

WP2 - ESG trainer profile

R2.3 - Report on activities which summarizes the activities undertaken in WP2 and the results achieved.

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Introduction

Work package 2 represents a critical initial stage in the GreenChambers project, focused on developing a competence profile and learning pathway for training staff from the partner Chambers as ESG (environmental, social, governance) strategies trainers.

The main aims of WP2 is to reach a common understanding among partners on the key ESG concepts and competences to be addressed in the project, involve relevant target groups in identifying competences needed by ESG trainers, develop a document clearly describing the required knowledge, skills and competences to effectively take on the role of ESG trainer and provide quality training to SMEs, and outline the learning process and training structure needed for Chambers staff to gain ESG trainer expertise.

This report informs about the activities carried out with this purpose, and the outcomes obtained thanks to them.

Activities

A2.1 Partner seminar on ESG competences

This two-day working seminar on ESG competences was held in Dublin, Ireland on February 22-23, 2023. The seminar took place at the Dublin Chamber of Commerce premises and brought together all the project partners from Spain, Slovenia, Cyprus, Malta, Poland, and Ireland.

On Day 1 of the seminar, partners participated in various activities led by Omnia to build knowledge on ESG competencies. This included presentations, workshops, and group activities, covering a variety of key topics (Climate change facts, UN Sustainable Development Goals, Circular economy and bioeconomy, CSR vs ESG, ESG frameworks and standards, ESG reporting). There were also open microphone sessions where partners shared good practices.

On Day 2 focused more on defining the ideal profile and skills of an ESG trainer. The seminar aimed to align partners on ESG concepts and begin mapping out an ESG trainer profile and learning pathway for the Green Chambers curriculum. Having representatives from chambers across Europe share diverse perspectives helped to shape the training content and approach. Activities also included defining the workflow for the project.

Overall, this activity was a collaborative working session to start integrating ESG competencies into the vocational education programs of the partner chambers. The seminar brought together researchers from all partner organisations to align key ESG concepts and competences, it allowed for a common understanding for the development of the results, and its outputs informed the next steps of the curriculum design process.

A2.2 Focus groups

The activities organized across the partner countries exhibited a diversity of approaches. Slovenia conducted both online focus groups, engaging internal trainers and SME representatives, while Ireland conducted interviews with trainers and SMEs. Malta held two online focus groups, one with key staff members and another with sustainability-focused business representatives. In Poland, a single comprehensive online focus group included both ESG trainers and SME representatives from diverse sectors. Cyprus organized a focused online session with representatives from SMEs specializing in environmental engineering, consultancy for food sector companies, and creative industries. In Spain, two separate online focus groups involved technicians from various Spanish Chambers in one, and representatives of SMEs operating in diverse sectors in the other, collectively offering a well-rounded perspective on ESG-related topics. These activities showcased a thoughtful blend of participant profiles, varying formats, and geographical contexts, providing a comprehensive understanding of ESG readiness and training needs.

The objective was to gain their perspectives on the ESG competencies needed and the ideal training approaches. These activities provided very valuable information to determine the required ESG trainers profiles.

A2.3 Development of the competency profile and learning pathway

Based on partners' preliminary research and the results of focus groups the partners mapped out the competencies of the ideal ESG trainer profile, to outline required expertise so chambers can develop skilled ESG trainers. The analysis sought to cover different categories of the profile that were previously listed and defined: Knowledge, skills, soft skills, technical competencies, entrepreneurial competencies, work experience, education and background, awards, recognition, and professional membership, and training methods.

In parallel to the profile development, partners designed a learning pathway for ESG trainers based on the competency profile and the results of the focus groups.

In summary, both activities were based on detailed input from end-users and underwent an iterative development process by the partners to ensure a robust trainer profile and learning pathway. This laid a solid foundation for the next phase of training programme development.

A2.4 Validation process

In the final stage of the development of WP2, a validation process was carried out. A double panel of internal and external experts reviewed the reports R2.1 ESG trainer competence profile and R2.2 Learning pathway.

This validation process was not a technical objective of the work package, but had a cross-cutting objective of quality, durability and usability.

Activities for the validation of Competence Profile

Two distinct evaluation activities were conducted to gauge the development of the Competence Profile for ESG trainers.

For an internal validation, the approach involved surveying two staff members from each partner organization, leading to a total of 14 responses. The purpose of this survey was to scrutinize and confirm the efficacy of the various activities undertaken to craft the ESG trainer profile. It sought to assess not only the usefulness of each development activity but also the individual sections of the trainer profile and the overall structure, format, and design.

For the external validation of the Competence Profile, feedback was sought from experts affiliated with chambers, including sustainability experts. A total of four expert responses were collected in this phase. The aim of this external perspective was to assess if the competence profile met the requirements and standards of field experts, aligning with best practices.

Activities for the validation of Learning Pathway

The evaluation of the Learning Pathway for ESG trainers also consisted of two key activities: an internal assessment involving 14 survey responses from two staff members of each partner organization to validate sections, module quality, and overall structure, and an external evaluation that garnered feedback from four experts in chambers, including sustainability experts, to provide an expert perspective on the learning pathway's sections, module quality, and overall design.

Outcomes

Focus groups

The outcomes of the focus group activities yielded valuable insights and perspectives on several key themes. First, regarding the readiness of SMEs to operate with ESG concepts, it became evident that SMEs are at an early stage, with some basic awareness but also grappling with numerous competing priorities and resource limitations. Trainers expressed concerns about SMEs' apprehension toward change and the potential impact on their revenues. Both SMEs and trainers uniformly recognized the formidable challenge that SMEs face compared to larger corporations in embracing ESG principles. On the topic of skills needed and desired training, trainers identified various training needs, including financial literacy, critical thinking, and technical competencies, emphasizing the need for customized training based on sector and company size. Meanwhile, SMEs expressed a desire for comprehensive training across the ESG spectrum, including sustainable finances and technologies. The desired skills and competencies for ESG trainers ranged from technical knowledge to entrepreneurial competencies and transversal skills, showcasing the interdisciplinary nature of the role. While both trainers and SMEs agreed on the importance of a business experience for trainers, they differed on the relevance of awards and recognition, emphasizing the value of practical experience. In terms of teaching methods, trainers suggested a combination of online and face-to-face training, with an emphasis on motivation through best practices. SMEs, on the other hand, preferred practical, on-site training that allows cross-hierarchy interaction and focuses on real-world opportunities. These outcomes underscore the evolving landscape of ESG readiness among SMEs and the multifaceted needs of both SMEs and

trainers as they navigate the sustainability domain, highlighting the importance of practical, tailored, and interactive training methods.

The focus groups provided useful insights from end-users that informed development of the trainer profile and learning pathway.

A specific focus groups report was produced.

Competency profile and learning pathway

Based on the results of the previous activities, documents detailing the competencies needed for the ESG trainer and a schematic learning pathway were developed.

For the ESG trainer profile it was produced a comprehensive description of the ideal knowledge, skills, competencies, experience and teaching methods an ESG trainer should possess in order to deliver high quality training. The profile outlined the technical expertise required across areas like ESG frameworks, measurement, reporting and risk management as well as critical soft skills such as communication, empathy and strategic thinking. This profile gives chambers a clear understanding of the multi-dimensional capabilities needed to be an effective ESG trainer and a benchmark to aim for when recruiting and developing skilled professionals in this emerging field. The profile also enabled partners to align on the key competencies that are foundational for impactful ESG training delivery.

A specific report, R2.1 ESG trainer competency profile, was produced. This report describes in detail the areas of knowledge and competencies that the trainer should have in order to provide quality training in ESG strategies to SMEs.

Complementing the trainer profile, the learning pathway mapped out a structure and sequencing of learning content to progressively build the identified competencies. The pathway outlined core training modules moving from introductory concepts to advanced ESG strategies across seven main topics. This high-level curriculum map provides chambers with a model to design comprehensive ESG training programs tailored to their specific trainer needs. It allows trainers to acquire knowledge and skills in a logical progression from foundation.

A specific report, R2.2 Learning pathway, was produced. This report sets out the structure and contents that the training course should have, the expected learning outcomes and tentative duration.

Together the trainer profile and learning pathway give chambers and partners a roadmap and common reference point as they move forward in creating skilled ESG trainers that can effectively advise and assist SMEs with integrating sustainability and ESG into their business strategies and operations.

Validation process outcomes

All data collected through the internal and external surveys were analysed by Omnia, the partner responsible for this activity, and different reports were produced on the internal and external evaluations of both documents, the ESG trainer competence profile and the learning pathway.

Validation outcomes of Competence Profile

The evaluation of the Competence Profile for ESG trainers yielded consistent results in both internal and external assessments. Internally, the data demonstrated that the ESG trainer profile met the partnership's expectations, with partners expressing high satisfaction at each assessment level. This internal validation affirmed the ESG trainer profile's significance in shaping the GreenChambers project's learning pathway. External validation, involving experts, also showed maximum satisfaction levels, ensuring external validity and alignment with industry standards. The combined internal and external assessments revealed congruence, with the experts' feedback enriching the document's quality. Based on this combined input, the partnership agreed to make minor improvements, incorporating expert perspectives to finalize the ESG trainer profile document.

Validation outcomes of Learning Pathway

The evaluation of the Learning Pathway for ESG trainers produced congruent results in both internal and external assessments. Internally, the data showed that the pathway met the partnership's expectations, with partners expressing high satisfaction levels regarding module quality and the pathway's structure. Externally, experts also indicated their maximum satisfaction with these aspects. This alignment between internal and external evaluations affirmed the pathway's quality. It underscores the importance of involving both partners and experts to ensure that the training materials align with industry standards and best practices.

Summary of conclusions

Through focus groups with trainers and SMEs, the partners gained valuable insights into the ESG competencies trainers need to effectively advise companies on sustainability. It became clear that there was a gap in basic knowledge on ESG concepts that trainers would need to address. To fill this gap, a broad skill set encompassing technical knowledge, business acumen and interpersonal skills would be required.

These findings formed the basis for the development of a comprehensive trainer profile outlining the ideal knowledge, skills, experience and pedagogical capabilities that an ESG trainer should possess. This profile provides chambers with a benchmark to aspire to when recruiting and developing qualified professionals in this emerging field. It also allowed partners to align on the multidimensional competencies that are vital for effective ESG training.

The partners then mapped out a modular learning pathway to guide trainers on how to progressively develop the identified competencies through practical training. The pathway outlines core training topics ranging from basic ESG concepts to advanced integration strategies. This creates a structure for chambers to design tailor-made programmes that ensure continuity in the development of full ESG trainers.

In summary, WP2 provided two key outputs - the trainer profile and the learning pathway - that offer chambers a roadmap for cultivating qualified ESG trainers ready to assist SMEs. The activities underlined the need for trainers to have broad technical and social competences to support companies

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on their sustainability journey. The results lay the groundwork for the development of an ESG training curriculum and resources to strengthen the capacity of chambers in this critical area.

As ensured by the final validation process, the documents and agreements generated in WP2 will serve as crucial inputs for the next phase of training content development and deployment. Overall, the finalisation of this work package represented an essential step forward in equipping Chambers with the necessary knowledge to provide quality ESG support and guidance to SMEs.