

# A Sustainable Future: Cooperation, Communication, and Connectivity in the Western Balkans' Rural and Adventure Tourism

• Synergising Strategies •

24-25 October 2024, Hotel Princess, Bar, Montenegro

## P R O G R A M M E

Thursday, 24 October 2024 - DAY 1

12:00 – 14:00 Registration of participants, lunch and welcome coffee

Welcome words and introduction to the programme

**Masters of Ceremonies: Ms. Melika Arifhodzic and Ms. Anica Palazzo**

14:00 – 14:20 Opening and welcome notes

- **Ms. Pranvera Kastrati**, Acting Head of Programme Department, RCC (online)
- **Ms. Karin Rau**, SEDRA Project Manager, GIZ
- **Mr. David Hudson**, Senior Expert, European Commission DG NEAR (online)

14:20 – 16:20 Strategic insights and current realities in the WB6 tourism, with the members of the RCC Tourism Expert Group (TEG)

**Presentation** of the current state of play regarding sustainability, rural and adventure tourism development by WB6 Ministries' or Tourism Organisations' representatives.

**Panel 1:** Moderated discussion with the representatives of economy-level tourism authorities.

**Moderation:** **Ms. Kirsi Hyvaerinen**, GIZ International Tourism Advisor

***Objective:** To gain insights into the topics, and engage in a deeper discussion on the goals, challenges and solutions facing the WB6, both individually and collectively as a region.*

16:20 – 16:40 "Family photo" & coffee break

16:40 – 17:10

### Transformation of rural areas: opportunities and best practices

**Presentation:** Mr. Klaus Ehrlich, General Secretary of RURAL TOUR - European Federation of Rural Tourism

*Objective: To familiarise participants with the EU common approach to rural tourism and showcase best practices as an opportunity for the diversification of the WB6 rural economy.*

17:15 – 18:15

### Rural and adventure tourism: Challenges, key success factors and unexplored potentials in the WB6

**Panel 2:** Moderated discussions with representatives of regional private, public and non-governmental sector organisations.

**Moderation:** Ms. Anica Palazzo, Advisor on Tourism, GIZ SEDRA

- Mr. Simon Reuter, Senior Research Partnership Manager, Outdooractive (online)
- Mr. Boris Stijepovic, President, Western Balkans Adventure Travel Association (WBATA)
- Ms. Aleksandra Todorovska, Coordinator of Balkan Rural Development Network (BRDN) Sekretariat

*Objective: To deepen the understanding of the current state of rural and adventure tourism by exploring both challenges and opportunities and working towards enabling joint policy-making in the WB6.*

18:15 – 19:00

### Empowering journeys: Women's transformative role in tourism

**Panel 3:** Moderated discussion and sharing of stories and experiences.

**Moderation:** Ms. Evisi Koplaku, Expert on Competitiveness RCC

- Ms. Blerina Bombaj, Blerina's Agrotourism Concept, WB6 "Woman Entrepreneur of the Year" Recognition
- Ms. Uta Ibrahim, Union of International Mountain Leader Association (UIMLA) Guide & Founder of Utalaya Foundation and Butterfly Outdoor Adventure (online)
- Ms. Snezana Zecevic, Project Manager, Regional Development Agency Bjelasica, Komovi & Prokletije
- Ms. Aida Korman, owner of REBORN-WEAR AIDA, Founder of Association of Creative Artists

*Objective: To raise awareness of the important role of women in tourism and to motivate further support towards greater female participation in leadership roles in the sector, as well as the management and delivery of tourism services.*

19:00 – 19:30

### Takeaways of the day

**Moderated conversation with the audience.**

*Objective: To reaffirm the relevance of raised topics and identify priorities.*

**Moderation:** Mr. Ekrem Hyseni, Advisor on Tourism, GIZ and

Ms. Kirsi Hyvaerinen, GIZ International Tourism Advisor

20:00

### Dinner & time for open networking



## Friday, 25 October 2024 – DAY 2

08:00 – 09:30 Breakfast / welcome coffee

09:30 – 10:00 Sustainability as a strategic management system of countries, destinations and businesses

**Presentation: Ms. Masa Klemencic**, Project Manager, Slovenia Tourist Board (online)

*Objective: To support the WB6 economies in aligning perspectives, understanding the bigger picture, and turning vision into action on sustainability management in tourism.*

10:05 – 11:00 Standardisation and certification for sustainability, quality and safety of adventure travel in the Western Balkans: “the Why - the Who - the How”

**Panel 4:** Moderated discussion and sharing of information on international standards of sustainability management and adventure travel operation.

**Moderation: Ms. Aleksandra Drinic**, Tourism specialist

- **Mr. Kostantin Ciriviri**, Western Balkans Adventure Travel Association (WBATA), Macedonian Association of International Mountain Leaders (online)
- **Mr. Aleksandar Pastir**, Rescue 3 Europe Instructor, International Rafting Federation (IRF) Instructor
- **Ms. Suela Tahiraj**, Coach and Auditor, Balkan Green Albania
- **Mr. Tihomir Dakic**, National Coordinator, EuroVelo (online)
- **Mr. Zeljko Loncovic**, Head of the Mountain Rescue Service Montenegro

*Objective: To present locally rooted regional networks of cooperation and explore how they can serve as strategic partners in implementing international standards for sustainability management and adventure travel operations, with a focus on safety, client care, and risk management.*

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee break

11:30 – 12:30 The importance of a skilled workforce for the competitiveness of the WB6 and ways to achieve harmonised, continuous knowledge and skills development

**Panel 5:** Presentations and moderated conversation with the audience

**Moderation: Ms. Kirsi Hyvaerinen**, GIZ International Tourism Advisor

- **Mr. Fedja Begovic**, Chief of Party, USAID Turizam (Tourism Academy) BiH
- **Mr. Semsettin Toprak**, Programme Manager, TUI Care Foundation
- **Ms. Deborah Herz**, Specialist at atingi.org, GIZ (online)
- **Mr. Arben Bacaj**, Advisor on Skills Development, GIZ SRD/ProSEED, Albania

*Objective: To explore the potential of relevant projects to foster coordinated and continuous vocational seminars and training in creating a more unified and sustainable approach.*

12:30 – 13:15

## EU steps and strategies in greening the joint economy – challenges and solutions in the WB6 tourism sector – support mechanisms/development cooperation

**Panel 6:** Moderated discussion about the latest development in strategic frameworks in the EU and WB6, related to greening the tourism industry.

**Moderation:** Ms. Melika Arifhodzic, Expert on Tourism, RCC

- **Ms. Ramune Genzbigelyte-Venturi**, Policy Officer for Tourism, European Commission Directorate-General Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship & SMEs (DG GROW), (online)
- **Mr. Felix Rohn**, Policy Officer for sectoral cooperation on skills, European Commission Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion (DG EMPL), (online)
- **Mr. Teixidor Costa Arnau**, Programme Manager - Ecosystem Resilience and Spatial Planning, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation
- **Ms. Sonja Geber**, Associate Programme Management Officer, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (online)
- **Mr. Marv Barbullushi**, Expert on Green Agenda, RCC

**Objective:** To discuss the advancement of the Tourism Transition Pathway in the EU and its relevance for the WB6 in advancing sustainability, and exploring support mechanisms under the EU Green Deal related to tourism.

13:15 – 13:45

## Wrap up and next steps, including a joint call for action, building for sustainable growth and connectivity

**Moderated conversation with the audience.**

**Objectives:** To confirm readiness and possible innovative forms of continued regional communication, collaboration and connectivity in advancing sustainable rural and adventure tourism development in the WB6.

14:00

## Lunch & networking - Departure of participants