Skills for Sustainable and Inclusive Tourism in the Adriatic-Ionian Region

5–6 November 2026

REPORT ON WORLD CAFFEE DISCUSSIONS

World Café: Working Table 1 — Future Skills in Tourism

The discussion highlighted that preparing the tourism workforce for the future involves strengthening the skills that underpin good hospitality while helping workers and managers respond to changing guest expectations, new technologies and sustainability requirements. The table also considered how employers, education providers and local organisations could work together to make training more relevant and accessible.

1. Which skills should we prioritise to prepare the tourism workforce in the Adriatic–Ionian region for the future?

Hospitality and interpersonal skills should remain a core part of tourism training. The discussion emphasised communication, empathy and flexibility in responding to guests' needs. These skills matter because visitors experience a destination through their interactions with people across many services. Training should help staff listen to guests, recognise different needs and adapt their response to the situation. This includes the ability to welcome and serve people with different access needs.

Management training should help people see how their work fits into the wider tourism offer. The flipchart notes point to a gap in understanding the whole picture. Managers need to see how decisions about staffing, service delivery and sales affect the guest experience. At destination level, the discussion also identified skills for developing tourism plans and strategies, building partnerships, and involving local actors in decisions. Resilience and adaptability were highlighted, including the ability to respond to crises and disruption.

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Creative thinking should be connected to the ability to deliver and sell a tourism experience. The group raised both content development and the practical question of how to create an experience. Developing an idea around local culture or gastronomy, for example, draws on a combination of skills: shaping the content, organising delivery, communicating its value to visitors and providing good hospitality. The notes also mention EU funding in connection with developing tourism content, suggesting a possible avenue to explore where a suitable funding opportunity exists.

Digital, green and inclusion skills should be tailored to the work people do. The table identified AI, sustainability and the management of inclusive tourism as areas for development. The training needs of a person working directly with guests will differ from those of a business manager or destination planner. A practical implication is to define what each role needs to be able to do, then design training around those tasks.

2. How can education providers and tourism employers work together to identify changing skills needs and respond more quickly?

Build regular contact between education providers and employers around concrete skills needs. The table discussed employer surveys and economic forums as ways to bring education providers, businesses, chambers and sector associations together. Surveys can help identify recurring problems across businesses, while forums can give employers and educators a chance to clarify what is missing in practice. The discussion referred to a Greek approach to identifying market needs as an example worth exploring. A practical next step would be to use the findings from these exchanges to decide which programmes need updating or where a short new course would be useful.

Support employers to provide meaningful workplace learning. The flipcharts mention grants for tourism employers that provide practical work experience, as well as scholarships supported through public–private partnerships. These measures could help employers and learners take part. To make the learning worthwhile, education providers and employers should agree on the tasks learners will undertake, who will guide them and how they will know whether learners have acquired the intended skills.

Use structured traineeships to link training with employment. Placements of up to six months were discussed as one possible model. The purpose of a structured placement would be to give trainees time to practise real tasks and receive feedback. It would also give education providers a way to learn from workplace experience: recurring difficulties reported by trainees and employers could inform the next revision of the programme.

3. What would make training more accessible to seasonal workers, staff in small businesses and people living in rural or island communities?

Address both the cost of training and the time available to take part. The table suggested targeting vouchers at seasonal workers, staff in small businesses and people in rural or island communities. It also raised longer seasonal contracts or arrangements that provide greater continuity of employment. The underlying point is that paying for a course only solves one barrier. Workers also need a realistic opportunity to attend, particularly when their employment is short or work is concentrated in the busiest months. Offering training before or between seasons could be one way to put this into practice.

Combine online access with practical learning close to where people live or work. Free webinars and online courses were identified as useful options, alongside non-formal and practical training. The formats can serve different purposes: online sessions can introduce a topic and reach people at a distance, while local or workplace sessions can give participants a chance to practise. The discussion highlighted a role for civil society organisations in organising outreach and delivering training, with public

policies supporting participation by groups who might otherwise be missed. Local organisations can help identify suitable times, venues and formats.

Consider basic tourism training for people across the wider visitor economy. The notes mention taxi drivers as an example of workers who regularly interact with visitors but may sit outside conventional tourism training. Short, practical courses could help these workers develop relevant hospitality and communication skills. The table also raised the possibility of certifying basic skills. Any such approach would need to be proportionate to the role and designed so that people can realistically participate.

4. How can digital and green skills be translated into practical improvements in everyday tourism work?

Start with a task that workers or managers already need to perform. For digital skills, a visitor information team could practise using AI to draft answers to common questions, then checking opening hours, transport options or accessibility information against official sources before sharing them. For green skills, a hospitality team could examine where food is wasted during preparation or service, test a change and compare what happens. In both cases, the training has a clear purpose that staff can recognise and apply.

Design training with the people who will use it. An employer or destination organisation could identify a problem from daily operations, an education provider could turn it into a short practical module, and staff could test the new approach at work. Civil society organisations and other local partners could contribute where they have relevant expertise or can help reach smaller operators. The same training topic may need to be taught differently in a large hotel, a small rural business and a visitor information office.

Assess what people can do after training and what improves in practice. A simple review could ask whether staff can complete the task independently and whether the change is useful. For a digital task, that might mean checking the accuracy and consistency of information provided to visitors. For a green task, it could mean observing whether a change reduces waste during a trial period. This gives employers and training providers feedback they can use to improve future training.

World Café: Working Table 2 — Inclusive Tourism and Employment

The discussion looked at inclusion from two perspectives: who can enjoy tourism experiences and who can work in the sector. Participants described inclusion as being open to everyone and highlighted accessibility as a practical condition for full participation. Across the four questions, the discussion pointed to changes in recruitment, working conditions, infrastructure and service design. Participants also stressed the importance of involving local communities in shaping tourism and sharing in its benefits.

1. Is tourism ready to employ people from underrepresented and marginalised groups? What needs to change?

There is a gap between willingness to employ a more diverse workforce and the ability to do so in practice. The discussion identified gaps in knowledge, resources and accessible infrastructure. These can make it difficult for employers, particularly small businesses, to know how to recruit candidates they have not reached before or how to adapt a workplace. Raising awareness should therefore go hand in hand with practical guidance on recruitment, adapting tasks and organising working time.

Employers should review how jobs are designed and how people enter the sector. Participants highlighted education, skills development and working conditions as areas for improvement. For people with disabilities, an inaccessible workplace or an inflexible schedule can prevent someone from taking up a role even when they have the skills to do it. The discussion also pointed to cooperation between students and employers, including universities and small hotels, as one way to give people experience of tourism work and help businesses reach a wider pool of candidates.

Workforce shortages can prompt employers to widen recruitment, and the aim should be to create jobs people can stay in. The table discussed how employers facing staffing pressures could draw on talent they have previously overlooked, provided they make the necessary adaptations. The question covered people with disabilities, women, young people and local community members. The discussion suggests starting with the barriers people face in a particular role or destination, since the same measure will not address every group's needs.

2. What support do people need to move from training into employment and remain in work?

Support should continue through the transition into work and after a person starts the job. Participants highlighted the transfer of skills from training to the workplace, mentoring and workplace adjustments. An individual approach would allow the employee, employer and training provider to agree what support is useful. This could involve guided practice during induction, a named mentor or a follow-up conversation after the first few weeks to see whether adjustments are working.

Salary, working conditions, and opportunities to learn affect whether people stay. The discussion highlighted good salary, flexible working hours, and access to training while employed. Participants also linked year-round tourism with the potential for more continuous employment. This matters when someone has invested time in training, but the jobs available are limited to a short season. The table also pointed to technology in cultural and creative tourism as an area where continued learning could help workers take on new tasks.

Employment support needs to account for barriers outside the workplace. Participants raised public infrastructure and access to social services, particularly in rural areas. Cooperation between public services, employers and training providers can help identify barriers that a single employer cannot resolve. The table emphasised direct, personal contact and support tailored to the individual. ESF+ projects were mentioned as a possible way to support this type of cooperation.

3. How can tourism employers be encouraged and supported to recruit, train and retain a more diverse workforce?

Combine financial incentives with practical advice and support after placement. The table discussed subsidies, vouchers and support for on-the-job training, alongside access to mentors, tutors and inclusion specialists. Financial support could help an employer cover the time and cost of induction or training. Specialist advice could help the same employer work out how to adapt tasks, support a new employee and respond if difficulties arise. This combination could be particularly useful for small businesses without dedicated human resources staff.

Make recruitment more personal and give employers a clear point of contact. Participants highlighted direct contact and in-person interviews as ways to help employers and candidates get to know each other. The broader recommendation is to offer an interview format that works for the candidate and allows them to demonstrate their abilities. Employers should also know whom to contact for advice during recruitment and after someone starts work. The discussion raised the idea of a centre or specialist service that could provide this expertise.

Make good practice visible and link recognition to what employers do. The flipchart proposed a brand or label recognising social impact, alongside awareness campaigns and education. If developed further, such a label could showcase employers that make practical changes to recruitment, training and working conditions. Its value would depend on whether it recognises actions that improve employees' experience, including the support they receive once they are in work.

4. What examples show how tourism services or products can become more inclusive and accessible?

Cultural tourism offers several ways to improve access. The discussion referred to a Greek project concerning accessibility at cultural sites and mentioned the use of EU funding for infrastructure improvements. Participants also raised digital tools for accessible cultural tourism, opening times and free museum admission for some younger and older visitors. These examples point to different barriers: whether people can enter and navigate a site, find and understand information about it, visit at a suitable time and afford to take part.

Local communities can help design and deliver the visitor experience. The flipchart noted examples of local communities presenting their own culture and highlighted the importance of giving residents an active role. A practical implication is to involve local people in deciding what is shared, how it is presented and who has the opportunity to deliver the experience. This connects visitor inclusion with participation and opportunity for the host community.

Hospitality and social enterprises can make inclusive employment visible. Participants cited PizzAut, a café initiative involving autistic young people, and social enterprises in tourism as examples for discussion. These examples offer a starting point for exchanging practice on how businesses organise work and support employees. The table also called for education about inclusion to begin early, including in kindergarten, so that inclusive attitudes can develop before people enter the workforce as employees, employers or customers.

World Café: Working Table 3 — Macro-regional Cooperation and Future EUSAIR Initiatives

The discussion identified a practical problem for cooperation in the Adriatic–Ionian region: useful projects and networks already exist, but their results do not always reach the organisations that could use them. The table pointed to two ways forward: make existing work easier to find and adapt and use cross-border partnerships to test solutions to problems that several destinations face. Housing and integration were raised as examples of challenges that tourism businesses, education providers and local authorities could address together.

1. What could education providers, centres of competence and tourism businesses from different countries develop together?

Agree on a common set of activities around a shared problem. The table discussed developing approaches that cities and regions could test locally and adapt elsewhere. Housing and integration offer a starting point because they link tourism employment with conditions in the wider community. A joint initiative could bring education providers and centres of competence together with employers to identify the skills and support workers need, while local authorities and community organisations address barriers that businesses cannot resolve on their own.

Test approaches locally before expanding them. Participants raised piloting and scaling up regional programmes, as well as socially responsible learning involving NGOs. In practice, partners could agree

on a common method, apply it in a small number of destinations and compare what works in each setting. Education providers could design learning activities, employers could test their relevance in the workplace, and NGOs could help involve workers and communities whose experiences might otherwise be missed. The comparison would show which elements could be shared and which need to be adapted.

2. How can we make it easier to exchange good practices and adapt successful approaches to different national and local contexts?

Make existing projects easier to find and understand. The table called for a better overview of funded projects and discussed a platform for good practices, newsletters and short videos. A useful overview would explain what problem each project addressed, what it produced, who can be contacted and what another organisation would need to put the approach into practice. Grouping examples by EUSAIR priority would make it easier for practitioners to find relevant work. The discussion also raised the possible use of AI to help identify relevant projects in existing material.

Pair information sharing with direct exchange. Participants highlighted mentoring, peer reviews, study visits and in-person meetings, with webinars as another way to reach interested organisations. A short video can show what a project did; a study visit or peer review can help explain how it worked and what made it possible. Following the exchange, the receiving organisation could identify what it can adopt, what needs to change locally and whom it needs to involve. This would give exchanges a practical purpose beyond presenting completed projects.

Reach organisations outside the original partnerships. The notes highlighted limited visibility at national and local levels, as well as difficulty reaching young people. Existing networks and youth structures could help share opportunities in formats their audiences are likely to use. The table also saw value in exchanging practice across the four EU macro-regional strategies, where similar initiatives may offer lessons for EUSAIR.

3. Which funding opportunities and existing networks could support joint initiatives and help them continue beyond individual projects?

Use Interreg and existing networks as starting points. The table cited Interreg projects as examples of cross-border cooperation and Interreg webinars as a way to share practice. It also highlighted networking as a strength of EUSAIR and identified tourism and environmental NGOs as potential partners. The discussion raised flagship projects as a possible route for taking forward joint work, while emphasising that a credible initiative needs financing and partners capable of delivering it.

Plan for continued use from the outset. The flipcharts raised a concern that projects can finish without their results being communicated or taken up. A practical response would be to agree early which organisation will keep materials accessible, convene partners or continue a tested activity after funding ends. Closer cooperation between local, regional and national actors could help promising approaches find a home in existing programmes. Communicating results at EU level could also help secure wider recognition for work undertaken in the region.

4. What concrete joint initiative should EUSAIR prioritise, and which partners would need to take the lead?

Proposed initiative: a cross-border pilot on housing and integration for tourism workers. This is one way to bring together several ideas from the table: common challenges facing cities and regions, stronger youth engagement, and regional programmes that can be tested and expanded. The pilot could begin by mapping existing approaches in a small number of destinations and holding a joint workshop with workers, employers and local partners. A youth hackathon on housing, a format raised in the

discussion, could help generate ideas. The partnership would then select one practical measure to test, such as improving how newly recruited workers find information on accommodation and local support services.

Proposed lead partners. EUSAIR's Sustainable Tourism and Improved Social Cohesion pillars could convene the partnership. Participating cities or regions could lead local delivery, with tourism businesses and employer organisations identifying workforce needs and testing solutions. Education providers and centres of competence could develop any training required, while NGOs, youth representatives and workers could help shape the pilot and assess whether it meets their needs. The first deliverable could be a short plan naming the participating destinations, the measure to be tested and the organisation responsible for carrying it forward.