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National Report

Analysis 2

Activity A2.3

BULGARIA



Developed by
BAAT



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National context related to "Skills for the green and circular transition": strategies, plans, studies aimed at green skills, at national level, in general and specifically (tourism and related fields + VET in tourism)

National Context Related to "Competencies for Green and Circular Transition" in Bulgaria

Strategies and Plans:

The National Plan for Recovery, Transformation and Resilience¹:

This comprehensive plan includes a strong focus on green and sustainable transitions, incorporating circular economy principles in various sectors, including tourism. It aims to promote environmentally friendly practices, reduce environmental impact and improve resource efficiency.

National strategy for sustainable tourism development in Bulgaria 2014-2030²:

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.

Strategy for transition to a circular economy³:

Bulgaria has made the circular economy a long-term development policy priority in that strategic document. The National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 puts forward the "circular and low-carbon economy" as a priority. This strategy for transition to a circular economy is a first and important step in this direction. The European Union's general policy on the circular economy is evolving and our country is aware of the challenges that lie ahead as well as the duration of such a transformation of societal attitudes, economic processes and institutional priorities. The transition to a circular economy will provide the country with economic growth and a better environment. The necessary institutional, financial and human resources will be mobilised for this purpose.



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).

¹<https://www.mlsp.government.bg/natsionalen-plan-za-vzstanovyavane>

²https://www.tourism.government.bg/sites/tourism.government.bg/files/uploads/strategy-policy/strategy_2014-2030_13_05_2014-sled_ms_26_05_2014.pdf

³https://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

⁴https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SR-2023-17/SR-2023-17_BG.pdf

Vocational Training (VET) in Tourism:

In Bulgaria the VET programs with green competencies in their programs are increasing. These programs aim to train the students that want to become tourism professionals with the knowledge and skills needed to support sustainable and circular economy practices in their fields⁶. Nowadays in Bulgaria there are Masters degrees on circular economy, alternative tourism, specialized courses and trainings, certifications in sustainable tourism management, energy efficiency practices in the hospitality sector and environmentally friendly travel policies. Slowly the number of certified travel agencies is growing and more businesses introduce themselves as sustainable.

National and sectoral efforts:

Green competencies in tourism:

National efforts are focused on improving competencies related to energy efficiency, waste management, sustainable resource use, and the application of green practices in tourism operations. These initiatives are designed to prepare the workforce for the demands of a green and circular economy.

Integration of circular economy principles:

Both national and sectoral strategies highlight the importance of circular economy principles. Training programs and educational initiatives are developed to ensure that tourism professionals understand and can implement practices that reduce waste, optimize resource use and promote sustainability.

Collaboration with industry stakeholders:

The government collaborates with industry stakeholders, educational institutions and professional bodies to develop and promote training programs that focus on green and circular skills, such as: the ability to minimize the use and maximize the efficiency of energy and water consumption. These partnerships help align training with industry needs and ensure the relevance of the skills being taught.



Description of how the national analysis was carried out (steps, way of implementation, methods and tools used, challenges faced)

The national analysis on sustainability and circularity in Bulgarian tourism sector and vocational education and training (VET) was carried out using a structured approach, involving several key steps, methods and tools, while addressing a number of challenges.

BAAT started planning the objectives and scope of the analysis and clearly defining it. This phase included the identification of the target groups, gathering contacts of tourism organizations and VET institutions in the tourism sector. Two separate questionnaires were developed to collect relevant data, with sections dedicated to demographics, organizational characteristics and practices related to sustainability and circularity.

We started the data collection consisted of distributing the questionnaires via e-mail. To maximize participation, follow-up communication via phone and reminders were sent. In addition, key stakeholders from both tourism organizations and VET institutions were selected for in-depth interviews. These sessions provided qualitative data.

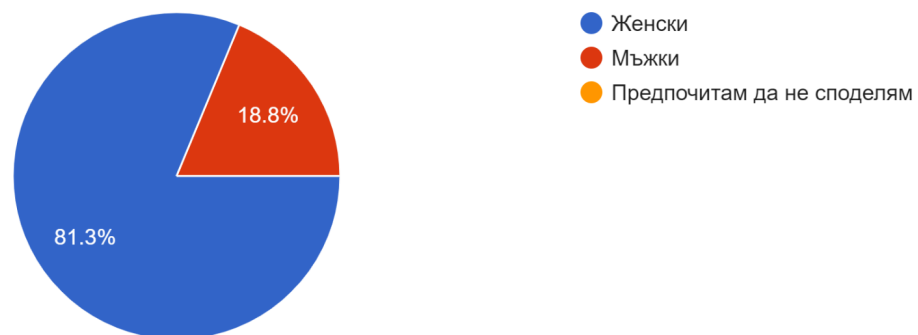
The results were compiled into a comprehensive report detailing the current state of sustainability and circularity in the tourism sector and VET in Bulgaria. The report also included recommendations for improving sustainability practices and promoting the principles of the circular economy.

Description of respondents (type, number of participants, average age, background)

The questionnaires were carried out to a total of 40 participants, distributed as follows:

VET Questionnaire: 16 respondents - 13 women, 3 men

16 responses



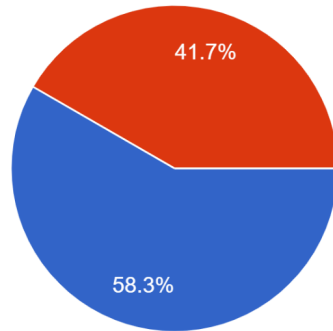
Tourism Organizations Questionnaire: 24 respondents - 14 women, 10 men



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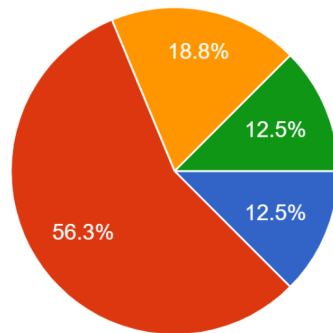
24 responses



- Женски
- Мъжки
- Предпочитам да не отговоря

**Age Distribution:
VET Questionnaire:**

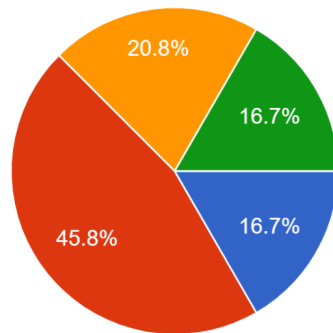
16 responses



- <35
- 36-50
- 51-60
- >60

Tourism Organizations Questionnaire:

24 responses



- <35
- 36-50
- 51-60
- >60



Background:

VET Questionnaire: Most respondents (7) held a Bachelor's degree, after them come Masters degree (5) and the rest are PhD (2) and High school (2, students). The majority belonged to institutions of higher education.

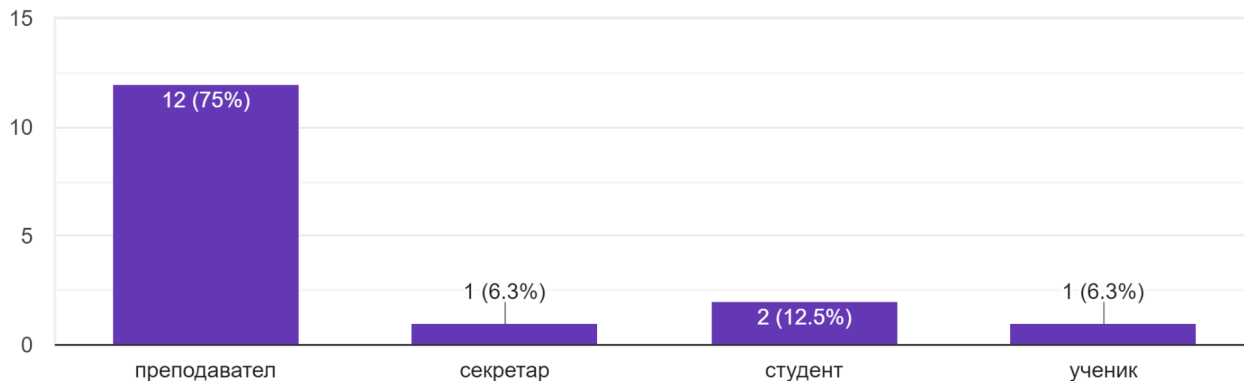
Tourism Organizations Questionnaire: Respondents represented mostly micro company size (just 3 are small business). The majority is from the hospitality sector (8) and travel companies (7). The rest are from tourism attractions (2), transport companies (2) and institutions and NGO (5).

24 responses



The VET respondents are 75% teachers and trainers, 3 students and 1 administrative staff.

16 responses



Tourism sector respondents are managers of accommodations and travel companies (7), chefs (2), waiters (2), museum staff (2), guide and driver (2), administrative staff of NGO and institutions (7), receptionist, travel and event organizers (2).



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24 responses



General Conclusions and Recommendations - as they resulted from the interpretation and synthesis of the answers received/all relevant data (**detailed analysis supported by quantitative interpretation (statistical data, graphs, etc.) and qualitative interpretation**)



This report explores the circular economy in the tourism sector, based on extensive research conducted through questionnaires and interviews. The study targeted two main groups: tourism organizations and VET centers, with the aim of understanding their perceptions, challenges and practices related to circular economy principles. The results highlight the importance of the transition to sustainable practices, identify the main barriers and provide recommendations for improving circularity in tourism.

Survey Findings

Importance of the circular economy

Both tourism organizations and VET respondents responded overwhelmingly acknowledged the need to move to a circular economy. Key skills identified as critical included waste management, recycling, minimizing energy and water use, preventing pollution, and using local products. All respondents from tourism organizations expressed a willingness to acquire these skills, highlighting the need for practical training and support networks.

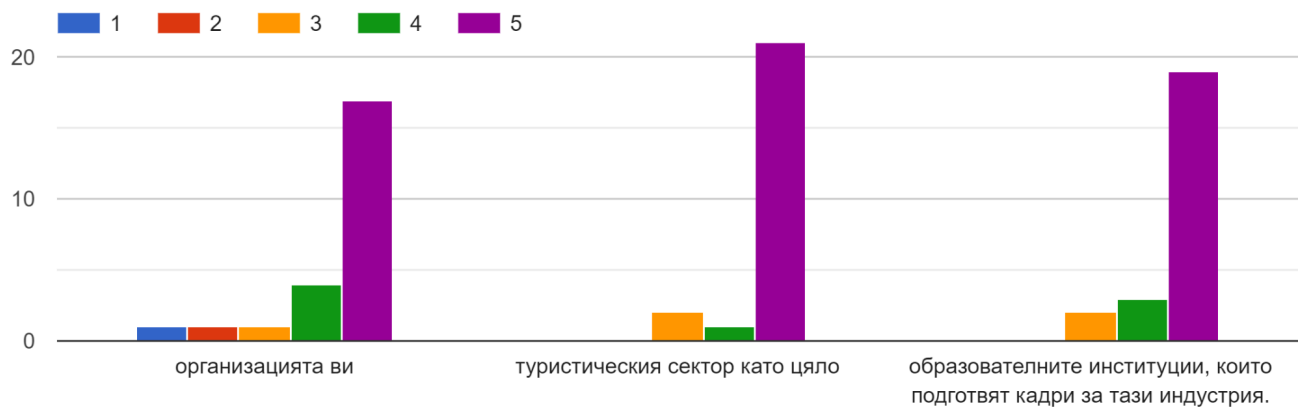
Barriers and support

Major barriers included curriculum limitations and lack of familiarity with circular economy principles among VET teachers. Both groups highlighted the importance of various forms of support, such as mentoring, training, exchange of good practices and networking. Financial support was considered crucial to facilitate the transition.

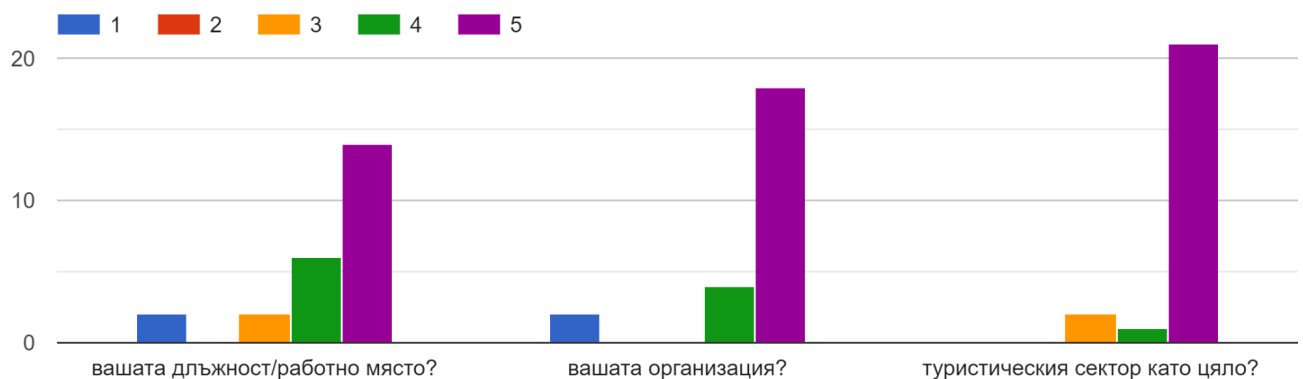
The survey results indicated a strong recognition of the importance of the circular economy in the tourism sector. In terms of the need for skills, respondents rated various areas on a scale of 1 to 5, with the majority rating the importance of minimizing energy and water consumption, waste management, conservation, sustainable transport and pollution prevention as 5 (very important). Similarly, they highly valued digital skills to reduce carbon emissions and the use of local products and resources.

Survey responses for tourism organizations:

On the question **“Do you think that the ecological and circular transition is needed in...?”** 71% from the respondents strongly agree for their organization, 88% strongly agree about tourism sector and 79% are very positive for VET. This shows that the topic is important and tourism businesses find it important for their future development.



The last conclusion above is proven by the answers of the question about the importance of green skills where the majority strongly agree: for their work - 58%, their organisation - 75% and the tourism sector - 88% (no negative answers). There are some skeptics that don't agree about their work and company which shows that maybe the company doesn't have plans for now or the person doesn't see himself as part of the the green transition.



10. In your opinion, how important are the following ecological competencies for tourism?



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	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
Ability to minimize energy and water use and maximize energy and water efficiency energy and water consumption	43,5%	43,5%	4,3%	8,7%	-
Ability to manage waste, wastewater recycling and composting	56,5%	26,1%	8,7%	8,7%	-
Resource conservation and reuse	52,2%	39,1%	-	8,7%	-
Promotion of sustainable forms of transportation and entertainment	52,2%	43,5%	4,3%	-	-
Promotion of environmental ly friendly products and activities	47,8%	43,5%	8,7%	-	-
Pollution prevention	65,2%	30,5%	-	4,3%	-
Circulation of products and materials at their	43,6%	47,8%	4,3%	4,3%	-



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maximum value					
Skills for online and digital activities and services to reduce carbon emissions.	56,5%	26,2%	13%	4,3%	-
Use local products and resources	65,2%	21,7%	8,7%	4,3%	-
Ability to reuse, reorient and recycle resources	43,9%	21,8%	-	4,3%	

11. Which of the following ecological competencies would you like to acquire and develop in order to be more productive in the organization to which you belong?

	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
Ability to minimize the use and maximize the efficiency of energy and water consumption.	60,9%	26,1%	8,7%	4,3%	-
Ability to manage waste, wastewater, recycling and composting	52,3%	21,7%	21,7%	4,3%	-
Resource conservation and reuse	52,2%	26,1%	17,4%	4,3%	-



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Promotion of sustainable forms of transportation and recreation	56,6%	21,7%	8,7%	8,7%	4,3%
Promotion of environmentally friendly products and activities	69,7%	13%	8,7%	4,3%	4,3%
Pollution prevention	65,3%	17,4%	13%	4,3%	-
Circulation of products and materials at their maximum value	56,7%	21,7%	13%	4,3%	4,3%
Competencies for online and digital activities and services to reduce carbon emissions	52,3%	21,7%	17,4%	4,3%	4,3%
Use of local products and resources	56,5%	21,7%	17,5%	4,3%	-
Ability to reuse, reorient and recycle resources.	69,6%	17,4%	8,7%	4,3%	-

12. What type of support would be most appropriate to develop the green skills needed for the transition to the circular economy in tourism?

	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
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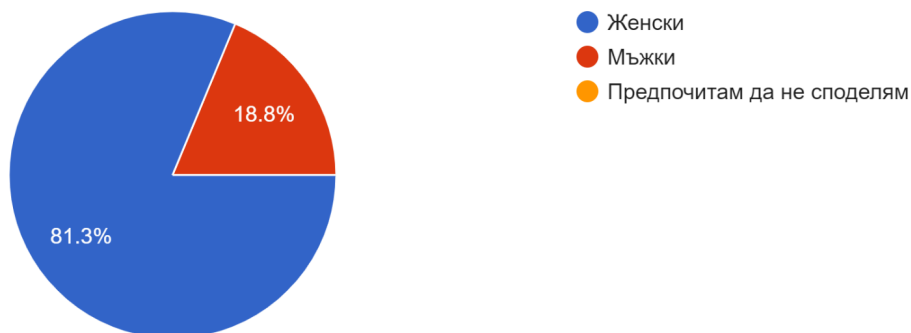
Advice on circular economy	43,5%	34,8%	17,4%	4,3%	-
Training programs	39,1%	39,1%	17,5%	4,3%	-
Exchange of best practices	56,5%	26,1%	8,7%	8,7%	-
Networking with other organizations other tourism organizations	56,5%	21,7%	17,5%	4,3%	-

Link to Questionnaire readiness for circularity of the tourist sector:

<https://forms.gle/rBpPnZMTegas1Lmp9>

Survey responses for VET representatives:

16 responses



1. Select your gender

Female – 81,3%

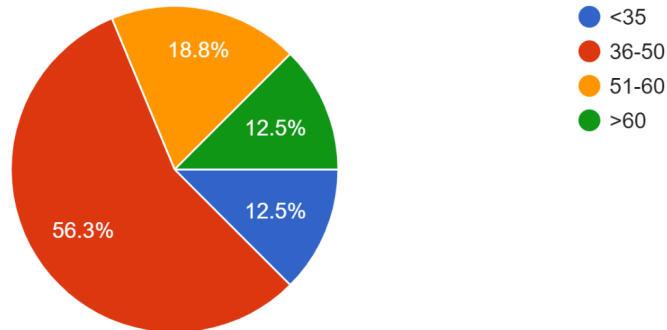
Male – 18,8%



age?

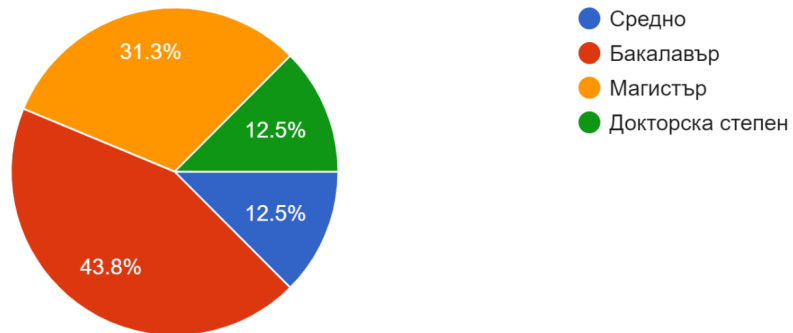
<35 years old – 12,5%
36-50 years old – 56,3%
51-60 years old – 18,8%
>60 years old – 12.5%

16 responses



3. What is your level of education?

16 responses



High school – 12.5%
Bachelor's degree – 43.8%
Master's degree – 31.3%
Doctorate – 12.5%

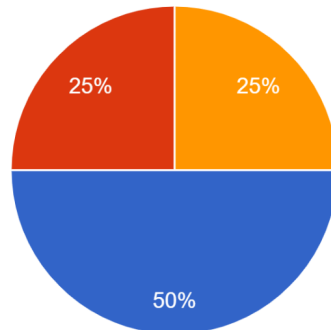
5. In what type of vocational education and training (VET) institution in tourism and related fields are you currently enrolled?



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16 responses

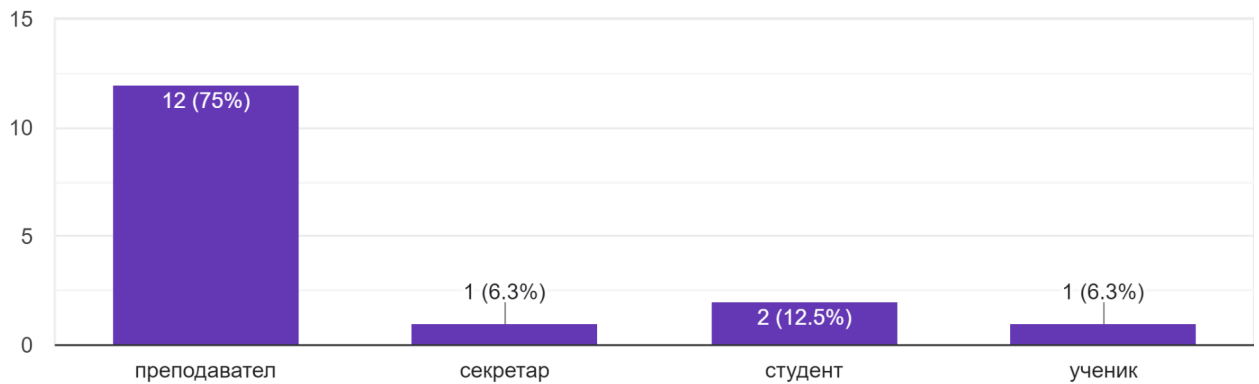


- Висше учебно заведение
- Колеж
- Средно училище със специализация в туризма

University - 50%
College – 25%
High School – 25%

6. What is your current position/position within the organization where you work?

16 responses

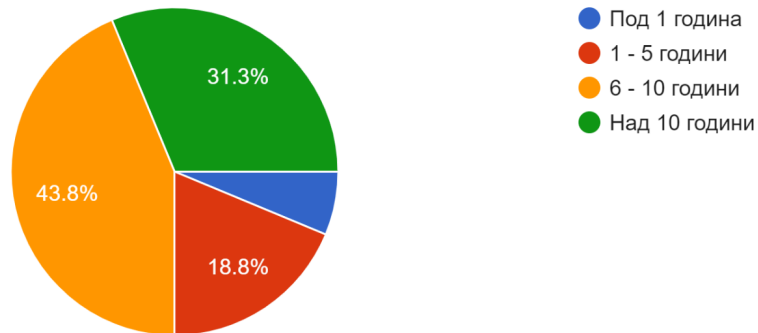


Teachers and trainers - 75%
Students - 25%

7. How many years of experience do you have in vocational education and training (VET) in tourism and related fields?



16 responses



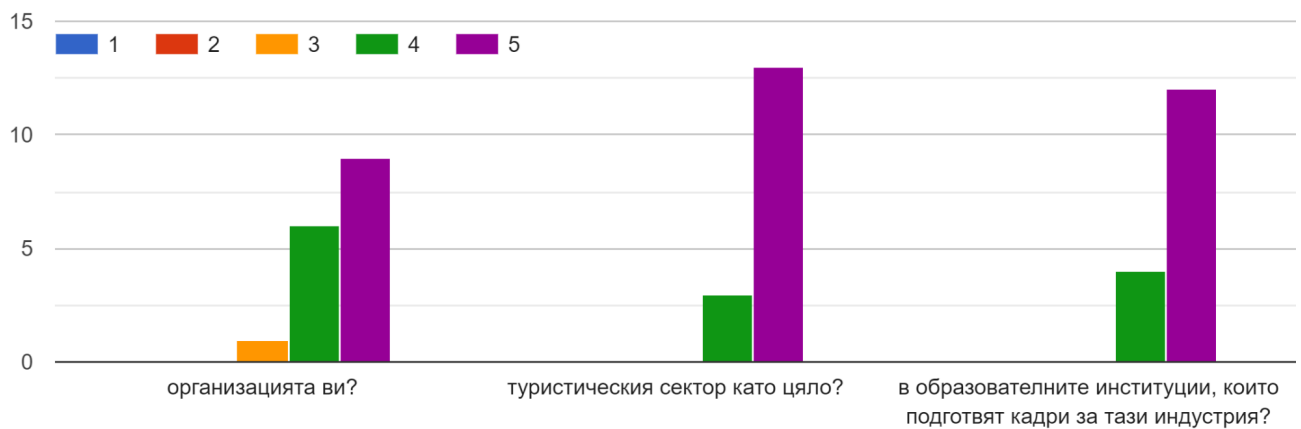
Less than one year – 6,3%

1-5 years – 18,8%

6-10 years – 43,8%

More than 10 years – 31,3%

8. Do you believe that the ecological and circular transition is necessary in:

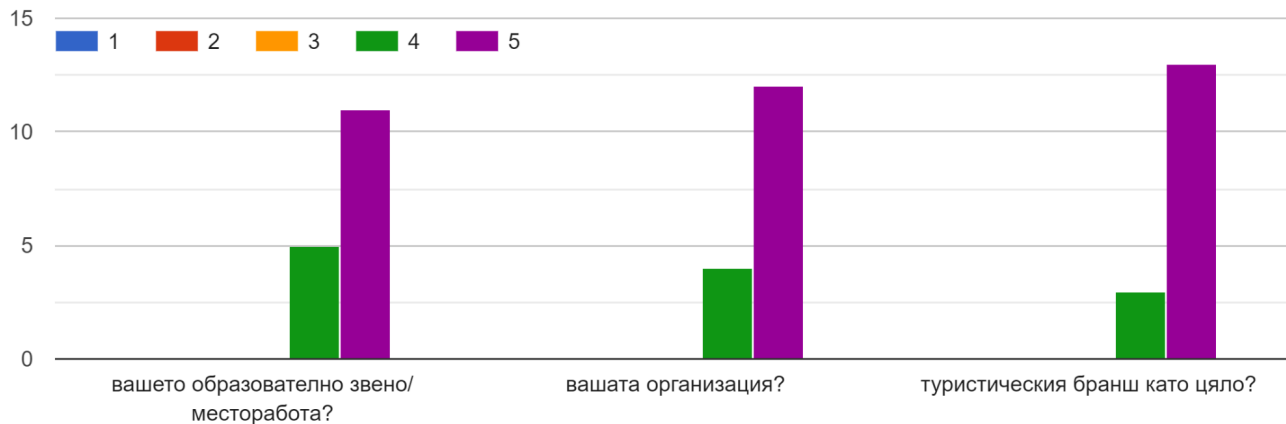


The graph shows that the majority of the people involved in the survey are positive about the need of ecological and circular transition and there are no negative answers.

9. Do you think green skills are important to:



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Again we see really positive reaction about the importance of green skills and that proves that this VET group want to be more involved.

10. Which of the following green competencies should VET organizations focus on in order to train personnel capable of operating in the circular economy?

	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
Ability to minimize energy and water use and maximize energy and water efficiency energy and water consumption	83%	17%	-	-	-
Ability to manage waste, wastewater recycling and composting	46%	38%	4%	4%	8%
Resource conservation and reuse	71%	17%	-	8%	4%
Promotion of sustainable forms of transportation and entertainment	79%	13%	4%	-	4%



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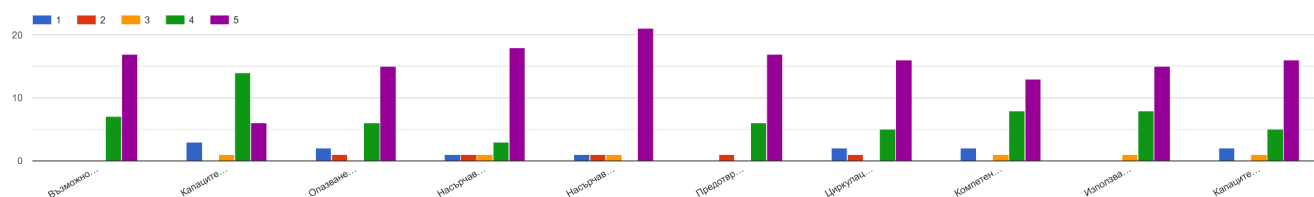


Promotion of environmentally friendly products and activities	84%	8%	8%	-	-
Pollution prevention	100%	-	-	-	-
Circulation of products and materials at their maximum value	67%	21%	-	4%	8%
Skills for online and digital activities and services to reduce carbon emissions.	50%	37%	-	-	13%
Use local products and resources	92%	8%	-	-	-
Ability to reuse, redirect and recycle resources	88%	4%	4%	-	4%

All the participants in the survey find the prevention of pollution as highly important as 100% of them answered with strongly agree. The majority also give high importance to energy and water efficiency, promotion of environmental friendly and local products, the resource conservation, reuse and the ability to reuse, redirect and recycle of resources.

11. To what extent is your organization prepared to train and develop the above-mentioned ecological competencies for your graduates?

(Please rate them on a scale from 1 - the lowest score to 5 - the highest score.)



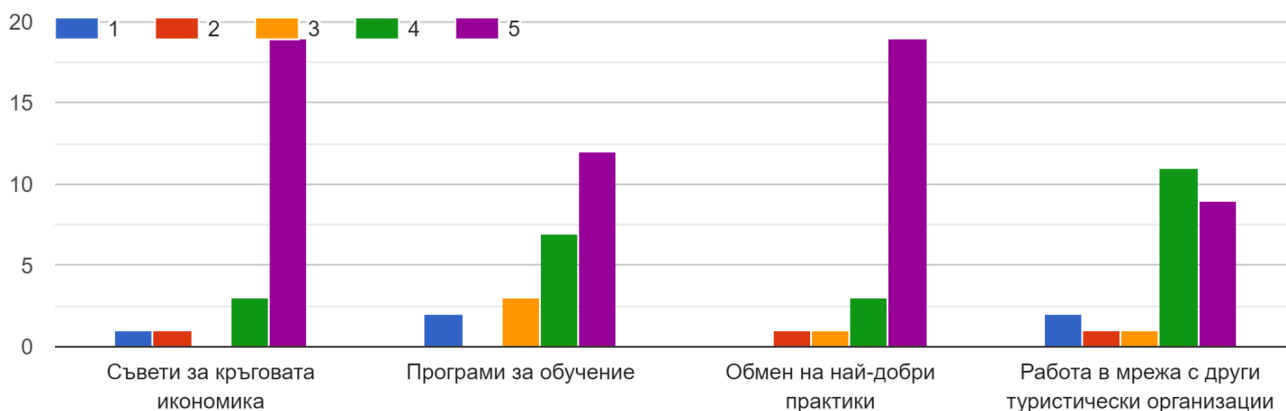
The respondents give high scores to all the competencies and this shows that they are interested in understanding better the ecological topics and circularity practices.

12. In your opinion, what are the main obstacles that could prevent your organization from training and developing these green skills for your graduates?



13. What type of support would be most appropriate for VET organizations to prepare their graduates for green tourism and circularity?

AllHig



Highly scored are the advices for circular economy and the exchange of good practices but the training programs and work in network are also well scored and important for the audience. This shows the necessity of more information, networking and exchange of knowledge on circularity and green tourism.

Link to Questionnaire VET representatives:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfmc83IoiEYh6WGa0tRJrN-Vb4UIzQpd_BxT8S7Qldh-Gp/pw/viewform

Interview:

The participants to the interview were 2 representatives from the tourism industry and 2 VET teachers. The tourism representatives are product manager in tour operator who is also a guide and family hotel owner. They both consider that tourism sector plays an important part in sustainability and that there is a need of more information and initiatives related to circular economy and sustainable practices. The tour operator explained more details why green certification for use of certified products are not popular in the sector - lack of trust, high prices, not many regional.

The VET teachers are from High school and University admit that they don't have a specific content about circularity but they integrate it as a hidden curriculum and invite experts from time to time to discuss the topics but is ones per year. They see that their students are more and more open for the topics. There are some projects that some schools and universities start and engage the students in



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eco-activities

but it is
sign is

not regular and part of the official program. Good that there are Bachelor and Masters degrees with circularity and sustainability in their programs.

Conclusions and recommendations:

Both tourism representatives and VET teachers suggested actions that could change the tourism model, starting with training and exchange of knowledge. To promote the circular economy and sustainability, specific content must be included both in secondary school and VET centres including training for teachers. At the VET level there are no qualifications in this sense.

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