SECTOR ANALYSIS

TOURISM and YOUTH IN THE PELAGONIA REGION

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Resen, January 2026

List of abbreviations

SSO – State Statistical Office

RSM – Republic of North Macedonia

Contents

SECTORAL ANALYSIS FOR TOURISM IN THE PELAGONIA REGION **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Client ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

List of abbreviations 3

Contents ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

1. Introduction 5

2. Methodology 7

3. Survey research - key findings 9

4. Focus group ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

5. Analysis of strategic documents of the municipalities of the Pelagonia region ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

6. Recommendations ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

7. Conclusion ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

8. References ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

9. Attachments ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

1. Introduction

This sector analysis aims to identify the current situation, potentials and challenges in the tourism sector in the Pelagonija region, with a special focus on the Prespa region. The analysis is based on a combined methodology that includes a survey, working group work, focus groups and a review of relevant regional and local strategic documents. Special emphasis is placed on the role of young people, local stakeholders and the opportunities for the development of alternative sustainable forms of tourism.

The Republic of North Macedonia abounds in natural beauty, delicious traditional food and cultural heritage, and thus the potential for sustainable tourism is enormous, yet underutilized. Municipalities play a major role in the development of tourism and in encouraging and supporting local stakeholders and providers of tourism offerings.

According to an online survey conducted with data taken from the State Statistical Office / MAKSTAT, an analysis of tourist attendance in the Pelagonia Planning Region with an average for the last 3 years would look like this:

- Official tourist arrivals (registered tourists)

Official data (SSO / MAKSTAT) for the last three years show stable but moderate tourist activity in the Pelagonia planning region, with a dominance of domestic tourism and a relatively short average stay. Registered tourists: approximately 60,000 - 65,000 tourists per year.

Nights spent: around 145,000 – 160,000 nights per year

Average stay: around 2.3 – 2.6 nights per tourist

Structurally:

Domestic tourists account for approximately 65–70%

Foreign tourists account for 30–35%, mostly concentrated in Bitola, Krusevo and seasonally in Prespa.

This figure represents the "visible" tourist activity, i.e. only tourists who spent the night in registered accommodation facilities.

- Unofficial / real tourist arrivals

The actual attendance in the region is significantly higher than the official statistics, due to three main factors:

- Day visitors (without overnight stays) – cultural, mountain and excursion tourism
- Unregistered overnight stays – private accommodations, weekend homes, staying with relatives
- Excursions and transit groups – especially in Bitola, Krusevo and Pelister National Park

Estimated actual attendance (average for 3 years):

Daily visitors: ≈ 2 to 3 times more than registered tourists

Unregistered stays: additional 20–30% on top of official figures

Actual tourist attendance (average): 200,000 – 300,000 visitors per year

This figure better reflects the true economic and spatial exposure of the region to tourism, especially for: local economy, infrastructure, environment, need for new tourism products (rural, agro, gastro, eco-tourism).

This indicates a significant "hidden" tourism potential, especially in the segments of short-stay, rural and excursion tourism, which is not fully covered by official statistics.

Conclusion of the SWOT analysis of tourism according to the above data based on attendance in the Pelagonia region.

- Developing package products (weekend, theme, agro) and promotion aimed at converting day visitors into overnight stays.
- Support and formalization of local accommodation facilities (training, subsidies, registration).

- Investing in basic tourism infrastructure and a regional marketing route (Pelister–Prespa–Krushevo–Bitola).

- Introducing measures for visitor management and protection of natural and cultural resources.
- Encouraging cooperation between the tourism sector and local agriculture/producers for greater economic benefit.

On a positive note, the Municipality of Krushevo has been officially recognized as one of the 100 best green destinations in the world for 2025, which is a great success for eco-tourism in the RSM. The municipality is developing as a destination for all four seasons, offering sustainable activities such as mountain biking, paragliding and hiking, while focusing on nature conservation.

2. Methodology

This sector analysis is based on the following methodological approaches:

- Online/desktop research
- Survey research (quantitative and qualitative approach)
- Working group with relevant local stakeholders
- Focus group on the thematic area of tourism
- Analysis of strategic documents, including:
    - Local Economic Development Strategy of the Municipality of Resen 2023–2027
    - Youth Strategy of the Municipality of Resen 2025–2025
    - Local Economic Development Strategy of the Municipality of Bitola 2023-2027
    - Local Economic Development Strategy of the Municipality of Kruševo 2023-2027
    - Local Economic Development Strategy of the Municipality of Krivogaštani 2024-2028
    - Strategy for Local Economic Development of the Municipality of Novaci 2024-2028

This combined approach allows for a comprehensive insight into the state of the sector and alignment of findings with local development policies.

3. Survey research – key findings

On November 26, 2024, a questionnaire was created and sent to a group of respondents: youth, civic associations, business sector, pensioners, public sector from the Pelagonia Region. By December 1, 2024, 42 responses were registered, of which the most responses came from the following municipalities:

1. Municipality of Resen – 24 responses / 57.2%
2. Municipality of Bitola – 7 responses / 16.7%
3. Municipality of Krushevo – 7 responses / 16.7%

The survey consists of 25 questions that connect young people and the potential of tourism in their municipality. In Annex 1 of this report there is a list of all the questions that were in the survey questionnaire.

When asked about the key sectors that can provide better economic prospects for young people, tourism is dominantly identified as the leading sector (30 responses), significantly ahead of agriculture (11 responses) and the other sectors. This result indicates: a strong perception of tourism as a real opportunity for employment and entrepreneurship, recognition of tourism as a sector with a low threshold for entry, especially in alternative and rural forms, connection of tourism with local resources, identity and natural advantages. It is important that young people do not see tourism only as an additional activity, but as a basis for long-term economic stability in the region.

The survey responses show high consistency and a clear diagnosis of the problems. The challenges can be grouped into several categories:

- Infrastructural and spatial problems:
    - poor infrastructure,
    - unkempt beaches and public spaces,

- insufficient number of accommodation facilities.

- Market and organizational weaknesses
  - weak or insufficient promotion,
  - lack of a database for tourist services,
  - insufficient mutual cooperation between service providers.
- Human resources and capacities
  - lack of labor and professional staff,
  - lack of innovation and offers aligned with market demand.

Of particular significance is the perception that Prespa is losing tourists not due to a lack of potential, but due to insufficient promotion and systemic support, which indicates a management, not a structural, problem.

Respondents clearly emphasize the need for more active and structured cooperation between the municipality and the civil society sector, through:

- education and workshops,
- events, fairs and networking,
- greater communication and awareness,
- co-creating priorities with young people.

The need for a Tourism Info Center is particularly strongly emphasized, which is not seen only as an information point, but as:

- coordination mechanism,
- a tool for connecting supply and demand,
- a means of increasing attendance and better promotion of the region.

This indicates that the local community expects an institutional anchor for tourism, not *ad hoc activities*.

When asked in which direction the respondents see the potential of tourism, the answers clearly indicate that growth is not seen in mass tourism, but in:

- active tourism,
- gastronomy,

- all forms of alternative tourism (rural, agro, eco, lake, mountain),
- preservation and restoration of natural resources (Lake Prespa, beaches).

This means that there is a broad consensus for a development model based on sustainability, which is fully aligned with modern European tourism policies and market demands.

When asked about youth entrepreneurship and barriers, respondents identified the following key barriers:

- bureaucracy and administrative formalities,
- lack of finances and information,
- insufficient jobs and experience,
- economic and social prejudices.

As a solution, the following are proposed:

- subsidies and grants for youth,
- investor networking forums,
- youth councils and cultural centers,
- direct support programs from the municipality.

This shows that young people are not looking for passive help, but rather a structured opportunity and fair conditions for a start.

The results of the questionnaire clearly show that:

- The Pelagonia region has a strong natural and cultural potential for tourism throughout the year.
- Tourism is recognized as a key economic sector for youth, but is currently constrained by systemic and institutional weaknesses.
- The lack is not in resources, but in organization, promotion, infrastructure and coordination.
- There is a clear need for local tourism architecture: info center, databases, networks of service providers and an active role of the municipality.

- Young people see a future in tourism, but they are looking for easier access, support and partnership, not just declarative strategies.

A meeting with the working group was held on 04.12.2024, at which the above-mentioned results of the survey were presented. The discussion allowed for a deepening of the findings, their validation and identification of key structural problems and development opportunities in the tourism sector.

4. Focus group

As part of the project "Youth Policies Tailored to Young People", on April 7, 2025, a focus group dedicated to the development of tourism was organized in Resen, with the aim of an in-depth discussion on the challenges, potentials and future directions for tourism development in the Pelagonia planning region.

The focus group included tourism service providers, tour operators, restaurants, accommodation facilities, tourist guides, as well as representatives from the local government of the Municipality of Resen. The diversity of the participants allowed for a comprehensive discussion that covered the different aspects of the tourism ecosystem and reflected the real conditions on the ground. An online questionnaire was sent to all municipalities, but responses were received from the Municipalities of Kruševo, Krivogashtani, Mogila and Resen.

9 workshop participants, all from Prespa (1 local government employee) unanimously emphasized that the region has significant, but underutilized, tourism potential, especially in the segments of adventure, alternative and cultural tourism. Special emphasis was placed on the cultural and historical heritage, with a focus on the Resen Palace, which was identified as a facility with high tourism and educational potential, but with insufficient promotion and integration into existing tourism offers.

During the discussion, the need for better organization and association of all tourism service providers was strongly emphasized. Participants suggested

establishing an umbrella organization, cluster or common tourism brand, which would unite the different stakeholders and enable a coordinated appearance on the market. It was emphasized that such a model should be developed at the level of each municipality, but also

In parallel, there should be a regional association within the Pelagonia planning region, with the aim of joint promotion and creation of integrated tourist packages.

Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of actively and continuously presenting Prespa at international tourism fairs, not only as a geographical destination, but also as a space with authentic local stories, experiences and products. In this context, the need for professionally produced brochures and promotional materials was highlighted, which would reflect the diverse tourist offer and increase the visibility of the region at national and international levels.

Many participants emphasized that there is a lack of systematic education on sustainable tourism, especially aimed at young people. According to them, it is precisely such educational programs that can contribute to motivating young people to return to the Municipality of Resen and start their own tourism or related businesses. It was emphasized that sustainable tourism represents a real opportunity for employment, self-employment and long-term local development, if young people receive appropriate support, knowledge and encouragement.

At the same time, it was emphasized that the Municipality of Resen should take a more active role in the promotion of tourism, especially through social networks, but also by improving the official website, where it is necessary to create a special space dedicated to tourism. A key recommendation was the establishment of a public registry of tourism service providers, which would cover all forms of tourism (agro, rural, adventure, cultural, gastronomic, etc.) and would be easily accessible to tourists and other stakeholders.

The focus group clearly confirmed that young people are a key driver of future tourism development not only in Prespa but in the entire Pelagonia region, but their potential is still not fully exploited. Participants agreed that it is necessary for young people

to actively engage in the creation of local policies, programs and initiatives related to tourism, in order to ensure sustainable, inclusive and long-term development of the tourism sector in

the Municipality of Resen and the wider region. The same questionnaire was sent online to other municipalities in the Pelagonia region, of which only

The Municipality of Krushevo responded positively that they have a register of tourism service providers consisting of 72 providers and that they represent Krushevo as a destination at international fairs.

5. Analysis of strategic documents of the municipalities of the Pelagonia region

Municipality	Strategy for tourism	Validity	Total tourism budget (MKD)
Resen	yes	2023-2027	36,500,000.00
Bitola	yes	2023-2027	5,749,270.00
Prilep	no	2013-2020	n/a
Krushevo	yes	2023-2027	39,255,400.00
Dolneni	no	2019-2023	n/a
Demir Hisar	no	2021-2024	n/a
Mogila	no	n/a	n/a
Krivogashtani	yes	2024-2028	15,360,000.00
Novaci	yes	2023-2028	35,050,000.00
Total	**5**		**131,914,670.00**

The Municipality of Resen in the Local Economic Development Strategy 2023-2027 as Strategic Objective number 2 has Improvement of the tourist offer of Prespa. The total budget is 36,500,000.00 (thirty-six million and five hundred thousand) denars. Of this budget, 34,000,000.00 are planned for infrastructure activities, while only 2,500,000.00 denars are planned for promotion and support of local tourist and catering entities for the improvement of the tourist offer:

2. Strategic objective: Improving the tourist offer of Prespa						
Specific objective	**Activities**	**Timeframe**	**Partners involved**	**Budget (MKD)**	**Results**	**Indicators**
2.1 Investments in tourism infrastructure	2.1.1. Preparation of urban planning/technical documentation for tourism infrastructure	2023-2027	Municipality of Resen, Government. Competent ministries/ institutions. Domestic and foreign donors, programs, credit lines, etc.	2,000,000	Preparation of urban planning/technical documentation for the construction/reconstruction of infrastructure in support of tourism development.	Number of prepared urban planning/basic designs
	2.1.2 Construction/reconstruction of tourism infrastructure	2023-2027		15,000,000	Construction/reconstruction of road and utility infrastructure in support of tourism development.	Number of constructed/reconstructed infrastructure facilities
2.2 Encouraging the establishment of a tourism development zone	2.2.1 Locating suitable land and preparing urban planning/technical documentation for an industrial development zone.	2023-2027	Municipality of Resen, Government. Competent ministries/ institutions. Domestic and foreign donors, programs, credit lines, etc.	2,000,000	Locating suitable plots and preparing urban planning/technical documentation for establishing a tourism development zone.	Number of building plots
	2.2.2 Construction of utility infrastructure to and within the tourism development zone	2023-2027		15,000,000	Construction of road infrastructure, water supply, sewerage, energy infrastructure, etc.	Number of constructed infrastructure facilities

Figure 1: LED Strategy of the Municipality of Resen

2. Strategic objective: Improving the tourist offer of Prespa						
Specific objective	**Activities**	**Timeframe**	**Partners involved**	**Budget (MKD)**	**Results**	**Indicators**
2.3 Support for local tourism and hospitality entities to improve the tourist offer	2.3.1 Informing, encouraging and supporting local tourism and hospitality entities in using domestic and foreign programs and funds	2023-2027	Municipality of Resen, Government. Competent ministries/ institutions. Tourism and hospitality entities. Domestic and foreign donors, programs, credit lines, etc.	500,000	Registry of tourism and hospitality entities, tourist sites and landmarks of interest for tourism development in the Municipality of Resen. Informing, encouraging and supporting the use of domestic and foreign programs and funds for improving the tourist offer and developing new tourism products.	Number of informed and supported tourism and hospitality entities
	2.3.2 Raising the quality and promotion of the tourist offer	2023-2027		500,000	Analysis of the tourism market, encouraging networking of the tourist offer, promotion and placement of local tourism products, promotional activities, production and distribution of promotional material, digital tools and promotional events.	Number of partnerships established/Number of initiatives/Number of trainings.

Figure 2: LED Strategy of the Municipality of Resen

2. Strategic objective: Improving the tourist offer of Prespa						
Specific objective	**Activities**	**Timeframe**	**Partners involved**	**Budget (MKD)**	**Results**	**Indicators**
2.3 Support for local tourism and hospitality entities to improve the tourist offer	2.3.3 Improvement, standardization and networking of the tourist offer	2023-2027	Municipality of Resen, Government. Competent ministries/ institutions. Tourism and hospitality entities. Domestic and foreign donors, programs, credit lines, etc.	1,000,000	Building the capacities of tourism and hospitality service providers by strengthening the individual capacities of the entities, standardizing the tourist offer, sharing and implementing good practices, cooperation with scientific institutions in the field, networking of the tourist offer of local and cross-border entities.	Number of partnerships established/Number of initiatives/Number of trainings.
	2.3.4 Improving the development of value chains in tourism	2023-2027		500,000	Information meetings to encourage the value chain, encouraging tourism entities to apply new practices and innovative tools. Investments in energy efficiency, improvement of tourism services, inclusion of entities in the value chain, application of EU standards for tourism services, encouraging the establishment of new tourism entities.	Number of events and meetings organized. Number of new practices applied in the tourism chain. Investments in tourism, number of services included in the value chain, number of new innovative tools/services, etc.

Figure 13: LED Strategy of the Municipality of Resen

As part of the strategy, a SWOT analysis of the Municipality of Resen has been prepared:

MUNICIPALITY OF RESEN SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths	Weaknesses
-Favorable conditions for agricultural production. -Long tradition, knowledge and experience in apple production. -Favorable conditions for tourism development: Lake Prespa, Golem Grad island, Pelister and Galichica national parks, Ezerani Nature Park, cultural and historical heritage. -Favorable conditions for the development of health tourism (the only hospital for non-specific respiratory diseases, Otesevo). -Favorable conditions for the use of renewable energy sources (large number of sunny days).	-Insufficient diversification in apple placement and export orientation of agricultural production toward regions affected by war conflict and sanctions. -Insufficient promotion, lack of recognition and low added value of local agricultural products. -Insufficient utilization of local resources for tourism development. -Small number of accommodation facilities. -Small number and insufficient quality of tourism products. -Absence of a local tourism organization. -Insufficient promotion and marketing of the region as a tourist destination. -Insufficient entrepreneurial skills and business ideas among the local population.
Opportunities	**Threats**
-Access to financial resources from domestic and foreign funds and programs. -Increased demand for alternative forms of tourism. -Increased demand for organic and eco-friendly agricultural products and processed products. -Opening of the Markova Noga border crossing with Greece, a joint cross-border tourist offer of the Prespa region, "Three countries, two lakes, one destination – Prespa".	-War conflict closing export markets for agricultural products. -Pandemic, energy and economic crisis negatively affecting travel overall. -Water pollution and fluctuations in the level of Lake Prespa. -Population migration.

Conclusion: Tourism as a key development potential of the Municipality of Resen

The SWOT analysis clearly indicates that tourism is one of the most promising, but underutilized development sectors in the Municipality of Resen. The combination of natural, cultural and agricultural resources gives Prespa a unique position in a national and regional context, especially in the area of alternative and sustainable tourism.

A strong foundation for tourism development

The strengths show that the region has an exceptionally rich and diverse tourist base: Lake Prespa, the Pelister and Galichica national parks, the island of Golem Grad, the cultural and historical heritage (including the Resen Palace), as well as a long tradition in agriculture. These elements enable the development of year-round tourism – lake, mountain, agro, cultural, gastronomic and health tourism. In addition, the favorable climatic conditions and the potential for renewable energy sources create a good basis for the development of green and sustainable tourist facilities.

Key structural weaknesses

Despite the significant potential, the SWOT analysis indicates that the main constraints are not in the resources, but in the system. Insufficient promotion, the absence of a local tourist organization, the small number of accommodation facilities and the underdeveloped tourism products result in low utilization of existing attendance. Tourism is currently fragmented, without clear branding, coordination and added value, which limits its economic impact on the local community.

Realistic positioning opportunities

The opportunities clearly indicate that the Municipality of Resen can position itself as a destination for alternative, eco and agro-tourism, in line with global tourism trends. The increasing demand for authentic experiences, local food and sustainable forms of travel is directly aligned with the character of Prespa. An additional strategic opportunity is the cross-border cooperation with Greece and Albania, which can strengthen the attractiveness of the region through joint tourist offers and routes ("Prespa – one destination").

Risks and the need for sustainable management

Threats, especially environmental risks related to pollution and fluctuations in the level of Lake Prespa, as well as population migration, indicate that tourism development must be strictly planned and sustainable. Uncontrolled or

Mass tourism could further worsen these conditions. Therefore, tourism should be developed as a tool for nature protection and population retention, not as a pressure on resources.

Overall conclusion

The SWOT analysis confirms that tourism has the potential to become one of the main drivers of local economic development in the Municipality of Resen, but only if it moves from a spontaneous and fragmented approach to a strategic, coordinated and sustainable development model. The key lies in better promotion, institutional organization, development of quality tourism products and active involvement of young people and the local population.

With properly targeted policies and interventions, tourism can provide new jobs, diversify the local economy, and preserve the unique identity of Prespa in the long term.

According to the Youth Strategy of the Municipality of Resen 2025-2029, financial resources are provided for young people to start their own business and education. This framework represents a realistic and well-established model for supporting youth entrepreneurship, which can effectively contribute to retaining young people in the municipality and strengthening the local economy, if consistently implemented and adequately funded.

Area 3 – ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT	
Strategic objective 3.1: Motivated and prepared young people run successful businesses that support local economic growth and development	
Results	**Indicators**
1.2.3. At least 2 young entrepreneurs are financially supported annually to open their own business in the municipality	• At least EUR 10,000 per year provided by the Municipality to support two local businesses • Number of newly opened businesses supported • Number of people employed in the new businesses
Measures for objective 1.1: • The Municipality has adopted procedures and provided a budget for two businesses led by young people	
Strategic objective 3.2: Young people are capable of starting and managing their own businesses	
Results	**Indicators**
3.2.1 Mentoring support provided to young entrepreneurs and newly opened youth-led businesses	• Number of mentors engaged in implementing the program • Number of young entrepreneurs benefiting from mentoring support
3.2.2 A youth entrepreneurship training program is opened and implemented for young people	• Number of young entrepreneurs who are direct beneficiaries of the program • Number of local businesses included in the program
Measures for objective 3.2: • A mentoring support program for young entrepreneurs has been adopted • A local provider selected to deliver trainings for young entrepreneurs	

Figure 4: Youth Strategy of the Municipality of Resen

The Municipality of Krushevo is an example of good practice in the Pelagonia planning region, but also at the national level, in the area of sustainable tourism development. In 2025, Krushevo acquired the prestigious "Green Destination" certificate, officially including it among the destinations that systematically apply the principles of sustainable tourism, environmental protection and responsible management of tourism resources.

Additionally, 11 tourist facilities from the Municipality of Kruševo have received the Good Travel Seal certificate – an internationally recognized mark of quality and sustainability in tourism, intended for small and medium-sized tourism businesses, destinations and services that apply responsible practices in their operations. These recognitions confirm the commitment of the local tourism sector to improving the quality of services and compliance with international standards.

As a result of this approach, the Municipality of Krushevo was included in the list of "Top 100 Green Destinations" in the world in 2025, along with renowned tourist destinations from countries such as the United States, Chile, France, Sweden, Slovenia and Japan. This selection was made by the international organization Green Destinations, which recognizes and supports tourist destinations that successfully integrate the principles of sustainable development and environmental responsibility into their tourism policies.

Such international recognitions are the result of a long-term, coordinated and dedicated approach of all relevant stakeholders – local government, the private sector, civil society associations, institutions and citizens. Their joint work is aimed at developing tourism as a key driver of the local economy, while respecting the principles of sustainability, inclusiveness and protection of natural and cultural heritage.

According to the findings of the overall research, the SWOT analysis for tourism in the entire Pelagonia planning region looks like this:

S – Strengths

- High actual attendance (200–300 thousand visitors per year) in relation to officially registered tourists, which indicates a strong attractiveness of the region.
- Diversified tourist offer (cultural tourism – Bitola, mountain – Pelister, active – Krushevo, lake – Prespa).
- A large share of domestic tourists (65–70%), which ensures stable demand independent of international crises.
- Short but frequent visits, suitable for weekend tourism and rapid development of new tourism products.

W – Weaknesses

- Low conversion from visitors to overnight stays (only ~60–65 thousand registered tourists per year).
- Significant "gray segment" (unregistered accommodations and stays), which reduces the official economic effect.

- Short average stay (2.3–2.6 nights), which limits local consumption and income.
- Insufficient tourist infrastructure and packaging of the offer at the regional level.

O – Opportunities

- Converting day visitors into overnight tourists through agri-tourism, rural tourism, gastro and themed weekend packages.
- Formalization of unofficial tourism (local accommodations, family facilities), with growth in revenues and tax base.
- Development of integrated regional tourist routes (Pelister–Prespa–Krushevo–Bitola).
- Connecting tourism with local agriculture and small producers, which increases economic multiplicity.

T – Threats

- Pressure on natural and cultural resources without proper management (especially with the growth of daily visitors).
- Continued low overnight stays, which may limit interest in investments in accommodation facilities.
- Demographic trends and staff shortages in rural areas.
- Competition from other regions with more clearly branded tourism products and longer stays.

6. Recommendations

Based on all the data collected, the following priority recommendations are proposed:

Recommendation 1: Organization of a promotional tour by young people in the Pelagoninia Region - Organization of a structured promotional tour (FAM / PRESS tour) in each with the aim of increasing the visibility of the destination and better positioning of the local tourist offer at the national and international level.

Action points:

- Identification and invitation of relevant media, travel agencies and influencers (local, national and regional)
- Design of a promotional tour program (2-3 days) including:
  - local tourist attractions,
  - authentic experiences (agro, gastro, cultural, adventure),
- Active promotion of local products, services and tourist experiences (accommodation, gastronomy, crafts, guides)

- Coordination with local tourism entities
- Monitoring and documenting media releases and online content after the tour ends

Expected result:

- Increased media and digital visibility of each municipality in the Pelagonia Region as a tourist destination
- Better recognition of local products and tourist services
- Increased interest from travel agencies in including the region in their offer
- Better positioning of the Pelagonija Region as an authentic and sustainable tourist destination

Recommendation 2: Tourism Organization and Management - Establish a local umbrella organization / tourism platform in each of the Municipalities in the Pelagonia Region.

Action points:

- Formation of a working group (municipality + private sector + associations)
- Registration of a formal association or public-private partnership
- Defining a common tourism brand for the region/municipality
- Creating an annual plan for activities and promotion

Expected result:

- Coordinated market presence, better collaboration and increased destination visibility.

Recommendation 3: Digitalization and information - Establish a tourist info-system and a public registry of service providers.

Action points:

- Creating a tourist section on the official website of the Municipality
- Creation of a public registry (online database) of all tourist services
- Integration of the info system with social networks
- Designation of a person/team for maintenance and updating

Expected result:

- Better information, transparency and easier access for tourists.

Recommendation 4: Promotion and visibility of the destination - Enhanced national and international promotion of each municipality in the Pelagonia region separately or jointly as a sustainable tourist destination.

Action points:

- Preparation of a promotional strategy for the region/municipality
- Participation in at least 2 international tourism fairs per year
- Production and printing of brochures with stories from local service providers
- Creating digital promotional materials (video, social media)

Expected result:

- Increased interest, better recognition and market positioning.

Recommendation 5: Integrated tourism product and packages - Development of integrated tourism packages (agro, cultural, adventure tourism) by young people in cooperation with tourism service providers in Pelagonija, as well as with representatives from the LED. To create a working group that will voluntarily work for further promotion of the packages.

Action points:

- Mapping of existing tourism resources and services
- Development of at least 3 pilot packages (weekend, one-day, seasonal)
- Networking with tour operators from other municipalities in the Pelagonia Region

Expected result:

- Longer stay of tourists and higher local consumption.

Recommendation 6: Education and human capacity development - Development of educational programs for sustainable tourism with a focus on youth.

Action points:

- Organizing trainings on sustainable tourism and entrepreneurship
- Involvement of local and external experts

- Developing a mentoring program for young tourism startups
- Connecting with educational institutions and youth organizations

Expected result:

- Increased number of young people involved in tourism and new local businesses.

Recommendation 7: Support for youth entrepreneurship - Create municipal programs to support young entrepreneurs in tourism.

Action points:

- Introducing micro-grants and subsidies

- Simplification of administrative procedures
- Organizing forums to connect with investors and partners
- Activating a youth council with a focus on tourism

Expected result:

- Reduced barriers to entry and retention of young people in the region.

Recommendation 8: Regional cooperation - Strengthening regional tourism cooperation in the Pelagonia planning region.

Action points:

- Initiating a regional platform
- Development of joint tourist routes and events
- Coordination of promotional activities at the regional level

Expected result:

- Greater competitiveness and integrated regional tourism offer.

Key message

Tourism development in the Pelagonija region does not require new resources, but better organization, coordination, promotion and support of young people, so that tourism can become a strong local economic driver in each of the municipalities.

It is recommended that Municipalities adopt at least the first 3 recommendations as key, but since they are themselves building upon each other, it would be useful if all of them could be implemented.

7. Conclusion

Tourism in the Pelagonia region has significant but underutilized potential. The main challenges are structural and organizational in nature, while the greatest opportunity lies in activating young people, improving coordination and clearly positioning Pelagonia as an

authentic alternative tourist destination, rather than a transit one (conclusion of the presentation with the Prespa focus group in January 2026).

8. References

- Local Economic Development Strategy of the Municipality of Resen 2023–2027

- Youth Strategy of the Municipality of Resen 2025–2025

- Strategy for Local Economic Development of the Municipality of Bitola 2023-2027

- Local Economic Development Strategy of the Municipality of Kruševo 2023-2027

- Local Economic Development Strategy of the Municipality of Krivogaštani 2024-2028

- Strategy for Local Economic Development of the Municipality of Novaci 2024-2028

9. Attachments

Attachment 1:

Online survey questionnaire for “Sector analysis on the topic – tourism, in the Pelagonia region”

1. Please indicate in which municipality your organization is headquartered?

2. What sector do you come from?

    a. Business sector

    b. NGO / Civil Society Sector

c. Local Government / Public Sector

d. Other _____

3. In your opinion, what are the key sectors in your municipality that can provide better economic prospects for young people?

4. Do you consider tourism to be a key economic sector in your municipality?

5. What are the primary challenges that local tourism businesses face in their operations?

6. How would you describe the level of youth involvement in economic tourism development in your municipality?

7. Do you think that tourism can provide young people with good economic prospects in your municipality?

8. How do public and local municipal policies influence the decision of young people to stay in your municipality and engage in tourism?

9. Are there specific programs or initiatives aimed at increasing employment or supporting entrepreneurial activities of young people in the tourism sector?

10. Does your organization actively promote youth engagement, e.g. through internships, training programs or through special youth employment opportunities in the tourism sector?

11. How do you collaborate with other stakeholders (local government, ministries, agencies, business and non-governmental sector) to promote tourism development and youth employment in tourism?

12. Are there functional platforms for communication between all stakeholders in the areas of tourism development and youth policies?

13. How can the municipality better collaborate with the civil society sector to strengthen youth engagement in the tourism sector?

14. Is there a tourism organization in your municipality that unites all tourism service providers?

15. Is there a tourist information center in your municipality?

16. Do you think there is a need for a tourist information center?

17. If you answered YES to the previous question, what would be the benefit of that Info Center?

18. What are the main opportunities for economic tourism growth in your municipality in the next 5 years?

19. How can the municipality better support youth entrepreneurship and innovation in tourism?

20. What barriers do young people face when trying to enter the local labor market?

21. Do you think that your municipality can have a good enough tourist offer to interest young people to stay and work in it?

22. Do you see tourism as one of the leading sectors in your municipality in the next 10 years?

23. For what type of tourism does your municipality have the best conditions:

a. Lake

b. Mountain adventure

c. Rural / gastronomic

d. Agro-Tourism

e. Other _____

24. Explain why you chose the previous answer?

25. Do you see young people as drivers for the growth of tourism in your municipality?

Attachment 2:

Survey questionnaire for a focus group on tourism in the Pelagonia region

1. Please provide the name of your municipality and is there a register of tourism service providers in your municipality?

2. If you answered YES to the previous question, how many tourism service providers are in your registry and are they categorized?

3. Does the official website of your municipality have information about the tourist offer in your municipality?

4. Does the local government promote tourism in your municipality? If YES, in what form does that promotion take place?

5. How much budget is allocated for the development of tourism as an economic branch in your municipality?