

Skills development strategy for the tourism sector in the Republic of Serbia



Skills development strategy for the tourism sector in the Republic of Serbia

Belgrade, 2024



**International
Labour
Organization**

This strategy document has been published with the support of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The responsibility for the opinions expressed in this document rests solely with the authors. The ILO takes no responsibility for the correctness, accuracy or reliability of any of the materials, information or opinions expressed in this document.

Acknowledgements

The Serbian Association of Employers (SAE) expresses its gratitude to Dr. Blagica Novkovska and Dr. Dusan Borovcanin for their work in preparing this strategy document. For their technical assistance and guidance throughout the process, special thanks are also extended to Mrs. Alessandra Molz, Skills and Employability Specialist, and Mrs. Iulia Drumea, Senior Specialist for Employers' Activities at the ILO DWT/CO Office for Central and Eastern Europe.

We would also like to acknowledge Mr. Nikola Miljanic for his graphic design work, and Mrs. Jelena Jokanovic for her translation of the strategy.

Finally, we express our sincere appreciation to all stakeholders— representatives of the hotel business, public educational institutions, trade unions, ministries, and other relevant public institutions—who generously contributed their time and expertise to the development of this strategy.

Contents

1. Introduction	6
1.1. The need for a skills strategy for the tourism sector	6
1.2. Sector definition and scope	6
1.3. Objectives and scope of the strategy	7
2. Brief profile and analysis of the tourism sector	9
2.1. Economic and labour force profiles	9
2.2. Drivers of change, catalysts, main trends and their projected impact on employment	10
2.3. Sector growth forecast	10
2.4. Labour force growth and development	11
3. Main occupations, key skills and career pathways	12
4. Vision for the future of the sector	15
5. Business capacity gaps	17
5.1. The implications of business capacity gaps for skills development	17
5.2. Main occupations affected	18
6. Current offer for skills development	20
6.1. Adult education: Key training providers and programmes relevant for the sector	20
6.2. Data on TVET enrolment and completion of relevant training courses	22
6.3. Labour shortages	24
6.4. Skills shortages: Relevance and quality of existing skills, skills gaps, and emerging skills	24
6.5. Key supply-side challenges and constraints	25
6.6. Cooperation between employers and education providers	27
7. Recommendations for implementing systemic sector priorities: Priority skills needs and shortages	29
7.1. Which occupations and skills are needed and where?	29
7.2. Who will deliver and how?	29
8. What next: Sectoral plan implementation	31
8.1. Recommended actions for resolving priority needs	31
8.2. Recommended actions for addressing system-level priorities	31
9. Glossary of terms	33

1. Introduction

1.1. The need for a skills strategy for the tourism sector

The Serbian tourism sector shows a promising potential for growth, with the country offering visitors a rich cultural history, spa and alpine resorts, vibrant cities and untouched eco-tourism destinations. The latest trends show an increase in total arrivals and overnight stays by domestic and foreign holidaymakers, and Serbia can expect an increasing number of tourists in the upcoming years.

The Government of Serbia has had a Tourism Development Strategy in place for the period 2016–2025, which incorporates efforts to boost the sector through agricultural, rural, cultural and sustainable urban development, coupled with a marketing component. However, the strategy does not take into account the need for sectoral growth to be accompanied by the development of human resources and their professional competences. As a result, the lack of a qualified and specialized workforce risks becoming an obstacle for the Serbian tourism sector in the event of rapid growth, especially regarding tourist accommodation in rural areas.

To address this challenge, the Serbian Association of Employers (SAE) sought support from the International Labour Organization (ILO) to tackle the pressing skills deficit in the tourism sector. In response, the ILO assisted the SAE in launching a comprehensive initiative that engaged a broad range of stakeholders from across the sector. Applying its Skills for Trade and Economic Diversification (STED) methodology,¹ the ILO facilitated the development of a skills strategy for the tourism sector, with a particular emphasis on the hotel industry, which is dominant in the sector. This collaborative effort aimed to identify capacity gaps, forecast future skills needs and guide the development of human resources to support the sector's continued growth.

1.2. Sector definition and scope

Different definitions of the tourism sector reflect its various aspects and activities. According to the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat), tourism is defined as *"the activity of visitors taking a trip to a main destination outside their usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose, including business, leisure or other personal purpose, other than to be employed by a resident entity in the place visited"*.

Eurostat tourism statistics includes two main components relating to:

- ▶ **Tourist accommodation capacity and occupancy:** capacity data relate primarily to the number of establishments and number of bed places, while occupancy data relate to the number of arrivals and number of nights spent in establishments.
- ▶ **Tourism trips:** this data refers to the number of tourists and completed tourist trips broken down by main trip characteristics including destination, duration, mode of transportation or costs, as well as by socio-demographic characteristics like the age and gender of tourists.

Several sets of indicators are covered by the sector definition above. Available relevant sets of indicators for Serbia were used in the analysis providing the basis for this strategy. For the purposes of this strategy the sector is associated with branch 55 of the Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community (NACE Rev. 2). This division is a subsector of sector I — Accommodation and food service activities of the Nomenclature of Economic Activities (NACE), as well as of the International Standard Industrial Classification of all economic activities of United Nations (ISIC Rev. 4).

A complete list of economic activities in division 55 of NACE Rev. 2 is given below. In comparison, ISIC Rev. 4 codes are given in parallel (table 1).

¹ "Skills for Trade and Economic Diversification" (STED) is an ILO program for identifying skill development strategies required for future success in international trade and growing sectors with potential for decent employment. A "rapid" STED analysis refers to a shortened approach that culminates with the development of a sectoral skills strategy but does not include ILO support for implementation of the identified priorities.

Table 1. List of business activities in the tourism sector

NACE Rev. 2				* part of
Division	Group	Class	Activity description	ISIC Rev. 4
55			Accommodation	
	55.1		Hotels and similar accommodation	
		55.10	Hotels and similar accommodation	5510*
	55.2		Holiday and other short-stay accommodation	
		55.20	Holiday and other short-stay accommodation	5510*
	55.3		Camping grounds, recreational vehicle parks and trailer parks	
		55.30	Camping grounds, recreational vehicle parks and trailer parks	5520
	55.9		Other accommodation	
		55.90	Other accommodation	5590

Source: EUROSTAT NACE Rev. 2 - Statistical classification of economic activities.
dd5443f5-b886-40e4-920d-9df03590ff91 (europa.eu)

1.3. Objectives and scope of the strategy

This strategy, developed through a collaboration between the SAE and the ILO, aims to help Serbia's tourism sector identify capacity gaps, forecast skills needs and prioritize actions to develop human resources that will drive the sector's growth.

As the contribution of the tourism sector to Serbia's GDP and exports steadily increases, alongside a growing workforce, skills development has become critical for sector growth and diversification. However, the sector faces multiple challenges including adequately anticipating and meeting the skills needs of new and rapidly growing tourist destinations and adapting to the introduction of new technologies.

To address these challenges, a methodical approach (the ILO STED methodology) was applied to identify the skills needs in the sector and to determine how these should be developed through technical vocational education and training (TVET) as well as through targeted training and reskilling programmes. Emphasis is placed on the need to develop practical skills over theoretical knowledge. For example, an understanding of client preferences and satisfaction – and the related communication skills and flexibility – are integral elements of professional competence in this sector. Keeping this in mind requires a practical approach to training that incorporates real-life applications. An adequate and continuous adaptation capacity of the education and training system is central to meet these needs in the short and medium term.

This skills development strategy for the tourism sector in the Republic of Serbia is a stepping-stone to understanding the anticipated skills requirements of the sector. A comprehensive research and consultation process (diagnostic study) was conducted prior to the strategy's development to fully understand the sector's specific needs and shape actionable strategies to address them.

As a first step, the SAE, in collaboration with the ILO, conducted a diagnostic background study to anticipate future skills deficits in the tourism sector, with a focus on the hotel industry. This research drew on available statistical data and studies and was further informed by a survey of 269 employers conducted in early 2023. Additionally, extensive interviews with various stakeholders provided deeper insights into patterns identified

from the survey data. The results of this research were discussed during a skills needs foresight workshop held in September 2023, which concluded in the prioritization of areas for intervention.

The input from the diagnostic study and the workshop informed the development of the skills strategy, which was validated in January 2024 at an event attended by a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives of hotels and other companies in the tourism sector. The strategy outlines, alongside other related factors, the proposed roles of different actors, responsibilities and institutional arrangements, and identifies gaps in business capacities and how these reflect on the provision of appropriate skills.

The development of such skills anticipation exercises should not remain a one-time exercise. Stakeholders in the tourism sector, public and private institutions, companies and sectorial institutions need to join forces to regularly conduct such exercises in the years ahead.

2. Brief profile and analysis of the tourism sector

2.1. Economic and labour force profiles

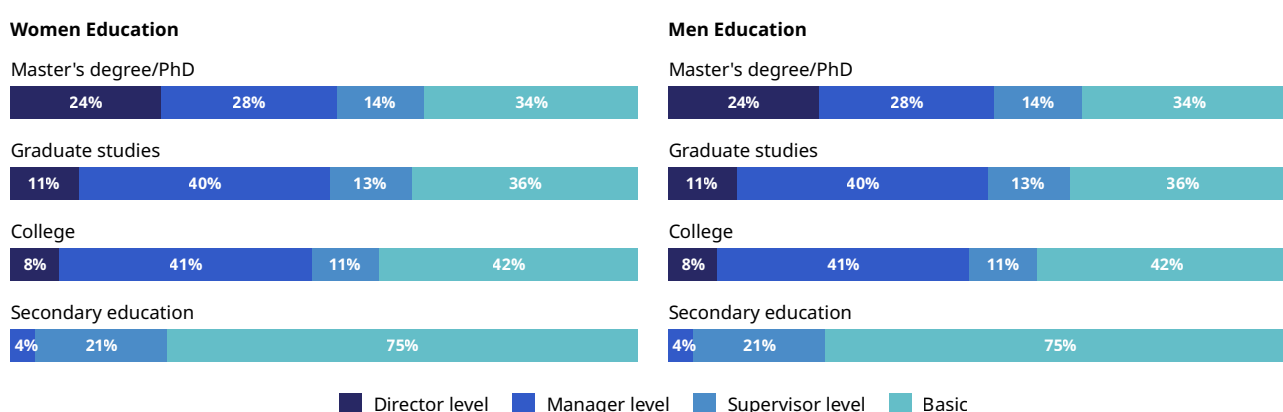
Tourism is an important economic branch in Serbia. Thus, the participation of the tourism sector (Division 55: Accommodation) in total GDP in 2022 was 0.53 per cent. The share of the sector in total employment in 2022 was 0.52 per cent. The share of the number of the sector's employees in total employment shows continuous growth. This means that the importance of tourism will continue to grow, underpinning the need for well-designed promotion and support for sector development.

Although the growth of wages in the sector is steady, it lags behind the growth of average wages in Serbia. This is related to the qualification structure of employees in the tourism sector, which does not progress as quickly as in sectors involving a higher concentration of knowledge, such as IT. Thus, the structure of occupations in the tourism sector in Serbia is dominated by basic occupations such as: housekeepers (25 per cent), front desk clerks (18 per cent) and hotel kitchen assistants (14 per cent).

Based on a survey, conducted during the diagnostic phase (resulting in a diagnostic study) inequalities were observed in Serbia's hotels regarding the treatment of employees based on gender and level of education. Although on average the female respondents had attained a higher education level (figure 1), there is a clear difference in the distribution when observing the roles that they perform in relation to their gender and level of education.

Some 75 per cent of women with high school education work in basic positions, while only 45 per cent of men with the same level of education are employed in the same level of jobs. Exactly 18 per cent of men with secondary education are employed in supervisory positions, while only 11 per cent of women with the same education are engaged in the same jobs. Only 4 per cent of all women with secondary education occupy managerial positions, in contrast to 37 per cent of men. No directors (general managers) in the sample have completed only secondary education. When it comes to persons holding vocational college degrees, 41 per cent of women work in basic positions, while the percentage of men performing the same roles is only 16 per cent. Twenty-nine per cent of men with vocational college degrees work in supervisory positions, in contrast to 11 per cent of women. This clear difference was confirmed through research, even when factoring in length of work experience, hotel type or location.

Figure 1. Research results on education levels and job positions, by gender



Source: Survey data from the diagnostic study.

2.2. Drivers of change, catalysts, main trends and their projected impact on employment

Explicit **political will** in Serbia is driving an effort to promote the country as a global tourist destination based on its attractions and a specific pairing of diverse services.

The second driver is **international competition** with other Balkan countries and Turkey, some of which offer numerous attractive seaside destinations. Only through a diversified offer can Serbia propel itself onto the international stage as an equal or better alternative to well-known regional destinations.

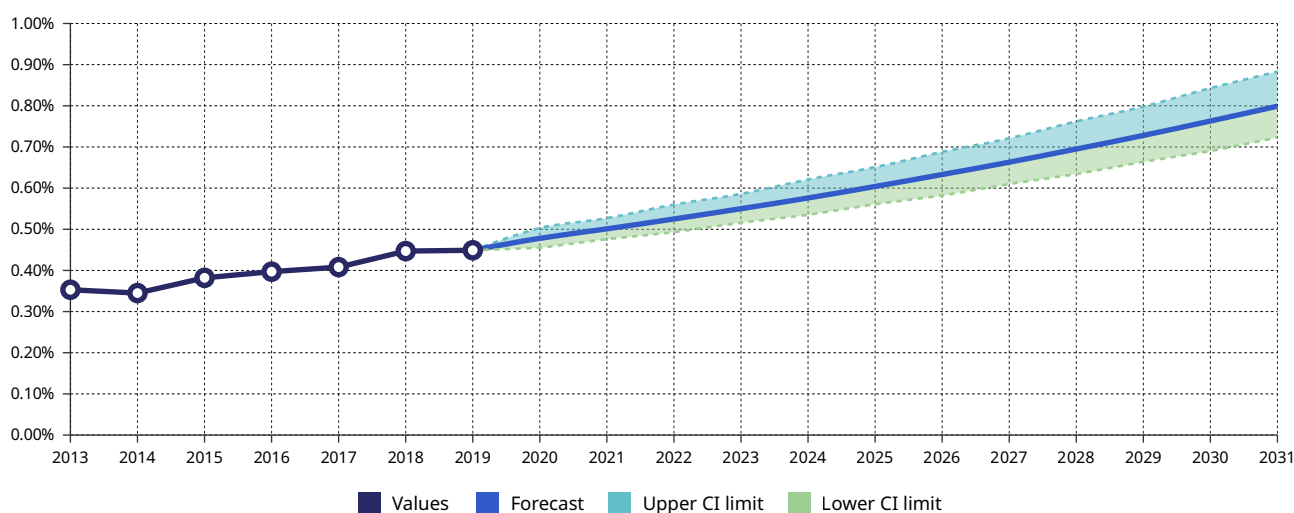
An **intensive process of opening up Serbia** has encouraged a flow of international tourism, increasing the number of visitors traveling to Serbia to experience its unique attractions. This momentum should be harnessed to encourage a sustained growth in tourism in the next medium-term period.

The **Open Balkan initiative** is leading to better neighbourly relations in the region; it aims to increase the unobstructed movement of labour, people and goods, and enable closer regional cooperation. This, in turn, leads to the creation of an international common market that can provide a more diverse and better offer in the tourism sector, as well as a markedly greater number of users of tourist services. The Open Balkan initiative may have a positive impact on workers and employers, increase labour market competition and provide workers with the necessary skills for employment in the tourism sector.

2.3. Sector growth forecast

The following forecast on the future development of the tourism sector as a share of total GDP for the long term until 2031 is produced in line with a scenario based on exponential growth observed immediately before the Covid-19 pandemic (figure 2). It is expected that the share of the tourism sector in total GDP will be almost doubled by the beginning of the next decade and reach a level of around 0.8 per cent of total GDP. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is significant potential for further growth of the tourism sector accompanied by an increase of its share in total GDP.

Figure 2. Forecast of tourism sector share in the total GDP until 2031

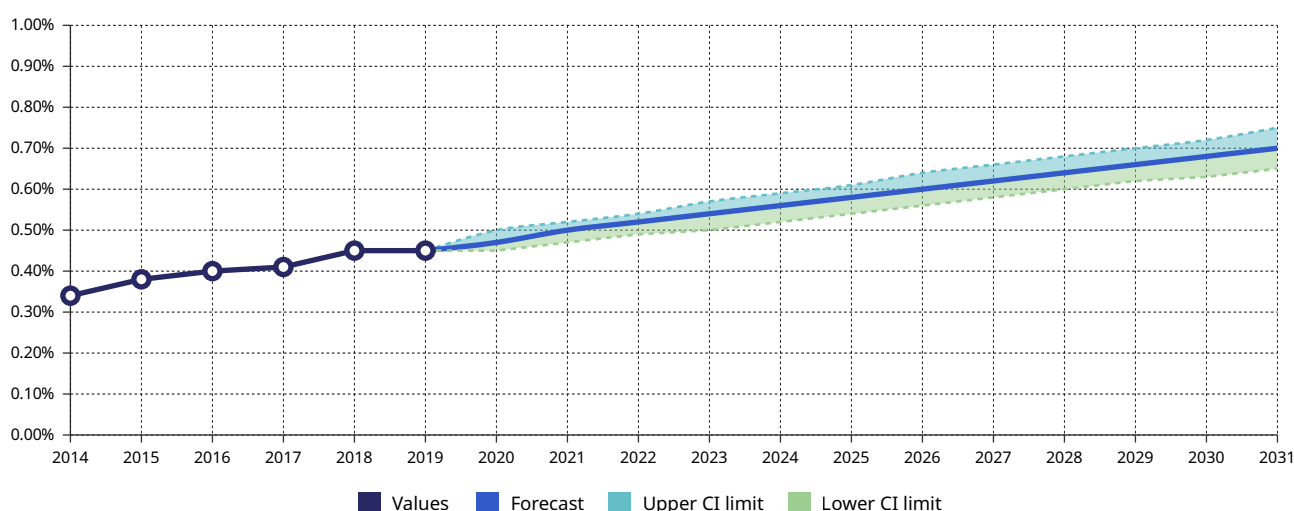


Source: Authors' calculation on the basis of data received from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.

2.4. Labour force growth and development

A forecast for the development and growth of the labour force until 2031 is shown in figure 3. In addition to the main line (thick line), lines for the upper confidence interval limit and for the lower confidence interval limit are indicated. It is expected that the share of employees in tourism in the total number of employees will double by the beginning of the next decade (from 0.45% in 2020 to 0.7% in 2031).

Figure 3. Forecast of the future share of tourism employees in the total number of employees until 2031



Source: Authors' calculation on the basis of data received from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.

3. Main occupations, key skills and career pathways

The main occupations in the sector are distributed across a wide range of levels. This range also enables career development under certain conditions from the lowest (operational) to the highest (management) levels, through gaining experience, lifelong learning and specialized or additional training. Career development opportunities in the sector contribute to employees' motivation to work for a company over the long term when they perceive their job as promising, with opportunities for career advancement and continuous wage growth.

Based on the rapid STED diagnostic study, the skills foresight workshop and a supplementary survey conducted in early 2023, it can be concluded that 96 per cent of current and 97 per cent of new employees expected in the medium term will belong to the occupations identified below. The following thus can be considered as the main key occupations for the tourism and hotel sector.

Key occupations

- ▶ Hotel operations manager
- ▶ Sales and marketing director
- ▶ Advertising and marketing specialist
- ▶ Front desk manager
- ▶ Front desk clerk
- ▶ Chef
- ▶ Director of housekeeping
- ▶ Hotel housekeeper
- ▶ Hotel kitchen assistant

Within these main occupations, ranging from front desk clerks and chefs to marketing specialists and operations directors, diverse sets of priority skills can be identified.

The key existing skills identified are agility, analytical skills, communication skills, courtesy, digital and technological skills, discretion, effective problem-solving, flexibility, general awareness, inter-departmental coordination, language skills, motivational skills, negotiation skills, organizational skills, prioritization, risk management, stress management, teamwork and time management. Communication skills are critical in customer-facing positions such as front desk clerks and front of house servers, emphasising the importance of creating positive guest experiences. In addition, skills such as inter-departmental coordination and risk management highlight the need for a well-rounded skill set to navigate a complex and dynamic environment.

In addition to these skills, which are emphasized as the most important, skills that are likely to become more important are: analytical skills, crisis management, digital competences, social skills, a willingness for lifelong learning and working under pressure.

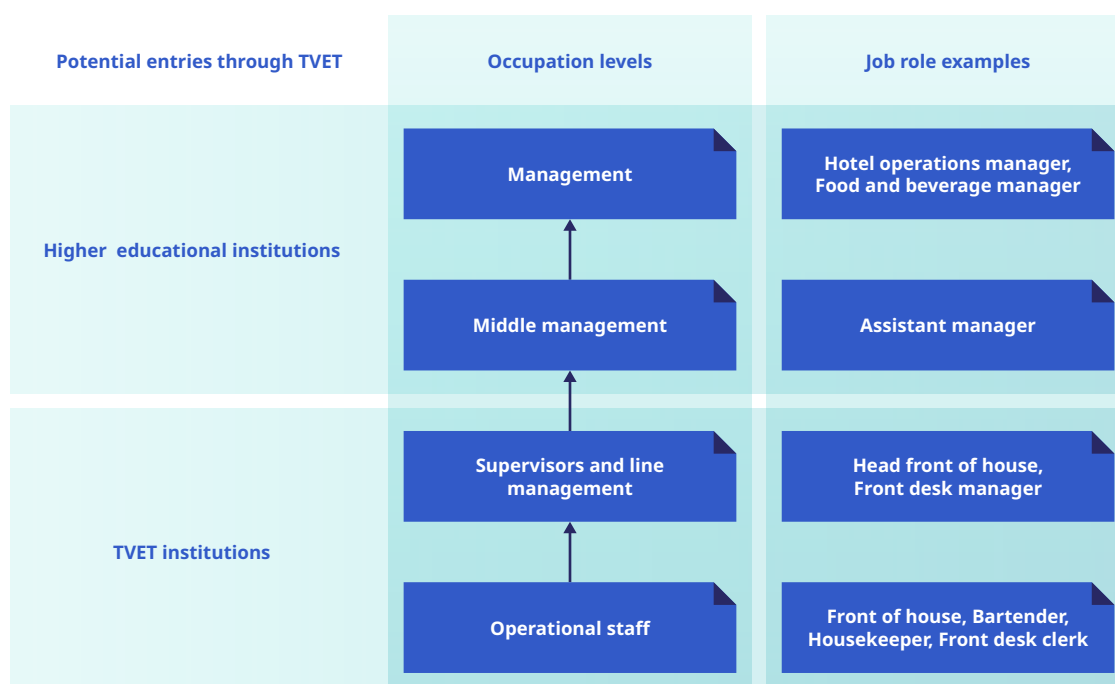
The diagram in figure 4a presents a map of occupations in the tourism sector in Serbia, with expected career development opportunities. Solid arrows indicate expected possible transitions to higher positions based on work experience. The map indicates the different opportunities for career development in management positions, while the career development opportunities for basic positions are very limited. However, due to the similar nature of jobs, including the same type of users and services, there is a possibility for career development following the acquisition of further education. Such transitions are shown in the diagram by dashed arrows.

Figure 4a. Map of occupations and career development paths in the tourism sector in Serbia



Source: Authors' presentation based on the diagnostic study and the foresight workshop.

The links in Figure 4a between entry into higher-level occupations demonstrate the importance of education and training and the pivotal role of educational planning to achieve strategic skills development objectives in Serbia's tourism sector.

Figure 4b. Expected progression through occupation levels in the Serbian tourism sector

Source: Authors' presentation based on the diagnostic study and the foresight workshop.

Figure 4b presents the expected professional progression through different education levels for Serbia's tourism sector. Potential entry points are linked to education levels, moving upwards and starting from TVET² degrees. Entry after completing general education is shown by arrows in the left column. The corresponding occupational levels are shown in the middle column. In the rightmost column, examples of equivalent occupations are given for each occupational level. The figure is simplified to display the development of qualification-related interventions that could ensure a steady supply of skills and workers for existing and emerging occupations and support Serbia's competitiveness in the tourism sector, vis-à-vis established tourism industries in neighbouring countries. The development of a new qualifications structure should be one of the foundations for faster development of and higher revenues from Serbia's tourism sector.

2 TVET – Technical Vocational Education and Training.

4. Vision for the future of the sector

A handful of strategic documents provide a window into the future of Serbia's tourism sector, including a view on the sector's importance for overall economic development and another view on human resource development.

The current Tourism Development Strategy was adopted in late 2016. This strategy remains valid until 2026 and develops a vision of tourism and hotel industry in Serbia until 2025. The main elements are listed below:

- ▶ *In 2025, the Republic of Serbia will become a globally recognized tourism destination, based on a strategic approach for the sector's development, sustainable resource management and the coordination of activities among all main stakeholders participating in the development of the tourism industry.*
- ▶ *Tourism and its related activities will become one of the dominant economic sectors, effectively providing new added value and sustainable employment and contributing significantly to local and regional development.*
- ▶ *Tourism will become the leading promoter of Serbia's image in the world as a modern and desirable destination for leisure, holidays and business.*
- ▶ *Given its continuous modernization, and the acceptance and adoption of global business and management standards and models, tourism will become the preferred sector for employment and career development, particularly for young people.*
- ▶ *The Republic of Serbia will become a popular, high-ranking and competitive global destination.*

In line with the vision of the Serbian tourism strategy, a total of eight objectives were produced for 2025:

1. Raise the share of hotels and similar catering facilities in total accommodation capacity to 50 per cent
2. Reach a total occupancy of accommodation capacity (accommodation units) of 30 per cent
3. Increase tourist influx up to three times, or at least by 50 per cent, by 2025
4. Increase unit expenditure of tourists (per night) by 50 per cent
5. Increase the share of inbound tourists' overnights to 45 per cent by 2020 and to 55 per cent by 2025
6. Double the direct share of tourism in Serbia's GDP
7. Increase the amount of direct employment in the tourism industry by at least 50 per cent and increase employment in tourism and complementary activities up to three times
8. Grow direct investments

Although a few of these objectives are unspecific – such as “grow direct investments” (it is not specified in which areas or what types of products, facilities and so on) or “increase employment up to three times” – most of them have clear indicators that enable monitoring of the progress throughout implementation. To support the achievement of these objectives, the strategy provides a set of prioritized tourism products.

In accordance with the Tourism Strategy, a Strategic Tourism Marketing Plan (Strategic Marketing Plan 2021) was drafted and consequently adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic (five years after adoption of the Tourism Development Strategy). This plan contains an analysis of the current state of tourism marketing at home and in competing countries, presents best practices and offers an analysis of current tourism marketing challenges and opportunities in Serbia. It outlines strategic goals of Serbia's tourism marketing and includes a marketing plan that contains a proposal for new airline connections between Serbia and strategic markets, a plan for tourism products and a plan to brand Serbia as a major tourist destination. In addition, it also defines five key tourism products in Serbia:

1. Alpine breaks
2. City Breaks
3. Festivals and events
4. MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions)
5. Spa and wellness tourism

Based on this, we can extrapolate that the largest number of activities in the tourism and hotel industry in the upcoming period – and therefore the highest number of employees who will be hired accordingly – will focus on service providers who participate in the process of meeting the listed tourist needs, both in large cities and in mountainous and spa centres. Guests are increasingly demanding, and their happiness can only be guaranteed with high-quality services based on exceptional standards and delivered by employees who are fully prepared.

During the rapid STED foresight workshop in September 2023, participants defined the following vision for the tourism sector and hotel industry within the framework of this project in the following way:

“We strive to create a highly standardized sector based on an efficient legal system, and which provides high-quality services based on use of modern technologies to satisfy guest and employee demands.”

However, workshop participants stated that the education and training of qualified professionals as well as staff development in this sector are poorly outlined, exactly by the strategic documents (Tourism Development Strategy and Strategic Marketing Plan) that provide some information about the requisite knowledge and skills. For this vision to be achievable, it is necessary to create a new strategy that would establish a list of priority skills aligned with the specific needs of the hotel industry.

5. Business capacity gaps

As part of the foresight workshop organized by the Serbian Association of Employers and the International Labour Organization in September 2023, participants were asked to identify key capacity gaps experienced by businesses in the tourism sector, to analyse the implications of these gaps affecting business performance, identify occupations particularly affected by skills gaps and explore the current status of skills supply – existing training and upskilling programmes and their quality – to remedy these skills gaps.

The exercise served to deepen the understanding of workshop participants about the challenges faced by the hotel sector in Serbia. Workshop participants identified a number of key problems, in particular in relation to human resource management, which in turn has important implications on workforce skills. Firstly, they noticed the lack of – or poor familiarity with – certain skills (such as recruitment and selection of new employees, communication, sales, networking and relationship marketing) as well as a lack of capacity to transfer them to others. This can lead to a lack of minimum competencies for entry-level positions (guest relationship specialist, receptionist, front of house server, sales specialist and so forth). As a consequence, the onboarding process for new workers can take several months, potentially leading to a loss of motivation among workers. In addition, workshop participants also identified shortcomings related to communication, the recruitment process and time management skills.

The lack of skills for the identification, selection and workplace integration of guest workers was also recognized as a problem. Another type of skill set related to hotel staff's capacity to successfully advertise and improve the image of their site, in particular when using information and communication technologies, the preferred source of information for new generations of travellers when choosing a destination.

Efficient planning and management of hotel resources constitute another critical skill set. Serbia faces a disproportion between available hotel facilities, especially accommodation capacities, and real market needs. This has wider implications on employees' everyday work. Inadequate infrastructure, including hotel design and construction, may compound a situation where the hotel sector cannot fully accommodate market demand on the one hand, and a non-optimal and inefficient management of hotel resources and capacities on the other.

Another problem is a failure by hotel management to properly implement legal regulations. This leads to non-compliance with service quality standards, which, in turn, can negatively affect the reputation and competitiveness of the hotel sector. Overall, this influences both efficient human resource management and service quality.

Improving the integration and use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in hotel business operations was also highlighted. Integrations can improve various aspects of a hotel's operations, including guest services, occupancy and reception. Faster and easier services with the help of ICT can increase guest satisfaction and improve a hotel's competitive advantage.

According to workshop participants, such a list of limitations and implications clearly indicates the need for fundamental reforms and improvements in Serbia's hotel sector in order to improve the quality of services, efficiently manage resources and achieve a greater competitive advantage in the tourism market.

To solve these issues, the workshop participants created a package of actions and initiatives that include a training provision by a combination of training providers, human resource development academies of hotel chains and consultants. They suggested introducing authentic practical lessons during studies and recruiting lecturers from the business sector who can transfer real-world experiences to students. Analysing guest comments and ratings to feed into training programmes and curricula was mentioned as a useful approach.

5.1. The implications of business capacity gaps for skills development

While the current skills of the sector's workforce remain relevant, improvement and alignment with market demand is a precondition for Serbia's growing tourism sector. At the foresight workshop, participants underlined the necessity for more intensive practical work during studies and vocational training, including dual education and workplace training specific to the hotel sector. They also highlighted how the government plays an important role in promoting training and education and improving the qualifications of sector staff.

One of the main shortcomings lies in human resource management and an absence of a human resources department in many hotels, in particular small and medium-sized hotels. Many employees are missing a basket of necessary skills, whether they be analytical, digital, recruitment and onboarding or social based. On the

one hand, the individuals' existing skills are often unrecognized; on the other hand, they may be insufficient. Haphazard hiring affects all occupations, especially frontline staff who interact the most with guests (front desk clerk, reservation manager and so forth).

The quality of services also may suffer without an update to skills such as communication, crisis management, customer service, foreign language(s), holistic thinking, proactivity and problem-solving. Poor-quality service can have an impact on all occupations in the hotel industry. Both short informal education trainings and on-the-job knowledge transfer by sector managers are immediate remedies to improve knowledge and performance.

As previously mentioned, there is a disproportion between existing hotel facilities and real needs (from the aspect of accommodation capacity, for example). Marketing is weak, and compliance with legal regulations is not properly implemented. This leads to non-compliance with defined quality standards, insufficient compliance with infrastructure requirements, which compounds in difficulties positioning Serbia's hotels on the international market and maintaining quality service. The defined implications for skills are as follows: insufficient development of skills; inadequate hotel planning and infrastructure that hamper the daily activities of its workers; inadequate staffing caused by poor planning as to the type and size of hotel.

An overview of business capacity gaps and corresponding skills gaps is presented in table 2.

Table 2. Business capacity and skills gaps

Business capacity gaps	Skill gaps
Transformation of HR departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Human resources management ▶ Human resources selection ▶ Planning and organization of necessary trainings
High-quality service assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Sales and management skills ▶ Understanding the complexities of the whole hotel industry
The need for ICT integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Direct marketing (by email or social media) ▶ Data analysis and basic knowledge of data interpretation ▶ Use of social media for networking, customer relations ▶ Use of digital user management tools
The need for more higher-end hotels, as well as better services in hotels to receive higher-end category awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Creativity and innovation ▶ Willingness to learn ▶ Communication skills ▶ Leadership

Source: Authors' presentation based on the diagnostic study and the skills foresight workshop.

5.2. Main occupations affected

Occupations identified as affected by these gaps are human resources staff and also front desk clerks, front of house servers and other basic positions. In particular, labour shortages were identified for entry-level positions such as receptionists, front of house servers, line cooks and housekeepers among others. However, a serious skills shortage has been identified in relation to communication, sales and time management, which is the result of an inadequately trained workforce in the labour market. There is also a noticeable lack of knowledge and skills transfer, which leads to lower service performance for front of house servers and front desk clerks. Of note, the onboarding process may take several months, potentially leading to low morale and high turnover rates.

1. Technical/specialized occupations

Based on consultations with interested parties, the supply of qualified workers/graduates for technical/specialized occupations has mostly corresponded to demand. This means that the current number of national qualifications for specific occupations in the tourism sector meets demand. The qualifications of tourism technician and tourism-hotel technician are important for the sector. However, there is an increasing need for event managers as an emerging occupation. In addition, the cluster manager is emerging as a new specialized occupation in hotels as a result of mergers and acquisitions in the sector.

2. General occupations

On the contrary, the supply of workers in occupations for basic positions (such as housekeeper or janitor) is insufficient. Low wages and few opportunities for career development play a role in this shortage. Higher wages for specific positions, special awards and scholarships for obtaining a higher educational degree towards career advancement could incentivize these roles.

6. Current offer for skills development

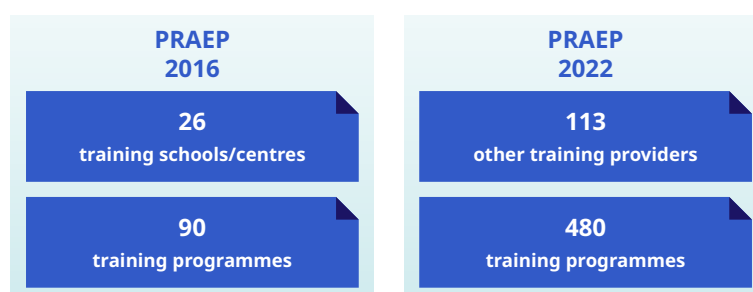
The current skills offer is divided into (1) adult education – upskilling and retraining opportunities for existing workers and unemployed – (2) vocational education and training for initial vocational education and (3) training for young people who take part in a learning programme to obtain a full occupation. Here, “adult education” refers only to people above the age of 15, 17 or 18 who have completed primary or secondary education, including TVET, and are either working or unemployed. This section first will look at the offer for adult education and further below at the offer for TVET. Accredited programmes are provided by vocational schools and other providers (business associations, companies, institutes, national workers’ universities and so on). A large percentage of programmes is developed in cooperation with local employers and social partners, with the aim of responding to the demands of the local labour market. According to collected data, the trainings planned and implemented by Publicly Recognized Adult Education Providers (PRAEP) in 2022 are mostly attended by: natural persons (58.33 per cent), private and public companies’ employees (36 per cent) and persons from the National Employment Service (NES) registry (4.5 per cent).

6.1. Adult education: Key training providers and programmes relevant for the sector

On the basis of available information, skills development and training for adults is implemented at the national level through:

1. The implementation of programmes for and acquisition of competences and qualifications by unemployed and employed persons as organized by PRAEP (figure 5);
2. Implementation of informal adult education and training activities and programmes by NES, together with other national authorities and institutions, associations and chambers, help both employed and unemployed persons acquire competences of importance for personal and professional development, employment, career management and making of decisions on future education and employment options.

Figure 5. Growth and structure of publicly recognized adult education providers



Source: Annual Report on the Implementation of the Adult Education Plan in the Republic of Serbia in 2022.
<https://prosveta.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Izvestaj-GPOO-2022.pdf>

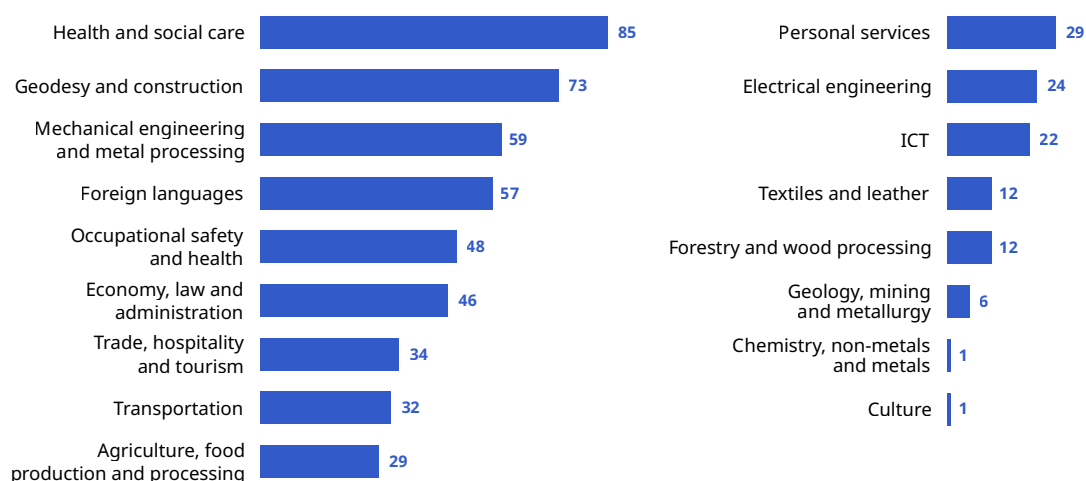
The distribution of all accredited adult training programmes by areas of work in 2022 is presented in table 3.

Table 3. Accredited adult training programmes by areas of work, 2022

Sector	Number of training programmes	Sector	Number of training programmes
Health and social care	23	Trade, hospitality and tourism	8
Mechanical engineering and metal processing	18	Transportation	8
Geodesy and construction	17	Occupational safety and health	7
Foreign languages	15	Agriculture, food production and processing	4
Economy, law and administration	13	ICT	2
Personal services	10	Forestry and wood processing	2
Electrical engineering	9	Textiles and leather	1

Source: Authors' presentation based on the diagnostic study.

In 2023, the number of accredited training programmes is significantly higher in mechanical engineering and metal processing (up 9 per cent), electrical engineering (up 6.5 per cent) and occupational safety and health (up 5 per cent). The number of programmes in the fields of occupational safety and health, foreign languages and economy is continuously increasing. The accredited PRAEP programmes for the period 2016-2022 are presented in figure 6.

Figure 6. Accredited PRAEP programs per business areas, 2016-2022

Source: Annual Report on the Implementation of the Adult Education Plan in the Republic of Serbia in 2022. <https://prosveta.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Izvestaj-GPOO-2022.pdf>

On the basis of data presented here, it can be noted that according to the number of accredited programmes (34) trade, hospitality and tourism have taken eighth place (out of over 17 business areas) which indicates an increase in the interest of programme providers. If transportation were to be accounted for alongside trade, hospitality and tourism – since transportation makes an essential element of almost every tourism activity – then we could conclude that these areas are among the programmes with the highest demand.

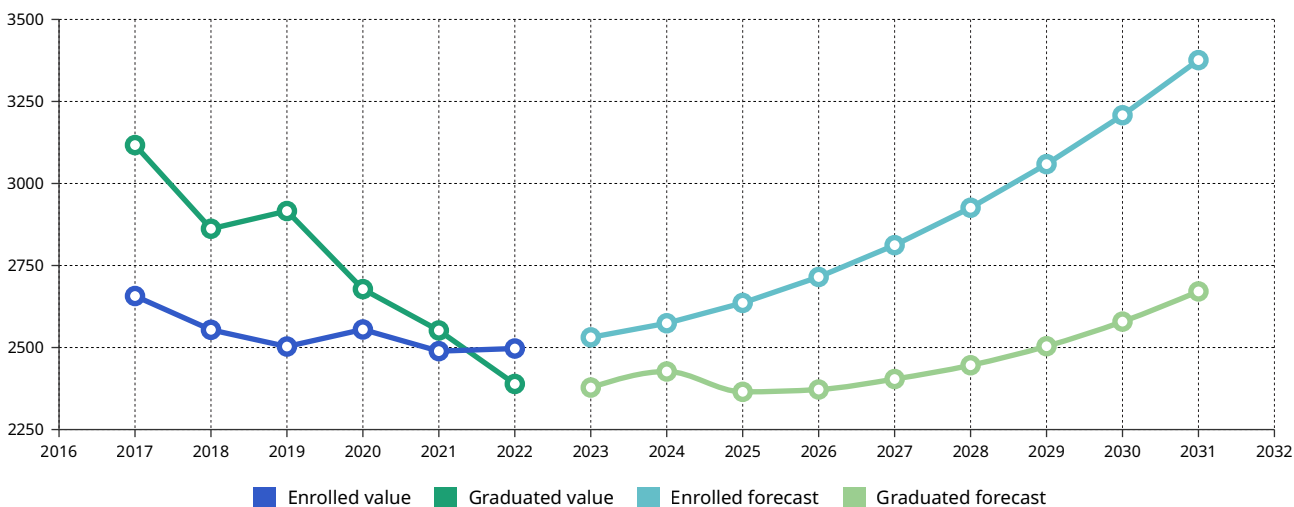
6.2. Data on TVET enrolment and completion of relevant training courses

Based on the available data on PRAEP, which are accredited by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD), the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Regulations, Administration and National Minorities-National Communities (PSERANM-NC) and the Agency for Qualifications (AfQ), it is only possible to identify the number of accredited training programmes – 681 (total for all areas) and their distribution by city and municipality (dominated by large cities like Belgrade, Niš and Novi Sad, followed by Čačak, Jagodina, Kragujevac, Subotica, Užice, Vranje, and then a few municipalities such as Ada, Bačka Palanka, Čajetina, Vlasotince and so on). To calculate the precise number of TVET students enrolled in courses relevant to the tourism sector, a separate study (survey of training providers) is required.

The most significant share of employment in the tourism sector is expected from an annual influx of persons who have completed secondary education. Those qualifying for tourism sector jobs typically have passed through technical vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education. Specific qualifications closely related to the sector are tourism technician and tourism-hotel technician. The number and composition of a qualified workforce for the labour market is determined more or less by the number of students who complete secondary education for these qualifications.

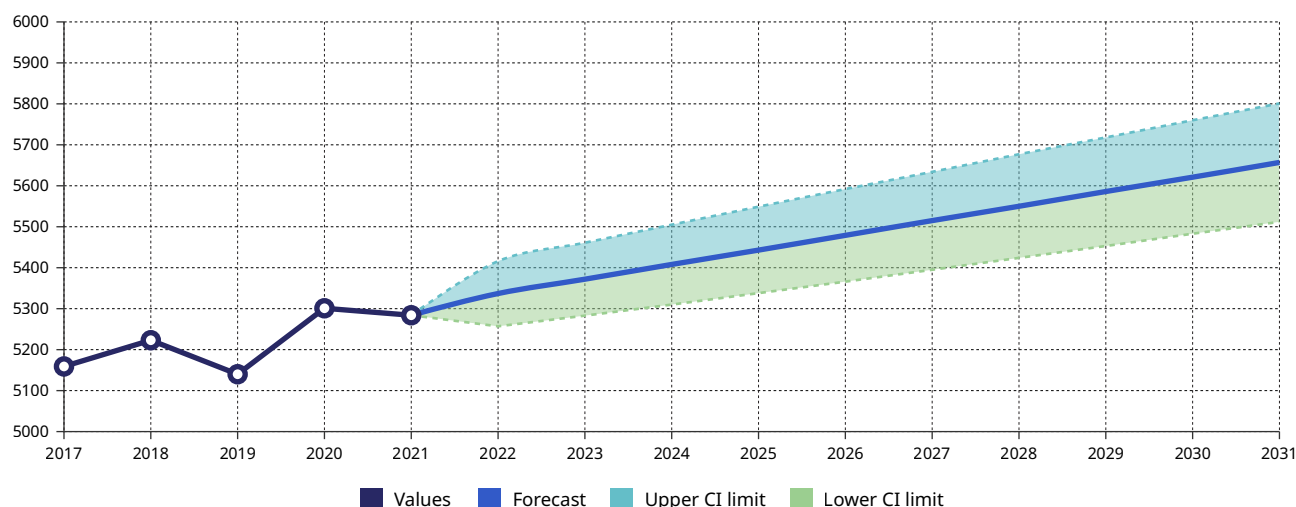
Figure 7 shows a trend in the number of students who enrolled and those who completed secondary education with the qualification of tourism technician or tourism-hotel technician by year and according to enrolment, that is graduating year, with forecasts until 2031. There is a noticeable change in the trend from decline to growth after 2020, both for the number of enrolled and graduated students.

Figure 7. Number of students who have enrolled and graduated from vocational schools with tourism technician or tourism-hotel technician qualification, per year, by enrolment/graduation year, with forecast until 2031



Source: Authors' calculation on the basis of data received from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.

Qualifications obtained in the category of "trade, hospitality and tourism" are largely indirectly linked with tasks related to jobs in tourism. Observed trends and forecasts until 2031 are presented in figure 8. A growth in the number of graduates is expected during the next decade, forming a solid basis for future development of the sector and an increase in the number of workers.

Figure 8. Forecast of trends in the number of people who have completed education in the field of trade, hospitality and tourism, until 2031

Source: Authors' calculation on the basis of data received from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.

There is a significant number of higher education institutions offering programmes for education of tourism workers. The list of such institutions producing the highest number of graduates is presented below (table 4).

Table 4. Higher education institutions for workers in tourism

Higher education institutions for tourism	Programmes
Faculty for Tourism and Hotel Management, Singidunum University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Tourism, hotel industry and food economy
Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Industry, Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of Novi Sad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Geography teacher ▶ Geoinformatics ▶ Tourism ▶ Hotel industry ▶ Gastronomy ▶ Hunting tourism
Faculty of Economy, Belgrade University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Tourism and hotel management
Faculty of Geography, Belgrade University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Tourismology department
Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Industry in Vrnjačka Banja, Kragujevac University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Hotel industry and tourism, gastronomy management
College of Hotel Management, Academy of Applied Studies, Belgrade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Hotel industry ▶ Restaurant industry ▶ Gastronomy
College of Tourism, Academy of Applied Studies, Belgrade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Economy and tourism

Source: Authors' presentation based on the diagnostic study.

For the purposes of a greater share of high-income and higher-end tourism, in addition to the creation of new high-end category tourism establishments, a key role should be played by higher education institutions that can provide skills necessary for work in high-end tourism, that is, with a large amount of specific knowledge and skills relevant to this category of luxury.

6.3. Labour shortages

According to the survey conducted in the diagnostic phase, 92.7 per cent of companies recruited or at least attempted to recruit staff in the past 24 months. Other companies have not always succeeded in recruiting the staff they were looking for, mainly due to a limited number of candidates with appropriate qualifications. As a solution, they generally hired people without the appropriate qualifications and trained them to do the job or trained existing staff to perform the required tasks.

Skills still in high demand include communication skills, managerial and organizational skills as well as teamwork. It is concerning that although a large percentage of employees – of whom many are new hires – are aware of this need, over 30 per cent have not been offered any training by their employer in the last two years. Even so, employers remain optimistic about market trends, primarily regarding the forecast growth of tourist traffic and balance of payments, which they expect to lead to better professional results for their companies.

6.4. Skills shortages: Relevance and quality of existing skills, skills gaps, and emerging skills

Quality in human resources development is crucial for the sustainable growth and success of the tourism sector. The identified existing skills form the basis of a high-quality workforce, ensuring customer satisfaction, efficient operations and overall organizational excellence. The emphasis on efficient problem-solving, friendliness and teamwork contributes to a quality service created by hotel staff. In interviews conducted for this report, business leaders emphasized that the inclusion of digital and technological skills reflects the adaptation of Serbia's economy to technological progress, ensuring that employees can use digital tools for improved efficiency and guest experiences.

Skills gaps

Despite the findings of the diagnostic study that the majority of hospitality employees possess the basic skills needed for their jobs, the analysis and the foresight workshop point to potential challenges and skills gaps, in particular with changes in the sector resulting in emerging occupations and skills. For instance, the emergence of occupations such as mystery guests³, revenue managers and digital experts suggests a shift in the needs of the economy, possibly outstripping the current skills supply. Skills gaps can be the result of a variety of factors, including demographic changes, evolving consumer expectations and rapid technological advances. It is becoming imperative for stakeholders in the hospitality sector to proactively address these gaps by investing in training programmes, upskilling initiatives and strategic workforce planning.

According to the participants of the foresight workshop, the following emerging skills can be identified:

- ▶ Ability to work under pressure
- ▶ Adaptability/flexibility
- ▶ Analytical thinking
- ▶ Capacity for continuous professional development – lifelong learning
- ▶ Digital skills
- ▶ Foreign language skills
- ▶ Politeness/hospitality protocol
- ▶ Various social skills (especially communication, politeness, presentation skills)

³ Mystery guest in hotels can be defined as an audit hired by a hotel to evaluate the quality of its services. Mystery guests are trained in their profession and use a checklist as a basis for their research and feedback to the hotel manager.

Emerging skills

Analytical and social skills such as networking, communication and relationship building are highlighted as critical in an evolving environment like tourism, indicating a growing need for employees who can navigate complex interpersonal dynamics and analyse data for informed decision-making. Digital competence and crisis management skills emphasize the economy's recognition of the transformative impact of technology and the need to be prepared for unforeseen challenges.

Constraints to acquiring new skills

According to workshop participants, addressing these constraints is linked closely to the national skills policy and strategy, coordination of key actors, curriculum development, training funding and relevance of curricula. They highlighted the need for a collaborative and holistic approach. A coherent national skills policy and strategy can provide a framework for aligning education and training programmes with the needs of the economy. Effective management and coordination among key stakeholders, including educational institutions and the private sector, facilitate the development of tailored curricula and qualification frameworks. Adequate funding ensures the sustainability of training initiatives, while assessment practices and collaboration between the education system and the private sector increase the availability of training to target groups.

The constraints related to the acquisition of emerging skills were discussed for the skills presented in table 5:

Table 5. Constraints related to acquisition of emerging skills

Technical-specific skills	Generic skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Data analysis and basic knowledge of data interpretation ▶ Direct marketing (by e-mail or social media) ▶ Flexibility skills ▶ Human resources management ▶ Multitasking ▶ Networking ▶ Sales and management skills ▶ Understanding the complexities of the whole hotel industry ▶ Use of digital tools for user management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Adaptability ▶ Communication skills ▶ Complex problem-solving ▶ Creativity and innovation ▶ Critical thinking ▶ Cross-cultural skills and diversity ▶ Empathy ▶ Initiative ▶ Leadership ▶ Negotiations and conflict management ▶ Teamwork ▶ Willingness to learn

Source: Authors' presentation based on the diagnostic study and the skills foresight workshop.

Based on additional survey research, it was determined that the most important generic skills that need to be improved, as identified by the largest number of companies, are creativity and innovation (84.6 per cent of companies), willingness to learn (69.2 per cent of companies) and communication skills (61.5 per cent of companies). As for technical (specific) skills, companies placed the greatest emphasis on sales and management skills (76.9 per cent). The following were also considered as very important: understanding the complexity of the whole hotel industry (46.2 per cent of companies) and human resource management (38.5 per cent of companies).

6.5. Key supply-side challenges and constraints

The identified key supply-side challenges and constraints affecting the quality and supply of skills are contributions/constraints of sector skills boards, industry-institution linkages, funding, relevance of curriculum and qualifications, stakeholder management and support for on-the-job learning and will be detailed later in the text.

While Serbia's official institutions (Office for the Dual Education Sector and the National Qualifications Agency, the National Qualifications Framework Council) do not possess precise information about today's key challenges and constraints, they currently are catching up and conducting the relevant research. Businesses, aware of a critical need to improve the health of their sector, have expressed their views during the aforementioned workshop held in September, and their observations will be presented below:

Stakeholder management and coordination

According to leaders from the tourism and hotel industry, one prominent challenge is the absence of strategic documents that analyse and address the actual situation in the hotel industry. However, many of the key informants for the diagnostic study and the foresight workshop were unaware of Serbia's current National Strategy for Tourism Development as well as Strategic Marketing plan. Such a glaring gap highlights the importance of effective stakeholder management and coordination. During the foresight workshop discussions, participants emphasised the need to adapt the existing strategies in order to better respond to a dynamic economic environment. In their view, it is imperative to ensure that stakeholders, including government bodies, educational institutions and business representatives, collaborate and coordinate their efforts, which is key to creating comprehensive and effective strategies that address the current needs of the sector.

Funding of training and upskilling programmes

Inadequate wages in the hotel sector contribute to the current challenge facing the industry, leading to youth emigrating from Serbia in search of better opportunities. The research participants agreed that funding of training and upskilling programmes appears to be key to overcoming this situation. However, the analysis highlights that funding is a limiting factor for those actors who provide training for acquiring the necessary skills. Difficulties in approving budgets for training initiatives hinder the development and improvement of skills within the workforce. Addressing funding challenges requires coordinated efforts between public and private entities in order to effectively allocate resources and prioritize skills development.

Curriculum and qualifications relevance

The analysis indicates a mismatch between the educational system and the real needs of the economy, which is linked to outdated curricula and qualifications. Clear frameworks and objectives were identified as necessary to promote inclusive development in the hotel sector. Adapting the curriculum to the dynamic demands of the economy is vital. This requires ongoing collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders to ensure that the skills taught in schools are aligned with the current and future demands of the sector.

Contribution/constraints of sectoral skills development

Identified weaknesses in the hotel sector, including an unskilled workforce, low wages and infrastructural constraints, directly affect sectoral skills. The lack of qualified staff affects the quality of services, guest satisfaction and overall business organization. Low wages further contribute to the difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified workers. In addition, infrastructure constraints present challenges in providing optimal working conditions for the workforce. Overcoming these constraints requires a holistic approach, including addressing wage level issues, investing in infrastructure development and fostering an enabling work environment.

Links between the economy and educational institutions and support for on-the-job learning

The need for stronger ties between the economy and educational institutions also became evident during the discussion. Workshop participants pointed out shortcomings in human resource management, highlighting the lack of certain skills and inadequate knowledge transfer. This directly affects the ability to efficiently fill positions such as front of house servers and front desk clerks. Improving the links between business and the education sector includes the inclusion of authentic practical teaching during studies and the engagement of business lecturers with practical experience. On-the-job learning is key to developing specific skills like communication, sales and time management, which have been identified as missing in the current job market.

6.6. Cooperation between employers and education providers

The Law on Dual Education and the Law on the Dual Study Model in Higher Education regulate cooperation between the education sector and the economy in formal education. These laws regulate the content and method of implementing dual education in secondary and higher education; mutual rights and obligations of pupils/students, parents and legal guardians; schools/higher education institutions and employers; the material and financial security of pupils/students as well as other issues of importance for the implementation of dual education in secondary vocational education and dual education studies.

The position of managers from the sector for dual education and the sector for the National Qualifications Framework is that dual education as a model for the implementation of teaching in secondary schools and at universities rests within the framework of formal education. It encourages good cooperation between the education system and the economy, with the aim to ensure quality professional education at all levels, strengthen the competences of pupils and students and include the relevant business sector in planning curricula.

Nonetheless, the stakeholders attending the workshop emphasised a need to improve cooperation between the hotel sector and the tourism TVET sector in Serbia. During the discussion at the workshop, several key points emerged that highlighted the challenges facing the education system and the economy followed by recommendations for improvement.

The identified challenges

Short study programs and market needs:

There is a recognized demand for short study programmes that are in line with market needs. However, the slow process of creating new study programmes often results in a mismatch between the actual educational offer and rapidly changing market demands.

Decline in enrollment at universities:

A notable drop in enrolment of young people at universities was highlighted, along with concerns about its impact on the pool of adequately qualified staff on the labour market.

Cooperation with the TVET sector:

Workshop participants emphasise the absolute necessity to strengthen cooperation between the hotel sector and the TVET sector. This cooperation is considered crucial for the growth and development of the hotel industry.

Key recommendations:

Fifteen recommendations provide a comprehensive response to identified gaps and needs.

1. An analysis identifying strategic priority skills
2. Development of incentives for employing vulnerable groups
3. Establishment of several sectoral councils (or thematic sub-groups) within the current Sector Skills Council for the Tourism Industry, with more specialized members, to better focus on single product and service lines
4. Hotels/management providing more and better information and training of employees in accordance with hotel policy
5. Improvement of occupation and industry image
6. Improvement of the system for accreditation of informal education providers
7. Incentives to motivate young people to take up studies in tourism/hotel industry, for example, awards, scholarships, other incentives
8. Interaction between the education system and the industry
9. Introducing required resources forecasts in sectoral policies
10. More flexible implementation of relevant curricula
11. Obligation of hotel management to implement continuous employee training

12. Promotion of mechanisms to strengthen training providers and labour-market responsive training provision in hotel industry
13. Reform of the practical teaching and traineeship (in the hotel industry)
14. Reskilling and referring unemployed workforce to relevant institutions and training providers (for instance, NES and so on)
15. Strengthening the role of the Social and Economic Council.

The workshop participants highlighted the following six priority recommendations

1. *Interaction between education system and industry:*

Foster a strong link between the educational system and the economy. This recommendation aims to bridge the gap between the academic knowledge and practical skills needed in the hotel industry.

2. *Improvement of the occupation and industry image:*

Recognizing the impact of perception on the choice of career, promote efforts to improve the image of the entire profession and the hotel industry. An improved image can attract more students and professionals to consider a career in tourism.

3. *Reform of practical teaching and traineeship (in the hotel industry):*

Aiming to solve the lack of practical experience among graduated students, focus on a reform of practical teaching and traineeships in the hotel industry. Placing an emphasis on practical experience throughout students' educational journeys can better prepare them for taking up management positions after graduation.

4. *Obligation of hotel management to implement continuous employee training:*

Considering the dynamic nature of the economy, hotel management should be obliged to provide continuous training to their employees. This ensures that the workforce is up to date with the latest industry skills and trends.

5. *Incentives to motivate young people to study tourism/hotel industry:*

Recognizing the importance of motivating students to pursue studies in tourism, identify and fund various awards, incentives and scholarships. Such incentives can encourage students to invest more effort in their studies.

6. *An analysis identifying strategic priority skills*

This recommendation emphasises the need for a strategic approach to establish a list of priority skills. Identifying and focusing on core skills ensures that educational programmes are aligned with the specific needs of the hotel industry.

These priority recommendations jointly deal with critical aspects of cooperation between Serbia's education and tourism sectors. Strengthening the interaction between the education system and the economy is essential to produce graduates with relevant skills. In addition, efforts to improve the image of the profession can positively influence students' career choices, encouraging a greater interest in hospitality.

A reform of practical teaching is in line with demand in the economy for experienced graduates, ensuring that students are well prepared for management roles. The commitment to continuous professional development of hotel management reinforces the importance of lifelong learning in a dynamic sector such as hospitality.

A focus on awards, education, incentives, motivation and scholarships aims to create a stimulating environment for students, encouraging them to pursue a career in hospitality. Finally, the development of a skills prioritization strategy ensures that education programmes remain aligned with the evolving needs of the sector.

The success of these recommendations depends on active stakeholder participation, including educational institutions, business representatives and policymakers working together to shape the future of education in the field of trade, hospitality and tourism in Serbia.

7. Recommendations for implementing systemic sector priorities: Priority skills needs and shortages

An expected increase of employment in the tourism sector implies continued growth in demand for relevant skills until the beginning of the next decade. The matching of supply and demand for qualifications suitable for jobs in the tourism sector has been largely ensured through the regular education system. However, a maximum synchronized action of all interested parties is needed in order to ensure high-quality education and provision of appropriate skills. This should be prioritized in education, keeping in mind that an important trend in Serbia's tourism sector is a shift towards high-income tourism anticipated to stimulate rapid economic growth.

7.1. Which occupations and skills are needed and where?

Emerging occupations which are expected to be of importance for the development of tourism in Serbia were identified in consultations with stakeholders. These are largely professions that have emerged recently in countries with highly developed tourism industries, and which should be introduced to Serbia's hotel industry to achieve the key strategic goal of establishing Serbia as a globally recognized tourist destination.

Emerging occupations:

- ▶ Baggage handler
- ▶ Digital specialist
- ▶ Head of human resources (HR services are lacking in general)
- ▶ Hotelier (one universal vocational school programme should be created – integrating five existing occupational profiles)
- ▶ IT manager
- ▶ IT/analyst/marketing/guest services (development of small software or tools within the hotel and externally)
- ▶ Kitchen manager (administration, supplies, people, standards, hygiene and so on)
- ▶ Mystery guest
- ▶ Quality manager
- ▶ Revenue manager
- ▶ Supervisor of smart solutions

According to expectations of employers surveyed for the diagnostic study, these occupations are expected to account for about three per cent of the total number of new employees in the next mid-term period.

7.2. Who will deliver and how?

1. National policy and skills strategy

The most effective way to deliver the appropriate skills for the tourism sector is through the preparation and adoption of a national strategy for the skills system covered by education and training, both for current and emerging occupations. This approach will enable a maximum impact matched with a rational use of resources for policymaking and reform. Many of these new skills are needed in several other sectors due to the introduction of new technologies that are often applied in a similar way across several sectors.

2. Stakeholder management and coordination

The process of preparing the education and training system for emerging skills must be as transparent as possible, and the activities of all stakeholders must be synchronized. In this manner, the objective of delivering emerging skills can be achieved in the medium term, because modernization processes require the sector to tackle the challenges of maintaining international competitiveness. The government, as the main strategy and policy implementer, should provide stakeholder coordination mechanisms. All stakeholders should be exceptionally active and provide constant contributions during that process.

3. Funding

The state should provide resources from the budget and international funds for the implementation of new regulations and reforms in the education system. The cooperation and financial support of interested companies is also of great importance during the preparation of a framework for the delivery of new skills.

4. Delivery and assessment practices

Since many of these skills are fundamentally new, they are also delivered in new ways. To ensure uniform quality of skills, it is necessary to identify best practices and recommend their implementation. Assessing the quality of skill delivery setup is a key step in the selection of best practices.

5. Approach to training

New skills are needed by future and current employees in the tourism sector. The same applies to improvement of existing skills. Therefore, access to the acquisition of emerging skills should be made possible through regular education, as well as through initial and advanced training organized by the companies themselves and by external service providers. It is necessary to establish a standardized approach to the delivery of skills to all users in order to ensure a harmonized application of skills, both by current and future employees. This should lead to uniformity of skills delivery by all service providers to all users.

6. Links between the industry and institutions and support to on-the-job training

Since many new skills are based on contemporary in-depth knowledge, the connection between companies and higher educational and research institutions can embolden the transfer of knowledge to relevant employees. This can be achieved by on-the-job training designed by companies in collaboration with higher education and research institutions.

8. What next: Sectoral plan implementation

The recommendations given here are based on a diagnostic study and a foresight workshop on the skills needed in the hotel and tourism sector in Serbia. A systematized list of recommended actions to address the aforementioned priorities is provided below.

8.1. Recommended actions for resolving priority needs

Education of hotel employees in accordance with business policy: in order to develop the skills of employees, hotels must organize more and better-quality in-house trainings. Until a systematic solution based on a future skills strategy is found, the aforementioned trainings should be conducted in accordance with the respective hotel's business policy.

Improving cooperation between hotels and educational institutions: improve the process of cooperation through sectoral councils/thematic sub-groups and also between hotels and educational institutions, with the aim of more effective cooperation through further training, jointly organized traineeships and scholarships for students who are preparing for a profession in tourism.

Improving the image of the tourism sector and its occupations: organize regular activities through which the work in the sector is presented as an attractive career option, providing decent work opportunities that are of great importance to Serbia's economy.

8.2. Recommended actions for addressing system-level priorities

Based on the study and workshop on the necessary skills in the hotel and tourism sector in Serbia, specific priority activities at the system level for the sector were selected, as presented in table 6. In addition to these specific activities, the corresponding expected outcomes and timelines for their realization have also been identified, as well as the implementers responsible for each of the specific activities.

Table 6. Short term and midterm strategic action plan

Short term (12 months)			
Specific activity	Expected outcome	Timeline	Responsible implementer
Connect the hotel industry with the education system	More and better cooperation between the educational institutions and hotels and constant interaction with service providers	ASAP	Government
Complement regular education programmes with informal trainings	Systematic acquiring of missing skills through informal training provided	By end of 2024	Government, educational services providers and employers
Define accredited service providers in tourism and hotel industry	The registry of accredited service providers in the hotel industry established	By end of 2024	Government

Midterm (24 months)			
Specific activity	Expected outcome	Timeline	Responsible implementer
Promote the establishment of more HR management departments/ professionals in the hotel industry	Good HR management and training ensured	By end of 2025	Employers
Draft and adopt a national strategy for the system of skills covered by education and training activities	National strategy for a system of skills adopted	By end of 2025	Competent ministries
Enable the inclusion of vulnerable categories	Inclusion of vulnerable categories enabled	By end of 2025	Government and employers
Improve the level of transparency of service providers	Ministry of Tourism and Youth creates a registry of accredited service providers in the hotel industry on its website, so it is accessible to users	By end of 2025	Government
Increase the number of luxury hotels	Service quality improved and the share of high-revenue tourism increased	By end of 2025	Employers
Reform practical teaching and traineeships (in the hotel industry)	Skills received through formal education improved (with a focus on missing skills)	By end of 2025	TVET and universities with tourism-related study programmes in cooperation with the hotel industry
Provide training, motivation and awards, incentives scholarships for the employees	Improved employee skills and higher motivation	By end of 2025	Employers

9. Glossary of terms

Competence: an integrated set of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes, which enable an individual to act effectively in accordance with the qualification standard.

Formal education: organized learning processes that are implemented on the basis of plans and programmes of teaching and learning in primary and secondary education and study programmes of higher education.

Informal education: organized learning processes of adults that are implemented on the basis of special programmes, in order to acquire knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes needed for work, or personal and social development.

Informal learning: the process of independent acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and abilities by adults in everyday life, work and social environment.

Knowledge: a set of acquired and related information resulting from learning. It is a collection of data, principles, theories and practices related to a field of work or study.

Labour shortage: difficulties in filling a vacancy when there aren't enough workers in the job market (working conditions play a role, or poor employment practices).

Lack of skills: it occurs when the skills a person already possesses are below the level of those that they need to perform their duties competently.

Lifelong learning: includes all forms of learning and implies participation in various forms of educational activities throughout life, with the aim of constantly improving the necessary personal, civic, social and work competencies.

Occupation: a group of jobs that have a repetitive set of main tasks and duties in different industries.

Professional competences: the employee's ability to perform tasks in accordance with the requirements of a job.

Qualification: certified outcome of training/education, formal recognition of acquired competencies. An individual acquires a qualification when the competent body determines that they have achieved learning outcomes within a certain level and according to a given qualification standard, which is confirmed by a public document (diploma or certificate)

Skill: the ability to perform a mental or manual activity, acquired through study and practice. A comprehensive term that includes knowledge, competence and experience.

Skills gaps: mismatches between the skills that workers possess and the skills required by employers. This can manifest in various forms, such as overqualification, underqualification, or a lack of necessary skills for available jobs.

Skills needs: a catch-all term that refers to both quantitative and qualitative needs. This should not be confused with demand.

Skills shortage: another catch-all term that refers to both skills shortages and labour shortages. The labour market lacks enough qualified people. The shortage is the result of either a labour shortage/tight labour market (when unemployment is low) or an insufficient number of individuals possessing the specific skills required.

Training needs assessment (TNA): the need for training when there is a gap between what is required, the skills required to perform work tasks, and the skills possessed. Assessment is the process of gathering and analysing information and data.

УНИЈА ПОСЛОДАВАЦА СРБИЈЕ
SERBIAN ASSOCIATION OF EMPLOYERS



Serbian Association of Employers

Stevana Markovića 8
11080 Beograd, Zemun

Phone: +381 11 3160 248

Fax: +381 11 2610 988

info@poslodavci.rs

www.poslodavci.rs

