

Communities

Why is it important?

To build and maintain our reputation as a good corporate citizen we rely on the trust and support of the communities that live near our sites. Indeed, those communities are home for many of our employees. At the same time, a growing number of people want to work for companies that demonstrate strong social connections and provide opportunities for community volunteering. In providing those opportunities, we can help create a greater sense of belonging and purpose among employees.

Our commitments

We are proud of our long tradition of supporting our local communities, in particular through our Synthomer Foundation. Since it was established, first as the General Tire and Rubber Foundation and through its evolution as GenCorp and OMNOVA, the Foundation has played a positive role in communities in the USA for more than 60 years.

For more information about the Synthomer Foundation – [click here](#)

We want to continue building on this great legacy and, in the past few years, we have refocused our global approach to community engagement, adapting the way we provide funding and support for local community activities, based on lessons learnt from the Foundation. As part of that process, we have set a community-based target under our Vision 2030 roadmap.

Our Vision 2030 target

- Provide volunteer support and financial contributions in excess of £1 million a year to advance education, public health, diversity and environmental stewardship.

Associated policies

Our Code of Conduct – [click here](#)

Focusing on our most material issues

Our approach is informed by the issues that matter most to our stakeholders, including employees, investors and customers, and that are most aligned with delivering our business strategy.

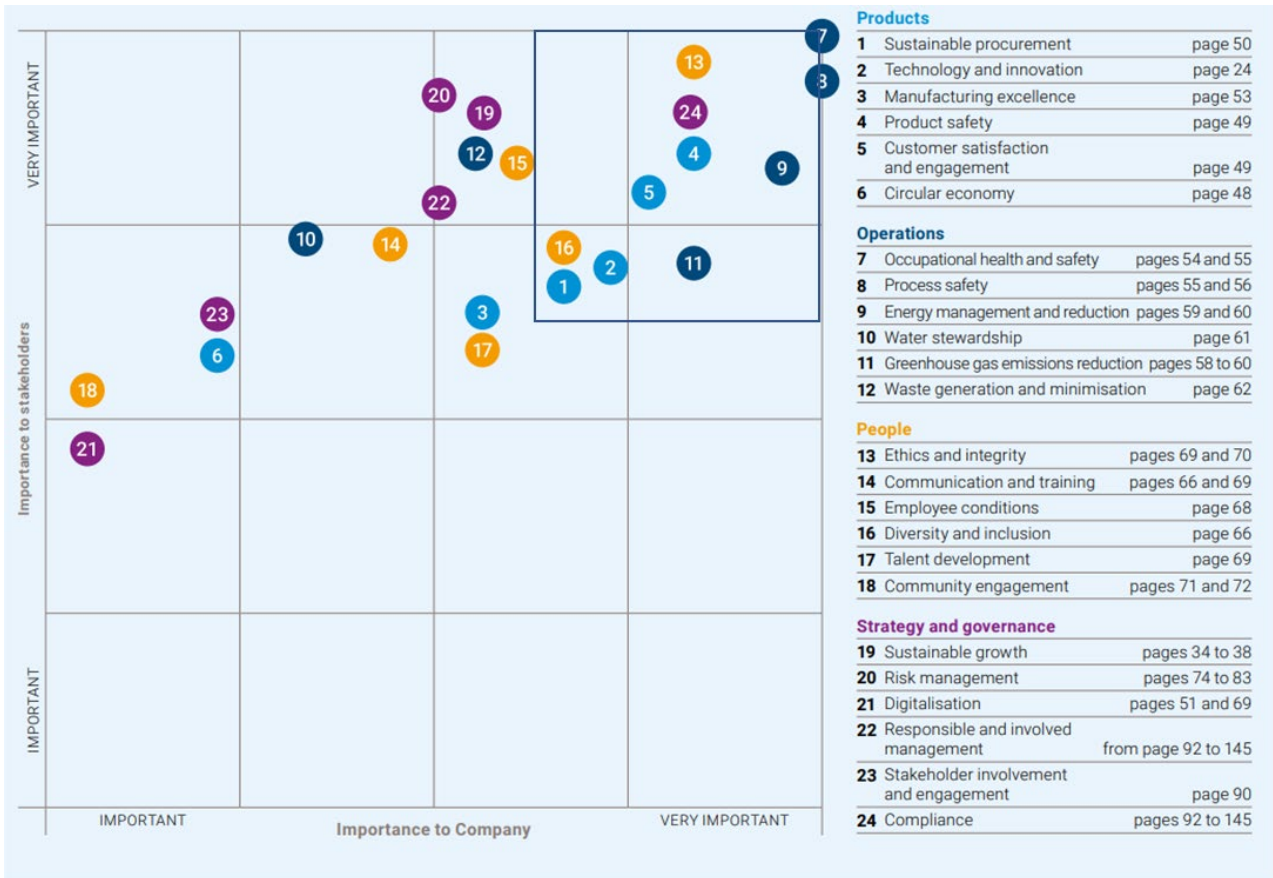
We update our understanding of those issues through a materiality assessment, and completed our last one in 2021. Having reviewed that assessment, we believe we are still focused on the most relevant sustainability issues.

In our 2021 materiality assessment, stakeholders ranked community engagement as an important issue.

This year, we chose not to update our materiality assessment using our existing methodology, given the changing sustainability reporting requirements under the EU’s Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB). We are developing a ‘double’ materiality approach, in line with CSRD and ISSB, that will assess the issues that are material to our business prospects and their impact on the wider world.

This is a significant project, but we believe it will help us further integrate sustainability issues into our decision making, performance and disclosures. We expect to complete this work in 2024.

Figure 1. Synthomer materiality matrix



Our approach

We want the communities where we work to thrive, and look for ways to promote learning and career development in chemistry and engineering. We also support and encourage our site-based social committees to host activities that help raise funds for good causes. However, we do not get involved in providing any financial or non-financial support for political activities.

Our Vision 2030 target reflects our desire to take a more strategic, long-term approach to community support. A significant proportion of our funding target will come via the Synthomer Foundation for community projects in the USA.

We focus our activities on four key areas:

Area of focus	Why we get involved
Education	We want young people to feel inspired to study scientific and technical subjects and consider careers in these areas. In doing so, we contribute to the future talent pipeline – ours and the wider manufacturing industries that modern society relies on. We also want to help develop the leaders of the future who will one day positively contribute to their neighbourhood’s growth and prosperity.
Health and well-being	Strong communities rely on healthy citizens, so we look to support the immediate social needs of vulnerable members of the community.
Diversity	Companies like ours rely on diversity of thinking in order to succeed. As well as striving to reflect the communities in which we operate, we want to help them celebrate and amplify their culture, supporting activities that foster unique opportunities to broaden cultural horizons.
Environmental stewardship	We want to minimise our impact on the environment. We always operate within local legal regulations and seek to do more where possible. As well as our Vision 2030 targets, our sites look for ways to care for their local environment, encouraging employees and local communities to get involved through volunteering activities.

As well as our community engagement programmes, we encourage our employees to get involved in local volunteering opportunities. Our global volunteering network, formed in 2021, has helped drive consistency across our approach. Corporate and social responsibility (CSR) representatives from each site propose and present initiatives to their regional coordinator on a regular basis. Those representatives then meet with our central team on a quarterly basis to discuss project proposals and share volunteering ideas. They also track high-level metrics, such as the number of volunteers and hours volunteered. The network is actively supported by an executive sponsor and our Human Resources network.

We want to encourage more employees to get involved in community activities and have now made our matched-funding programme available to everyone. Previously, this opportunity was only open to UK employees. We also continued to develop a ‘working with the community’ component to our talent development and graduate programmes in all our key regions.

In May 2021, we launched Synthomer Cares week, where employees around the world get involved in activities to raise funds, support local communities and feel connected with one another – and, since then, we have run this annually.

Our performance in 2023

	Unit	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
Total donations	£m	1.1	1.35	0.93	0.82	>1.0

Once again, we exceeded our 2030 target.

In the USA, the Synthomer Foundation continues to partner with the American institute of Chemical Engineers to support the Future of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) Scholars Initiative, providing a \$240,000 multi-year commitment to support students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

This year, we welcomed colleagues from our sites in China and Spain into our growing volunteering network, and our entire Global Leadership Team also took time out during its annual meeting in North Carolina, USA, to build and donate bikes to a local charity.

Global: our third annual Synthomer Cares week

In 2023, we ran our Synthomer Cares week for the third year in a row, giving our people around the world the opportunity to give back to their communities, as well as supporting national and international charities. This year, more than 700 employees got involved in our physical activity challenge, covering more than 33,000 kilometres and raising more than £14,000 for good causes. The graphic below shows the charities that received a percentage of that money:



Below are more highlights from a selection of our programmes from each of our operational regions during the past year.

Malaysia: building a new school science laboratory

Our team in Pasir Gudang, Malaysia, helped transform a dilapidated classroom into a science laboratory for a school located in a rural area, where students mainly belong to fishing families.

A combination of funding from Synthomer, additional funds raised by employees, and donations of unused but operational equipment from our labs, helped create a brand-new inclusive learning environment.

The team of seven volunteers put their management and technical skills to work, helping to complete the laboratory in about five months. The project was also sponsored by Synthomer's Asian leadership team and has helped strengthen ties between the community and our teams.

Czech Republic: promoting science to students of all ages

Our team in Sokolov, Czech Republic, ran a programme called 'From kindergarten to university' aimed at encouraging student interest in technical subjects across the academic spectrum in four ways:

1. Motivated kindergarten children through indoor and outdoor technical games, such as the 'Chemistry around us' painting contest
2. Made presentations at the Open Doors Days and at the national Young Chemist competition, as well as working closely with the teachers, to inspire children at elementary schools and their parents to choose technical secondary schools and pursue future technical careers
3. Provided secondary school students with practical training, lectures and excursions at our Sokolov plant. Future graduates are invited to attend our 'job centres' programme
4. Provided university-level chemistry students with specific projects and study stays, which we hope will inform and prepare them for their future careers.

USA: finding new ways to help employees get involved

The [Synthomer Foundation's](#) partnership with Akron Children's Hospital has grown to become more than just a financial contribution. This year, our employees volunteered their time and creative talents to the hospital's annual Christmas Tree Festival fundraising event. That included several employees from sites around the world working with our Tech Center team to provide beautiful ornaments for our 'Synthomer Celebrations Around the World' tree. All proceeds from the tree sales benefit the hospital.

We also continued to look for ways to help employees get involved in volunteering opportunities. For example, in April 2023, we ran a specific on-site activity at our Global Tech Center for employees who are unable to leave site during work hours. Employees donated toys, confectionery, books and other fun items to include in Easter baskets, which were assembled and donated to the Ravenna Center of Hope. Additionally, over the Christmas holiday, our team at our Beachwood site 'adopted' a family and held an onsite gift-wrapping session to prepare presents that we then delivered to the family.

Our next steps

We will continue to support local activities and provide financial contributions in line with our Vision 2030 target. And we will keep looking for ways to help more employees get involved in those activities. That includes our next Synthomer Cares week, which will take place in April 2024.