



EXperiential **T**Ourism 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



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

EXTOR

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

Focus Group National Report - Einurd

FOCUS GROUP INFORMATION

Please add the main information about your focus group(s).

COUNTRY OF IMPLEMENTATION: Iceland

CITY OF IMPLEMENTATION: Reykjavík

NUMBER OF FOCUS GROUPS: 7

DATES OF THE FOCUS GROUP(S): 29/05/2024

VENUES OF THE FOCUS GROUP(S): Online (Zoom)

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS (per focus group if more than one): 7

TARGET GROUP AND STAKEHOLDERS: DMOs of the rural marketing offices (2 representatives of Visit North, 1 representative of Visit East, 1 representative of Visit South, 2 representatives of Tourism Skill Cener (Hafnisétur), 1 representative of the Icelandic Tourism Cluster

FOCUS GROUP DESCRIPTION

Please provide a detailed description of the focus group(s).

- **Number of focus groups implementers and description of their background:**

Magdalena conducted the focus group. Magdalena holds a PhD in Tourism Studies and is an expert in qualitative data gathering, which focus groups are part of. Magdalena further has experience in project management and is involved in a series of innovative projects dealing with tourism development in the Nordics.

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

In total 7 people participated at the focus group discussion. All of them are representatives of the above-named institutions that offer educational programs for tourism entrepreneurs and tourism professionals with a focus on rural areas.

- **Duration of the focus group(s):**

The focus group took 40 minutes. May is a busy season for everybody involved in tourism development, so we kept the discussion short and precise. The participants were informed beforehand about the project

- **Main structure and agenda of the focus group(s):**

After a short introduction round, where also the mile stones of the project were again highlighted, we started the discussion by following the questions suggested by the EXTOR Focus Group template. The main points were

- Describing rural tourism in Iceland (trends and development)
- Ongoing VET offers
- Gaps in VET offers
- Challenges and recommendations regarding VET offers that serve rural tourism entrepreneurs and professionals

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

The participants knew each other to the biggest part and had and have been collaborating in projects regarding VET offers before. So the discussion was vivid and fruitful.

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

All participants were interested and willing to share. The discussion was fruitful and everybody contributed to each question.

- **Main comments and evaluation points from participants (the most important suggestions and recommendations, improvement points etc.):**

1. Trends and opportunities:

- ✓ Activity-based tourism is on the rise, with a focus on outdoor activities such as hiking, skiing, and snow-related activities.
- ✓ There is a growing demand for luxury services and accommodations in rural tourism.
- ✓ Companies are increasingly focusing on connecting with local communities and practicing sustainable and regenerative tourism.
- ✓ There is a trend towards building more hotels and investing in digital solutions for tourism.

2. VET offers/programs available:

- ✓ VET programs in Iceland mainly consist of short-term, ad hoc programs focused on marketing and communication.
- ✓ Programs are set up based on specific needs or demands from tourism businesses
- ✓ There is a lack of formal education and a focus on marketing, management, and communication skills – which shows in that courses dealing with that are mainly requested by the businesses

3. Engagement of the authorities/community:

- ✓ Efforts are being made by national and local authorities to promote rural tourism, focusing on policies supporting rural solutions and infrastructure development.

- ✓ There is an emphasis on supporting small tourism companies rather than larger ones.
- ✓ Funding for training programs is seen as crucial, but there are challenges in adapting courses to the needs of companies and providing sufficient funds.

4. Suggestions/Recommendations

- ✓ Focus on providing VET programs in technology, digital skills, sustainable practices, and general management for rural tourism providers.
- ✓ Develop programs to prepare the next generation to take over tourism businesses (many rural tourism providers are getting old)
- ✓ Increase funding for training programs and make them more adaptable to the needs of the companies.
- ✓ Encourage collaboration among tourism companies to form clusters for training opportunities.
- ✓ Raise awareness among companies about available funding options for training programs to reduce costs.
- ✓ Provide support and funding for companies to implement new solutions, such as digital solutions and sustainability practices.

- **Any challenges faced during the focus group(s):**

No particular challenge.

- **Main conclusions of the focus group(s):**

The group agreed that the main reason for the gap in VET offers is that rural tourism businesses and VET providers are short in time and money.