

# ESG — LAB —

## NEWSLETTER VOL. 4



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# 1. Conducting Focus Groups in Cyprus, Greece, and Portugal: What did we learn from Blue Economy SMEs?

The Focus Group aimed to:

- Evaluate participants' understanding of ESG principles
- Identify existing practices (including informal ones)
- Explore the main needs and challenges faced by SMEs
- Introduce a simple ESG self-assessment tool



## FOCUS GROUP IN PORTUGAL

On October 27, 2025, an in-person focus group was held in Aveiro, Portugal, in an informal setting that encouraged open and constructive discussion. Nine representatives from eight Blue Economy organizations took part.

The organisations that participated where:

Hotel As Americas, Bags de Sal Wine Greenhouse, Sal Poente, Loja do Zeca, Marinha Noeirinha, Horta dos Peixinhos, Costa do Sal Hotel Boat

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Dialogue diversity

Participants demonstrated strong environmental awareness but limited familiarity with ESG as a structured framework. While many sustainable practices are already in place, these are often implemented without formal documentation or measurable indicators.

**Companies implement:**

- Recycling & reduced water use
- Use of local suppliers.
- Support for local employment.

**However, there is no:**

- Connection with numerical indicators.
- Structured reporting.
- Understanding of the Governance pillar.

**Key challenges identified included:**

- Limited time and human resources
- The perception that ESG mainly concerns large corporations
- A lack of simple, SME-friendly tools to measure impact

Participants expressed the need for clear ESG guidance, including practical checklists, ready-to-use templates tailored to tourism, hospitality, and aquaculture, short webinars, examples of successful ESG implementation by Portuguese SMEs, and the creation of a local network to exchange best practices.

**FOCUS GROUP IN GREECE AND CYPRUS**

On December 9, 2025, an online focus group was conducted with representatives from the hotel and education sectors in Cyprus and Greece. The organisations that participated were: Archon lotink, Nisi beach resort, Apopsi

**From this meeting, we identified that the organizations apply ESG practices such as:**

Recycling and reduced water consumption  
Use of local suppliers  
Support for local employment  
Solar energy systems for hot water  
Food waste management initiatives  
Comprehensive employee insurance coverage  
Strong emphasis on workplace safety

**However, several gaps were identified:**

Limited documentation of ESG-related practices  
Absence of structured ESG policies  
Lack of basic environmental performance indicators (energy, water, waste)  
No simplified ESG reporting framework adapted to SME needs

Participants highlighted the importance of targeted ESG training in the form of short, practical webinars, including real-life SME examples and step-by-step demonstrations of simple tools.

### **Common Conclusions across Cyprus, Greece, and Portugal**

Despite differences in national contexts and levels of ESG maturity, SMEs across all three countries are already implementing sustainability-related actions. However, they require greater structure, clarity, and practical guidance.

**SMEs are looking for:**

- Concise, applicable training
- Low-cost, easy-to-use tools
- Clear links between ESG performance, financing opportunities, and competitiveness

## **2. World Café**

### **Dialogue, cooperation, and practical solutions for SMEs in the Blue Economy**

**World Café Portugal – Aveiro (October 2025)**

The World Café sessions in Portugal were held in person in Aveiro, bringing together businesses from tourism, catering, aquaculture, and port-related sectors. The organizations that participated were Sal Poente Restaurant, Baga do Sal, Ostra Aveiro, Horta dos Reixinho, Cais a Porta



What emerged from the meeting was that the concept of sustainability is well known, but the term ESG remains less understood — particularly in the Social and Governance pillars.

### **Many businesses reported already implementing:**

Recycling initiatives and plastic reduction

Water- and energy-saving measures (e.g., low-flow showers, LED lighting, towel reuse policies)

Responsible tourism practices, including advising visitors on environmentally friendly behavior

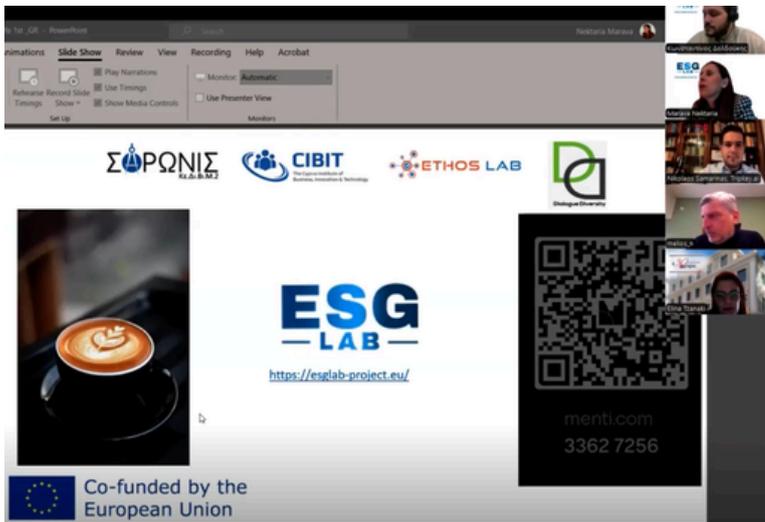
While environmental actions are relatively well developed, participants acknowledged that Social and Governance aspects receive less attention.

To address this imbalance, SMEs emphasized their preference for:

- Financial incentives linked to ESG performance
- Simple environmental measurement tools adapted to local realities
- SME-friendly reporting templates

### **World Café Greece and Cyprus**

On February 12, 2026, an online World Café session was held with SMEs and start-ups from Cyprus and Greece to better understand their readiness, challenges, and needs regarding ESG integration. The organizations that participated were: apopsi, tripkey.ai, pyxida



**The discussion confirmed that sustainability is a familiar concept, but ESG is often perceived as:**

- Complex and overly technical
- Relevant mainly to large companies
- A regulatory requirement rather than a strategic opportunity

**Participants identified the need for:**

- Simplified ESG reporting templates tailored to small businesses
- Digital tools for monitoring performance indicators
- Short, practical training sessions
- E-mentoring and advisory support
- Networking opportunities with other SMEs

**At the same time, it was recognized that adopting ESG can strengthen:**

- The brand and customer trust
- Employee engagement
- Access to financing and partnerships

## Final Takeaways

Most SMEs are already implementing sustainability-related actions, though often in a fragmented way. Environmental initiatives such as recycling and energy-saving measures are common. Social practices focus on compliance with labor legislation and community engagement, while governance typically centers on legal compliance and basic operational rules.

The overall conclusion from both focus groups and World Café sessions is clear: ESG should not be treated as a bureaucratic obligation. Instead, it can serve as a strategic tool to enhance competitiveness, build credibility, and facilitate access to financing and partnerships.

ESG LAB continues to transform dialogue into action by developing simple tools, practical guidance, and fostering an active Blue Economy SME community.

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