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Press release

Black Sea Women Entrepreneurship Connection - Empowering Women through Tourism (WETOURL – BSB1030)

“Empowering Women through Tourism”

Press release: Launch of the WETOURL project

Location: Black Sea Basin (Greece, Georgia, Bulgaria, Armenia, Turkey)

Partners: SEGE, GAWB, BAA, ARMECAS, KAGIDER

When: 26/06/2021 – 25/06/2023

One of the most interesting projects ever funded by the **ENI CBC Black Sea Basin Programme 2014-2020** for the empowerment of women in tourism has just been launched. The **WE TOUR – “Black Sea Women Entrepreneurship Connection – Empowering Women through Tourism”** project aims to create a cross-border business network in the Black Sea Basin area by strengthening, supporting and developing female entrepreneurship through tourism and providing women with new economic and social opportunities.

The difficulties

Women entrepreneurship is an emerging sector in the global business environment, a real driving force in today’s modern economy. They shape and redefine the workplace, business networks, financial institutions and culture, but in the Black Sea Region represents an unexploited potential. Despite the long-term tradition of Eastern Europe in officially supporting gender equity, gender inequality in leadership, decision-making, education and deterioration of the position of women in economic and social life still exist in the Black Sea Basin area. Socio-cultural constraints have limited women’s access to a meaningful business experience and led to careers interrupted by family obligations. Furthermore, women have less human capital for the management and development of their businesses. Only 32% of the entrepreneurs of the area are women and opportunities are wasted at a time when sustainable economic growth figures high on the agenda of all governments in Europe.

In general, entrepreneurship is seen as a key driver for economic success, but few coordinated initiatives are target towards women. Research shows that tourism has become one of the main income generators in both developed and developing countries, with

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business volumes that equal or surpass oil exports, food products or the car industry. Travel and tourism have been proven to provide women with more opportunities for empowerment compared to other industries, giving the sector increased responsibility for the advancement of women.

The countries around the Black Sea are using very different policy instruments and projects in order to increase the number of women entrepreneurs. Few countries have adopted a clear policy to encourage and facilitate women to start their own business or to become more ambitious. Generally, women are under-represented in high growth sectors and they have fewer employees than men.

The solution

Black Sea Region is one of the largest tourism areas in Eurasia. The tourism industry constitutes today a source of revenues for most Black Sea countries. The Black Sea is being shaped as a cohesive region and an attractive tourist destination not only for foreign visitors but for its own people too. The BSB countries attract almost 12% of global tourism or more than 106 million tourists. What becomes important for the potential of regional cooperation is the fast increase in intra-regional tourism flows in the last years, a trend not present in the 1990s Black Sea Region has very rich historical and cultural heritage, but it is not so famous and attractive touristic destination.

The region is relatively under developed especially in comparison with other pan - European tourism zones. Such challenges as lack of infrastructure, low quality of services and low employment in tourism sector especially for women are standing in front of the sustainable development. Tourism operators and agents located in less popular destinations face the challenge to promote effectively and purposefully their destinations. Lack of entrepreneurial skills and competences of the existing and potential stakeholders in the value chain (use of ICT tools, networking, strategy thinking, design of innovative business models and captive / by products etc.) impedes establishment of a more sustainable and economically viable approach to promote the region as a hotspot touristic destination.

WE TOUR project, is closely related to the common challenges of the programme area. The participating organizations are going to create a strong partnership in the field of women entrepreneurship, not only between them but also among the countries that they represent. Also, WETOUR's main tasks are the promotion of gender equality in cooperation with civil-society organizations and public authorities and the transfer of knowledge through the organization of workshops connected to the project's aims.

The project includes 5 partners from 5 different countries – 4 business women associations from Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia and Turkey and 1 tourism association from Armenia. Every partner has different role in the business sector and different responsibilities in the project

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implementation. Project partners will join efforts to develop innovative entrepreneurial framework for development of tourism and promotion of Black Sea macro region as an attractive touristic destination.

The partnership will carry out mainly similar activities having a cross border impact. The cross-border cooperation is crucial because it will provide women with best practices and successful policies already implemented in the area in order to bring them closer to entrepreneurship and employment.

The WE TOUR partnership will achieve its goals applying the following approaches:

- cross – industry driven approach building the collaboration among tourism
- strategy - driven approach fostering the promotion of Black Sea region and increase of entrepreneurial skills of women
- working in tourism

The results

WETOUR project is working on bringing women closer to entrepreneurship and employment, therefore the project's main results are the following:

1. Built capacity in female entrepreneurship in tourism sector through development and organization of trainings and programs in tourism sector entrepreneurship, business management and digital marketing. At least 500 women, youth professionals and women entrepreneurs, will be trained how effectively to manage and growth their business, how to get involved with tourism and get aware of tourism local plans and policies. On the other side the entrepreneurship in tourism will be promoted as a tool for self-employment and future career development.
2. Increase the exchange of experience between relevant stakeholders, through the establishment of "WE TOUR" portal. The new regional business network will create a global network for knowledge sharing. Through the "WE TOUR" portal the stakeholders will exchange national policy information on women entrepreneurs as well as valuable contact for cross-border visits and cooperation, best practices, business management support. The portal will support the future joint efforts for discussing and developing working methods and tools in few of improving the support of women's entrepreneurship nationally.
3. Improve the role of women and support female entrepreneurship in the BSB area, through the development of an awareness raising campaign. More than 5.000 people will be informed about the project.
4. Boost women confidence and their business skills by establishing a strong network and a long term partnership between women support organizations, business organizations, public authorities and other local stakeholders.

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SEGE – Greek Association of Women Entrepreneurs

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