

TRANSNATIONAL REPORT FOR
Analysis 1
" Are we ready for Circularity?"
Activity A2.2.

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1 Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of Analysis 1 under the ADVANCE CIRCULAR project, which aims to assess the readiness of the tourism sector and VET institutions for adopting circular economy (CE) principles in Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain. The analysis seeks to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to integrating CE practices in these sectors, providing a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape and recommendations for future actions.

1.1 Key Findings

The transnational analysis of circularity readiness in the tourism and VET sectors across Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain reveals a high level of awareness regarding the importance of circular economy (CE) principles but highlights significant disparities in their implementation. Key findings include:

Awareness and Integration Challenges: Both sectors demonstrate an awareness of CE principles and their potential benefits, particularly in enhancing sustainability and competitiveness. However, the integration of CE into practical applications and educational curricula remains inconsistent. VET institutions face challenges in updating curricula and providing adequate training for both educators and students, while tourism businesses struggle with applying CE practices due to limited knowledge and resources.

Financial and Resource Constraints: Financial barriers are a major obstacle for both VET and tourism sectors. Limited access to funding and financial incentives restrict the ability to invest in CE initiatives, upgrade infrastructure, and provide necessary training. This financial gap is further widened by insufficient public and private sector support, which hampers the progress towards sustainable practices.

Collaboration and Knowledge Transfer: The need for enhanced collaboration between VET institutions, tourism organizations, and other stakeholders is critical. Effective partnerships can facilitate knowledge transfer, practical training opportunities, and the development of CE-focused educational programs. However, current collaboration efforts are sporadic and need strategic strengthening to foster a comprehensive approach to circularity.

Regulatory and Market Dynamics: Regulatory frameworks supporting CE adoption are in place but vary significantly in their effectiveness and enforcement across the partner countries. Additionally, market acceptance of CE practices is often hindered by concerns over additional costs and perceived complexities in implementation, suggesting a need for market education and harmonized regulations that promote CE without imposing excessive burdens.

Need for Additional Training and Skills Development: There is a high demand for additional training and knowledge enhancement about CE principles in both the tourism and VET sectors. Developing targeted training programs, updating educational resources, and increasing awareness of CE's practical applications are crucial steps to equip future professionals with the skills needed to support a circular economy.

Overall, the analysis indicates that while progress has been made in raising awareness of circularity, significant efforts are required to overcome financial, educational, and regulatory barriers. Strengthening strategic partnerships, increasing funding support, and enhancing training opportunities will be vital to advancing circularity readiness in the tourism and VET sectors across the partner countries.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background and Objectives

About the project

ADVANCE CIRCULAR project will help to have a clear picture of the Circular Economy (CE) influence in the Tourism industry and VET regarding readiness and skills, bringing together VET institutions and companies. Comparisons can be made, but connections are created between two perspectives (the one of VET and that of the labour market employers) regarding Capacity Building (necessary skills and relevant ways of moving towards CE).

The project also helps to support the tourism industry in preparing and putting in place socially and environmentally sustainable solutions to link closely with VET organisations and organise people in this sector to become future-proof.

Circular mindsets and skills must be addressed directly in the business and VET framework, which requires a fresh view, resources and tools, expert training and more.

Both educational institutions in this sector need to start prioritising people, investing in their ongoing employability, and leveraging skills to boost the transition to a more sustainable economy through CE.

The main aim of the ADVANCED CIRCULAR project is to foster innovative circular approaches and tools in the tourism sector and other related areas through transnational cooperation and knowledge transfer by linking vocational education and training to this sector.

2.2 Scope of the Report

About the analysis 1

Analysis 1 referred to getting the answers in the target area of the whole partnership, **"Are we ready for circularity" in tourism** in the regions of the partners' countries?

The aim of this analysis 1 was to support an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses and the challenges and obstacles related to the circular economy.

Analysis 1 revealed the main challenges and readiness in the partner countries concerning CE influence in the tourism industry and VET.

2.3 Methodology

The hypothesis of the research for analysis 1:

1. Actual circular economy practices in the tourism industry, including accommodation, transport and tourism activities, already exist in each country.
2. The level of public awareness of circular economy practices in tourism is good.
3. There are some training programmes for tourism stakeholders, which include topics on circularity.
4. The country encourages innovation in tourism that includes circularity.
5. Tourism activities are energy efficient, and some already use renewable energy sources.
6. Some countries have also developed a tourism certification system for circular economy in tourism, and some use it. However, it is only used in some places.
7. For digital innovation, some countries already have digital technology to increase circularity in tourism processes.
8. Some countries also have marketing strategies and promote a circular economy in tourism.
9. Some countries cooperate with international organisations, but far too little to share best practices in circular economy.
10. In some countries, there is also already transferability of practices. However, successful circular economy practices cannot be everywhere and can be transferred between different destinations within a country.
11. In some countries, new circular economic concepts and innovations are being rapidly introduced into the tourism sector to monitor innovation.

In conducting the analysis, quantitative and qualitative methods were employed within the partnership to enhance its relevance.

2.3.1 The survey based on the questionnaire

Analysis No. 1 in partnership countries was implemented based on the Methodology for implementation, which was developed in the consortium for Activity A2.2. For the main topic of the analysis, no. 1, the partnership created 3 tools: survey-based questionnaires, an Interview-based survey, and a Focus group. For Analysis No. 1 in partner countries, the survey was based on the questionnaires.

The survey based on the questionnaire was done online (based on a Google form). We have used two questionnaires:

- Questionnaire 1 – for the representatives in tourism and related fields.
- Questionnaire 2 - for representatives of VET institutions, which prepare the workforce for tourism and related fields.

During the entire period of the analysis process in the partner's countries, the following activities have been done:

- Translating both questionnaires into partner's national languages.
- Prepare the Google forms for both questionnaires for online responses.
- Preparing a list of stakeholders:
 - The target group of organisations acting in tourism and related sectors and
 - VET institutions, teachers, and trainers who educate future employees working in tourism and associated sectors.
- We are disseminating information about the analysis process on web pages, social media, e-mails, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings.
- Raising awareness: Communicating with target groups about the project's topics, presenting (sending) them Vocabulary, and inviting them to complete the online questionnaires.
- Motivating them to provide relevant answers and opinions about Analysis No. 1.
- Facilitating a balanced representation of the two groups of respondents.

Each partner prepared the e-mail database with a VET expert to distribute the questionnaire, considering the GDRP principles.

2.3.1.1 Questionnaire for tourism organisations, companies, providers

The second questionnaire was designed to collect opinions and insights on how prepared the tourism sector in partners' countries is for adopting circular economy practices. It aimed to understand the perspective on the sector's current state and its capacity for circularity. The questionnaire was translated into the project partners' language. Each partner prepared the e-mail database with a tourist sector representative to distribute the questionnaire considering the GDRP principles.

2.3.2 Interview-based survey

The interview-based survey employed an informal instrument utilising the focus group. This tool comprised predefined items while also granting interviewers the flexibility to introduce topics and allow interviewees to provide additional qualitative information. Furthermore, the interview delved deeper into the data collected from the online questionnaire. Each interview consisted of 3-4 open-ended questions, allowing interviewees to communicate all relevant aspects of our research.

2.3.3 Focus group

Focus groups were prepared as group interviews to explore the perceptions and attitudes of representatives of tourism sector companies and VET institutions in this industry. The main topic of analysis was a relevant method to discover the valuable views of respondents.

2.3.4 Desk research

Partners have done the desk research. For each partner country, the readiness for circularity in the field of tourism, which requires a holistic approach, was checked. The participating partner for its country carried out the survey. The following four countries were analysed: Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania and Spain.

The partners have answered the following questions.

1. National tourism strategies in the countries already include targets and guidelines for circularity.
 - a. What national strategies exist at the country level in tourism?
 - b. Are circular economies included in tourism strategies?
 - c. Do national strategies include guidance on circularity? If yes, which ones?
2. Countries have waste management and recycling policies in tourist destinations.
 - a. What waste collection policies do countries have?
3. Countries have financial incentives and subsidies that individual countries offer for sustainable tourism projects.
 - a. The outline of some financial incentives in the tourism sector and VET in tourism and whether the incentives also include circular economy principles.

3 Understanding Circularity



Figure 1: The circular economy model: less raw material, less waste, less emissions¹

Benefits: why do we need to switch to a circular economy?

- **To protect the environment**

Reusing and recycling products would slow the use of natural resources, reduce landscape and habitat disruption, and help limit biodiversity loss. Another benefit of the circular economy is reducing total annual greenhouse gas emissions. The European Environment Agency states that industrial processes and product use are responsible for 9.10% of EU greenhouse gas emissions. In comparison, waste management accounts for 3.32%.

Creating more efficient and sustainable products from the start would help to reduce energy and resource consumption, as it is estimated that more than 80% of a product's environmental impact is determined during the design phase.

A shift to more reliable products that can be reused, upgraded and repaired would reduce the amount of waste. Packaging is a growing issue; Europeans generate nearly 180 kilos of packaging waste annually on average. The aim is to tackle excessive packaging and improve its design to promote reuse and recycling.

- **Reduce raw material dependence.**

The world's population is growing, and the demand for raw materials is increasing. However, the supply of crucial raw materials is limited.

Finite supplies also mean some EU countries depend on other countries for their raw materials. According to Eurostat, the EU imports about half of the raw materials it consumes.

The total value of trade (import plus exports) of raw materials between the EU and the rest of the world has almost tripled since 2002, with exports growing faster than imports. Regardless, the EU still imports more than it exports. In 2021, this resulted in a trade deficit of €35.5 billion.

Recycling raw materials mitigates the risks associated with supply, such as price volatility, availability and import dependency.

This especially applies to critical raw materials, such as batteries and electric engines, needed to produce technologies crucial for achieving climate goals.

¹ Source: European Parliament Research Service. Accessible on: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/economy/20151201STO05603/circular-economy-definition-importance-and-benefits>

- **Create jobs and save consumers money.**

Moving towards a more circular economy could increase competitiveness, stimulate innovation, boost economic growth and create jobs (700,000 jobs in the EU alone by 2030). Redesigning materials and products for circular use would also boost innovation across different sectors of the economy.

Consumers will be provided with more durable and innovative products to increase their quality of life and save them money in the long term.

- **What is the EU doing to become a circular economy?**

In March 2020, the European Commission presented the circular economy action plan, which aims to promote more sustainable product design, reduce waste, and empower consumers, for example, by creating a right to repair). There is a focus on resource-intensive sectors, such as electronics and ICT, plastics, textiles and construction.

In February 2021, the Parliament adopted a resolution on the new circular economy action plan demanding additional measures to achieve a carbon-neutral, environmentally sustainable, toxic-free and fully circular economy by 2050, including tighter recycling rules and binding targets for materials use and consumption by 2030.

In March 2022, the Commission released the first package of measures to speed up the transition towards a circular economy as part of the circular economy action plan. The proposals include boosting sustainable products, empowering consumers for the green transition, reviewing construction product regulations, and creating a strategy for sustainable textiles.

In November 2022, the Commission proposed new EU-wide rules on packaging. It aims to reduce packaging waste and improve packaging design, with clear labelling to promote reuse and recycling; it calls for a transition to bio-based, biodegradable and compostable plastics.

3.1 Importance of Circularity in VET and the Tourism Sector

Promoting Sustainable Practices: Circularity emphasises reducing waste, reusing resources, and recycling materials, directly contributing to sustainable development. This approach helps mitigate environmental footprints in the tourism sector by minimising resource consumption and waste generation.

Enhancing Skills for the Future: Integrating circular economy principles into Vocational Education and Training (VET) prepares learners with skills relevant to emerging green jobs. That ensures the workforce is equipped to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving job market focused on sustainability.

Economic Benefits: Circularity can save costs by optimising resource use and reducing waste disposal costs. For tourism businesses, this means more efficient operations and potentially higher profitability through sustainable business models.

Meeting Consumer Demand: As more consumers seek sustainable travel options, integrating circularity into tourism services can attract eco-conscious travellers. So enhances the reputation of tourism providers and meets the growing demand for responsible tourism.

Regulatory Compliance and Competitive Advantage: With increasing sustainability and waste management regulations, adopting circular practices helps organisations comply with legal requirements. It also provides a competitive edge as businesses prioritising sustainability are often preferred by customers and partners.

Resilience and Innovation: Circularity fosters resilience by reducing dependency on finite resources and encouraging the use of renewable inputs. It also drives innovation as businesses and VET institutions develop new solutions for sustainable practices, keeping the sector dynamic and forward-looking.

Creating a Positive Impact on Local Communities: In tourism, circular practices can contribute to the well-being of local communities by reducing pollution, supporting local economies, and promoting cultural heritage preservation through responsible resource management.

Aligning with Global Goals:

Embracing circularity supports the broader global agenda, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by promoting responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) and climate action (SDG 13).

This alignment enhances the sector's contribution to global sustainability efforts.

IMPLEMENTING CIRCULARITY IN VET AND THE TOURISM SECTOR DRIVES ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS AND BUILDS A SUSTAINABLE FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE, ENSURING THESE SECTORS CAN THRIVE WHILE PROTECTING THE PLANET

3.2 Current Trends and Innovations

1. **Zero-Waste Tourism:** One of the key trends is the shift towards zero-waste tourism, where businesses aim to eliminate waste by reducing, reusing, and recycling materials. It includes initiatives like banning single-use plastics, offering refillable amenities, and composting organic waste. Many hotels, resorts, and tourism operators are now committing to zero-waste goals, enhancing their sustainability credentials.

2. **Sustainable Accommodations:** The rise of eco-friendly accommodations, such as green hotels and eco-lodges, reflects the growing emphasis on circularity. These establishments integrate circular economy principles by using sustainable building materials, renewable energy sources, water-saving technologies, and waste reduction practices, creating a more environmentally friendly guest experience.

3. **Circular Supply Chains**: Tourism businesses increasingly adopt circular supply chain models. It involves sourcing products and materials that can be reused or recycled, opting for locally produced goods to minimise carbon footprints, and partnering with suppliers who follow sustainable practices. Circular supply chains help reduce overall resource consumption and waste generation.

4. **Resource Efficiency and Energy Management**: Innovations in energy efficiency, such as intelligent energy management systems, solar power installations, and energy-efficient appliances, are becoming standard in the tourism sector. These technologies help reduce the carbon footprint of tourism operations and lower operating costs, aligning with circular economy goals.

5. **Carbon Offset and Regenerative Tourism**: There's a growing focus on regenerative tourism, which goes beyond sustainability to restore and improve ecosystems actively. This trend includes carbon offset programs, where tourism businesses compensate for their emissions by investing in environmental projects like reforestation. It also encompasses practices like habitat restoration and biodiversity conservation as part of tourism activities.

6. **Circular Tourism Experiences**: New tourism experiences are designed with circularity, such as guided tours that educate travellers about sustainable practices, eco-friendly activities like cycling or walking tours, and farm-to-table dining experiences that emphasise local seasonal produce. These experiences not only minimise environmental impact but also raise awareness among tourists.

7. **Digital Solutions and Smart Technologies**: Digital innovations are crucial in advancing circularity in tourism. Intelligent technologies, such as apps for tracking waste, energy usage, or carbon emissions, help businesses monitor and reduce their environmental impact. Digital platforms also facilitate the sharing economy, encouraging tourists to rent or share resources rather than purchase new ones.

8. **Extended Product Life and Upcycling**: Tourism businesses are increasingly embracing upcycling and extending the life of products. For example, old furniture or decor items in hotels are being refurbished or repurposed instead of discarded. Similarly, initiatives like equipment rental services promote reuse, reducing the need for new products.

9. **Water Conservation Innovations**: Water-saving technologies are becoming more prevalent in tourism, particularly in regions facing water scarcity. Innovations include greywater recycling systems, water-efficient fixtures, and rainwater harvesting, all of which help reduce water consumption and promote circular water use within tourism operations.

10. **Collaborative Initiatives and Partnerships**: Collaboration is a key trend, with tourism stakeholders partnering across sectors to promote circularity. It includes joint initiatives between hotels, tour operators, local governments, and communities to

implement circular economy practices, share best practices, and drive sector-wide change.

4 Targets and guidelines for circularity in the National tourism strategies in the partnership countries

4.1 The national strategies in tourism in partner countries

4.1.1 The National Strategy for Tourism in Bulgaria

Tourism is considered one of the most relevant elements contributing to a country's economic and social development. In Bulgaria, in 2023, the tourism industry constituted 6% of the country's GDP².

Bulgaria has a diverse cultural and natural heritage at a crossing point between the West and East. Over the years, the country has become more popular for foreigners searching for different European experiences. Bulgaria is famous for its beaches on the Black Sea coast, mountain areas with ski resorts, rose valleys, rich history, 10 UNESCO heritage sites, and nature sites such as the mountains Rila (the highest mountain on the Balkan peninsula), Pirin (UNESCO heritage) and the Balkan Range. Not so well known, but becoming more popular, are the rural areas near nature areas with decadent cuisine and wine. One very perspective but still not so well-developed part of Bulgaria is the Danube River region with the EvroVelo 6 cycling route connecting many countries.

National strategies in the tourism sector:

1. The National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development in Bulgaria 2014-2030³ is in force.

² <https://www.tourism.government.bg/bg/infographs/294>

³ https://www.tourism.government.bg/sites/tourism.government.bg/files/uploads/strategy-policy/strategy_2014-2030_13_05_2014-sled_ms_26_05_2014.pdf

This Strategy systematises the vision, strategic objectives, priorities, and activities. Implementing it will lead to the establishment of sustainable schemes for the development and management of tourism activities.

The developed Strategy aims to ensure the lasting competitiveness of Bulgaria as a tourist destination, to support the sustainable development of the tourism industry, to make maximum use of the information obtained from marketing studies, reports, analyses and forecasts, including from international sources such as the UN World Tourism Organization, the European Travel Commission, the World Travel and Tourism Council, Euromonitor, Eurostat, etc., to take into account the expectations and intentions of all stakeholders, to comply with the requirements to create a correct, realistic and stable positioning of Bulgaria in the target markets and be flexible.

The Strategy has weaknesses that raise doubts about its realism and how much it aims at sustainable development, not only on paper.

2. Each year, the Ministry of Tourism prepares a National program for promoting tourism³ and the Goals of the Administration of the Ministry of Tourism⁴.

3. Basis for Strategy until 2024⁵: Long-term tourism development - analysis and proposals to help develop a plan for tourism development up to 2040. Specific priorities and measures that could form part of a long-term tourism development strategy.

4.1.2 The national strategies in tourism in Romania

Tourism is considered one of the most relevant elements contributing to a country's economic and social development. In Romania, in 2023, the tourism industry constituted 4.19% of the country's GDP⁶.

TRENDS

These trends and innovations highlight the tourism sector's commitment to integrating circular economy principles, driving sustainable transformation, and meeting the increasing demand for responsible travel options.

⁴ <https://www.tourism.government.bg/bg/kategorii/strategicheski-dokumenti/cei-na-administraciyata-na-ministerstvo-na-turizma-za-2024-g>

⁵ <https://www.tourism.government.bg/bg/kategorii/strategicheski-dokumenti/godishna-programa-za-nacionalna-turisticheska-reklama-za-2024>

⁶ <https://www.statista.com/topics/7436/travel-and-tourism-in-romania/#topicOverview>

Romania is a tourist attraction supported by a diverse geographical, historical and cultural heritage: the Danube Delta, the Black Sea, the Carpathian Mountains, rivers, lakes, and forested areas. In addition, in Romania, several world heritage sites are protected by UNESCO, namely the Churches of Moldova, Maramureș, Transylvania, several Dacian Citadels and the Danube Delta.

National strategies in the tourism sector:

1. Romania's National Strategy for Tourism Development 2023-2035⁷ is in force. This Strategy focuses on three levels to serve as a guide for the sustainable development of tourism in Romania:

- -to further strengthen Romania as a well-known, world-class tourist destination throughout the year, as well as a destination that meets EU standards in terms of the provision of products and services;
- to value the people, tradition, places, natural and cultural heritage of Romania;
- to increase Romania's visibility and reputation in first-rate international tourism markets.

2. There is also a *Master Plan for the Development of National Tourism 2007-2026*⁸ - one of its objectives being: "Ensuring a sustainable development of tourism in a way in which its environmental, cultural and heritage riches are equally valued today and preserved for future generations".

3. *The National Strategy of Eco-tourism Development- context, vision and objectives - 2019-2029*⁹ approved in 2019. It has as a general objective: " Affirming Romania's natural and cultural values by creating and promoting a network of eco-tourism destinations with national and international notoriety, which will improve the lives of local communities and preserve local natural and cultural resources".

4. *The Strategy for developing spa tourism* was approved in 2019. A development opportunity is mentioned: green spa tourism following the general positioning of the destination Romania - focus on green spa products: "the forest bathing".

National strategies in sustainable development:

1. *National Strategy for the SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT of Romania 2030*¹⁰
Within GOAL 8: Decent work and economic growth, brief references are made to the tourism sector, mentioning the strategies in the field. There are no mentions of the circular economy in tourism.

⁷[StrategiaNationala de Dezvoltare a Turismului 2023-2035\(1\).pdf \(mmediu.ro\)](https://mmediu.ro)

⁸https://turism.gov.ro/web/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/masterplan_partea2.pdf

⁹<http://www.monitoruljuridic.ro/act/strategie-na-ional-din-30-mai-2019-de-dezvoltare-a-ecoturismului-context-viziune-i-obiective-2019-2029-emitent-219401.html>

¹⁰[Strategia-nationala-pentru-dezvoltarea-durabila-a-României-2030.pdf \(edu.ro\)](https://edu.ro)

Within GOAL 12: Responsible consumption and production, there is a short section on the Circular Economy; among others, it is mentioned that: "The transition to the circular economy implies a coordination of economic policies with those related to job growth in the sectors circular economy, increasing investment in specific sectors, developing social policies and innovation in the economy, combating climate change and its effects."

4.1.3 The national strategies in tourism in Slovenia

1. Slovenia Development Strategy 2030¹¹: This Strategy outlines a long-term framework for sustainable development in Slovenia, including a transition to a circular economy (future referred to as CE).

- **Goals:** Achieve a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and 95% by 2050 (compared to 1990), decrease resource consumption, and increase renewable energy sources.
- **Measures:** Enact legislation and policies that promote CE principles, invest in research and innovation within this field, and raise public awareness through education.
- **Programs:** National Program for Transitioning to a CE, Program for Promoting Green Jobs.

2. City of Maribor's Transition to a Circular Economy Strategy¹²: This Strategy focuses on practical ways for Maribor to shift towards a CE model. Adopting the Strategy means following the United Nations Agenda 2030 entirely.

- **Goals:** Reduce waste generation, increase the proportion of recycled materials, promote sustainable mobility, and achieve energy efficiency.
- Implement separate waste collection systems, encourage composting and material reuse, and invest in energy-efficient buildings and public transportation.
- **Programs:** Wcycle Maribor Project, Urban Soil 4 Food Project.

3. Slovenian Tourism Strategy 2022-2028¹³: This Strategy emphasises sustainable tourism, which aligns with some elements of a CE.

- **Goals:** Develop a more resilient and green tourism sector that respects local communities and the environment.
- **Measures:** Support green tourism providers, encourage the use of local products and services, and educate tourists on sustainable practices.

¹¹ https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MKRR/Strategija-razvoja-Slovenije-2030/Strategija_razvoja_Slovenije_2030.pdf

¹² https://circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/sites/default/files/strategy_wcycle_final.pdf

¹³ <https://www.gov.si/en/news/2022-05-10-government-adopts-the-new-seven-year-slovenian-tourism-strategy-2022-2028/>

- **Programs:** Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism, Green Practices of Slovenian Tourism.

4. Recovery and Resilience Plan (NOO—RRP): This national plan includes measures for a green transition after the COVID-19 pandemic. It focuses on investments in green transition, circular economy, and green skills training. Slovenia has earmarked €1.7 billion under the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) to promote the green transition, circular economy, and skills training. This program defines actions to achieve the circular economy goals outlined in the Slovenia Development Strategy 2030.

- **Goals:** Increase the share of circular materials within the economy, decrease waste generation, and create more green jobs.
- **Measures:** Support businesses adopting circular business models, fund research and innovation in this area, and provide workforce training.
- **Programs:** Calls for co-financing circular economy projects, Program for Promoting Green Technologies.

4.1.4 The national strategies in tourism in Spain

Spain has established a solid national recovery, transformation and resilience plan to foster sustainability in the tourism sector¹⁴. Known as the "Tourism Sustainability Strategy in Destinations"¹⁵, this initiative aligns closely with the global goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda, demonstrating Spain's commitment to sustainable tourism practices at the national level.

4.2 Circular economies included in tourism strategies

4.2.1 Circular economies in tourism strategies in Bulgaria

1. National Strategy for sustainable development of tourism in Bulgaria 2014-2030

No circular economy is mentioned; it is just sustainable development and sustainability.

0. The basis for Strategy until 2024: **Long-term tourism development - analysis and proposals to help develop a strategy for tourism development up to 2040.** Specific priorities and measures that could form part of a long-term tourism development strategy.

The second mission-specific content focuses on "Tourism development requires sustainability that corresponds with the goals of the Green Deal, digital transformation, and the circular economy. Efforts should focus on creating conditions

¹⁴https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/temas/fondos-recuperacion/Documents/160621-Plan_Recuperacion_Transformacion_Resiliencia.pdf (p. 57- 70)

¹⁵https://turismo.gob.es/es-Novedades/Documents/0Estrategia_Sostenibilidad_Turistica_Destinos.pdf

for accessible and more sustainable transport, better connectivity, smart management of tourism flows based on analytics and reliable information, and diversification of tourism service offerings using new digital technologies."

The circular economy is also included in the following:

- Measure 1.3 Assessment of the contribution of Tourism sector interventions to the economic growth and employment plan:

Sub-objective 3. Build a tourism ecosystem that is more resource efficient and has a low carbon footprint, and accelerate the digital transformation towards adapting the tourism ecosystem value chain to circular economy principles.

- Measure 1.4 Develop financial instruments to support and stimulate digital transformation that take into account green and circular economy requirements
- Measure 1.6 Support job seekers to acquire new skills in developing new products and services within the tourism ecosystem that respond to green, digital and circular economy principles.

4.2.2 Circular economies in tourism strategies in Romania

Romania's National Strategy for Tourism Development 2023-2035 **does not include objectives and directions of action regarding the circular economy in this sector.**

Instead, within the general principles of the Strategy there is included Principle no. 3: "Sustainability as a general theme" - "it refers to environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development and it is necessary to ensure an adequate balance between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability".

The Master Plan for the Development of National Tourism 2007-2026 **does not include directions of action measures related to the circular economy.**

In the National Strategy of Eco-tourism Development, **there is no reference to the circular economy.** Still, a domain is included which aims at CONSERVATION OF NATURE AND PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT: "... encouragement of green practices and stricter control over existing activities in protected natural areas and in eco-tourism destinations..."

There is no reference to the circular economy in the Strategy for developing spa tourism.

4.2.3 Circular economies in tourism strategies in Slovenia

Some initiatives are directly or indirectly connected to the circular economy in all specified strategies.

Slovenian Development strategy includes legislation and policies that promote the circular economy. Under this Strategy, there are two national programs: the National

Program for Transitioning to a Circular Economy and the Program for Promoting Green Jobs.

The City of Maribor's Transition to a Circular Economy Strategy focuses on practical ways for the City to shift towards a circular economy model to reduce waste, increase recycled materials, promote sustainable mobility, and increase energy efficiency. This Strategy includes several programs and initiatives, such as cycling and the Urban Soil 4 Food Project.

Slovenian Tourism strategy also includes some elements of CE, such as green tourism, the use of local products and services, and educating tourists on sustainable practices. Some programs are ongoing, such as the **Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism and the Green Practices of Slovenian Tourism**.

The Recovery and Resilience Plan (NOO-RRP) also includes measures and focus on investment in green transition, CE, and green skills training. Some calls are going on: calls for co-financing circular economy projects and a Program for Promoting Green Technologies.

4.2.4 Circular economies in tourism strategies in Spain

Circular economy principles are deeply integrated into Spanish tourism strategies. The Sustainability Strategy prioritises green and sustainable transition efforts, highlighting circular economy initiatives¹⁶. This strategic alignment underscores Spain's recognition of circularity as a fundamental component of achieving lasting sustainability in the tourism sector.

4.3 The guidance on circularity in national strategies

4.3.1 The guidance on circularity in Bulgaria

1. Strategy for transition to a circular economy¹⁷

The Strategy covers the context (National context of the circular economy, Production, Consumption and Waste management), the Priority areas, the Participants, The Comprehensive approach, Vision and Strategic Objectives, Horizontal conditions, Regional dimensions, Institutional framework, Funding sources, Conditions for successful implementation of the Strategy, Monitoring plan, Action plan).

The Strategic objectives are:

Strategic Objective 1: A green and competitive economy

¹⁶ <https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/calidad-y-evaluacion-ambiental/temas/economia-circular/estrategia.html>

¹⁷

https://www.moew.government.bg/static/media/ups/tiny/%D0%A3%D0%9E%D0%9E%D0%9F/%D0%A1%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%B8%D1%8F%20%D0%BA%D1%80%D1%8A%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%20%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0/fin_StrategiyaFinal.pdf

Specific objective 1.1: Higher resource productivity
Specific objective 1.2: New business models
Specific objective 1.3: Connected Economy
Specific objective 1.4: Bulgaria contributes to the supply of critical raw materials
Strategic objective 2: Less waste, more resources
Specific objective 2.1: Less waste
Specific objective 2.2: More opportunities for sustainable use
Specific objective 2.3: More recycled waste, better quality raw materials
Specific objective 2.4: No landfilled waste
Strategic Objective 3: A consumer-friendly economy
Specific objective 3.1: Better informed consumers
Specific objective 3.2: Sustainable behaviour patterns
Specific objective 3.3: Social green economy

4.3.2 The guidance on circularity in Romania

The National Strategy regarding the Circular Economy was adopted in September 2022. This Strategy¹⁸ states that the improvement of the circular economy has the most significant potential in the following sectors (7 specific and 2 transversal sectors):

- Agriculture and forestry;
- Automotive industry;
- Constructions;
- Consumer goods such as food and beverages;
- Packaging (glass, paper, plastic materials, etc.);
- Textiles;
- Electrical and Electronic Equipment;
 - o *waste - transversal sector*;
 - o *water and wastewater - transversal sector*.

Tourism is not among the key sectors relevant to the circular economy.

The main argument is that: "even if the economic contribution of the tourism sector is relatively high, the circularity of the sectors is limited by the level of sustainability and circularity of the sectors with which tourism is connected, the most important of which are already prioritised, namely agriculture, construction and packaging".

The Action Plan¹⁹ for the Strategy was adopted in 2023; this plan proposes and describes concrete actions to promote the transition to the circular economy in Romania.

The plan proposes a series of transversal actions and specific sectoral actions. Transversal actions include education and vocational training measures, research, development and innovation, green procurement and encouraging digitisation, which is essential for facilitating circular transformation in the Romanian economy.

¹⁸ <https://dezvoltaredurabila.gov.ro/strategia-nationala-privind-economia-circulara-13409762>

¹⁹ <https://cdn.juridice.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/0918Bis.pdf>

The plan also presents actions specific to the nine economic sectors²⁰ identified with the most significant potential for circularity in the Romanian economy. The sectors were selected based on economic importance, environmental and health impacts, and circular economy issues and opportunities.

Thus, this plan can be considered an essential element of guidance; for each priority action, a detailed description of the challenges addressed, the measures to be taken to remedy them, the entities responsible and involved, and the time horizon for their implementation is provided. Also included are examples of good practices that are relevant for priority actions, as well as tables for monitoring and evaluating progress in implementing the plan.

4.3.3 The guidance on circularity in Slovenia

National strategies in Slovenia include some critical points about circularity:

- **The 2022-2028 National Tourism Strategy** emphasises sustainable development, aligning with some CE principles. It lays the groundwork for future integration through goals like reducing waste and promoting local products.
- **Focus on Sustainability:** Many national strategies in Slovenia, particularly those related to environmental protection and resource management, indirectly promote circularity principles by focusing on waste reduction and resource efficiency.
- **Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning:** This website contains information on national environmental protection and resource management strategies, which could touch upon CE principles (Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning Slovenia).
- **Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform:** This European platform offers resources and information on circular economy initiatives in various countries, including Slovenia.

Some activities are underway in government departments regarding the CE and towards a more sustainable and protected environment, and they are in the process of validation.

4.3.4 The guidance on circularity in Spain

The Spanish Ministry of Industry and Tourism has published a comprehensive **Practical Guide** specifically adapted to the tourism sector²¹. This guide serves as a roadmap for implementing the principles of the circular economy, offering practical recommendations and strategies. Key measures highlighted in the guide include reducing dependence on non-renewable resources, promoting the adoption of

²⁰ See above these sectors

²¹ <https://www.segittur.es/sala-de-prensa/informes/guia-practica-para-la-aplicacion-de-la-economia-circular-en-el-sector-turistico-en-espana/>

renewable energy sources for self-production and encouraging the use of locally sourced products. By providing clear and practical guidance, Spain's national strategies empower stakeholders to embrace circularity in the tourism sector, fostering a more sustainable and resilient industrial landscape.

5 The policy on waste management and recycling in tourist destinations in partner countries

5.1 Waste collection policies in Bulgaria

Separate waste collection is not well established in Bulgaria. Individual containers are set up in the big cities, not everywhere. In some parts of Bulgaria, including tourist destinations (South Black Sea coast), where the separate collection is not implemented, and some business owners are trying to deal with it on their own, it is not working well and causing demotivation. There is a separate collection of **plastic packaging, paper, glass, and cans. From 2025, there will be separate biological waste collection.** Most of the mixed waste ends in landfills or waste-burning incinerators. There is a working group for implementing the deposit return system for packaging, but it is working slowly and won't be ready for 2025 as planned.

5.2 Waste collection policies in Romania

Romania, known for its rich cultural heritage and natural landscapes, has experienced a significant rise in tourism over the past decades. This growth brings economic benefits, contributing 6.5% to the national GDP and poses environmental challenges. Romania's favourable climate and diverse natural resources support year-round tourism activities. However, tourism has been identified as a significant source of anthropogenic pressure along the Romanian coastline, leading to environmental degradation and impacting the attractiveness of tourist destinations. Additionally, tourism is considered a driver of marine plastic pollution in the Black Sea region.

Therefore, the most significant potential for circularity is the promotion of sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism that considers circular principles, from transport to accommodation, recreation, food supply and waste reduction/prevention. One critical environmental concern is waste management in tourist destinations. In response, the Romanian government has implemented various policies and strategies to improve waste management and recycling, recognising the necessity of sustainable tourism practices:

Romania's National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030 (SNDDR) (Romanian government, 2018) aims to achieve the transition to a CE in line with SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production. The Strategy proposes the transition to a new development model by introducing elements of CE, increasing resource productivity, reducing food wastage and waste by reducing waste generation at all levels, increasing recycling and reuse, encouraging companies to adopt sustainable practices and integrating information on the sustainability of their activities into the reporting cycle, and raising public awareness of what it means to live in harmony with nature. By Government Decision no. 754/2022 to amend and supplement Government

Decision no. 877/2018 on adopting the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania 2030, the National Action Plan, a key document guiding the implementation of the NSDS 2030, was approved.

Senate Decision No. 3/2016 was adopted to express an opinion on the Circular Economy Package proposed by the European Commission, which attests to Romania's openness to the circular economy model. The abovementioned decision expresses Romania's intention to build a framework conducive to implementing the circular economy by transposing European legislation.

Thus, **Government Ordinance 92 of 2021 on the waste regime²² has fully transposed the EU Directive 2018/851/EC provisions**. The Ordinance aims to align national legislation with European objectives regarding waste management. In this sense, the Ordinance contributes to the transition to a CE. The Ordinance also establishes new increased municipal waste recycling rates and new rules for the calculation of municipal recycling rates, providing a framework for sustainable material management and ensuring the protection, conservation and improvement of the quality of the environment and human life and ensuring the use of prudent and rational management of natural resources.

The European Commission approved the National Recovery and Resilience Plan in September 2021. It allocates €1.239 billion²³ out of €29.2 billion for developing modern waste management infrastructure (COMPONENT C3 - WASTE MANAGEMENT). Waste management projects under the plan must be completed by 2026. By 2024, 565 collection centres and seven integrated waste collection centres must be built for small and medium-sized communities. In addition, 14,000 digitised 'green islands' for the separate collection of all types of waste will be set up around residential buildings.

The National Waste Management Plan was adopted to promote the transition to a Circular Economy within the framework of Romania's Development Strategy. **The National Waste Management Plan** was approved by Government Decision No. 942 of 20 December 2017, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, No. 11 of 5 January 2018. Waste management plans at the county and municipal levels were adopted in 2021, identifying the measures needed to meet the objectives of the Circular Economy Package.

The National Waste Management Plan has set the following targets until 2030:

- Gradual transition to a new development model based on the rational and responsible use of resources, with the introduction of circular economy elements and the development of a roadmap;

²² <https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/ha3tsnbtgi4a/ordonanta-de-urgenta-nr-92-2021-privind-regimul-deseurilor>

²³ <https://mfe.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/6c5361a5fd58b7b22eddf8316192abc8.pdf>

- Reduce per capita food waste at retail and consumption levels and reduce food losses along the production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses;
- Recycling 55% of municipal waste by 2025 and 60% by 2030;
- Recycling of 65% of packaging waste by 2025 (plastic 50%; wood 25%; ferrous metals 70%, aluminium 50%, glass 70%, paper and board 75%) and 70% by 2030 (plastic 55%, wood 30%, ferrous metals 80%, aluminium 60%, glass 75%, paper and board 85%);
- Separate collection of household hazardous waste by 2022, bio-waste by 2023 and textile waste by 2025;
- Establish mandatory Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes for all packaging by 2024;
- Implement sustainable green public procurement practices per national priorities and European policies.

Therefore, the waste legislation is developed strategically through European directives and transposed in Romania through dozens of laws, government decisions and ministerial orders. The legal obligations on waste management are scattered among many pieces of legislation (laws, government decisions, ministerial orders, regulations, and decisions) and, therefore, difficult to follow and implement. At the same time, waste management is a costly legal obligation, and the fines are significant. The most crucial waste management legislation grouped in several relevant sections are:

I. National legislation

1. Waste regime

- Government Emergency Ordinance no. 92/2021 amends the waste regime (GEO no. 92/2021) and repeals Law no. 211/2011 on the waste regime. The purpose of the Ordinance is to align the national legislation with European objectives in this area to contribute to the transition to a circular economy;
- Law no. 132/2010 on selective waste collection in public institutions, as subsequently amended and supplemented.

2. Local sanitation service

- Law no. 101/2006 on the sanitation service of localities, updated by Law 99/2014, GEO 58/2016, GEO 172/2020;
- Order no. 82/2015, approving the Framework Regulation of the sanitation service of localities, was amended by Order no. 520/2018.

3. Packaging waste

- Law no. 249/2015 on the management of packaging and packaging waste updated by GEO no. 38/2016, GEO no. 50/2019, Law no. 99/2021, Government Ordinance no. 1/2021;
- Order no. 794/2012 on the procedure for reporting data on packaging and packaging waste
- GEO 74/2018 amending and supplementing Law 211/2011 on the waste regime, Law 249/2015 on the management of packaging and packaging waste and GEO 196/2005 on the Environmental Fund, approved by Law 31/2019 (amended by GEO 92/2021 on the waste regime);
- Decision no. 1074/2021 on the establishment of the guarantee-return system for non-reusable primary packaging;
- Government Ordinance no. 6/2021 on reducing the environmental impact of certain plastic products (single-use plastic).

4. Taxes and Contributions to the Environment Fund

- Contributions to the Environment Fund are regulated by GEO 196/2005 on the functioning of the Administration of the Environment Fund, amended and supplemented successively by several normative acts, including Government Ordinance no. 31/2013 approved by Law no. 384/2013; GEO no. 39/2016; GEO no. 74/2018 approved by Law no. 31/2019; GEO no. 50/2019; GEO no. 108/2021; GEO no. 136/2021.
- GEO no. 196/2005 cannot be implemented without Order no. 578/2006 approving the Methodology for the calculation of contributions and taxes due to the Environmental Fund, amended and supplemented successively by several normative acts, including Order no. 2413/2016; Order no. 1503/2017; Order no. 149/2019 amending and supplementing the Annex to the Order of the Minister for the Environment and Water Management no. 578/2006 approving the Methodology for the calculation of contributions and taxes due to the Environment Fund

5. Waste electrical and electronic equipment

- GEO no. 5/2015 - on waste electrical and electronic equipment amended by GEO 44/2019; GEO 93/2020;
- Order no. 269/2019 on the approval of the procedure for establishing the registration, reporting, reporting frequency to the National Register of Producers, and recording and reporting the information referred to in Art. 9 para. (4) and Art.

27 para. (6) of Government Emergency Ordinance no. 5/2015 on waste electrical and electronic equipment;

- Order no 417/2021 approves standards in the field of treatment, including recovery, recycling and preparation for reuse of waste electrical and electronic equipment;
- OM no. 1441/2011 - financial guarantee for EEE (electrical and electronic equipment) producers;
- Order no. 1494/846/2016 on granting the operating licence for collective organisations and approving the operating plan for producers fulfilling their obligations individually for the management of waste electrical and electronic equipment - amended by Order No. 1274/2036/2020;
- Order no. 556/435/191/2006 (Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Economy, ANPC) on the specific marking of electrical and electronic equipment placed on the market after 31 December 2006.

6. Waste batteries

- Government Decision no. 1132/2008 - on waste batteries and accumulators amended by GO no. 1079/2011; GO no. 540/2016; Law no. 203/2018; GO no. 478/2020;
- Order no. 669/2009 on the registration of battery producers amended by Order no. 825/2014 for the amendment of some normative acts in the field of waste management;
- Order no. 1399/2009 - record keeping and reporting of battery waste;
- Order no. 2743/2011 - authorisation of collective organisations for managing battery waste - as amended and supplemented.

7. Other specific legislation relevant to waste management

- Decision no. 1061/2008 - on the transport of hazardous and non-hazardous waste on the territory of Romania;
- Decision no. 856/2002 - on the record of waste management and for the approval of the list of waste, including hazardous waste, amended by GD no. 210/2007;
- Order no. 1271/2018 on the registration of waste collectors at the UATs (territorial administrative units);
- Law no. 51/2006 on community public utility services (on the organisation and functioning of Intercommunity Development Associations -ADI), republished, with subsequent amendments and completions;

- Order no. 1362/2018 on the authorisation of OIREPs (organisations implementing extended producer responsibility obligations) amended by Order no. 1555/2020; Order no. 2190/2021;
- Order no. 2190/2021 amending and supplementing Order no. 1362/2018 approving the procedure for the authorisation, annual approval and withdrawal of the right to operate of organisations implementing extended producer responsibility obligations;
- Emergency Ordinance no. 195/2005 on environmental protection amended by Law no. 123/2020; Law no. 140/2020; Law no. 90/2021;
- Decision no. 1265/2021 amending and supplementing Decision no. 788/2007 on the establishment of measures for the implementation of the European Parliament and Council Regulation (EC) no. 1.013/2006 on shipments of waste;
- Law no. 181/2020 on the management of compostable non-hazardous waste;
- Order of the Ministry of Health no. 119/2014 approving the hygiene and public health rules on the living environment of the population (includes measures on the location of composters collection of waste medicines by pharmacies);
- Order no. 1226/2012 for the approval of the Technical Norms on managing waste resulting from medical activities and the data collection methodology for the national database on waste resulting from medical activities.

II. The most relevant European Directives and their national equivalents

- Directive 904/2019 on the reduction of the environmental impact of certain plastic products (single-use plastic and not only) transposed by Ordinance no. 6/2021 on the reduction of the ecological impact of certain plastic products;
- Directive 849/2018 amending Directive 2000/53/EC on end-of-life vehicles, Directive 2006/66/EC on batteries and accumulators and waste batteries and accumulators and Directive 2012/19/EU on waste electrical and electronic equipment;
- Directive 850/2018 on landfills (from the "Circular Economy Package");
- Directive 851/2018 amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste (from the "Circular Economy Package") - partly transposed by:
 - GEO no. 92_2021_on the waste regime;
 - Law no. 249/2015 on the management of packaging and packaging waste updated by GEO no. 38/2016 and GEO no. 50/2019;
 - GEO no. 196/2005 with subsequent amendments and additions;

- Directive 852/2018 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 amending Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste (from the "Circular Economy Package") transposed by GEO no. 50/2019 amending and supplementing GEO no. 196/2005 on the Environmental Fund and amending and supplementing Law no. 249/2015 on the management of packaging and packaging waste, GO no. 1/2021 amending and supplementing Law no. 249/2015;
- Directive 19/2012 on waste electrical and electronic equipment transposed by GEO no. 5/2015 - on waste electrical and electronic equipment;
- Directive 98/2008 - transposed by GEO no. 92/2021 on the waste regime;
- Directive 66/2006 - transposed by GO 1132/2008 - on waste batteries and accumulators;
- Directive 20/2005 amending Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste transposed by Law no. 249/2015 - on packaging waste with subsequent amendments and additions;
- Directive 31/1999 - transposed by Decision no. 349/2005 - on waste disposal (repealed by Ordinance no. 2/2021 on waste disposal);
- Directive 1975/439 - transposed by Decision no. 235/2007 - on waste from waste oils (repealed and replaced by GEO no. 92/2021).

Implementation in Tourist Destinations

Infrastructure Development. Infrastructure development is crucial to managing waste effectively in tourist areas. Romania has made significant investments in:

- *Recycling Bins and Stations:* Installation of recycling bins in strategic locations such as tourist attractions, parks, and beaches.
- *Waste Collection Services:* Enhancing waste collection services to ensure timely and efficient waste management.
- *Waste Treatment Facilities:* Establishing facilities for sorting and processing recyclable materials.

Public Awareness Campaigns. Educating tourists and local communities about the importance of waste management and recycling is essential. Romania has launched several initiatives, including:

- *Information Campaigns:* Distribute informational materials and signage in multiple languages to guide tourists on proper waste disposal.
- *Community Engagement:* Involving local communities in clean-up activities and promoting environmental stewardship.

Collaboration with the Tourism Industry. The success of waste management policies in tourist destinations also depends on cooperation with the tourism industry. Key measures include:

- *Green Certifications:* Encouraging hotels, restaurants, and other tourism businesses to obtain green certifications, which include waste management standards.
- *Training Programs:* Providing training for staff in the tourism sector on sustainable practices and waste management.

Effective waste management and recycling are vital for the sustainability of Romania's tourist destinations. While significant strides have been made through policy frameworks, infrastructure development, public awareness, and industry collaboration, ongoing efforts are required to address existing challenges. By leveraging innovative solutions and fostering a culture of sustainability, Romania can ensure that its tourist destinations remain attractive and environmentally friendly for future generations.

To increase recycling rates in Romania, several tools²⁴ have been implemented, such as:

- Economic instruments: taxes on non-biodegradable packaging materials, imports of industrial oils, imports of hazardous substances, and landfills.
- Legislation/coercive instruments include higher fines for incineration and illegal waste disposal, the possibility for authorities to confiscate the vehicle used for illegal waste disposal, and new fines for companies that do not audit their internal waste management processes and the EPR system.
- Administrative tools: new administrative structures and databases for waste management have been introduced, such as the Waste Shipment Register and the WTSIS - Waste Traceability Information System. SIATD is an online application for monitoring and controlling the traceability of packaging waste, which economic operators and local administrations must use to report packaging waste under the EWWR scheme. It will complement other tools, such as the new Waste Traceability Information System, introduced in 2022, in which all companies with recycling capacity must be registered. The system also contains information on the transport of waste in Romania.

²⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/eir/pdf/report_ro_en.pdf

5.3 Waste collection policies in Slovenia

Slovenia has a comprehensive waste management and recycling policy, including tourist destinations. The main features of this policy are:

Legal framework:

Slovenia follows the European Union waste management guidelines, including legislation such as the Environmental Protection Act and the Waste Management Regulation. These regulations set out responsibilities for waste collection, treatment, and disposal, as well as promoting recycling.

Separate waste collection:

Separate waste collection is well established in Slovenia. Individual containers are set up at tourist destinations for different types of waste: packaging, paper, glass, biological waste and mixed waste. This helps to recycle more efficiently and reduce the amount of waste ending up in landfills.

Promoting recycling:

Slovenia actively promotes recycling through various programs and initiatives. For example, awareness campaigns are often organised in tourist destinations to inform tourists about the importance of separation and proper waste management.

Producer responsibility:

Legislation stipulates that producers and importers of products are responsible for the waste generated by their products. This includes financing systems for collecting and recycling packaging and other waste.

Utilities:

Each municipality has municipal companies responsible for waste collection and treatment. These companies often partner with tourist destinations for adequate waste management infrastructure and services.

Waste reduction strategy:

Slovenia also implements waste reduction strategies such as promoting reuse, repair and donation instead of throwing away products. That includes initiatives to reduce single-use plastics and promote sustainable products in tourist destinations.

Educational activities:

Tourist destinations often organise educational activities for visitors and local people to promote environmentally friendly practices and proper waste management.

Through these measures, Slovenia aims to ensure sustainable waste management that protects the environment and improves residents' and tourists' quality of life.

5.4 Waste collection policies in Spain

Spain's national recovery, transformation and resilience plan for the sustainability of tourism has solid waste management measures²⁵. These measures include implementing a waste segregation plan at the source and subsequent selective collection procedures. In addition, the plan emphasises actions aimed at the reuse and recycling of waste generated by tourism activities. This proactive approach to waste management reflects Spain's commitment to promoting sustainable practices within its tourism sector, ensuring the preservation of natural environments and improving visitor experiences.

6 Financial incentives and subsidies that countries offer for sustainable tourism projects

6.1 Financial incentives in the tourism sector

6.1.1 Financial Initiatives in Romania

At the national level, financial incentives are identified in a few public institutions like the Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism, other central public administration bodies, and local public administration authorities.

Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism: launched a state aid program in 2022 to facilitate the transition to EC in the manufacturing sectors, with 8 million Euros allocated from the state budget. The program attracted a record number of applications. It confirms that there is significant interest in the EC in Romania and the need for additional funding to accelerate the transformation and convergence of the Romanian economy with EU and OECD countries.

Different finances are assured by:

- ✓ **The National Recovery and Resilience Plan** provides grants and subsidies to *tourism businesses* that adopt sustainable practices.
Measures to ensure the implementation of different activities are based on:
- ✓ Supporting new business models, such as the "product as a service" model (such as product-as-a-service (PaaS) in tourism, the services of pick-up and collection of second-hand products or repair services, for example, by the provision of public funds or by the implementation of taxation measures.
- ✓ Incentivising producers to ensure a closed circuit for their products and supporting tourism consumers to repair and reuse products to repair and refurbish hotel equipment and furnishings.
- ✓ Facilitating the coordination and collaboration of public authorities with organisations and actors in the circular economy industry

²⁵ <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/l/2022/04/08/7>

- ✓ Providing financial support for the creation of opportunities to develop specific skills for those workers who may be adversely affected by the transition to the circular economy
- ✓ Financial incentives for businesses with recognised sustainability certifications can boost marketability and reduce operational costs.
- ✓ Collaborative projects between the government and private sector to develop sustainable tourism infrastructure and services (the development of eco-tourism resorts or sustainable transportation systems)

Measures to ensure implementation of different VET activities:

- ✓ Through awareness-raising actions and communication campaigns, consumer education should be promoted to use fewer products for a while longer.
- ✓ Training programs for disadvantaged groups, social views, developing a network of ecological schools, transforming agricultural high schools into vocational training centres, etc.
- ✓ facilitating labour force transition/growth employment and participation in the labour market (Scholarships for students pursuing education in sustainable tourism and hospitality management; funding for vocational training centres that offer courses on sustainable tourism practices, eco-certification processes, and environmental management)
- ✓ financial aid programs for students enrolling in courses focusing on green tourism practices.
- ✓ Financial support for tourism businesses that invest in upskilling their staff in sustainable practices, product lifecycle management, sustainable resource use, and waste minimisation.
- ✓ Stipends and financial incentives for students and apprentices engaging in internships focusing on sustainable tourism.

Financial incentives:

EU's Green Deal funding programs support eco-friendly tourism projects.

Tax credits or deductions for investments in sustainable infrastructure, renewable energy sources, and energy-efficient upgrades.

Access to low-interest loans for projects that promote sustainability in tourism, such as green building certifications or eco-friendly transportation.

Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions: for offering financial support for skills development.

The state budget. Several actions that enable the integration of principles of EC **The Just Transition Fund** for entrepreneurial support, which became available for Romania in December 2022, can finance SME investments in diversifying the green economy in six counties: Dolj, Galați, Gorj, Hunedoara, Mureș and Prahova.

6.1.2 Financial Initiatives in Slovenia

Slovenia offers various financial incentives and subsidies for sustainable tourism projects, vocational education, and training, including circular economy principles.

Financial initiatives in the tourism sector

1. Public calls for tender by the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology:

The Ministry of Regional Development and Economic Cooperation regularly launches calls for proposals to co-finance tourism projects that promote sustainable and innovative practices. That includes projects based on the CE, such as reducing resource consumption, recycling and reusing materials.

2. Slovenian Enterprise Fund:

The Fund offers subsidies and soft loans to small and medium-sized enterprises in tourism that implement sustainable projects. Special attention is given to projects that contribute to sustainable development and introduce CE principles.

3. Financial incentives for energy efficiency:

The Slovenian Environmental Public Fund (EcoFund) offers subsidies for projects that increase energy efficiency and use renewable energy sources in tourism facilities. These projects also include circular practices such as using recycled materials and reducing energy consumption.

4. European Union programs:

Slovenia participates in various EU programs, such as COSME and ERASMUS+, which support sustainable tourism. These programs fund projects that include developing sustainable tourism products and services and education on the CE.

Financial incentives in Vocational education and training in tourism

1. Centre for Vocational Training (CPI):

The CPI runs training and education programs for tourism workers, integrating sustainable practices and CE principles. It includes courses and workshops to improve knowledge and skills in sustainable tourism.

2. ERASMUS+ program:

This program funds training projects and exchanges that enable tourism workers to acquire knowledge on sustainable practices and the CE. That includes partnerships between Slovenian and foreign educational institutions.

3. Professional training programs:

The Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism and other government bodies fund professional training programs focused on sustainable tourism. These programs often include modules on the circular economy, sustainable resource management, and reducing the environmental footprint of tourism activities.

CE principles

All of the above financial incentives and training programs also incorporate CE principles such as:

- **Waste minimisation:** Promoting projects that reduce waste and encourage reuse and recycling.
- **Resource efficiency:** Support for projects that optimise the use of natural resources and energy.
- **Innovation and Sustainable Technologies:** Funding the development and deployment of new technologies that support the circular economy.

Through these initiatives, Slovenia supports sustainable tourism development and strengthens the knowledge and skills of tourism professionals in sustainable practices and the CE.

6.1.3 Financial Initiatives in Spain

In Spain, financial incentives for sustainable tourism and vocational education and training (VET) in tourism include:

Grants and Subsidies²⁶: Spain offers financial support to tourism businesses and organisations to implement sustainable practices²⁷ and participate in VET programs²⁸. These incentives include funding for green initiatives, energy efficiency projects, waste management programs, and training activities.

²⁶ https://www.mintur.gob.es/es-es/servicios/AyudasPublicas/Documents/PES_2022-2024.pdf

²⁷ <https://www.mintur.gob.es/PortalAyudas/experiencias-turismo-espana/Normativa/Paginas/Index.aspx>

²⁸ <https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/ceneam/formacion-ambiental.html>

Tax incentives²⁹: Tax exemptions and reductions are offered to tourism businesses that invest in sustainability and participate in VET initiatives. Qualified expenses may include investments in renewable energy systems, environmentally friendly infrastructure, and cultural preservation efforts.

Low-interest loans and financing programs: Financial institutions and government agencies offer specialised financing options to support sustainable tourism and VET projects in the tourism sector³⁰. These options include low-interest loans and financing programs tailored to promote resource efficiency, waste reduction and circular economy principles.

Recognition and certification programs: Spain recognises and incentivises sustainable tourism practices and participation in VET programs through certification and accreditation schemes³¹.

7 Readiness for Circularity in the Tourism Sector

7.1 Summary of the section's general question in questionnaires

7.1.1 Summary of the section's general question in survey

Based on the questionnaire, the survey had 177 respondents, 97 of whom were from tourism and related fields and 80 of whom were from VET institutions.

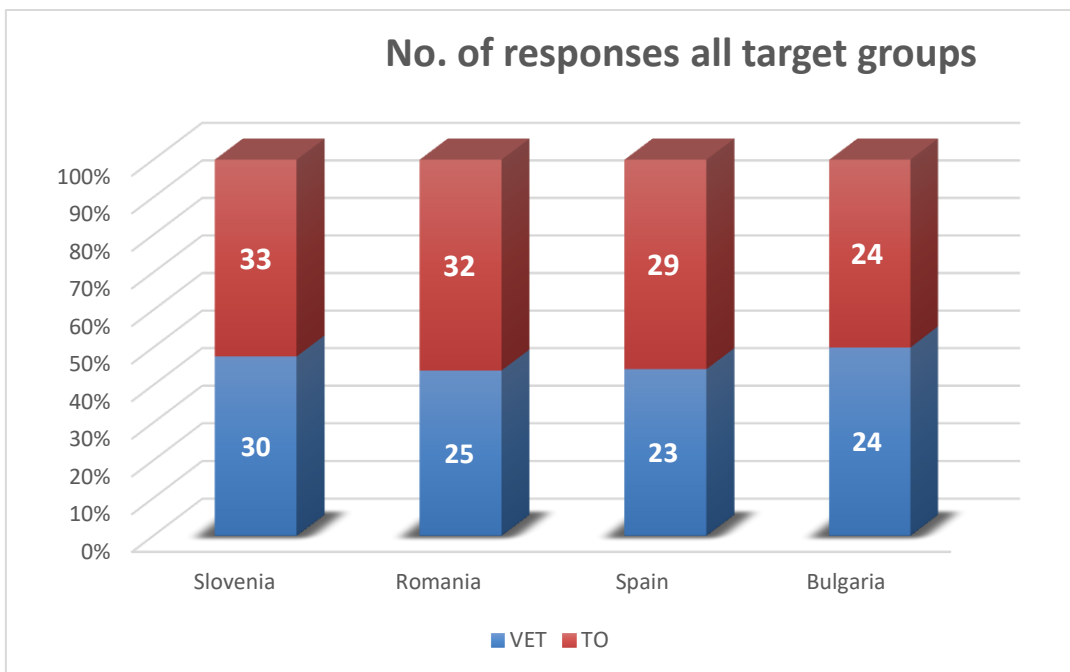
Country	VET	TO	total	%
Slovenia	25	29	54	30,51
Romania	18	25	43	24,29
Spain	17	23	40	22,60
Bulgaria	20	20	40	22,60
Total	80	97	177	100,00

Total responses in all target groups (VET and TO) in the survey

²⁹ <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/l/2022/12/21/28/dof/spa/pdf> (pag.13)

³⁰ <https://www.mintur.gob.es/es/gabineteprensa/notasprensa/2022/documents/dossier%20prensa%20pst%20extraordinarios%202022.pdf>

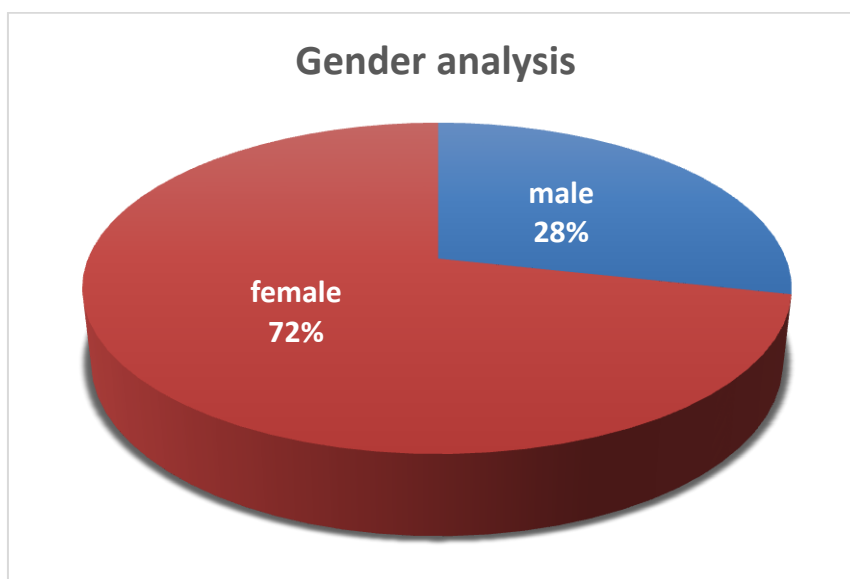
³¹ <https://www.aenor.com/certificacion/turismo-y-ocio>

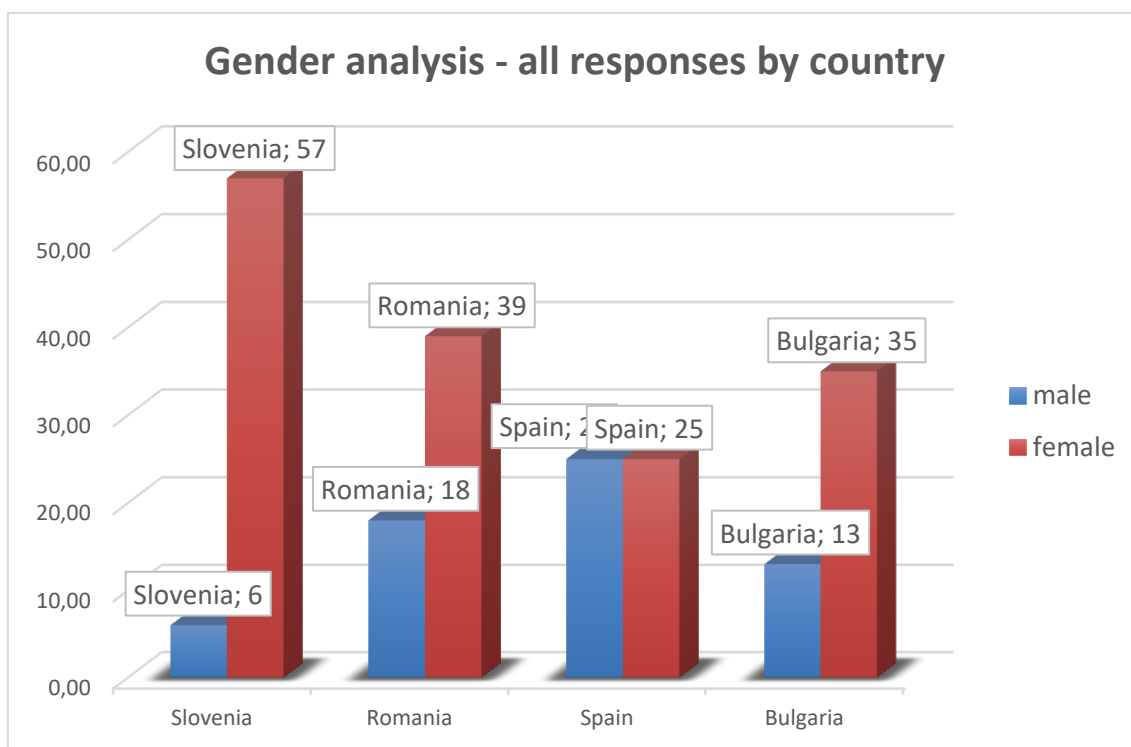


The graph shows the % of responses of all target groups by countries, that includes: questionnaires responders, participants in focus groups and participants, that were interviewed.

Participants by Gender:

By gender of both responders' groups: **70,9 %** were female, and **28,2 %** were male responders.





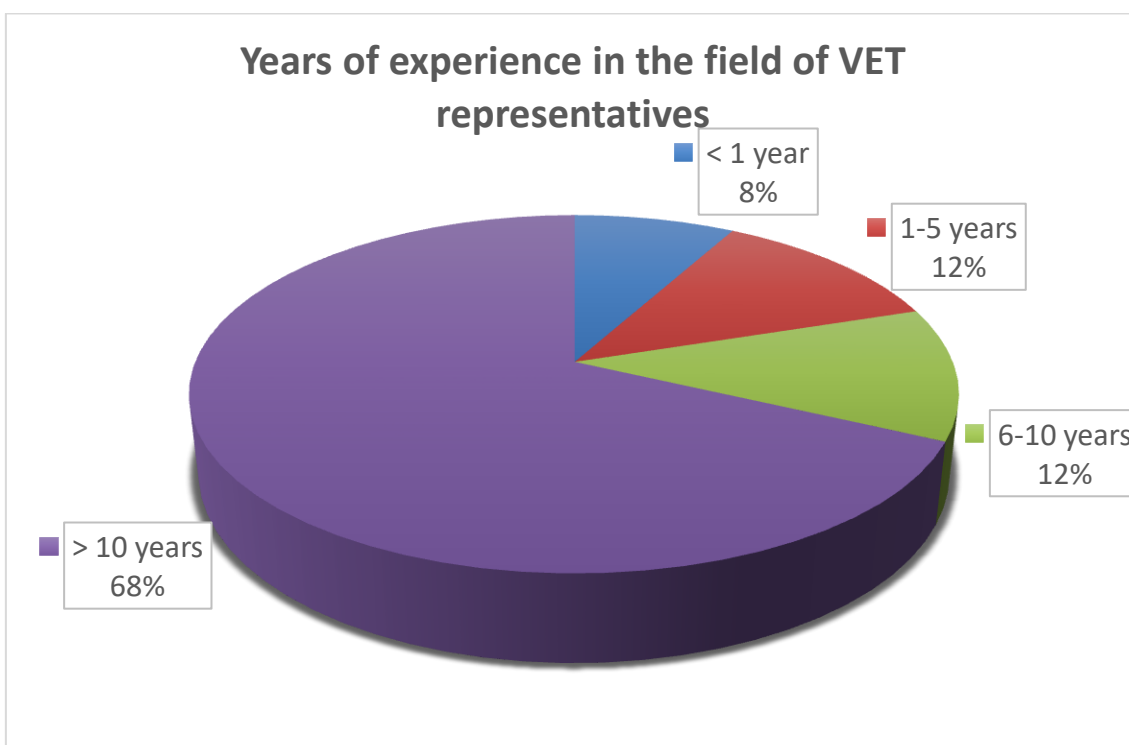
The graph shows the gender responses by countries.

Years of experience – tourism professionals



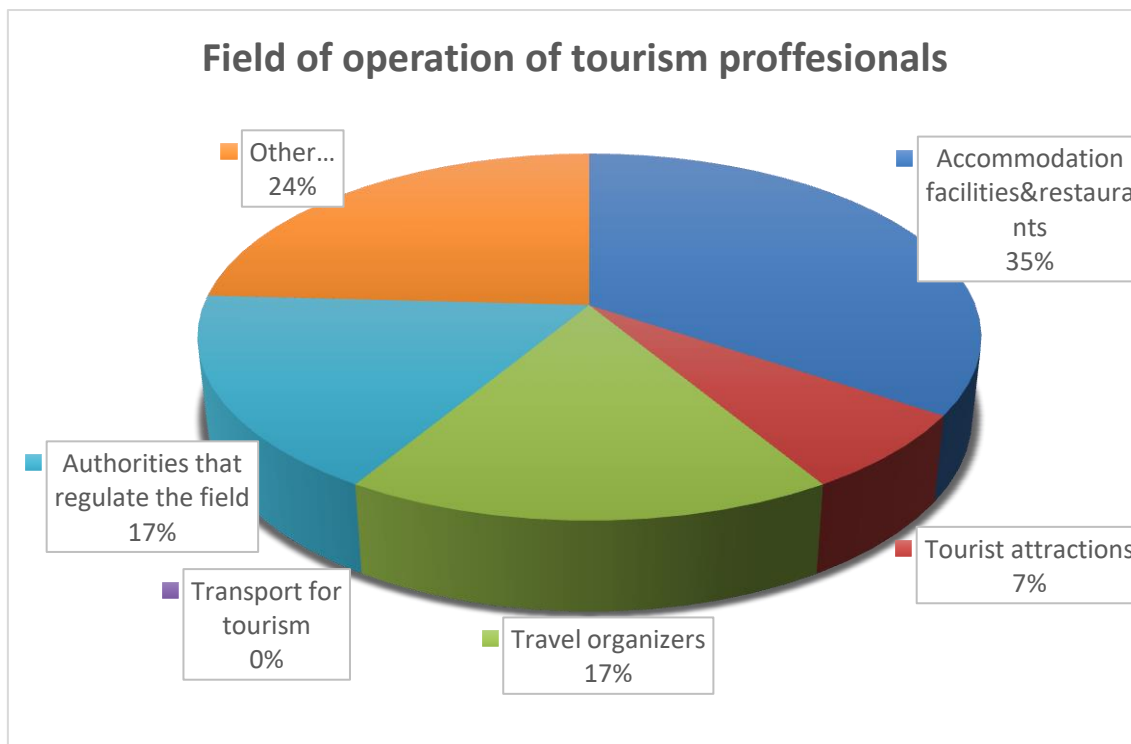
62 % of the responses were active more than 10 years in the field of tourism, following by 28% that had 1-5 years' experiences.

Years of experience in the field of VET



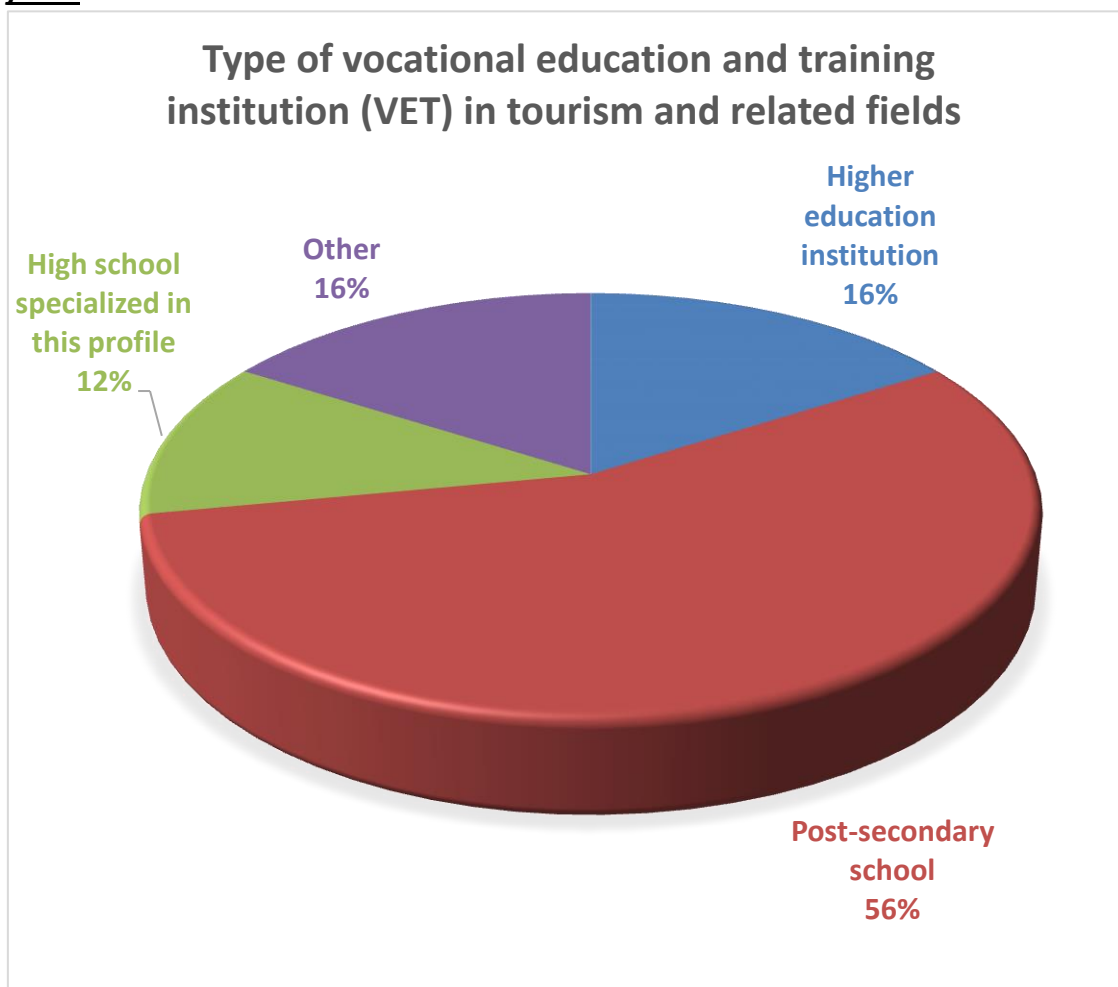
68 % of the representatives were active more than 10 years in the field of VET, following by 12% that had 6-10 years' and 1-5 years' experiences.

Field of operation - tourism professionals



The tourism professionals that has responded to our survey mainly came from the organizations that have Accommodation facilities & restaurants (35%), 17 % came from Travel organizers (tour operators, travel agencies, event organizers, etc.) and also 17 % from Authorities that regulate the field of tourism (national, regional, local tourism offices; associations; unions and employers in the field of tourism, etc.), 17 % came from Tourist attraction services (museums, parks, exhibition centres, health treatment facilities, etc.) and 34% were other organizations in different area of activity, such as: associations, farmers, etc.

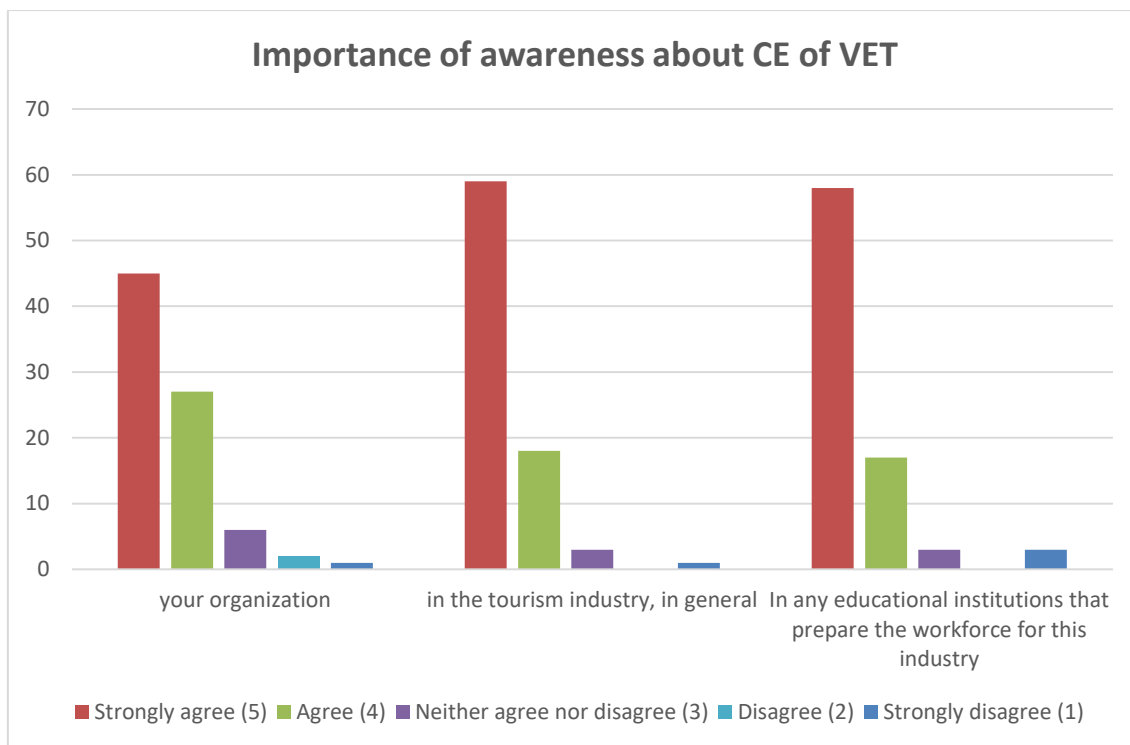
Type of vocational education and training institution (VET) in tourism and related fields



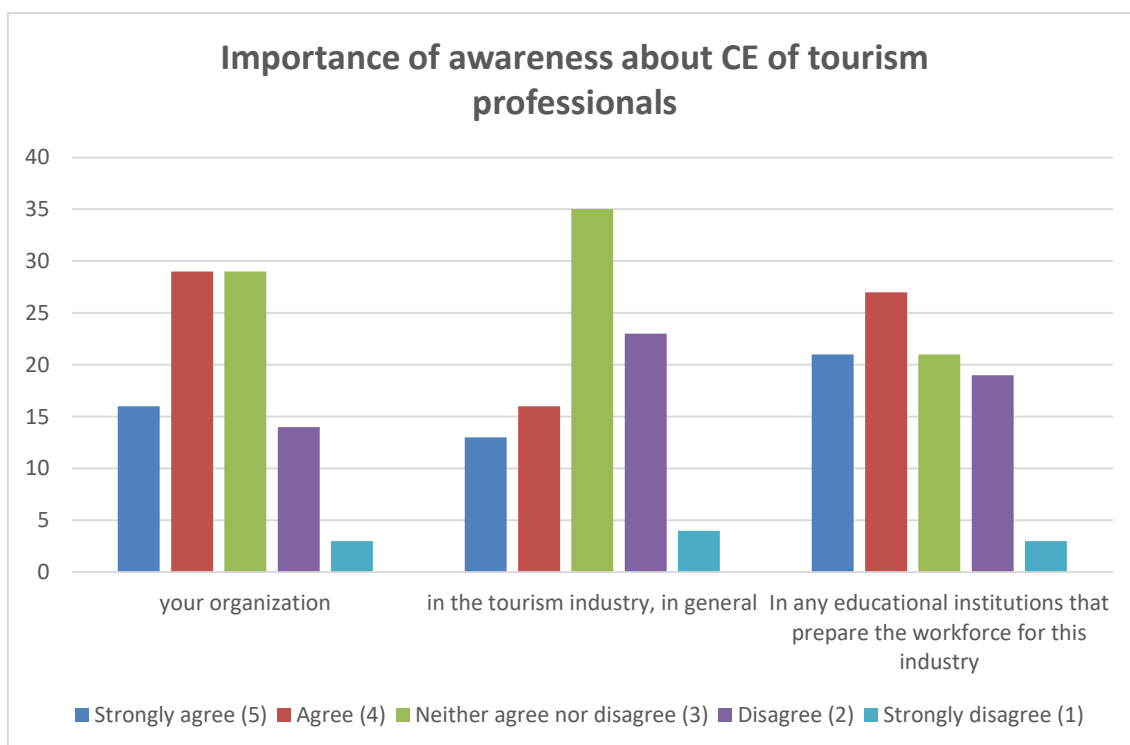
In VET 56% of participants came from post-secondary school, 16% came from higher education institution, 12% came from high school specialized in this profile and 16 % came from other institutions.

7.2 General Conclusions and Recommendations resulted from the interpretation and synthesis of the answers received

7.2.1 Importance of awareness about CE in VET and tourism field



Overall, the data indicates a strong consensus on the importance of circular economy awareness across individual job roles, organizations, and the broader tourism industry. The highest levels of agreement are seen regarding the tourism industry in general, suggesting a widespread recognition of the critical role circular economy principles play in this sector.

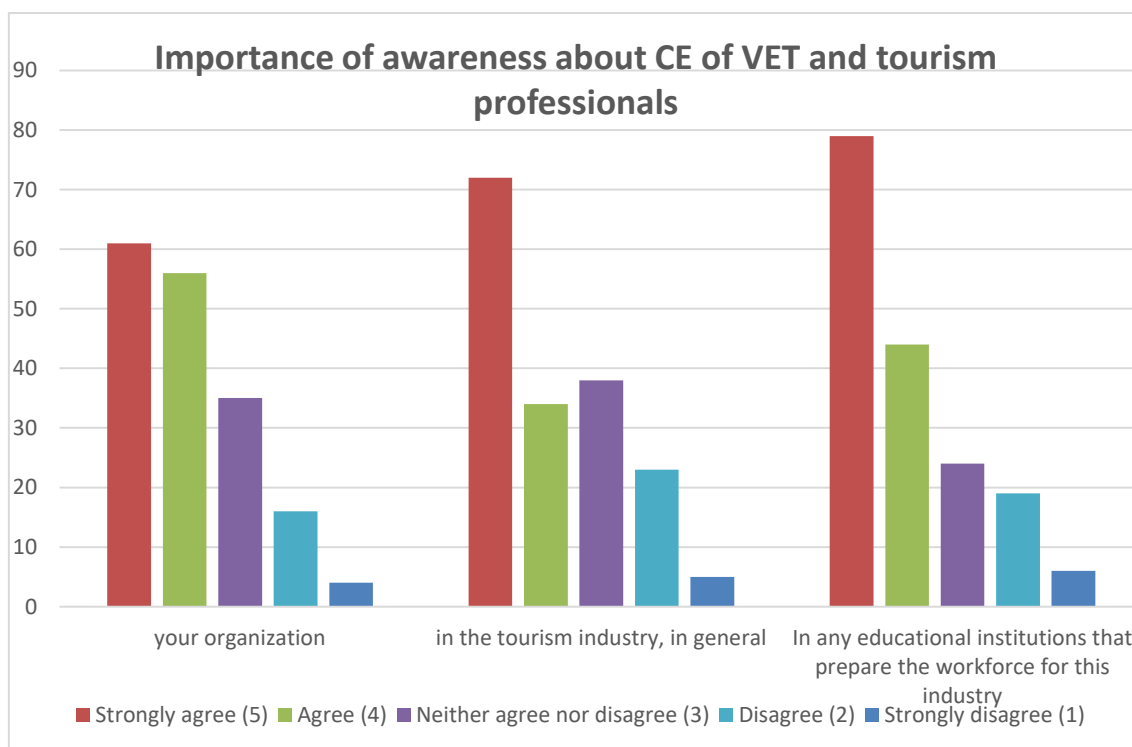


Tourism organisations gave different results:

- The importance of raising awareness about the CE in their organisations: 32% neither agree nor disagree, 49,5% agree and strongly agree.
- The importance of raising awareness about the CE in the tourism industry in general: 38,5% neither agree nor disagree, 29% agree and strongly agree, but 25% still disagree.
- The importance of raising awareness about CE in any educational institutions that prepare the workforce for this industry: 53% agree and strongly agree, 23% neither agree nor disagree, and 20 disagree.

This shows that tourism organisations do not have enough knowledge and information about the CE in general and its importance for their organisations. Some of them still disagree about the necessity about the awareness about CE in the institutions that prepare the force for this industry. So, they need more information, motivation, training, and activities that will raise their awareness in the future.

The total of importance of awareness about CE of VET and tourism organizations shows high awareness in their organizations, in the tourism industry in general as well as in any educational institutions that prepare the workforce for this industry. This shows high need for educational system to open the curriculum to CE on all levels of work and life.



7.2.2 Raising awareness and readiness in circularity in VET

VET organizations focus primarily to raise awareness and create a workforce capable of acting in the circular economy on following points:

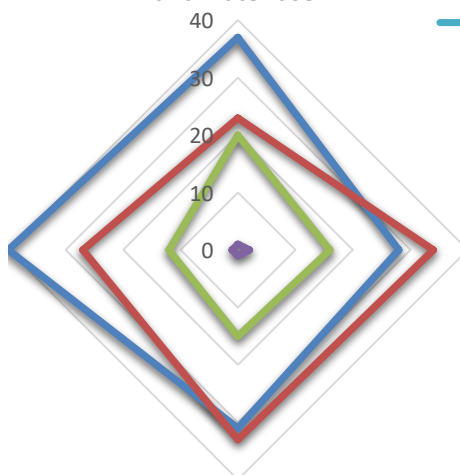
- Prepare students to navigate the challenges posed by new competing destinations that emphasise green and safe tourism practices, supporting circularity.
- Prepare students to implement CE principles in their future workplaces, such as reducing energy and water use
- Equip students to contribute to CE in social area focusing on cultural authenticity and building an inclusive society.
- Include teaching students how to utilize digital marketing channels in tourism effectively.

VET organizations focus primarily to raise awareness in CE

prepare students to implement circular economy principles in their future workplaces, such as reducing energy and water use.

- Strongly agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

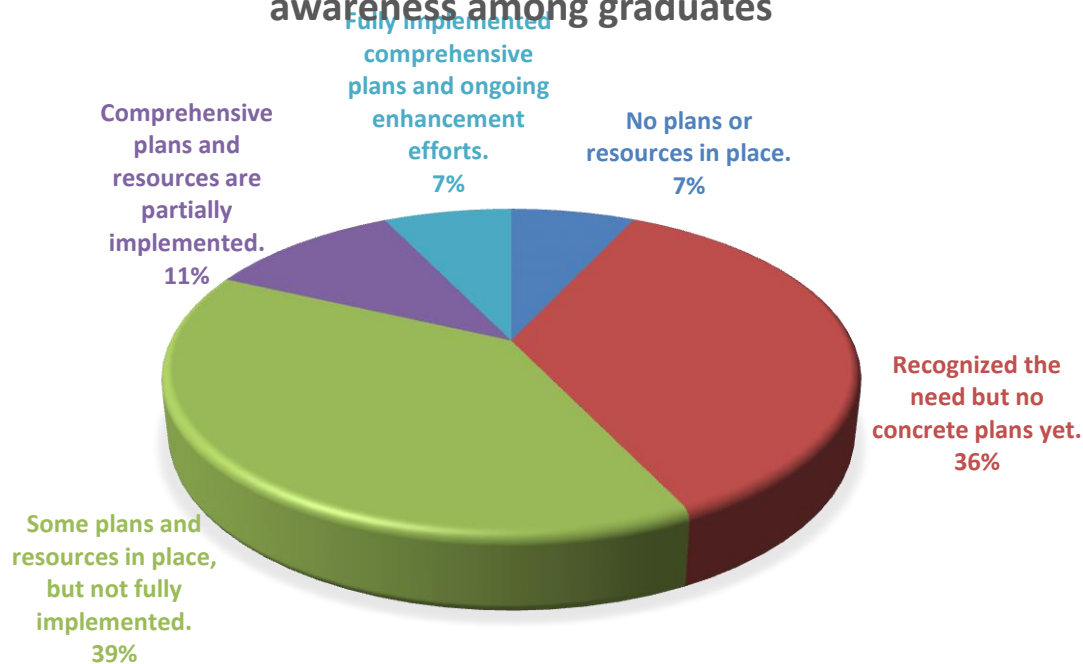
prepare students to navigate the challenges posed by new competing destinations that emphasize green and safe tourism practices, supporting circularity



equip students to contribute to CE in social area focusing on cultural authenticity and building an inclusive society

include teaching students how to utilize digital marketing channels in tourism effectively

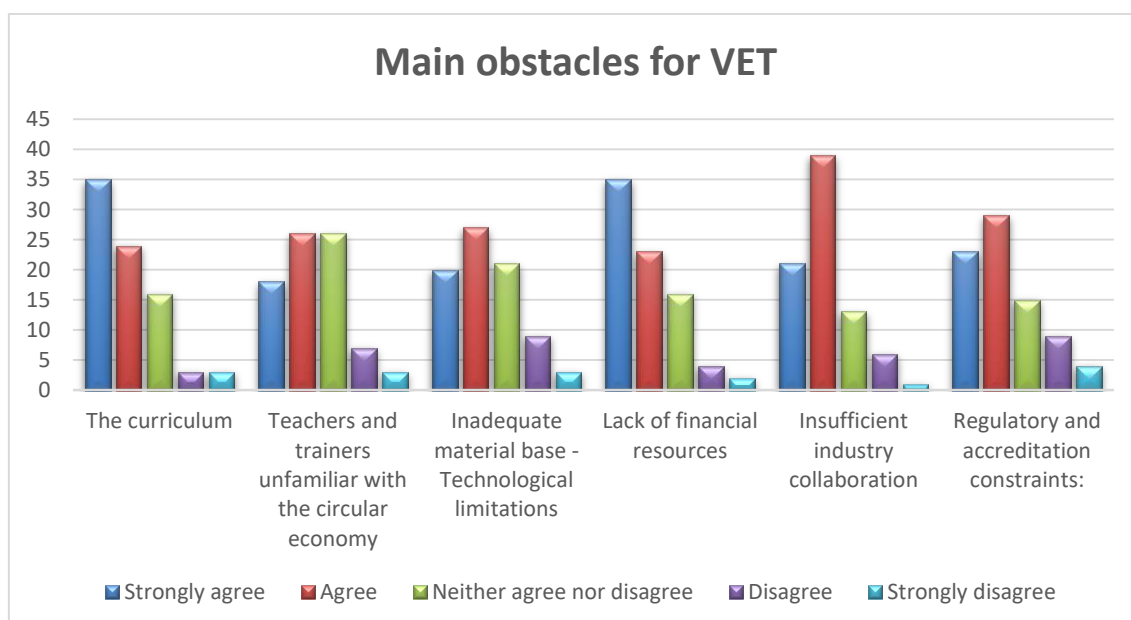
Readiness to provide training and enhance awareness among graduates



VET responses shows the area of readiness to provide training and enhance awareness among graduates in following poits:

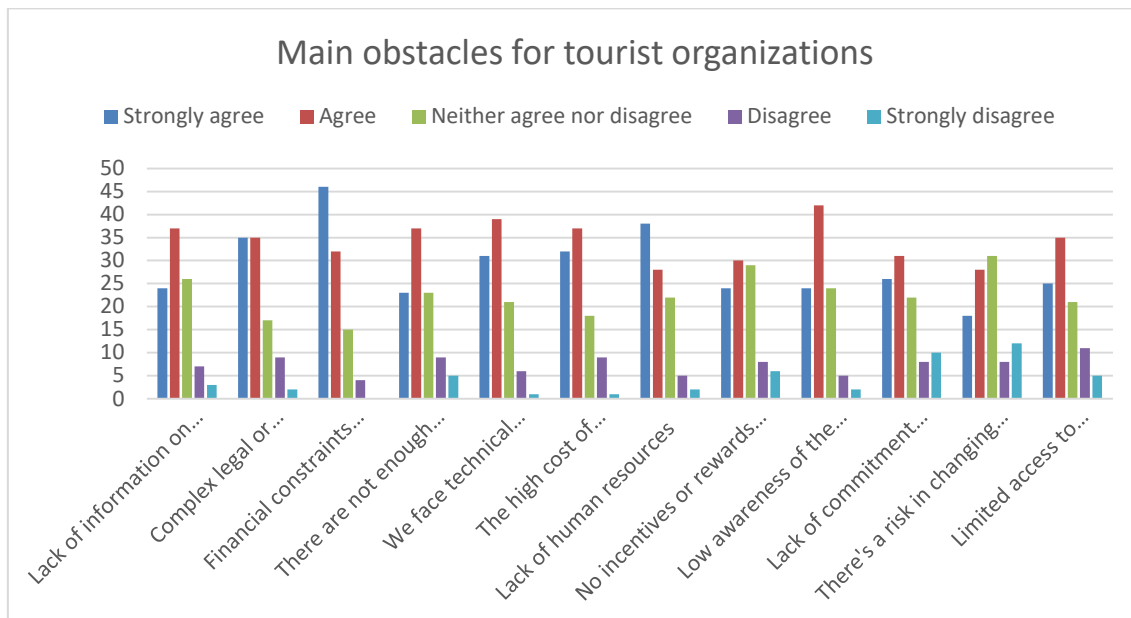
- Some plans and resources in place, but not fully implemented (39%).
- Recognized the need but no concrete plans yet (36%).
- Comprehensive plans and resources are partially implemented (11%).
- Fully implemented comprehensive plans and ongoing enhancement efforts (7%).
- No plans or resources in place (7%).

7.2.3 Main obstacles and barriers in VET



For VET institutions, major obstacles are insufficient industry collaboration, the curriculum and lack of financial resources. VET specialists are facing challenges in awareness, commitment, and adapting to new models, highlighting the need for targeted support and resources to facilitate the transition to circular economy practices.

7.2.4 Main obstacles and barriers in tourist organizations



The most significant barriers to adopting CE tourism practices in organisations are:

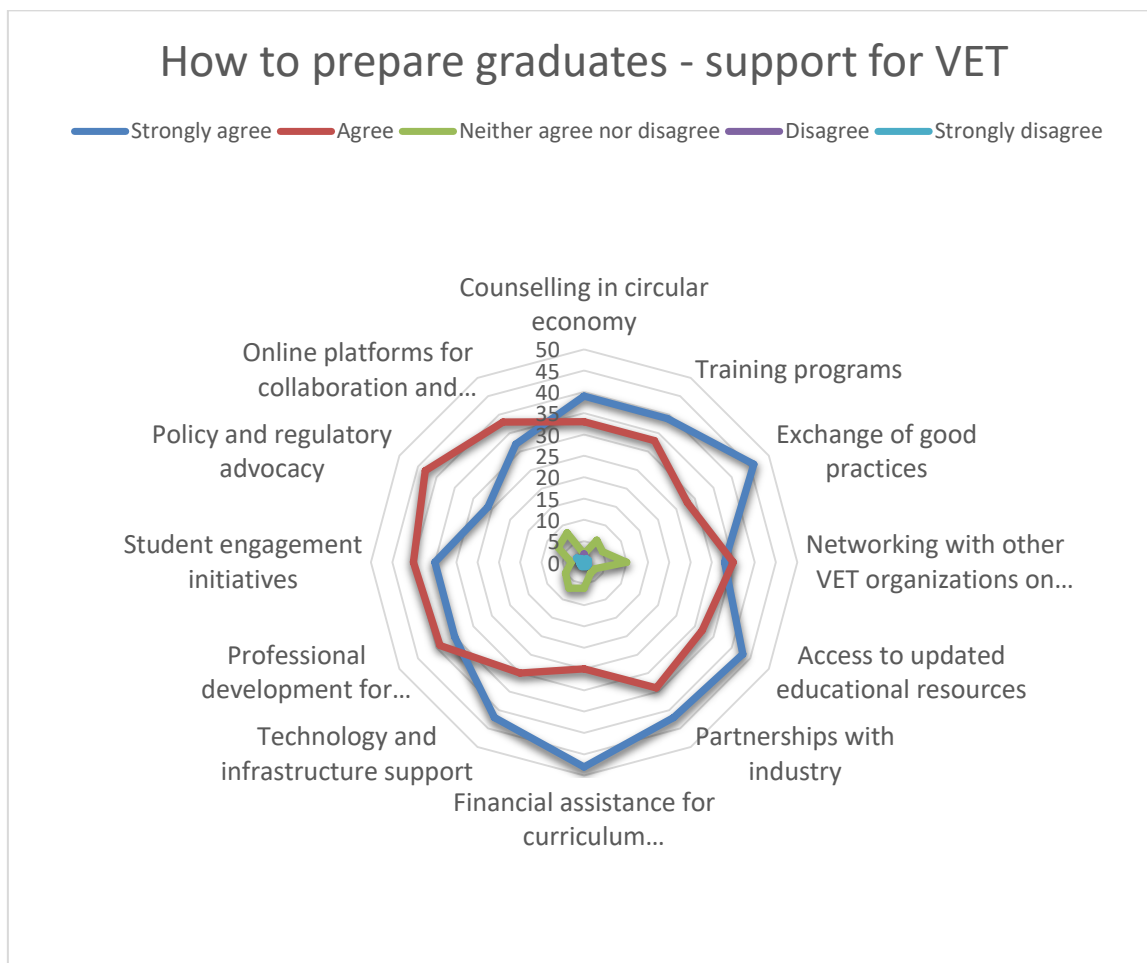
- Financial barriers, ability to invest in CE initiatives (13%)
- Lack of human resources (11%)
- Complexity and administrative procedures (10%)
- Technical challenges (right equipment, facilities) (9%)
- High costs of environmental regulations and standards (9%)

Following by:

- Lack of commitment within the organizations to adopt CE practices
- Limited access to suppliers of sustainable products (organic food, alternative fuels, biodegradable items)
- Low awareness of the CE principles among companies
- No rewards for business that adopt CE practices
- Lack of proven examples or models of CE

For tourism organizations, the most significant barriers include financial constraints, technical challenges, and lack of information on implementing circular practices.

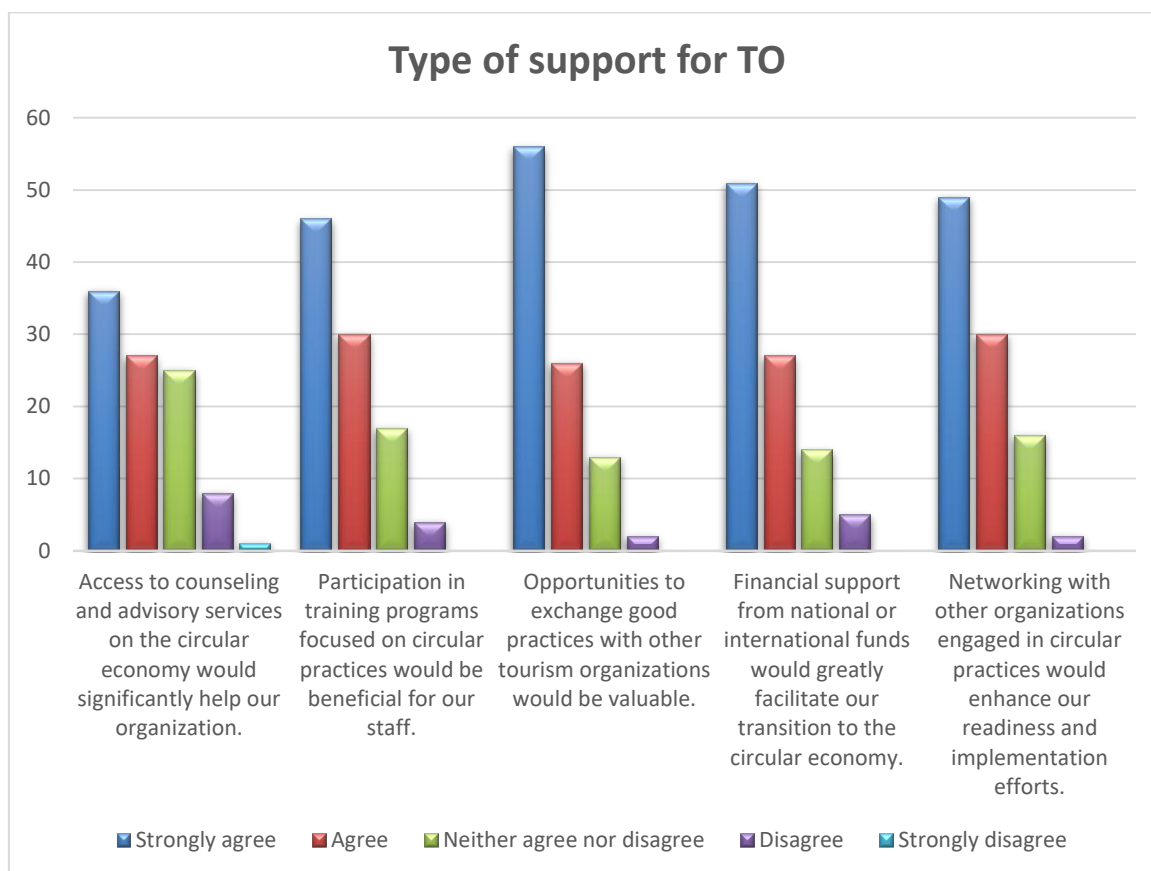
7.2.5 How to prepare graduates – support for VET



The type of support that would be the most appropriate for VET organizations to be able to prepare their graduates for raising awareness for circular economy are:

- Counselling in circular economy
- Training programs
- Exchange of good practices
- Networking with other VET organizations on tourism
- Access to updated educational resources
- Partnerships with industry
- Financial assistance for curriculum development
- Technology and infrastructure support
- Professional development for educators
- Student engagement initiatives
- Policy and regulatory advocacy
- Online platforms for collaboration and learning

7.2.6 Type of support for tourism organizations



Tourist organisations mostly agree and strongly agree the following type of support to raise awareness towards greater readiness for the CE in tourism:

- Opportunities to exchange good practices with other tourism organisations.
- Networking with other organisations engaged in circular practices.
- Financial support from national or international funds.
- Participation in training programs focused on circular practices.
- Access to counselling and advisory services on the circular economy.

7.3 The survey based on interviews and focus group

The interviews with 6 experts in VET and the tourism sector have been implemented in Bulgaria, Romania and Spain.

In Romania, Slovenia, and Spain, focus groups were implemented with 29 participants.

Face-to-face interviews and focus groups nuanced and brought a more in-depth perspective on the factual data, obtained through the online questionnaires. Thus, the following conclusions and opinions are worth taking into account, regarding the topic of Analysis 1 "Are we ready for Circularity":

- Integration of the concept of circularity in tourism in the didactic activity of teaching is not included in the learning activity process, as a different course, only by simple activities like supplementary themes for the papers they present when they discuss issues related to sustainability, there is observed a use of the circular economy term. Simple actions are also observed in "green week" & "other week" – when circular economy projects are discussed and presented among students.
- The development of workforce skills in green tourism is a critical need, but it lacks financial support through specific funding calls.
- Green skills is connected with the technological development for products and also for services that assumes development of the workforce is related also with this aspect. Awareness and concern for climate change, pollution and conservation of natural resources are growing globally. This awareness is expected to lead to an increase in demand for employees with green skills and knowledge.
- Organisational strategy for green and circular transition is essential concern for the entire organization has to be guided by the principle of focus and action in doing what is proper for the planet.

The investment in the green and circular transition specific skills of tourism employees, as well as of teachers&trainers in VET organizations should be seen as a benefit, and not just as a cost.

7.4 Suggestions from VET and the tourism sector (What would you do differently?)

7.4.1 Suggestions from Bulgaria:

VET Suggestions:

Develop a Strategic Plan for CE Integration: Establish a comprehensive strategic plan to incorporate circular economy (CE) knowledge into VET training programs, ensuring that the curriculum aligns with current industry needs and sustainability goals.

Update Existing Curricula with CE Topics: Revise and adapt current VET curricula to include relevant CE topics, providing students with a deeper understanding of sustainability and its practical applications in the tourism sector.

Enhance CE Awareness and Motivation: Increase the availability of information and motivation about CE principles among VET students, emphasizing the importance of sustainability for future tourism professionals. This could include guest lectures, workshops, and case studies that showcase the benefits of CE practices.

Foster Collaboration with Tourism Organizations: Encourage VET institutions to collaborate with tourism organizations on joint projects addressing CE. This partnership can provide students with hands-on experience and exposure to real-world applications of circular principles.

Develop New Educational Programs: Design new educational programs focused on CE to equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills needed to implement circular practices in their future workplaces. These programs should include practical components, such as internships or project-based learning, that directly connect students with industry challenges.

Organize Teacher Training on CE Topics: Provide targeted training for VET educators to enhance their understanding of CE topics. This training will enable teachers to effectively convey CE concepts to students and integrate them into everyday teaching practices.

Obtain Relevant Qualifications: Encourage both educators and students to pursue qualifications in CE-related fields. Certifications or additional coursework can bolster the credibility and depth of CE education within VET institutions, positioning graduates as knowledgeable candidates in the job market.

Tourism Suggestions:

Increase CE Knowledge for Businesses: Tourism organizations should seek out more information and training on CE principles, focusing on how to effectively integrate these practices into their operations. This might include attending workshops, consulting with experts, or participating in industry-led initiatives.

Promote the Exchange of Best Practices: Facilitate the exchange of best practices in CE among tourism businesses. This could be achieved through networking events, online platforms, or partnerships that allow companies to learn from each other's experiences and successes in implementing CE strategies.

Collaborate with VET Institutions: Strengthen partnerships between tourism businesses and VET institutions to enhance knowledge transfer and align training with industry needs. By working closely with VET programs, businesses can help shape the skills of future employees, ensuring they are well-prepared to support circular practices.

Engage in Joint Projects with VET and NGOs: Expand cooperation with VET institutions and NGOs to participate in national and European projects focused on CE. These collaborations can provide access to resources, expertise, and funding opportunities that support the implementation of circular economy initiatives in tourism.

Highlight Success Stories and Benefits: Actively share success stories and tangible benefits of adopting CE practices within the tourism sector. Showcasing real examples of how businesses have reduced waste, improved sustainability, or gained a competitive edge through CE can inspire others to follow suit.

7.4.2 Suggestions from Slovenia:

VET suggestions:

- A good strategic plan for implementing CE knowledge into the training programs is needed.
- Adopting the existing curriculum with CE topics.
- More information and motivation about CE principles in VET for future tourism workers.
- Cooperation with tourism organisations in joint projects addressing CE.
- Develop new educational programs to give students appropriate knowledge and a basis for CE principles so they will be prepared and equipped with knowledge when starting to work in the tourism industry.
- Organise teacher training about the CE topics.
- Get some qualifications in this area.

Tourism suggestions:

- Get more information and knowledge about CE principles and how to incorporate them into their businesses.
- Exchange of good practices in CE principles.
- Cooperate with VET in tourism to gain more knowledge and train their students to become future employees in this sector.

Cooperation with VET and NGOs is needed for joint European and national projects and initiatives.

Establish a CE centre where tourism organisations can get more information and specific directions on implementing CE principles in their businesses.

7.4.3 Suggestions from Romania:

- Incorporate practical experiences, such as internships, field trips, and project-based learning, where students work on real-world sustainability projects in tourism.
- Create mentorship programs where experienced professionals in green tourism mentor students and provide career guidance.
- Facilitate networking opportunities through industry conferences, seminars, and workshops.
- Use this feedback to improve the curriculum and teaching methods continuously.
- Promote lifelong learning by offering continuing education courses, workshops, and online modules for professionals seeking to update their skills in green tourism.
- Encourage alums to stay engaged with the institution and contribute to ongoing sustainability initiatives.
- Launch campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of green tourism and the available training programs.
- Highlight success stories of individuals and businesses that have benefited from green tourism education.
- Engage with local communities to promote sustainable tourism practices and involve them in educational initiatives.
- Use community projects to demonstrate the practical benefits of green tourism and build support for training programs.

7.4.4 Suggestions from Spain:

Both tourism representatives and VET teachers suggested actions that could change the tourism model, starting with education. Specific content must be included in secondary schools and VET centres, including teacher training, to promote the circular economy and sustainability. At the VET level, there are no qualifications.



As for the tourism industry, promote less the sense of productivity and focus more on national and local tourism than on trips abroad so that we leave less carbon footprint, that is, more sustainable destinations.



Summary of Suggestions from Bulgaria, Slovenia, Romania, and Spain:

To enhance circular economy (CE) integration in VET and tourism sectors across Bulgaria, Slovenia, Romania, and Spain, several key strategies have been suggested. For VET institutions, a comprehensive approach includes developing strategic plans to integrate CE into training programs, updating curricula with relevant CE topics, and enhancing both teacher and student qualifications through targeted training and certifications.

Additionally, fostering collaboration between VET institutions and tourism organizations through joint projects and practical experiences, such as internships and mentorship programs, is emphasized to bridge the gap between education and industry needs. In tourism, businesses are encouraged to increase their knowledge of CE principles, exchange best practices, and engage in joint projects with VET and NGOs to drive sustainability initiatives.

Promoting national and local tourism to reduce carbon footprints and establishing CE centers for guidance are also highlighted. Across all countries, there is a strong call to include CE and sustainability content at all educational levels, from secondary schools to VET centers, and to leverage community engagement and success stories to inspire broader adoption of green tourism practices.

These collective suggestions aim to create a more integrated and practical approach to embedding circular economy principles within the tourism and VET sectors.

8 SWOT analysis based on the questionnaire 1 and 2 responses in partner's countries

8.1 Strengths in Circularity

The tourism sector across these countries shows a high awareness of the benefits and competitive advantages of adopting circular economy (CE) practices. There is already some implementation of CE measures, such as local sourcing, waste management, and green products like recycled paper and biodegradable materials. Participation in CE-related projects demonstrates a solid commitment to sustainability, and there is widespread recognition that CE principles are crucial for the future operations of businesses. This sector also emphasises the importance of circular transition and developing green skills in the tourism industry, reflecting a willingness to train and enhance knowledge in CE.

VET institutions across Slovenia, Romania, and Spain exhibit a strong awareness of the importance of CE, particularly its relevance in the tourism sector. This awareness is complemented by integrating digital tools in teaching, which includes training students on utilising digital marketing channels effectively in tourism and equipping them with CE-related skills. Furthermore, these institutions prepare students to address and adapt to climate change challenges and implement CE principles in their future workplaces. They also encourage students to contribute to CE in social areas, focusing on cultural authenticity, inclusivity, and innovative green tourism practices. The overall emphasis on student engagement in collaborative economy activities strengthens the sector's readiness to embrace circularity.

8.2 Weaknesses in Circularity

Despite these strengths, notable weaknesses include insufficient knowledge and information about CE and its importance and application within organisations. Financial constraints and a lack of funds present significant barriers to investing in CE initiatives, often resulting in additional costs for businesses and their customers. There is also a lack of trained staff and human resources knowledgeable in CE and inadequate education on best practices. Technical challenges persist, such as the need for appropriate equipment and facilities to support CE practices and limited access to suppliers of sustainable products like organic food and alternative fuels.

Despite these strengths, VET institutions face significant challenges, particularly regarding financial constraints. There is a notable lack of resources to update curricula, train educators, and implement new pedagogical methods related to CE. Collaboration with industry partners practising CE principles is also insufficient, which limits the practical application of CE concepts in training programs. The existing curriculum often

leaves little room to incorporate new subjects or modules related to CE, and some educators lack the necessary familiarity and training to teach these concepts effectively. Additionally, limited access to the materials and resources needed to teach practical CE skills further hinders comprehensive education.

8.3 Opportunities in Circularity

There are several opportunities for enhancing CE in the tourism sector, including access to national and European funds that provide financial support for CE initiatives. There is a strong willingness within the industry to collaborate, exchange good practices, and participate in national and EU projects related to CE. Supporting the regional economy by prioritising local suppliers and sustainable sourcing offers potential benefits. Moreover, there is a growing interest in training staff and customers about CE principles, which can enhance awareness and engagement. Opportunities also exist for cooperation and knowledge exchange across domains to support the transition towards circularity.

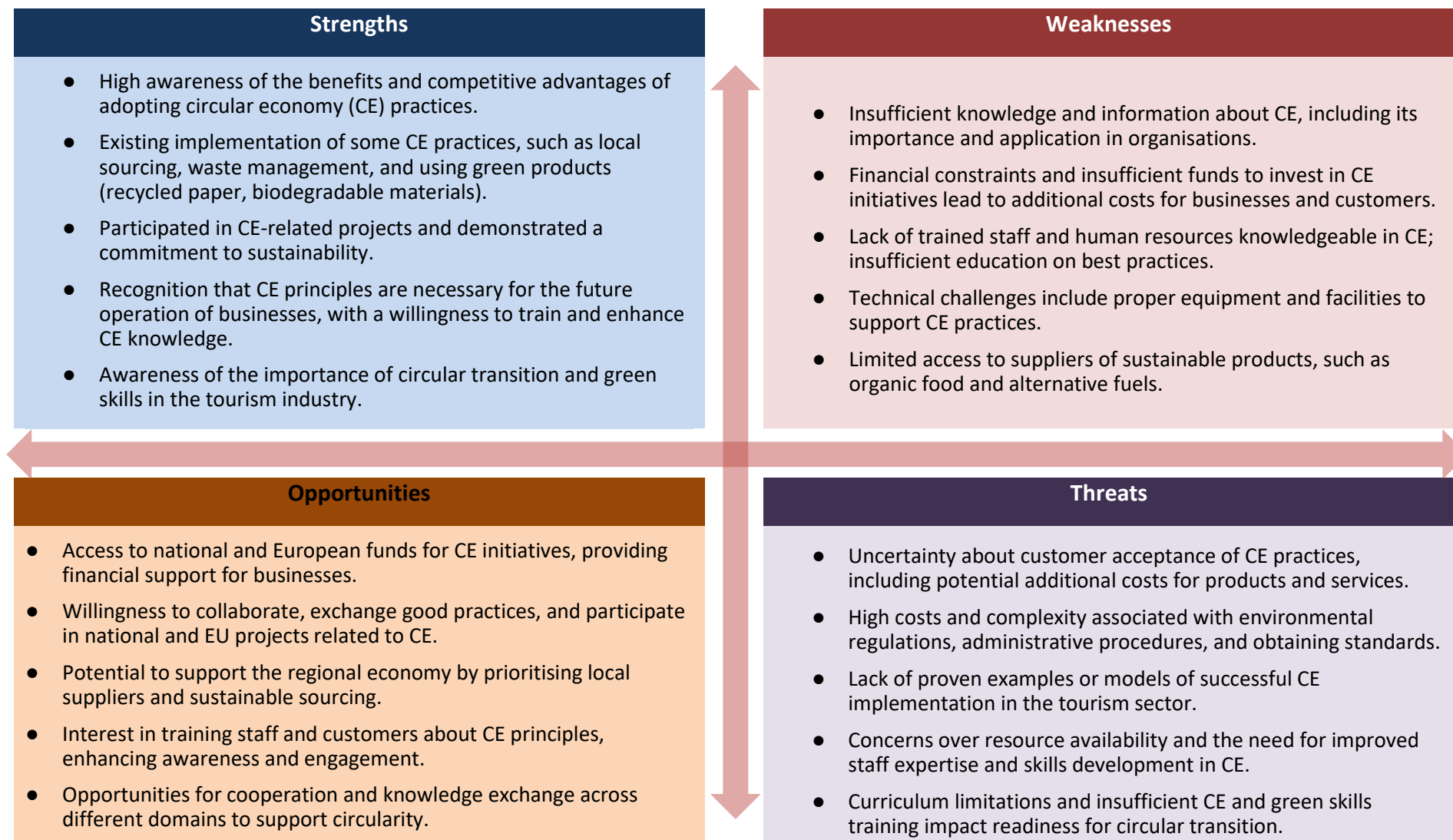
VET institutions have numerous opportunities to enhance their role in promoting circularity within the tourism sector. One significant opportunity lies in the growing interest among the younger generation in learning about CE and developing related skills. There is also potential for greater collaboration with government and industry to advocate for educational policies and regulations that support CE education. Developing specialised training programs for educators and staff on CE and sustainable practices could address current gaps in knowledge and resources. Furthermore, creating online platforms for resource sharing, collaboration, and virtual learning on CE could expand access to educational materials and foster greater collaboration among institutions. Engaging students in CE projects, competitions, and community activities offers a practical way to build real-world skills and encourage active participation in sustainability initiatives.

8.4 Threats in Circularity

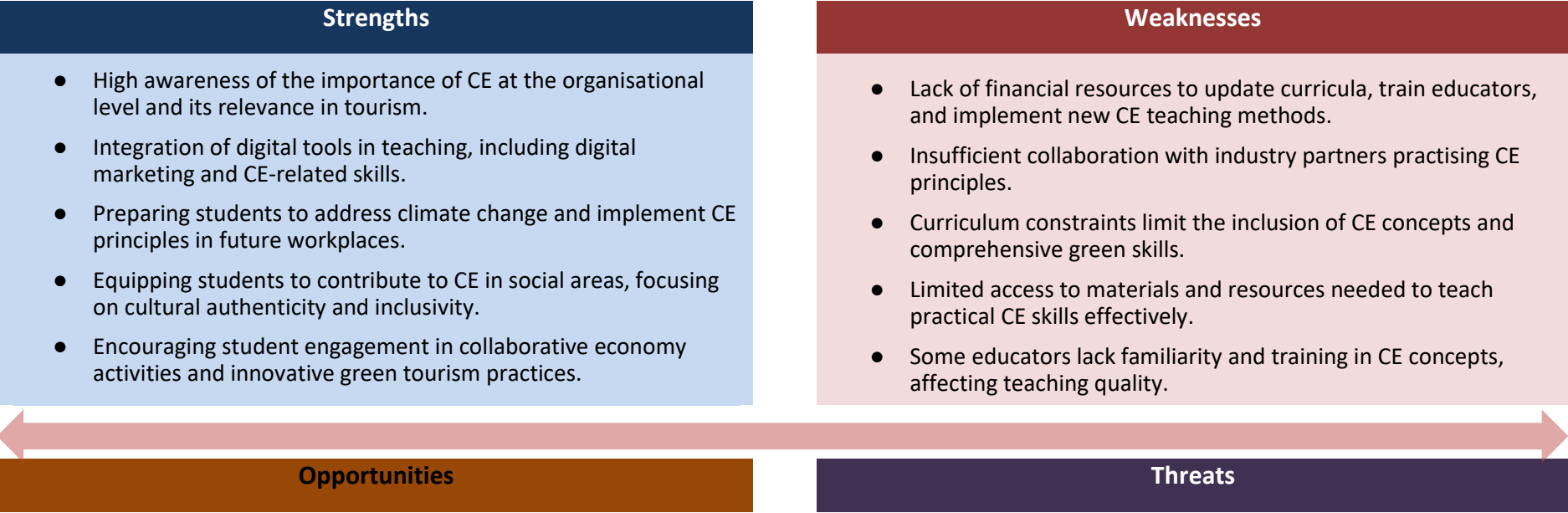
However, the sector faces several threats that could impede progress. There is uncertainty about how customers will accept CE practices, particularly regarding potential additional costs for products and services. The high costs and complexity associated with environmental regulations, administrative procedures, and obtaining standards pose significant challenges. A lack of proven examples or models of successful CE implementation in the tourism sector also creates hesitation. Additionally, concerns over resource availability and the need for improved staff expertise and skills development in CE are ongoing issues. Curriculum limitations and insufficient CE and green skills training further impact the sector's readiness for a circular transition.

However, several threats could undermine these opportunities. Regulatory and accreditation constraints may pose significant challenges, as existing educational

standards and requirements might not fully support the integration of CE concepts. There is also a risk that educational programs may not align with international market trends, leading to a mismatch between the skills taught and the labour market demands. Additionally, integrating green job creation opportunities within CE into the curriculum remains a challenge, as does ensuring that students receive comprehensive education on pollution prevention, eco-friendly transportation, and heritage preservation. The lack of cooperation between VET institutions and national public authorities on CE initiatives could further hinder progress in this area, limiting the effectiveness of educational programs in preparing students for future roles in a circular economy.



SWOT TOURISM ORGANIZATION: This joint SWOT analysis integrates the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified in Bulgaria, Slovenia, Romania, and Spain. It highlights the shared strengths of awareness and initial CE practices, common weaknesses related to financial and knowledge gaps, opportunities for funding and collaboration, and threats from regulatory complexities and customer acceptance challenges in the transition towards a circular economy in the tourism sector.



- Growing interest among the younger generation to learn about CE and develop related skills.
- Potential for collaboration with government and industry in policy advocacy to support CE education.
- Creation of specialised training programs for educators and staff on CE and sustainable practices.
- Development of online platforms for resource sharing, collaboration, and virtual learning on CE.
- Opportunities to engage students in CE projects, competitions, and community activities, fostering real-world skills.

- Regulatory and accreditation constraints may hinder the integration of CE concepts in education.
- Inconsistencies between international market trends and the skills of the national labour force in CE.
- Challenges in aligning educational programs with green job creation and long-term environmental impact mitigation.
- Difficulties in educating students on pollution prevention, eco-friendly transport, and heritage preservation.
- Limited cooperation between VET institutions and national public authorities on CE initiatives.

SWOT VET: This joint SWOT analysis consolidates the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified in Bulgaria, Slovenia, Romania, and Spain. It emphasises the strengths of high awareness and integration of digital tools, the weaknesses related to financial and curriculum limitations, opportunities for increased collaboration and specialised training, and threats from regulatory challenges and misalignment with market needs. This analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the readiness and challenges of VET institutions in integrating circular economy principles into the tourism sector.

8.5 Key Drivers and Enablers for Circular Transition

The results from Analysis No. 1 show the following Key Drivers and Enablers for Circular Transition:

Policy and Regulatory Support: National and European policies drive the circular transition by setting clear guidelines, standards, and targets. The presence of national strategies, such as Slovenia's Transition to a Circular Economy Strategy and Spain's integration of circular principles into tourism strategies, provides a framework that encourages businesses and institutions to adopt CE practices. These policies often include funding opportunities, regulatory incentives, and mandatory compliance measures that push sectors towards sustainability.

Access to Funding and Financial Incentives: The availability of funding from national and EU sources is a significant enabler for CE initiatives. Financial support helps overcome the high upfront costs associated with implementing CE practices, such as investing in new technologies or redesigning products and processes. This funding is essential for VET institutions and tourism businesses to initiate or scale up their circularity efforts.

Industry Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing: Collaboration between various stakeholders, including VET institutions, tourism businesses, government bodies, and international organisations, facilitates the sharing of best practices and innovation in CE. Networking opportunities, joint projects, and knowledge exchange platforms are vital for disseminating successful circular strategies and fostering a collective approach to overcoming challenges.

Integration of Circular Economy in Education and Training: Incorporating CE principles into educational curricula and vocational training programs is crucial for building a skilled workforce ready to support the circular transition. VET institutions that provide specialised training on sustainability and circularity prepare students to enter the workforce with the necessary skills and mindset to contribute to CE practices in their future careers.

Consumer Demand and Market Trends: Growing consumer awareness and demand for sustainable products and services drive businesses to adopt CE practices. The tourism sector, in particular, benefits from catering to eco-conscious travellers who prefer destinations and services that minimise environmental impact. This shift in market preferences is a powerful incentive for businesses to integrate CE into their operations, offering a competitive edge and aligning with global sustainability goals.

These drivers and enablers highlight the multi-faceted approach required to support the circular transition, involving regulatory frameworks, financial resources, collaboration, education, and market dynamics. Together, they create a conducive environment for advancing circular economy principles.

9 Comparative Analysis

9.1 Comparison of Circularity Readiness between VET and Tourism Sector

Based on the results of Analysis No. 1, the circularity readiness between the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector and the tourism sector can be compared in the following key points:

Level of Awareness and Implementation:

Both VET institutions and tourism organizations exhibit high awareness of the importance of circular economy (CE) principles. However, while the tourism sector has started implementing some CE practices such as waste management and using green products, VET institutions are primarily focused on raising awareness and incorporating digital tools in their teachings. The integration of CE into the curriculum remains inconsistent in VET, whereas the tourism sector shows varying degrees of CE implementation.

Financial and Resource Challenges:

Financial constraints are a significant barrier in both sectors, impeding the adoption of CE initiatives. VET institutions struggle with limited funding to update educational programs, train educators, and develop new curricula, while tourism organizations face high costs related to compliance with CE standards and environmental regulations. Both sectors lack adequate resources and infrastructure to fully support CE practices.

Collaboration and Cooperation:

There is a recognized need for increased collaboration and cooperation in both sectors, but the extent varies. Tourism organizations have engaged more in joint projects and best practice exchanges, though there remains a need for broader

international cooperation. VET institutions have opportunities to enhance their impact by developing partnerships with tourism organizations and other stakeholders to provide practical, hands-on learning experiences.

Opportunities for Education and Training:

The VET sector has significant potential to enhance circularity readiness by integrating CE topics into their curricula and creating specialized training programs. There is a strong interest in developing teacher education and offering practical experiences like internships and project-based learning. For the tourism sector, training programs focused on CE principles are crucial to equipping staff with the necessary skills to implement sustainable practices effectively.

Regulatory and Market Challenges:

Both sectors face regulatory and market challenges that affect their readiness for circularity. Existing educational standards and regulatory frameworks do not fully support CE integration, creating barriers for VET institutions. In the tourism sector, uncertainty regarding customer acceptance of CE practices, especially when they involve additional costs, poses a significant threat. Addressing these challenges is essential for fostering a conducive environment for CE adoption.

THESE COMPARISONS HIGHLIGHT THE SHARED AND UNIQUE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES BETWEEN THE VET AND TOURISM SECTORS IN THEIR JOURNEY TOWARD CIRCULARITY, EMPHASIZING THE NEED FOR STRATEGIC COLLABORATION, ENHANCED FUNDING, AND TARGETED EDUCATIONAL REFORMS TO ADVANCE CIRCULAR ECONOMY PRINCIPLES.

9.2 Transnational Perspectives on Circularity Readiness

Based on the results of Analysis No. 1, the readiness for circularity across VET and tourism sectors in Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain reveals both shared and distinct characteristics influenced by national strategies, industry practices, and educational frameworks. Below are key transnational perspectives on circularity readiness:

High Awareness but Varied Implementation: Across the partner countries, there is a high level of awareness of the importance of circular economy (CE) principles in both VET and tourism sectors. However, the implementation of these principles varies significantly. While some countries like Slovenia and Spain have started integrating CE practices into their national tourism strategies and educational programs, others, such as Romania and Bulgaria, show gaps in comprehensive adoption. This discrepancy highlights the need for a more unified approach to CE readiness.

Challenges in Financial and Resource Allocation: Financial constraints are a common challenge across all countries, impacting both VET institutions and tourism businesses. Limited funding for updating curricula, training educators, and investing in necessary infrastructure impedes progress in VET, while tourism sectors struggle with the high costs of adopting and maintaining CE practices. Addressing these financial barriers is crucial for advancing circularity readiness across all sectors.

Collaboration and Partnerships: Collaboration between VET institutions, tourism organizations, and other stakeholders is essential yet unevenly developed across the countries. Successful examples of partnerships in Slovenia and Spain demonstrate the potential of joint projects to drive CE initiatives. However, the need for stronger and more strategic collaborations, particularly involving government bodies and NGOs, remains a priority to enhance circularity readiness.

Need for Tailored Education and Training: The integration of CE topics in educational programs is progressing, but there is a significant need for more targeted and practical training. VET institutions in all partner countries are encouraged to develop specific CE-focused curricula, provide teacher training, and offer students practical experiences that align with industry needs. This approach will better equip future professionals with the skills required to support circular practices in tourism.

Regulatory and Market Dynamics: Regulatory frameworks supporting circularity are in place but vary in their comprehensiveness and enforcement across the partner countries. In some regions, regulatory constraints and market acceptance of CE practices pose significant challenges. For instance, concerns over customer acceptance of added costs linked to CE practices are prevalent in the tourism sector. Harmonizing regulations and improving market education on the benefits of CE can help mitigate these challenges and enhance readiness.

These transnational perspectives underscore the importance of a coordinated effort to align educational and industry practices with circular economy principles, leveraging strategic partnerships, financial support, and tailored educational initiatives to foster a sustainable transition in the VET and tourism sectors.

10 Conclusion

The implementation of Analysis 1 successfully validated the research hypotheses, demonstrating that circular economy (CE) practices are present in varying degrees across the tourism sectors of Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain. The findings confirmed that CE practices, such as waste management, green products, and energy-efficient tourism activities, are being adopted inconsistently across countries. Public awareness of CE in tourism is generally high, supporting the hypothesis that stakeholders recognise the importance of CE principles.

While certain countries have advanced in embedding CE practices into their national strategies and educational programs, others are still grappling with initial stages of adoption. This uneven progress underscores a critical need for more cohesive and sustained efforts to align both sectors with CE objectives, ensuring that all regions can fully integrate these practices.

Financial constraints emerged as a significant barrier across all countries, limiting the capacity of both VET institutions and tourism businesses to adopt and implement CE practices effectively. The lack of adequate funding affects the ability to update curricula, provide targeted training, invest in new technologies, and cover the costs associated with sustainable initiatives. This financial shortfall is compounded by the absence of specific financial incentives and subsidies tailored to CE projects, indicating an urgent need for increased support from national and EU levels to overcome these barriers.

Collaboration and strategic partnerships are highlighted as essential for advancing circularity, yet they remain underdeveloped in many areas. The analysis points to the need for stronger cooperation between VET institutions, tourism organizations, government bodies, NGOs, and the private sector to foster knowledge exchange and practical application of CE principles. Additionally, addressing regulatory and market challenges, such as inconsistent standards and consumer hesitancy towards CE practices, will be crucial. Harmonizing regulations and enhancing market education on the benefits of CE can drive broader acceptance and implementation, paving the way

The analysis reveals that despite high awareness, both the tourism and VET sectors across Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain face significant gaps in implementing circular economy practices due to financial constraints, insufficient collaboration, and a critical need for additional training and knowledge in CE principles.

for a more sustainable and circular economy across the tourism and VET sectors in all partner countries.

11 References

- National Report of Analysis 1_Bulgaria
- National Report of Analysis 1_Romania
- National Report of Analysis 1_Slovenia
- National Report of Analysis 1_Spain