

## IMPACT SHEET: A Model for Sustainable Tourism in Central Asia (MOST)

### Building capacities, Creating awareness, Introducing technology



*Promoting sustainable tourism in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan through implementation of ISO standards related to green procurement and eco-labeling.*



## PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Central Asian countries present considerable opportunities to become major tourist destinations due to their unique cultural, historical, archaeological, and natural attractions and heritage. While Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have strategically utilised tourism to drive economic growth, the sector still faces numerous challenges, including lack of supply chain and logistics facilities, underdeveloped infrastructure and low standard services for tourists. In some countries, visa restrictions and high prices are also considered inhibitory factors for travellers.

The recent development and high potential of the tourism sector in the region provides an opportunity not to miss for setting-up and promoting a sustainable tourism model aimed at supporting growing local economies, respecting communities and protecting cultural and heritage sites from risks of overcrowding and from damage caused by natural disasters.

The EU SWITCH-Asia project “A model for sustainable tourism in Central Asia: Building capacities, creating awareness, introducing technology” (MOST) aims at promoting a new and well-structured model for sustainable tourism in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan that can contribute to preserving and strengthening local culture, heritage and traditions, while also protecting the natural environment. The main focus of this project was on technical and regulatory practices which would favor sustainability.

## CHALLENGE

The former Soviet Asian States present considerable opportunities to become a major tourist destination in the way of unique cultural, historical, archaeological, and natural attractions. Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have strategically utilised tourism for driving economic growth. However, the sector faces numerous problems and challenges. The most important are the lack of supply chain and logistics facilities, underdeveloped infrastructure and low standard services for tourists. In some of the countries, the visa regime and the high prices are also considered as inhibitory factors. Given the tourism sector in these countries is still under-developed but with very high potential, the setting of a sustainable tourism model is very crucial. Sustainable tourism has the potential to support growing local economies, by respecting communities and protecting cultural and heritage sites from risks of overcrowding and from damage caused by natural disasters. Destinations that are becoming increasingly popular today, as is the case in Central Asia, have the opportunity to sustainably develop their tourism sectors and become role models for other countries around the world.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

MOST aimed to promote sustainable tourism in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan through the implementation of ISO standards related to green procurement and eco-labeling. To elaborate, guidelines on sustainable consumption, including the usage of water, energy, and recyclable waste were developed. The project sought to promote the sharing of EU best practices, such as legislative frameworks and regulations, while applying necessary ICT and marketing tools.

The specific objectives included:

- Support tourism companies, mainly in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, to adopt SCP practices by providing the appropriate knowledge and ICT tools.
- Support regional and local authorities in planning and implementing policies that assist the development of sustainable tourism.
- Raise awareness of sustainable tourism and consumer awareness about sustainable consumption patterns.
- Strengthen the dialogue between authorities, SMEs, and end users on SCP.

## TARGET GROUPS

- At least 440 enterprises in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan
- Public authorities at national and local level
- Tourism stakeholders within the three Countries
- The Tourism Community worldwide (indirect)

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES

### Capacity building of tourism MSMEs and associations on adapting EU Environmental standards and on supporting technological solutions

Given the foundational nature of MOST, activities have embraced a various spectrum of working fields. As expected, the need for training was urgent, and within different work packages, the consortium successfully managed to provide training materials for GTSC criteria, relevant standards, and green procurements, as well as training materials on ICT tools and marketing support. Empirically, a great deal of benefit has come from the organization of workshops for sustainable planning, round tables among MSMEs, and local and regional authorities to strengthen the role of regional and local authorities in sustainable development and enhance public dialogue. Workshops for end users regarding sustainable consumption and networking events between MSMEs and business angels and investors were also conducted.

More specific activities, such as installations of standards/certification preparation software, certification of 5 tour operators and 10 hotels with Travelife, and installations of real-time monitoring of water and energy consumptions, provided the necessary technical framework for implementation. Throughout the duration of MOST, the partnership has been capable of producing fundamental deliverables such as the publication of financial resources for the EU and other international donors for adapting SCP practices, a manual with EU good/best practices, a policy recommendations document, as well as a widespread promotional campaign for sustainable tourism, which included social media coverage as well as leaflets and flyers.

The final conference at the end of the grant project managed to sum up the achievements of MOST, thanks also to the substantial echo it received inside and outside Central Asia boundaries.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The first unexpected and therefore unforeseen challenge arose due to limitations, primarily related to the movement of people, associated with COVID. The nature of the planned activities required physical presence and direct interaction between trainers, trainees, and stakeholders for their optimal implementation. However, this was not possible for a significant period of time. Consequently, the management had to adapt to the circumstances, relying heavily on local partners and increasing online training efforts.

The second ongoing challenge involves the capability to deliver a message that is first believed and then adopted by national and local authorities. This is essential to incorporate MOST findings and best practices into regulatory and market practices concerning sustainable tourism strategies and policies.

The main lesson learned, on the one hand, is a confirmation that the success or failure of any international project – once goals and targets are clearly defined, accepted, and shared – merely depends on the capacity of the Consortium to overcome internal contrasts and find a modus operandi with the financing stakeholders. MOST finally managed to do both.

On the other hand, during the project implementation, MOST showed that the more stakeholders are involved (not necessarily with an immediate economic return) and become an interactive part of a project, the more their contribution will be substantial and constructive. Beneficiaries themselves, despite initial reluctance shown by a large number of SMEs, witnessed that the EU contribution has been determinant on their path toward sustainable tourism, thanks to their interest and dedication.

## PROJECT ACHIEVEMENT

Although reality tells us that rarely any project achieves 100% of its initial forecast, MOST Management is confident that cooperation among partners has led to very good results. The MOST grant had the goal of making use of existing good practices to directly contribute to the mainstreaming of Central Asia's growing sustainable tourism industry. The policy recommendations published toward the end of the project represent the final achievement in the sense that they have been officially presented to national authorities, extensively discussed with them, and are now being implemented.

Key achievements include:

- Involvement of more than 500 SMEs in the training and installation activities, a higher number than initially foreseen.
- Constructive interaction among trainers, technical personnel, and participating SMEs during numerous in vivo and online training and installation sessions (more than 20 overall).
- Acceptance, as a result of their participation in MOST, of the three national partners as stakeholders by national and regional authorities of their countries.
- Very good cooperation among the consortium, the contracting authority, the facility, the EU representations, and the Commission services.





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Sustainable tourism in Central Asia is no longer a utopia! Through MOST efforts, tourism stakeholders are incorporating innovative regulations based on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) and Greenhouse Gas (GHG) measures into mainstream strategies and policies to make sustainability a reality.



## Long-term project sustainability

The commitment of the management and EU partners is to monitor the implementation of adopted measures for at least one year after the completion of the grant, in close cooperation with local partners. Technical support will be provided where necessary. Moreover, the medium/long-term sustainability of the grant will be substantially achieved when MOST policy recommendations are officially incorporated by national and local authorities. This incorporation will be closely monitored by the consortium, which will seek other financing sources to continue the work started.

## Project contributions to Climate Change Mitigation and SDGs

The goal of ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns has been a guiding principle of MOST, especially considering the Consortium's proactive synergy with the SWITCH-Asia SCP Facility, which consistently promoted activities related to sustainable production and consumption. From the conception of the grant, the intention has been to physically assist tourism operators in Central Asian countries in adopting sustainable practices to mitigate the negative effects of the climate crisis. This assistance included offering meters that were installed in participating SMEs to measure consumptions of different nature, thereby enabling establishments to regularly monitor and reduce their environmental footprint.

As sustainability is a continuous line rather than a dotted one, all goals are somewhat linked. Given the scope of the project, nonetheless, MOST activities contributed more to a series of proximity goals, such as [Goal 7](#) (lower consumption through installed meters makes energy more affordable), [Goal 11](#) (sustainable consumption means sustainable and more resilient cities), and [Goal 13](#). This was achieved by creating a mentality and an entrepreneurial approach to sustainability and climate change consciousness through dozens of training sessions and parallel workshops conducted live and online over the 42 months of the project's duration.



# Impacts at a Glance

<b>Economic Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall, it is estimated that SMEs that installed MOST meters save 1 MEURO in two years</li> <li>Doubled the green product portfolio for participating SMEs</li> <li>Enhanced number of clients and users of SMEs facilities by 10% after almost 3 years</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fuel saving is expected to be 20% per SME on average</li> <li>Installations of meters to calculate and optimize the consumption of electricity and water led to reduction in water consumption and waste</li> </ul>
<b>Social Impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some SMEs foresee an up to 10% increase in workers income</li> <li>Up to 2 new jobs for at least half of the 500 participating SMEs</li> </ul>
<b>Climate Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electricity and fuel savings are expected to be 20% per SME on average</li> <li>Average 25% GHG reduction per SME</li> <li>An increase of 20% in renewable energy in the medium-long term</li> </ul>
<b>Green Finance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At least 50 SMEs per Country could have better access to finance in the medium term</li> <li>Round tables, exhibitions and fairs, B2Bs with more than 50 SMEs participating</li> </ul>
<b>Target Group Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More than 600 SMEs engaged in project activities</li> <li>More than 60 stakeholders such as Governments, Local Authorities, Tourism Associations and Committees, Chambers of Commerce, Universities, Banks involved in Technical training, field visits, seminars and workshops, direct meeting</li> </ul>
<b>Policy Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12 contacts/events with policymakers</li> <li>2 new policies, regulations or standards defined based on recommendation from project</li> <li>Adoption of sustainable tourism strategies based on EU good practices, adoption of SCP regulations for the tourism industry, connection of sustainable tourism with national and regional development policies</li> <li>As expressed by officials of Tourism Committees in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan during informative meetings, new sustainable tourism strategies at national levels are taking into consideration MOST deliverables</li> </ul>
<b>Europe-Asia Cooperation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15 events organized with European and Asian participants (workshops, field visits)</li> <li>One new EU-Asia partnerships initiated</li> </ul>





## FUNDING

EUR 2,009,009.40  
(EU Contribution: 80%)



## DURATION

2020 - 2022



## PARTNERS



Heraklion Development Agency



Applied Industrial Technologies  
(APINTECH)



Association of Private Tourism  
Agencies of Uzbekistan (APTA)



Eurasian Tourism  
Association (ETA)



European Profiles S.A.



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Latvian Country Tourism  
Association "Lauku celotajs"  
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