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Corporate social responsibility in agribusiness in the context of human rights protection in Eastern Europe

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyse corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Eastern European agribusiness through the lens of human rights protection, particularly environmental and labour rights. The research methodology was based on an interdisciplinary approach, including the analysis of regulations, the study of international CSR standards, and an empirical analysis of the activities of agribusinesses in Ukraine, Romania, and the Czech Republic. The findings revealed that CSR implementation considerably contributes to the enjoyment of environmental rights, specifically the right to a clean environment. This is achieved through the rational use of natural resources, introduction of renewable technologies, and reduction of pollutant emissions. In the labour sphere, CSR protects the rights of employees by creating decent working conditions, preventing discrimination, and providing social guarantees such as health insurance

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and professional development. The analysis of large agricultural holdings, such as MHP (Ukraine), Trans-Oil (Romania), and Agrofert (Czech Republic), showed that companies actively integrate CSR into their business strategies, particularly in the area of employee rights protection, specifically through the creation of safe working conditions, social guarantees, and professional skills development. Therewith, the study revealed major barriers to systematic implementation of CSR in the context of human rights protection. The primary obstacles include insufficient state control over compliance with environmental and labour standards, as well as limited engagement of civil society in monitoring the activities of agribusinesses. This complicates systemic change and increases the risk of human rights violations. The conclusions highlighted the need to strengthen state control, develop incentive mechanisms for business, including tax benefits, and actively engage civil society in monitoring. The findings confirmed the value of integrating CSR into business strategies to ensure sustainable development and human rights protection

Keywords: sustainable development; agricultural sector; social guarantees; working conditions; environmental safety

Introduction

Agribusiness is a key sector of the global economy, contributing to food security, economic development, and employment in many countries. However, the activities of agricultural companies often involve human rights challenges, including labour conditions, access to resources, and environmental safety. These challenges are particularly acute in Eastern Europe, where socio-economic instability complicates the implementation of effective corporate social policies. Understanding corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a concept implies its multidimensionality: economic, social, and environmental aspects. In the context of agribusiness, CSR includes companies' commitments to employees, communities, consumers, and ecosystems.

The issue of CSR in agribusiness is of particular significance in the context of ensuring respect for human rights in Eastern Europe. The agricultural sector is characterised by a strong level of social impact, as the activities of large agribusinesses directly affect the environment, workers' rights, and local communities. Still, in many countries of the region, the issue of integrating CSR into company strategies as a tool for ensuring social justice and sustainable development stays relevant.

While many researchers have addressed the labour rights and environmental standards within the framework of CSR, there are still gaps in the coverage of the practical effectiveness of these policies. For instance, some researchers analysed the economic impact of CSR on companies, including increased reputation and competitiveness, while others focused on the legal aspects of regulating business responsibility. The researchers found that many companies limit themselves to declarative commitments without implementing systematic changes in their operations. However, the real impact of CSR on the observance of human rights, specifically labour and environmental standards in Eastern Europe, has been understudied, which is why the present study is relevant.

Climate change has created serious challenges for agriculture, requiring the introduction of innovative approaches that accommodate both environmental and social aspects. CSR has become a valuable tool for ensuring sustainable development of the agricultural sector and protecting human rights. K. Biró *et al.* (2020) focused on the adaptation of agriculture to modern challenges, including climate change, through CSR

mechanisms. The Hungarian study showed that although climate-oriented CSR activities were still underdeveloped, there was a growing awareness of the need to implement adaptive strategies. The researchers noted that the protection of human rights includes the environmental rights of citizens, as well as the right to a safe environment. Actions aimed at adapting to climate change in the agricultural sector directly affect the quality of life of people, especially those living in rural areas.

Integration of CSR into agribusiness policy is a key element of sustainable development, which contributes to the simultaneous protection of social and environmental rights. M. Mello *et al.* (2021) emphasised the significance of integrating CSR into agribusiness policy as a tool for achieving sustainable development, which simultaneously contributes to the protection of human rights. The emphasis on the need for further investigations in this area is especially relevant, as the lack of scientific research complicates the implementation of strategies aimed at respecting social and environmental rights in the agricultural sector.

CSR is increasingly viewed as a key factor of sustainable development in agribusiness. Thus, F. Cordova-Buiza *et al.* (2021) focused on identifying CSR actions that contribute to sustainable community development. The researchers concluded that CSR in agribusiness can serve as a tool for protecting human rights through the implementation of initiatives in the social and environmental spheres. Integrating CSR into the agri-food industry opens new opportunities for value creation and human rights protection. C. Nazzaro *et al.* (2020) focused on the theoretical analysis of CSR in the agri-food industry and the development of an interpretive model of social responsibility processes as a value creation strategy. The empirical part included the analysis of case studies, interviews with food industry managers and industry experts, as well as focus groups. The researchers showed how CSR in the

agri-food sector can contribute to the protection of human rights through innovation and responsibility in business processes.

The implementation of CSR and circular economy principles is becoming a key area for the development of sustainable business processes in the agri-food sector. G. Zaman *et al.* (2020) made such an observation while focusing their study on the integration of CSR and the circular economy into sustainable business processes in the agri-food sector, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises in Italy. The combination of CSR and circular economy contributes to sustainable resource management and increases the efficiency of business processes. Agri-food companies are highly responsible for food safety and consumer health.

Ukrainian researchers also addressed this issue, for example, O. Soloviova *et al.* (2022). The researchers explored the interdependence of society and business development, which led to the introduction of CSR in business. The principal conclusion was that CSR had become not only a means of economic development but also stimulated social and environmental progress. The value of agricultural development as the basis for food security requires ensuring environmentally friendly production, which encourages agribusinesses to implement CSR principles.

In the face of global challenges, including military conflicts, CSR has become an essential tool for business to adapt to new conditions. In Ukraine, in the context of war, social responsibility of agribusiness is of particular relevance, as it is a crucial factor not only in maintaining economic stability, but also in ensuring social peace and development. V. Antoshchenkova and M. Deineha (2023) covered this aspect of the problem. The researchers found that CSR is a self-regulating business model that helps companies to be socially responsible to themselves, stakeholders, and the public in crises. CSR is viewed as a relationship between government, society, and business, where the purpose

is not only to increase profits, but also to perform social, civic, and moral obligations. S. Vasylyshyn *et al.* (2024) also studied the relevant issues. The researchers focused on the substantiation of a system of social responsibility indicators to develop integrated reporting of Ukrainian agribusiness in the context of war. The researchers argued that disclosure of policies of cooperation with local communities and initiatives in times of war is vital for increasing transparency and trust in business, as it guarantees the protection of social rights of the community, promotes sustainable development, and ensures well-being in crises.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of CSR policies of large agro-industrial companies in Eastern Europe in terms of human rights, particularly labour and environmental standards. For this purpose, the study had to complete the following objectives: to analyse key aspects of CSR policies of large agro-industrial companies in Eastern Europe, focusing on their effects on labour rights; to investigate the compliance of implemented environmental standards within CSR with international and regional norms, as well as to assess their environmental impact; to identify the principal problems and challenges in CSR implementation, and to offer practical recommendations for improving their effectiveness.

Materials and Methods

The study of CSR in Eastern European agribusiness, specifically in the context of human rights protection, covered three countries: Ukraine, Romania, and the Czech Republic, which helped to assess the specific regional features of CSR implementation, especially in terms of environmental and labour rights. The research methodology was based on an interdisciplinary approach that combined qualitative and quantitative analysis to ensure a comprehensive consideration of CSR in agribusiness in the context of human rights protection. The study

was based on a content analysis of the legal frameworks of Ukraine, Romania, and the Czech Republic, which was used to identify legal requirements and standards in the field of CSR, labour and environmental rights. This method systematised the data on legal regulation and identified the specifics of the implementation of international standards in national legislation.

Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) was analysed to determine the fundamental principles of protection of workers' rights, including the right to decent wages. The study analysed the International Standard No. ISO 26000:2010 "Guidance on Social Responsibility" (2010), which helped to assess the practical aspects of implementing social responsibility of business and their impact on human rights, the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council No. 2014/95/EU "Amending Directive 2013/34/EU as regards the Disclosure of Non-Financial and Diversity Information by Certain Large Undertakings and Groups" (2014), the analysis helped to establish the requirements for non-financial reporting. Council Directive No. 89/391/EEC "On the Introduction of Measures to Encourage Improvements in the Safety and Health of Workers at Work" (1989) was used to assess EU legislative initiatives aimed at improving occupational safety and health, particularly in the agricultural sector.

The principal documents of Ukraine included the Law of Ukraine No. 1264-XII "On Environmental Protection" (1991), which allowed examining environmental obligations of agricultural enterprises. The Labour Code of Ukraine (1996) defined the requirements for labour relations and protection of employees' rights. The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine *et al.* 278 "On Approval of the List of Seasonal Work and Seasonal Industries" (1997) was also reviewed to understand the specific features of regulating the labour of seasonal workers. The Order of the Cabinet of

Ministers of Ukraine No. 66-r “On Approval of the Concept of Implementation of the State Policy in the Field of Promoting the Development of Socially Responsible Business in Ukraine for the Period up to 2030” (2020) was also considered. This document provides a detailed consideration of the possibilities of state support in creating a favourable environment for the development of socially responsible business in Ukraine and identifies prospects for improving the mechanisms of regulation and monitoring in the field of CSR.

The principal document of Romania was the Constitution of Romania (1991), which was used to analyse the rights and freedoms of Romanian citizens in the context of general legal protection at the workplace and the basic principles of labour rights. The Law of Romania *et al.* 202/2002 “On Equality of Opportunities for Women and Men” (2002) was used to examine the rights of women and men to equal working conditions in agriculture and other sectors, specifically, to ensure equality and combat discrimination.

The Law of Romania No. 53 “Labour Code” (2003) allowed assessing the regulatory mechanisms for guaranteeing labour rights and practical aspects of labour relations regulation in the country. The documents analysed in the context of CSR of agricultural enterprises in the Czech Republic included the Constitution of the Czech Republic (1993), which was used to investigate the general rights of employees in the Czech Republic, specifically, labour protection and equal opportunities. The study reviewed the Act of the Czech Republic No. 258/2000 (2005) and Act of the Czech Republic No. 309/2006 “Act Regulating Additional Requirements for Occupational Safety and Health in Employment Relationships and on Ensuring Safety and Health in Activities or Provision of Services Outside Employment Relationships (Act on Ensuring Additional Conditions for Occupational Safety and Health)” (2006) were used to analyse legislative measures aimed at

protecting workers’ health and ensuring proper working conditions in the agricultural sector, specifically in terms of sanitation and safety.

The research included a comparative analysis of CSR practices of large agricultural holdings in Ukraine, Romania, and the Czech Republic, specifically, MHP (2023; n.d.a) (Ukraine), Trans-Oil (n.d.a) (Moldova), and Agrofert (n.d.) (Czech Republic). For this purpose, official reports of leading agro-industrial companies were used, which provided valuable information on approaches to CSR implementation in different countries, including environmentally responsible practices and measures to protect the rights of employees. In the context of Ukraine, the data on state control and monitoring in the labour sphere was analysed from the State Labour Service of Ukraine (2024), which helped to assess the effectiveness of state supervision over human rights.

Results

The concept of CSR emerged in the mid-20th century in the United States of America, when business structures began to realise their responsibility for addressing social and environmental challenges (Latapí Agudelo *et al.*, 2019). In Ukraine, the development of CSR has gradually taken shape under the influence of international standards and recommendations, especially in the context of active implementation of European integration initiatives. Ukraine’s attempts to integrate into the European legal space and meet international requirements for environmental, social, and governance policies have contributed to the spread of CSR principles among domestic enterprises.

Despite the absence of a clear definition of CSR in Ukrainian legislation, its basic principles are reflected in a series of regulations. Specifically, the Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 66-r “On Approval of the Concept of Implementation of the State Policy in the Field of Promoting the Development of Socially Responsible Business in Ukraine

for the Period up to 2030" (2020) defines the principal areas of the state policy aimed at supporting socially responsible business practices. The document proposes mechanisms to encourage businesses to integrate social, environmental, and ethical standards into their operations. The key purpose is to promote sustainable economic development,

improve the quality of life of citizens and strengthen cooperation between the state, business, and civil society. To demonstrate the effects of CSR on the economic, social, and environmental aspects of agricultural enterprises, Table 1 presents the key CSR principles that illustrate the significance of their integration into business practices.

Table 1. Basic principles of CSR of agricultural enterprises

Principle	Content	Implementation examples	Expected outcome
Environmental responsibility	Focus on minimising environmental impact through the introduction of environmentally friendly technologies and renewable practices	Rational use of water resources, reduction of pesticide use, implementation of a waste management system	Reduced ecological footprint, improved ecosystem of the region, increased trust of local communities
Protection of employees' rights	Compliance with labour standards, safe working conditions, equal pay and non-discrimination	Training employees, medical insurance, equal opportunities for women and men	Increased labour productivity, reduced staff turnover, and improved company image as an employer
Social support for communities	Investment in the development of local communities by creating jobs, supporting educational, healthcare, and cultural initiatives	Funding school construction, support for local farmers, and greening programmes	Improvement of the socio-economic situation in the regions, creation of a positive image of the company in the society
Transparency and accountability	Openness in the company's operations, regular publication of non-financial reports, compliance with international CSR standards	Publication of non-financial reports, engagement of independent auditors, participation in international business transparency initiatives	Stronger trust from investors and partners, increased competitiveness of the company
Innovation and sustainability	Implementation of innovative solutions that ensure the long-term sustainability of the enterprise	Usage of drones to monitor crops, introduce biotechnology, and create precision farming systems	Increased efficiency of agricultural production, reduced costs, increased competitiveness in the international market
Ethical responsibility	Adherence to ethical principles in relations with employees, partners, customers, and communities	Prohibition of child labour, adherence to the principles of fair competition, introduction of a code of ethical conduct	Stronger corporate culture, increased customer and partner loyalty, and brand trust

Source: compiled by the authors

Agribusiness plays a key role in the economies of Eastern Europe, employing millions of workers. According to the latest World Bank statistics in 2018, the number of people employed in the agricultural sector has been on a downward trend over the past decades. In 2018, about one billion people were employed in the

sector, accounting for approximately 28% of the total working-age population. For comparison, in 1991, this figure reached 44%, indicating a gradual decline in the share of agricultural employment due to technological progress, urbanisation, and structural changes in the economy (Cassidy & Snyder, 2019).

Around 450 million people are wage labourers, with a considerable proportion of them earning their primary income from plantation activities. Despite a decline in the share of people employed in agriculture in a series of countries due to technological advances and changes in economic structures, the sector continues to play a key role in livelihoods, food security and rural development. However, those employed in agricultural production often face challenges such as low incomes, lack of wage security, unfavourable working conditions, labour shortages, and limited access to social protection mechanisms. Building a sustainable agri-food sector based on the principles of full, productive, and voluntary employment with decent working conditions is an essential element in the fight against poverty, reducing social inequality, and eliminating hunger on a global scale. Thus, ensuring decent working conditions for all categories of agricultural workers is an essential condition for sustainable development and social justice (International Labour Organisation, 2023).

Over the past three decades, the structure of employment has undergone significant changes in line with the global trend of a declining share of workers in agriculture and industry in favour of services. This process, which began more than 250 years ago, led to a massive shift of labour from the agricultural sector to industry, and in the 20th century to a further decline in industrial employment in favour of the service sector. These changes have substantially affected workers' rights, including the right to just and favourable conditions of work, the right to social protection, and the right to health and safety.

The shift to the service sector has contributed to an overall reduction in physically demanding and hazardous work in the agricultural sector but has also brought new challenges to workers. Specifically, agriculture has experienced an increase in the share of temporary, seasonal, and informal

employment, which is often accompanied by labour rights violations. A considerable number of workers continue to be vulnerable to violations of fundamental human rights, including the right to safe and healthy working conditions, as the use of chemicals, excessive working hours, and heavy physical activity pose significant health risks. Furthermore, the failure to respect the rights to equal pay and social protection leads to discrimination against certain categories of workers, including women and migrant workers.

The impact of digital technologies on working conditions in the agricultural sector should also be considered. On the one hand, automation and technological innovations can reduce physical activity and increase production efficiency. On the other hand, they promote atypical employment, which can lead to a loss of social security for workers as increasingly more jobs become temporary or informal. Changes in the structure of employment and the transformation of the agricultural sector require strengthening human rights protection mechanisms, including the establishment of effective labour law enforcement, the expansion of social security and healthcare programmes, and the improvement of collective representation. Only a comprehensive approach can ensure that key human rights in the agricultural sector are respected, including the right to decent work, equality of opportunity, social protection, and occupational safety and health (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2023).

In the EU and in Ukraine, human rights in the agricultural sector are regulated by a series of international and national regulations that ensure the protection of labour rights, gender equality, the right to health, education, an ecologically safe environment, and legal protection of workers. This is achieved through concrete provisions of such regulations as the European Social Charter (1996) and the European Convention on Human Rights (1950). The European Social Charter

guarantees a series of social rights, including the right to work in conditions that ensure a decent living (Article 1), equality of opportunity for men and women (Article 20), and the right to health and safe working conditions (Article 3). It requires member states to ensure gender equality in working conditions and to prevent discrimination based on sex and other grounds (Article 20). Furthermore, the Charter requires that working conditions are not harmful to workers' health, and that necessary restrictions are imposed on the use of harmful pesticides (Article 3). It also includes provisions obliging enterprises to provide workers with opportunities for advanced training and vocational education (Article 9), as well as to provide instruction and training on safety and modern agricultural technologies. As for environmental rights, the European Social Charter (Article 30) states that workers are entitled to work in conditions that are not harmful to their health. This includes ensuring that workers can report environmental violations without fear of reprisals or discrimination from their employer.

EU legislation also regulates these issues. For example, Council Directive No. 89/391/EEC (1989) on ensuring the safety and health of workers at work requires employers to take all necessary measures to ensure safe working conditions, including safety training for employees. This act also prescribes mandatory briefings, safety training, and requirements to limit the effects of harmful factors on employees' health, such as pesticides and other agrochemicals. According to Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), everyone is entitled to respect for their private and family life, including protection from unlawful video surveillance and unreasonable inspections. These provisions protect employees' right to privacy and personal life, preventing abuse by employers.

Employees' rights to take part in decision-making are also an essential element of European labour legislation. Specifically, Directive

of the European Parliament and of the Council No. 2002/14/EC (2002) mandates that employees should be able to take part in decision-making on the organisation of work in enterprises, including the opportunity to express their suggestions and comments on the organisation of work and improvement of working conditions. Article 24 of the European Social Charter (1996) entitles employees to legal protection, which enables them to apply to a court or other authorities in case of violation of their rights. This includes the right to go to court or to labour inspectorates to protect their interests, as well as the right to an employment contract that clearly states the employee's rights and obligations. Thus, the observance of human rights in the European agricultural sector is ensured through a set of international and national regulations that guarantee equality, safety, the right to education and legal protection of employees, as well as oblige employers to create conditions that meet healthcare and environmental requirements.

In Ukraine, legislation clearly governs labour rights, ensuring the protection of workers, including those in the agricultural sector. Specifically, the right to fair remuneration is stipulated in Article 95 of the Labour Code of Ukraine (1996), which defines the minimum wage. This ensures that employees of agricultural enterprises receive remuneration not lower than the established level, which is an integral aspect of social justice. Occupational safety is regulated by Article 153 of the Labour Code of Ukraine, which prescribes labour protection and safety measures that are critical to reducing production risks in the agricultural sector.

Article 45 of the Constitution of Ukraine (1996) guarantees the right to rest, which includes regulation of working hours, holidays, and days off. Social security of employees, including health insurance and pension contributions, is regulated by the Law of Ukraine No. 1105-XIV (1999), which creates stable conditions for social protection, including for those working in the agricultural sector.

Another prominent element of labour rights is the possibility of collective bargaining, as prescribed in Article 44 of the Labour Code of Ukraine (1996), which gives employees the opportunity to influence their working conditions through collective bargaining agreements. Protection of employees' health and dignity is another vital component of CSR. The Law of Ukraine No. 2694-XII (1992) establishes the obligations of employers to ensure proper working conditions, including access to personal protective equipment and medical care. According to Article 13 of the Law, employers are obliged to create safe working conditions, conduct regular labour protection briefings, provide employees with personal protective equipment, and technically equip workplaces according to the established standards. These measures are the basis for reducing the risk of occupational injuries and improving working conditions.

Ukrainian legislation stipulates five main types of liability for breaches of labour law: disciplinary, material, administrative, financial, and criminal. They can be applied independently of each other, depending on the nature of the violation and its consequences. State control over compliance with labour laws is exercised not only by the State Labour Service of Ukraine, but also by the State Tax Service of Ukraine and local governments. Specifically, they are entitled to verify official employment and identify cases of salary payments "in envelopes". A prominent aspect is the absence of a statute of limitations for bringing to financial responsibility under Article 265 of the Labour Code of Ukraine (1996), although sanctions are imposed under the legislation in force at the time of the violation.

Apart from labour guarantees, Ukrainian legislation also aims to ensure gender equality and non-discrimination. The Law of Ukraine No. 2866-IV (2005) defines the legal mechanisms for ensuring gender equality in the labour market, and Article 24 of the Constitution of Ukraine (1996)

prohibits discrimination on any grounds, including gender, age, nationality, religion, and other factors. This is a crucial aspect of ensuring equal access to employment and professional development opportunities. Education and professional development are also critical components of the social responsibility of agricultural enterprises. The Law of Ukraine No. 2145-VIII (2017) prescribes opportunities for training and professional development of employees, which contributes to the modernisation of the industry and increase of labour productivity. It also pays considerable attention to the environmental aspects of agricultural enterprises. The Law of Ukraine No. 1264-XII (1991) sets out requirements for environmental safety of production, specifically, the use of pesticides and minimisation of adverse environmental impact.

Furthermore, Ukrainian legislation mandates legal protection of employees in case of violation of their rights. Article 55 of the Constitution of Ukraine (1996) guarantees judicial protection of citizens' rights, which allows them to go to court or other competent authorities to defend their interests. All this forms the legal basis for CSR compliance in agribusiness and contributes to the improvement of working conditions in this sector. Ukrainian legislation clearly regulates labour relations, defining the rights of employees and the obligations of employers, promoting compliance with social standards and ensuring fair working conditions. These regulations provide a framework for CSR implementation in Ukraine, but long processing times and corruption in the courts complicate its effective implementation.

In Romania, human rights in the agricultural sector are regulated through a series of national and international regulations. The most significant are the Constitution of Romania (1991), the Law of Romania No. 53 "Labour Code" (2003), as well as EU regulations that the country is obliged to implement as part of its European integration. Thus, labour rights and gender equality are governed by

the Law. According to Article 5 of Law, all employees are entitled to equal working conditions and protection against discrimination. This includes the prohibition of discrimination based on gender, race, nationality, age, disability, sexual orientation, etc. The country also has the Law of Romania No. 202/2002 (2002), which mandates active measures to ensure gender equality in all areas of labour relations, including in the agricultural sector. This law prohibits any discrimination based on sex and requires equal opportunities for men and women in terms of employment, remuneration, and promotion. The Law of Romania No. 53 (2003) also regulates the right to health and dignity. According to Article 54, employers are obliged to create working conditions that are not harmful to the health of workers, particularly in the agricultural sector, where they often face risks of exposure to harmful chemicals such as pesticides. The law also regulates medical examinations of employees to check their health and ability to work in the agricultural sector. The same law also regulates educational rights. According to Article 29, workers are entitled to vocational training, including advanced training and education. In the agricultural sector, this is particularly relevant for improving skills in the use of the latest agricultural technologies. The legislation also obliges employers to provide instruction on safety, agricultural technologies, and modern practices that are significant for ensuring the health and safety of employees. Furthermore, Article 86 of the Law requires the organisation of regular safety trainings.

According to Law of Romania No. 265 (2006), workers in the agricultural sector are entitled to work in conditions that are not harmful to their health. This includes restrictions on the use of pesticides, measures to protect against harmful factors, and environmental protection. The Law enables employees to report violations of environmental norms and standards without risk of retaliation. In Romania, according to the Constitution of

Romania (1991) and the Law of Romania No. 53 (2003), employees are entitled to legal protection in case of violation of their rights. This includes the right to apply to a court or labour inspectorate in case of violation of labour rights, as well as the right to receive an employment contract that clearly defines the employee's rights and obligations (Article 16). Article 175 of this Law obliges employers to create safe working conditions, provide regular training on occupational health and safety, and maintain workplaces following the established standards. At the same time, the experience of Trans-Oil (2024), a large agro-industrial enterprise, demonstrates the significance of implementing a sustainable development policy, including through the implementation of the Corporate Health and Safety Policy, which contains the principle of "Training and competence of employees" (Article 3). Particular attention is paid to regular training, which contributes to the formation of awareness of their roles and responsibilities in ensuring a safe working environment.

Romania also guarantees protection against excessive control and privacy violations. According to the Constitution of Romania (1991) (Article 28), everyone is entitled to respect for private life, which includes the prohibition of illegal video surveillance and unreasonable inspections. The law also prohibits the imposition of fines or disciplinary sanctions without sufficient grounds and due process. According to the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council No. 2002/14/EC (2002), which has been implemented in Romania, employees are entitled to take part in decision-making processes concerning the organisation of work. This includes the right to make proposals on the organisation of the work process, as well as the possibility to take part in the company's social or economic development programmes. It also includes the right to take part in collective bargaining over working conditions. Thus, the Romanian legal system provides

a reliable mechanism for the protection of labour rights, health, education, environment, and participation in decision-making in the agricultural sector, in line with EU and international standards.

In the Czech Republic, human rights in the agricultural sector are regulated through a combination of national laws and international acts, such as the Constitution of the Czech Republic (1993), the Act of the Czech Republic No. 262/2006 (2006) and European directives that ensure the protection of labour rights, gender equality, health, education, and legal protection of workers. According to Act of the Czech Republic No. 435/2004 (2004), Article 1 guarantees the right of employees to equal working conditions without discrimination on any grounds, including gender, age, nationality, or sexual orientation. The law prohibits any discrimination in labour relations (Article 16), which includes gender equality in recruitment and remuneration, as well as according to the Act of the Czech Republic No. 198/2009 (2008).

According to the Act of the Czech Republic No. 435/2004 (2004), the Act of the Czech Republic No. 258/2000 (2005), and the Act of the Czech Republic No. 309/2006 (2006), employers are obliged to provide safe and healthy working conditions for their employees. This includes providing measures to reduce health risks, particularly in the agricultural sector, where there is a risk of exposure to pesticides and other harmful chemicals. The Act of the Czech Republic No. 258/2000 (2005) stipulates that working conditions in the agricultural sector should not be harmful to the health of employees. This includes limiting the use of pesticides, protecting against harmful factors, and creating safe working conditions. Article 101 of the Act of the Czech Republic No. 435/2004 (2004) on labour defines the obligation of employers to provide health and safety instructions and to conduct regular medical examinations of employees. According

to the Act, employees are entitled to vocational training and further education. In the agricultural sector, this may include training in the latest agricultural technologies and working methods, as well as mandatory health and safety training. Additionally, according to Act of the Czech Republic No. 309/2006 (2006), the employer is obliged to organise regular safety training and briefings, including those specific to agricultural production (e.g., handling of agricultural chemicals, use of machinery, etc.). Czech legislation also protects the right of employees to work in environmentally safe conditions.

The Constitution of the Czech Republic (1993) (Article 36) guarantees access to legal protection for all citizens, including workers. It allows employees to take legal action in court or before labour inspection bodies in case of violation of their labour rights. The Act of the Czech Republic No. 435/2004 (2004) also stipulates that the employment contract must clearly define the rights and obligations of the employee and the employer (Article 30), which enables employees to protect their rights in court if necessary. The Czech Republic has provisions protecting employees from excessive control. The Constitution of the Czech Republic guarantees the right to privacy (Article 10), which includes protection against unlawful video surveillance and inspections in the workplace. The Labour Code Act (2006) also restricts the possibility of imposing fines or disciplinary sanctions without proper grounds (Article 54). According to Czech legislation, employees are entitled to take part in decision-making concerning the organisation of work at the enterprise, including through collective bargaining and discussions. According to the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council No. 2002/14/EC (2002), which was implemented in the Czech Republic, employees are entitled to express their proposals for improving working conditions and take part in the company's social and economic

programmes. This right implies the involvement of employees in the making of significant decisions regarding the development of the company.

According to reports from the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the country has one of the highest rates of compliance with occupational health and safety standards in Europe, largely due to strict requirements for companies and systematic government monitoring. However, even leading agribusinesses, such as Agrofert, admit that ensuring full compliance with these standards at all stages of the production process continues to be a challenge. According to Agrofert's official report (n.d.) for 2023, the company invested over EUR 15 million in occupational health and safety measures, including equipment upgrades, the development of automated monitoring systems, and employee training. Over 3,200 briefings were held during the year, involving 26,000 employees, including temporary and seasonal staff. The key problematic aspects highlighted in the report were shortcomings in ensuring an adequate level of protection for employees when working with complex machinery. Specifically, the report noted the lack of measures to minimise injury risks and the inability to ensure timely maintenance of equipment. Particular attention was paid to the problem of organising and conducting quality training for employees, especially in the context of a seasonal increase in the workload of enterprises, when temporary workers were hired due to the high demand for additional labour (Nawaz *et al.*, 2022). This created further challenges in following safety standards and made it impossible for new employees to fully adapt to working conditions. Thus, in the Czech Republic, human rights in the agricultural sector are ensured through national laws and European directives that guarantee equality, safety, the right to education, environmentally safe working conditions, and the possibility of protecting workers' rights.

At the international level, the development of CSR standards is largely based on key documents

that form the general principles and approaches to its practical application. One of the most significant among them is the International Standard No. ISO 26000:2010 "Guidance on Social Responsibility" (2010), developed by the International Organisation for Standardisation. Although this standard is not mandatory, it provides guidance on how to integrate CSR principles into organisations' strategies and day-to-day operations. International Standard No. ISO 26000:2010 "Guidance on Social Responsibility" covers a wide range of issues, including corporate governance, human rights, labour practices, consumer protection, environmental protection, community development, and ethical behaviour. It emphasises the significance of an integrated approach to social responsibility that accommodates the interests of all stakeholders and aims to achieve long-term sustainability for both business and society overall.

In Ukraine, this standard was adopted as a national standard under the designation State Standard of Ukraine No. ISO 26000:2019 "Social Responsibility Guidelines (ISO 26000:2010, IDT)" (2020). It is not a certification standard but serves as a guideline for organisations seeking to integrate the principles of social responsibility into their activities. In Romania and the Czech Republic, this standard is also used as a guideline for implementing socially responsible practices. Although the standard does not make provision for certification, organisations in these countries can turn to specialised consulting companies to assess their compliance with the principles. This contributes to increased transparency, ethical behaviour, and sustainable development for both business and society in general.

In Eastern Europe, respect for labour rights is one of the key aspects of CSR in the agricultural sector. Ensuring the protection of labour rights in the agricultural sector is key to sustainable development and raising social standards in the region (Sharma, 2019). Implementing CSR in this area

helps to minimise risks for employees, improve working conditions, and build a positive image of companies in the international arena. The sectoral structure of the economy plays a significant role in determining the level of occupational risks for employees. A great proportion of people employed in industry, agriculture, and construction often correlates with an increased probability of exposure to harmful occupational factors such as noise, vibration, or contact with hazardous substances. However, this relationship is not linear, as other factors, including occupational health and safety policies and technological developments, also influence the level of risk. Countries where a considerable share of the workforce is employed in industry, agriculture and construction usually demonstrate an increased level of risks to the physical health of workers due to exposure to vibration, noise, and hazardous substances. Among them, Romania leads the way (49.4%), where these sectors account for the largest share, followed by Poland (49.1%), and Hungary (37%) in seventh place (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2023).

According to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2023), the working conditions of seasonal and seconded workers, particularly in the agricultural sector, are among the most vulnerable due to unstable working conditions, risks of labour law violations, and insufficient social protection. The lack of proper control over the observance of labour standards creates preconditions for violations of workers' fundamental rights, which contradicts the principles of international labour law. In its recommendations on seasonal employment, the European Commission noted that this category of workers is often in a more vulnerable position compared to other groups of workers. The principal problems include unstable working and living conditions, violations of labour laws, insufficient social protection, and a considerable level of undeclared labour. This indicates the need to improve the

regulatory framework and monitoring mechanisms to ensure the rights of workers in the area of occupational safety and health.

Furthermore, there is a growing trend of non-standard forms of employment. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, they account for more than 30% of total employment, which indicates the transformation of the labour market and has major implications for the observance of labour rights. In 2019, the share of new forms of precarious work ranged within 0.5-3% of total employment. In agriculture, this process is manifested through a decrease in self-employment and the emergence of new digital employment platforms, which often stay outside of proper legal regulation (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2023). Thus, the above data confirms the relevance of the study of human rights in the agricultural sector, as violations of the rights of seasonal, seconded, and precarious workers suggest the need to strengthen state control, introduce effective social protection mechanisms, and adapt labour legislation to the emerging challenges.

The experience of leading agricultural companies demonstrates the desire to improve labour safety standards. For instance, according to the MHP Group's Integrated Annual Report and Financial Statements (2023), MHP implemented a series of initiatives aimed at protecting employees from potential health and safety hazards caused by the ongoing conflict. One of the key measures was the formation of an internal fire brigade and improvement of fire emergency response mechanisms. The focus was on organising effective evacuation, containment, and extinguishing of fires, as well as ensuring the resumption of business processes after incidents. The health and safety programmes were subject to regular review and continued in 2023. Specifically, the network of safe shelters was expanded to reduce the risks associated with air attacks,

and additional individualised evacuation procedures were developed to meet the specific conditions of each MHP production facility in Ukraine.

Ensuring proper working conditions and reducing the risk of occupational injuries are key aspects of sustainable development of enterprises, especially in the context of current challenges, including the armed conflict and economic instability. The analysis of incident data and investments in occupational health and safety for 2021-2023 showed both a positive trend in the reduction of the total number of occupational injuries and an increase in spending on preventive measures.

During the period under review, a substantial decrease in the total number of incidents was observed: from 39 cases in 2021 to 15 in 2023. Specifically, the number of severe incidents was halved, while the number of low-severity incidents almost quadrupled, suggesting an increase in the effectiveness of safety measures. At the same time, although the number of fatalities in 2023 (2) was lower than in 2022 (3), it still exceeded the figure for 2021 (1). This indicates the need to further strengthen measures to prevent fatal incidents.

The reduction in the occupational injury rate is accompanied by a considerable reduction in lost working time due to incidents. While in 2021 this figure was 17,097 hours (1,822 days), in 2023 it decreased to 6,866 hours (813 days). This trend suggests the effectiveness of the measures taken to ensure safe working conditions and emergency medical care. The financial component of occupational health and safety also showed an upward trend in investments in preventive measures. Total occupational health and safety costs in 2023 amounted to UAH 102.2 million, which is higher than in 2022 (UAH 97.9 million), although it did not reach the level of 2021 (UAH 118.3 million). Meanwhile, spending on certified personal protective equipment increased substantially: in 2023, UAH 69.2 million was spent on their purchase, which is 48% more than in 2022. This indicates the active

renewal and improvement of the quality of protective equipment for employees. Another prominent area is the financing of occupational health and safety training programmes. Over three years, investments in this sector increased by more than 60%, reaching UAH 3.1 million in 2023. This confirms the company's increased focus on improving the safety skills of its employees. In the European operating segment, the company also pays great attention to occupational health and safety. In 2023, total expenditures for these purposes amounted to EUR 125.6 thousand, of which more than EUR 1.17 million was spent on the purchase of certified personal protective equipment. Thus, the data analysis showed progress in occupational safety, a reduction in the number of incidents, and increased funding for employee protection measures. At the same time, the persistence of high-severity and fatal incidents highlights the need to further improve occupational health and safety policies, including through the introduction of modern technologies, expansion of training programmes, and improved operational response to risks.

Decent pay is one of the key aspects of CSR in agribusiness and a crucial component of human rights protection (Nave & Ferreira, 2019). In this context, compliance with the principles of fair remuneration for labour is determined not only by the moral obligations of companies, but also by the concrete requirements of national and international legislation (Ali, 2023). According to Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), everyone is entitled to decent remuneration for work that ensures an existence worthy of the human person. In Europe, these principles are concretised in the European Social Charter (1996), ratified by many Eastern European countries, which obliges member states to ensure fair working conditions and equal pay for workers. For example, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Ukraine have legislation that sets minimum standards of remuneration, including national minimum wages.

In Ukraine, compliance with the principle of decent wages is regulated by Article 95 of the Labour Code of Ukraine (1996). The minimum wage is guaranteed by the state and as of 2025 is UAH 8,000 per month, equivalent to approximately USD 220. In Romania, as of January 2025, the minimum wage was 4,050 lei per month, equivalent to approximately USD 900. In the Czech Republic, the minimum wage was CZK 20,800 per month, which was equivalent to approximately USD 934 (Act of the Czech Republic No. 262/2006, 2006; Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2024).

Thus, the minimum wage in the Czech Republic was the highest among the three countries, while Ukraine had the lowest. Notably, the Czech Republic and Romania did not have a subsistence minimum, but Ukraine did, and it was set at UAH 3,028 per month for able-bodied persons, which was equivalent to USD 84. The minimum wage was greater than the official subsistence level for able-bodied individuals but still was one of the lowest in Europe. This level of income substantially limits the ability of employees to ensure a decent standard of living, especially considering the elevated costs of housing, utilities, and medical care.

According to research, almost 20% of workers in the agricultural sector were paid only slightly above this level. Trans-Oil (n.d.a.) (Romania), one of the largest agribusiness players in the region, spent more than 15% of its operating budget in 2023 on raising employee salaries. In the Czech Republic, Agrofert (n.d.) noted in its 2023 report that the average salary of its employees exceeded the minimum level by 28%. At the same time, seasonal contract workers accounted for up to 40% of the staff during peak seasons, and often received only the minimum wage, but with access to social guarantees.

To address the many challenges that arise in implementing CSR policies, comprehensive and coordinated cooperation between government agencies, the business sector, and international

organisations is needed. Such cooperation should include the development of effective regulatory mechanisms, exchange of best practices, financial and technical support, and the creation of joint initiatives aimed at ensuring social, environmental, and labour standards (Tamvada, 2020). For instance, EU programmes such as the European Social Fund aim to increase wages and improve working conditions in the agricultural sector (European Commission, 2024). Thus, decent remuneration in agribusiness is not only a basis for ensuring basic human rights, but also a valuable tool for rural development in Eastern Europe. It depends on a combination of CSR efforts by companies, effective government regulation, and international support.

Respecting the rights of seasonal workers is one of the most relevant aspects of CSR in agribusiness in Eastern Europe, where agricultural activities are largely dependent on seasonal labour. Despite the major contribution of these workers to production processes, their rights are often violated due to unstable working conditions, low pay, lack of social guarantees, and insufficient enforcement (Chiles *et al.*, 2020). In Eastern European countries, the legal regulation of seasonal workers has certain differences, but the common thread is the obligation of employers to ensure the fundamental rights of workers according to international standards. Specifically, Article 7 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) guarantees fair working conditions for all, including seasonal workers. This principle is also stipulated in the European Social Charter (1996).

In Ukraine, the Labour Code of Ukraine (1996) and Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 278 "On Approval of the List of Seasonal Work and Seasonal Industries" (1997) regulate the rights of seasonal workers. However, in practice, violations of seasonal workers' rights are widespread. According to a study by the Ministry of Finance, about 40% of seasonal workers in the

agricultural sector work without official registration (Gavrilyuk, 2024). This deprives them of access to social guarantees, such as sick pay or pensions. In the Czech Republic in 2023, the minimum wage for seasonal workers in agriculture was CZK 18,900, but some employers avoided performing these obligations (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2024). For example, Agrofert (n.d.) noted in its report that 12% of its seasonal workers were employed on temporary contracts with a minimum social package.

Leading agriholdings, such as MHP in Ukraine and Trans-Oil in Romania, are actively implementing programmes aimed at improving working conditions and ensuring social protection for their employees. Specifically, MHP (n.d.c) implemented systematic occupational health and safety training, provided employees with modern personal protective equipment, and guaranteed transparency in payments and social packages. Analogously, Trans-Oil (n.d.b) focused on creating safe working conditions, including regular staff development and social support for employees in case of force majeure. These measures not only contributed to production efficiency but also demonstrated the responsibility of companies to their employees.

Respecting the rights of local communities is another prominent aspect of CSR in agribusiness, as the activities of enterprises in rural areas directly affect the welfare of the local population (Wettstein *et al.*, 2019). The companies' efforts are aimed at investing in social infrastructure, developing educational programmes, improving healthcare, and implementing environmental initiatives. For example, in 2023, the Czech company Agrofert (n.d.) allocated over EUR 10 million for social projects, including the modernisation of schools, the construction of kindergartens, and support for local hospitals in the regions of its operations. Such initiatives help to improve the living standards of the local population and build a positive image of the company.

Thus, the implementation of CSR policies in large agribusinesses in Eastern Europe is comprehensive. They include measures aimed at improving labour conditions, supporting local communities, and ensuring sustainable development of the industry with due regard for human rights. The effective implementation of such policies in the agribusiness sector, particularly in the context of environmental responsibility, is a crucial factor that affects the long-term sustainability of the industry (Carroll, 2021).

The agricultural sector is under increasing pressure from international organisations and civil society to adopt socially responsible and environmentally sustainable practices. Particular attention is paid to the environmental component of CSR, as the state of the environment directly affects the health, quality of life, and rights of both employees and residents of the surrounding areas (Ratajczak & Stawicka, 2020). Priority areas of environmental responsibility within CSR include minimising the adverse environmental impact of agricultural production, optimising resource use, and introducing innovative technologies. For instance, the use of modern water management systems helps to ensure their rational use and access to quality water, which is a basic human right. Another notable aspect is the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and soil pollution, which positively influences the health of people living in agricultural regions.

The effectiveness of environmental policies within the framework of CSR is determined by a series of key factors. One of them is the existence of clear standards and regulatory requirements. In Eastern European countries, including Ukraine, the environmental component of CSR is gradually being stipulated in legislation, but its implementation is largely hampered by economic challenges and institutional constraints. In this regard, the adaptation of international standards, such as International Standard No. ISO 26000:2010

“Guidance on Social Responsibility” (2010), which provides companies with guidance on environmental responsibility, plays a vital role.

Another major factor is the integration of environmental components into companies’ development strategies. For example, Ukrainian agribusinesses are implementing modern approaches to sustainable farming. These technologies not only reduce the environmental footprint but also ensure economic sustainability by conserving natural resources and increasing production efficiency. The key practices include precision farming technologies that use modern tools such as satellite monitoring, drones, GPS navigation, and agroecosystem analysis software. For instance, the Kernel company (n.d.) actively uses precision farming, which helps to rationalise the use of fertiliser, water, and crop protection products, which reduces soil degradation and overall environmental impact.

The next technology is zero or minimal tillage (No-till and Strip-till). This technology involves minimising mechanical intervention in the soil, which helps to preserve its structure, prevents erosion, and retains moisture. For example, MHP (n.d.b) uses the No-till system on many of its farms, which helps to preserve soil fertility and reduce fuel consumption (Gavrilyuk, 2024). MHP is actively implementing environmental initiatives to minimise its environmental impact. The company developed a unified form of annual internal environmental reporting that covers all of the group’s businesses. This reporting includes information on waste, wastewater, air emissions, resources consumed, environmental complaints, and the results of environmental inspections. The implementation of these technologies contributes not only to environmental safety but also to the economic efficiency of agricultural production. They help to preserve soil fertility, minimise resource costs, and meet sustainability standards, which is a crucial factor in the competitiveness of Ukrainian agricultural enterprises in the global market.

The level of transparency and reporting in CSR plays a prominent role in achieving environmental and social goals. Regular publication of detailed reports on the implementation of environmental initiatives, such as emission reduction, energy efficiency, and rational use of natural resources, facilitates an objective assessment of the results of the measures taken. Such reports not only create a positive image of the company but also increase the level of trust among key stakeholders, including consumers, investors, partners, and local communities.

Transparent reporting also provides mechanisms for public scrutiny, motivating companies to improve their environmental and social initiatives. One of the key instruments in this area is Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council No. 2014/95/EU “Amending Directive 2013/34/EU as regards the disclosure of non-financial and diversity information by certain large undertakings and groups” (2014), which requires large enterprises in the EU to disclose non-financial information, including environmental aspects of their activities. This approach is actively employed by agro-industrial holdings in Eastern Europe, which report on their commitments to the environment, social protection of employees, and support for local communities. Leading agricultural holdings in the region are introducing innovative green technologies and initiatives aimed at improving working conditions and ensuring fair pay (Pucheta-Martínez & Gallego-Álvarez, 2019). For example, the Czech agricultural holding Agrofert (2024) uses technologies to reduce the adverse environmental impact, specifically in fertiliser production. The company set a goal to reduce CO₂ emissions by 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels and achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. To achieve these goals, a special working group was set up to coordinate the necessary measures.

An analysis of large agribusinesses’ operations helped to identify the primary areas of CSR implementation aimed at protecting human

rights, enhancing social responsibility, and improving environmental sustainability. The key aspects and activities within the CSR framework

were summarised in Figure 1, which illustrates the practical aspects of implementing these initiatives in the agricultural sector.

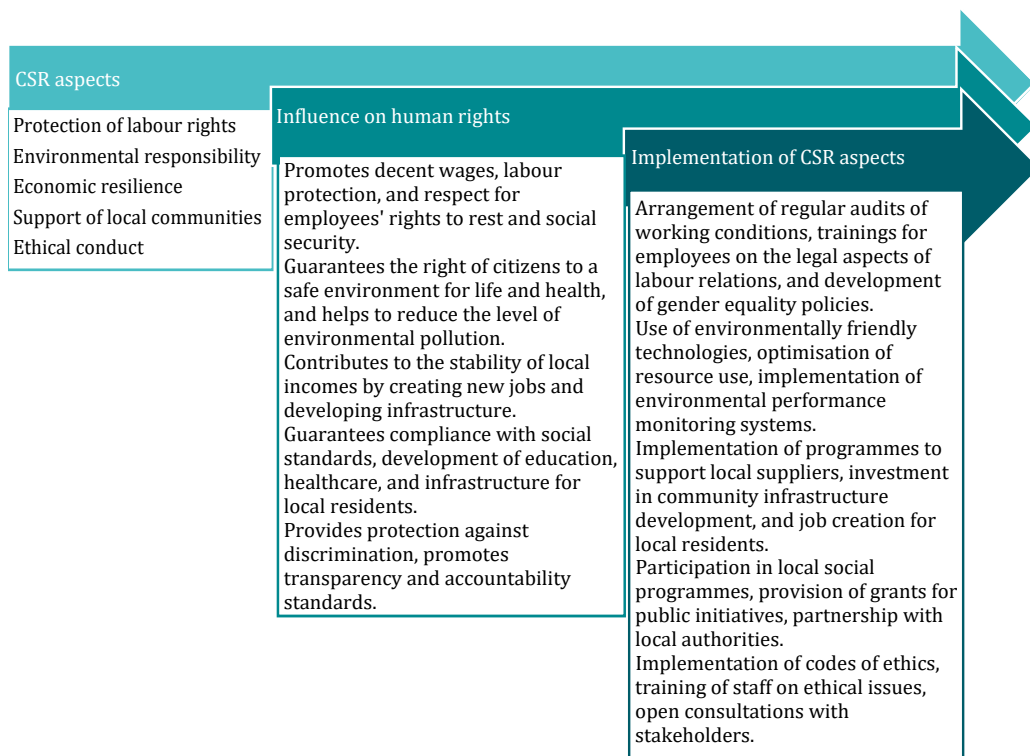


Figure 1. Aspects of CSR implementation

Source: created by the authors

The findings of the study suggest the need to improve the state regulatory policy in the field of CSR of agricultural business in Ukraine. A crucial step in this regard is the creation of effective mechanisms for assessing and monitoring CSR implementation, specifically in the context of human rights protection. To ensure the sustainable development of the agricultural sector, it is necessary to increase the level of transparency of agricultural enterprises and involve civil society in monitoring and evaluating the environmental and social aspects of agribusiness.

One of the key areas for improving CSR is to strengthen government control, which involves

developing clear criteria for assessing the social responsibility of companies, introducing regular monitoring of CSR commitments, and creating mechanisms for accountability for non-compliance with social and environmental standards. At the same time, agricultural enterprises should be encouraged to implement socially responsible initiatives, which can be achieved by introducing tax benefits, grant programmes, and other financial instruments for companies that actively implement measures in the field of sustainable development, labour protection, and environmental safety.

One of the key aspects of improving CSR is ensuring transparency and accountability, which

requires agricultural companies to publish non-financial reports on the implementation of CSR strategies according to international standards, such as Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council No. 2014/95/EU (2014) and International Standard No. ISO 26000:2010 (2010). Furthermore, the adaptation of Ukrainian legislation to European standards is significant, including the harmonisation of national provisions with EU best practices in the field of social protection of agricultural workers, environmental responsibility of business, and corporate governance.

An equally crucial step is to support innovative environmental technologies, including the introduction of advanced agricultural practices such as precision farming, zero and minimum tillage (No-till, Strip-till), environmentally friendly plant protection products, and effective water and waste management. The comprehensive implementation of these measures will help to increase the level of social responsibility of Ukrainian agricultural enterprises, strengthen labour rights protection, improve environmental safety, and generally improve working conditions in the agricultural sector.

Discussion

The findings of the study confirmed that CSR in Eastern European agribusiness plays a crucial role in protecting human rights, but its implementation continues to be fragmented and ineffective. The analysis of large revealed that even though most companies declare their adherence to CSR principles, in practice these initiatives are often formal and do not lead to real improvements in working conditions. These findings are partially consistent with the observations of C. Bruzelius and M. Seeleib-Kaiser (2023), who analysed the enforcement of the rights of mobile workers, specifically seasonal agricultural and forestry workers in the EU. The researchers noted that enforcement in these sectors is limited and depends on the capacity of EU Member States. However, despite the

distinct enforcement regimes in countries such as Austria, Germany, Sweden, and the UK, the rights of seasonal workers are often neglected, creating a situation of institutionalised exploitation. The researchers pointed to the need for administrative enforcement to ensure workers' rights. The findings of the present study pointed to numerous violations of the rights, exploitation, and lack of adequate legal protection of migrant workers, particularly in the agricultural sector. It was noted that workers in the agricultural sector often face violations of their rights, such as non-compliance with working conditions and inadequate social guarantees. The study also confirmed the significant of administrative coercion in ensuring the rights of mobile workers. Without proper control by the state, law enforcement in the agricultural sector becomes ineffective, which creates conditions for the exploitation of workers. However, the findings of the present study do not agree with the conclusions of C. Bruzelius and M. Seeleib-Kaiser (2023) that enforcement cannot be effective without administrative enforcement, as strengthening social dialogue between employers, employees, and governments is also essential. Involving agribusiness in labour rights enforcement and establishing self-regulatory mechanisms positively influences the improvement of the situation. Large agribusinesses (Trans-Oil, MHP) are trying to incorporate CSR mechanisms into their sustainable development programmes.

R.G. Anghel *et al.* (2025) also investigated this problem. The findings of the present study and the researchers' conclusions have some shared aspects, specifically in recognising that seasonal migration is a key factor in the transformation of the agricultural sector and rural areas in Eastern Europe. Both studies highlighted inequalities in labour relations and migrant mobility, as well as the structural changes that result from these processes. At the same time, the results of the present study do not agree with the conclusions

of R.G. Anghel *et al.* (2025) that the social and economic impacts of seasonal migration, such as migrant returns or changes in the structure of agriculture, are more significant than the protection of workers' rights. The researchers focused on the social aspects of migration, considering it as a factor in the development of rural communities, while the present study focused on the problem of exploitation of labour migrants, violation of their rights, and the need to strengthen human rights mechanisms. For without adequate protection of workers' rights, positive social change will be minimal or even unattainable.

Comparing the findings of studies on the legal protection of labour migrants in the agricultural sector, both similar aspects and certain differences in approaches to solving the problem can be identified. A.T. Adaileh *et al.* (2024) emphasised the existence of substantial gaps in Jordanian legislation that did not provide an adequate level of protection for labour migrants. The researchers pointed to restrictions on freedom of choice of employer and exploitation as key issues that must be addressed. The findings of A.T. Adaileh *et al.* (2024) are in line with the findings of the present study regarding the necessity of addressing workers' rights due to the imperfect social protection system. However, in contrast to the conclusions of A.T. Adaileh *et al.* (2024) the problem cannot be solved by administrative measures alone. It requires deeper structural changes in legislation and the creation of effective legal protection mechanisms, including improved judicial and extrajudicial means of resolving labour disputes.

J. Hunt (2014) investigated the problem of exploitation of migrants in the EU agricultural sector, especially due to the seasonal nature of work. The researcher emphasised the value of integrating social standards into the Common Agricultural Policy. The present study supported an analogous approach, as strengthening mechanisms for

protecting workers' rights can improve the situation. A major step in the development of CSR is to strengthen state control through clear evaluation criteria, regular monitoring and accountability mechanisms for violations of social standards.

M.I. Ortega *et al.* (2016) focused on the problem of insufficient attention to social labour standards in the agricultural sector and a fragmented approach to CSR implementation. The researchers emphasised the insufficient attention to social labour standards, especially in relation to employees, including migrants. Furthermore, both the present study and the cited study pointed out that business owners often have a limited and fragmented understanding of CSR, focusing on certain aspects, such as environmental initiatives, but leaving out the social issues. Notably, the researchers argued that the negative attitude of owners towards social standards substantially affects labour conditions, while the present study showed that companies that declare CSR do make selective improvements to these conditions. The researchers also noted that environmental initiatives are implemented more effectively than social initiatives, while the present study considered both areas to be interrelated.

The problem of social protection of employees in hazardous sectors, specifically in agribusiness, continues to be relevant. A.K. Liebman *et al.* (2013) emphasised the necessity of regulatory protection for such workers, pointing to the elevated risks of their activities. This is in line with the findings of the present study, which indicated a low level of social protection in this sector. However, the agricultural sector should not be viewed as an exceptional case requiring a special approach. Instead, labour relations regulation should be integrated into the general labour law policy of countries and agribusiness specifically, ensuring an adequate level of protection for all employees.

S. Battistelli *et al.* (2022) covered an analogous issue. The researchers proposed a comprehensive

approach to the regulation of labour exploitation in the agricultural sector using the example of Italy. First of all, the researchers analysed global challenges and local contextual responses, namely, recruitment mechanisms in the agricultural sector and their effects on workers. The role of public services, private intermediaries, and technological solutions designed to ensure proper interaction between employer and employee was also discussed. A major aspect is the analysis of regulatory instruments used to improve labour conditions, such as collective bargaining, institutional instruments, and voluntary initiatives in the context of insufficient institutional support. All these instruments are aimed at improving compliance with labour laws and promoting responsible business practices. Thus, S. Battistelli *et al.* (2022) proposed an integrated regulatory approach that combines legal and repressive measures with co-management tools and more active business participation. The researchers also emphasised the significance of establishing local regulatory forums and strengthening social dialogue, which is necessary for the successful implementation of these initiatives. This is in line with the findings of the conducted study on the need for a multidimensional approach to the regulation of labour rights, as only comprehensive measures combining various instruments – legal, social, and economic – can effectively address labour exploitation. At the same time, more institutional mechanisms must be created at the state level to ensure more effective control and resolution of problems related to labour migrants and agricultural workers overall.

Thus, the issue of observance of workers' rights in agriculture continues to be relevant and requires a multidimensional approach, including changes in legislation, strengthening of social protection, and improvement of mechanisms for monitoring the observance of labour rights. Despite the overarching challenges, research

showed both similar and distinct approaches to CSR implementation, which depends on local conditions and the level of integration of this concept into business strategies.

Conclusions

The study confirmed that the concept of CSR is a crucial element of the business environment, contributing to the harmonisation of economic, social, and environmental interests. The origins of CSR date to the mid-20th century, when business began to realise its role in addressing social challenges, and later this approach became an integral part of the activities of many companies around the world. In Ukraine, CSR development was largely driven by European integration processes and the need to adapt to international standards.

Agribusiness continues to be one of the key sectors of the Eastern European economy, employing millions of workers. However, despite the significance of the agricultural sector, the number of people employed in it is declining due to technological advances and structural changes in the economy. This created new challenges related to working conditions, income levels, and social protection of workers. Ensuring decent working conditions and expanding social guarantees in this area is still a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development and social justice.

An analysis of European and Ukrainian legislation on labour rights in the agricultural sector revealed that compliance with social standards and ensuring workers' rights are priorities for government policies. The EU ensures a comprehensive approach to the regulation of labour relations, specifically through mechanisms of environmental law, protection against discrimination, employee participation in decision-making, and social security. Ukrainian legislation, while regulating the basic rights of employees, still requires a more systematic approach to implementing CSR and ensuring proper monitoring

of labour standards. The agricultural sector is under increasing pressure from international organisations and civil society to adopt socially responsible and environmentally sustainable practices. The study paid particular attention to the environmental component of CSR, as the state of the environment directly affects the health, quality of life, and rights of both employees and residents of the surrounding areas. The priority areas of environmental responsibility within CSR are minimising the adverse environmental impact of agricultural production, optimising the use of resources, and introducing innovative technologies. A crucial factor is the integration of environmental components into companies' development strategies. Specifically, Ukrainian agribusinesses implemented modern approaches to sustainable farming. These technologies enable not only the reduction of the environmental burden but also ensure economic sustainability by conserving natural resources and increasing production efficiency. The principal practices include precision farming technologies that use modern tools such as satellite monitoring, drones, GPS navigation, and agroecosystem analysis software.

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Thus, the study confirmed the significance of CSR as a tool for sustainable development. To improve the effectiveness of CSR in Ukraine, it is necessary to improve legislative regulation, expand mechanisms to support socially responsible enterprises, and strengthen control over compliance with labour and environmental standards.

Limitations of the study included the lack of statistical data on CSR implementation in Ukraine and limited access to internal company documents. In the future, a promising area of research would be to analyse the effects of international CSR standards on the activities of agro-industrial enterprises in Eastern Europe to identify best practices and adapt them to the conditions of Ukraine, as well as to assess the impact of CSR on socio-economic stability in rural areas.

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Conflict of Interest

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Корпоративна соціальна відповідальність у агробізнесі в контексті захисту прав людини у Східній Європі

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Анотація

Метою дослідження був аналіз корпоративної соціальної відповідальності (КСВ) в агробізнесі Східної Європи через призму захисту прав людини, зокрема екологічних і трудових. Методологія дослідження базувалася на використанні міждисциплінарного підходу, включаючи аналіз нормативно-правових актів, вивчення міжнародних стандартів КСВ, емпіричний аналіз діяльності агропромислових підприємств в Україні, Румунії та Чехії. Отримані результати продемонстрували, що впровадження КСВ значною мірою сприяє реалізації екологічних прав, зокрема права на чисте довкілля. Це досягається через раціональне використання природних ресурсів, впровадження відновлювальних технологій та зменшення викидів забруднюючих речовин. У трудовій сфері КСВ забезпечує захист прав працівників шляхом створення гідних умов праці, недопущення дискримінації та забезпечення соціальних гарантій, таких як медичне страхування й професійний розвиток. Аналіз великих агрохолдингів, а саме МНР (Україна), Trans-Oil (Румунія), Agrofert (Чехія), вказав, що компанії активно інтегрують КСВ у свої бізнес-стратегії, а саме у сфері захисту прав працівників, зокрема через створення безпечних умов праці, забезпечення соціальних гарантій і розвиток професійних навичок. Разом із тим, дослідження виявило значні бар'єри для системного впровадження КСВ у контексті захисту прав людини. Серед основних перешкод – недостатній державний контроль за дотриманням екологічних і трудових стандартів, а також обмежена участь громадянського суспільства у моніторингу діяльності агропромислових підприємств. Це ускладнює системні зміни та підвищує ризики порушення прав людини. У висновках наголошено на необхідності посилення державного контролю, розробки стимулюючих механізмів для бізнесу, зокрема податкових пільг, та активного залучення громадянського суспільства до моніторингу. Отримані результати підтвердили важливість інтеграції КСВ у бізнес-стратегії підприємств для забезпечення сталого розвитку та захисту прав людини

Ключові слова: : сталий розвиток; аграрний сектор; соціальні гарантії; умови праці; екологічна безпека