

GREEN SKILLS FOR A SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMY

Green skills are more than just technical expertise — they are essential competencies that empower individuals and communities to address the pressing challenges of climate change and environmental degradation. As the world strives to build a sustainable future, green skills have the potential to be a driving force for transformation. When cultivated strategically, these skills can unlock new opportunities for job creation, enhance the capacity of local communities, and contribute to the restoration and protection of our planet's ecosystems.

ABOUT RISI ALBANIA

RisiAlbania is a youth employment project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, in partnership with Ministry of Economy, Innovation and Culture, implemented by Helvetas and Partners Albania. The project has been operating from 2013 until 2025.

RisiAlbania and its partners worked to strengthen green skills as a key component of fostering sustainable economic development in Albania, with a focus on the agribusiness and tourism sectors. In agribusiness, the project aimed to build a competitive, export-oriented sector based on certified products targeting high-value markets. This approach offered long-term sales opportunities, entrepreneurial stability, and employment for young women and men in rural areas. Challenges such as limited professional knowledge, fragmented production, low efficiency, high costs, minimal government support, and restricted access to finance beforehand hindered reaching full potential.

In parallel, RisiAlbania supported the development of sustainable tourism by promoting year-round travel and enhancing tourist experiences across both coastal and inland regions. The goal was to create jobs, boost local economies, and preserve Albania's cultural and natural heritage while minimizing environmental impact. At the time, tourism was concentrated in peak seasons and coastal zones, with rural businesses struggling due to weak collaboration, limited awareness, and a shortage of skilled labor. By addressing these gaps through green skills development—such as sustainable farming practices and eco-tourism services—RisiAlbania contributed to increasing the sectors' resilience, environmental responsibility, and appeal to high-value markets and visitors.

RISI ALBANIA'S APPROACH

RisiAlbania recognized that green skills are not standalone capabilities, but an essential component of broader development strategies. By embedding green skills into the agribusiness and tourism sectors, the project contributed to a shift from environmentally harmful practices toward more sustainable, climate-resilient approaches. This integration supported inclusive economic growth, strengthened rural economies, and promoted environmental stewardship through targeted education, vocational training, and hands-on learning.

The project viewed green skills as a catalyst for systemic change—empowering young women and men in Albania's rural and tourism areas, fostering local resilience, and creating long-term, sustainable livelihoods. Green skills were developed not only to reduce environmental impact, but also to equip individuals with the knowledge, values, and attitudes necessary to thrive in an inclusive green economy.

RisiAlbania's green skills component focused on both emerging and existing jobs, addressing the evolving skill demands of a transitioning economy. This included technical and transversal competencies relevant to sustainable agriculture, and eco-tourism practices. The initiative emphasized the need for adaptive education systems—from adult learning and vocational education and training (VET)—to respond to these changing requirements with innovative teaching and learning approaches.

Through its work, RisiAlbania demonstrated that integrating green skills into economic development is a powerful lever for change. By preparing youth and businesses for a green future, the project helped pave the way for a more resilient, equitable, and environmentally responsible Albania.

Green Economy in Action – Agribusiness: Results and Impact from RisiAlbania

As part of its final phase, the RisiAlbania project made significant contributions to embedding green skills into Albania's agribusiness sector, particularly within fruits and vegetables and medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs). Through a targeted approach combining training, innovation, and systemic change, the project supported a transition to more sustainable, competitive, and inclusive value chains—driving job creation, higher incomes, and improved environmental practices.

Green Skills for a Sustainable Workforce

Empowering Access to High-Value Markets

RisiAlbania worked closely with Albanian farmers and exporters to meet international quality and sustainability standards, particularly through GlobalG.A.P certification. This opened doors to premium export markets—30% in the region and 70% in the EU—where products command prices 3 to 4 times higher. By 2023, 21 exporters and over 300 farmers were certified, compared to just two exporters in 2018. These certified exporters now represent over 38% of Albania's total fruit and vegetable exports, valued at more than €60 million. To institutionalize these practices, a National Technical Working Group (NTWG) for Global G.A.P was established, ensuring long-term support and knowledge sharing.



Advancing the MAPs Sector with Green Innovations

The medicinal and aromatic plants sector saw a shift from wild collection to sustainable cultivation. Exporters adopted eco-friendly practices, established centralized drying facilities close to production areas, and invested in quality management systems. These changes were supported through services like farmer contracting and internal extension. Collaboration with the University of Agriculture enabled the introduction of the *MAPs Compendium model from Agroscope*, supporting applied research and sector-wide innovation.

Driving Competitiveness through Digital and Traceability Solutions

RisiAlbania introduced ICT-based innovations, including digital traceability systems like FarmForce and Helius—used for the first time in Albania. These tools helped improve transparency, quality control, and efficiency across both Fruit & Vegetable and MAPs value chains, aligning with green market requirements.

Impact at a Glance

- **Employment:** 2,003 new jobs created, including 1,245 for women and 918 for marginalized individuals. Employment in processing and exporting increased by 20–50% due to higher volumes and improved production systems.
- **Income Growth:** Exporters saw a 20–30% increase in income; farmers gained an average of 15%.
- **Certified Land Area:** GlobalG.A.P certified farmland expanded from 45 ha in 2018 to 760 ha in 2023.
- **Export Growth:** Fruit and vegetable exports doubled from €75.2 million in 2018 to €158.3 million in 2023. Exports to the EU increased to €78.8 million.
- **Innovation and Services:** 883 private agribusinesses adopted sustainable, growth-oriented practices, 11 business development service providers offered enhanced services in quality, certification, export, and finance; nine new partnerships and advocacy efforts addressed systemic challenges in agribusiness development
- **Investments and Income:** €9.4 million in private investment leveraged and €1.9 million in net additional income generated.

Through the integration of green skills, RisiAlbania supported a transformative shift in Albania's agribusiness sector—enhancing sustainability, boosting competitiveness, and creating opportunities for youth, women, and marginalized communities. The project leaves behind a legacy of systems that are more resilient, market-oriented, and environmentally conscious.

Green Economy in Action – Sustainable Tourism: Results and Impact from RisiAlbania

As part of its mission to promote inclusive and sustainable economic development, RisiAlbania made key contributions to transforming Albania's tourism sector by embedding green skills and sustainability principles into rural and inland tourism. By supporting local entrepreneurs, tour operators, and institutions, the project helped shape a more resilient, responsible, and competitive tourism economy—one that creates jobs, protects cultural and natural heritage, and delivers real value to communities.

Green Skills for a Sustainable Workforce

Inland Tourism Innovation and Year-Round Experiences

RisiAlbania supported innovative tour operators in developing over 220 new tourism products that go beyond traditional offerings—focusing on authentic, year-round experiences in rural Albania. These new packages involved close collaboration with local businesses and communities, ensuring that economic benefits stayed in the regions. As a result, 1,318 people gained employment, including 606 women and 358 individuals from marginalized groups.



Promoting Quality through Sustainability Standards and Certifications

To help small tourism enterprises tap into higher-value, quality-minded market segments, RisiAlbania promoted the adoption of Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) standards. By 2024, eight tour operators had been certified, supported by a network of 20 trained consultants, including eight qualified GSTC auditors. This certification wave aligned with national policy shifts—sustainability was formally declared a guiding principle in Albania's new tourism law and strategy, and steps were taken toward GSTC membership.

Regional Branding through Destination Management Organizations

RisiAlbania played a key role in establishing three regional partnerships in Gjirokastra, Saranda, and Korça, where public and private stakeholders joined forces to promote their regions as destinations. These Destination Management Organizations not only improved coordination and branding but also fostered job creation and tourism sustainability. Notably, *Visit Gjirokastra* launched a commercial spin-off (DMC) to provide complementary services and generate revenue.

Rural Hospitality through the Albergo Diffuso Model

In partnership with rural communities, the project introduced the *Albergo Diffuso* concept—an innovative hospitality model where village businesses join forces to create a unified lodging experience. Starting in Kruja, and expanding to Berat and Qyteza, this model was officially recognized in Albania's new tourism law as a valid form of accommodation, enabling rural areas to attract niche, eco-conscious travellers.

Building Green Skills for Sustainable Tourism

Green skills were a cornerstone of the project's success, with wide-ranging training provided through hotel management modules and the *Green Academy*. Key topics included: Energy and water efficiency; Waste management; Sustainable food and beverage practices; Eco-friendly business strategies; Certification, policy, and planning in sustainable tourism; Communications for sustainability; Integration of SDGs into tourism operations. These initiatives helped 498 local tourism businesses adopt improved, growth-oriented practices and positioned them for long-term success in a competitive, sustainable market.

Impact at a Glance

- 20% increase in tourist numbers.
- 28% increase in business turnover.
- 22% increase in employment in sustainable tourism.
- €1.9 million in private investments leveraged.
- €400,000 in net additional income generated.
- Eight Albanian tour operators adopted GSTC sustainable tourism standards and obtained international certifications.
- 20 tourism professionals and consultants got trained as GSTC experts. Eight got trained and qualified as GSTC auditors.

- The Ministry of Tourism and Environment of Albania and GSTC signed a Memorandum of Understanding, initiating a concrete collaboration for the development of sustainable tourism in Albania.



© Training youth on wood carving at a workshop in the MedievalBazaar. © Visit Gjirokastra Association

Through targeted support, capacity building, and policy advocacy, RisiAlbania demonstrated how green skills can transform tourism into a sustainable growth engine. The project not only contributed to environmental protection and cultural preservation but also ensured that local communities benefit directly from tourism—making Albania a more sustainable and attractive destination for the future.

💡 Lessons learnt:

- Green skills development integrated into lifelong learning programs provides flexible opportunities for training (reskilling/upskilling) to sustainable challenges.
- Behavioural change is important: Raising awareness about green skills through media and community programs encourages broader participation.
- Green skills development has been successfully integrated into training programs, including new courses focused on sustainability and digital skills, offering flexible learning options like online and blended formats.
- Collaboration between public and private sectors through Sectoral Skills Committees ensures training programs align with labour market needs, making green skills more relevant and effective.
- Promoting sustainable tourism practices by supporting certifications and training for tour operators helps advance the green transition in the tourism sector.
- Sustainable agricultural practices are encouraged via platforms like Agroquality, which guide farmers and exporters in adopting international green standards such as GlobalG.A.P.
- Raising awareness through events like Skills Week, involving youth and educators in green skills discussions, fosters behavioural change and broader community engagement in sustainability.

🚀 Looking Ahead

As RisiAlbania approaches the conclusion of its implementation period, the project envisions:

- **Integrated Skills Development:** Expand green and digital skills training aligned with labour market needs, with a focus on marginalized groups and underserved regions (e.g., Korça, Shkodra, Kruja, Saranda).
- **Policy & Strategy Alignment:** Support the National Employment and Skills Strategy (2023–2030) to embed green and digital competencies, benefiting over 10,700 individuals.
- **Sectoral & Regional Partnerships:** Strengthen Sector Skills Committees (ICT, Tourism) and partner with ministries, academia, and industry to ensure responsive, future-ready training.
- **Sustainable Economic Development:** Foster eco-friendly growth in agribusiness and tourism through sustainable practices, certifications, and support for local communities.
- **Awareness & Inclusion:** Promote green skills through public campaigns and inclusive training models, ensuring broad access and engagement.
- **Monitoring, Innovation & Transparency:** Use data-driven monitoring to improve training quality and encourage sustainability reporting among providers and businesses.