



**SEASON READY**



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# **Guide with recommendations for the adoption of work-based learning in small and medium hospitality enterprises**

**Developed by Croatian Chamber of Trades and Crafts**

**FINAL VERSION**



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## 1. Introduction

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 was implemented by a consortium of six partners from Greece, Italy and Croatia. At the beginning of the project, an extensive research on local and regional contexts and preconditions for successful introduction of work-based learning was conducted. Having in mind specific training needs of the on-the job trainers and seasonal staff, a methodology guide for work-based learning in the hospitality sector was prepared. Together with the training methodology, training materials were prepared and piloted in project countries. Based on the project results, focus group and structured interviews conclusions, the consortium presents this **Guide with recommendations for the adoption of work-based learning in small and medium hospitality enterprises.**

## 2. Project background

While partner countries provide initial VET training for chefs, waiters, receptions, lower level hospitality management, as well as tertiary level courses in tourism and hospitality management, most of those working in tourism and hospitality do not have a formal training and it is even more so for seasonal workers. 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.

While it is difficult to estimate exact number of seasonal workers, in Croatia about 40.000 people are employed in seasonal work in tourism, in Italy over 100.000 contracts are seasonal and about 50.000 in Greece. Work in hospitality, regardless of the nature of employment contract, is low paid, with unsocial working hours and often physically and emotionally demanding.

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.



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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.

### 3. 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 placements 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 provides learning that happens in the normal work situations and involves teaching the skills, knowledge and competences that are need for the employees to perform a specific job within the workplace and work setting.

The SeasonReady project aims at training of seasonal employees in hospitality sector who are not primarily in education and owners/managers in charge of recruitment, training and management of human resources, which is why the concept of on-the-job training and workplace learning is the most suited approach.

#### 3.1. Current WBL training offer for seasonal workers

In Croatia, there are no systematic WBL trainings for seasonal staff. There were initiatives by the Croatian Employers Association together with the Ministry of Tourism and Croatian Employment Service to provide measures for seasonal hospitality workers. In 2018, a measure for education and training of seasonal workers in hospitality sector was introduced. However, the measure was not sufficiently promoted, and people were not informed about it. Also, the Croatian Employment Service organises free workshops and training for the unemployed and special target groups, which are in the risk of long-term unemployment. However, those activities are being implemented through various projects, but the response, quality and outcomes of those activities are not systematically monitored.

In Italy, there are training possibilities organised by both professional associations (general topics and soft skills) and private agencies. Trainings organised by private agencies are more appropriate for SMHE since they can be tailored to the needs of the SMHE. However, these trainings can be expensive and time consuming for SMHEs.

In Greece, there are training possibilities organised by the Greek National Tourism Organization (EOT), addressing seasonal workers in specific occupations. However, there is a



limited number of places for trainees and minimum working experience in the field is required. Greek Manpower Employment Organization (OAED) offers more general trainings rather than trainings for specific occupations. Finally, there are initiatives by Vocational Centres which have a participation fee.

In all project countries, majority of the WBL trainings are conducted by big hotel chains, which have their internal educational programmes. Those programmes are specifically tailored for hotels which conduct them in order to meet their specific needs for trained and skilled seasonal staff. SMHEs have difficulties to implement that kind of WBL trainings due to the lack of time and resources to implement such programmes efficiently.

In comparison to current WBL offer in project countries, SeasonReady WBL training methodology and training materials represent a very good start for SMHEs and training of seasonal staff in all project countries, since this is the first time that a WBL methodology has been introduced to SMHEs accompanied by training material as well as guidelines and tools on how to be used by SMHE owners/managers/ in-house trainers. On the other hand, SMHE owners and managers have the possibility to develop a training programme, which will be tailored to their specific needs and could be easily implemented with a lot of practical exercises in the real working environment.

## **4. SeasonReady research on preconditions for WBL introduction**

### **4.1. Key problems identified by research**

After conducting the research on local and regional contexts and preconditions for successful introduction of work-based learning, similar problems were noticed in all project countries.

The first problem was the lack of seasonal workers in general. Secondly, it was noted that seasonality impacted 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 their personal development is slowed down and their skills do not evolve. Following that, due to the seasonal nature of the work where there is poor career path development, employees do not put an effort in their skills development, while for employers it is too expensive and time consuming to provide additional training, leading in most cases to an ad-hoc on the job training for which they are poorly trained. Also, employers find it 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 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 they are not able to perform under pressure and solve problems effectively.

The 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. Some of the trainer skills that need to be developed are technical skills for the job, knowledge transfer, emotional intelligence, communication, leadership, ability to motivate, patience etc.

## 4.2. Solving key problems identified by research

The main task of project partners was to develop a training programme which would upgrade necessary skills in the efficient and time saving manner. The training materials were designed to be easily readable by employees of different educational levels. Also, the emphasis was on practical knowledge acquisition rather than theoretical knowledge.

In order to achieve this task, various sources were used such as videos, articles, self-reflection activities and activities for application. In this way, employees had the opportunity throughout the efficient educational procedure, to acquire new knowledge and skills, exploiting at the same time their previous experience in the sector. And of course, the results could be maximized since employees can practice what they have learned under real working circumstances during their working routine under the supervision and guidance of in-house trainers who are following specific methodology and use the same training material.

Furthermore, the training programme was designed to improve the attitude of seasonal staff towards their job and profession by increasing their self-confidence, the sense of belonging to the specific working environment and SMEH company as well as developing their responsibility as workers in the hospitality and tourism sector.

## 5. SeasonReady Methodology Guide for WBL in Hospitality Sector

This methodology guide presents a universal model for implementation of WBL for seasonal hospitality workers. It considers specific issues that need to be addressed in the context of seasonal employment in hospitality and tourism such as short time for initial training, increased workload in the peak season, inexperienced and untrained seasonal workers and non-professional in-house trainers in small and medium hospitality enterprises.

The Guide is dedicated, in the first place, to employers, managers, supervisors and trainers of micro, small and medium hospitality enterprises who don't have extensive experience and



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expertise in training. It intends to provide them a practical and easy to understand tool to design and implement an effective training customised to the specific need of their business and their staff.

Firstly, the Guide presents theoretical foundations of work-based learning, defines related terminology and summarises the advantages of on-the-job training. Learning the job by execution of work tasks in real workplace enables workers to develop specific professional expertise and soft skills, improve confidence and support new-comer's integration into the team. For employers, it presents a cost-effective method of training which can be easily adjusted to their specific needs and so generate positive effects on workers' performance and overall management of human resources.

Secondly, the Guide focuses on design and development of training analysing what, where, who and how train. It gives instructions on how to set SMART learning objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely), where to do a training session and how to set a favourable learning environment, how to schedule training and decide its duration, how to identify and select a good trainer and how to choose the most suitable type and method of training.

Method of training included in the Guide respect the characteristic of seasonal workers' training in hospitality and tourism. The methods are practice-oriented and easy to apply- such as observation and demonstration, roleplaying, job shadowing or buddy system.

After having analysed training design and development, the Guide deals with training delivery. It focuses especially on the scheduling and organising of training implementation, proposing the ways how to structure tasks in simple steps and how to identify specific knowledge, skills and attitudes required. It also offers a concrete plan for delivery of practice-oriented learning.

The last phase in the training cycle is evaluation. The Guide offers tools for internal evaluation including evaluation of trainees as well as evaluation of the entire training programme.

Because the quality of on-the-job training is strongly dependent on the quality of the trainer, the Guide includes a section on training skills for in-house trainers in hospitality sector which summaries the key assets a successful trainer should have such as knowledge of the business field, knowledge of the profession and the workplace, communication, motivational, interpersonal and managerial skills.

Each chapter of the Guide incorporates practical suggestion, examples and tips to facilitate the process of in-house training, assessment and self-assessment tools and exercises for trainers and managers to help them improve their skills.



## 6. Training materials for WBL of unspecialized seasonal hospitality staff

Following the Methodology Guide, training materials for WBL for seasonal hospitality workers were developed. The materials cover main tasks usually assigned to seasonal staff—such as **front office service**, **housekeeping** and **food and beverage services**, but also modules about **customer service**, **communication** and **personal and professional development**. The materials are specifically designed to address both content-wise and structure-wise the identified needs of the seasonal staff in a way that is easy to use by in-house trainers.

The piloting phase of SeasonReady was crucial for the validation and finalization of SeasonReady training material and methodology for work-based learning. Piloting was conducted in two phases.

First, the in-house trainers attended a short training with the use of the SeasonReady WBL methodology and the training materials in order to understand the learning process to be followed and shadow/support trainees in actual training.

Second, piloting of training materials and methodology for WBL of unspecialized seasonal hospitality staff took place, with the help of the in-house trainers and experienced external VET trainers.

A total number of 27 trainees and 10 in-house trainers from 5 SMHEs participated in the piloting in Croatia, Greece and Italy. The module “Food and beverage Service” was piloted in Croatia, the module “Housekeeping” in Greece and the modules “Customer Service” and “Front Office” in Italy.

The evaluation of SeasonReady WBL methodology and training materials was very positive. In-house trainers said that the methodology guide is easy to be applied in SMHEs and that the provided paradigms of how to use proposed training techniques address the most important issues that are faces in the daily routine of a hotel. They also noted that the opportunity provided through this training to communicate and collaborate between employees was very useful, as well as self-reflection, demonstration and practical application. Most of the trainees and in-house trainers also believe that their skills have been improved after participating in the piloting. Most of the employees were very much satisfied with the way in-house trainer trained them. Both trainees and in-house trainers noted that they would recommend the WBL methodology to other employees or other SMHEs. Some employees believe that participating in the training had the opportunity to improve their mind-set, to reconsider the way that they provide services and manage their work and become better professionals. In-house trainers believe that the proposed methodology gave them the opportunity to reconsider their training practices and theoretical knowledge as well as to learn more practical tools. They also believe that the



methodology guide gave them the opportunity to put themselves in the employees' shoes, reflect on situations they are facing daily in a more different way and improve their teamwork skills. They would propose the methodology to small enterprises that cannot afford a more professional training to their employees.

## 7. Recommendations for implementation and promotion of WBL training

In order to discuss sustainability, exploitation and transferability of project results, focus groups and structured interviews with relevant stakeholders in project countries were organised. The objective was to recommend strategies for the adoption of WBL for the training of seasonal staff in SMHE, propose ways to overcome existing obstacles and suggest systemic changes at regional and national level. Relevant stakeholders were policy makers, VET providers, tourism associations, educational authorities and SMHE representatives. In Croatia and Greece, structured interviews were conducted. In total, 17 stakeholders were reached through the interview (7 in Croatia, 10 in Greece). In Italy, a focus group meeting was organised in which 8 stakeholders participated.

Through this discussion in project countries, key benefits of WBL training for project target groups were identified.

<b>Employers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>free use of training methodology in their businesses and the possibility to adapt training for their specific needs</i></li> <li>• <i>possibility to use the training programme as risk management tool to minimize the effect of low-skilled seasonal workers by providing them with the training which will meet their needs</i></li> <li>• <i>by implementing the WBL training overall quality of service and offer by SMEH can be raised</i></li> </ul>
<b>Seasonal staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>improving their employability in the long-term sense since they can prove as worthy employees during the training</i></li> <li>• <i>contributing to their mobility since their skills and knowledges could be required by other SMHEs</i></li> <li>• <i>raising self-confidence and increasing the performance of the trained seasonal staff</i></li> <li>• <i>real working environment during the training enables trainees to deal with the issues and challenges that cannot be learned through purely theoretical trainings</i></li> </ul>
<b>In-house trainers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>training material could be used as a guide for the preparation and facilitation of teaching covered topics</i></li> <li>• <i>improvement of training techniques by using developed guidelines and tools</i></li> <li>• <i>raising the quality of managing trainees and conducting training programmes in the company</i></li> </ul>
<b>GENERAL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>promoting the WBL methodology to a wider audience by</i></li> </ul>



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*emphasizing its value and benefits it brings to SMHE owners and managers when they apply it in their businesses*

Based on the results of the focus group meeting and structured interview, the following recommendations were formulated. The recommendations are structured by country, in order to be specific enough.

### 7.1. Country Specific Recommendations for Croatia

#### **Short term recommendations**

- *promote good practice examples by connecting and networking SMHEs with big hotel chains in order to transfer knowledge of mentors from big hotels to trainers and mentors in SMHEs; in that way, the mutual learning would be added value for all sides and the awareness of the importance which mentorship has, would be raised*
- *use all promotional channels to raise awareness and create the positive momentum regarding the proposed WBL training (local media, social media, etc.)*
- *distribute flyers and brochures at thematic events related to hospitality and tourism as well as job seeking fairs where lots of seasonal workers are being hired*
- *create the network of trainers and trainees who have passed the SeasonReady training programme*

#### **Long term recommendations**

- *establish the stakeholder network, which would include all the relevant stakeholders from the hospitality and tourism sector to work on designing supportive measures for the wider implementation of WBL training methodology and programmes for seasonal staff*
- *ensure financial mechanisms to support SMHEs which participate in training programmes (different kinds of tax reliefs, incentives, equipment and materials subventions, etc.)*
- *design the national promotional campaign to promote the value of WBL for SMHEs and seasonal workers*

### 7.2. Country Specific Recommendations for Italy

#### **Short term recommendations**

- *improve collaboration between employers, professional training centres schools and public authorities and thus solving the issue of divergence between different public and private entities; local public bodies are not well informed about the problems*



*and needs of employers, while employers find it difficult to gain relevant and accurate information from public bodies*

### **Long term recommendations**

- *support WBL training and professional development through public funding, tax relief and other incentives*
- *provide incentives to employers who train their seasonal workers and thus support the development of local human resources, facilitate their future employment and enhance the quality and potential of the whole sector*

## **7.3. Country Specific Recommendations for Greece**

### **Short term recommendations**

- *introduce a certificate for completing the training that would be recognized by SMHE owners/ managers*
- *raise awareness through face to face meetings with SHME owners/managers to promote benefits of SeasonReady WBL training*
- *promote SeasonReady WBL training through all media channels*
- *distribute informative materials such as flyers and brochures*
- *develop connections between SMHE owners who participate in the SeasonReady WBL training*

### **Long term recommendations**

- *develop a register of excellent SMHEs in which the key criteria for excellence would be trained, qualified and skilful staff*
- *increase hotel category as a result of participation of SMHE's seasonal staff in trainings*
- *organise exchange of good practices in the area of staff training*
- *support WBL training through tax reliefs and reduction in employers' contributions for SMHEs who decide to train their seasonal staff*
- *encourage positive attitude of SMHE owners/ managers toward WBL training through local trade union organisations, also through organisation of conferences and round tables to discuss benefits of WBL training*
- *promote employment of qualified staff through chambers, public authorities and local associations*



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## 8. General recommendations

Based on the project results, focus group and structured interviews conclusions, the consortium presents these general recommendations **for the adoption of work-based learning in small and medium hospitality enterprises.**

- I. work on improving the quality of WBL for seasonal workers in tourism and hospitality sector by designing well-structured programmes targeting the specific needs of SMHEs through the support of the wide stakeholder network within the sector
- II. provide the systematic support for SMHEs implementing WBL for seasonal workers in tourism and hospitality sector as well as create efficient advisory services regarding the implementation and quality assurance of WBL
- III. advocate for the financial support and incentives, tax reliefs, insurances for SMHEs providing WBL training for seasonal workers in tourism and hospitality sector
- IV. promote the WBL for seasonal workers by emphasizing good practices and examples from the real life guided by the principles of social responsibility and sustainability as well as the value and importance of lifelong learning and career development in general.