



SEASON READY



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## O4: FOCUS GROUP REPORTING

### COUNTRY REPORT

# Italy

**CESIE and Confesercenti**



**Date on which the focus group was organized:** 16/10/2019

**Location:** Confesercenti, Piazza Castelnuovo, 26, 90141 Palermo PA

#### Participants' profile

The focus group was held with 8 stakeholders representing regional policy makers, professional associations, VET providers, job agencies and public and private bodies. All of the participants take part in professional associations.

Name	Organisation + role in organisation	Stakeholder role
Vincenzo Lo Monte	CE.S.COT Messina	VET training body in Sicily region
Nino Dario Ruvolo	Associazione IDEA	Organisation for professional training
Claudio Tacconelli	Hydra Studio S.r.l.	Services, member of professional association
Cosino Cannata	A.Si.Fo.P.	Organisation for professional training and consultation
Valeria Drago	ANPAL Servizi	Agenzia Nazionale per le Politiche Attive del Lavoro (National Agency for Active Labour Policies)
Francesco Paolo Ferraro	Studio di Consulenza	Professional Consulting Agency
Flaminia Sangiorgi	Studio di Consulenza	Professional Consulting Agency
Mara Mezzatesta	La Linea Della Palma	Organisation for professional training and Job agency



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### INTRODUCTION TO THE FOCUS GROUP/ PROJECT

#### Which steps did you take before organizing the focus group?

- Studied the focus group guidelines.
- Identified the stakeholders.
- Prepared invitation letter and agenda.
- Contacted the stakeholders – email invitations with agenda, phone calls and personal contact.
- Explained the purpose and content of the focus group to the participants in advance.
- Presented the project to those who didn't know it, presented the results and invited them to the final conference.

#### Which materials did you deliver to focus group participants?

- Project leaflet
- Presentation of the project
- The SeasonReady Methodology Guide (O2)
- The Training materials for seasonal staff (O3)

#### Did you introduce the project before or at the beginning of the focus group meeting?

- Yes, in the invitation email, during the phone calls and personal meetings before the focus group. Using PPT presentation, O2 a O3 materials and printed project flyers at the beginning of the focus group.
- Some of the focus group participants knew the project before the focus group.

### FOCUS GROUP TOPICS

- 1. Identification of the issue: the lack of skills and competences of seasonal staff/the lack of training system for seasonal staff in small and medium hospitality enterprises.**

*Training of season workers is still quite underestimated in Sicily even though the stakeholders are well aware of the importance of quality staff in the tourism and hospitality sector.*

*More importance is put on professional training and development of permanent employees. In case of seasonal workers, on-the-job training is often seen as waste of time instead of an investment to the future. The reason is their high turnover and low certainty that seasonal workers will return for the next season.*



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*In this context, seasonal workers are often put directly to the job without giving enough time to learn the job and respective standard procedures. The quality of services is put in risk because of the unqualified and untrained staff.*

*Competences and skills mostly lacking in seasonal worker are foreign languages, soft skills such as customer care are also hard skills directly needed for the job.*

*Not successful recruitment also affects the quality of seasonal workers. Selection must be done very quickly which makes the process less successful.*

### **2. Solving the issue: implementing WBL training in small and medium enterprises**

*Professional training, work-based training as well as professional development programmes are definitely important and useful in the tourism and hospitality sector. Ideally, initial training and on-boarding support should be provided to all new employees to ensure good-quality service, improve performance and team work. Employers should be responsible for training and on-boarding of their new employees; however, they often prefer to invest in training of permanent employees, not seasonal workers. In this case, employers should at least focus on training of in-house trainers and managers in order to be able to deliver on-the-job training and instruct successfully seasonal workers.*

*Seasonal workers are as well responsible for their own professional development. They should keep their skills and competences updated and make effort to learn the standard procedures valid at the workplace. However, jobs in tourism are very stressful which discourages some seasonal workers from training or self-study. Judging by the participants' experience, it's difficult to involve people in training (e.g. online courses are often misused).*

*Some of the focus group participants mentioned that some employers use outsourcing of human resources to cover their personnel needs during high season and avoid the need to train them on-the-job. The temporary employment agencies<sup>1</sup> select and supply staff with the professional profile required by the employer and are responsible for administrative issues including obligatory training. Some of the participants argued against this approach emphasising some sensitive ethical issues such as low wages, predominance of foreign workers or uncertain quality of workers. Some also*

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<sup>1</sup> Agenzie interinali – lavoro in somministrazione



*mentioned the risk of lacking relationship between the employee and employer which leads to lower engagement and motivation of outsourced workers.*

*To support the selection of seasonal workers, job-matching agencies should help doing pre-assessment and facilitating meeting the needs of employers with the workers' profile (a third private or public body).*

### **3. Existing training**

*All stakeholders are aware of training offers available for companies in the sector of tourism and hospitality. These training courses are dedicated to companies of all sizes, organised by professional associations and are available for free.<sup>2</sup> The topics are various (e.g. foreign languages, customer care, ecology and environment protection in hotels).*

*Despite the training opportunities, many employers consider staff their training as waste of time. The problem is their motivation and awareness of the benefits of such investment (even though some training courses are free of charge employers still perceive the "waste of time"). To solve this rather cultural problem, awareness raising and information campaigns for small and medium enterprises are needed. In some cases, employers are interested in developing skills and competences of their staff but don't succeed in implementing any training due to lack of time and other resources.*

*Training courses developed and provided by private agencies may have high costs and are rarely used by small and medium enterprises.*

*Training courses described above are dedicated to companies and their employees. In case of seasonal workers, the situation is more complicated. After the season they are unemployed and can't participate in training dedicated to employees. The access to professional training for unemployed seasonal workers is more difficult. However, they can access training for unemployed which in some cases is obligatory.*

### **4. Training preferences**

*The stakeholders consider crucial training in: foreign languages, customer care and customer relations, intercultural understanding (interaction with and services to guests and clients coming from different cultures) and standard procedures. Real-life experience and simulation of typical situations on the job should be included in an*

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<sup>2</sup> *Fondi interprofessionali – bandi tematici*



*efficient training course. Most of the topics mentioned during the focus group correspond to the content of SeasonReady training materials.*

*Some employers find extremely useful manuals of standard procedures in different hospitality jobs. Such manuals should be given to all new employees (permanent and seasonal) to ensure that they will follow them.*

*SeasonReady training modules (O3) are exactly the kind of manual the stakeholders mentioned. The focus group participants who didn't know the project were very interested in seeing and eventually using the SeasonReady materials.*

*As mentioned above, the stakeholders think that employers are more willing to invest in training of regular staff working on higher positions. In this context, some of the focus group participants proposed two-level training as an optimum approach – training for in-house trainers and managers who can then efficiently and successfully train, support, lead and motivate the staff. Training of trainers must be of very good quality including training materials and face-to-face training sessions.*

*Another useful tool, according to the focus group participants, would be a training material (a manual for self-study) in foreign languages to facilitate on-boarding and work insertion of foreigners. In Italy, especially low-profile jobs are often occupied by refugees and migrants from Africa or other third-country citizens who don't speak well Italian. For that reason, training materials, manuals or handbooks in their mother tongue would be useful.*

*Some stakeholders reckon, that a collection of good practices, success stories and examples to follow would be also useful to SMHEs. The employers, however, have to be motivated to study such materials and put them in practice.*

## **5. Suggestion and recommendations for implementing the training for seasonal workers in SMHEs and improving the discussed issues**

*Training and professional development should be supported on public level via funding, tax reliefs and other incentives. For example, part of the city and tourist taxes could be used to fund professional training, upskilling and requalification of people working in tourism and hospitality. (Considering that SMHEs contribute significantly to income and overall development of the territory).*

*Public authorities can organise their own training programmes and put in place various training offers. An alternative would be providing incentives to employers who*



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*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. Such efforts should be better recognised and appreciated by the local public bodies.*

*Collaboration between employers, professional training centres, schools and public authorities must be improved. There is divergence between different public and private entities that makes their collaboration difficult. Missing interaction between public bodies and employers leads to the lack of information on both sides. Local public bodies are not well informed about the real problems and needs of the employers, employers, on the other hand, find it difficult to gain relevant and accurate information from public bodies. As a result, public authorities don't offer adequate support to the local employers and employers can't reach all the services possibly available.*

### **OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION**

#### **Overall impression of the focus group organization.**

The organisation of focus group was successful thanks to the smooth collaboration between CESIE and Confesercenti. CESIE took care of the methodological preparation of the focus group, analysed the results and prepared the national report. Confesercenti was responsible for communication with the stakeholders, invitations and presentation of the project. The focus group took place at the office of Confesercenti with participation of 8 highly relevant stakeholders representing the national, regional and local level.

#### **Did you face any challenges or difficulties in focus group organization and how did you solve them?**

The stakeholders relevant to the focus group are very occupied professionals and finding a date and time suitable for all of them was slightly challenging. For that reason, the focus group had to be organised in the middle of October when the high tourist season is over in the Sicilian region.

#### **Additional comments and conclusions.**

The SeasonReady project, its objectives and especially results (Methodological Guide O2 and training materials O3) were very positively accepted and evaluated by the focus group participants stating that such materials can strongly support the development of seasonal staff and training in SMHEs. This meeting was very important for the project exploitation and sustainability because most of the present stakeholders have strong multiplying potential, will share and use the SeasonReady resources in the future.