

GREEN LEADER & GREEN WORK COMPETENCES

THE PROFESSIONAL PROFILE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GREEN LEADER AND THE FUTURE GREEN DIVISION

GREENLEAD

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Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving European business landscape, the green transition is no longer a matter of choice—it is a strategic necessity. Climate change, resource scarcity, regulatory pressures, and shifting consumer expectations are transforming the way businesses operate. For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which represent over 99% of all businesses in the EU and account for more than 60% of total employment, this transition carries both challenges and opportunities.

SMEs are both the backbone of the European economy and key players in achieving the goals of the European Green Deal, particularly the target of making Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. Yet, many SMEs struggle to adapt. According to the European Commission, only 24% of SMEs have taken tangible steps toward sustainability, and even fewer have embedded it into their core business strategy. Common obstacles include limited financial and human resources, lack of technical knowledge (in green innovation, environmental compliance and circular economy), and insufficient access to green innovation and digital tools.

To address these barriers, there is a growing need for a new type of 'specialized leadership' within SMEs — leaders or professionals who can who can bridge the gap between sustainability goals and business operations from the inside, helping the SME to transition toward greener, more digital, and socially responsible business models. These individuals must possess a mix of green, technical, and soft skills to navigate regulatory requirements, engage stakeholders, and embed sustainability into everyday decision-making processes.

This paper introduces the **Green Leader** profile—a new professional role designed specifically to support sustainability leadership within SMEs. It also proposes the establishment of a **Green Division** within SMEs: a flexible, cross-functional unit, which may be informal or formal, led by a Green Leader or a team of sustainability-minded staff. The document also presents a **Green Leader Competence Framework**, outlining the key knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for professionals to lead effective green transitions within organizations of all sectors and sizes. The framework reflects the realities of today's corporate sustainability landscape and anticipates future demands in which, the Green Leaders will become a cornerstone of SME resilience, competitiveness, and environmental responsibility in Europe's evolving green economy.

Rather than creating a separate role restricted to top management or sustainability departments, the Green Leader can emerge from any function—be it operations, HR, logistics, or administration—provided there is willingness to lead change. This democratized approach to leadership ensures that green transformation becomes embedded in the culture of the SME.

As demonstrated by recent studies, while sustainability may seem resource-intensive at first, sustainable practices not only bring benefits to the environment—they also drive long-term business resilience. SMEs that embrace green practices often experience reduced operational costs (e.g., energy, materials), increased access to green financing and grants, stronger brand loyalty, improved market positioning with

customers increasingly prioritizing sustainability and improved compliance with emerging EU regulations such as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD).

The transition to a green economy requires leadership at every level. By empowering employees to take ownership of sustainability initiatives, SMEs can become more agile, innovative, and competitive. Green Leaders help drive this transformation by embedding sustainability into daily operations and decision-making—ensuring that sustainability is not an add-on, but a core part of how business is done.

By presenting the Green Leader profile and the vision for a Green Division, this paper contributes to the broader policy and industry conversation around making sustainability actionable, inclusive, and strategic for Europe's SMEs.

Executive Summary - Green Leader at a glance

The transition to a green economy requires leadership at every level. By empowering employees to take ownership of sustainability initiatives, SMEs can become more agile, innovative, and competitive. Green Leaders help drive this transformation by embedding sustainability into daily operations and decision-making—ensuring that sustainability is not an add-on, but a core part of how business is done.

Who is a Green Leader?

A **Green Leader** is an employee—regardless of their title or department—who guides their SME towards more environmentally responsible and sustainable practices across department. They are not necessarily sustainability experts but individuals with the drive and capacity to lead change from within.

What do Green Leaders do?

(1) Promote eco-friendly behaviors across teams and departments

(2) Identify opportunities to reduce energy use, waste, emissions, and costs

(3) Coordinate or support green projects, no matter how small

(4) Ensure compliance with new sustainability regulations (e.g., CSRD, EU Taxonomy)

(5) Act as internal champions of the circular economy, eco-innovation, and climate resilience

What skills and knowledge do they need?

(1) Basic understanding of environmental impacts and sustainability principles

(2) Ability to motivate and engage peers across the organization

(3) Familiarity with digital tools for tracking emissions, energy usage, waste or sustainability metrics

(4) Project coordination skills and a proactive, solution-oriented mindset

(5) Communication and collaboration skills to work across functions and teams

(6) Willingness to lead change even without a formal role

Who can become a Green Leader?

The Green Leader role is open to **anyone in the company** willing to learn and take initiative—be it a logistics coordinator, HR assistant, procurement officer, junior technician, or office administrator. What matters most is a mindset of responsibility, collaboration, and action.

Chapter 1: Green Leadership

1.1. THE TRANSITION TOWARDS GREEN(ER) LEADERSHIP

Until the 1970s, traditional development theories primarily emphasized economic growth, with leadership focused predominantly on profit maximization (K. Piwowar-Sulej, Q. Iqbal, 2022). However, in recent decades, business leaders have shifted their attention towards finding a good balance between achieving profits and integrating the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental considerations (M.S. Correia, 2019). This evolution in the business philosophy reflects growing awareness of the interconnectedness of long-term business success with environmental stewardship, social responsibility and the necessity for a more holistic approach to development as a whole (Rizwan Ullah Khan, 2023).

This, has been a result of the mounting pressure which today's enterprises face from diverse stakeholders — consumers, investors, regulatory bodies and society as whole—to mitigate adverse environmental impacts (Rizwan Ullah Khan, 2023) which, on the other hand, has led to the incorporation of robust environmental management practices into companies' routine operations, such as green operations, green marketing, including green accounting.

1.1.1. The role of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting directive (CSRD)

On December 16th, 2022, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) was published in the Official Journal of the European Union. This came with the need for the directive to be transposed into national laws in the EU member states within a period of 18 months (Jörg Plass, 2023).

The directive itself increased the requirements for corporate sustainability reports, pushing all large companies[1] in Europe or a total of 50,000 large-size enterprises towards greater transparency regarding their sustainability practices, performance and **impacts** (Jörg Plass, 2023).

This regulatory push has led to significant advancements in sustainability practices among large firms in the EU while SMEs, and especially micro-enterprises were excluded from the responsibility, and with that from the pressure to thrive. For instance, the Financial Times' list "Europe's Climate Leaders 2025" highlights a number of companies that have managed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions intensity as a result (Financial Times, 2025).

While large companies in Europe are leading the charge in green leadership, supported by robust regulatory frameworks like the CSRD, SMEs are gradually embracing sustainability, aided by tailored reporting standards and support mechanisms. Continued efforts to provide resources and incentives will be crucial in empowering SMEs to fully integrate green practices into their operations.

[1] A "large company" in this sense is defined as one that meets at least two of the following criteria: +250 employees, +40 million net sales, +20 million Balance sheet total.

Recognizing the importance of the Directive, the EU has extended CSRD's scope, including a listed number of SMEs which from 2026 will report on sustainability matters (European Commission). To facilitate this transition, the European Financial Reporting Advisory Group (EFRAG) has developed proportionate sustainability reporting standards tailored for SMEs which aim to balance the need for transparency on sustainability practices and performance with the capacity constraints of smaller businesses (Green Forum, 2024).

1.1.2. What drives the Green Leadership

Despite the many challenges SMEs face, such as limited resources and expertise to implement comprehensive sustainability strategies, studies indicate that SMEs are more likely to engage in sustainability practices when driven by supply chain pressures or potential cost savings rather than by regulatory compliance (Ismail Juma Ismail, 2024).

Research published in SAGE Open, on the other hand highlights the **positive relationship between environmental or green leadership and company's overall performance**. The particular research emphasizes that proactive environmental strategies set by leaders dedicated to setting environmentally-friendly practices can lead to improved financial outcomes (SAGE Journals, 2020).

Additionally, the World Economic Forum emphasizes that embedding sustainability in corporate strategy is essential to meet the evolving investor pressure, consumer demand, and regulatory requirements (World Economic Forum, 2022).

1.2. THE CONCEPT OF GREEN LEADERSHIP

To respond effectively to the changing climate with new regulations, policy changes, consumer behaviour, technological shifts, and changes in the business environment, companies, including SMEs increasingly require **dedicated leadership** consisting of professionals capable of designing, managing, and accelerating sustainable practices from within (Rizwan Ullah Khan, 2023). Such a form of leadership is also required as a means to achieve good environmental performance and is connected to the growing need for **implementation of green leadership and environmental knowledge sharing in the workplace** (Rizwan Ullah Khan, 2023).

1.2.1. What is Green Leadership?

Green leadership is considered a very important concept in terms of sustainable development (Lusiani, M, 2020). It is defined as **a type of leadership or a leadership style that contributes to the shaping of employees' green behaviour and the green behaviour of all other stakeholders** so 'to create services and products in accordance with environmentally friendly policies' (M.C. Davis, 2020). In another description, green leadership is presented as a leadership style that helps to create products and services and to manage the management of the business organization by protecting the natural environment (Rizwan Ullah Khan, 2023).

What is most important is that employees in companies that integrate green leadership practices are considered 'inclined to invest more resources in environmentally friendly outcomes', and also, 'receive greater support from their leaders, termed as green leaders' (Rizwan Ullah Khan, 2023). Considering the critical role of leadership in encouraging employees to participate in the business's environmental initiatives without harming the natural environment, green leadership can be also defined as the '**ability of the leaders to influence individuals and organizations to realize a vision of long-term ecological sustainability**' (C.P. Egri, S. Herman, 2000).

1.2.2. Why do companies need Green Leadership?

Green or environmental leadership encourages various green activities within the company. It inspires green innovation, creativity, capacity enhancement and much more (Aftab et al., 2022a). It is considered that green leaders or green leadership better understand the need for environmental management, and through ecological and environmental knowledge sharing practices within the companies they enhance eco-friendly production processes and are more committed to organizational change to achieve sustainable performance (Rizwan Ullah Khan, 2023).

1.2.3. What is the Green Division?

To effectively implement and scale the green and sustainability efforts, many companies—particularly SMEs—are establishing **green departments or** also known as **green divisions.** The green divisions are actually "**green teams**" which gather a team of employees that follow some proven best green practices, to maximize company's sustainability impact (PlanA, 2019). These specialized units are responsible for coordinating the company's environmental strategies, ensuring compliance with regulations, tracking progress on sustainability goals, and promoting a culture of environmental responsibility across all levels of the organization (Pave Commute, 2024).

These Green Divisions serve as a central hub for:

- Designing and overseeing sustainability initiatives (e.g., carbon reduction, waste management)
- Monitoring environmental performance and ESG reporting
- Supporting cross-departmental collaboration on green projects
- Ensuring alignment with EU policies like the Green Deal, CSRD, and circular economy principles

For SMEs, having a dedicated green division—even a small one—ensures that sustainability is not just a side activity but an integrated part of business strategy. These divisions often work closely with a **Green Leader or Sustainability Manager** to implement changes in procurement, production, logistics, and human resources, making the entire organization more resilient, efficient, and competitive in a green economy. Ultimately, both green leadership and structured green departments are essential to prepare SMEs for future regulations, attract eco-conscious customers and investors, and contribute meaningfully to the global transition toward sustainability.

1.2.4. What does 'Green Leader' mean?

A **Green Leader can** be described as a 'strategically positioned professional who drives the ecological or green transition of a business'. This role is critical for enabling companies, including SMEs to 'not only **meet the environmental regulations**, but also to **unlock their competitive advantage**, to **access green financing**, and to **align with the shifting market demands'**.

Furthermore, green leaders are also defined as **leaders with a specific set of 'skills and abilities to reduce the negative effects of a company's production process on the environment, lifestyle, and utilization of natural resources'** (Rizwan Ullah Khan, 2023). They are keen to develop environmental commitment and awareness in the workplace with specific focus on a lasting behavioral change among employees (M.C. Davis, 2020).

Also, green leaders are leaders that '**enhance employees' interest in environmental issues and help them establish an emotional connection with the natural environment** so that the business operations proceed in accordance with the sustainable environmental policies (Rizwan Ullah Khan, 2023). For example, in a study conducted in 2020, it is stated that 'if green leaders build correct and strong relationships with their subordinates, employees' concerns about environmental problems increases' (M.C. Davis, 2020). Another study indicates that individuals working in the teams of green team leaders have high awareness and are more likely to engage in sustainable behaviors such as waste reduction, energy saving, and environmentally conscious purchasing decisions (J. Feng, 2018).

1.2.5. What Green Leaders do?

Green leaders can be considered responsible for a variety of activities. However, most of these activities can be presented in 5 specific areas, such as:

- **ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP**

Green leadership means caring for the environment and committing to constant acting to protect it. Leaders must understand the impact their company has on the environment and work to reduce their company's negative effects on nature by using eco-friendly practices, cutting carbon footprints, and implementing waste reduction measures. A good start is the data-driven approach - conducting an environmental audit to identify where improvements are needed. This helps companies set clear and realistic goals for reducing resource consumption, emissions, and waste. By incorporating environmental considerations into the decision-making process, leaders can help build a greener company culture.

- **RENEWABLE ENERGY INTEGRATION**

Switching to renewable energy is an important part of green leadership. Leaders can consider options like solar, wind, or hydropower to meet their energy needs in a sustainable way. Working with energy experts to assess and adopt the right solutions helps reduce environmental impact and supports the move to a greener economy. This shows a clear commitment to sustainability and inspires others to do the same.

- **SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT**

A green leader understands that sustainability should be built into every part of the supply chain. From choosing raw materials to how products are disposed of, each step is a chance to make eco-friendly decisions. This can include working with responsible suppliers, using recycled materials, and improving transport to cut emissions. By managing the supply chain with the environment in mind, leaders help create a broader culture of sustainability across their industry. (Green Success Stories).

- **EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION**

Green leadership isn't just about company policies—it also involves inspiring people within the organization. Leaders help build a culture of sustainability by educating employees and encouraging them to take part in green initiatives. Programs like eco-friendly challenges or rewards for sustainable actions can boost engagement and teamwork. When employees adopt a green mindset, it improves the company's environmental impact and supports a wider move toward sustainability in society.

- **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

Green leaders understand that their role goes beyond the workplace—they actively support the communities around them. This includes taking part in local environmental projects, investing in green spaces, or helping with clean-up efforts. By engaging in social and environmental causes, leaders show they care about people and the planet, building trust and a strong reputation.

Green leadership isn't a passing trend—it's a vital shift toward a more responsible and sustainable future. Leaders who commit to environmental action not only help protect natural resources but also position their organizations as forward-thinking. By leading in areas like clean energy, sustainable supply chains, employee engagement, and community involvement, they help build a world where business success and environmental care go hand in hand (Next One Staffing, 2024).

1.3. GREEN LEADERSHIP IN THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE

In Europe, green leadership often exists under diverse titles, each reflecting specific functional and strategic priorities of specific entities, such as:

- Sustainability Manager or Officer
- Environmental Compliance Coordinator
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Manager
- Sustainable Innovation Lead
- Energy & Resource Efficiency Advisor
- Circular Economy Specialist

These roles are typically found in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, construction, transport, ICT, and tourism, where environmental impacts are significant and regulatory compliance is tightly monitored.

Outside the EU, in countries like Canada, the U.S., Japan, and Australia, enterprises also show an increasing focus on sustainability leadership with interest. Common green or sustainability leadership profiles include:

- Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO) – more common in medium-sized firms scaling toward international markets.
- Green Operations Manager – found in manufacturing, logistics, and energy-intensive sectors.
- Sustainable Procurement Lead – growing in SMEs involved in retail, food, and textile industries.
- Eco-Innovation Coordinator – prominent in technology and clean energy startups.

In a 2022 Global SME Survey conducted by the International Chamber of Commerce, over 60% of SMEs globally acknowledged that they lack a formal sustainability strategy, but more than 70% expressed intent to hire or train staff with green competencies within the next two years (ICC Global Survey, 2022).

According to the European Investment Bank (EIB), more than 40% of EU SMEs report that lack of internal expertise as a major barrier to green investment, while over 75% agree that improving environmental performance is a business priority (EIB Investment Survey, 2023).

Across Southern and Southeastern Europe, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are increasingly prioritizing the recruitment of green leadership roles to drive their sustainability agendas. This trend is evident in countries such as Spain, Slovenia, Greece, and North Macedonia, where businesses are recognizing the strategic importance of integrating sustainability into their operations.

1.3.1. Green Leadership in different contexts

S P A I N

Spanish SMEs are actively seeking professionals to lead their sustainability initiatives. A recent study analyzing Spanish SMEs identified key factors that facilitate the adoption of sustainable practices, highlighting the growing emphasis on environmental and social goals within these enterprises (SAGE Journals, 2025).

The demand for sustainability professionals is further evidenced by the availability of numerous job openings in this field with focus on sectors such as renewable energy (solar, wind, etc.), sustainability consulting, and environmental engineering as high demand sectors. For instance, Glassdoor (an online community for job-related topics) lists 97 open positions for Environmental Sustainability Managers in Spain, indicating a robust market for green leadership roles (800+ positions listed).

Also, **Spain is integrating sustainability into the vocational education and training (VET) curricula to support the green transition across the country (Education and Training Monitor 2024).** With the regulatory development of Organic Law 3/2022, the Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports (MEFD) introduced a module of sustainability into all VET diploma programmes, applied to the relevant productive system (ETM, 2024). This module aims to develop basic knowledge and skills in the green economy, sustainability and environmental impact. The Spanish National Qualifications Institute, which

regulates qualifications, has updated all its curricula according to the principles of a sustainable economy and the relevant environmental regulations. In addition, MEFD has published a full range of new vocational training programmes in the field of sustainability, including courses on maintaining hybrid or electric vehicles.

In general, to become a sustainability expert in Spain, a person can pursue various educational paths, including online or on-campus Master's degrees, as well as specialized training courses. Many universities and business schools offer specialized programs in sustainability, often with a focus on corporate social responsibility and innovation. Additionally, organizations like SGS and AZTech Training & Consultancy provide training in sustainability, ESG, and related topics.

Furthermore, **a diverse array of training programs tailored for companies** to enhance their sustainability practices and develop in-house sustainability expertise in environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles and other topics.

- **SGS Spain – Sustainability and ESG Training:** provides a comprehensive suite of training courses focusing on sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Topics include social compliance systems, sustainable management, ecodesign, and ESG reporting. These courses are designed to help organizations improve efficiency, reduce risks, and gain a competitive edge in sustainability practices.

- **La Salle – Course in Sustainability Management in Business:** 8-week on-site course in Barcelona equips professionals with the knowledge to manage, measure, and communicate sustainable strategies within organizations. The curriculum covers circular economy, decarbonization, governance models, and compliance with the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD). Participants work on creating personalized strategic sustainability plans through case studies and practical exercises.

- **EADA Business School – Master in Sustainable Business & Innovation:** offers a 10-month full-time master's program in Barcelona, focusing on sustainable business practices and innovation. The program combines theoretical knowledge with practical applications, preparing professionals to lead sustainability initiatives and drive business transformation.

- **Iberdrola – Sustainability Training Programme for SMEs:** offers a free online training program comprising six modules that cover key aspects of corporate sustainability, including leadership, current regulations, and opportunities. This program is particularly beneficial for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) seeking to enhance their sustainability practices.

- **AZTech Training – Sustainability Courses in Madrid**: offers expert-led sustainability training courses in Madrid, covering strategic thinking, practical implementation, and essential leadership skills. These courses address critical challenges and opportunities within today's business landscape.

- **IE Business School – Master in Sustainability & Business Transformation**: equips professionals with the knowledge and skills to lead change focused on sustainability. It offers a holistic approach to business, providing a 360-degree view to succeed in doing business through a sustainability lens.

- **ESEI Business School** – **Short Course in Sustainability and Social Impact**: teaches how businesses can contribute to a more sustainable and equal world through a mix of theory, practice, and work on real impact-driven projects.

- **TrainingCred – PECB Sustainability Training Courses**: offers sustainability training courses in Spain to master essential skills for promoting sustainability.

SLOVENIA

Slovenian businesses are demonstrating a strong commitment to environmental sustainability, also. According to the European Investment Bank (EIB), nearly all Slovenian companies—97%—have implemented measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, positioning Slovenia among the EU's climate-action leaders (European Investment Bank).

This proactive approach extends to the manufacturing sector, especially, where companies are embracing circular economy principles to enhance environmental protection and economic growth. Such initiatives underscore the increasing demand for green leadership to guide sustainable transformations within Slovenian SMEs.

Furthermore, Slovenia's green job market includes various roles in renewable energy, green building, sustainable development and environmental consulting. Specific job titles include Project Managers in renewable energy, Junior Engineers, Process Specialists, Production Managers etc. In addition, roles related to environmental protection, such as environmental consultants and those focused on waste management, are also in demand.

On the topic of available training and education, among the available programs, apart from the formal Master's and other courses are:

- **SGS Slovenia – Sustainability and ESG Training:** provides training courses on sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Topics include social compliance systems, sustainable management, eco-design, and ESG reporting. These courses are designed to help organizations improve efficiency, reduce risks, and gain a competitive edge in sustainability practices.

- **IRDO Institute – Managing Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development:** offers online seminars and workshops titled "Managing Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development of the Company." These sessions are aimed at companies looking to embed sustainability into their core strategies. Participants can earn a Level 1 IRDO certificate upon completion (IRDO).

- **Preferred by Nature – Sustainability Certification Training:** delivers high-quality courses on certification schemes and sustainability topics. Their training programs are designed to inspire and build competence for a sustainable future among public and corporate sector stakeholders.

- **Unichrone – ISO 20121 Event Sustainability Management Training:** offers training on the ISO 20121 standard, focusing on integrating sustainability into event management. This course is beneficial for companies involved in organizing events and looking to minimize environmental impacts while promoting social responsibility.

- **Unichrone – Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Training in Ljubljana:** offers CSR training that delves into environmental stewardship and sustainable practices. The course includes topics like stakeholder engagement, ethical governance, and the measurement of CSR initiatives' impact.

- **TrainingCred – Clean Energy and Sustainability Management Training:** the course focuses on essential strategies for a sustainable future, covering clean energy and sustainability management practices.

GREECE

Greek SMEs are too actively investing in sustainability, supported by significant financial commitments. The European Investment Bank (EIB) has allocated €1 billion in green financing to Greek SMEs and mid-caps, targeting renewable energy, energy efficiency, and other climate-focused projects (ESG News, 2025).

The growing focus on sustainability is reflected in the job market, with Glassdoor listing 75 open positions for Sustainability Managers in Greece. This indicates a rising demand for professionals capable of leading green initiatives within Greek enterprises such as: renewable energy, environmental consulting, waste management, and conservation. Specific job titles include ESG & Sustainability Officers, Health and Safety Experts, Sustainability Analysts, and HSE Specialists.

Among the training opportunities for companies, in the field of green transition and sustainability are:

- **Bureau Veritas Hellas – Sustainability Courses:** offers a range of courses aimed at helping companies navigate the complex landscape of sustainability. These courses assist organizations in identifying key activities for implementing coherent sustainability strategies, ensuring compliance with international standards and best practices.

- **GLOMACS – Sustainability & CSR Training in Athens:** provides expert-led training courses in Athens that encompass both technical and management subjects related to sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). These courses are tailored to professionals from diverse

industries, aiming to enhance their problem-solving abilities and provide them with the knowledge needed to gain a competitive edge in their field.

- **AZTech Training – Sustainability Courses in Athens:** offers sustainability courses in Athens focusing on strategic thinking, practical implementation, and essential leadership skills. These courses address critical challenges and opportunities within today's business landscape, enabling participants to become agile and adaptive decision-makers.

- **Sustainable Greece – Training on the Greek Sustainability Code:** provides training seminars aimed at presenting the Greek Sustainability Code as a tool for companies to respond to the requirements of Greek legislation and the EU Directive for the publication of non-financial data. The code incorporates a series of international standards and reference frameworks, including ISO, EMAS, GRI, and the UN Global Compact.

- **CSR School – Advanced Training in Sustainable Development:** offers advanced training programs updated based on new requirements in the field of Sustainable Development. The training focuses on identifying business opportunities related to sustainability and integrating responsibility at the core of business strategy to achieve sustainable value and formulate a more resilient organization.

- **Certified Sustainability (ESG) Practitioner Program – CSE:** offers a challenging two-day on-site sustainability ESG practitioner program in Athens. This program provides practical tools and resources required to implement or upscale corporate sustainability, improve ESG ratings, and create successful ESG and Sustainability strategies.

- **Grant Thornton Greece – ESG & Sustainability Services:** supports companies in understanding the broader context of sustainability through workshops and personalized training programs. These programs involve all team members, aiming for maximum understanding and active participation in sustainability issues.

NORTH MACEDONIA

In North Macedonia, SMEs are increasingly recognizing the importance of green leadership in driving sustainable growth. A study on the country's green economy concept revealed that while awareness is growing, only 15% of SMEs have been involved in green economy initiatives, and 69% lack a strategy for implementing such concepts (Aneta R. Jankuloska, Dushko Josheski, 2024).

To address these gaps, significant investments are being made. The European Investment Bank (EIB) has unlocked €100 million to boost the development and green transition of SMEs in North Macedonia, aiming to finance energy and green transition projects (European Investment Bank, 2024). Additionally, the Green Finance Facility, worth €30 million, has been launched to provide performance-based incentives to

SMEs for investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency solutions (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2023).

In line with these efforts, some of the opportunities in the field of green transition and sustainability are:

- **ESG Training Sessions – AmCham North Macedonia**: organized by the American Chamber of Commerce, offers training sessions that aim to strengthen the role of North Macedonia's corporate sector through integration of ESG principles. They provide insights into sustainable business practices and reporting.

- **ESG Basics Programme – PwC North Macedonia**: offers training sessions focused on non-financial reporting, carbon footprint measurement, and sustainable assets and projects, providing a comprehensive overview of ESG and sustainability trends.

- **Green Business Ideas Accelerator Program**: this free training and mentoring program supports green entrepreneurs in creating sustainable circular business models, providing knowledge on legal frameworks, business modeling, and financing opportunities.

- **DECOS – IECE:** the "Developing Eco Skills for a Green Economy" programme aims to enhance green skills in sustainability, waste, and energy management, targeting professionals across various sectors.

- **Eco Logic's School for Sustainable Development**: organizes workshops and camps for high school students and teachers, focusing on local sustainability challenges and promoting the integration of sustainable development goals into extracurricular activities.

- **Eco Logic's Sustainability Coaches Program:** aims to train adult educators and NGO workers to become "Sustainability Coaches," who can inspire and guide communities towards sustainable actions

Chapter 2: Green Leader Profile

The Green Leaders' role in the company is to, among others, **enhance employees' interest in environmental issues and help them establish an emotional connection with the natural environment** so that business operations proceed in accordance with sustainable environmental policies (Rizwan Ullah Khan, 2023). For example, in a study conducted in 2020, it is stated that "if green leaders build correct and strong relationships with their subordinates, employees' concerns about environmental problems

increases" (M.C. Davis, 2020). Another study indicated that individuals working in the teams of green team leaders have high awareness and are more likely to engage in sustainable behaviors such as waste reduction, energy saving, and environmentally conscious purchasing decisions (J. Feng, 2018).

On the other hand, a Green Leader is not simply an environmental expert — they are **strategic enablers**, equipped with:

- **Knowledge** of environmental legislation, sustainable business models, and circular economy practices;
- **Skills** to manage change, assess environmental performance, and mobilize teams; and
- **Attitudes** of innovation, resilience, and ethical leadership.

Green leadership roles within SMEs are increasingly vital in aligning business operations with sustainability goals. These positions, while sharing common objectives and responsibilities (centered around environmental stewardship, regulatory compliance, and sustainable innovation), exhibit regional nuances influenced by national policies, economic structures, and educational frameworks.

Below is an overview of some key green leadership roles, responsibilities, required skills, competences and organizational contexts that need to be taken into consideration:

- **SUSTAINABILITY MANAGER OR ADVISOR**

Sustainability manager or otherwise known as a sustainability officer is viewed as a professional responsible for developing, implementing, and monitoring a company's sustainability strategies (Unity Environmental University). This role involves provides assistance in the design and implementation of plans and measures to ensure that the manufacturing processes and products comply with given environmental regulations and social responsibility standards (ESCO). These managers monitor and report on the implementation of sustainability strategies within the company supply chain and business process (ESCO). They analyse issues linked to manufacturing processes, use of materials, waste reduction, energy efficiency and products traceability to improve environmental and social impacts and integrate sustainability aspects into the company culture (ESCO).

Although the role of the Sustainability Manager is still a relatively new concept, and specific academic qualifications are still in their early days, the particular position is often part of the senior management team, it usually requires experience in the field and/or in logistics, communications or marketing, including project management, as well as it requires a 4-year bachelor's degree in environmental science or similar fields.

A sustainability manager may work with other members of the team to create plans that may help businesses reach their goal of environmental sustainability. Sustainability is the goal of increasing environmental, social and economic welfare while decreasing environmental impact achieved through increased efficiency and reduced use of nonrenewable materials.

Typical Responsibilities of the Sustainability Manager are:

- To help companies incorporate more eco-friendly business practices.
- To ensure companies remain compliant with all local and national legislation in the field.
- To develop various sustainability initiatives, including, to oversee their implementation.
- To make sure that all sustainability initiatives of the company are aligned with its goals.
- To conduct sustainability assessments and to report on environmental performance.
- To engage all team-members and stakeholders in company's sustainability initiatives.
- To promote the company's sustainable practices, internally and to the general public.

Some of the general SOFT SKILLS required for the Sustainability Manager role are:

- **LEADERSHIP,** since sustainability managers often require leadership skills to coordinate and motivate their teams to accept and implement company's sustainability initiatives. For example, a sustainability manager may train a department on recycling specific waste and give a presentation on the best ways to recycle.
- **TEAMWORK,** since sustainability managers may work with different staff members and departments, to help improve the company's environmental performance. For example, jointly with other employees and departments, a sustainability manager may coordinate the development of a waste management plan or energy efficiency.
- **COMMUNICATION AND STORYTELLING,** since sustainability managers often may require effective communication skills to convey key messages related to company's sustainability practices to other people, businesses, institutions and stakeholders, including ability to explain complex environmental issues in a simple and understandable way. For example, a sustainability manager may present a report of employee's waste management habits, which may help the company to identify its key areas for improvement, set targets and improve the overall waste management at company and individual (employee) level.
- **STRATEGIC THINKING,** since sustainability managers often use critical thinking skills when comparing different environmental management systems and processes to choose which practices match best with their environmental values. For example, a company may use an environmental assessment framework to evaluate its purchase of light bulbs. The framework can help the company choose whether it's more environmentally friendly to switch to fluorescent or LED bulbs.
- **CHANGE MANAGEMENT,** since sustainability managers often must lead and support businesses through transitions that require changes in mindset, operations, and company culture. This includes guiding teams as they adopt new sustainable practices, policies, or technologies that may

initially face resistance. For instance, an advisor may introduce a company-wide initiative to reduce single-use plastics in packaging. Through effective change management, the advisor can facilitate workshops, communicate the long-term environmental and financial benefits, and provide phased implementation plans to ease the transition.

- **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT,** since sustainability managers often communicate with internal and external stakeholders, from employees to investors and regulators, they must tailor their communication to diverse audiences with varying priorities. For example, they may present carbon reduction goals to senior management in terms of risk and compliance, while framing the same goals for employees as part of a company-wide green initiative. By building trust and aligning messages with stakeholder interests, the advisor ensures broader support and smoother implementation of sustainability measures.
- **CRITICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING,** since sustainability managers often use problem-solving skills when working with businesses or other government agencies to solve issues related to environmental management. For example, a sustainability manager may work with an engineer and manufacturer of bulldozers to reduce emissions produced by their vehicles.

On the other hand, **some of the general TECHNICAL SKILLS required for the Sustainability Manager are**:

- **KNOWLEDGE OF DATA ANALYSIS AND SUSTAINABILITY METRICS,** since sustainability managers often need knowledge in KPIs, Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) tools, Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emission protocols to measure, track, and report performance indicators like CO_2 emissions, water or energy use, or waste levels. For example, a manager analyzes year-on-year emissions data to recommend more efficient HVAC systems.
- **ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (EMS),** since sustainability managers often need to design, implement, and monitor EMS within organizations. For example, structures like ISO 14001 that help businesses organize and continuously improve their environmental efforts are very much needed, same as, the particular knowledge and skill will help the professional to implement effective EMS that schedules regular audits and tracks regulatory compliance.
- **SUSTAINABLE DESIGN & ENGINEERING** (where relevant), since in some sectors and companies, sustainability managers must apply eco-design principles to reduce environmental impact during product's development and use phase. For example, a company modifies a product to use fewer materials and extend its lifespan, reducing waste and costs.
- **DIGITAL TOOLS FOR SUSTAINABILITY**, since sustainability managers often need to use computer programs, such as spreadsheets or databases, to track information on the environmental considerations of their projects, including software for carbon accounting, energy monitoring, compliance tracking, reporting, and visualizing sustainability performance. For example, a manager sets up a dashboard to monitor energy use in real-time across company sites.

- **PROJECT MANAGEMENT**, since managing sustainability initiatives, including budgeting, timelines, stakeholder coordination is crucial for planning and executing sustainability initiatives on time and within budget. For example, a sustainability project manager coordinates departments to implement solar energy systems, ensuring alignment with budgets and timelines.

And most importantly, **the general GREEN COMPETENCES required for the Sustainability Manager are**:

- **KNOWLEDGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**, since sustainability managers use their ability to perform such assessment to evaluate how business activities affect the environment, including emissions, water use, and biodiversity. For example, a sustainability manager may conduct a carbon footprint analysis before expanding the company's logistics fleet and giving evidence to why the company should choose low-emission vehicle options.
- **KNOWLEDGE OF CIRCULAR ECONOMY MODELS**, since sustainability managers often use this knowledge to apply the principles like reuse, recycling, and minimizing waste throughout a company's product's life cycle. For example, when redesigning packaging, the advisor may recommend switching to recyclable materials and introducing a return system for used products.
- **KNOWLEDGE OF SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**, since sustainability managers often focus on using energy, water, and raw materials more efficiently to reduce company's environmental impact and financial costs, therefore, general knowledge and understanding of the subject, as well as ability to perform specific audits may be necessary. For example, a company might install motion-sensor lighting and low-flow taps after an advisor conducts an energy and water usage audit.
- **KNOWLEDGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND STANDARDS**, since sustainability managers need satisfactory level of knowledge and understanding of EU and national regulations such as the EU Green Deal, ISO 14001, or ESG frameworks to ensure legal compliance of company's operation, including to improve company's image and market positioning. For example, a sustainability manager or advisor helps a manufacturing firm align with ESG reporting requirements to attract green investors.
- **KNOWLEDGE OF CLIMATE RISK AND ADAPTATION PLANNING,** since sustainability managers often work to identify potential risks related to climate change (e.g., flooding, drought) and to adapt company's operations accordingly. For example, a company relocates a warehouse to a safer zone after a sustainability manager maps future flood risks.
- **KNOWLEDGE OF SUPPLY CHAIN SUSTAINABILITY**, since sustainability managers often work to assess the environmental and social practices of suppliers and work to improve those practices across the value chain. For example, a sustainability manager or advisor may help a retailer choose textile suppliers with verified sustainable farming and fair labor certifications.

Furthermore, **other competences** that may be useful for the position are:

- **BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE**
- **SCIENCE KNOWLEDGE** (knowledge of science and science-related fields, including physics, chemistry and biology)
- **ECONOMICS AND FINANCE SKILLS**
- **ICT KNOWLEDGE** (big data, artificial intelligence, LLM, etc.)

Other Job Titles under which this role can be found are: sustainability analyst, sustainability coordinator, sustainable design consultant or coordinator, sustainability director, chief sustainability officer, sustainability specialist, sustainable business manager, sustainable business process manager etc.

A sustainability manager may work with other members of the team to create plans that may help businesses reach their goal of environmental sustainability.

A sustainability manager is not a requirement for every business. Some smaller organisations may not afford to take on another member of staff and have their role solely based on the company achieving environmental objectives. These enterprises, including some small to medium enterprises, may incorporate this role into an existing job in their company or to hire a sustainability consultant on an as-needed basis to help them stay on track with their sustainability progress and goals.

For instance, **companies in the Manufacturing Sector** may require such role with focus on the following green and soft skills:

- Knowledge of Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) for products.
- Energy-efficient production processes.
- Sustainable sourcing of raw materials.
- Waste and emissions management (e.g., ISO 14001 compliance).
- Circular economy integration into product design and packaging.
- Change management to shift production routines.
- Cross-functional communication (e.g., between engineering, procurement, and management).
- Problem-solving under cost-efficiency constraints.

Companies in the Services Sector (e.g., Finance, IT, Tourism) may require:

- Knowledge of ESG reporting and sustainability benchmarking.
- Knowledge of sustainable procurement policies.

- Knowledge of digital tools for sustainability tracking (e.g., carbon calculators, cloud-based EMS).
- Knowledge of environmental risk assessment in investment or operational decision-making.
- Ability for stakeholder engagement (clients, investors, and internal teams).
- Strategic thinking to align sustainability with service branding.
- Training and awareness-raising among staff.

The Food and Agriculture sector may require:

- Knowledge of sustainable land and water management practices.
- Agroecology and organic certification standards.
- Climate-smart agriculture approaches.
- Sustainable supply chain and traceability systems.
- Community engagement and knowledge transfer with farmers/producers.
- Cultural sensitivity and local adaptation.
- Systems thinking to balance ecological, economic, and social outcomes.

The Energy and Utilities sector may require:

- Renewable energy technologies and grid integration.
- Carbon accounting and decarbonization planning.
- Energy efficiency audits and improvements.
- Environmental impact assessments and regulatory compliance.
- Policy advocacy and liaison with regulatory bodies.
- Conflict resolution between stakeholders with competing energy priorities.
- Communication of complex technical data to non-specialist audiences.

The Construction and Real Estate sector may require:

- Green building certifications (LEED, BREEAM, etc.).
- Energy modelling and sustainable architecture principles.

- Waste management and sustainable materials sourcing.
- Urban sustainability and biodiversity planning.
- Negotiation and collaboration with developers, architects, and planners.
- Project management and timeline alignment with sustainability goals.
- Change leadership in construction norms and design standards.

In addition to high-impact sectors, SMEs in traditionally overlooked industries such as printing, small-scale retail, or artisanal production are also beginning to explore sustainability actions. These sectors often lack sector-specific guidance and require adapted tools to start their green transition journey.

Furthermore, in most SMEs, sustainability tasks will be combined with other responsibilities (e.g., logistics, HR, finance). A logistics manager may monitor carbon emissions from transportation; an HR officer may coordinate employee green challenges. These **HYBRID ROLES** integrated into the daily tasks demand basic training, clear delegation, and structured recognition of green duties.

● ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE COORDINATOR

The Environmental Compliance Coordinator is a role focused on ensuring that an organization adheres to environmental laws and regulations, minimizing its ecological footprint. Some of the typical responsibilities of the position are:

- To monitor and report on environmental compliance issues.
- To develop and implement environmental policies and procedures.
- To conduct audits and inspections to ensure regulatory adherence.

The particular professionals are typically situated within the compliance or environmental health and safety departments, collaborating with operational teams within enterprises.

● CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR) MANAGER

CSR Manager is a professional who manages the assessment of company's responsibility for its effects on environmental and social well-being. Some of the typical responsibilities of the CSR manager are**:**

- To develop CSR strategies that align with business objectives.
- To engage with stakeholders to promote ethical practices.
- To report on CSR activities and their impact.

The particular professional is often part of the communications or human resources departments, and is working closely with the executive leadership within the company (European Commission)

- **SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION LEAD**

Sustainable Innovation Lead is a role dedicated to driving innovation that supports sustainable development of a company, focusing on creating products or processes that reduce its environmental impact. Some of the typical responsibilities of such professionals are:

- To identify opportunities for sustainable product or process innovation.
- To collaborate with Research and Development teams to integrate sustainability into new developments.
- To monitor market trends to create informed sustainable innovation strategies.

The SIL is usually part of the research and development or strategy departments, interfacing with various business units (Kogan, 2024).

- **ENERGY AND RESOURCE EFFICIENCY ADVISOR**

Energy and Resource Efficiency Advisor is a specialist who assesses and advises the company on ways to improve its energy efficiency and resource utilization. Some of the typical responsibilities of the specific professional are:

- To conduct energy audits to identify efficiency opportunities.
- To recommend and implement energy-saving measures.
- To monitor energy consumption and reporting on improvements.

These kinds of advisors often work within facilities management or sustainability teams / green divisions, collaborating with operations and maintenance staff (Enel X).

- **CIRCULAR ECONOMY SPECIALIST**

Circular Economy Specialist is a professional focused on implementing circular economy principles to minimize waste and make the most of resources in a specific company. Some of the typical responsibilities of such specialist are:

- To develop strategies to reduce waste and promote recycling and reuse.
- To collaborate with product design teams to enhance product lifecycle sustainability, and
- To educate stakeholders on circular economy practices.

The specific professional may play an important role in a green division of an enterprise or a sustainability or operations teams within the company. The circular economy specialists chiefly work closely with supply chain and product development departments to jointly plan and implement specific projects and initiatives (Devex).

All these roles are particularly prevalent in sectors with significant environmental impacts, such as manufacturing, agriculture, construction, transport, information and communication technology (ICT), and tourism. The integration of these positions within SMEs underscores the growing recognition of sustainability as a core business imperative.

According to the European Investment Bank (EIB), more than 40% of EU SMEs report that a lack of internal expertise is a major barrier to green investment, while over 75% agree that improving environmental performance is a business priority (EIB Investment Survey, 2023).

Furthermore, the EU GreenComp Framework, introduced in 2022, emphasizes the development of sustainability competencies among citizens and professionals, highlighting leadership, collaboration, critical thinking, and action-taking as foundational to green leadership roles.

Internationally, SMEs in countries like Canada, the U.S., Japan, and Australia are also increasingly focusing on sustainability leadership, adopting roles such as Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO), Green Operations Manager, Sustainable Procurement Lead, and Eco-Innovation Coordinator. A 2022 Global SME Survey by the International Chamber of Commerce revealed that over 60% of SMEs globally lack a formal sustainability strategy, but more than 70% intend to hire or train staff with green competencies within the next two years.

The evolving landscape of green leadership within SMEs reflects a broader shift towards integrating sustainability into the core of business operations, driven by both regulatory requirements and a growing recognition of the strategic advantages of sustainable practices.

2.1. Diversity of Green Leadership Roles across Sectors

Sector	Green Leadership Focus	Example Role
Manufacturing	Energy efficiency, waste reduction, circular processes	Environmental Process Manager
Construction	Sustainable materials, carbon-neutral designs	Green Building Coordinator
Agriculture	Organic practices, soil & water conservation	Regenerative Farming Advisor
Transport & Logistics	Emissions reduction, fleet optimization	Sustainable Logistics Manager
ICT & Digital	Green IT practices, low-energy systems	Sustainable Tech Lead
Retail & Consumer Goods	Eco-packaging, sustainable sourcing	Sustainable Product Manager

2.1.1. Observations and gaps

Some of the existing gaps related to the Green Leadership roles and positions are:

- Green leadership is still **fragmented**.
- Roles are often **informally defined** or integrated into broader management tasks.
- **Training and certification pathways** are limited, especially for SME-specific contexts.
- There's a **lack of harmonized frameworks** linking these roles to national and EU qualification systems (e.g., EQF, ESCO).

This fragmentation reinforces the need for a **standardized Green Leader profile and competence framework**.

2.1.2. Comparation of existing sustainability roles vs the Green Leader role

To understand how the Green Leader profile consolidates and elevates the functions of existing sustainability roles within SMEs, the following comparison table outlines key characteristics of commonly found green roles and how they align with or differ from the proposed Green Leader profile:

Role Title	Main Focus	Typical in	Overlap with Green Leader	Gaps Addressed by Green Leader
Sustainability Manager / Officer	General sustainability planning & reporting	Manufacturing, logistics, public services	Strong: strategy, stakeholder engagement, compliance	Lacks digital, innovation, or systems thinking integration
Environmental Compliance Coordinator	Ensures adherence to environmental laws & regulations	Construction, energy, waste sectors	Partial: legal knowledge, reporting	Limited leadership, communication, and change management focus
CSR Manager	Social and environmental responsibility, corporate ethics	Larger SMEs or family businesses	Partial: stakeholder engagement, ethics	Less focused on operational transformation or green innovation
Energy Efficiency Advisor	Reducing energy consumption, introducing efficient systems	Energy-intensive industries	Technical overlap: energy management	Not a leadership or strategic role; limited scope

Role Title	Main Focus	Typical in	Overlap with Green Leader	Gaps Addressed by Green Leader
Sustainable Procurement Officer	Green supply chains and sourcing	Retail, consumer goods	Partial: supply chain awareness	Broader sustainability leadership and cross-functional integration missing
Green Innovation Lead	Integrating sustainable innovation into products/services	Tech SMEs, startups	Strong: innovation, sustainability thinking	May lack structured leadership or regulatory understanding
Proposed Green Leader	Strategic coordination of sustainability across SME operations	All sectors	Synthesizes all above roles into one coherent strategic function	Provides systems view, cross-cutting competencies, strategic alignment, and leadership for green transition

Chapter 3: Green Leader Competence Framework for Enterprises

In a green economy, **every enterprise will need at least one Green Leader**—and for many, this will evolve into **cross-functional teams** or **dedicated sustainability departments**. The role of that one Green Leader may be sufficient to initiate and guide the transition of a company, while for others, especially those in high-impact sectors or with complex operations, a dedicated **green team or sustainability department** may be required to integrate sustainability across all functions — from procurement to production, marketing and human resources.

To support this emerging role, the **Green Leader Competence Framework** has been developed as part of the GreenLead project. This framework defines the essential **competence areas**, including sustainability strategy, regulatory compliance, green innovation, stakeholder engagement, and digital tools for environmental monitoring. Each competence is mapped to concrete **knowledge, skills, and attitudes**, and is aligned with the **European Qualification Framework (EQF)**.

The goal is to ensure that these professionals are not only well-informed but also well-equipped with skills, knowledge and attitudes to drive actionable change.

Ultimately, the integration of a Green Leader into every SME — either as a single role or a team — is no longer a luxury, but a strategic necessity. These professionals will be essential to unlocking green funding, meeting regulatory requirements, improving resource efficiency, and enhancing brand reputation. In doing so, Green Leaders will help SMEs become more resilient, competitive, and adaptable to the fast-evolving green economy.

3.1. Green Leader's knowledge, skills, attitudes

Green Leaders must possess a **broad and interdisciplinary competence set**, including:

- **Knowledge** of sustainability regulations, environmental management systems, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting, and sustainable business models.
- **Skills** in change management, stakeholder engagement, data analysis, and innovation and digital tools for green monitoring and reporting.
- **Attitudes** rooted in ethical leadership, innovation, adaptability, and systems thinking.

Furthermore, a green leader combines traditional leadership qualities with a unique sensitivity to environmental issues.

Below are listed all 3 sets of necessary competences – green, technical, soft skills that a Green Leader must poses to drive the necessary transformation of each enterprise.

GREEN COMPETENCES

Competence	Description	Example Activity
Sustainability Mindset	Embraces environmental values, ethical responsibility, and long-term thinking.	Promotes sustainability in company strategy and daily decisions.
Systems Thinking	Understands how actions impact broader ecological, social, and economic systems.	Maps out how supply chain changes affect emissions and local communities.
Circular Economy Knowledge	Applies reduce–reuse–recycle–redesign principles.	Introduces product redesign to minimize waste.
Climate Risk & Adaptation	Assesses climate vulnerabilities and plans adaptive business responses.	Develops a climate resilience plan for a logistics center in a flood-prone area.
Environmental Compliance & Policy	Knows and applies relevant EU/environmental standards and regulations.	Ensures company compliance with EU Green Deal or ISO 14001.

(Aligned with GreenComp and the SDGs)

TECHNICAL COMPETENCES

Competence	Description	Example Activity
Sustainability Data Management	Collects, analyzes, and interprets sustainability metrics (e.g., CO_2, energy, water, waste).	Uses dashboards to track company energy efficiency goals.
Green Innovation & Design	Guides eco-friendly product, service, or process development.	Leads a cross-team redesign of a product for lower material use and emissions.
Environmental Management Systems (EMS)	Implements systems for tracking and improving environmental performance.	Installs EMS aligned with ISO 14001 and trains staff to use it.
Digital Sustainability Tools	Uses software for carbon accounting, ESG reporting, and monitoring.	Operates tools like SimaPro, OpenLCA, or GHG Protocol tools.
Project & Change Management	Plans, leads, and monitors green transformation projects.	Coordinates a zero-waste initiative across departments.

(Adapted from ESCO and sector needs)

LEADERSHIP AND SOFT SKILLS

Competence	Description	Example Activity
Strategic Thinking	Aligns sustainability with business goals and market trends.	Integrates sustainability KPIs into corporate strategy.
Stakeholder Engagement	Builds trust with internal and external partners (staff, clients, investors, communities).	Hosts workshops to co-develop sustainability targets with employees and suppliers.
Effective Communication	Translates complex sustainability concepts into clear, motivating messages.	Prepares ESG reports or pitches green benefits to executive boards.
Coaching & Empowerment	Supports and inspires teams to adopt sustainable practices.	Mentors team leaders to integrate sustainability into operations.
Resilience & Adaptability	Responds flexibly to changing conditions and complex challenges.	Quickly adapts sustainability plans to new legislation or supply chain shocks.

(Supports implementation and culture shift)

PROFICIENCY LEVELS *(EQF)*

Level	Description
Basic	Understands key green concepts; applies practices with guidance.
Intermediate	Applies sustainability competences independently; leads small initiatives.
Advanced	Drives strategy; leads cross-functional projects; mentors others.
Expert	Shapes organizational vision and policy; influences sectoral or national change.

3.1.1. How does the Green Leader profile and competence framework fill the gaps?

The **Green Leader** is designed to act as the **cornerstone of sustainable transformation** in SMEs. While existing roles focus on specific dimensions (e.g., compliance, energy, innovation), the Green Leader profile brings an integrated, strategic, and future-facing perspective. Furthermore, the Green Leader addresses some of the following challenges and gaps found across different sectors:

- **FRAGMENTATION OF ROLES**: The Green Leader unites technical, managerial, and communicative competences under one professional identity.
- **LACK OF STRATEGIC VISION:** Many current roles lack a holistic, long-term vision for sustainability. The Green Leader provides foresight, planning, and integration across business functions.
- **INSUFFICIENT FOCUS ON CHANGE MANAGEMENT:** Green transformation requires internal cultural change, and the Green Leader is trained in team leadership, stakeholder engagement, and organizational development.
- **MISSING DIGITAL AND GREEN SKILLS INTERSECTION:** The Green Leader bridges sustainability with digital tools (e.g., ESG software, carbon tracking platforms), essential for future competitiveness.
- **NO COMMON QUALIFICATION PATHWAY:** The Green Leader Competence Framework, aligned with the EQF and other EU tools (GreenComp, ESCO), lays the foundation for structured training, certification, and career progression.

3.1.2. Training and institutional integration of the Green Leader profile

The GreenLead project offers a modular, **hands-on training programme** aligned with the competence framework. This will include:

- Core sustainability knowledge and legislation
- Applied digital and environmental tools
- Leadership and communication for green transformation

- Innovation and systems thinking for business model adaptation

Chapter 4: Draft Training Program and Curriculum Structure for Green Leaders

Below is a suggested modular structure for the **Green Leader Training Programme**, aligned with the key competence areas identified in the framework. These modules are adaptable to different EQF levels and can be customized for various sectors.
The training programme is designed with flexibility in mind — an SME can train a single employee or distribute modules across several interested staff members (see proposed profiles) depending on time, interest, and role in the company. Please note that flexibility is key to successful implementation.

Module Title	Learning Outcomes	EQF Level	Duration
1. Foundations of Sustainability & the Green Deal	Understand sustainability principles, the SDGs, EU Green Deal policies		
2. Environmental Law & Compliance for SMEs	Navigate EU and national environmental regulations and ensure company compliance		
3. Circular Economy & Green Business Models	Design and support circular processes, reduce waste, reimagine value chains		
4. Leadership & Change Management in Green Transitions	Facilitate organizational change, manage resistance, inspire action		
5. Green Innovation & Technology in Practice	Identify, evaluate, and implement sustainable innovations		
6. ESG & Sustainability Reporting	Measure sustainability KPIs, communicate impact, prepare reports		

Module Title	Learning Outcomes	EQF Level	Duration
7. Digital Tools for Sustainability	Use carbon calculators, life-cycle analysis software, and environmental dashboards		
8. Communication & Stakeholder Engagement	Lead sustainability dialogues with internal teams and external partners		
9. Financing the Green Transition	Understand green funding mechanisms, grants, and tax incentives		
10. Capstone Project: Green Action Plan for an SME	Apply all competences to draft a sustainability roadmap for an SME		

These Modules can be delivered in **blended format**: self-paced online learning, live workshops, and workplace-based mentoring.

4.1. Mapping the Green Leader profile

EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (EQF) ALIGNMENT

Competence Area	EQF Level	Justification
Strategic Sustainability Leadership		Requires advanced problem-solving, initiative, and management of complex tasks
Environmental Compliance & Legislation		Requires analytical and applied legal knowledge, contextualized to industry
Communication & Engagement		Effective interaction across roles and stakeholders, adaptable communication
Digital Tools & ESG Reporting		Involves evaluation, adaptation, and integration of digital solutions
Innovation & Circular Economy		Application of advanced knowledge in new contexts; developing new ideas

EUROPEAN SKILLS, COMPETENCES, QUALIFICATIONS AND OCCUPATIONS (ESCO) MAPPING

Green Leader Competence	Related ESCO Occupations	Skills/Competences
Sustainability Strategy	Environmental manager	Develop environmental policy, manage sustainability strategies
Legal & Regulatory Awareness	Compliance officer	Ensure compliance with environmental legislation

Green Leader Competence	Related ESCO Occupations	Skills/Competences
Circular Economy Design	Environmental economist	Evaluate sustainability impact, conduct lifecycle analysis
ESG and Reporting	CSR specialist, data analyst	Report sustainability indicators, use reporting software
Digital Tools	Green IT specialist	Apply digital solutions to environmental monitoring, reporting and tackling environmental challenges
Change Management	Organizational development consultant	Lead organizational change, inspire behavioral change among employees, motivate teams to contribute to effective green transition

GREENCOMP INTEGRATION (EU SUSTAINABILITY COMPETENCE FRAMEWORK)

GreenComp Area	Green Leader Application
Systems Thinking	Lead integrated strategies that link environmental, economic, and social factors
Foresight	Anticipate and prepare for long-term environmental and regulatory changes
Responsibility	Promote ethical leadership and accountability in green transformation
Collaboration	Build partnerships across departments and value chains
Critical Thinking	Evaluate trade-offs in sustainability decisions
Empowerment	Enable and train others in sustainable practices

GREEN LEADER CURRICULUM STRUCTURE

Module	Title	Learning Objectives	Key Topics	Learning Methods	Assessment
M1	*Foundations of Sustainability & the European Green Deal*	Understand core sustainability concepts and EU policy context.	Sustainable development, EU Green Deal & SDGs, role of SMEs	E-learning , case study analysis	Online quiz, Short essay

Module	Title	Learning Objectives	Key Topics	Learning Methods	Assessment
M2	*Environmental Legislation & Compliance for SMEs*	Navigate EU/national environmental laws and implement compliance systems.	Key environmental directives, SME obligations, risk & compliance management	Webinars, interactive workshops	Compliance checklist creation
M3	*Circular Economy & Green Business Models*	Apply circular economy principles to SME operations.	Resource efficiency, product lifecycle, business model innovation	Group work, simulations	Business model canvas redesign
M4	*Leadership for Green Change*	Lead green transformation initiatives within organizations.	Change management, sustainability leadership, team motivation	Role-play, peer learning	Leadership self-assessment, Mini action plan
M5	*Green Innovation & Sustainable Technologies*	Identify, evaluate, and integrate green innovations.	Eco-innovation, clean tech for SMEs, low-carbon solutions	Guest experts, problem-solving labs	Innovation concept proposal
M6	*Sustainability Reporting & ESG Metrics*	Use tools for measuring and reporting sustainability performance.	ESG indicators, reporting standards (GRI, CSRD), environmental KPIs	Hands-on software demo, templates	ESG report draft
M7	*Digital Tools for Environmental Monitoring*	Use digital tools to support environmental decision-making and help SMEs meet reporting requirements	Carbon footprint tools, GHG Protocol tools (for emission tracking), open LCA software (for lifecycle analysis), data dashboards, SME specific platforms such as ClimateSmart or Enablon	Tool tutorials, real-data projects	Tool application exercise
M8	*Stakeholder Engagement & Green Communication*	Build support for green initiatives across internal and external actors.	Internal engagement, green marketing, communication strategy	Storytelling workshop, campaign design	Communication plan
M9	*Financing the Green Transition*	Identify and access funding for green initiatives.	- EU/national green funds- Private financing- ROI of green projects	Expert panels, funding simulation	Funding pitch & budget

Module	Title	Learning Objectives	Key Topics	Learning Methods	Assessment
M10	*Capstone: SME Green Transformation Plan*	Integrate competences into a strategic sustainability plan for an SME.	- Full plan development, implementation strategy-impact forecasting	Coaching, team collaboration, baseline sustainability assessment, action plan, interviews	Final project + presentation

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