



## **D3.3 The ESG Manager for Rural SMEs Profile**



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## Glossary

**ESG:** Environmental, Social, Governance

**SMEs:** small and medium enterprises

**VET:** Vocational Education and Training

**GRI:** Global Reporting Initiative.

*The GRI Standards enable any organization – large or small, private or public – to understand and report on their impacts on the economy, environment and people in a comparable and credible way, thereby increasing transparency on their contribution to sustainable development. In addition to companies, the Standards are highly relevant to many stakeholders - including investors, policymakers, capital markets, and civil society. <sup>1</sup>*

**SASB:** Sustainability Accounting Standards Board.

*SASB Standards enable organisations to provide industry-based disclosures about sustainability-related risks and opportunities that could reasonably be expected to affect the entity's cash flows, access to finance or cost of capital over the short, medium or long term.<sup>2</sup>*

**TCFD:** Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures.

*The TCFD recommendations on climate-related financial disclosures are widely adoptable and applicable to organizations across sectors and jurisdictions. They are designed to solicit decision-useful, forward-looking information that can be included in mainstream financial filings.<sup>3</sup>*

*The Financial Stability Board has announced that the work of the TCFD has been completed, with the ISSB Standards marking the 'culmination of the work of the TCFD'. [...] Companies can continue to use the TCFD recommendations should they choose to do so, and some companies may still be required to use the TCFD recommendations. Using the recommendations is a good entry point for companies as they move to use the ISSB Standards.<sup>4</sup>*

**KPIs:** key performance indicators

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<sup>1</sup> GRI, 2019

<sup>2</sup> IFSR Foundation, 2023a

<sup>3</sup> Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures, 2022

<sup>4</sup> IFSR Foundation, 2023b

# Introduction

## Section 1

## Introduction

In recent years, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations have become integral to the strategic framework of organizations across various sectors. For rural small and medium enterprises (SMEs), particularly within the agri-food sector, the role of an ESG Manager is increasingly pivotal. This document aims to delineate the profile of an ESG Manager tailored specifically for these enterprises, outlining the critical competencies, responsibilities, and impact of this role.

Rural SMEs, especially in the agri-food sector, face unique challenges and opportunities when integrating ESG principles. These enterprises often operate in environments where traditional practices intersect with modern sustainability expectations. An ESG Manager in this context not only champions environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and effective governance but also navigates the distinct socio-economic dynamics of rural communities.

The following sections will provide a comprehensive overview of the key attributes and skills required for an ESG Manager in Rural SMEs, including their role in driving sustainable practices, enhancing community engagement, and ensuring regulatory compliance. By defining these parameters, this document seeks to support rural SMEs in identifying and cultivating the right talent to lead their ESG initiatives, ultimately fostering resilience and long-term sustainability in their operations.

## Methodology

The present deliverable is part of the **WP2 – Development of the ESG Manager for rural SMEs (ESGMR) profile and Curriculum**, and as such it builds upon previous Deliverables developed under WP2: *D2.1. Needs Analysis Report on ESG in rural SMEs* and *D2.2 The ESGMR Management Framework*.

More specifically, the Profile of the ESG Manager in Rural SMEs has been designed with a three stages process. At *first*, partners defined the main responsibilities of this professional figure, taking into consideration:

- the four dimensions of the **ESG Management Framework** (role, person, organization, external ecosystem) outlined in D2.2;
- the main characterisations and competences recognized through the needs analysis of D2.1 and EU Competence frameworks;
- the specificities of rural contexts;
- the three dimension of ESG;

This analysis brought us to the definition of the main responsibilities and competences of an ESG Manager in Rural SMEs. At the same time, the analysis highlighted how when we talk about rural SMEs, we usually refer to small companies, family-led companies, companies in the agrifood or crafts sector, which have no comprehensive view on ESG criteria.

Within these types of rural SMEs, the role of ESG Manager could be taken on by the owner, the CEO or administrator, a family member who recently graduated, a single staff member, a team or department, but also an external expert.

Depending on the role within the Rural SME, but also on the personal and professional background of each individual, a variety of possible tasks and responsibilities emerged. Thus, as a *second step*, the profile of the ESG Manager for Rural SMEs has been broken down into three main, closely related roles:

- the **ESG Analyst**, responsible to *understand* the ESG trends and regulations, and gather data to analyse the ESG performance of the company. This role represents the necessary starting point to implement an ESG strategy.
- The **ESG Optimizer**, responsible to *implement* the ESG strategy of the company. The person in this role is in charge of the day-to-day management and control of the ESG Strategy and performance.
- The **ESG Leader**, responsible to steer and oversee the ESG Strategy and performance.

Having defined the different roles an ESG Manager can assume, as a *third step* we identified the main tasks and responsibilities for each role, and then associated the required skills and knowledge with them.

This highlighted how, overall, the profile of an ESG Manager is inherently flexible, shaped by the diverse personal and professional experiences of those who assume it. In a vocational education and training (VET) context, this flexibility is reflected in

the wide range of potential learner profiles, influenced by factors such as the rural setting, the learner's background—whether they are seeking upskilling, reskilling, or a more specialized program—and the specific ESG role they aim to fill, whether as an Analyst, Optimizer, or Leader.

Thus, rather than offering a one-size-fits-all approach, this document defines the key responsibilities and essential competences required for each ESG role, acknowledging that a learner may already possess some of these skills before entering an educational program.

This approach supports the creation of targeted, effective educational pathways for future ESG Managers, that can be tailored to their individual starting points and organizational needs.

# **ESG Manager Profile for Rural SMEs**

## Section 2



## Profile and roles

The role of the ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) Manager has emerged as a cornerstone for organizations aiming to align their operations with sustainable practices and social responsibility. For rural small and medium enterprises (SMEs), especially in the agri-food sector, the ESG Manager serves as a critical link between the enterprise's sustainability goals and its day-to-day operations, community engagement, and regulatory obligations.

The ESG Manager is responsible for embedding sustainability into the core of business practices, focusing on environmental protection, social equity, and sound governance. Their work ensures that the enterprise not only complies with evolving regulatory frameworks but also responds proactively to market demands for transparency, ethical operations, and environmental stewardship.

As highlighted as well in the *ESG Management Framework*, the ESG Manager profile is multifaceted, encompassing a blend of roles that cater to different aspects of sustainability management. At its core, the ESG Manager can be seen as an **ESG Analyst**, an **ESG Optimizer**, and an **ESG Leader**.

As an ESG Analyst, the *manager* focuses on gathering, analysing, and interpreting data related to the environmental, social, and governance performance of the enterprise. This includes monitoring regulatory changes, assessing risks, and ensuring compliance with ESG standards. The role of the ESG Optimizer is more proactive, where the manager identifies opportunities for improvement, streamlines processes, and implements sustainable practices that enhance resource efficiency and minimize negative impacts. Finally, as an ESG Leader, the manager takes on a strategic and visionary role, driving the long-term sustainability agenda of the enterprise. This includes fostering a culture of responsibility, engaging stakeholders, and positioning the organization as a leader in sustainability both within the community and the industry. Together, these roles ensure that the ESG Manager not only supports but also elevates the enterprise's commitment to sustainability.

In rural SMEs, the roles of **ESG Analyst**, **ESG Optimizer**, and **ESG Leader** can vary significantly based on the size and structure of the company.

**Micro-Enterprises** usually have fewer than 10 employees and a very lean structure, and often rely on versatile employees or external consultants to cover multiple functions.

In micro-enterprises, the *owner* often performs many functions, including understanding ESG trends and regulations. They may use external resources or consultants to gather ESG-related insights.

Similarly, in a small team, the same person (*owner or a multi-functional employee*) who understands ESG strategies will also implement them, ensuring the minimal necessary compliance with environmental, social, and governance criteria.

Finally, within micro-enterprises, the *owner* is usually the sole decision-maker, steering the company's overall direction. In this role, the owner sets priorities based on their understanding of ESG, focusing on practical outcomes, like maintaining local community relationships or conserving natural resources.

**Family-Run SMEs** typically have a slightly larger structure, possibly with 10-50 employees, often family members.

In a family-run business, a *next-generation family member* who has been trained in modern business practices or ESG principles might take on the role of ESG Analyst. Alternatively, a *trusted external advisor* with expertise in rural development might help the company understand key ESG factors.

Similarly, *one of the family members or an operational employee* might be responsible for implementing ESG improvements, such as updating processes for energy use, adopting sustainable sourcing practices, or ensuring regulatory compliance in social aspects like labour rights.

Finally, in a family-run SME, the *senior leader of the family* is typically the strategic decision-maker. As such they would take on the role of ESG Leader and integrate ESG priorities into the long-term vision, especially in ways that align with the family's values (e.g., supporting local communities, preserving land).

**Structured SMEs**, with over 50 employees, often have formal departments and clearer divisions of responsibility.

In a more structured SME, a *specific person or team* might be responsible for analysing ESG risks and opportunities, including data collection, regulatory monitoring, and stakeholder engagement.

A *middle manager* could have the role to ensure that ESG goals are implemented across different departments. They would be responsible to coordinate between departments like production, HR, and finance to make sure sustainability and governance measures are applied in daily operations.

Finally, in larger rural SMEs, the *senior leadership team or CEO* drives the ESG strategy, working closely with department heads to align ESG with business objectives. Their role includes fostering a culture of sustainability and ensuring that the company's ESG vision is clearly communicated to both internal and external stakeholders.

In summary, as rural SMEs become larger and more structured, the roles of ESG Analyst, Optimizer, and Leader become more specialized. In micro and family-run enterprises, these roles are often taken on by a few key individuals or even the same person, while in more structured SMEs, there is greater role differentiation and a more formalized approach to ESG management.

Regardless of who will perform the specific role, however, the tasks and responsibilities associated with each role do not vary, nor do the skills and knowledge required.

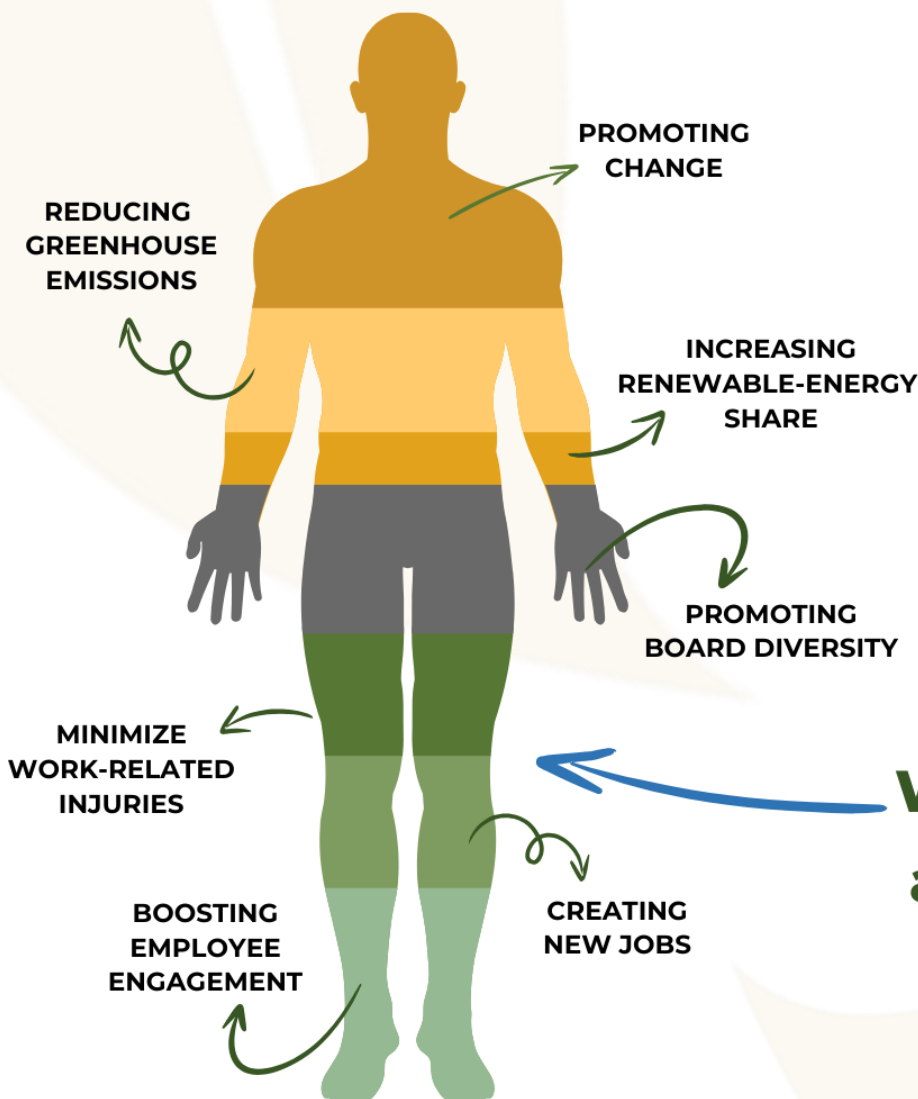
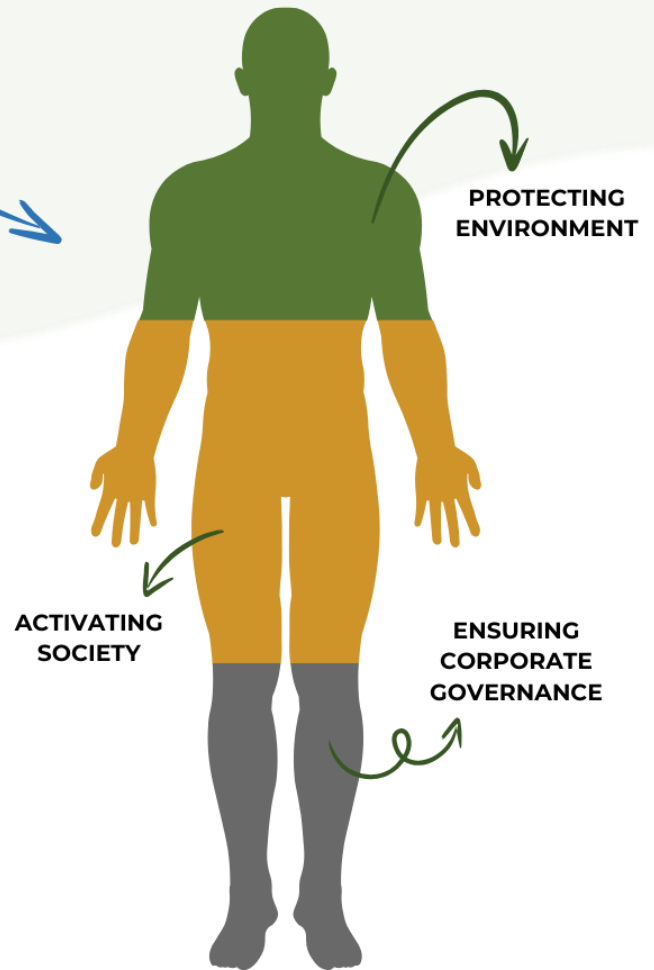
It is therefore possible to provide a general overview of these tasks, responsibilities, skills and knowledge.

From this general overview, it will be possible to create learning programmes specifically tailored to the level of preparation of the perspective learner.

The document could also guide the development of a tool – such as an assessment test – through which the learner/worker could determine the skills they need to acquire to assume a specific role, or also the role they can assume with the skills they already possess.

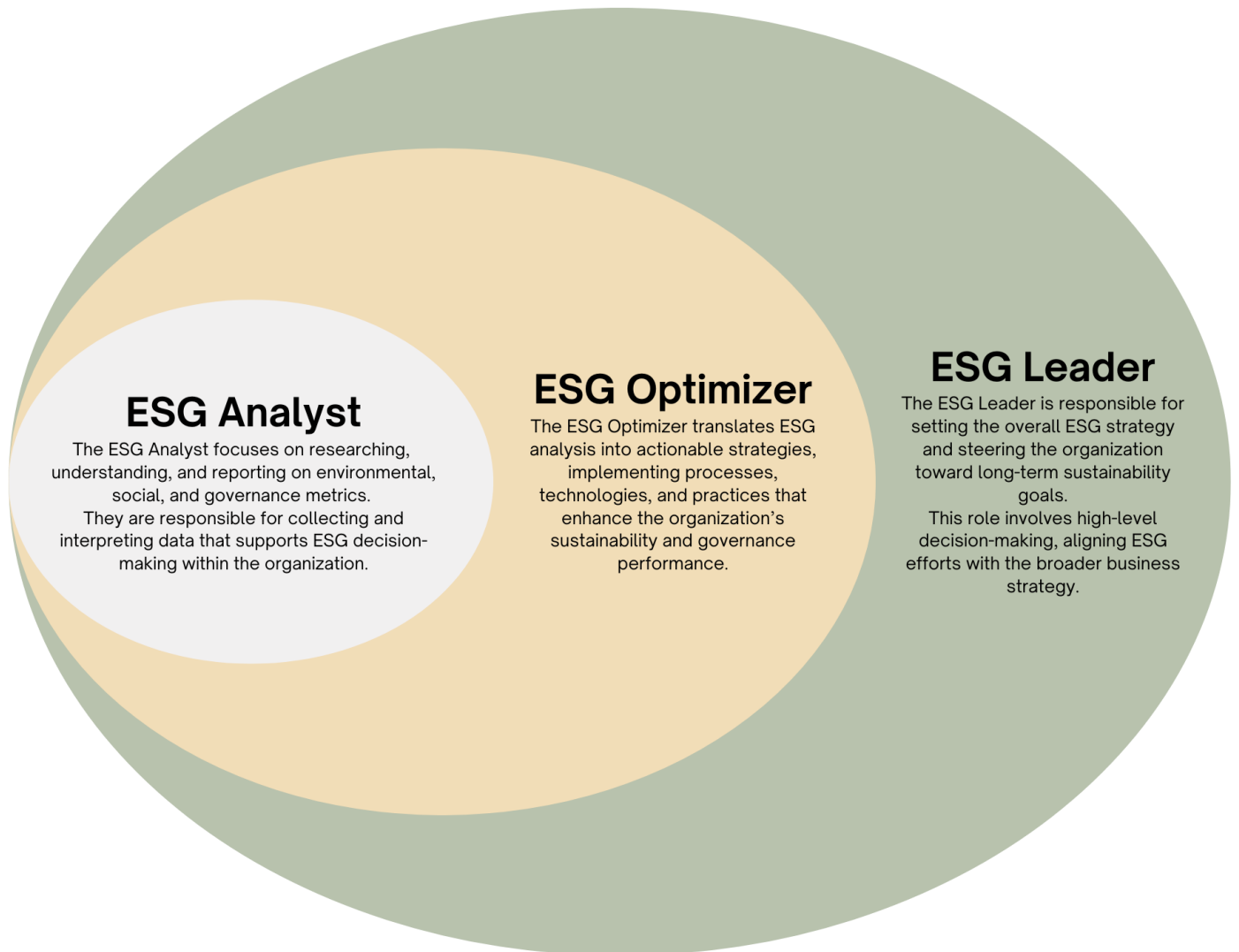
# What we think ESGs is

In this regard, there is no unique ESG profile but rather different kind of ESG profiles coming up from the combination of two or several competences, knowledge and capacities in the three main ESG pillars, which will be functional in the guiding and ideation processes of an ESG curriculum to help achieving the goals and meet the rural SMEs needs and expectations in terms of ESG criteria.



# What ESGs actually is

## Key responsibilities



## Key tasks



### ESG Analyst (Understanding)

- **Data Collection & Analysis:** Gather data related to environmental impact (e.g., energy usage, emissions), social factors (e.g., employee diversity, labour practices), and governance (e.g., board structure, compliance).
- **Benchmarking & Reporting:** Compare the organization's ESG performance with industry standards, competitors, or regulations. Prepare internal and external reports, ensuring compliance with frameworks like GRI, SASB, or TCFD.
- **Risk Assessment:** Identify potential ESG risks (e.g., regulatory changes, environmental liabilities) and evaluate their impact on the organization.

- **Stakeholder Communication:** Present findings to internal teams (e.g., finance, operations) and external stakeholders (e.g., investors, regulators) to highlight ESG performance and areas for improvement.
- **Regulatory Monitoring:** Stay updated on relevant ESG regulations and industry trends to inform the company's sustainability strategy.



### **ESG Optimizer (Implementing)**

- **Project Management:** Lead and manage the implementation of sustainability initiatives (e.g., renewable energy installations, waste reduction programs) to improve the company's ESG performance.
- **Operational Integration:** Work across departments (e.g., production, procurement, HR) to ensure that ESG principles are integrated into day-to-day operations.
- **Process Optimization:** Identify and implement operational improvements that reduce environmental impact, enhance social responsibility, or strengthen governance practices.
- **Supplier & Value Chain Management:** Collaborate with suppliers to ensure they meet ESG standards and promote sustainable practices throughout the value chain.
- **Training & Capacity Building:** Educate staff on ESG initiatives, processes, and their role in achieving organizational goals, fostering a culture of sustainability.



### **ESG Leader (Steering)**

- **Strategic Planning:** Define and set the company's ESG vision and strategy, ensuring alignment with business goals and long-term sustainability objectives.
- **Governance & Compliance:** Oversee compliance with all ESG-related regulations and governance frameworks. Ensure the company's ESG practices adhere to ethical standards.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Engage with key stakeholders (e.g., investors, customers, government bodies, local communities) to communicate the company's ESG strategy, achievements, and future goals.
- **Leadership & Culture Development:** Foster a company-wide culture that prioritizes sustainability, ethical practices, and responsible governance.
- **Board & Executive Collaboration:** Work closely with the board of directors and executive leadership to ensure that ESG is integrated into the company's risk management, growth strategies, and corporate governance.
- **ESG Performance Tracking:** Monitor and report on the organization's ESG progress, adapting strategies as needed to ensure continuous improvement.

## Key competences

Dimension	ESG AREA	Competences
<b>1. ROLE</b>	Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Having ethical and sustainable thinking</li> <li>2. Being a change-maker</li> <li>3. Understanding and doing impact assessment</li> <li>4. Innovative thinking</li> <li>5. Knowledge of the certification process</li> <li>6. Knowledge of waste &amp; water management</li> </ol>
	Social	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Valuing ideas</li> <li>2. Promoting VET opportunities</li> <li>3. Promoting workers' health and security</li> <li>4. Understanding and promoting inclusion and diversity</li> <li>5. Understanding and promoting Gender balance</li> <li>6. Knowledge of working conditions</li> <li>7. Knowledge sharing and re-skilling process</li> </ol>
	Governance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Knowledge of Systems thinking – considering time, space and context</li> <li>2. Supporting equity and justice</li> <li>3. Planning and management abilities</li> <li>4. Knowledge of sustainable financial planning and investments</li> </ol>
<b>2. PERSON</b>	Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Defining a vision</li> <li>2. Promoting an interdisciplinary approach</li> </ol>
	Social	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Having and promoting motivation and perseverance</li> </ol>
	Governance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Critical thinking</li> <li>2. Problem framing</li> <li>3. Vision and opportunities</li> </ol>
<b>3. ORGANISATION</b>	Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Knowledge of Sustainability KPIs</li> <li>2. Valuing sustainability</li> <li>3. Understanding impacts transferability</li> <li>4. Understanding and promoting results replication potentials</li> </ol>
	Social	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mobilising others</li> <li>2. Learning through experience</li> <li>3. Staff training</li> </ol>

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Knowledge of corporate inclusion policy</li> <li>5. Promoting a multi-stakeholder' approach</li> <li>6. Ability to foster stakeholders' involvement</li> <li>7. Benefit Impact Assessment</li> </ol>
	Governance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ability to mobilise resources</li> <li>2. Financial and economic literacy</li> <li>3. Knowledge of Compliance regulations and procedures</li> <li>4. Understanding and planning long-term investments</li> <li>5. Knowledge of Anti-corruption policies</li> <li>6. Knowledge of Compensation policy</li> <li>7. Promoting Financial sustainability</li> </ol>
<b>4. EXTERNAL ECOSYSTEM</b>	Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promoting resilient ecosystems</li> <li>2. Understanding Rural SMEs needs</li> <li>3. Understanding Country ESG report</li> </ol>
	Social	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promoting Collective action</li> <li>2. Ability to work with others</li> <li>3. Knowledge of EU Competence Frameworks</li> <li>4. Enhancing justice</li> <li>5. Valuing and promoting Culture, values and traditions</li> <li>6. Understanding of community impacts</li> </ol>
	Governance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Coping with ambiguity, uncertainty and risks</li> <li>2. Ability to give feedbacks, comments, assessments</li> <li>3. Knowledge of EU and national legislative frameworks</li> </ol>

The competencies for the ESG Manager for Rural SMEs have been identified across four key dimensions, as outlined in the ESG Management Framework. Each competency has been aligned with the most relevant ESG area within these dimensions.

Competencies are coded by first identifying the dimension, followed by the ESG area, and finally the specific competency number. For instance, the code "3.G.4" refers to the fourth competency related to the "Governance" area within the "Organization" dimension: "Understanding and planning long-term investments".

As shown on the following page, each competency applies to all three designated roles, though its significance may vary. To clarify the relevance of each competency for specific roles, icons representing the roles are displayed in ascending order of importance.





# Use cases

## Section 3

## Introduction

Section 3 introduces four learner personas to provide a practical understanding of how different individuals may approach and engage with the role of ESG Manager in rural SMEs.

These personas represent diverse backgrounds, experiences, and learning preferences, demonstrating the various paths individuals may take to develop the necessary ESG skills. By presenting these cases, the document highlights how tailored training and development programs can support learners with unique needs, from recent graduates to experienced business owners, as they pursue ESG-related roles. These examples help illustrate the flexibility of ESG competencies and showcase how learners can approach their professional growth, depending on their personal and organizational contexts. The goal is to ensure that rural SMEs can identify and cultivate ESG talent that fits their specific challenges and opportunities, making sustainability an accessible and actionable goal.

DEBBIE



31 years old



Germany

## MAIN COMPETENCIES NEEDS

1.E.5 – 1.G.4

3.E.1 – 3.G

4.E – 4.S – 4.G

## ABOUT ME

Degree in Economics and Management, 6 months as a stagiaire in manufactory industry experience + 2,5 years as an Administrative Responsible in a Coffee producer industry abroad, before moving back and take over my family company operating in the sunflower seeds and oil production.

## GOALS

Increase the export level of the company by at least 5-8% in the next year

## NEEDS

How do I identify new target markets? How do I increase my analysis capacities? Where do I get information on green and digital criteria on procurements? Are there targeted training courses or VET in line with my purpose?

## PERSONALITY

- Curious
- Brave
- Enthusiastic

## BEHAVIOUR TRAITS

- Ambitious
- Reactive
- Performer

## PAIN POINTS

- Stubborn
- Not sure if it would be worth it

## PASSIONS & INTERESTS

I love travel and exchanges  
I like running, meeting people, reading

## HOW DO I WANT TO LEARN?

With a SCORM/MOOC, I could follow the training also in asynchronous way

# DAVE



62 years old



Italy

## MAIN COMPETENCIES NEEDS

1.E. - 1.S

3.E.

4.E.1 - 4.S.3 - 4.G.3

## ABOUT ME

I've always considered myself a farmer, even if now I'm more an entrepreneur and producer of tomatoes and tomatoes products. I'm in this business since my early 20s when I decided to create my own company (a very small one) which, in the last 40 years grew a lot and increased in resources and turnover. Today my company is one of the biggest in Italy with an export rate of 58%.

## GOALS

I would like to generate an impact and a lesson for future generations before I go on retirement. I would also like to create a working environment in which people motivate and engage each other.

## NEEDS

How do I innovate management process and decision making in my company? How do I involve young people in my company in uptaking professional up-skilling process to be able to face upcoming challenges?

## PERSONALITY

- Extrovert
- Talkative
- Tireless

## BEHAVIOUR TRAITS

- Responsibility
- Respectful
- Self-controlled

## PAIN POINTS

I don't like communicating via emails, and prefer in-person communication

## PASSIONS & INTERESTS

I love enotourism and walking. I like nature, landscapes and agrifood.

## HOW DO I WANT TO LEARN?

I prefer meetings and networking events



**HARLEY**

## ABOUT ME

I'm a Civil Engineer, with 18 years experience in the construction sector as a building planner and designer.

In the 6 last years, I started focusing on sustainability and new materials in the construction sector and I'm now willing to focus on building a consultancy career based on my need to contribute to a more sustainable world.

## GOALS

To adapt my vision to local contexts as to generate a tangible impact

## NEEDS

How do I start operating in economic sectors different than the construction one?

## PERSONALITY

- Openness
- Self-confidence
- Emotional

## BEHAVIOUR TRAITS

- Empathetic
- Patient
- Ambitious

## PAIN POINTS

I am not really good with financial and funding and accountability tasks

## PASSIONS & INTERESTS

I love mountains, music, animals.  
I like going to concerts, watching independent movies, asiatic cuisine.

## HOW DO I WANT TO LEARN?

I would love an interactive "in-person" training to meet new people and professionals and exchange.



44 years old



Greece

## MAIN COMPETENCIES NEEDS

1.E - 1.S - 1.G

2.E

4.E - 4.S - 4.G.2

## TOM



21 years old



Slovenia

### MAIN COMPETENCIES NEEDS

1.E - 1.S - 1.G  
2.E - 2.S - 2.G  
3.E

### ABOUT ME

I'm a student at the School of Environmental Sciences at Nova Gorica.

### GOALS

My dream is to work in the fields of environmental research and protection as well as the management of the environment

### NEEDS

Where to look for specific on-the-job training to better understand how to assess one company's footprint on the environment?

### PERSONALITY

- Introvert
- Humble
- Sensitive

### BEHAVIOUR TRAITS

- Willing to learn
- Determined
- Responsible

### PAIN POINTS

I have no knowledge or experience of the entrepreneurship context. I have no professional expertise

### PASSIONS & INTERESTS

I love biking, bird-watching and river-rifiting. I like nature, landscapes and rock music.

### HOW DO I WANT TO LEARN?

I would prefer an academic course, or a Master course.

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