



SEASON READY



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## RESEARCH REPORT ON LOCAL/REGIONAL CONTEXTS AND PRECONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTRODUCTION OF WORK-BASED LEARNING

### Executive summary

SeasonReady project was launched with the aim to improve competitiveness of hospitality and tourism sector by fostering productive, professional and efficient seasonal workforce through the development and implementation of a work-based learning program designed to meet the needs of employers and seasonal workers, focusing specifically on food and beverages, housekeeping and front office, as most work is generated by this three areas of hospitality. The project is implemented by a consortium of six partners from Greece, Italy and Croatia. It is divided in four parts. The first step is to investigate the specific training needs of the on-the job trainers and seasonal staff in order to develop methodological foundations (intellectual output 2) and training material (intellectual output 3) coupled with the guide with recommendation to policy makers and other stakeholders (intellectual output 4).

This report brings together the results from that first step in the project implementation – needs assessments, consisting of an overview of the sector in the partner countries and seasonal employment issue, identification of theories suitable to guide design of the SeasonReady learning approach and assessment of the skills gap through a combination of primary research methods (in-depth interviews, focus groups and survey).

### Sector profile

The three partner countries are one of the most important tourism destinations in Mediterranean and Europe. The three partners countries, in total, realised 86 million international tourist arrivals (in 2016), a 33 per cent share in the Mediterranean. The latest available data (for 2017) from the



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World Tourism and Travel Council, shows that total tourism's contribution to GDP amounts to 10.3 per cent for the EU, and ranges from 13 per cent for Italy to 25 per cent for Croatia. While Italy's employment is the least dependent on tourism, employing about 6.5 per cent directly and about 15 per cent in total, it is an important generator of jobs in, both, Greece and Croatia, where it is estimated that about a quarter of all jobs is directly or indirectly generated by tourism.

### Education for tourism and hospitality

While many people working in tourism sector do not have specific training in tourism and hospitality, partner countries provide initial VET training for chefs, waiters, receptions, lower level hospitality management (i.e. front office). At the tertiary level courses in tourism and hospitality management are commonly offered by many universities. However, most of those working in tourism and hospitality do not have a formal training and it is even more so for seasonal workers. Only those employed in big hotels go through an organised training. Small and medium size enterprises lack resources for training and expect that the training of the workforce that they need should be provided by the public sector.

### Employment & seasonal workers

Most jobs are generated in the accommodation and food sector. Just these two sectors provide 4.8 per cent of all jobs in the EU (in 2017). The sector is also noticing a steady rise in employment that grew 12.75 per cent from 2011 to 2016. Accommodation and food accounted for 6.84 per cent of total employment in Croatia, 9.2 in Greece and about 6 per cent in Italy. While it is difficult to estimate exact number of seasonal workers, in Croatia about forty thousand people are employed in seasonal work in tourism, in Italy over one hundred thousand of contracts are seasonal (in 2015) and about fifty thousand in Greece (in 2016). Work in hospitality, regardless of the nature of employment contract, is low paid, with unsocial working hours and often physically and emotionally demanding.



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## Skills for tourism and hospitality<sup>1</sup>

In general, EU tourism and hospitality employers display dissatisfaction with the quality of the workforce. Increasingly, employers report several problems in recruiting employees –due to the shortage of people willing to work in the sector and to the shortage of skills. In general, the following skills are needed for jobs in the sector:

- Soft skills crucial for service delivery, including language, customer service, cultural awareness and cross-cultural skills, service quality and communication skills;
- Problem-solving skills needed for working in a technology rich environment, notably those related to social media, e-marketing and e-commerce;
- Small business management skills (finance, human resources etc.), along with leadership, entrepreneurship and innovation skills;
- Emerging skills needed in the sector are those relating to accessibility and ‘green skills’ for sustainability.

While on-the-job training is most commonly used for (seasonal) workers training, a common problem is that trainers do not have skills needed to provide appropriate on the job training. This is especially the case for the prevailing micro, small and medium enterprises.

## Work based learning

Work-based learning (WBL) is defined as an educational strategy that combines academic education with work experiences where academic and technical skills can be applied and evolved. It encompasses a diversity of formal and non-formal arrangements including apprenticeships, work placement and informal on-the-job learning. In more general way, WBL can be defined by three key elements: learning through work, learning for work and learning at work. Workplace learning involves self-directed learning usually enhanced by coaching, mentoring, e-learning or more formal planned experience. On-the-job training (OTJ) provides learning that happens in the normal work situations and involves teaching the skills, knowledge and competencies that are needed for employees to

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<sup>1</sup> Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services (2016). Mapping and performance check of the supply side of tourism education and training. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.



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perform a specific job within the workplace and work setting. For SeasonReady project that aims at training of (1) seasonal employees in hospitality sector who are not primarily in education and (2) owners/ managers in charge of recruitment, training and management of human resources, the overall approach need to be with the concept of on-the-job training and workplace learning.

### Primary research - methodological approach to need assessment

In order to fulfil objectives of this stage of the background research on training needs of seasonal workers in tourism and hospitality, three research methods were used - in-depth interviews, focus groups and a survey. Such research design enable us to harness a view of a broad range of stakeholders involved in the human resources management for tourism and hospitality, dealing with the seasonal workers in particular: owners/managers of hospitality enterprises, tourism and hospitality VET trainers, relevant professional organisations and policy makers.

As the aim was to obtain insights into the training needs of the seasonal workers, three methods were combined to ensure triangulation of results, especially important since, due to time and financial constraints, it was not possible to launch large scale representative surveys in all partner countries.

In total, we have conducted fifteen interviews with policy makers, professional associations of employers and employees and employment services. Three focus groups were also conducted with representatives of employers, VET trainers and hospitality VET consultants – one in each partner county. Finally, seasonal workers' training needs were assessed through a survey. Using snow-balling sampling technique, we have collected 108 completed questionnaires.

### Primary research - results

Common to all three partner countries are:

- lack of seasonal workers in general, in particular for front office and for up-market service delivery; this is especially the case in Croatia, where all respondents highlighted the lack of



## SEASON READY



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people ready to take up seasonal work with most of those with a sound experience left to work abroad;

- seasonality impacting adversely seasonal workers' motivation to learn and develop their skills, as they take up seasonal work in hospitality out of necessity rather than personal choice; subsequently they do not develop professionalism, their personal development is slowed down and their skills do not evolve;
- due to the seasonal nature of work where there is poor career path development, employees do not put an effort in their skill development, while for employers it is too expensive to provide additional training (either through hiring trainers or by providing in-house training a few days in advance of enterprises opening), leading in most cases to an ad-hoc on the job training for which they are poorly trained;
- for employers it is also risky to invest in seasonal workers as they are rarely loyal to an enterprise, tending to change employers from season to season, or even within the season;
- due to a poor training and skills acquired through doing the job, employees lack confidence and adaptability to different circumstances, what becomes most noticeable in peak season when, due to poor training and lack of operational procedures, they are not able to work under pressure and solve problems effectively; this is most obvious in food and beverages services;
- while housekeeping is the core of the hospitality industry, this job is often underrated as it does not require specific competencies; however, as housekeeping is perceived to require simple skills, training needs of housekeeping staff are often underestimated.

Our research has also pointed out that, while work-based learning is preferred method for (seasonal) workers in tourism and hospitality, the lack of proper training of trainers is an important issue. In terms of the scope of training for trainers, the following skills / traits need to be developed:

- Technical skills for the job
- Knowledge transfer
- Emotional intelligence



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- Communication
- Leadership
- Ability to motivate
- Basic of organisational behaviour – ability to identify employees' strengths and weaknesses
- Empathy – understanding employees' point of view
- Patience and helpfulness.

From the seasonal workers point of view, the trainers should focus on:

- Taking time to explain how work is organised in the company/enterprise
- Give a clear information about what is expected from each employee
- Allow enough time for training and adjustment – the latter is important as many seasonal workers, even if having prior experience, are likely to be first time with the employer
- Show respect and understanding
- Understand that the workers are under stress and provide them with the coping strategies
- Explain the way that they want to behave towards guests – what standard of service and assistance is expected
- Do not assume that showing how something is done once or twice is enough – be patient, explain slowly and as many times as required
- Provide regular feedback on their performance
- Give them some information on who the guests are and what they expect
- Provide more information about the company.

Skills that are needed by seasonal workers are summarised in Table 1 below. Firstly, skills are divided into general and job specific skills needed for all, regardless of the type of work that they perform. Then, additional skills (over and above those pertaining to all jobs) are listed for three occupations – food and beverages, front office and housekeeping.



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**Table 1.**

Skills needed for seasonal workers in general and by occupation

Occupation	Type of skills	Skills
<i>For all jobs</i>	Customer service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Welcoming guests</li> <li>○ Willingness / readiness to help customers or meet their needs and expectations</li> <li>○ Deliver quality service to guests with special needs</li> <li>○ Overall customer care - smile, sense of hospitality, will to learn, curiosity, ambition, seriousness</li> <li>○ Ability to provide information about destination</li> <li>○ Managing guest complaints.</li> </ul>
	Communication skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Overall good communication skills</li> <li>○ Ability to communicate in foreign languages, especially English at B2 level</li> <li>○ Ability to accommodate cultural differences in communication</li> <li>○ Appropriate non-verbal communication – friendly attitude, smile, helpfulness, friendliness.</li> </ul>
	Professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Personal grooming</li> <li>○ Motivation for work /pride in job well done</li> <li>○ Work ethics</li> <li>○ Team work</li> <li>○ Ability to work under pressure</li> <li>○ Flexibility /multitasking.</li> </ul>
<b>Food and beverages</b>	Job specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Technical skills               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ general cooking skills,</li> <li>▪ new techniques (i.e. cocktail),</li> <li>▪ cooking and pastry making,</li> <li>▪ wine tasting,</li> <li>▪ sales,</li> <li>▪ barmen skills</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ New methods in food preparation and trends in serving food</li> <li>○ Hygiene in food handling (storage, preparation, cleaning)</li> <li>○ Serving skills</li> <li>○ Product knowledge.</li> </ul>
	General skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Personal hygiene</li> <li>○ Professional, polite manners for waiters.</li> </ul>
<b>Housekeeping</b>	Job specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Knowing and understanding standard of work</li> <li>○ Quality control</li> <li>○ Taking care of inventory/reporting damage and repair</li> <li>○ Understanding and following hygiene and safety rules.</li> </ul>
	General skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Accuracy</li> <li>○ Ability to complete tasks quickly</li> <li>○ Hygiene</li> <li>○ Patience</li> <li>○ Basics of foreign language - greetings</li> <li>○ Interpersonal skills.</li> </ul>
<b>Front office</b>	Job specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Technical skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ reservations,</li> <li>▪ invoicing,</li> <li>▪ booking</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ ICT skills / knowledge of reservation systems</li> <li>○ Knowledge about destination – attraction, restaurants, entertainment, excursions.</li> </ul>
	General skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Multitasking</li> <li>○ Customer service – politeness, greetings, empathy, smile, positive attitude</li> <li>○ Problem solving</li> </ul>



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- Organizational skills
  - Sales skills
  - Time management.
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