**How Covid-19 pandemic affected tourism in Western Macedonia**

***An online survey for Western Macedonia*** *was launched by the Regional Development Fund of Western Macedonia in July 2021 within Epicah project. The aim of the online survey* ***was to identify needs for new projects, good practices in the fields of culture, nature, and tourism, and also, the impact of Covid-19 on regional tourism.***

**23 organizations** located in the Region of Western Macedonia responded to the survey providing information on their needs and plans for new projects related to the topics tackled by the Investment Priority 6.c., the good practices identified in their territories both within Interreg projects as well as other projects funded by EU or national funds.

Especially referring to **the effects** **of the pandemic crisis Covid-19** on the tourism of their region, as well as about the opportunities in the post-pandemic crisis era, the organisations that participated in the online survey declared that the pandemic crisis Covid-19 affected mostly the entrepreneurship and the employment in the tourism sector, as well as the operation of visited sites. Speaking for the future, **the main challenges to face** will be to restore international and domestic tourists’ trust to traveling as well as to adopt effective business support measures, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Among **the stimulation strategies proposed** were the promotion of tourist products and experiences related to nature, health and well-being, outdoor activities, the support of businesses that have been remarkably affected by the Covid-19 restrictions and the stimulation of the domestic market demand. Finally, with regards to the opportunities arising from this situation, based on the answers received within the online survey, these are the differentiation through the alternative experience-based tourism, the adoption of new technologies (5G etc.) and the stimulation of rural tourism.

*To be noted that at the same time, during 2021 the Regional Development Fund of Western Macedonia followed successfully the implementation of its Action Plan within Epicah project that had a remarkable progress:*

* *10 project proposals of a total budget of 8.035.777,35Eur are under evaluation within Call No. 116, including actions aiming to (i) the improvement of the accessibility in archaeological sites, museums, and information centers and (ii) the upgrading and/ or the improvement of contemporary art infrastructure (theatre, music, fine arts, dance, etc.) and the supply of relevant equipment.*
* *2 project proposals have been submitted up to now within Calls No 126 and 136 including actions for special trekking routes of low difficulty for elderly and disabled people including also safety equipment for the support of outdoor activities (Call No.136 particularly focus on areas near lakes). The calls were officially launched in January 2021.*