

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS – AN ANALYSIS OF ESG POSTGRADUATE STUDIES OFFERINGS IN POLAND

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Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to identify opportunities for competence development and managerial education in corporate sustainability activities in an ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) perspective.

Design/methodology/approach: The paper has been prepared based on a review of literature and online sources. An analysis of 30 ESG education programmes offered by universities in 15 cities across Poland was conducted. Data sourced directly from university websites, including programme duration, teaching hours, available learning formats and tuition fees, were utilised. Additionally, short telephone interviews were conducted with selected HR staff members of postgraduate programmes as part of the research process.

Findings: A wide selection of postgraduate studies covering various aspects of ESG is available in Poland. Results of the analysis reveal that the highest number of programmes are offered by universities in Warsaw (14) and Poznań (5). The average cost of ESG courses in Warsaw is EUR 2,163.28, while in Poznań it is EUR 1,647.83. In the remaining 13 locations, the average fee is EUR 1,581.03. The offer is dominated by programmes administered in a hybrid format, accounting for 47% of all courses.

Research limitations/implications: The list of examples of postgraduate ESG studies provides a general overview that may not be exhaustive. However, it raises awareness of available educational offerings and opportunities for education for sustainable business in Poland.

Practical implications: This paper can serve as a valuable source of information, particularly for prospective postgraduate students, by offering an overview of available programmes in the field of ESG.

Originality/value: By reviewing postgraduate educational programmes, analysing their content and learning formats, this paper provides insights into available opportunities in Poland for developing competencies in the ESG area, which are essential for effective implementation of sustainable development strategies within organisations.

Keywords: ESG, managerial education, postgraduate studies, sustainable development.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Environmental, social and internal governance factors, defined in the literature by the acronym ESG (*Environmental, Social and Governance*), are becoming an integral part of enterprise management. This stems not only from necessity but also from broad changes in the legal and regulatory environment being established at the international level, particularly at the European level (Gemra et al., 2024, pp. 24-25).

Climate change and the consequent need to adapt to it necessitate legislative and institutional efforts to find solutions that mitigate or counteract environmental degradation with consideration for and balanced continuation of fulfilling societal needs. Consequently, enterprises and entrepreneurs face the challenge of adapting their operations and thinking about business in terms of *sustainability*, as measured by the three-pronged concept of ESG (Gemra et al., 2024). Viewed in this context, it can be stated that companies should strive to incorporate measures of *sustainability* into their business strategies, considering how their business activities impact the natural environment (environmental aspect), the social environment (social aspect) and internal governance principles (internal aspect).

To properly identify these measures, it is crucial not only to deepen existing knowledge but, above all, to acquire it in new areas. This is because ESG is an interdisciplinary “product” representing the convergence of exact, natural and social science disciplines. On the one hand, there is regulatory growth, synthetically embracing quantitative and qualitative methods for measuring compliance. On the other hand, there are environmental standards and indicators defining the characteristics of environmentally sustainable activity. This combination requires deepening knowledge in new areas, previously unrelated to business activities, and learning to analyse the enterprise-environment-society relationship in a multifaceted way. Understanding this correlation of factors, which jointly overlap and exert a reciprocal influence, requires building a workforce capable of appropriately managing the transformation process. This requires statutorily established educational institutions to develop courses and curricula that address the need to develop competencies and skills in the area of ESG (Grygiel-Tomaszewska et al., 2023).

2. The Role of Education for Sustainable Business

ESG is not a young concept in the market, having been known in the literature on the subject for 20 years (Łudzińska, 2024, p. 117). Nevertheless, its business consolidation in the Polish market has occurred over the last six years. This is a direct result of changes in the legal environment and, consequently, the business environment in the perception of how businesses

operate. While lawmakers impose the need to manage ESG aspects on market actors (Gemra et al., 2024), consumers of goods and services themselves, through their consumer preferences, force businesses to adopt a transformational approach in which ESG factors begin to play a key role (Ślażyńska-Kluczek, Brzezek, 2023, p. 74). As a result, ESG is increasingly influencing internal management of this area in terms of compliance and the long-term impact on competitiveness and profits of companies (Ślażyńska-Kluczek, Brzezek, 2023, p. 74). In order to address these challenges, a proper understanding of the ESG issue and its impact on the future fate of individual sectors and businesses within them becomes crucial. Holistic training of personnel, who embody the change and understand the ongoing legal, regulatory and consumer breakthrough, is essential from this point of view.

3. Review of Postgraduate Studies in the Field of ESG in Poland

Polish universities are introducing and integrating ESG topics into their curricula at various levels and across multiple disciplines. Individuals seeking to build and develop businesses sustainably and responsibly require the expertise, practical skills and competencies necessary to implement sustainable practices in their organisations in an environmental, social and corporate governance perspective and to influence their development strategy (Studia Podyplomowe Strategiczna Transformacja ESG w Przedsiębiorstwie, n.d.; Zrównoważony rozwój przedsiębiorstwa – wdrażanie i raportowanie ESG, n.d.). Boards of directors and management executives of various types of organisations – companies, central and local government units, non-profit sector entities; business owners; employees responsible for preparing and implementing ESG strategies; those involved in ESG reporting in line with the CSR directive; employees dealing with communication, marketing, human resources management, investor relations, environmental protection (Kształcimy liderów przyszłości. Prowadzimy badania naukowe ważne dla sukcesu gospodarki, n.d.; Studia Podyplomowe ESG compliance w przedsiębiorstwie, n.d.) as well as those wishing to pursue a career in environmental management, sustainable supply chains, life cycle analysis and circular economy (Menedżer ESG. Studia podyplomowe WSiLiZ, n.d.) are increasingly seeking ways to enhance their qualifications, develop their competencies and pursue managerial education in these areas. In response to the growing interest and demand, many Polish higher education institutions offer two-semester postgraduate studies focused on sustainable development and ESG issues.

The study analysed 30 ESG education programmes offered by universities in 15 cities in Poland. The data used was directly from the universities' websites. Additionally, short telephone interviews were conducted with selected HR staff members of postgraduate programmes as part of the research process. The criteria used to assess the potential of these programmes included the reputation and prestige of universities, measured by their position in national educational

rankings (Ranking Szkół Wyższych Perspektywy, 2024) and the degree of recognition of Polish universities internationally. The analysis of the websites was conducted between September 20, 2024 and October 5, 2024. Table 1 presents a summary of these 30 programmes. It contains detailed information regarding location, names of the programmes, their duration, number of course hours, form of delivery, cost of attendance, and also includes a list of partners and patrons of the postgraduate study programmes.

Table 1.

Overview of selected postgraduate programmes in the field of ESG (figures as of September/October 2024)

No.	Location	Educational institution	Programme name	Duration		Mode of education (Form of study)	Tuition fee** [EUR]	Partner of the programme/Patronage
				Semesters [N]	Hours taught [N]			
1.	Bydgoszcz Łódź Toruń	WSB Merito University	Sustainable Development (ESG) for the Financial Sector	2	160	Hybrid – in-person and online classes. The curriculum includes 10 sessions	1,382.96	
2.	Dąbrowa Górnicza	WSB Academy	Sustainable Development and ESG	2	176	Distance education. Classes taught online	1,617.36	Partner of the programme: TÜV NORD Polska
3.	Gdańsk	University of Gdańsk	ESG Manager	2	168	Hybrid. First and last session are in-person. Remaining classes are online	1,265.76	
4.	Gdynia Gdańsk	WSB Merito University	Sustainable Development and ESG – Company Growth Strategy in the Age of the Latest EU Reporting Regulations	2	160	Distance education. Classes taught online	1,511.88	Partners of the programme: SGS Poland, FSD for sustainable development
5.	Gliwice	Silesian University of Technology	Sustainable Development and ESG in Industry	2	200*	In-person	1,758.00	
6.	Katowice	University of Economics in Katowice	Green Transformation Manager – ESG Reporting	2	190	Distance education. Classes taught online	1,336.08	Partners of the programme: EcoGreen, Polska Agencja Ewaluacji Sektora Publicznego S.A.
7.	Kielce	Świętokrzyskie University	ESG Reporting	2	No data	Hybrid – in-person and online classes	1,640.80	Partners of the programme: Teaching Academy in Malbork, Non-Public Teacher Training Centre NODN Progresfera, JLDA Institute, Świętokrzyskie University in Kielce, New Consulting Group, Kraków Institute for Education Development

Cont. table 1.

8.	Kraków	Kraków Business School at the Kraków University of Economics	ESG Manager	2	180	Group 1: Distance education Group 2: In-person education	1,875.20	Partner of the programme: WSE
9.	Poznań	Poznań University of Economics and Business	ESG Manager	2	160	Distance education – using distance learning methods and techniques (in the form of videoconferencing with synchronous interaction)	1,476.72	Programme administered in collaboration with TÜV NORD Polska
10.	Poznań	Poznań University of Economics and Business	Sustainable Development in Organisation Strategy and Non-Financial Reporting (ESG)	2	160	Distance education – using distance learning methods and techniques (in the form of videoconferencing with synchronous interaction)	1,476.72	
11.	Poznań	Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań	ESG Compliance in Enterprises	2	120	Hybrid – in-person and online classes	1,828.32	
12.	Poznań	Collegium Da Vinci	ESG Management	2	180	Hybrid: 70% in-person 30% remote	1,933.80	Partner of the programme: KMPG
13.	Poznań	Poznań University of Technology	Sustainable Business Development – ESG Implementation and Reporting	2	190	Hybrid – in-person and online classes. Studies are administered during a maximum of 9 sessions per semester	1,523.60	
14.	Rzeszów	University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów	ESG Manager	2	180	Hybrid: ca. 80% online classes	1,593.92	Programme patronage: TÜV NORD Polska

Cont. table 1.

15.	Sopot	Sopot Academy of Applied Sciences	ESG in Practice	2	180	Distance education (80%), except for the first and last session, which are held on campus	1,992.40	Partners of the programme: ESO AUDIT, ARETE AUDIT Olga Petelczyc Programme patronage: SITO Strategy, Growth Through Diversity, Polish Institute for Human Rights and Business.
16.	Warsaw	Kozminski University	Sustainable Finance and ESG	2	192*	Hybrid. First and last classes in each semester are held on the Kozminski University campus (approximately 30% of contact hours), the rest are taught online	2,906.56	Partners of the programme: Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego, CFA Society Poland, e-Mission, WM Advisory Poland Patronage: Chapter Zero Poland, UN Global Compact Network Poland
17.	Warsaw	Warsaw University of Life Sciences (SGGW)	ESG and Climate Transformation	2	160	Distance education – using distance learning methods and techniques, except for the first session, which is held in-person on the SGGW campus. The curriculum includes 10 sessions	1,359.52	The postgraduate studies are administered in collaboration with and under patronage of: National Chamber of Commerce, Rymarz Zdort Maruta, ESG Impact Network, TÜV SÜD Poland, ESG Consulting, SGGW Institute of Economics and Finance, ZGWRP, Go Green Community
18.	Warsaw	University of Warsaw, Faculty of Management	ESG Academy	2	150	In-person	2,203.36	Partners of the programme: pwc, IBM
19.	Warsaw	Warsaw University of Technology	ESG in Construction	2	192	In-person. A total of 12 sessions are planned. The university provides the option to attend in a hybrid format.	2,578.40	Programme created in consortium by the Faculty of Civil Engineering, Warsaw University of Technology, in collaboration with CMS law firm and ARCADIS sp. z o.o.

Cont. table 1.

20.	Warsaw	SWPS University	ESG Change Manager Managing Change for Sustainable Development	2	192	Hybrid: 60% in-person 40% remote	2,203.36	Partner of the programme: GPM Driving Sustainable Change
21.	Warsaw	Łazarski University	Compliance & ESG Officer	2	177	In-person	1,828.32	Partner of the programme: ICC Poland
22.	Warsaw	University of Warsaw, Faculty of Management	Sustainable Finance	2	200	Hybrid	2,062.72	
23.	Warsaw	Kozminski University	ESG Perspective. Responsible and Sustainable Management	2	188*	Hybrid. The curriculum includes 15 sessions (of which 5-6 are conducted online)	2,390.88	Partner of the programme: Deloitte
24.	Warsaw	Institute of Environmental Protection – National Research Institute	Sustainable Development and ESG Economy	2	240	In-person, hybrid or remote (student's choice). The curriculum includes 16 sessions	1,406.40	
25.	Warsaw	SGH Warsaw School of Economics	Strategic ESG Transformation in Enterprises	2	180	Hybrid. The first and last session are held in-person on campus. The rest are held online	2,320.56	Content partner of the programme: Studies administered in collaboration with KPMG
26.	Warsaw	SGH Warsaw School of Economics	ESG Business Models. Sustainable Development Reporting	2	160	In-person	2,273.68	
27.	Warsaw	SGH Warsaw School of Economics	Corporate Governance and ESG for Supervisory Board Members	2	160	Hybrid – in-person and online classes	2,086.16	Studies co-organised by SGH and the NadzórKorporacyjny.pl portal
28.	Warsaw	SGH Warsaw School of Economics	ESG Fundamentals for Business***	2	164	In-person. The curriculum includes 13 sessions	2,109.60	Partner of the programme: pwc

Cont. table 1.

29.	Wrocław	WSB Merito University	Sustainable Development and ESG Manager	2	176	Distance education – using distance learning methods and techniques. The curriculum includes 11 sessions	1,418.12	Partner of the programme: EY Academy of Business, Fairtrade Polska Foundation
30.	Warsaw	Managerial Academy of Applied Sciences	ESG in Business	2	160	Hybrid. Classes are taught online and in-person. Lectures and laboratory classes at KEZO Research Centre of the Polish Academy of Sciences are held in-person on selected Saturdays and Sundays.	2,554.96	Partners of the programme: Polish Academy of Sciences Research Centre for Energy Conversion and Renewable Sources (PAN KEZO), EY Academy of Business

* Number of hours taught, including examinations.

** Tuition fee for postgraduate studies, assuming a one-time payment. The tuition fee indicated in Polish zloty (PLN) has been converted into the international currency euro (EUR) based on the average exchange rate of the National Bank of Poland (NBP) as of January 10, 2025, where PLN 1.00 = EUR 0.2344.

*** English is the language of instruction for this programme.

Source: own work based on a review of online sources.

The ESG postgraduate studies offerings presented, while sharing some similarities, also exhibit significant differences. The programmes offer a wide range of specialisations covering various aspects of ESG, such as ESG Reporting, ESG Manager, ESG in Construction, ESG in Business, Responsible and Sustainable Management, Sustainable Finance, ESG Compliance in Business, and others.

The highest number of such courses are available in Warsaw, where universities offer a total of 14 programmes. These include programmes offered by the SGH Warsaw School of Economics (4), Kozminski University (2), University of Warsaw (2), Institute of Environmental Protection (1), Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW (1), SWPS University (1), Managerial Academy of Applied Sciences (1), Łazarski University (1) and Warsaw University of Technology (1). Poznań ranks second in terms of the number of ESG postgraduate programmes, with 5 courses available. Studies there can be undertaken at the Poznań University of Economics and Business, which offers 2 courses, as well as at the Adam Mickiewicz University, Collegium Da Vinci and Poznań University of Technology. Postgraduate programmes are also offered in other cities such as Bydgoszcz, Łódź, Toruń, Dąbrowa Górnicza, Gdynia, Gdańsk, Sopot, Gliwice, Katowice, Kielce, Kraków, Wrocław and Rzeszów, although their number is significantly lower.

All postgraduate study programmes span 2 semesters, but the number of teaching hours varies depending on the course. The shortest course, “ESG Compliance in Enterprises”, administered by the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, comprises a total of 120 teaching hours, including 28 lecture hours and 92 hours of exercises and workshops. More intensive, longer programmes include “Sustainable Development and ESG Economy” offered by the Institute of Environmental Protection – National Research Institute in Warsaw, encompassing 240 hours, of which 165 are lectures and 75 are exercises, and “Sustainable Finance” at the University of Warsaw, comprising 200 hours of lectures and workshops. Most postgraduate programmes include 160 teaching hours (7 programmes) or 180 hours (5 programmes).

Among the listed study programmes, the language of lecture in 29 of them is Polish. The exception is the “ESG Fundamentals for Business” programme offered by the SGH Warsaw School of Economics, which is taught in English.

Tuition fees for postgraduate studies in ESG vary, reflecting the diversity of educational programmes. The most expensive postgraduate studies in ESG are “Sustainable Finance and ESG” administered by the Kozminski University, priced at EUR 2,906.56. The next highest fees are for “ESG in Construction” at the Warsaw University of Technology (EUR 2,578.40) and “ESG in Business” at the Managerial Academy of Applied Sciences in Warsaw (EUR 2,554.96). The least expensive programme, “ESG Manager”, is offered by the University of Gdańsk at EUR 1,265.76. These studies are conducted in a hybrid mode, with the first and last sessions held in-person and the remaining classes taught online. Other cost-effective options include “ESG and Climate Transformation” at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW (EUR 1,359.52) and “Green Transformation Manager – ESG Reporting”

(EUR 1,336.08) at the University of Economics in Katowice. Both programmes are delivered online, which likely contributes to their lower cost. In Warsaw, fees for postgraduate studies in ESG range from EUR 1,359.52 to EUR 2,906.56, while in Poznań they range from EUR 1,476.72 to EUR 1,933.80. The average cost for such studies in the remaining 13 locations is EUR 1,581.03.

Postgraduate instruction is delivered in in-person, hybrid (classes are held both online and in-person) and remote modes (classes are conducted entirely online using distance learning methods and techniques). The majority of programmes, as many as fourteen (47%), are delivered in a hybrid format. Nine courses offer remote curricula (30%), while the smallest number, six courses (20%), are administered in-person, five of which in Warsaw. The Institute of Environmental Protection – National Research Institute is the only institution that allows students to choose their learning format, offering studies in in-person, hybrid or remote modes, depending on participant preference.

Out of the thirty available postgraduate programmes, the vast majority (70%) were created or are administered in collaboration with industry partners, including international advisory firms, research institutes, consulting firms and non-governmental organisations. Among the partners of ESG postgraduate programmes are TÜV NORD Polska, EY Academy of Business, KPMG, Deloitte, pwc, IBM, the Warsaw Stock Exchange (WSE), Fairtrade Poland Foundation, GPM Driving Sustainable Change, Foundation for Sustainable Development (FSD), Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK) and Chapter Zero Poland. These partners provide additional content support, enriching the programmes with practical knowledge and helping to ensure the currency of curricular content, aligning it with current trends and market needs.

4. Summary

The range of postgraduate studies in ESG in Poland is diverse in terms of programmes, locations, teaching hours, costs and learning modes. All postgraduate programmes last 2 semesters, encompassing between 120 and 240 teaching hours, with almost half of the courses comprising 160 or 180 hours. Tuition fees range from EUR 1,265.76 (University of Gdańsk) to EUR 2,906.56 (Kozminski University). In Warsaw, the average fee for postgraduate studies in ESG is EUR 2,163.28, while in Poznań it is EUR 1,647.83. In the remaining 13 cities, the average tuition fee is EUR 1,581.03. Study programmes are administered in in-person, hybrid or remote modes, with the hybrid mode being the most frequently available option (47%). It is worth emphasising that the vast majority of the courses are conducted in collaboration with industry partners. Programme partners include well-known industry organisations, scientific and research institutions, international consulting and advisory firms and institutions supporting sustainable development. This ensures that participants gain not

only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills aligned with contemporary standards and addressing the growing labour market demand for specialists in this field.

Education in the field of ESG is important from the point of view of market attractiveness, not only for the employees themselves, but especially for companies. Study programmes offered on the Polish didactic market are characterized by a range of topics and the degree of sophistication of the knowledge transferred. Such differentiation allows not only to acquire new knowledge and skills, but also to deepen the knowledge already possessed. A key aspect of the analysed programmes is their interdisciplinary nature and close cooperation between academia and business. This allows for duality in meeting needs by adjusting the programmes during their duration. Objectively, the close cooperation of business and academia in the ESG field makes it possible to combine theoretical knowledge with market practice. This provides an opportunity for students to properly understand the concept of ESG and put the knowledge gained into practice.

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