

# ESG Manager for Rural SMEs

A short Guide on why  
and how



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# The Consortium



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# Why this role matters for your business

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Today, customers, suppliers, and governments are asking companies to show they care about the environment, their people, and how they run their business.

For small and rural businesses — especially in farming and food production — this can be a big challenge. That's why many companies now name someone as their ESG Manager (or give this job to an existing staff member).

This person's job is to:

- Make sure the business follows environmental and social rules
- Find ways to save resources and improve working conditions
- Help the business build trust with customers and the community

This guide explains what an ESG Manager does, the skills they need, and how even a small company can take steps toward sustainability — without making things too complicated.

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# Who can be an ESG Manager

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Every business is different — and the ESG Manager role can be flexible too.

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In a small or family business, this person might be:

- The owner or manager
- A family member who recently finished school or training
- An employee with an interest in sustainability
- An external expert or consultant hired part-time

What matters is not the job title but the **tasks they take on**. The ESG Manager is simply the person who takes responsibility for helping the business work in a way that respects people, the planet, and the law.

## What an ESG Manager Does

An ESG Manager helps your business look after three key areas:

- **Environment** – Use resources wisely, cut waste, reduce emissions
- **Social** – Treat employees fairly, keep them safe, support your community
- **Governance** – Follow the rules, keep good records, run the business ethically.

Their job is to make sure these values are part of everyday work — not just a “nice idea.” In practice, this means thinking about ESG when making decisions, solving problems, or planning for the future. It could be as simple as checking waste disposal costs, making sure safety signs are visible, or talking to suppliers about where materials come from.

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# Who is doing what in ESG

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Even if your company doesn't have someone with the title "ESG Manager", some of these tasks are probably already happening — maybe done by different people in different moments.

To make sense of this, it helps to think of the ESG Manager as wearing three hats or playing three roles:

- **Understand** (Analyst) – gathering and analysing information about your business;
- **Act** (Optimizer) – turning that knowledge into practical improvements;
- **Lead** (Leader) – setting direction and keeping ESG on the agenda.

Together, these three roles make up the ESG Manager's profile.

Thinking about them separately can help you understand how ESG is handled in your company today. It allows you to see which parts are already covered, where there may be gaps or a need for training and support, and whether the work can be shared internally or might require hiring someone new.

So, how can you know if someone is already covering these roles?

Let's look at each one in more detail.

## 1 ESG Analyst – Understand & Assess

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The Analyst helps you see where you are today.

They ask: *What are we already doing? What's missing? What matters?*

Typical tasks:

- Collect information on existing practices (energy, waste, safety, HR policies)
- Spot risks, gaps, and opportunities for improvement
- Ask staff and partners for feedback
- Track data such as waste, energy use, sourcing practices
- Turn raw information into clear insights for decision-making

**Who might do this in your SME:** owner, admin staff, accountant, or an external advisor.

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## 2 ESG Optimizer – Turn Insight Into Action

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The Optimizer makes change happen, step by step.

They ask: *How can we do this better? What changes will work here?*

Typical tasks:

- Turn strategy into practical, doable actions
- Improve daily routines (waste, sourcing, safety, energy use)
- Test and refine new ideas with the team
- Support staff training and behaviour change
- Monitor progress and adjust when needed

**Who might do this in your SME:** operations manager, production lead, co-owner, or hands-on consultant.

## 3 ESG Leader – Keep the Direction & Make It Visible

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The Leader connects ESG with the company's purpose and long-term vision.

They ask: *Where are we going, and why does it matter?*

Typical tasks:

- Set clear ESG priorities that fit your business goals
- Make decisions that respect people and the environment
- Share goals and progress with staff, customers, and the community
- Build support with partners and employees
- Create a culture where sustainability is part of everyday decisions

**Who might do this in your SME:** owner, CEO, senior family member, or trusted team leader.

Go through these three roles with your team. Write down who already does each task and what might be missing. This will help you see whether you need to train existing staff, bring in outside support, or appoint a dedicated ESG person.

# What skills does an ESG Manager need?

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An ESG Manager doesn't have to be an expert in everything, but they should have – or be willing to learn – skills in three areas: knowledge, people skills, and planning.

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## 1. Knowledge

The ESG Manager should know the basics of:

- Sustainability: how to reduce waste, save energy, manage water
- Workplace safety and fair labor practices
- Local rules and regulations for environment, health, and governance
- Financial basics: budgets, long-term planning, compliance requirements

## 2. People Skills

They should be able to:

- Communicate clearly with employees, suppliers, and community
- Motivate others to take part in ESG efforts
- Encourage teamwork and involve the right people
- Support inclusion, diversity, and fairness at work

## 3. Planning and Problem-Solving

- They should be comfortable with:
- Setting clear goals and measuring progress
- Spotting risks early and finding practical solutions
- Turning ideas into realistic action plans
- Thinking ahead about the future of the business



Use this as a checklist: see which skills your team already has, mark the gaps, and tackle the most urgent first.

# How ESG works in different companies

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Every business needs these three roles covered — what changes is how many people share the work.

In **Micro-businesses** (<10 employees), the owner or manager usually does it all (sometimes with outside help). The focus is on quick wins — saving energy, staying compliant, keeping good relationships with the community.

In **Family-run SMEs** (10–50 employees), ESG work is shared. One person collects data, another improves operations, and a senior family member sets the direction.

In **Structured SMEs** (50+ employees), often a dedicated ESG officer or team is appointed. Departments share responsibility, managers coordinate, and leadership ensures ESG is part of business strategy.

If you don't have the budget for a new role, start small — pick one person to collect data and launch a single improvement project. You can grow the role as your business grows.

## Tailoring ESG to Your Business

ESG is about building a stronger, safer, and greener business — not just following rules.

Your ESG focus might be on:

- Environment – cutting waste, reducing emissions, using renewable energy
- Social – keeping workers safe, creating jobs, supporting your community
- Governance – following good practices, staying transparent, improving management

Start with the area that matters most right now (for example, waste reduction) and expand step by step until ESG becomes part of everyday decisions.



# ESG Role, Task & Competence Mapping

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## How to Use This Tool

This is a simple way to see who does what for ESG in your business, and whether they have the right skills.

1. For each question, write the name or role of the person responsible.
2. Tick **Yes** / **No** / **In Training** to show whether they already have the skill needed.
3. If nobody is responsible, leave the line blank — this shows a gap that needs to be filled.

When you're done, you'll know:

- Which ESG tasks are covered and which are missing;
- Whether your team has the skills to cover them or needs training;
- Whether you might need to assign, share, or hire for these tasks.

Task	Competences Needed	Who is responsible?	Competences present?
Who collects data on energy, water, waste, or resource use?	Data collection & basic analysis		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Training
Who checks that we meet safety, hygiene, and labor rules?	Knowledge of local regulations		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Training
Who monitors new regulations or risks that could affect us?	Regulatory awareness		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Training
Who keeps records of ESG-related issues (incidents, suppliers, waste disposal)?	Record keeping & compliance		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Training
Who summarizes this information for management / owners?	Reporting & communication		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Training
Who leads projects to improve efficiency or reduce waste/costs?	Project management & problem solving		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Training
Who trains staff on ESG topics (safety, hygiene, sustainability)?	Training & motivation skills		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Training
Who works with suppliers to meet quality or sustainability standards?	Supplier collaboration		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Training
Who tracks results of improvement projects and reports progress?	Monitoring & record keeping		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Training
Who ensures ESG improvements become part of daily work?	Follow-up & process integration		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Training

Task	Competences Needed	Who is responsible?	Competences present?
Who decides our ESG priorities and goals?	Strategic thinking & goal setting		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Training
Who ensures ESG is part of major decisions and business planning?	Business planning & decision-making		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Training
Who communicates ESG progress to employees, customers, community?	Communication & stakeholder engagement		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Training
Who represents the company in community / industry sustainability efforts?	Leadership & networking		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Training
Who ensures ESG is regularly discussed at management level?	Governance & accountability		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In Training

## Making Sense of Your Results

- **Blank names** = missing tasks → these are your priority for assigning, hiring or outsourcing.
- **No or In Training** = skill gaps → plan training for these staff.
- **One name appearing too often** = risk of overload → consider sharing tasks across the team or appointing dedicated ESG support.

# ESG gaps & next steps

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## Step 1 – Collect Your Gaps

Go back to the previous page.

Write down all the rows where **no one was responsible** or where the competence was marked **No** or **In Training**.

## Step 2 – Decide What to Do

For each missing task or skill, choose one action:

- **Assign internally** – give it to an existing staff member
- **Train internally** – upskill the person you named
- **Hire or outsource** – look for external support or create a job ad

Competence or Task	Who Could Cover It?	Action (Assign / Train / Hire)

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## Step 3 – Build Your ESG Role

Now create a short role description using what you just wrote down.

This can be for an existing employee (to make their responsibilities clear) or for a job ad for a new hire/consultant.

### Role Description

#### Purpose of the Role

*This person will be responsible for:*

[List only the missing or most important tasks from your mapping exercise]

#### Skills Needed

*They should have or be trained in:*

[List the competences from the mapping exercise that were missing or marked “Train”]

#### Reporting Line

*They will report to:*

[Owner / General Manager / Management Team]

#### How We Will Measure Success

*We will know this role is working if:*

[e.g., data is collected regularly, fewer compliance issues, 1 project completed per year]

You can use now the Role Description to write a Job Ad or an Internal Vacancy Notice.

## Step 4 – Take Your First Step

Choose one thing to start with this month — a small, easy win.

This could be assigning someone to collect data, planning a training, or writing a job ad. Small steps make ESG progress real.

# Conclusion

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Every SME has someone who can lead on ESG. The question is: who will wear the hat in your company?

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This guide gives you a simple way to see who is already taking care of ESG in your business and where you might need extra help or training.

*Even small changes — like assigning clear responsibilities or starting to measure your energy or waste — can make a big difference over time.*

If you want to go deeper, visit our project website: [www.esg4smes.eu](http://www.esg4smes.eu)

There you can find:

- The full **ESG Manager for Rural SMEs Profile** – with all tasks, skills, and roles explained in detail
- The **Training Course for ESG Managers for Rural SMEs** – practical learning materials to build ESG knowledge step by step

Use these tools when you are ready to grow your ESG work and involve more people in your company.





This guide was developed within **ESG4SMEs**, an Erasmus+ project dedicated to helping small and rural businesses take their first steps toward sustainability.

Across Europe, companies of all sizes are being asked to show how they care for the environment, their employees, and their communities. For small and family-run businesses, this can feel like a challenge — but also a great opportunity. ESG4SMEs provides practical tools, training, and inspiration to make sustainability a natural part of everyday work, without unnecessary complexity.

By using this guide, you are joining a growing community of SMEs that are ready to build stronger, safer, and greener businesses. Start where you are, take small steps, and watch how ESG can help you strengthen trust, improve efficiency, and stay competitive in a changing world.

Learn more and access free resources at [www.esg4smes.eu](http://www.esg4smes.eu).



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