EU as of June 2014.²⁶ The table below (Table 1) presents its findings with some updates found during preliminary research by the author of the paper.

Table 1: State of development of National Action Plans on CSR in EU Member States

Countries with CSR NAPs in 2014	Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic (updated NAP in 2016 ²⁷ , new draft in 2018), Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, UK Update: Ireland (NAP 2017-2020 ²⁸)
Countries with NAPs close to completion (as of June 2014)	Austria, Ireland (see previous category’s update), Hungary, Malta, Spain



Countries with NAPs under development	Croatia, Greece, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia
Countries without plans to develop a formal NAP	Luxembourg

Source: Based on the EC's Compendium 2014 "Corporate Social Responsibility National Public Policies in the European Union" and preliminary research by the author.

As stated in Compendium 2014, a lack of a NAP does not imply an absence of any CSR initiatives, which is also demonstrated through a multitude of Slovenian initiatives presented in the report. However, the NAPs researched in 2014 show a number of common CSR priorities²⁹ which are also considered during the development of the Slovenian NAP:

- Many MSs have initiatives aimed at integrating, disseminating or shaping the existing global CSR approaches within their national policy frameworks. Transnational CSR approaches and tools, which can facilitate responsible business conduct by all stakeholders are: 1) the ISO 26000 Guidance on Social Responsibility, 2) the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration), 3) the UN Global Compact, 4) the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and 5) the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs)³⁰.
- NAPs focus on Business and human rights and responsible supply chain management, is reflecting the increasing emphasis on the topic with EU and broader. Slovenia has already prepared a separate NAP on Business and human rights in 2017³¹, however due to the government's resignation in 2018 it is waiting the next mandate to be adopted.³² This NAP will also be accompanied by guidelines for conducting a thorough review of human rights by businesses.³³
- Due to the previously mentioned importance of SMEs in EU economies, many NAPs set high priorities to the measures to support SMEs in the development of CSR approaches.
- Social and employment policies aimed at social inclusion as a priority of EU 2020 strategy resonate in many MSs strongly affected by the economic crisis.
- Building consumer awareness and responsible business promotion is part of many existing and draft NAPs to establish critical consumer demand for responsibly-sourced and produced products as one of the critical steps to successful implementation of any CSR strategy.
- Reporting and disclosure of CSR performance of larger companies (strongly connected to the EC initiative and directive 2014/95/EU).
- Training, education and further development of curricula for business managers, which can raise awareness of CSR concerns among (future) businesspersons. In some countries, the schools and universities are already recognising the need for it.
- Many countries, also through the revisions of the relevant directives at EU level, are recognising the incentive available through public procurement such as the use of social and environmental (green) clauses in public procurement.
- A more recent theme gaining importance among some MSs and companies is also socially responsible investment.

Other important themes in the NAPs are also climate change and environmental sustainability, as well as financial reporting obligations and anti-corruption policies.



3 Process of developing Slovenian NAP on CSR

In 2017, through the Road-CSR project, co-funded by Interreg Europe, the civil society facilitated new engagement in the field by, among others, “promoting public dialogue and consultation process to build consensus and ensure the successful implementation of regional action plans, through the support and participation of key regional stakeholders”³⁴ (e.g. Slovenian action plan). This prompted the restart of consultations on preparation of strategy on CSR in 2017, however due to Government’s resignation in early 2018 the process on the development of strategy stalled yet again.

Even though the draft proposal of the strategy included the first beginnings of a NAP proposal, the individual discussions with the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy on its further development opened a debate, whether Slovenia truly needs a separate CSR strategy to develop a NAP. As it has just adopted Slovenia Development Strategy 2030, they introduced an idea to base the NAP development on the Development Strategy as well as other national and international strategic documents Slovenia has already in place or has committed to. There are conflicting opinions on the matter within civil society. Although this would mean that the end of the road to the NAP could be one step closer, by omitting the development and adoption of the Strategy, on the other hand one could argue that the Development Strategy does not approach CSR holistically. Furthermore, the development of both – the strategy and the NAP – is yet to provide also the needed legitimacy by identifying an authority taking on the responsibility of coordinating their implementations.

The new debate aside, with the NAP proposal development process being supported by before mentioned Road-CSR project, the process became more result oriented (result being producing a full proposal of NAP on CSR by end of November 2018). Therefore, the set goal is a NAP proposal that presents a holistic message of business, civil society and public sector already active in the field of CSR and thus develops either a more in-depth implementation of the CSR field regulated in other national strategic documents or the finalisation of the already drafted strategy for CSR in Slovenia. Both approaches include also the results and experiences gained by the working group developing the Strategy, as well as a continuous stakeholder involvement in the NAP proposal development, with the first approach being more focused on mapping the known actors in the field and assigning them the activities and measures; making the NAP proposal process a bottom-up initiative.

Reflection of international commitments in NAP

Development and implementation of a NAP also presents a structured way to implement international commitments, directives and operational programs.

One of the most notable and recent EU directives in the field of CSR is in 2014 adopted the Directive 2014/95/EU on disclosure of non-financial and diversity information by certain large undertakings and groups³⁵. Although, national laws already required many companies in the EU to disclose non-financial information in the countries where they operate, these requirements were often regarded as unclear and ineffective. In order to harmonize the EU legislation EU adopted the directive 2014/95/EU, which defines the requirements for the reporting on social, economic and environmental topics.³⁶ In Slovenia in the field of respect for human rights in business prior to the EU directive, companies mostly only noted in their



reports that ‘they respect human rights and do not perceive any violations’. NGOs believe that the systemic framework of the EU directive will be somewhat helpful in changing the reporting standards in the field.³⁷

Directive 2014/95/EU requires companies with more than 500 employees with total assets of more than €20 million and a sales revenue of more than €40 million, which are “of public interest” to disclose information on policies, outcomes and risks related to at least: Environmental matters, Social and employee aspects, Respect for human rights, Anticorruption and bribery issues, and Diversity in their board of directors. Notably, the directive is not directly relevant to the large majority of EU companies, as in total, the EU estimates that approximately 6000 large companies will be directly affected³⁸ (the estimate for Slovenia is presumably less than 50 companies, according to business registry keeper AJPES even as low as 10 companies apart from insurance companies (138) and banks (69)³⁹). Although an increase from around 2500 large EU companies that were already disclosing environmental and social information regularly before 2014, it is still omitting the driving force of EU economy and employment – the SMEs. At the same time, SMEs have worst effects in the social and environmental sphere. It is argued that even though the SMEs will not face any further direct obligation under the Directive as the implementation of CSR for them remains on voluntary basis, they might be affected indirectly through requests regarding data collection from their larger partners, which are required to disclose also the information about their supply chain.⁴⁰ The surge in data collection might spur the development of CSR among SMEs, as many past examples of increased interest among certain type of suppliers to obtain specific certificates, awards, and standards show. However, although transposed to Slovenian legislation, the Directive itself will most likely have no actual impact on the development of CSR in Slovenia without the development of national CSR strategy, NAP and guidelines for SMEs. With proven positive relationship between SMEs and CSR and their competitiveness, it is important that Slovenia develops a national CSR strategy and NAP, which are currently lacking, and make them suitable for SMEs based economy.⁴¹

Apart from EU’s Non-Financial Reporting, the governments and other regulators in general are increasing the number of instruments requiring or encouraging CSR disclosures especially among (large) transnational companies. According to the Global Reporting Initiative’s (GRI) Sustainability Disclosure Database, the total number of these instruments reached 400 across 71 countries in 2016, up from 180 instruments across 44 countries in 2013.⁴² According to different authors, “this indicates an emerging consensus that transnational companies can and ought to contribute to sustainable development by enhancing positive impacts (e.g. on livelihoods, health and education) and reducing negative ones (e.g. resource consumption, pollution, human rights violations)”⁴³.

In 2016, the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their targets came into effect. The interconnected 17 SDGs present the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) linked together in the global Agenda 2030, adopted by developed and developing countries alike.⁴⁴ The Agenda 2030 also presents the first time the private sector has been actively involved in shaping sustainable development agenda and is explicitly recognized as both an addressee and an important partner in its achievement.⁴⁵ According to PwC survey, SDG awareness amongst the business community is high (92%) compared to 33% of citizens aware of SDGs. Despite only 10% business respondents ranking business with prime responsibility to achieve the SDGs, business has already started to take action.⁴⁶ According to the CSR Europe’s survey, more and more companies are viewing



SDGs “as highly aligned with corporate values and sustainability strategies, and are also viewed as an important catalyst for new business opportunities and multi-stakeholder collaborations”. However, the survey also revealed that the awareness of the SDGs remains limited to top management and those in CSR or sustainability functions. For the companies to help drive the fulfilment of SDGs while fully taking advantage of business benefits, they will also need to educate and engage their middle management and employees. Thus raising interest in the SDGs and unlock innovation.⁴⁷

The potential benefits of SDGs are also visible to some of SMEs in Slovenia, especially in social-enterprise community, where first promotional activities were organised by Etri Community inspiring SMEs and micro companies to identify how their work contributes to the achievement of SDGs.⁴⁸

With business community signalling its interest to become the lever to achieve SDGs, Schönherr and others⁴⁹ are joining other authors to tackle the challenging tasks to develop the instruments necessary to guide transnational companies through the process of measuring and managing their impacts on sustainable development. They suggest that the SDGs with their universally agreed-upon 169 targets may fill this gap and provide an integrated framework for future-oriented CSR engagement. As the “SDGs fully acknowledge the integrated and systemic nature of sustainable development issues, they may consequently provide a framework against which transnational companies may start to map their CSR activities in order to identify leverage points for enhancing positive impacts and mitigating negative ones.”⁵⁰

Another type of international documents, which could be reflected in an emerging NAP, are regional development and cohesion policies, such as OP 2021-2027, which focus on different investment priorities within EU. EU prepared new investment framework for the period 2021-2027, which might be considered in a NAP for the overlapping periods, as it might be a viable source of funding. The OP 2021-2027 defines main objectives which will drive EU investments in the future. These span from support to SMEs (through innovation, digitisation and economic transformation), implementation of Paris Agreement by investing in energy transition, renewables and the fight against climate change, developing strategic transport and digital networks to supporting quality employment, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to healthcare, and finally, by supporting locally-led development strategies and sustainable urban development across the EU.⁵¹

The NAP content

As the review of NAP of other countries and regions is still ongoing and the process of developing the Strategy is yet to yield some important final decisions on priorities, the current NAP content will be subject to major changes in coming months. It is important that the NAP’s goals and activities are prepared with SMEs in mind, which does not exclude the largest companies as potential addressees as it could other way around.

1. Background of CSR in Slovenia
2. Current CSR practice in Slovenia and CSR actors
3. Priorities and activities with indicators
 - 3.1 Adjustments of related Legislation
 - 3.2 Governance and promotion of socially responsible leadership



- 3.3 Awareness Raising
- 3.4 Strengthening partnerships
- 3.5 Role of public authorities and (social, green) public procurement
- 3.6 Integration, dissemination and shaping of international CSR approaches
- 3.7 Business and Human Rights and responsible supply chain (separate NAP)
- 3.8 Social and employment policies (inclusion, certificates)
- 3.9 Fair business practice
- 3.10 Environment protection and climate change
- 3.11 Protection of Cultural heritage
- 3.12 CSR in Supply Chain
- 3.13 Social Entrepreneurship
- 3.14 Socially responsible investment
- 3.15 Further integration of CSR into education (development of curricula), training, and research
- 3.16 Awarding organisations for CSR
- 3.17 CSR reporting and disclosure for larger companies
- 3.18 Consumer awareness and responsible business promotion (brands)
- 3.19 Prevention of corruption
- 3.20 Highlighting measures to support SMEs in development of CSR approaches
4. Strengthening the inter-sectorial cooperation on CSR
5. NAP evaluation methodology
6. Conclusion

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