



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR PROFESSIONNALS AND EDUCATORS



EDITORIAL

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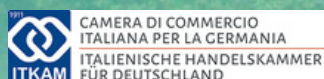
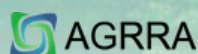
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1. WHY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS?

These recommendations were developed in the context of the overall Guide Me Green project strategy, a project co-funded by the Erasmus Plus programme. Guide Me Green aims to promote sustainable travel and tourism as well as encourage the development of a sustainable tourism offer for low-budget travellers. The project has been working towards making sustainable tourism more accessible and supports adult travellers in making more sustainable travel decisions.

Guide Me Green has developed materials for adult educators to encourage more sustainable tourism practices among audiences travelling on a low budget:

- A Manual of Best practices from across the partner countries
- An online training programme for adults, educators and tourism professionals
- An educators' handbook

The objective of the policy recommendations is to raise awareness about the need for sustainable travel and tourism to become more accessible and encourage the development of a sustainable tourism offer that is accessible to all. The content of the recommendations is mainly based on the work carried out in the framework of the project. Other resources have been consulted to confirm the conclusions of the project partners.

For more information please visit: <https://www.guidemegreen.eu/>

2. THE GUIDE ME GREEN PROJECT

The Covid-19 crisis brought significant changes in mobility, consumption patterns, leisure, work, and many other dimensions of our lives. These changes have/will have a significant impact on travel and tourism as we used to know them. As a result of the considerable drop in travel linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism was in a deep crisis. Being central to the European recovery, tourism needs smart (digital, sustainable) ecosystems for all tourism stakeholders, offering travellers more memorable and sustainable experiences.

Today, more than two years after the project started, tourism is at pre-pandemic levels in many destinations and in some even exceeding these levels. While the pandemic has definitely led to an increase in sustainable tourism development, these offers are still not accessible to a large proportion of the population. Guide me Green focuses specifically on sustainable travel and tourism for those travelling on a low budget but the reason for lack of financial resources can be manifold. On the one hand this for example includes younger Gen Z travellers who are actively looking for sustainable low cost options and on the other hand for example older generations from difficult socioeconomic backgrounds and lower education levels who are not very familiar with concepts surrounding sustainability. Another possible group are travellers with a disability or a medical condition, unable to hold regular jobs and therefore travelling on lower budgets.

In addition to raising awareness about the need for more sustainable travel options for all, Guide me Green aims at making links between the needs of tourists from all backgrounds and local communities for more adequate sustainable travel. At the same time, the project has approached travellers from an educational perspective to enlighten them to travel in a sustainable way by displaying best practices and offering an adapted and high-quality training programme.

2. THE GUIDE ME GREEN PROJECT

The project goals are to:

- Inspire and empower low-income and disadvantaged adults to engage in sustainable tourism to encourage social cohesion.
- Support adult educators to empower individuals/organisations in the educational, civil, and tourism sectors to become more digital and green in line with this priority of the EU of climate neutrality in 2050 (European Tourism Convention 2020, European Green Deal).
- Work towards improving travellers' (adult learners) knowledge about sustainable travel and the opportunities sustainable tourism offers is essential.
- Offer an attractive training opportunity for adult travellers, including those who work in the tourism sector (low educated workers who in turn are low-budget travellers).
- Supporting disadvantaged and low-income groups to gain access to sustainable tourism by empowering community agents to inspire actions targeting public authorities, destination management/tourism offices, sector representations, etc.
- Encourage non-participating adults to consider suitable (local and domestic) tourism options.

The project partners are:

- **Coordinator:** The Italian Chamber of Commerce for Germany (ITKAM)
- DomSpain (Spain)
- EURAKOM (France)
- Landesverband Sachsen-Anhalt (vhs) (Germany)
- Nikanor (Bulgaria)
- AGRRA (Croatia)
- X23 The Innovation Bakery (Italy)

3. OUR VISION

Our vision is that all European adult travellers are consciously making travel decisions based on sustainable options and have sufficient knowledge about their individual and collective negative impact linked to travel in order to make informed decisions. Our vision is also for destinations and tourism professionals to fully embrace social sustainability as part of sustainable tourism development. While destinations and businesses increasingly work on improving their environmental standards, many are still lagging behind when it comes to offering sustainable options to the lower budget segment. Cheaper accommodation such as one or two star hotels, camp sites, youth hostels etc. or cheap eateries can all considerably improve their sustainability standards without necessarily making huge investments.



4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR TRAINING PROVIDERS AND EDUCATORS

1. TRAVELLING SUSTAINABLY

Issue: More than three-quarters of people want to make their holiday travel sustainable, according to Booking.com's 2023 Sustainable Travel Report. However, one of the barriers to sustainable travel, according to the report, includes a perceived lack of options and uncertainty over where to search for holidays that promote environmental stewardship and support local communities. Percentages may vary from country to country of course but the report provides an overall trend that has been confirmed to various degrees through similar research at national or regional levels across European countries. According to the Booking.com report 74% of participants perceive sustainable travel as imperative to combat climate change, and nearly half (49%) believe sustainable travel options are prohibitively expensive. With escalating inflation, this perception is exacerbated, with 49% of travellers feeling compelled to choose between sustainability and financial constraints. In the face of concerns about meeting basic needs and navigating energy crises, sustainability in travel can appear non-urgent to many. Moreover, 47% of respondents express a desire for guidance on budget-friendly sustainable travel, while 49% seek discounts and economic incentives to opt for eco-friendly alternatives. Thus, while a significant number of travellers aspire to engage in sustainable tourism, the perceived high cost remains a formidable barrier.

Recommendation: Adult training providers and educators need to ensure that sustainability becomes a core element of any training programme and that learners develop an awareness of sustainable principles and practices. It is equally important that educators convey the benefits of sustainable travel for the local communities, local economy and the environment and that sustainable options don't always have to be expensive. Giving guidance about an array of low-cost options for sustainable travel will support mainstreaming sustainable practices and increase the consciousness of hosts and travellers.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR TRAINING PROVIDERS AND EDUCATORS

2. UP-TO-DATE TERMINOLOGY AND CONCEPTS

Issue: Educators use different terminologies and concepts without sometimes fully understanding or explaining their meaning to learners. As such, sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, eco-tourism, slow or regenerative tourism are all used in parallel and also have different meanings when translated into different European languages. Educators also use different and not up-to-date terminology to refer to some sensitive issues related to disabilities, accessibility and special needs (i.e. different formats of families, senior travellers...) that may apply to target groups who are travelling on a low budget.

Recommendation: Educators need to review concepts and terminology linked to tourism and accessibility/disabilities to ensure that they are adequately applied in a learning context. Making sure that concepts and terms are used in the right way leads to a more relevant training offer. We recommend using European and International standards in their use of terms and definitions (such as [UN Tourism glossary](#) or the [Eurostat glossary](#) for tourism related terminology or the [European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education glossary](#) for disabilities related terminology, among many existing others). We also recommend educators create their own shortlist of most useful terms in their context and that they make them as specific as needed, providing examples that adults can understand.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR TRAINING PROVIDERS AND EDUCATORS

3. AWARENESS ABOUT GREENWASHING

Issue: Greenwashing has become a major issue in the tourism sector, with many businesses claiming they are sustainable or green without providing tangible evidence or focusing on one thing they do very well while omitting other aspects that have a considerable negative impact on the environment, local communities or even on their own staff members. While the EU Green Claims directive could bring some clarity with regard to the value of sustainable labels in the EU, today's adult learners find it difficult to navigate the current sustainable tourism offer, including various labels and certifications offered at both national and European levels. A lack of awareness and understanding of sustainable practices makes it difficult for adult learners to identify genuine sustainable tourism offers, making them easy targets for greenwashing.

Recommendation: Educators should provide information about the value of labels and certifications that have been developed by independent bodies or public authorities and where businesses are audited by third parties. It is essential for educators to convey the main aspects of sustainability that tourism providers have to comply with, such as environmental and social sustainability as well as criteria linked to internal governance and operations. However, in addition to recognising the value of labels and certifications, educators need to better convey how to identify sustainable offers by providing clear information that summarises a set of criteria that enable the recognition of whether a tourism offer is truly sustainable or not.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR TOURISM SMES AND BUSINESS ORGANISATIONS

1. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM OFFERS

Issue: The overall number of SMEs and tourism organisations offering sustainable options for low-budget travel and tourism remains limited, especially in destinations prone to mass tourism or those targeting package tourism. High-end sustainable tourism experiences are considered as more profitable and are at the centre of marketing campaigns linked to sustainable tourism. In addition, SMEs already offering sustainable travel deals to specific target groups are not always willing to diversify and offer adapted solutions for low-budget travellers. Sustainable practices sometimes lack the economies of scale enjoyed by traditional methods, limiting widespread adoption. Moreover, there persists a prevailing notion that sustainable products and services inherently warrant higher costs due to their environmental or ethical benefits. This misconception leads businesses to price sustainable offerings higher, even when production costs may not significantly differ.

Recommendation: SMEs who are looking to attract tourists and visitors travelling on a budget should consider getting better informed about ways to implement sustainable practices in their daily operations. These can bring financial benefit to the organisation and at the same time attract more sustainability-conscious travellers. It is equally essential to raise awareness among SMEs about the benefits of widening their target groups in order to make their offer more accessible and inclusive in line with the need for improving social sustainability. We recommend SMEs to look out for relevant training opportunities to upskill their staff on sustainability related topics as well as communication so that they can communicate more effectively about their sustainable practices.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR TOURISM SMES AND BUSINESS ORGANISATIONS

2. UNDERSTANDING OF SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES

Issue: Some travellers, especially those with lower levels of education or who have a challenging socio-economic background, do not understand the value of sustainable practices and why they must participate in different initiatives at the destination. Even some travellers who for example sort their waste for recycling at home, do not want to do so when on holiday.

Recommendation: Businesses need to make it easy for travellers to follow instructions at their destination. They also need to explain the sustainable practices of their business to travellers and why they are implementing them. A first and easy-to-implement step is to make practices visible to guests in the form of signs, communication on their website, and social media.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR TOURISM SMES AND BUSINESS ORGANISATIONS

3. INVESTMENTS IN SUSTAINABILITY

Issue: Various surveys, for example, the one conducted by Eurobarometer in 2022, have shown that businesses believe becoming sustainable implies considerable additional investments. The Covid-19 pandemic brought considerable financial burdens for tourism SMEs and some of those that survived the pandemic are still struggling to make up for lost income during that time. While businesses face multiple challenges today in order to stay profitable, such as staff shortages and the need to implement digital solutions in order to stay relevant in the market, sustainability remains a main factor in developing a competitive advantage while an increasing number of aspects linked to sustainability are becoming compulsory across Europe.

Recommendation: Businesses should explore in detail what can be done without considerable investments, simply by optimising current practices. Communicating the intention as a business to move in the right direction and raising awareness about sustainability among travellers already constitutes an important step. Businesses that would like to have more sustainable practices but are lacking the money to invest, should contact authorities and research possibilities for receiving public support to cover part of the necessary investment.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

1. DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE LOW-COST TOURISM OFFERS

Issue: Local Authorities together with DMOs are increasingly focusing on attracting sustainability-conscious travellers, yet remain relatively inaccessible to low-budget tourists and travellers. A significant segment of tourists, characterised by high levels of "sustainable intelligence" – encompassing commitment, attitude, knowledge, and behaviour towards sustainability – is willing to pay more to visit destinations aligned with their values. Low-budget travellers constitute a substantial portion of overall tourism activity. By offering sustainable options to this target group, destinations can mitigate the environmental impact of tourism and also tackle the need for a more accessible tourism offer. The provision of affordable sustainable choices distributes tourism spending more equitably across a destination, therefore benefitting a broader array of residents and businesses. Diversifying tourism offerings to appeal to a wider range of hosts and travellers renders destinations less reliant on high-spending tourists, making them more resilient and more adaptable to fluctuating market conditions.

Recommendation: Destinations or local authorities, in isolation, cannot address this issue. Again, collaboration, in this case with business networks and enterprises, is essential to increase the adoption of sustainable practices and options among all types of accommodation providers, restaurants, and other businesses catering to low-budget travellers. Setting up collective meetings with local businesses and offering regular support regarding the implementation of sustainable practices, including support to apply for relevant funding opportunities can help to increase the implementation of sustainable principles businesses that target low-budget tourists and visitors. Local authorities should encourage collaboration between sustainable businesses and other local stakeholders to develop initiatives tailored to low-budget travellers. By pooling resources and expertise, businesses can create innovative and affordable sustainable travel experiences. Local authorities can collaborate with other organisations to offer guidance on pricing strategies, marketing tactics, and operational efficiency measures to ensure profitability while maintaining sustainability standards. Assisting businesses in adapting products and services to meet the needs of low-budget travellers is crucial. Authorities should also consider the development of training offers linked to sustainability for local SMEs and support them to effectively communicate about their sustainable practices.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

2. INCLUSIVE DESTINATIONS

Issue: Many travellers who travel on a low budget are also restricted by a physical or mental disability. In 2022, 27% of the EU population over the age of 16 had some form of disability. According to Eurostat estimates, that equals 101 million people or one in four adults in the EU (Consilium 2023). Despite numerous networks, organisations and associations that are advocating for more inclusive destinations, the tourism offer for travellers with a disability remains patchy in many destinations across the Guide Me Green partner countries. Where adequate offers do exist, they are often not visible to travellers or not sufficiently promoted to the relevant target groups. Lack of visibility is often linked to a lack of coordination around the subject of inclusivity within the local culture and tourism ecosystems.

Recommendation: Closer collaboration of public authorities with tourism, education and culture stakeholders as well as local associations will support making any sites, visitor centres, museums and places of cultural interest accessible to disabled travellers. Supporting (the creation) of local and regional stakeholder networks dedicated to inclusive and sustainable tourism will help to identify existing offers, create additional ones and contribute to effective communication towards potential target groups, be they local, regional, national or international visitors.

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FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

3. BETTER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

Issue: The implementation of sustainability practices in destinations is undermined by a lack of community engagement and involvement in local tourism development. Sustainability is also undermined by a lack of collaboration between communities and tourism SMEs, which leads to many tourism offers not being attractive for today's demanding travellers while they also do not reflect the needs and expectations of local inhabitants at the destination. In sum, advancing overall sustainability in destinations requires local authorities to actively communicate and engage communities in order to improve the resilience and acceptability of tourism development in destinations.

Recommendation: Multiple best practices exist regarding how destinations can successfully engage local populations in tourism development. Active communities and stakeholders are at the heart of a sustainable destination. Community engagement and the participation of communities and stakeholders in decision-making are essential in order to ensure that tourism development and the overall development of destinations are in line with the needs and expectations of all those living and working at the destination. Therefore, it is recommended to carefully review the possibilities of involvement. In addition to surveys and consultations often carried out at destinations, the local authority could set up various thematic working groups that collect feedback from the community and that can come forward with proposals to enhance tourism development or sustainability at the destination.

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