



CSR Germany (www.csrgermany.de) – The CSR Internet portal of Germany's four leading business organisations.

Our understanding of CSR

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) describes companies' commitment to work towards sustainability by acting voluntarily beyond their legal obligations on ecological, social and economic matters wherever they are involved around the world. CSR is not a new development. Companies have been engaging for the society in which they do business for as long as there have been companies.

Best known are the many foundations through which business personalities have been contributing to their communities since the Middle Ages. This commitment has continuously developed as society has evolved and processes have been modernised. Today, a commitment to society is a fixed component of German business culture.

CSR is multi-faceted

Businesses assume their responsibilities under complex conditions: the responsibility of a multinational enterprise in Bangladesh is completely different from that of an artisan in Europe. The challenges faced by an IT firm in terms of CSR differ from those of a business in the oil industry. The type and structure of a company's commitment to society depends on its size as well as the sectors and markets in which it operates. The priorities that a business sets for ecological and social activities are geared to the needs of the relevant stakeholders. There can therefore be no harmonised standards or binding framework requirements. Companies must have unrestricted scope for action so that they can develop and implement the best CSR approaches for their individual situation. In this regard, the exchange of experience is particularly important. Through the dissemination of good practice examples, the various possibilities for assuming social and ecological responsibility are demonstrated.

Companies should be supported with as little red tape as possible in their creativity and their quest for the best solutions. The aim is to publicise the diversity of CSR approaches instead of holding back innovation and dynamism in the area of CSR through reference frameworks, certification and regulatory interventions.

Opportunities and limits of CSR

Many companies are actively involved in solving weighty societal problems, especially in emerging and developing countries. Through their CSR activities, companies can make an important contribution to sustainable development, also in partnership with other players in society. In this context, the division of roles between governments and companies needs to be clearly delineated.

Companies can complement the efforts of politicians for development of society and social progress through their commitment, but cannot substitute for them.

Furthermore, there are governments that still have to transpose and implement fundamental environmental and social standards. This task

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cannot be delegated to companies. This would amount to a privatisation of law enforcement. The UN Special Representative for human rights and multinationals, John Ruggie, gave concrete expression to this division of roles in a draft endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council and based on three pillars “Protect – Respect – Remedy”.

Protect: it is the task of the state to protect the people on its territory from infringements of human rights by non-state players. Respect: it is the duty of companies to respect human rights as enshrined in the relevant national legislation and to build the necessary management structures to that end. Remedy: legal and out-of-court complaint mechanisms need to be developed and strengthened to improve redress for infringements of human rights committed by companies and others.

Our objective

With the Internet portal CSR Germany, Germany’s leading business organisations support the multi-faceted commitment of German companies to society:

CSR Germany offers companies the possibility to

- link up with a network in order to promote the exchange of experience;
- present their CSR activities to a wider public;
- obtain information about backgrounds, recent developments and trends.

The initiators

Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände

BDA is the leading social policy organisation of the German business community. It represents the interests of small, medium-sized and large companies from all sectors on all issues relating to social and pay policy vis-à-vis policy-makers, trade unions and public opinion. It is the voice of business and offers its members a comprehensive range of services. BDA defends the interests of one million businesses which together employ twenty million workers and which are linked to BDA through their voluntary membership of 6,500 employer federations.

Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie

BDI is the leading organisation of German industry and industrial services. It speaks for 37 sectoral confederations and represents more than 100,000 companies with more than eight million employees. It is the voice of German industry vis-à-vis policymaking institutions at national, European and international level.

Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag

As the umbrella organisation of 80 German Chambers of Industry and Commerce, **DIHK** defends the interests of German business vis-à-vis policy-makers in the German political world and the European institutions. It does so on behalf of and in coordination with its members. The Chambers

organisation represents general business interests on the basis of a broad cross-section of business people: 3.6 million commercial businesses are statutory members of Chambers. This means that the Chambers organisation is independent of individual interests and carries a particular weight vis-à-vis policy-making bodies. Overseas chambers at 20 locations in 80 countries around the world promote the German economy's external commercial relations.

Zentralverband des Deutschen Handwerks

ZDH brings together 53 chambers of skilled crafts, 36 central confederations of skilled crafts as well as important business and academic skilled crafts institutions in Germany. ZDH is a forum for developing harmonised positions on all fundamental issues linked to crafts policy. It represents the overall interests of skilled crafts vis-à-vis German parliament, German government and other central German authorities, the European Union and international organisations.

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