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## Press Release 2

### **Black Sea Women Entrepreneurship Connection - Empowering Women through Tourism (WETOUR – BSB1030)**

#### **“Empowering Women through Tourism”**

**Project:** WETOUR

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

**Partners:** SEGE, GAWB, BAA, ARMECAS, KAGIDER

**Implementation period:** 26/06/2021 – 25/06/2023

The WE TOUR - "Black Sea Women Entrepreneurship Connection - Empowering Women through Tourism" project funded by the ENI CBC Black Sea Basin Program 2014-2020, aims to create a cross-border entrepreneurial network in the Black Sea Basin region, strengthening, supporting and developing women's entrepreneurship through tourism and providing women with new economic and social opportunities.

#### **The Problem**

Women's entrepreneurship is an emerging sector in the global business environment, a true driving force in today's modern economy. It shapes and redefines the business landscape and the entire society, but in the Black Sea region, women's entrepreneurship represents an untapped potential. Despite the Eastern European region's long-standing commitment to promoting gender equality, disparities in leadership, decision-making, education, and the marginalization of women in economic and social life persist in the Black Sea basin.

Unfortunately, socio-cultural constraints have limited women's access to meaningful entrepreneurial experiences and often led them to pursue professional paths that are frequently interrupted by family responsibilities. Besides the numerous social roles women are expected to fulfil, which can distance them from the idea of entrepreneurship, those who do manage to become entrepreneurs still experience inequalities. They typically have smaller capital available for managing and growing their businesses, which often leads to a higher likelihood of their businesses closing down sooner.

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It is important to emphasize that throughout the Black Sea basin, only 32% of all entrepreneurs in the region are women, and opportunities continue to be lost in an era where sustainable economic development is a top priority for all European governments. Generally, women's entrepreneurship is considered a crucial lever for the economic success of Europe as a whole, but even today, initiatives targeting women are scarce.

### **The Solution**

Research shows that tourism has become one of the main sources of income in both developed and developing countries, with a business volume equivalent to or surpassing that of oil exports, food products, or the automotive industry. Travel and tourism have proven to provide women with more empowerment opportunities compared to other industries, giving the sector increased responsibility for the progress of women.

The Black Sea region is one of the largest tourist destinations in Eurasia. The tourism industry has become a significant source of revenue for most countries in the Black Sea area. The Black Sea is emerging as a cohesive region and an attractive tourist destination, not only for foreign visitors but also for its own residents. The countries of the Black Sea attract nearly 12% of global tourism, with more than 106 million tourists. What becomes crucial for regional cooperation is the rapid increase in intra-regional tourist flows in recent years, a trend that did not exist in the 1990s. The Black Sea region possesses a rich historical and cultural heritage but is not as well-known or attractive as other European tourist zones.

However, the region is relatively underdeveloped, especially compared to other European tourist destinations. Challenges such as lack of infrastructure, low service quality, and low employment in the tourism sector, particularly for women, hinder sustainable development. Tourism operators and agents located in less popular destinations face the challenge of promoting their destinations in an effective and targeted manner. The lack of entrepreneurial skills and capabilities among existing and potential stakeholders in the value chain (such as the use of ICT tools, networking, strategic thinking, innovative business model design, and related products) hinders the establishment of a more sustainable approach to promoting the region as a tourist destination.

The WE TOUR project is directly linked to the common challenges of the region. The project partners have established a strong relationship in their efforts to develop new strategies and empower more women, promoting gender equality in collaboration with civil society organizations and public authorities. They facilitate knowledge transfer through workshops aligned with the project's goals.

The project includes 5 partners from 5 different countries - 4 associations of female entrepreneurs from Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia and Turkey and 1 tourism association from Armenia. Cross-border cooperation is crucial because it provides women with best practices

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and successful policies already implemented in the region in order to bring them closer to entrepreneurship and tourism.

### **The Results**

The WE TOUR project has been working and continues to work even after its completion to bring women closer to entrepreneurship and employment. The main outcomes of the project include:

1. Developing women's business skills through the creation of educational material and the organization of seminars in the fields of tourism, business management, and digital marketing. At least 500 women, entrepreneurs or potential entrepreneurs have already been trained on effective business management and development, engaging in tourism, and being informed about local and European policies.
2. Exchange of experiences and educational opportunities through the creation of the "WE TOUR" web portal. The "WE TOUR" portal allows project partners and interested individuals to exchange experiences regarding entrepreneurship and valuable information about the Black Sea region. The portal supports the collective efforts of project partners to develop women's entrepreneurship and promote tourism at the European level.
3. Strengthening the role of women and supporting women's entrepreneurship in the Black Sea region through the organization of local events and social media activities.
4. Boosting women's self-confidence and their entrepreneurial skills by establishing a strong network involving women support organizations, entrepreneurial associations, public authorities, and other local stakeholders.

### **Field Research**

The project partners, at the beginning of the implementation of WE TOUR activities, proceeded with the mapping of female entrepreneurship in order to identify the competences, strengths, weaknesses and needs of entrepreneurs, SMEs and young professionals active in the tourism sector in the Black Sea region. The results of the research are presented in a comparative report prepared on the competences and needs of female entrepreneurs in the tourism sector in Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, Armenia and Georgia.

Below, you can find a preview of the main findings:

#### Greece

In Greece, the tourism industry significantly contributes to the country's economy, representing about 20% of its GDP. According to a report by the Hellenic Confederation of

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Commerce and Entrepreneurship (ESEE), women constitute only 31% of the total number of entrepreneurs in the country. While there is no specific data on female entrepreneurship in the tourism sector, it is safe to assume that women are underrepresented in this industry as well.

In terms of skills, in Greece, female entrepreneurs in the tourism sector need to develop marketing and financial management skills. WE TOUR's research found that female entrepreneurs tend to run small businesses, with limited access to financing and marketing resources. To address this issue, programs and projects that provide training in marketing and financial management should be developed.

#### Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, the tourism industry is also an essential contributor to the country's economy, with a growth rate of 4.4% in 2019. According to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the country has one of the highest rates of female entrepreneurship in the world. In fact, around 46% of all small and medium-sized enterprises in Bulgaria are owned by women. However, there is no specific data on female entrepreneurship in the tourism sector.

In Bulgaria, female entrepreneurs in the tourism sector need support to develop their digital skills and to improve their networking capabilities. Due to the country's location, it has a unique position as a gateway to both Europe and Asia, which offers ample opportunities for tourism. However, digital and financial barriers and lack of networking opportunities can limit the success of female entrepreneurs in the tourism sector.

#### Turkey

In Turkey, the tourism industry is a significant contributor to the economy, accounting for approximately 12% of its GDP. According to a report by the Turkish Statistical Institute, women account for only 22% of all entrepreneurs in the country. Moreover, a report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) found that women's participation in the tourism sector in Turkey is limited due to social norms and gender biases.

In Turkey, female entrepreneurs in the tourism sector need support to develop their marketing and leadership skills. According to WE TOUR's research, female entrepreneurs in the tourism sector tend to be concentrated in low-skilled and low-paid professions. Therefore, programs and projects that provide leadership and management training can help female entrepreneurs in this sector to take on more prominent roles and increase their incomes..

#### Armenia

In Armenia, the tourism industry is a growing sector, with an average annual growth rate of 8% between 2016 and 2019. According to the National Statistical Service of Armenia, women

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account for only 26% of all entrepreneurs in the country. However, there is no specific data on female entrepreneurship in the tourism sector.

In Armenia, female entrepreneurs in the tourism sector need support to develop their marketing skills and to improve their access to finance. Armenia's location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia offers ample opportunities for tourism. However, economical barriers and lack of access to finance can limit the success of female entrepreneurs in this sector.

### Georgia

In Georgia, the tourism industry is one of the most important sectors of the economy, contributing to around 7% of the country's GDP. According to a report by the Georgian Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, women account for only 29% of all entrepreneurs in the country. Furthermore, a report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) found that women entrepreneurs in the tourism sector in Georgia face numerous challenges, including limited access to financing, lack of training and networking opportunities, and gender biases.

In Georgia, female entrepreneurs in the tourism sector require support to develop their digital and marketing skills. WE TOUR's research found that women entrepreneurs in the tourism sector in Georgia face challenges in accessing digital technologies and marketing resources. Programmes and projects that provide training in digital skills and marketing can help female entrepreneurs in this sector to overcome these barriers and compete effectively in the market.

Overall, identifying the competences and needs of female entrepreneurs in the tourism sector in Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, Armenia and Georgia is crucial for the development of activities and programs that can support and enhance their capacities. Although the needs of female entrepreneurs vary in these countries, there are some common themes, such as the need for training in marketing, finance, leadership, management and digital skills. By addressing these needs, WE TOUR project partners hope to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for female entrepreneurs in the sector, promoting economic development and women's empowerment.

### **The WE TOUR training program**

The WE TOUR training program was developed to support women entrepreneurs in the tourism sector in the Black Sea region, based on the research findings. The training program is designed to further enhance their business skills and marketing abilities, enabling them to effectively manage and grow their tourism businesses while promoting the Black Sea region as an attractive tourist destination, utilizing digital technologies and innovative marketing tools.

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The training program is divided into two main modules, including five (5) modules each. The first module, "Marketing and Management in Tourism," is designed to provide women who are engaged in or interested in the tourism sector with the necessary skills to enhance the competitiveness of their tourism businesses. The emphasis is on the quality of their offerings, communication, and marketing strategies. This module includes sub-modules related to tourism management, tourism promotion, international tourism marketing, digital marketing for sustainable development, and tour operating.

The second module, "Strategies and Policies in Tourism," is designed to engage policymakers and professionals in the tourism sector with a range of topics related to achieving sustainable tourism. This module comprises five sub-modules covering the understanding of tourism and its statistics, the development of new and innovative tourism policies, vertical and horizontal collaboration among all stakeholders, building entrepreneurial tourism skills, and leveraging local advantages for destination development and involving local communities in the process.

The training program has been tested and applied on a pilot basis during local educational workshops in all partner countries, including Greece. It has been designed by professionals with relevant skills and experience in social communication, business development, and local policies.

"We are thrilled to launch this innovative training program for female entrepreneurs in the tourism sector in the Black Sea region," stated the partners of the WE TOUR project. "Our goal is to empower female entrepreneurs with the essential skills and capabilities for managing and developing their businesses and to promote the Black Sea region as an attractive tourist destination, utilizing digital technologies and innovative marketing tools."

For more information about the WE TOUR training program, please visit the project's website at <https://wetourproject.com/> or directly contact the project partners.

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