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# The quest for sustainability: which competencies are sought by companies?



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## THE JOINT RESEARCH

The research endeavor has been undertaken by the collaboration between Sustainability Makers and Lighcast.

**Sustainability Makers** - the professional network is the Italian association of more than 300 professionals who specialise in planning and implementing sustainability strategies and projects, in business enterprises and other organisations: it's a third-sector organization which role is to qualify and enhance the skills and specialisation of these professionals through training and networking activities, studies and researches, conferences, workshops and webinars.

Set up in 2006, it represents Italy at the Global Network of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD).

Its mission is: to promote the standing of sustainability professionals for the good of the company and of society; to develop the professions associated with sustainability in the interest of the common good and corporate competitiveness.

<https://www.sustainability-makers.it/>

**Lighcast** is the world's leading authority on in-demand skills, labour market trends, and talent intelligence. Lightcast insight and expertise, powered by our best-in-class data on jobs and skills is used by companies across the globe to better understand their own workforce and find new talent, by education institutions helping prepare their students for the job market, and by community leaders to develop new solutions for growth in their regions. Headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts, and Moscow, Idaho, Lightcast is active in more than 30 countries and has offices in the United Kingdom, Italy, New Zealand, and India.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the global push for more environmentally and socially responsible practices, firms are increasingly integrating sustainability into their organizational structures. This shift has given rise to a diverse array of sustainability-related roles within these organizations. However, defining the exact competencies and skill sets required for these roles has proven to be a challenge. In response to this, Sustainability Makers and Lightcast have collaborated on a comprehensive research initiative on European market. This undertaking involved a meticulous and thorough analysis of extensive data extracted from a wide range of online job postings.

By delving deep into the myriad facets of these job postings, a comprehensive and illuminating picture has emerged, shedding light on the dynamic landscape of the sustainability job market. **In the year 2022, Italy witnessed approximately 770 online job postings for positions related to sustainability, signaling a substantial interest in these roles.** However, Italy's figures fell behind those of other prominent European nations. Notably, **Germany surged ahead with an impressive fivefold greater number of sustainability job postings than Italy, followed by France with 3.2 times more, and the United Kingdom with 2.7 times more.** These disparities reflect varying degrees of emphasis on sustainability across European countries, shaped by diverse economic factors, industrial priorities, and governmental policies.

The job market for sustainability roles across Europe has experienced a remarkable surge in recent years. **Italy has displayed an exceptional trajectory, boasting a staggering 22-fold increase since 2019. Similarly, France and the United Kingdom have showcased significant growth with 12-fold and 8-fold increments respectively.** This upward trajectory underscores the mounting significance of sustainability within corporate contexts.

One of the core questions our research seeks to answer is: What are the key competencies demanded by companies for roles in sustainability? **In Italy, when it comes to job postings for sustainability roles, the requested competencies often appear quite broad and general.** These positions typically mention skills related to sustainability or ESG without delving into specific details. This approach may encompass a wide range of sustainability-related activities but lacks precision in outlining the exact requirements. In contrast, **in other countries such as Spain, France, and the UK, job postings for sustainability roles tend to specify more precise and tailored competencies.** For instance, there is an increasing emphasis on skills related to achieving net-zero emissions within organizations. This focus reflects the growing global commitment to combating climate change and the urgency to reduce carbon footprints.

The results also highlight differences in skill requirements between roles. **In Italy, for entry-level sustainability roles, there is a clear emphasis on a broad range of sustainability skills, particularly those related to environmental sustainability initiatives.** This suggests a focus on mitigating environmental

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impacts and ecological stewardship for candidates in these roles. In contrast, **roles requiring two or more years of experience place a greater emphasis on business-related skills, especially in management and strategic decision-making**. This highlights the need for experienced professionals who can effectively guide sustainability efforts and integrate sustainable practices into overall business strategies. This distinction underscores the evolving responsibilities and expectations associated with sustainability positions as candidates gain experience. Employers are increasingly prioritizing strategic thinking, leadership, and comprehensive business acumen in shaping sustainable practices within organizations.

Another key question our research seeks to answer is: What are the sustainability-related skills sought by companies in individuals occupying positions beyond the sustainability department? In Italy, job postings for other professional profiles exhibit a diverse range of competency requirements. **Skills related to employee satisfaction and diversity and inclusion, as well as environmental skills like renewable energy and mitigation, are highly sought after**. Regardless of the country, change management is a common competency requirement. **Interestingly, in the United Kingdom, there is a unique focus on competencies related to stakeholder engagement**.

The rising demand for sustainability skills in non-sustainability roles reflects a growing recognition of sustainability's importance across various functions within organizations. Businesses are placing a heightened emphasis on sustainability, leading to an increased need for professionals with expertise in sustainable practices. This shift underscores the integration of sustainability competencies into diverse professional roles, signaling a more comprehensive and holistic approach to sustainability within the job market.