

DRAFT AGENDA

TITLE:

International networking event - Skilling up the Western Balkan agri-food sector

DATE AND VENUE

4-7 December 2023, Skopje, North Macedonia

Limak Hotel, Zeleznicka No.31, 1000 Skopje - [Limak Skopje Luxury Hotel \(limakhotele.com\)](https://limakhotele.com)

CONTEXT

The ETF's project "*Skilling up the Western Balkan agri-food sector: digitalising, greening*" aims to enhance joined-up skills development among a broad range of Western Balkan stakeholders and with their EU peers. The goal is to facilitate partnerships in education, training, upskilling and reskilling across the six Western Balkan economies.

The agriculture and food sectors are the largest producing and manufacturing sectors in Europe. The situation is similar in the Western Balkan region where all six economies have identified agri-food as a priority sector for smart specialisation. The COVID-19 pandemic, economic downturns, ongoing conflicts and climate change have all highlighted the importance of the agri-food sector even further. Skilled and qualified employers and employees are the key to maximising the innovation, competitiveness and economic growth potential of this key sectors.

In the Western Balkan region, innovative SMEs continue to emerge and thrive, bolstering the agri-food sector with new ideas and fresh perspectives. It is SMEs that are driving the shift to using more digital tools and other advanced technologies in the sector. From artificial intelligence and robotics to the Internet of Things and 5G, the latest technologies can offer invaluable support for SMEs across the agri-food value chain. SME support services, however, have not kept up with the developments and more needs to be done in terms SME training support, technology adoption, and technology transfer. Similarly, career development support to attract skilled professionals to the agri-food sector is lagging behind. Digitalisation is changing the sector and new attractive occupations and interesting job profiles are emerging, in particular at the cross-section of agri-food with other sectors, for both young people and experienced professionals.

Agri-food is at the core of the discussions on sustainability. The European Green Deal comes with climate and environmental goals and challenges to SMEs which can be turned into opportunities for innovation and competitiveness. There is a handful of innovative biochemical and microbial companies in the Western Balkans paving the way in applying sustainable and circular practices in their business models, products and services. Production of ecological, organic and regenerative foods and fertilisers is being driven by consumer demand across the Western Balkan region.

Digitalisation of the agri-food sector has the potential to revolutionise the agri-food sector, promote efficiency, sustainability, and competitiveness – all of which are essential in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as set out in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The challenges ahead concern availability, affordability, access to technologies, digital literacy across the

agri-food value chains, adapting sustainable technologies to small-scale producers - and ensuring employers and employees have the right skills to use them. To tackle the challenge, all stakeholders i.e. agri-food companies, business intermediary bodies, policymakers, and education, training, and research institutions, need to work together to jointly identify and address education, training, upskilling and reskilling needs. To support this process, the ETF project “*Skilling up the Western Balkan agri-food sector: digitalising, greening*” is centred around collaboration and peer learning, backed by research.

AIM OF THE NETWORKING EVENT

In June 2022, the ETF launched the project “*Skilling up the Western Balkan agri-food sector: digitalising, greening*” and it will run until 2025. The project aims to enhance cooperation on skilling, upskilling and reskilling in the agri-food sector among Western Balkan countries – and with EU member states. The aim of this second networking event is to:

- Facilitate networking building between companies, education/training providers, research organisations and intermediary organisations from the Western Balkans and likeminded partners from the EU
- Provide peer learning opportunities through dedicated sessions and site visits to innovative companies from Skopje
- Sharing results of country research on skills needs in the agri-food sector:
 - development and production of digital solutions for agri-food,
 - development and production of biochemical and microbial products for agri-food, and
 - production of organic food.
- Launching a foresight exercise to identify future needs in terms of skilling, upskilling and reskilling based on the current demands of the companies
- Getting familiar with funding opportunities from the EU

DAY 0: 4 December 2023

Time	Sessions
	<i>Arrival and registration Limak Hotel, Zeleznicka No.31, 1000 Skopje</i>
19.00	<i>FITD 10th Anniversary Aperitivo</i>

DAY 1: 5 December 2023

Time	Sessions
09:00 – 09.45	Welcome session
09.45 - 10:30	Peer Learning “getting started” <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jacques Trienekes, Wageningen University

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Elisabeth Hoenigsberger, Agricultural College Krems 3. Nick Pannecouque Provincial Technical Institute of West Flanders 5. Adeel Tariq, LUT Univ, Finland 6. Christelle Domingos + Patricia Coelho, Innovcluster, Portugal
10:30 - 11:00	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:00 - 12:30	Peer exchange – meet the EU peer learning partners
12:30 - 13:30	<i>Lunch</i>
13:30 - 14:00	Introduction to site visits
14:00 – 15:30	Small delegation to visit FITD headquarter in Skopje
14:00 - 17:00	SITE VISITS (one visit per person) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. GREENAGRO 2. BIO Engineering 3. Matryoshka
19:30 - 21:00	Networking dinner

DAY 2: 6 December 2023

Time	Sessions
09:00 - 9:30	Welcome Feedback from site visits Keynote speech Jacques Trienekens Wageningen University
9.30 – 10.30	Sharing results research on skills needs in the agri-food sector Launch of Foresight exercise
10:30 - 11:00	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:00 - 12:30	Foresight exercise: working groups
12:30 - 14:00	<i>Lunch</i>
14.00 –15:30	Foresight exercise: working groups

	<i>Coffee break</i>
15:45 – 16:30	Wrap Up Foresight
19:00 - 21:00	Networking dinner

DAY 3: 7 December 2023

Time	Sessions
09:00 - 10:30	Funding opportunities HORIZON AG FUTURA Mr MUKANOV European Enterprise Network, EEN Slovenia Vladimir Rudl · Head of Sector for Entrepreneurship at Regional Development Agency Podravje-Maribor. ERASMUS+ Adeel Tariq, LUT University, Finland
10:30 - 11:00	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:00 - 12:00	Parallel session 1: Introduction to and meeting of the Advisory Board <i>Online connection to externals</i>
	Parallel session 2: Peer Learning Cafés Individual sessions with EU peer learning partners
	Parallel session 3: Interview with businesses for training sessions 2024
12:00 – 12:30	Closing session
12:30 - 13:30	<i>Lunch</i>
	<i>Departure</i>

