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ESG4SMEs
Sustainability in Action

ESG Management for Rural SMEs

Educators Guide



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Facilitating Learning in ESG4SMEs

1. Facilitation approach in the ESG4SMEs training course

Purpose

Facilitation in ESG4SMEs is a **core methodological component** of the training course. It is not an individual teaching preference, but a deliberate approach designed to support **understanding, reflection, and realistic progression** among SMEs starting from very different situations.

The training course combines self-learning digital modules with face-to-face sessions. Within this design, **facilitation serves a specific function: helping participants interpret ESG concepts in relation to their own organisational reality and translate learning into feasible next steps**. Face-to-face sessions are therefore not intended for content transmission, but for **sense-making¹ and application**.

This chapter clarifies the **role of the educator**, the **logic of facilitation in a blended learning context**, and the **methodological boundaries** that must be respected to preserve the meaning and objectives of the ESG4SMEs training model.

Role of the educator

In ESG4SMEs, the educator acts primarily as a **facilitator of learning**, rather than as a subject-matter expert, consultant, or evaluator. Participants are not expected to acquire technical mastery of ESG, and educators are not expected to provide solutions, conduct audits, or assess business performance.

The educator's role is to support participants in **recognising existing practices, identifying gaps or risks**, and **understanding how ESG-related tasks and responsibilities are distributed** within their organisation. This role is closely aligned with the assessment methodology, which focuses on **orientation, readiness, and progression**, not on correctness or compliance.

Where educators position themselves as experts providing answers, responsibility tends to shift away from participants. Facilitation, by contrast, supports **ownership and reflection**, which are essential for SMEs to engage meaningfully with ESG.

What if I'm not sure what to say?

If in doubt: you are not expected to have the answers or to explain ESG in detail.
Your role is to facilitate reflection, not to solve problems.
Turn the question back to the group and ask how the issue is currently handled in their organisation or how they would handle it.

2. Facilitation in a blended learning context

The ESG4SMEs training course follows a **blended learning design**. Digital modules provide structured content, definitions, and examples that participants can explore independently and at their own pace. Face-to-face sessions are designed to **complement, not replace**, this self-learning component.

Educators should therefore expect **uneven levels of preparation and understanding** among participants. The purpose of facilitation is not to verify whether content has been completed or memorised, but to support **interpretation and integration**.

Repeating digital content during face-to-face sessions reduces time available for reflection and application. Facilitation should instead focus on clarifying meanings when needed, addressing misunderstandings as they emerge, and helping participants relate ESG concepts to **concrete situations in their own enterprises**.

¹ The process of helping learners understand what ESG concepts mean for their own organisation and role, by connecting learning to real situations. Further reading available at: <https://ojs.gsdjournal.it/index.php/gsdj/article/view/1373>; or at: <https://www.einsteinproject.org/science-solutions-1/2025/2/4/student-sense-making-a-path-to-owning-understanding>;

This approach reflects a central principle of ESG4SMEs: learning becomes effective when new concepts are connected to existing practices, constraints, and decision-making processes.

What if participants didn't complete the self-learning modules?

If in doubt: don't try to "catch them up" by repeating the online content. Keep the planned activity and let gaps surface naturally through discussion. Start from what participants bring, clarify terminology only when it blocks the task, and use the face-to-face session for sense-making and application. Point participants back to the relevant modules for follow-up.

Facilitation styles in ESG4SMEs

Within the ESG4SMEs methodology, facilitation is not neutral delivery. Different moments of the training require **different facilitation styles**, depending on participants' familiarity with ESG, their confidence, and the purpose of the activity. These styles are not personal preferences, but **functional responses** to learning needs.

Educators are expected to move between styles consciously, while remaining within the methodological boundaries described in this guide.

Exploratory facilitation is most appropriate at early stages of the course or when working with participants who are unfamiliar or sceptical toward ESG topics. Its purpose is to surface existing practices, assumptions, and concerns without introducing judgement or correction.

In this style, the educator prioritises open questions, invites participants to describe what they already do, and allows different interpretations to emerge. The objective is not to converge on a shared definition, but to help participants recognise that ESG-related issues are already present in their daily activities, even if not labelled as such.

Exploratory facilitation is particularly important before or around the pre-assessment phase. Using a more directive style at this stage risks biasing responses and undermining the diagnostic value of the assessment.

Structuring facilitation becomes more relevant once participants have been exposed to core concepts through the digital modules and begin to work with roles, tasks, and competences.

Structuring facilitation draws primarily on *interpretive* and *participative* facilitation styles, supporting meaning-making and active engagement while providing enough structure to connect discussion to learning.

In this style, the educator actively guides discussion, helps clarify terminology, and supports learners in linking experiences to ESG roles and responsibilities. Structure is introduced not to limit discussion, but to prevent dispersion and ensure that reflection remains connected to the learning objectives.

This style is particularly appropriate when helping participants interpret assessment-related insights.

Action-oriented facilitation is used when the focus shifts toward learning pathways and next steps. Action-oriented facilitation is informed by *delegating* and *participative* facilitation styles, while maintaining clear boundaries to avoid transforming facilitation into consulting or evaluation. Its purpose is to support translation from understanding to feasible action.

Here, the educator helps participants prioritise, reflect on constraints, and identify what is realistic in their specific context. Questions are framed to support decision-making and responsibility, while solutions remain owned by participants.

This style is particularly relevant after post-course assessment, when participants reflect on changes in understanding, confidence, or role orientation.

Across all styles, one principle remains constant: **facilitation supports reflection and readiness, not performance**. Educators should not position answers as *right* or *wrong*, steer participants toward specific roles, or validate particular choices. Doing so would compromise the developmental logic of the course and the integrity of the assessment methodology.

The ability to move between facilitation styles is therefore a key competence for educators delivering ESG4SMEs. It ensures that face-to-face sessions are responsive to participants' needs while remaining fully aligned with the course design.

You can learn more about facilitation styles [here](#).

Adapting facilitation to different levels of readiness

Participants in ESG4SMEs enter the training with different levels of familiarity, confidence, and readiness regarding ESG topics. **Readiness** should not be understood as competence or performance, but as a combination of prior exposure to ESG concepts, confidence in discussing them, and willingness to reflect on roles and responsibilities.

For this reason, facilitation in ESG4SMEs cannot follow a single fixed style. Educators are expected to adapt their facilitation approach to the situation they observe in the group, while remaining within the methodological boundaries of the course.

Three typical situations may occur:

Low readiness: uncertainty or scepticism

Participants may express confusion, scepticism, or a strong focus on constraints. In this situation, facilitation should remain **exploratory**. The educator's role is to create a safe space for discussion, surface existing practices and perceptions and help participants recognise that ESG-related issues already exist in their daily activities, even if not labelled as such.

At this stage, educators should:

- *ask open, descriptive questions;*
- *avoid introducing definitions or "correct" interpretations too early;*
- *refrain from linking discussion to assessment results or roles.*

The objective is recognition and engagement, not clarification or action.

Moderate readiness: operational curiosity

Participants begin to recognise ESG-related issues and ask questions about roles, tasks, or responsibilities. They may seek to understand how concepts relate to their organisation. Here, **structuring facilitation** becomes more appropriate. The educator helps participants organise their reflections, connect experiences to ESG roles, and clarify meanings without taking ownership of solutions.

At this stage, educators should:

- *help participants name and differentiate ESG roles and tasks;*
- *support interpretation of examples and assessment-related insights;*
- *keep discussion focused on learning objectives.*

The objective is understanding and sense-making.

Higher readiness: orientation toward action or leadership

Participants express motivation to act, improve practices, or define next steps. They may show interest in responsibility, coordination, or decision-making. In this case, **action-oriented facilitation** supports prioritisation and reflection on feasibility. The educator helps participants consider what is realistic in their context, while avoiding consulting, evaluation, or solution-giving.

At this stage, educators should:

- *encourage ownership of decisions;*
- *avoid proposing solutions or validating specific choices.*

The objective is readiness for action, not implementation.

In mixed groups, educators may need to move between facilitation styles during the same session. This flexibility is a key facilitation competence within ESG4SMEs and helps ensure that both learning and assessment remain meaningful and unbiased.

What if I choose the wrong facilitation style?

If in doubt: no facilitation style is “wrong” in itself.

What matters is whether it fits the moment and the participants’ readiness. If the discussion feels blocked, confused, or disengaged, shift style rather than pushing harder. When unsure, move back to exploratory facilitation and rebuild from participants’ experience before adding structure or focusing on action.

If you feel tempted to stay with the style you are most comfortable with, pause and check whether it serves the learning moment or your own preference.

3. From facilitation to assessment

Facilitation in ESG4SMEs is closely connected to the assessment methodology described in the following chapter. The way educators facilitate discussions before, during, and after face-to-face sessions directly influences how assessment tools function and how results can be interpreted.

The purpose of facilitation is not to prepare participants to “perform well” in assessments, but to create the conditions for honest reflection and meaningful engagement. When facilitation is exploratory and non-directive, participants are more likely to respond to pre-assessment tools based on their actual situation, rather than perceived expectations.

Similarly, after the learning phase, facilitation supports participants in interpreting post-assessment results as developmental insights, not as evaluations. By reinforcing that ESG roles are not labels or targets, facilitation helps preserve the diagnostic and learning-oriented nature of the assessment framework.

For these reasons, educators should avoid anticipating assessment outcomes, suggesting preferred roles, or framing certain responses as more desirable than others. Instead, facilitation prepares participants to engage with assessment tools as part of a coherent learning process focused on readiness, confidence, and realistic next steps.

The assessment methodology that follows builds on this facilitation logic. Together, facilitation and assessment form a continuous learning cycle that supports understanding, reflection, and progression without judgement.

Assessment Methodology, Tools and Scoring Guide

DISCLAIMER

The assessment tools and scoring logic described in this chapter are provided to ensure **transparency, consistency, and shared understanding** among project partners.

It is important to clarify that:

- **Participants will never be asked to calculate scores or interpret roles themselves.** The scoring logic is for internal use by facilitators and project partners only.
- **Partners are not expected to calculate scores manually during face-to-face sessions.** Wherever technically possible, quizzes will be created using digital tools that include automatic scoring and role calculations.
- In cases where automatic scoring is not feasible, partners will be provided with a **standardised spreadsheet** in which quiz results can be entered. The spreadsheet will automatically calculate Role Orientation Scores, Commitment Scores, Total Role Scores, and dominant/secondary roles.
- The purpose of describing the scoring logic in detail in this document is **not to require partners to perform calculations**, but to make the **reasoning behind role identification and progression explicit and methodologically sound**.

Finally, any identification of dominant or secondary ESG roles should always be understood as an analytical and developmental interpretation, not as a fixed classification or hierarchy. The assessment framework is designed to support learning, confidence-building, and realistic next steps for SMEs, not to label or evaluate them competitively.

1. Overall Assessment Methodology

Purpose

The assessment methodology has been designed to support **learning, orientation, and engagement**, not to test or rank SMEs. Many participating SMEs start from very different situations: some have informal sustainability practices but low awareness, others have interest but little time or confidence, and others already take decisions that clearly fall within ESG logic without using this language.

For this reason, the methodology:

- combines **knowledge, behavioural orientation, and commitment**;
- avoids presenting ESG roles as fixed job titles;
- uses assessment results to **guide learning pathways**, not to exclude participants.

The overall objectives are to:

- understand **baseline ESG knowledge and motivation**;
- identify the **dominant way participants currently approach ESG topics**;
- measure **changes after the training**;
- support SMEs in deciding **realistic next steps**.

Conceptual Framework: ESG Roles as a Learning Progression

Within ESG4SMEs, the three ESG roles (Analyst, Optimizer, Leader) are used as a **pedagogical model**. They describe *how* a person engages with ESG, not their position in the company.

- The **ESG Analyst** focuses on understanding the situation: collecting information, identifying gaps, and ensuring basic compliance.
- The **ESG Optimizer** focuses on action: improving processes, testing solutions, and turning ideas into practice.
- The **ESG Leader** focuses on direction and integration: setting priorities, making decisions, and embedding ESG into business strategy.

These roles form a **developmental sequence**. Progression from one role to another reflects increased confidence, responsibility, and scope of action. However, progression is **not mandatory** and not all SMEs are expected to reach the same stage.

Role	Focus	Typical mindset
ESG Analyst	Understanding & assessing	"I need to understand what is happening first"
ESG Optimizer	Acting & improving	"I want to make things work better in practice"
ESG Leader	Deciding & embedding	"I take responsibility and influence others"

Assessment Moments and Tools

Phase	Tool	Purpose
Pre-pilot	Online quiz (15 min)	Baseline knowledge, commitment, hidden role detection
Self-learning	Modules' quizzes	Learning and reflection
Face-to-face	Observation & discussion	Clarify difficulties and confidence
Post-pilot	Post-quiz + Mapping Exercise	Measure change, readiness, and possible role progression

2. Pre-assessment quiz

Purpose of the pre-assessment

The pre-assessment is a **diagnostic tool**, not an exam. Its purpose is to capture:

- participants' **prior ESG knowledge**;
- their **behavioural orientation** when facing ESG-related issues;
- their level of **commitment and willingness to engage**.

Results will be used internally by partners to:

- identify baseline gaps;
- infer participants' dominant ESG role (Analyst, Optimizer, Leader);
- tailor learning pathways and support.

*Participants **must not** receive scores, role labels, or feedback at this stage, in order to avoid biasing learning behaviour.*

Instructions to Participants

"This short quiz helps us understand your current knowledge and learning needs related to ESG. It is not a test, and there are no right or wrong answers. Your individual results will not be shared. Please answer honestly, based on your current situation."

SECTION A – ESG KNOWLEDGE (OBJECTIVE, SCORED)

These **scored** questions assess basic conceptual understanding of ESG as applied to SMEs. Each question has one correct answer. *See sample questions below.*

Scoring: 1 point per correct answer. Maximum score: 6.

Q1. What does ESG mainly refer to for an SME?

- A. Marketing and branding activities
- B. Environmental, social and governance practices affecting how a business operates**
- C. Corporate social responsibility only
- D. Financial reporting requirements only

Q2. Which activity is most closely linked to the Environmental dimension of ESG?

- A. Staff training on safety
- B. Transparent management decisions
- C. Reducing waste, energy or water use**
- D. Customer communication

Q3. Which activity best represents the Social dimension of ESG?

- A. Financial audits
- B. Workplace safety and fair working conditions**
- C. Energy efficiency
- D. Tax compliance

Q4. Which activity is most related to the Governance dimension?

- A. Waste sorting
- B. Employee wellbeing
- C. Transparent decision-making and compliance**
- D. Equipment maintenance

Q5. Which statement best describes how ESG affects small businesses today?

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- A. ESG only applies to large corporations
- B. ESG is optional and unrelated to regulations
- C. ESG increasingly affects SMEs directly or indirectly**
- D. ESG replaces existing legal obligations

Q6. Why might ESG be relevant even for a very small or rural business?

- A. Because it improves stock market performance
- B. Because it helps manage risks, costs and trust with stakeholders**
- C. Because it is required for all SMEs by law
- D. Because it replaces business strategy

Section B – BEHAVIOURAL ORIENTATION (ROLE INDICATORS, NOT “RIGHT/WRONG”)

These questions explore **how participants typically react** to ESG-related challenges. There are no correct answers. Each option corresponds to a different ESG role. *See sample questions below.*

Q7. When a new sustainability requirement appears, what do you usually do first?

- A. Check what it means and what information is needed → *Analyst*
- B. Try small changes to see what works → *Optimizer*
- C. Decide priorities and assign responsibilities → *Leader*

Q8. If energy costs are rising in your company, what would you most likely focus on?

- A. Analysing bills and consumption data → *Analyst*
- B. Testing efficiency improvements → *Optimizer*
- C. Setting targets and engaging staff → *Leader*

Q9. Which task would you feel most comfortable taking responsibility for?

- A. Collecting and organising ESG-related information → *Analyst*
- B. Improving processes and daily practices → *Optimizer*
- C. Coordinating people and decisions → *Leader*

Q10. When working on new topics like ESG, you prefer to:

- Understand the issue fully before acting → *Analyst*
- Learn by doing and adjusting → *Optimizer*
- Set direction and motivate others → *Leader*

Section C – COMMITMENT AND AGENCY (SCORED)

These statements measure willingness to engage and take responsibility. They are critical to distinguish **knowledge without action** from **readiness to progress**. *See sample questions below.*

Scale: Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Strongly agree

Q11. I am willing to invest time in improving ESG practices in my organisation.

Q12. I feel responsible for how my organisation deals with environmental and social issues.

Q13. I feel comfortable influencing decisions or behaviours related to sustainability.

Q14. I see ESG as relevant to the future of my business.

Scoring guidance provided in Section 4.

3. Post-assessment

Purpose of the post-assessment

The post-assessment is designed to capture **what has changed as a result of the training**, not to judge performance. In particular, it aims to:

- measure **knowledge gains** compared to the pre-assessment;
- assess changes in **commitment, confidence, and agency**;
- verify whether participants have developed a **clearer understanding of ESG roles and tasks**;
- identify possible **progression in ESG role readiness** (e.g. from Analyst to Optimizer).

Unlike the pre-assessment, the post-assessment is also a **learning and reflection moment** for participants and it helps SMEs translate learning into next steps.

Timing and setting

The post-assessment should take place **after** completion of the self-learning online, preferably **during** or **immediately after** the face-to-face sessions, when facilitators can support reflection and clarify doubts.

Recommended sequence during the face-to-face session:

1. Group discussion on difficulties and insights from the online modules;
2. Individual completion of the post-training quiz;
3. Completion of the ESG Role, Task & Competence Mapping exercise;
4. Guided discussion on results and next steps.

Tool 1 – Post-training quiz

The post-training quiz mirrors the pre-assessment in structure and length, in order to allow **direct comparison**:

- Section A: ESG knowledge (objective questions);
- Section B: behavioural orientation (role indicators);
- Section C: commitment and agency.

Questions will be similar in difficulty to the pre-assessment, but they will be rephrased to avoid recall bias. Ideally, questions will be aligned with the content covered / addressed / referenced in Module 3.

Instructions to Participants

“This short quiz helps us understand what you have learned and how confident you now feel about working on ESG topics. It is not an exam. Please answer based on your current understanding, even if changes have not yet been implemented in your company. Your individual results will not be shared.”

What partners should look for

From the post-training quiz, partners can observe:

- increase in correct knowledge answers;
- stronger commitment scores;
- shifts in behavioural preferences toward action or leadership.

These results provide **quantitative evidence of learning outcomes**.

Tool 2 – ESG Role, Task & Competence Mapping exercise

The mapping exercise is used to assess **applied understanding and readiness**. While the quiz measures knowledge and attitudes, the mapping exercise shows whether participants:

- understand concrete ESG tasks;
- can link tasks to competences;
- can realistically identify gaps and responsibilities.

This tool makes the three ESG roles **explicit and tangible**.

Instructions to Participants

“Fill in this exercise based on what you understand now. It is not necessary that your company already does all these things. The goal is to identify what is in place and what would be needed next.”

How to use it during face-to-face sessions

- Participants complete the exercise individually or in small groups;
- Trainers circulate to answer clarification questions;
- Emphasis should be on **reasoning**, not on having “all the boxes ticked”.

Observation and qualitative feedback

During the face-to-face sessions, facilitators are encouraged to observe:

- ease or difficulty in completing the mapping exercise;
- types of questions asked by participants;
- confidence in discussing ESG tasks.

Typical reactions may include:

- “I couldn’t do it” → indicates need to reinforce fundamentals;
- “I did it but realised we have many gaps” → indicates growing awareness;
- “I did it and want to continue” → indicates readiness for deeper engagement.

These observations complement the quiz results and should be briefly documented by partners.

Interpreting post-assessment results

Post-assessment results should always be interpreted **holistically**, rather than by looking at a single indicator in isolation. Partners are expected to combine quantitative elements, such as changes in quiz scores between pre- and post-assessment, with qualitative evidence emerging from shifts in behavioural orientation, results of the *ESG Role, Task & Competence Mapping* exercise, and observations collected during face-to-face sessions.

It is important to recognise that learning and progression can take different forms. Some participants may demonstrate a clear increase in ESG knowledge without an immediate change in their dominant role orientation. Others may show a strong rise in commitment and motivation, even if they still lack full competence or practical experience. In some cases, participants may clearly progress from a mainly analytical approach toward a more action-oriented or leadership-oriented role.

All of these patterns should be considered **valid and positive learning outcomes**. The objective of the post-assessment is not to force role progression, but to capture increased understanding, confidence, and readiness to engage with ESG in a way that is realistic for each SME.

4. Scoring and Role Assignment Guide

Purpose and principles

This section explains how partners should **read, combine, and interpret assessment data** in a consistent way across countries and pilots. The scoring system is intended to support **analysis and decision-making by facilitators and project partners**, not to label or rank participants.

Two guiding principles should always be kept in mind:

- First, **roles are inferred analytically**, not assigned formally to participants. Role profiles are used internally to understand learning needs and progression.
- Second, **no single indicator is sufficient on its own**. Knowledge, behaviour, and commitment must always be read together:

Knowledge scoring (Section A)

Knowledge questions have clearly defined correct answers. Each correct answer scores one point. The absolute score is less important than the **change between pre- and post-assessment**, which indicates learning gain.

Partners should avoid interpreting low pre-assessment scores negatively. In many cases, low scores simply reflect lack of exposure to ESG terminology rather than lack of good practices. For example, a participant moving from a low to a medium score may demonstrate a more meaningful learning outcome than a participant who starts and ends with a high score.

When analysing post-training results, partners should look for:

- overall increase in correct answers;
- improvement on concepts explicitly covered during the training;
- remaining weak areas that may require reinforcement.

Behavioural orientation and role signals (Section B)

Behavioural questions do not have right or wrong answers. Each option corresponds to one of the three ESG roles and provides a **signal of how the participant tends to approach ESG-related challenges**.

For each participant, partners should count how many answers point toward:

- an **Analyst orientation** (understanding, data, assessment);
- an **Optimizer orientation** (action, improvement, experimentation);
- a **Leader orientation** (decision-making, coordination, direction).

The role with the highest number of signals represents the participant's **dominant orientation at that moment**. Secondary signals are equally important, as they often indicate **potential for progression** or mixed profiles.

Role Orientation Scoring

To calculate scores, partners must use a simple counting logic.

For each participant, create three counters:

- *Analyst Role Orientation Score (ROS_A)*
- *Optimizer Role Orientation Score (ROS_O)*
- *Leader Role Orientation Score (ROS_L)*

For **each behavioural question**:

- if the participant selects an Analyst-type answer, add **+1** to ROS_A;
- if the participant selects an Optimizer-type answer, add **+1** to ROS_O;
- if the participant selects a Leader-type answer, add **+1** to ROS_L.

If Section B contains 4 questions, the score range for each role will be from 0 to 4. These scores indicate **behavioural preference only**: they show what the participant *tends to do first*, not whether they are ready to act or lead.

It is normal for participants to have similar scores across roles at this stage. For example, a participant may score 2–1–1, indicating a dominant tendency but also openness to other approaches. Behavioural scores must therefore always be interpreted together with commitment scores before drawing conclusions.

Commitment and agency (Section C)

Commitment questions measure willingness to engage, take responsibility, and influence decisions. This dimension is crucial to distinguish between participants who understand ESG conceptually and those who are ready to act.

Commitment Scoring

Each commitment statement uses a five-point Likert scale, which must be converted into numerical values (from low to high commitment) as follows:

Response	Points
Strongly disagree	0
Disagree	0
Neutral	1
Agree	2
Strongly agree	3

To calculate the **Commitment Score (CS)**, partners simply sum the points obtained across all commitment questions.

Example: if a participant answers four commitment questions with scores 2, 2, 1, and 3, their CS is:

$$CS = 2 + 2 + 1 + 3 = 8$$

To support consistent interpretation across partners and pilots, the Commitment Score (CS) is subsequently interpreted using broad commitment levels. This allows partners to relate individual scores to different degrees of readiness to engage with ESG topics.

Commitment levels are used exclusively for interpretive purposes in combination with behavioural orientation and qualitative observation, and are not communicated as performance thresholds or individual results to participants.

CS Range	Commitment Level	Interpretation
0–5	Low commitment	Limited readiness to engage; ESG mainly understood at a conceptual or observational level
6–10	Moderate commitment	Willingness to engage and experiment, but responsibility and influence may still be emerging
11–15	High commitment	Strong readiness to act, take responsibility, and influence decisions related to ESG

Interpreting results within the ESG Manager Profile framework

After scoring Sections A, B, and C, partners have a baseline diagnostic picture of each participant that includes:

- **ESG knowledge level** (Section A),
- **dominant behavioural orientation** toward ESG issues (Section B),
- **level of commitment and readiness to act** (Section C).

The purpose of the following step is **not to calculate an additional score**, but to **interpret this diagnostic picture** in relation to the ESG Manager profile framework used in ESG4SMEs.

Step 1 - Identify the dominant behavioural role

Using Section B, partners identify the participant's **dominant behavioural orientation** (ESG Analyst, ESG Optimizer, or ESG Leader).

The dominant behavioural role is determined by the **Role Orientation Scores (ROS)** calculated in Section B and corresponds to the role with the **highest number of behavioural signals**.

This role reflects *how the participant typically approaches ESG-related issues* (understanding, acting, or leading), not their seniority, competence, or formal position.

Step 2 - Interpret the level of commitment

The Commitment Score (CS) is used to assess the participant's **readiness to engage and take responsibility**, regardless of behavioural style.

For interpretive purposes, partners may group commitment levels into broad ranges (e.g. low, moderate, high), depending on the distribution of results within the pilot. These ranges are not communicated to participants and are used only to support analysis and learning orientation.

Step 3 - Place the participant within the ESG Manager profile

To place the participant within the **ESG Manager profile framework**, partners should read the **dominant behavioural orientation** together with the **commitment level**, using the matrix below.

The matrix reflects the idea that:

- behavioural orientation describes *how* participants tend to approach ESG issues;
- commitment level describes *how ready* they are to enact this orientation in practice.

Partners should identify the row corresponding to the participant's dominant behavioural orientation and the column corresponding to their commitment level. The resulting cell indicates the participant's **baseline ESG Manager profile**.

This placement is used to understand starting points, support analysis, and guide learning pathways. It is not communicated to participants as a fixed or prescriptive label.

	Low Commitment Level	Moderate Commitment Level	High Commitment Level
Dominant ROS_A	ESG Analyst	ESG Analyst	ESG Analyst
Dominant ROS_O	ESG Analyst	ESG Optimizer	ESG Optimizer
Dominant ROS_L	ESG Optimizer	ESG Optimizer / Leader*	ESG Leader

* When a participant shows a **Leader behavioural orientation** and a **moderate commitment level**, partners should look more closely at the **upper range of the Commitment Score** and at **qualitative signals** (e.g. confidence in taking responsibility, influencing decisions, or coordinating others).

If the Commitment Score is **toward the higher end of the moderate range**, and/or if behavioural role signals are **close or mixed** (for example, when Leader and Optimizer orientations are not clearly separated), the **ESG Leader profile may already be considered**.

The same principle — reading behavioural orientation together with the *strength* of commitment — may be applied **more generally, with discretion**, when interpreting ESG Manager profile placement. In all other cases, the matrix should be applied as shown.

After the post-assessment, this reading may also take into account observations and other evidence collected during the pilot.

Interpreting changes between pre- and post-pilot assessment

Role progression between pre- and post-assessment should be evaluated by comparing:

- changes in **behavioural orientation** (Section B),
- changes in **commitment level** (Section C),
- and the resulting **ESG Manager profile placement**, as determined using the placement matrix.

Meaningful progression may include:

1. **Increased commitment within the same behavioural orientation**, indicating stronger readiness to act, even where ESG Manager profile placement remains unchanged.
2. **Shift in dominant behavioural orientation** (e.g. Analyst → Optimizer), indicating a change in how the participant approaches ESG issues.
3. **Combined behavioural and commitment change**, resulting in movement toward a higher ESG Manager profile (e.g. Analyst → Optimizer, Optimizer → Leader).

Smaller variations **that do not result in a change in ESG Manager profile placement** should be interpreted as early-stage development or **consolidation**, rather than definitive role change.

The objective of this interpretation is **not to force linear progression**, but to capture increased understanding, engagement, and readiness to take responsibility in a realistic and context-sensitive way.

5. Using results to guide learning pathways

Assessment results are intended to support **tailored learning recommendations**, not generic advice or fixed progression paths. All learners complete **Module 3 - ESG Strategy Implementation for Rural SMEs** as a shared baseline before face-to-face sessions.

Following this, partners are encouraged to combine:

- identified **knowledge gaps**,
- feedback, doubts, or expressed desire to act,
- and observed **role inclinations** (Analyst, Optimizer, Leader),

to suggest additional modules that help learners **strengthen missing knowledge** and **progress toward a complete ESG Manager profile**, which includes analytical, operational, and leadership capacities.

Depending on individual needs, this may involve:

- strengthening **conceptual understanding and regulatory framing** (Module 1);
- reinforcing **data literacy and evidence-based analysis** (Module 2);
- developing **monitoring, reporting, and accountability practices** (Module 4);
- building **strategic planning and leadership capacities** (Module 5);
- enhancing the **adaptation of ESG strategies to local and rural contexts** (Module 6).

The ultimate objective of this scoring and interpretation process is to help SMEs take **realistic, confidence-based next steps** in their ESG journey.

If in doubt

- *If assessment results show gaps in basic ESG concepts or regulatory requirements that affect their business, suggest revisiting **Module 1 - Introduction to ESG Principles in Rural Context**, regardless of role inclination.*
- *If learners struggle to work with data, indicators, or evidence when discussing ESG decisions in their organisation, suggest **Module 2 - ESG Data Analysis for Rural SMEs** to strengthen analytical confidence.*
- *If learners are mainly involved in implementing ESG actions in their organisation but find it difficult to prioritise them, explain their business relevance, or connect them to longer-term goals, suggest **Module 5 – ESG Strategic Planning and Leadership** to support integration and prioritisation.*
- *If learners contribute to ESG-related decisions or coordination but feel uncertain about how to track progress, demonstrate results, or report on outcomes, suggest **Module 4 – Monitoring and Reporting on ESG Performance**.*
- *If learners show strong engagement but struggle to adapt ESG practices to the local, territorial, or community context in which their organisation operates, suggest **Module 6 - Adapting ESG Strategies to Local Contexts**.*

Learning pathways may combine several modules. For example:

- *A learner who is highly motivated to act but lacks a clear understanding of ESG fundamentals may benefit from combining **Module 1** and **Module 3**, followed by **Module 4** to track progress.*
- *A learner who is confident in implementing actions but struggles to prioritise or justify them at decision level may benefit from combining **Module 5** with **Module 4**.*
- *A learner who understands ESG concepts but feels insecure when working with data and indicators may benefit from combining **Module 2** with **Module 4**.*
- *A learner who shows strong engagement but works in a highly context-specific rural environment may benefit from combining **Module 6** with either **Module 3** or **Module 5**, depending on their role and responsibilities.*

*The recommended learning pathways should be framed as opportunities to **address gaps, respond to interests, and progressively complete the ESG Manager profile**, which includes analytical, operational, and leadership dimensions.*

Using face-to-face sessions to support learning

1. Purpose of the face-to-face sessions

The face-to-face session is a **key integration moment** in the ESG4SMEs pilot. It takes place **after** participants have completed the online self-learning activities. They are not designed to replace online learning or to repeat content that learners have already studied independently.

The face-to-face session is a space for **interpretation and application (sense-making)**, where learners connect what they learned online to their own SME context, compare experiences with others, and explore how ESG concepts translate into real situations. Learning in the face-to-face session can take place through facilitated discussion as well as through **practical or experiential activities**, such as simulations, that allow learners to test ideas and reflect on outcomes.

At the same time, the face-to-face session is **not** a moment for frontal teaching, consultancy-style advice, or evaluation. Partners are not expected to explain modules, provide ready-made solutions, or correct every misunderstanding as it arises. Instead, the focus is on facilitating interaction, reflection, and shared learning, helping learners build confidence and clarity before taking next steps.

2. Choosing a session structure

There is no single correct structure for a 90-minute face-to-face session. Partners may organise the face-to-face session in different formats, depending on context and availability.

The **methodological logic remains the same**. The choice of structure depends on:

- what learners bring after Module 3;
- signals emerging from discussion and activities;
- the type of support learners need at that moment.

One-to-one sessions (approx. 30 minutes per SME)

This format is recommended when:

- SMEs are very heterogeneous in size, sector, or readiness;
- sensitive organisational issues are expected;
- time constraints require short, focused interactions.

The individual format allows for deeper exploration of each participant's context, while still respecting the non-consultative nature of the session.

Group session (60–90 minutes, up to 3 SMEs)

This format is recommended when:

- SMEs are at comparable stages;
- peer learning and exchange are valuable;
- partners want to encourage comparison of experiences.

In group sessions, facilitators should actively manage time and ensure that discussion remains balanced and focused on learning rather than problem-solving.

3. The facilitation flow of the face-to-face session

Regardless of format, the face-to-face session should be structured around **four core blocks**. These blocks provide a clear rhythm and help facilitators stay within scope.

Block 1 – Reframing the learning journey

Purpose

To reconnect participants with the overall logic of the course and clarify the role of the face-to-face session within the pilot.

How to cover this block

Keep this part short and shared. For example, you can cover this block by doing a 1–2 minute “orientation check”.

- Ask participants: *“In one sentence, what is the purpose of today’s session?”*
- Then clarify (briefly): this is a practical integration moment after Module 3, not a lecture, and the goal is to identify needs and orient next steps.

Reinforce that:

- there is no “right” level to start from;
- the ESG Manager profile includes analytical, operational, and leadership dimensions;
- learning pathways are flexible and individual.

What not to do

- Do not re-explain ESG concepts.
- Do not justify the methodology at length.
- Do not position the session as an evaluation moment.

If in doubt: *Keep this block short. Its role is orientation, not instruction.*

Block 2 – Reflecting on the Module 3 experience

Purpose

To surface what learners found difficult, what they want to improve, and what they are motivated to work on through discussion and **guided practical work**.

This is the central reflective moment of the session.

How this block starts

Invite participants to reflect on:

- what felt easy or difficult to understand during the Module;
- what they tried to do in the mission;
- what surprised them.

Expected reactions

Based on pilot design, facilitators can expect three typical responses:

- *“I couldn’t really do it.”*
- *“I did it, but it was harder than expected.”*
- *“I did it and want to continue.”*

All three are equally valid starting points.

At this point, use exploratory and structuring facilitation to:

- surface gaps naturally;
- connect experience to organisational reality;
- avoid judgement or correction.

You could do this through one of the activities and exercises included in the Modules or through a new activity, such as the following activity:

What blocked me / what helped me

Step-by-step

1. Ask each participant think back to their experience with Module 3 (or other) and the mission. Then ask them answer two short questions in writing:
 - *What made this difficult for me?*
 - *What helped me move forward, even a little?*

If participants hesitate or ask *“what do you mean by difficult?”*, you could say:

“Anything that slowed you down, made you unsure, or made you stop.”

If they ask *“is this about ESG knowledge?”*, you can explain that:

“It can be about knowledge, organisation, time, roles or whatever felt relevant to you”

If someone says *“nothing helped”* or *“everything was difficult”*, that is acceptable. Ask them to write that.

2. Ask each participant to look at what they wrote and roughly separate their answers into two groups:

- things related to **knowledge or understanding**
- things related to **organisation, roles, time, or context**

Do not introduce new labels or theory. The goal is to help participants see patterns, not categories.

You do not need perfect classification. If participants are unsure where to put something, say: *“Just place it where it feels closest... this is not a test.”*

3. **In group sessions**, ask each participant to share one difficulty and one thing that helped. **In one-to-one sessions**, ask the participant ask the same question.

4. Repeat what you heard using neutral language. Do not add causes, blame, or advice.

“So, what made this difficult was [not knowing where to start].”

“What helped was [having some internal information already available].”

“[Time constraints] seem to have played a role.”

If participants compare themselves to others, explain:

“Different experiences are expected. There’s no benchmark here.”

If participants ask *“what should we do instead?”*, say:

“We’ll come back to next steps later. For now, we’re just understanding what happened.”

What you do as facilitator

- You **do not** help them overcome the difficulty.
- You **do not** explain what should have been done.
- You use what emerges only to:
 - make gaps visible,
 - connect experience to organisational reality,
 - prepare the ground for later orientation.

If in doubt: *This block is not about doing Module 3 “well”. If gaps, confusion, or frustration emerge, the block is doing its job.*

Block 3 – Post-assessment and observation

Purpose

This block connects the reflective discussion with the **assessment logic described in Chapter 2**. Its purpose is to consolidate assessment signals and observe how participants reason about ESG in practice, without evaluating or judging.

How this block starts

Before starting the post-assessment, briefly connect it to what emerged in the previous discussion. For example, you can say:

“Earlier, you shared what felt difficult, what helped, and what you might want to work on next. The quiz we’ll do now helps us capture this more clearly and consistently. It’s not a test and it’s not about right or wrong answers. It’s simply a way to make visible where you are now, after working on Module 3.”

If participants ask questions or express concern, repeat the key message:

“This assessment is a mirror, not a verdict.”

Then proceed directly with the post-assessment tools.

What happens next

- Participants complete post-assessment tools (survey, mapping exercise, or equivalent).
- Facilitators observe:
 - confidence in using ESG language;
 - ability to reason about actions and choices;
 - clarity about roles and responsibilities.

What not to do

- Do not interpret scores aloud.
- Do not label participants with roles.
- Do not draw conclusions prematurely.

If in doubt: *Observe, don't interpret. This block is about collecting signals, not explaining results.*

Block 4 – Co-defining next learning steps

To translate reflection and assessment into **personalised learning orientation**, without prescribing a fixed pathway or giving advice. It's not about deciding *what participants should do*, but about helping them see which learning options may be relevant given their current position

What to do

In this block, combine **three sources of information** that are already available:

- **Insights from Module 3**, as reported by participants (e.g. what felt difficult, unclear, or motivating);
- **Assessment and observation signals** from Block 3 (e.g. confidence with concepts, data, roles, responsibilities);
- **Participant interests, doubts, and constraints** (e.g. time, role in the organisation, immediate priorities).

Use these elements together to orient learning, not to evaluate readiness or performance.

How to run this block

1. Start by making the purpose explicit. You could say something like:
"Based on what you shared earlier and what emerged in the assessment, we'll now look at which parts of the course could be most useful for you."
2. Clearly link every suggestion in something concrete that already emerged, for example:
 - a difficulty mentioned in Block 2;
 - an uncertainty observed during assessment;
 - a gap made visible in roles or responsibilities.

Avoid abstract or generic recommendations.

3. Use the **"If in doubt"** box from Chapter 2 as your reference to:
 - identify relevant modules;
 - suggest one or two options, not many;
 - propose combinations only when they clearly respond to different needs.
4. Invite, don't assign. Frame all suggestions as options to explore, and always leave the choice with the participant.

Suggested language

- *"Based on what you found difficult, you might want to look at..."*
- *"If you want to strengthen this aspect of your role..."*
- *"To balance this part of your profile..."*

What not to do

- Do not imply progression or hierarchy.
- Do not overload participants with options.

If in doubt: *Suggest fewer modules rather than more. Depth matters more than coverage.*

Adapting the four blocks to different formats and durations

The four blocks described above represent the **core structure** of the face-to-face session and should always be covered, regardless of format. What changes between one-to-one and group sessions is **the depth, timing, and use of activities**, not the underlying logic.

One-to-one sessions (approx. 30 minutes per SME)

In one-to-one sessions, the four blocks should be covered **in a compact and focused way**, with emphasis on **diagnostic observation and targeted reflection**.

- **Blocks 1 and 4** should be kept short and highly focused (orientation and next steps).
- **Blocks 2 and 3** can be merged or partially overlapped, using a **single practical artefact** (e.g. one table or mission output) as both:
 - a reflection trigger on Module 3, and
 - an observation tool for post-assessment.

In this format, facilitators are encouraged to:

- work with **one concrete output** produced by the participant;
- ask a limited number of clarifying questions;
- suggest **one or two modules at most** as possible next steps.

The goal is not completeness, but **clarity and orientation**.

Group sessions (60–90 minutes, up to 3 SMEs)

In group sessions, the four blocks can be covered **more distinctly**, allowing time for **peer comparison, discussion, and shared sense-making**.

- **Block 1** can include a short round of expectations or initial reactions.
- **Block 2** should be the most substantial part of the session, using practical activities to compare experiences with Module 3.
- **Block 3** can combine individual post-assessment moments with short plenary reflections.
- **Block 4** should highlight that **different SMEs may be directed toward different learning pathways**, reinforcing the non-linear nature of the course.

In this format, facilitators should:

- actively manage time and participation;
- avoid turning discussions into problem-solving sessions;
- use differences between SMEs as learning inputs.

THANK YOU!



PARTNERS:

