

ESG specialist urgently needed. What must they know? Where can you find them?

ESG is not fashion: it is a necessity for more and more enterprises. So, what does the transition to ESG look like in Poland? What does an ESG expert need to know and be able to do in a company? What kind of employees do companies need? What do they offer?

Behind the abbreviation of ESG stand the company's activities carried out with care for the environment, society, and corporate governance. These are areas that should be of primary importance for companies in the short term. Why is that?

More and more often, not just the number of loyal consumers depend on ESG activities, but also investors and long-term employees, or job candidates. According to the study by Sustainable Brands, as much as 75 percent of millennials (the generation of people born in the 1980s and 1990s) consider environmental and social activities when making decisions about choosing a new job.

As the authors of the report point out, Polish companies often mention the topic of climate in their reports. It is noteworthy that 100 percent of the surveyed listed companies identify the main sources of carbon dioxide emissions and report greenhouse gas emissions. However, a quarter of WIG20 companies listed on the Warsaw Stock Exchange do not specify emission reduction targets and deadlines, and their sustainability strategies often lack important details, such as how and when they will be achieved.

An important point is that 7 out of 10 companies report information on occupational health and safety management, and 65 percent provide specific data on work-related injuries. These are indicators and parameters important for employees and job candidates in a given company.

Dr. Agata Rudnicka, from the Faculty of Management at the University of Lodz, very accurately diagnosed the problem.

“The starting point for assessing an organization in terms of ESG is good recognition of the environment, understanding its needs and juxtaposing them with current operations. In the environmental sphere, such expectations may include: reducing emissions, dropping out from the use of raw materials that generate pollution, changing the methods of production, etc. The social sphere primarily considers the need to assess risks related to human rights, creating conditions for development with respect for community rights, or ensuring transparent communication with the community. Activities in the field of organizational governance include, among others: analysis of documents, relationships, roles, and responsibilities in the decision-making processes. In ESG activities, it is equally important to go beyond the boundaries of the organization and examine the value chain. Only in this way will companies be aware of their actual impacts. Taking responsibility for the value chain requires a lot of determination and trust on the part of all partners, but it is an essential element in creating a framework for sustainable business. Only through recognising the expectations and needs, can there be space for further action.” says Dr. Agata Rudnicka.

The above assessment shows one thing: working as an ESG expert in a company will not be easy, light work, or pleasant, although in the long term it can give both material and intangible satisfaction. Looking at the assessment of the expert from the University of Lodz, the competences that such a specialist must have set a very high bar; this may result in a recruitment problem.

People responsible for the area of ESG have a difficult task of estimating organizational resources in the context of the planned sustainable development goals, not only in the short term, but also in the long term. From this moment on work begins on the operations related to conscious interventions, aimed at minimising negative social and environmental impacts, implementing desired solutions, checking, and verifying their effectiveness.

The market of ESG specialists is in its infancy. The global consulting company Deloitte is looking for a person who "would like to support our clients in designing and implementing an ESG strategy, integrated with their business strategy".

The qualifications that a candidate for a job at Deloitte must have include:

- About 2-3 years of business experience. A big advantage is if the experience comes from within the consulting industry.
- Experience in working in the business strategy department, in the implementation of strategic projects.
- Ability to analyse the market and competition.
- The ability to think logically, translate the collected knowledge and conclusions into synthetic information.
- The ability to learn quickly and use the newly acquired knowledge in practice.
- Ability to coordinate several streams of work simultaneously.
- The ability to prepare conclusions from analysis and recommendations in the form of PowerPoint presentations.
- The ability to use Excel in practice in order to, for example, analyse and build simple financial models.

Additionally, it would be great if the candidate has:

- Experience in designing and implementing strategies in the field of sustainable development and ESG.
- Experience in financial analysis or evaluation of enterprises from the perspective of a fund or a bank.
- Experience in assessing companies in terms of ESG ratings (Sustainalytics, Ecovadis, S&P, MSCI, etc.)
- Experience in implementing projects in selected areas: ESG, improving the efficiency of business processes, increasing company value, increasing brand value, climate protection and decarbonisation, circular economy, innovation, building organisational culture, implementing solutions)
- Basic knowledge of regulatory issues related to sustainable development (e.g. EU Green Deal, CSRD, Taxonomy, SFDR, TCFD/TNFD Guidelines, Digital Product Passport, etc.)
- Experience in researching consumer and industry trends.
- Experience in change management.

An ESG specialist is no joke. How many such experts are there in Poland? Good question.

The selection of a person responsible for ESG issues is currently one of the important issues for companies in the context of sustainable development. These aspects will have a significant impact on the image and long-term stability of the company. It is extremely important to find a person with the right skills and passion who will be able to effectively manage this area. The times when companies delegated someone to handle certain processes, on the principle of 'Now you will be our OHS or GDPR expert', are long gone.

What did Velma ESG LTD. require from candidates for the position of an ESG specialist?

- Minimum of 2 years of professional experience in the ESG area (necessary condition)
- Have a working knowledge of ESG tools and methodologies.
- Experience in developing and creating documents for the needs of individual organisational units of the company, and for a non-financial report.
- Ability to establish and maintain good professional relationships with colleagues.
- Knowledge of basic guidelines, concepts, and taxonomy.
- Proficient knowledge of the English language.

Again, level hard, as the aforementioned millennials say.

Gobarto SA, in addition to the specified requirements for a candidate for an ESG reporting specialist, offers, for example, 'coffee with the boss', as well as:

- Various development opportunities: training, promotions, internal recruitment.
- Celebrating successes
- Social fund
- Integration
- Medical care and life insurance
- Sports package
- Transparent employment conditions, employment contract: stable work for longer.

'Coffee with the boss' or 'celebrating successes' sounds encouraging, may be worth considering.

Job offers for specialists are currently posted by the largest firms on the market, which may mean that before ordinary entrepreneurs start looking for such professionals, many may already be taken up by the 'big game' players.

Many companies in Poland simply need people who will explain the idea of ESG to management boards, employees, or clients, and only then we can try to deepen the issues around ESG strategies, until an expert stage is reached, in line with the requirements of the largest firms for such job candidates.

Global companies are looking for ESG specialists, ESG managers, lead risk specialists. This is a good thing, although awareness among smaller companies is still insufficient, just like among most Poles. This has to change. Education, awareness, and market requirements are the most important. The rest will come along on its own in due time.

It is worth noting that the obligation to report ESG sooner or later will apply to every Polish company, so it is worth taking an interest in it now. New regulations introduced in the EU will have consequences for the entire market.

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