

# ISLAND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ACTION THROUGH RESILIENT SMEs

## I-STARS

### Call for Sustainability Experts

### Guide for Applicants

#### **DISCLAIMER:**

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## 1. I-STARS project description

I-STARS is a project co-funded by the European Commission under the Single Market Programme (SMP SMP/SME Pillar), which aims at building a more resilient, innovative, and sustainable tourism ecosystem by taking at least 125 tourism SMEs operating on the islands of Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Spain and Italy, on a transformation 'journey', the 2030 journey to recovery and sustainability - while another 175 SMEs will be boosted in as far as their development and capacity in the area of sustainable innovations is concerned.

Among the tourism industry, there is indeed still a lack of awareness of the tangible benefits of 'greening' the tourism ecosystem, by applying circularity actions that result in reduced costs in the long-term, tapping into profitable markets for low-carbon products and services, or promotion of businesses by using ecological labels. There is also a lack of sufficient skills and resources to develop business innovations around sustainability objectives and demand. Tourism actors need skills to understand the elements of environmental sustainability, but also to implement energy and resource efficiency measures, as well as how to deploy renewables on-site.

The participating SMEs will shift towards more sustainable and responsible management through sustainability certification schemes and the implementation of innovative solutions for sustainable tourism providing them with heightened resilience to shocks, enhanced social, economic, and environmental awareness and responsibility. Their skills and capacities in sustainable business practices will be significantly boosted via their participation in cross-sectoral webinars and the development of an innovative transnational e-learning space incorporating peer learning and knowledge sharing among tourism professionals and SMEs. Their sustainability performance will be monitored and reported for through the development of a relevant framework and indicators integrated in the participating SMEs' business model before, during and after being supported by the project.

The I-STARS project is implemented by the following partner organisations:

- [Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry](#) (Cyprus)
- [Network of the Insular Chambers of Commerce and Industry of the European Union \(INSULEUR\)](#) (Greece)
- [Observatory on Tourism for Islands Economy](#) (Italy)
- [Mallorca Chamber of Commerce](#) (Spain)
- [Mallorca Turisme Foundation](#) (Spain)
- [Vagabond Tours of Ireland](#) (Ireland)

## 2. 'I-STARS Call for Sustainability Experts' Objectives

To reach the project objectives, the I-STARS project partners will launch later this year an 'Open Call for SMEs' whereby tourism businesses can apply to receive a grant in the form of a voucher to be redeemed against the provision of services offered by Sustainability Experts/Service Providers. The provided vouchers shall boost tourism SMEs awareness, development, and capacity to integrate sustainable innovations in their business practice, adopting sustainability, resilience and circularity as drivers of their competitiveness in the rapidly changing global tourism market scenario.

The objective of the current '**Call for Sustainability Experts**' is to recruit service providers interested in assisting Tourism SMEs transition into sustainability, by offering a variety of services to them. A non-exhaustive list of such services can be found under Section 5 below. In essence, a pool of pre-selected experts/service providers will be developed, in the form of an online directory, enabling tourism SMEs to choose their provider who will accompany them during their I-STAR transformation journey to recovery and sustainability.

Those listed on the I-STAR online directory will be widely disseminated on the websites and social media platforms of all I-STAR project partners, consisting of Chambers of Commerce, destination management organizations, sustainable tourism companies, while the directory will also be available on the eLearning platform to be developed by the I-STAR project that will provide free online courses on sustainability themes.

### 3. Implementation of I-STAR journey towards sustainability

Successful SMEs that will be awarded the I-STAR voucher will sign the service agreement with their chosen sustainability expert, marking the departure of the I-STAR journey towards sustainability. Although the I-STAR project partners will provide a template service agreement, nevertheless the terms and conditions of the agreement among the awarded SME and the chosen Expert lie in the responsibility of the parties. The only requirements which must be complied with are the following:

- ✓ **Voucher expiry date:** the Sustainability Voucher has a maximum validity of 15 months, as the maximum duration of the I-STAR journey can last up to 15 months. Of course the duration could be shorter than 15 months as it depends on a number of factors including the size of the enterprise, level of readiness of business, etc.
- ✓ **Assessment before & after the I-STAR journey:** sustainability performance assessment must take place using the I-STAR assessment tool. This tool is currently under construction and will be available online and for free.
- ✓ **Completion of I-STAR journey:** both parties, SME on the one hand and Expert on the other hand, agree to implement and complete all stages of the I-STAR journey with the end result being the uptake of sustainable solutions and improved sustainability performance of the SME.
- ✓ **Monitoring and progress reporting:** both parties (SME and Expert) agree to monitor and report on the progress made throughout the I-STAR journey. A set of reporting templates will be provided by the I-STAR partners, while the reporting will take place in 3 stages: at 3 months, 9 months and 15 months after the journey departure date. All progress reports will be submitted to I-STAR partners in English language.
- ✓ **Visibility and publicity:** both parties (SME and Expert) agree to publicize their contact details, journey milestones, participate in public events organized by the I-STAR partners, as well as give their consent to be photographed and/or filmed for publicity purposes of the I-STAR project.

#### 4. I-STARS Journey Indicative Timeline

<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>INDICATIVE DATES</b>
Launch of the Call for tourism SMEs	12 <sup>th</sup> July – 25 <sup>th</sup> October 2023
Selection and award of SMEs	November 2023
Awarded SMEs sign Agreement with Sustainability Experts of their choice	November 2023
Awarded SMEs receive online training on sustainability themes <sup>1</sup>	1/12/2023 – 30/04/2024
Awarded SMEs are assessed on their level of sustainability performance under the guidance of their chosen Experts <sup>2</sup>	Dec' 2023 – Feb' 2025
Awarded SMEs embark on the 2030 journey using the services of their Experts	May 2024 – July 2025
Monitoring & reporting on progress made during 2030 journey (on behalf of SMEs & Experts)	M3 (July 2024), M9 (January 2025) & M15 (July 2025)
Awarded SMEs submit their financial report to I-STARS partners	August – October 2025
I-STARS partners reimburse Experts value of awarded vouchers	November 2025

<sup>1</sup> The I-STARS eLearning platform will be available for free and will include 6 online courses of approximately 30 hours. The courses will cover: energy management; waste management; water management; food-waste management; stakeholder engagement; digital upskilling to record customer experience and feedback. All awarded SMEs must complete their eLearning in all 6 courses before they depart on the I-STARS journey.

<sup>2</sup> Sustainability performance assessment will take place using the I-STARS online assessment tool.

## 5. I-STARS Grants Scheme Facts

Who can apply for the I-STARS grant scheme?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Small &amp; Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs)<sup>3</sup></li> <li>2) from any tourism sector</li> <li>3) at least 2 years of operation</li> <li>4) operating in Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy (incl. Sicily), Spain (incl. Mallorca)</li> </ol>
Form of I-STARS grant	Voucher
Total value of vouchers per country	€140,000.00
Maximum voucher value per SME	€5,600.00
Minimum number of vouchers per country	25
What can be funded? (non-exhaustive / indicative list of services)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Sustainability performance assessment before and after I-STARS journey (compulsory);</li> <li>2) Sustainability Certification Schemes (e.g. EU Ecolabel, Sustainable Travel Ireland, Biosphere, Green Globe, Travelife, etc.); including application, certification &amp; audit fees, expert's consultancy fees;</li> <li>3) Circular Economy Strategy; consulting, strategy development &amp; implementation of measures leading to transition to circular business systems</li> <li>4) Sustainability Marketing Actions; consulting &amp; implementation of internal and external sustainability communications/marketing, messaging &amp; reporting</li> <li>5) Corporate Sustainable Strategy; consulting, strategy development &amp; implementation of measures on sustainability, decarbonisation, developing action plans</li> <li>6) Life Cycle Assessment - Product</li> </ol>

<sup>3</sup> [Commission Recommendation 6 May 2003](#) on the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. MSME has fewer than 250 employees and annual turnover below €50 million or balance sheet below €43 million.

	Environmental Footprint (PEF); consulting, generation & implementation of recommendations of PEF studies
	7) Life Cycle Assessment - Organisation Environmental Footprint (OEF); consulting, generation & implementation of recommendations of OEF studies
	8) Sustainable Packaging; consulting & implementation of a sustainable, responsible and circular manner of the entire packaging system
	9) Sustainability Technology Solutions; purchase of software/technology solutions necessary to monitor and improve sustainability performance (max. up to 30% of total action cost)
Who pays Experts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I-STARS local partner</li> <li>• Payment arrangements will be agreed and included in the Service Agreement among the SME and the Expert</li> </ul>
Evidence of completion of I-STARS journey	Improved sustainability performance of awarded SME based on I-STARS assessment tool, and relevant sustainability certificate if available (e.g. Ecolabel, STI, Travelife, etc.)

## 6. Who can be listed on the I-STARS Sustainability Experts Directory?

- Legal entity, or natural person, operating as a Consultant;
- With proven record of consultancy experience and expertise in sustainable business practices;
- Ability to offer consulting services to businesses operating in at least Ireland (and Greece/ Italy / Spain)
- Excellent use of English language (written and oral);
- Membership in a professional body will be considered added value;
- Access to tourism businesses will be considered added value.

## 7. Interested to join the I-STARS Sustainability Experts Directory?

If you are an Expert in the field of sustainability, and you would like to be part of the I-STARS journey in order to assist Tourism SMEs transition into sustainability, we encourage you to **submit your Expression of Interest application online**. Click [here](#).

After submission, your application will be reviewed by the I-STARS project partner in your country.

If successful, once your application is approved to be enlisted in the I-STARS Sustainability Experts Directory, you will be notified by the local I-STARS project partner the latest by Friday 30th June 2023.

The deadline for applications is **Wednesday 14th June 2023**. There is limited space to join the I-STARS Sustainability Experts Directory, while applications will be treated on a first-come-basis.

By submitting your application, you give your consent to make publicly available your personal contact details.

## 8. Need more information?

Reach out to your local I-STARS project partner				
ORGANISATION	COUNTRY	CONTACT PERSON	TELEPHONE	E-MAIL
Vagabond	Ireland	Lauren Keogh Rebecca Toomey	+353 (0) 1 223 3661	<a href="mailto:istarsireland@gmail.com">istarsireland@gmail.com</a>