The Sustainability Code:
A solid partner for CSRD-compliant sustainability reporting

A digital solution to support companies in sustainability reporting – tailored to the specific country context

The challenge: Companies need support in implementing EU sustainability reporting requirements

The EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) brings with it considerable expansion of both direct and indirect reporting obligations. Going forward, substantially more companies will be required to produce sustainability reports in line with the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS) as part of their annual reporting. The reports comprise over 1,000 data points across more than 300 pages and pose a sizeable challenge on the companies concerned. Against this backdrop, it is essential that national institutions not only transpose the EU standards into national law, but also actively support companies, especially SMEs, when it comes to putting them into practice.

Germany's reliable sustainability reporting solution

To facilitate implementation of the CSRD, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy has put its weight behind the Sustainability Code (in German 'Deutscher Nachhaltigkeitskodex' or short 'DNK'). The code has been supporting companies in their sustainability reporting since 2011 and, as such, is a mine of expertise. The resulting experience has been incorporated into the new package of services provided by the Sustainability Code since the beginning of 2025. The services are structured in modules to correspond with the EU reporting standards for the different categories of companies. The first module, launched in early 2025, is aimed at companies subject to mandatory reporting (ESRS Set 1). A further module for companies reporting voluntarily (ESRS VSME) is in development. At the core of the new services is the DNK Platform for sustainability reporting, which guides companies efficiently through the entire digitalised reporting process free of charge.

The Sustainability Code services: The DNK Platform, the DNK Checklist and the DNK Sustainability Campus

As well as the DNK Platform itself, the Sustainability Code package of services consists of the DNK Checklist and the DNK Sustainability Campus. The DNK Checklist, which offers a structured guide to the complex ESRS standards, is integrated in the DNK Platform. This required the ESRS data points to be clearly and comprehensibly edited, mandatory and voluntary information to be indicated, and complex formulations and technical terms simplified. The Sustainability Campus, in turn, offers practical information and training options – from webinars and explainer videos to guidelines and fact sheets. Not forgetting our Helpdesk for personal initial advice over the phone or by email.

Features: What the DNK Platform offers in detail

In March 2025 we released the first module of our new DNK Platform for free, digital sustainability reporting. The DNK Platform maps the requirements of the CSRD and enables companies to create their digital sustainability reports. It guides them step by step through the reporting process, saving them considerable time and effort. In the process they can access numerous support options, including a virtual assistant, a glossary function and a comment function with named addressees. The finished report can be exported in XBRL format. Various interfaces allow data export to banks and insurance companies, for instance. We are constantly developing the DNK Platform to make it as user-friendly as possible. See this video for more on the different functions: https://youtu.be/IhLj30wSwiI

Market response: High demand, positive feedback from companies and recognition by leading industry associations

The DNK Platform is attracting wide interest: the online launch event on 11 March 2025 was attended by more than 750 people wanting to know more, and only a week later the DNK Platform had already recorded some 3,500 users. The positive feedback from various sectors, from chambers of commerce and industry, chambers of trades, as well as professional and industry associations, has confirmed that the Sustainability Code supports companies precisely where they need it most.

"This platform makes it quicker and easier for organisations to do their CSRD reporting. A big thank-you to the Sustainability Code for this fantastic service."

Wolfgang Ackenheil – building sector (www.schoeck.com/en)

"The Sustainability Code offers a simplified version of the ESRS and helps translate it into understandable language, something the market urgently needs."

Maria Blume – wholesale drinks chain (www.getraenke-hoffmann.de)

"From the point of view of ZDF, the Sustainability Code is extremely user-friendly, easy to understand, well laid-out, systematic and transparent. A really good tool for us to navigate through the jungle that is sustainability reporting."

Prof Dr Jens Müller – public broadcaster (www.zdf.de/unternehmen/en)

"Your free platform is an excellent service – especially for small and micro-enterprises that have a limited budget for producing an ESG report."

Sabine Melichar – full-service agency (www.circles-communication.de)

Latest developments: The VSME module for voluntarily reporting companies is becoming more important

On 26 February 2025 the European Commission presented the draft of an Omnibus simplification. The simplification package includes the postponement of reporting requirements, which was endorsed by the EU Parliament on 3 April. It also includes changes to the content and scope of sustainability reporting, the work on which will now start in Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee. This could lead to a smaller number of companies officially required to report than was originally planned. That said, we are assuming that more and more SMEs will choose to report voluntarily. After all, customers, contract partners,

investors and, above all, banks increasingly expect transparency on matters of sustainability. With our new VSME module ('V' standing for 'voluntary'), currently in development, we offer targeted support for companies that opt to report voluntarily according to the VSME reporting standard. The VSME module will be available in September 2025. Additionally, it is planned to enable the transition from the VSME module to the CSRD module on the platform.

One reporting tool for all EU states: Flexible adaptation to national requirements

Although the regulatory requirements of the CSRD are consistent across Europe, in practice, the way they are implemented differs in the individual EU member states. The Sustainability Code offers an open-source solution with a modular structure and can be flexibly tailored to country-specific needs. This way, national institutions can access a tried-and-tested practical reporting tool, which specifically helps companies to apply the sustainability guidelines – ultimately promoting a more sustainable, more efficient and more competitive economy. In fact, even before it was updated by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, the Sustainability Code served as an example for national adaptations in countries such as Greece, Türkiye, Romania and the Czech Republic.

Key benefits at a glance

- ✓ **Effective support for companies:** An online platform based on the open-source solution of the Sustainability Code takes the hard work out of CSRD-compliant corporate sustainability reporting.
- ✓ **Fast and cost-efficient:** Leverage a proven digital solution instead of starting from scratch – saving both time and resources.
- ✓ **Can be tailored to other country:** Existing component of the German Sustainability Code can be taken over and expanded for specific national requirements. The Sustainability Code is implemented by the German development agency GIZ, which boasts wide-scale international experience in more than 130 countries as well as specific expertise in sustainability reporting.
- ✓ **Suitable for all categories of companies:** In line with the different EU reporting standards, we offer a module for companies that are subject to mandatory reporting and one for those opting to report voluntarily.
- ✓ **Need-based and practical:** The platform's development in close consultation with stakeholders, in particular SMEs, means our reporting tool is especially targeted and user-friendly.
- ✓ **Future-proof:** Changes to the CSRD as a result of the EU Omnibus package will be promptly integrated, ensuring that the platform is always up to date.

Contact:

Victoria Diekkamp-Reimann, Head of German Sustainability Code
victoria.diekkamp-reimann@nachhaltigkeitsrat.de
Isabelle Krahe, Head of DNK Sustainability Campus
isabelle.krahe@nachhaltigkeitsrat.de