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Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

PRESS RELEASE – WESKILL PROJECT

“Wellness and Spa Tourism Sectoral Skills’ Development” (WeSkill)

*An innovative programme, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union
KA2: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices - Sector Skills Alliances*

Duration: 36 months

Start date: November 01, 2020

FEMTEC as a Worldwide umbrella organization is involved in the project for dissemination and promotion activities.

"The true voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands, but in having new eyes."

(Marcel Proust)

A consortium consisting of 19 Academic and Professional Institutions and 23 Associated Partners from 8 countries of the European Community (Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia, Slovenia, Netherlands, Greece, France and Serbia), coordinated by the Institute for Training of Personnel in International Organisations –ITPIO (<https://www.wellto.eu>), Sofia (Bulgaria) has begun the operational work on the project "Wellness and Spa Tourism Sectoral Skills' Development" (WeSkill), co-funded by the EU under the Erasmus+ program.

The work plan is part of the strategies of the The European Parliament (Joint motion for a resolution – 2020 June, 15) which points out “the importance of health tourism, comprising medical, wellness and spa tourism; calls on the Commission to promote, when appropriate, European health prevention, balneology, sustainable and mountain medical tourism; highlights the need for further investment in improving the sustainable tourism infrastructure, and the importance of enhanced visibility for European resorts for spa and wellness tourism; calls on the Commission to make provision for further science-based funding opportunities, as medical tourism may help to reduce health costs through prevention measures and lower pharmaceutical consumption, and would further improve sustainability and labour quality”.

In addition, it aims to become an operational response to the serious economic/ social issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

“A challenging and innovative program with the aim not only to acquire a general picture of the situation in the sector but to propose concrete operational proposals in the field of training and qualification of personnel and accreditation of curricula in a European vision with interesting spin-

offs for employment”: says Ludmil Kovachev, Executive Director of ITPIO and Coordinator of WeSkill Project.

The mobility of people, in fact, has been one of the main features of the current era. According to the forecasts of the UNWTO (WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION) in 2020 the number of international travelers was expected to far exceed one billion people, but the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic is having a drastic impact on international tourism globally. Presently, according to new UNWTO estimates, international tourism flows in 2020 fall by between 58 and 78 percent, compared to the previous year. For the OECD, the drop is between 45 and 70 percent.

There is notable increase in the wellness tourism in recent years, seen in huge investments and economic change, which the Global Wellness Institute estimates to over 4 trillion dollars.

The value of the health and wellness market in Western Europe has increased substantially between 2013 and 2018. At the beginning of the period observed, the health and wellness market valued approximately 126 billion euro and increased to around 149 billion euro in 2018. The health and wellness market in Eastern Europe experienced a similar increase in market value, increasing from approximately 22 billion euros in 2013 to 30.5 billion in 2018. The health and wellness trend has continued to grow across Europe as more individuals realize the importance of leading a healthy and active lifestyle.

The main challenge in the further development of the wellness tourism in response to the growing interest of tourists, as well as of the demand for wellness packages that include diversity of services, is availability of qualified staff.

All categories of partners who participate in this project (representative organizations, sectoral umbrella organization, qualification authorities, VET providers) are key actors in modernization and development of VET and new sector skills in their respective countries and implement main project activities on a regular basis.

The project's main objective is to be designed transnational curricula and respective training content in wellness and spa tourism sector. There will be developed 5 transnational modular curricula based on learning outcomes for learners at EQF 4 and companies' employees occupying EQF 4 related qualifications.

Equipping VET students and adults/employees from the sector being trainees with the missing skills, by using a strong modern personalized didactic tool (multilingual training mobile app), the WeSkill project will try to make wellness and spa tourism sector more appealing, sustainable, advanced and competitive in the EU area.

The WeSkill project was preceded by another project in the sector – WellTo – Present Stakeholders for Future Wellness Tourism Skills' Development. There was designed by the WellTo project, for the first time in the wellness tourism sector, a joint qualification – Administrator of Wellness Center (EQF 4). During the project's research phase, communicating with more than 260 wellness tourism sector's representatives (VET providers, companies, sectoral organisations, employees in companies from the sector) there was undoubtedly defined that the fast growing wellness and spa tourism sector highly demands on development of new curricula and learning materials for

improvement of some of the most important employees' skills as well as for acquiring of new modern skills in support to the sectoral dynamics and its raising importance for the national economies. Many of the involved in the WellTo project implementation sectoral stakeholders also stated their readiness to support future initiatives aimed at improvement and modernisation of the employees' skills from the sector as well as at equipping the VET students with adequate to the labour markets' needs skills which will allow their easier and more effective entrance on the world of the real business.

The Wskill project' s main objectives are:

- ✓ To be designed transnational curricula and respective training content in wellness and spa tourism sector;
- ✓ Equipping VET students and adults/employees from the sector being trainees with the missing skills, by using a strong modern personalized didactic tool (multilingual training mobile app);
- ✓ There will be developed 5 transnational modular curricula based on learning outcomes for learners at EQF 4 and companies' employees occupying EQF 4 related qualifications.

The Wskill roject results include:

- ✓ Report on findings of skills gaps research in existing data sources (desk research) in the 7 participating countries and in addition in 4 EU countries beyond the partnership;
- ✓ Development of complete, transferable and "ready to use" 5 curricula;
- ✓ Involvement of all key stakeholders' representatives in consultation workshops aimed at validation of the curricula developed;
- ✓ Creating and adopt/transfer/localize learning materials (handbook, exercises, simulations, tests);
- ✓ Performing national pilot trainings covering 2 target groups;
- ✓ Conducting Curricula implementation workshops in all 7 project countries;
- ✓ Development of a specific mobile app for support of the training modules;
- ✓ Establishment of non-formal new Sectoral Alliance on VET excellence in wellness and spa tourism.

"This program is also a great challenge for the world of balneology for a serious resetting, says Prof Umberto Solimene, President of FEMTEC, and the Federation a Worldwide umbrella organization being involved in the project as a partner will foster and help to enable project aims and outputs to be realized and widely disseminated (id. as good practices, info for support of social dialogue activities, as questionnaires to get specific topic feedback etc.) among their members (national employers' organizations), most of which are sectoral social partners. FEMTEC takes part on different EU and worldwide meetings and events, so FEMTEC-can therefore facilitate an active and strong sectoral project promotion and support of project results."