



EXperiential **TO**urism for sustainable **R**ural development

WP2: Success stories and needs mapping for VET renewal in rural tourism

A2.1: EU collection of success stories and analysis of national trends



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EXTOR

Analysis of the current national status of rural tourism and related VET offers

Individual Interviews National Report

Olympic Training and Consulting

INTERVIEWS INFORMATION

Please add the main information about the interviews.

COUNTRY OF IMPLEMENTATION: Greece

CITY OF IMPLEMENTATION: Pyrgos/Athens

NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS: 23

DATES OF THE INTERVIEWS: 12.04.2024 -29.04.2024

VENUES OF THE INTERVIEWS: online questionnaire filled in on phone calls by appointment

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS (per interview): 1

TARGET GROUP AND STAKEHOLDERS: A minimum of two representatives of each subsector of rural tourism was identified and invited to participate in the research process so as to ensure the heterogeneity of the participants and the representation of all different forms of rural tourism. Hence in the research conducted in Greece engaged companies and employees that are active in the following forms of rural tourism:

INTERVIEWS DESCRIPTION

Please provide a detailed description of the interviews.

- **Number of interview implementers and description of their background:**

The interviews were implemented by 3 researchers – staff members of Olympic Training, with background of tertiary education level and experience in the implementation of primary data research.

- **Number and description of the participants' background:**

A total of 23 people (12 rural tourism entrepreneurs and 11 rural tourism professionals) participated in the interviews.

- **Duration of the interviews:**

The core content of each interview (response to the defined common questions) had an average duration of 10 minutes but the overall duration of each meeting was approx. 30 minutes. All interviews were

conducted upon scheduled phone calls that were arranged after an introductory contact that was implemented more or less one week ahead so as to present the EXTOR project and activities, the research aims and process and the anticipated outcome of the activity.

- **Main structure and agenda of the interviews:**

Short introduction to the EXTOR Project aim and objectives;

Introduction of the interview process and rational of the questions;

Discussion on potential queries and issues that require clarifications;

Sharing of the questionnaire content with the interviewee

Discussion on the content of the questionnaire to be answered.

Wrap up of the interview.

1. *Rural Tourism Entrepreneurs:*

The process was initiated for the conduct of a total of 11 interviews with rural tourism professionals

2. *Rural Tourism Professionals:*

The process was initiated for the conduct of a total of 12 interviews with rural tourism entrepreneurs

- **Description of any group and/or interactive activities:**

N/A

- **Level of engagement of the participants:**

In terms of engagement It has been quite challenging to schedule the date/time of the individual meetings for the conduct of the interview but once the meeting was set the interviews had a good flow and the input was provided without any special difficulty. The participants were committed/ dedicated to the discussion and didn't allow for interruptions in the two or three cases where external issues occurred.

- **Any challenges faced during the interviews:**

The main challenges faced during the interviews concerned the capacity of some participants to discern between the definitions of different kinds of rural tourism

- **Main conclusions of the interviews:**

Rural Tourism Entrepreneurs

In order to investigate the levels of rural tourism in Greece, two questionnaires were developed through Microsoft Forms and sent to rural tourism entrepreneurs and employees mainly operating in the regions of Western Greece and Peloponnese. The invitation to participate in the survey was made via telephone and emails and the anonymity of the survey participants was ensured.

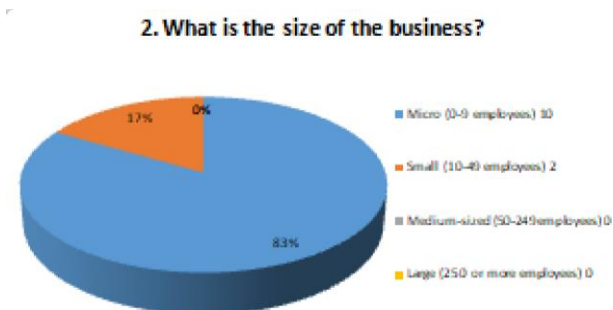
Analysis of data from a survey of Tourism Entrepreneurs

The survey targeting rural tourism entrepreneurs was divided into three sections. From the first one derives information about the type of businesses and the years they have been operating in the sector, in the second section the sources of financing are being described as well as whether they are sustainable; and finally, in the third section it is depicted whether they have participated in training programmes and the topics they are interested in.

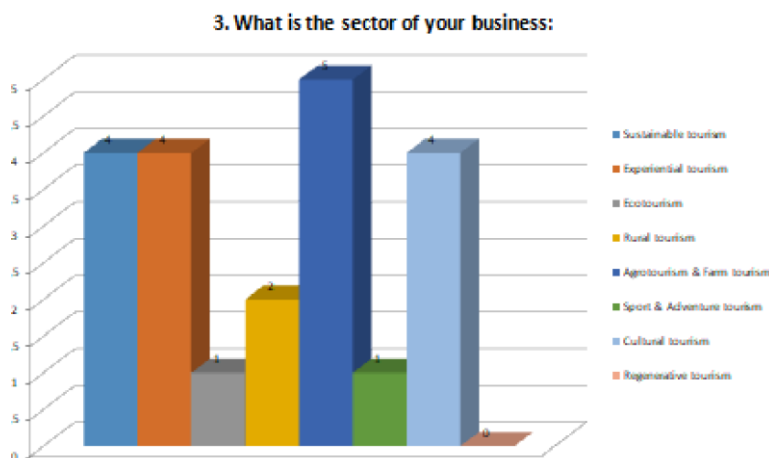
Section 1, Business Sector:

12 rural tourism entrepreneurs responded to the survey. From the data received, the oldest business started operating in 1986 and the most recent in 2020. The average number of years of operation is 18 years.

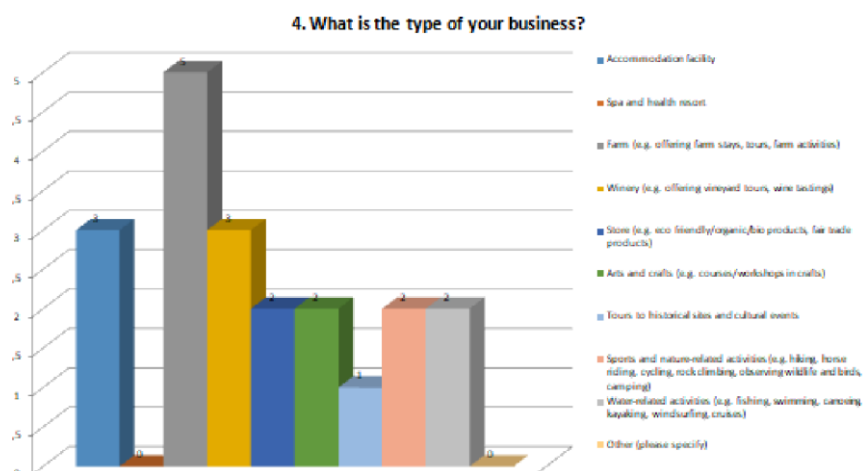
83% of the enterprises in the sector are very small in size employing up to 9 employees, while 17% are small in size having up to 49 employees.



Most businesses belong to the sector of Agrotourism & Agricultural tourism (5), fewer businesses implement activities in sustainable, experiential and cultural tourism(4) while very few of them are involved with activities in sports and ecotourism- none in regenerative tourism.



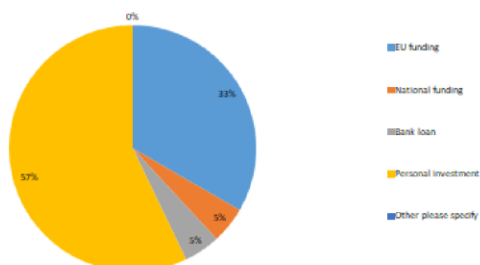
When asked about their type of business, most respondents said they were involved in farms (41.6%) a 25% declared activities related with accommodation services or winery and fewer (16.6%) a store or business in arts and crafts or sports and nature-related activities or water-related activities.



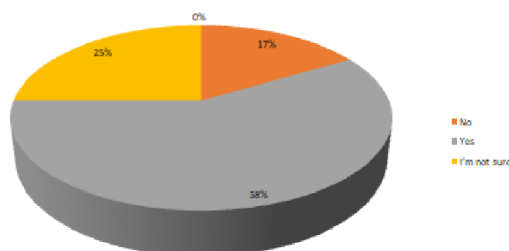
Section 2, Funding

In terms of resources for the financing of their business, more than half of the entrepreneurs, 57%, used own funds to finance their initial start-up and operating needs, and 33% received complementary funding from the European Union. Also in a related question 58% of the entrepreneurs are aware of the European or state funding opportunities, 17% of the entrepreneurs are not aware and 25% are not sure if they have sufficient information.

5. What sources of funding did you use for starting the business?

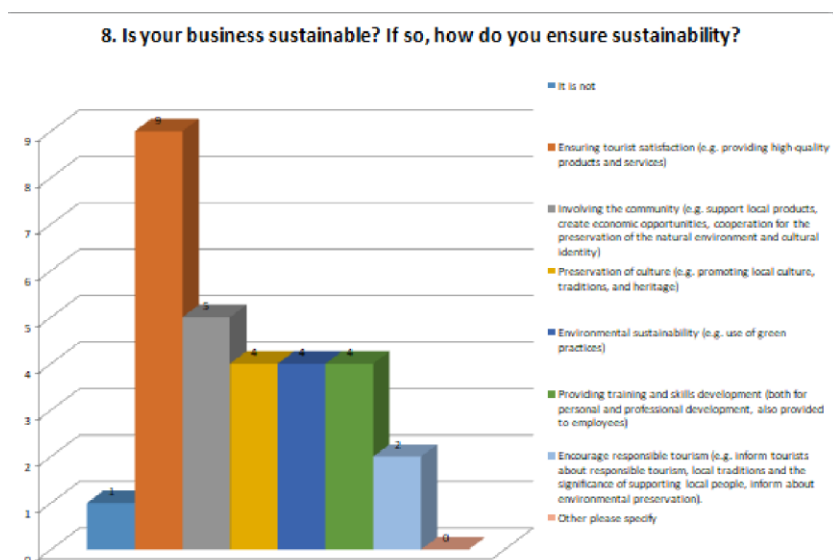


6. Are you aware of European or national funding opportunities?

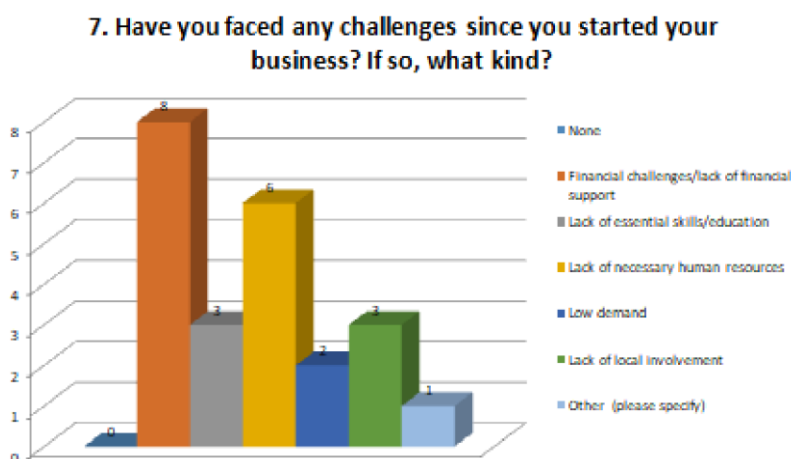


When asked about the sustainability of their businesses, most of our entrepreneurs responded positively, i.e. that they are sustainable, considering as main factor (75%) securing their sustainability the satisfaction of tourists through the provision of high quality products and services. Complementary factors affecting the sustainability of their businesses are a) the involvement of local communities in actions related to the support of local products(41,6%), the creation of economic opportunities, the preservation of the natural environment and cultural identity, b) environmental sustainability such as the implementation of green

practices 33,3% and c) the preservation of culture through the promotion of local culture of traditions and heritage 33,3% . Finally, fewer entrepreneurs believe the sustainability of their business is influenced by encouraging responsible tourism -16.6%.



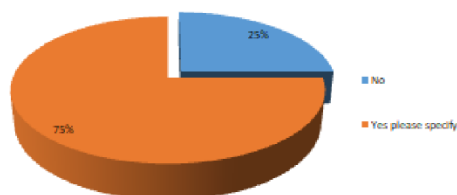
As in all business cases, difficulties are considered part of entrepreneurship. In this survey, lack of financial support is a major concern for the majority of entrepreneurs (66.6%), while the lack of human resources for employment in rural tourism enterprises is also considered an important challenge by 50% of the participants. Finally, several of the surveyed participants believe that local communities are not supportive in their work and that there are no education and training programmes to improve their skills.



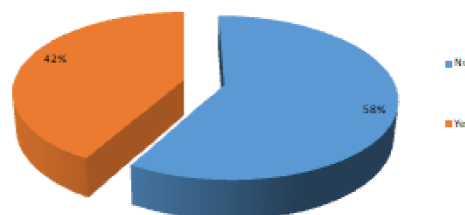
Section 3, Education & Training:

Moving on to the training section, the results show that 75% of the entrepreneurs have participated in a vocational education and training programme related to rural tourism, while 42% of them have offered their employees the opportunity to participate in a training programme in order to develop on a personal and professional level.

9. Have you ever participated in a VET program related to rural tourism or received any personal or professional development training?

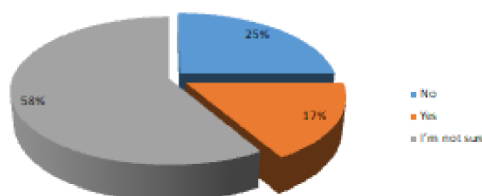


10. Have you ever provided personal or professional training to your employees?

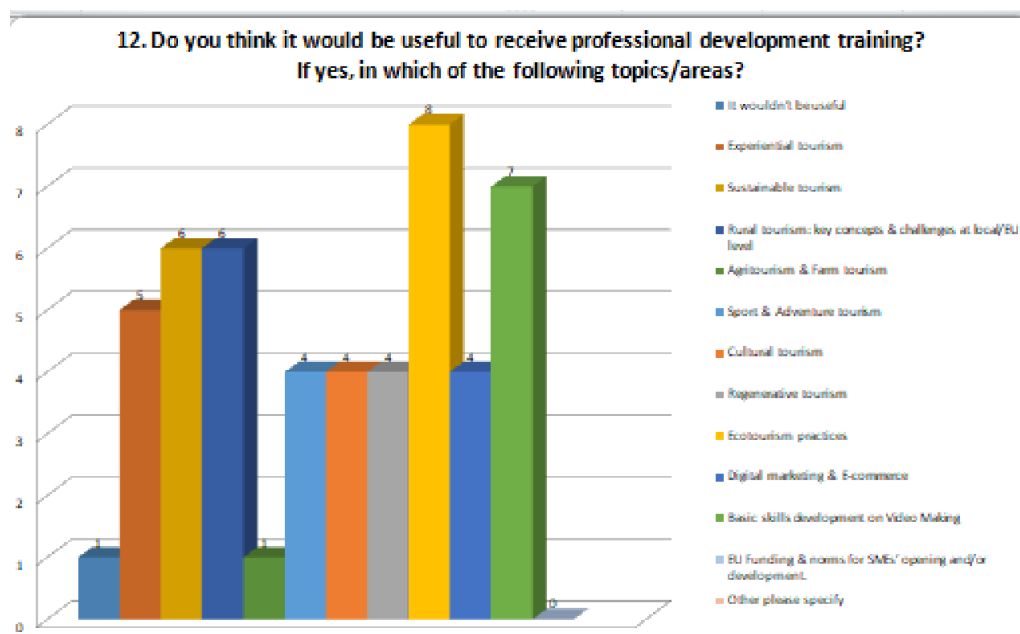


In the same context, the results regarding the information of entrepreneurs regarding the training programmes related to rural tourism in the region are disappointing, as 58% of them are not sure if they have been informed, while only 17% of the entrepreneurs have received information on the content of the programmes.

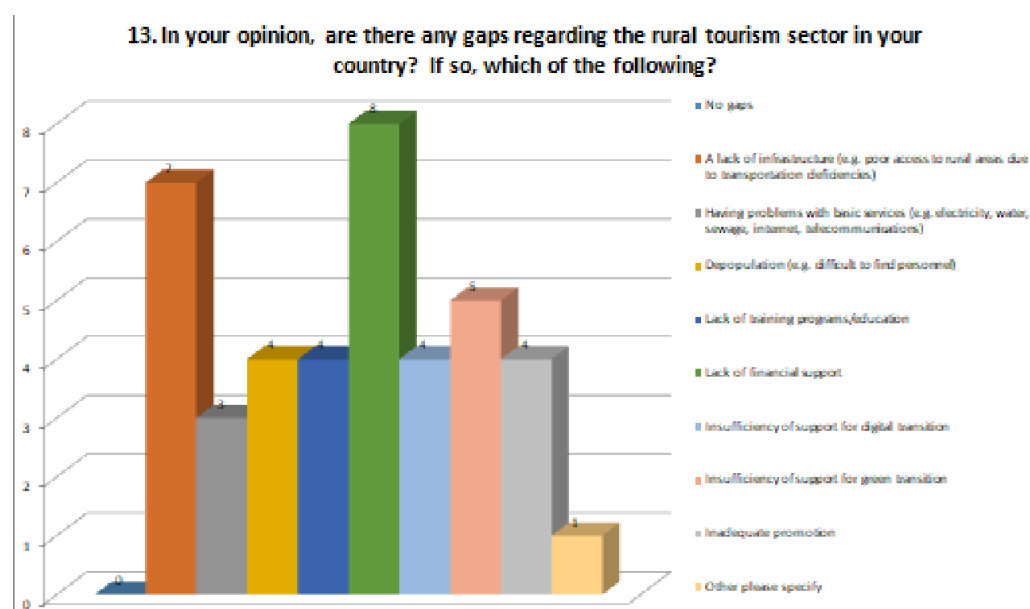
11. Are you aware of the VET programs or other professional training offered in your country related to rural tourism?



On the other hand, the majority of the participants believe that education and training in professional development is useful. The areas they are interested to be trained in are mainly programmes related to Digital Marketing and E-commerce 66.6%, EU Funding & norms for SMEs' opening and/or development (58.3%) but also Rural Tourism, Sustainable and Agricultural Tourism (50%). Finally, fewer entrepreneurs are interested in programmes related to Basic Skills Development on Video Creation, Regenerative Tourism and Sustainable Tourism or programmes related to Cultural Tourism and Ecotourism Practices (33%).



Finally, according to the results, the majority of the participants consider that there are shortcomings regarding rural tourism in Greece, the most important being the lack of financial support and infrastructure. Furthermore, important problems are the decrease of the population in rural areas, the lack of training programmes and the insufficient support for digital and green transition. Finally, few participants consider that there is a lack of organised promotion of their products.



As a last question, the entrepreneurs have been asked to provide potential suggestions/recommendations for the improvement of rural tourism in Greece. Here are their responses

- I have no recommendation
- Not for the moment
- Support all of the above
- More support from the state for promotion and promotion
- Systematisation of the support opportunities provided
- Improving the overall image of the region
- Financial support, accessibility
- Need organised support/training with long-term objectives as is done abroad rather than small/short programmes
- Advertising - financial support
- More financial support, promotion and training

The answers received lead to the conclusion that entrepreneurs consider that they receive insufficient support from the state at many levels of their operation i.e. the financial level, in terms of infrastructure, education - information and promotion of rural entrepreneurship activities in the domestic and global market. It is noteworthy that the word support appears in 7 out of 10 responses, which highlights how lonely entrepreneurs consider their rural tourism operation to be and how imperative the provision of systematic assistance is.

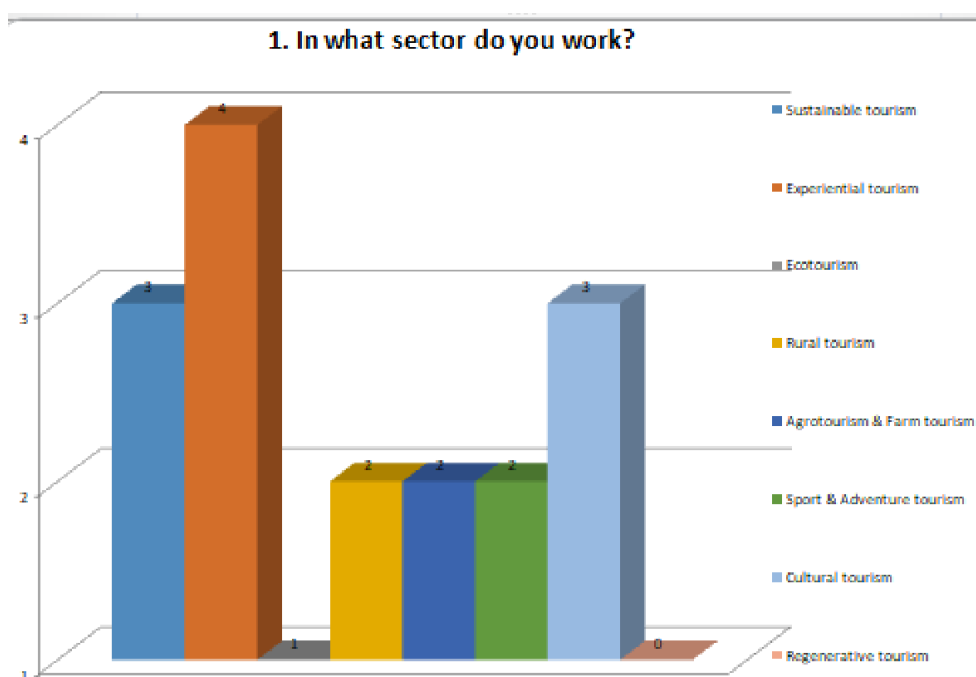
The entrepreneurs believe that there should be a comprehensive strategic plan by the relevant public institutions that includes measurable objectives in the short and long term and systematic support.

Rural Tourism Professionals

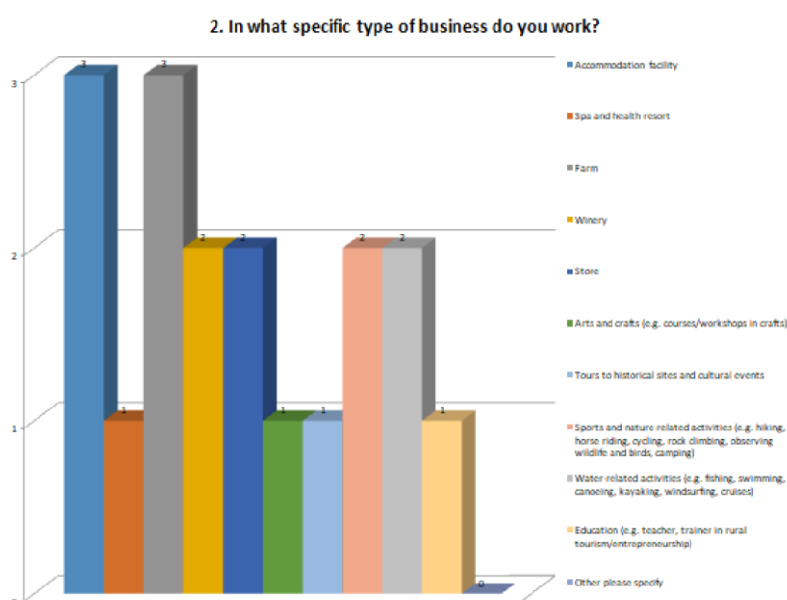
A total of 11 professionals employed in rural tourism sectors participated in the survey, with the most experienced having worked for 25 years in a wine-producing - tourism business and the list experienced having 3 years as an agronomist in an agro-tourism unit. The average number of years of employment/professional experience of the participants in the survey is 9 years.

The survey which aimed at rural tourism workers was divided into two sections. From the first one we obtained information about the profile of workers in the sector and the type of enterprises that employ them, while in the second section information was collected regarding their education & training in the field of rural tourism.

4 of the employees who participated in the survey state that they have work experience in experiential tourism businesses, 6 are employed in sustainable and cultural tourism businesses, while 6 others are employed in rural tourism, rural and agricultural tourism and sports tourism businesses.

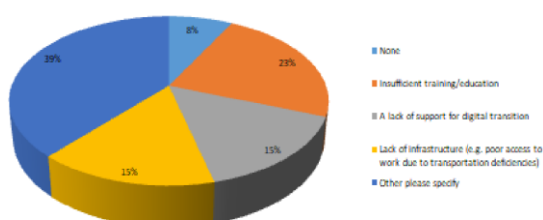


When asked about the type of business in which they work, most respondents stated that it is an accommodation services and farms business. Next in line were wineries, stores and businesses involved in sports and outdoor activities and businesses organising water-related activities. Finally, there were only one professional representing/operating in sectors such as spas and wellness centers, arts and crafts, guided tours of historical sites and education.

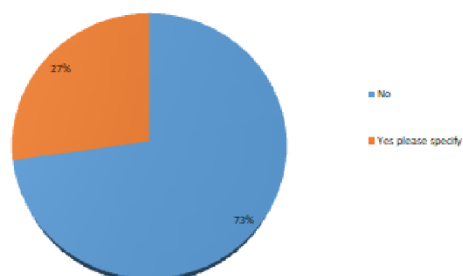


When asked about the challenges faced by professionals in rural tourism, 39% of the participants responded that they face challenges without specifying what they are, 15% answered that there is a lack of infrastructure, 15% that there is a lack of support for digital transition and 1% do not face any difficulties. Finally, the second most popular response with 23% concerned that there is a lack of training in basic skills. This result is also confirmed by the next question concerning the respondents' participation in a vocational education and training programme related to their profession or their participation in training for personal or professional development, with 73% of the participants answering negatively.

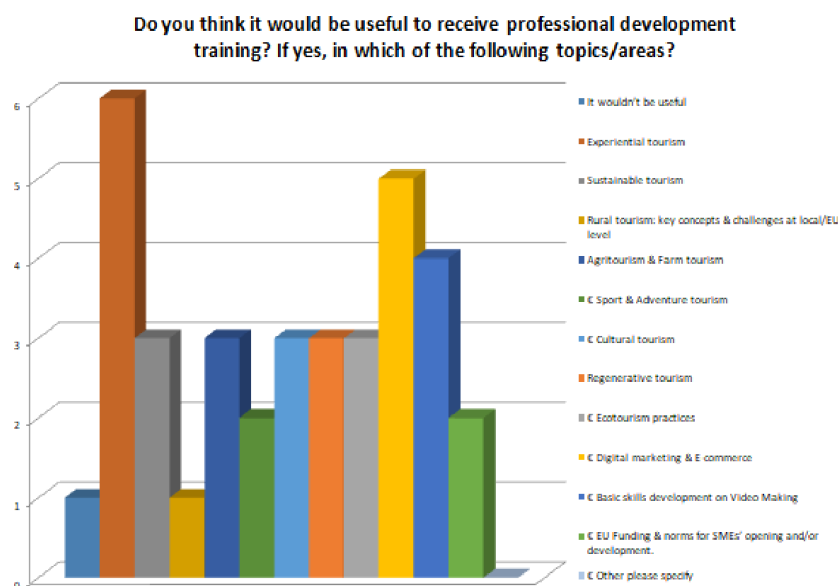
In your role as a rural tourism professional, what challenges do you face?



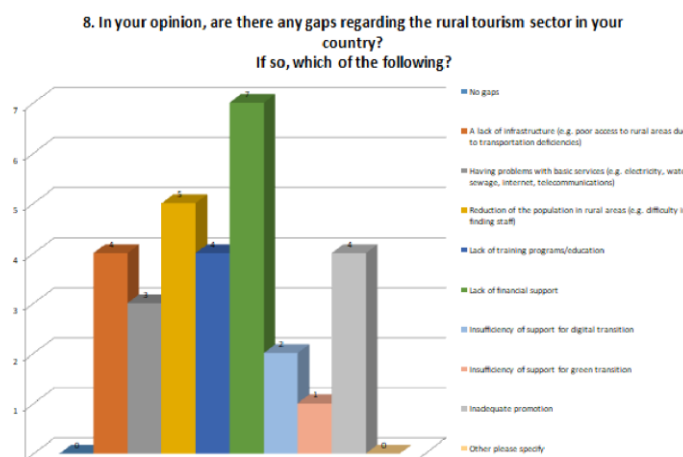
6. Have you ever participated in a VET program related to your profession or received any personal or professional development training?



Professionals also believe that a potential training would be useful with the majority being interested in training on topics related to experiential tourism with the next choice being topics related to digital marketing & e-commerce and the development of basic skills for video creation. There was less interest in more general training topics such as experiential tourism, agritourism and agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, regenerative tourism and finally ecotourism practices. Finally, there was less interest in training modules related to funding from the European Union and regulations for the opening and development of SMEs and sports tourism.



Finally, the main problem / gap in the field of rural tourism that is recognized by the professionals of the sector as a threat, is the significant lack of financial support, while the next problem in terms of importance is the reduction of the population in rural areas. They also recognize as an existing gap the lack of infrastructure along with the inadequate promotion of rural tourism, while the problem of lack of training and education is recurring. Finally, fewer participants consider that there are shortages and insufficient support for digital and green transition.



Also the professionals in rural tourism have been asked to provide potential suggestions for improving rural tourism in Greece. Their responses are presented as follows:

- Information campaigns
- Promotion of areas
- Creation of support and cooperation structures
- Promotion on the global market
- Supporting tourism in mainland Greece in a methodical and regular way based on a specific vision and perspective for the future of tourism
- There is a need to improve the overall image of the region, to make all the infrastructure and natural areas more attractive so that visitors feel comfortable visiting and exploring more places and discovering the beauties of the region
- Accessibility Advertising
- Better organisation by governmental bodies for advertising/promotion
- Financial support and training
- Financial facilities

Professionals highlight the importance of support for the marketing of the services in rural tourism so as to build an identity and strong brand name.

When questioned if there is any other kind of support that they would like to receive as a professional working in rural tourism they identified the following:

- Financial support
- Suggestions for improving the services provided
- Staff training
- Any support would be useful
- Toussaint advertising of the region to major agents

- Basic language learning, development of rural areas
- Better wages
- Government support

Professionals in rural tourism recognise the shortcomings in the sector from a variety of perspectives which however are considered as state responsibilities. Most of the comments received relate to the responsibilities of several public institutions such as the Ministries of Tourism, Rural Development and Food, Finance and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport. More specifically, the survey participants consider the main element for the improvement of the sector to be the promotion of rural tourism through targeted information campaigns and advertisements both in the Greek and the global market which is a subject that falls under the responsibilities of the ministry of tourism. They also consider as a necessary element the development of projects that will facilitate the access of visitors to the tourist units as well as the improvement of infrastructure that will help visitors to discover new activities and interests in rural tourism areas.

Finally, the need to adjust the wage scale and financial support for rural tourism professionals is noteworthy, as this is the human resource that will support the country's regional economy. At the same time, the professional training of workers in the sector is also considered important as it will update their knowledge and improve their skills in their field of employment.