

Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnerships project
No. 2022-1-LV01-KA220-VET-000089171

**Baltic Green Leadership: VET Students as Agents
of Change / Green Leadership"**

Overview

**"Best practices and challenges for
green and circular technologies in
the Baltic region"
-2023**

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Introduction

Baltic partners from Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania –



are implementing Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnerships project No. 2022-1-LV01-KA220-VET-000089171 “Baltic Green Leadership: VET Students as Agents of Change / Green Leadership”.

The project’s aim is to promote VET role and leadership in green transition. The project result will be a training program for VET teachers, trainers and managers including innovative teaching and learning approaches for acquiring green skills at VET schools.

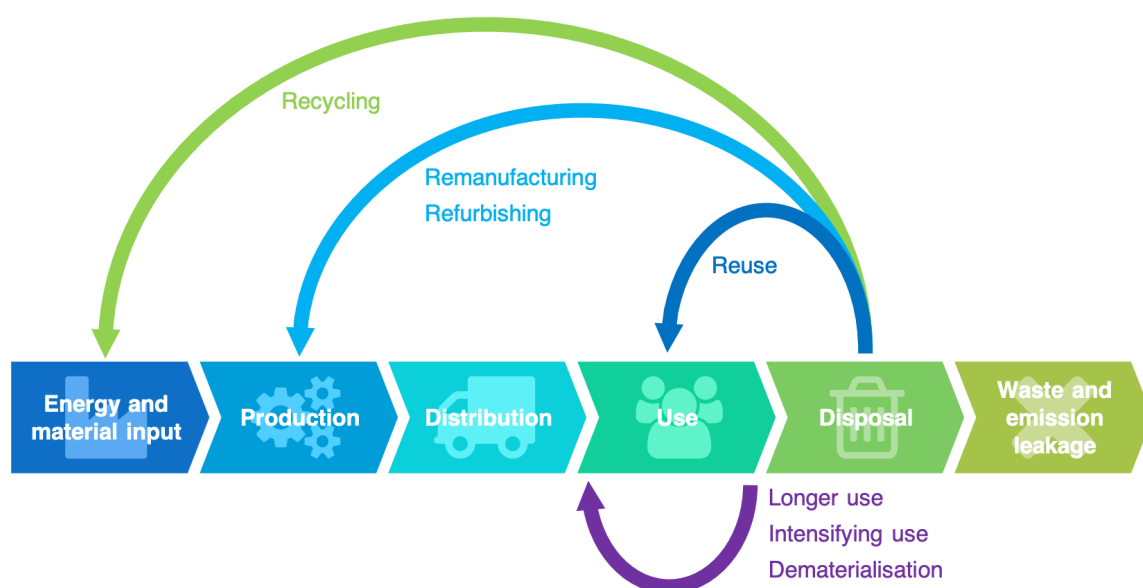
The project partners carried out interviews with companies in different sectors in their countries in order to develop a list of green and circular skills and collect essential information that is necessary to create the training programme. The interview questions helped identify the gaps, opportunities, and priorities for promoting circularity in organizations or industry, and develop a roadmap for transitioning to a more sustainable and regenerative business model.

This overview "Best practices and challenges for green and circular technologies in the Baltic region" is developed using the collected information from various companies. It outlines the current and future skill gaps and shortages in the companies in different sectors related to green jobs and technologies in Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

The overview might be helpful to those who want to get the main insights of the concept of green and circular economy and learn about initiatives and best practices in the Baltic states and Finland. The overview concludes with a list of green and circular skills to be developed for the employees in companies from different sectors.

Brief summary of the concept of green and circular economy

The concepts of the green economy and the circular economy are innovative approaches aimed at addressing environmental challenges and promoting sustainable development. They both emphasize the efficient use of resources, reduction of waste, and minimization of environmental impact.



An illustration of the Circular Economy concept

By Geissdoerfer, M., Pieroni, M.P., Pigosso, D.C. and Soufani, K. - Geissdoerfer, M., Pieroni, M.P., Pigosso, D.C. and Soufani, K., 2020. Circular business models: A review. Journal of Cleaner Production, p.123741. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Martin_Geissdoerfer2/publication/343810965_Circular_business_models_A_review/links/5f628dd092851c07896d7dd3/Circular-business-models-A-review.pdf, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=97396208>

Key features of the Green economy

The **green economy** is an economic system that seeks to reconcile economic growth with environmental sustainability. It focuses on creating value and wealth while also ensuring that natural resources are managed and used in a way that minimizes negative ecological and social impacts. The green economy aims to transition from traditional, resource-intensive industries to more sustainable alternatives.

Key features of the **green economy** include:

✓ Sustainable Production and Consumption:

The green economy promotes the production of goods and services that have a lower environmental impact. It encourages the adoption of cleaner production methods, energy-efficient technologies, and sustainable consumption patterns.

✓ Renewable Energy:

Renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, hydro, and biomass, play a central role in the green economy. They offer alternatives to fossil fuels, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and dependence on finite resources.

✓ Resource Efficiency:

Efficient use of resources is a fundamental principle. This includes minimizing waste generation, optimizing material use, and promoting recycling and reuse.

✓ Ecosystem Conservation:

The green economy recognizes the importance of healthy ecosystems for long-term economic viability. Conservation of biodiversity, restoration of ecosystems, and sustainable land and water management are key aspects.

✓ Job Creation:

The shift toward a green economy can create new employment opportunities in sectors like renewable energy, green technology, and environmental services.

✓ Inclusive Development:

Social equity is a core principle. The green economy aims to ensure that economic growth benefits all segments of society, especially marginalized and vulnerable populations.

Key features of the Circular economy

The **circular economy** is a regenerative economic model that seeks to redefine the traditional "take-make-waste" linear approach. It aims to design out waste and pollution, keeping products and materials in use for as long as possible and closing the loop through recycling, refurbishment, and remanufacturing.

Key principles of the **circular economy** include:

✓ **Design for Longevity:**

Products are designed with durability and repairability in mind, allowing for extended lifecycles and reducing the need for frequent replacements.

✓ **Resource Loops:**

Instead of disposing of products at the end of their use, materials are kept in circulation through recycling, upcycling, and repurposing.

✓ **Waste Minimization:**

The circular economy aims to minimize waste generation at every stage of the product lifecycle, from production to consumption and disposal.

✓ **Sharing Economy:**

Sharing and collaborative consumption models, such as car-sharing and tool libraries, contribute to optimized resource use and reduced individual ownership.

✓ **Reverse Logistics:**

The concept of reverse logistics involves the efficient management of products and materials at the end of their life, including collection, refurbishment, and proper disposal.

✓ **Business Innovation:**

The circular economy encourages businesses to innovate and develop new business models, such as product-as-a-service, that prioritize access and utility over ownership.

Both the green economy and the circular economy recognize the need for a fundamental shift in the way we produce, consume, and interact with the environment. They represent holistic approaches to sustainability that address economic, social, and environmental challenges in an integrated manner.

Green and circular economy practices in the Baltic countries

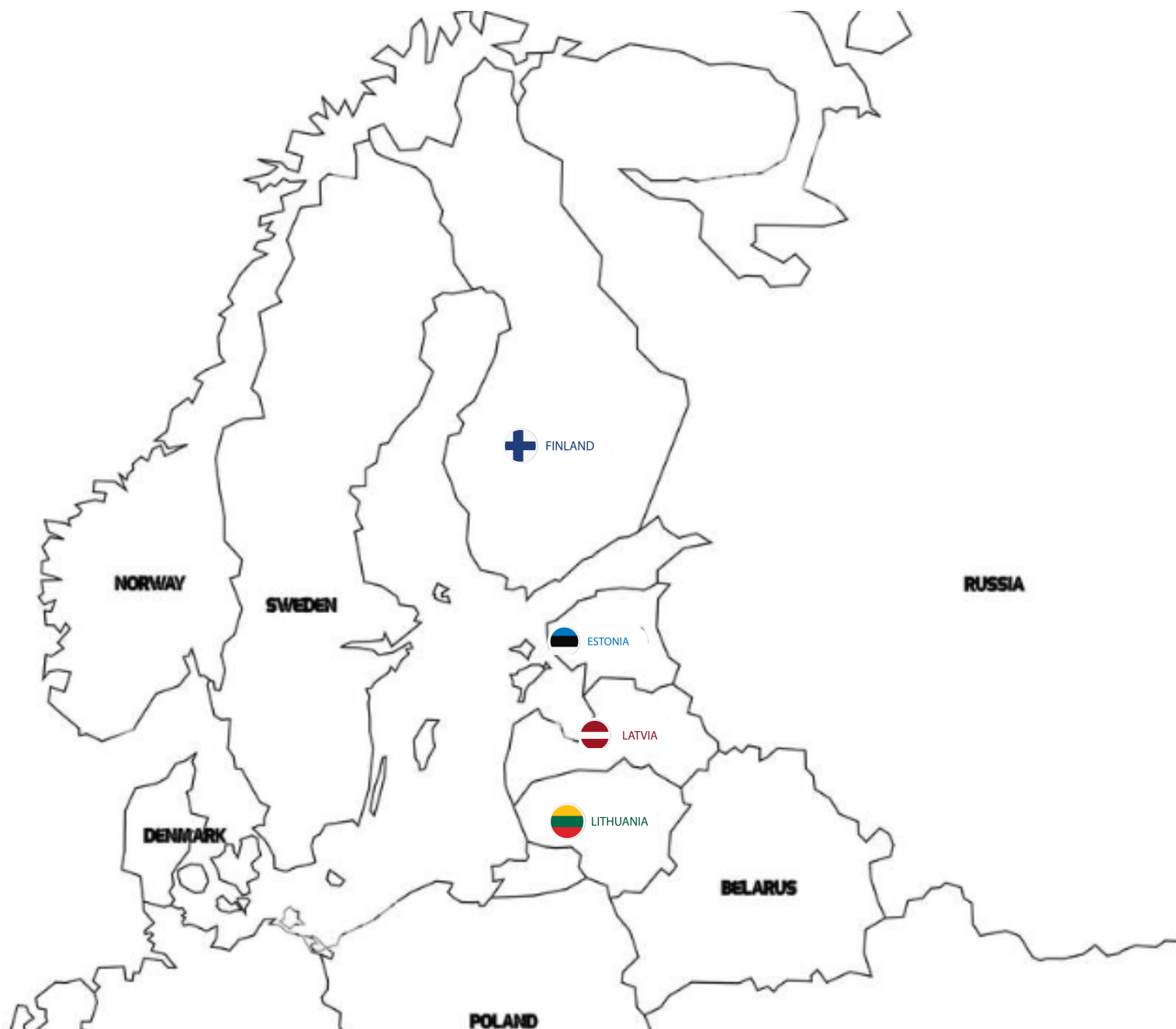
The Baltic countries - **Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania** have embraced the principles of green and circular economy, with initiatives such as waste management and reuse, promotion of green energy, and increased public participation. These initiatives have increased the sustainability of the region, while also providing economic growth and job creation.

One of the major benefits of green and circular economy is the reduction of environmental damage. Through initiatives such as waste management and reuse, the region is able to reduce its environmental impact and move towards a more sustainable future.

Green and circular economy also improves resource efficiency, as resources are reused and recycled, rather than being wasted. This reduces the need for new resources, and helps to reduce the environmental impact of the region.



Brief introduction to Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania



Global environmental performance ranking in 2022

<https://epi.yale.edu/epi-results/2022/component/epi>

	FINLAND	3rd position	76.50 EPI score
	ESTONIA	14th position	61.41 EPI score
	LATVIA	15th position	61.10 EPI score
	LITHUANIA	31st position	55.09 EPI score



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With a population of approximately 5.5 million people, Finland has a reputation for high-quality education, technological innovation, and a high standard of living. The country is known for its strong emphasis on social welfare, equality, and environmental sustainability.



With a population of approximately 1.3 million people, Estonia is known for its digital advancements. Estonia places a strong emphasis on circular economy practices and environmental sustainability as integral components of its development strategy. The country recognizes the importance of responsible resource management, waste reduction, and promoting a green and clean environment.



With a population of approximately 1.9 million people, Latvia places importance on environmental sustainability and nature conservation. The country is home to several national parks and protected areas, reflecting its commitment to preserving its biodiversity and landscapes.



With a population of approximately 2.8 million people, Lithuania is the country is home to national parks and nature reserves, protecting its diverse flora and fauna. Lithuania has also made strides in promoting sustainable practices and environmental conservation.

In the Baltic area, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania shine as examples of sustainability, blending beautiful nature with eco-friendly practices for a greener tomorrow.



Economic and environmental context of the Baltic countries

The Baltic countries – Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are leading the way in transitioning to a circular and green economy. This transition is being driven by the desire to reduce environmental impact, create jobs, and increase the competitiveness of businesses in the region. Through a combination of legislation, investment, and collaboration, these countries are transforming their economies into more sustainable models. Legally, the Baltic countries and Finland are at the forefront of the circular and green economy.

For example, Estonia has implemented a comprehensive circular economy strategy with a focus on waste reduction, reuse, and recycling.

Additionally, all three Baltic countries have joined the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, which works to promote the implementation of circular economy policies.

Finland, meanwhile, has adopted a number of policies to support the introduction of a green economy, including the promotion of renewable energy, energy efficiency, and waste management.

Additionally, Finland has created a number of green economy initiatives, including the Green Growth Program, which promotes sustainable business practices and the circular economy.

Existing policies and initiatives related to sustainable development

The Baltic countries and Finland have also made significant investments in the circular and green economy.

For example, Estonia has invested in a number of initiatives designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase energy efficiency, and promote sustainable land use.

Additionally, the The Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as Finland, have all made ambitious commitments to transitioning to a circular and green economy.

In Finland, the government has set ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase the use of renewable energy, and increase the amount of recycled materials. They have also implemented a number of initiatives to reduce waste and increase resource efficiency.

In Estonia, the government has adopted a Circular Economy Action Plan, aimed at reducing the use of resources, increasing the use of recycled materials, and improving resource efficiency. The plan includes initiatives to increase the reuse of materials, promote the sharing economy, and reduce waste.

In Latvia and Lithuania, the governments have put in place a range of policies and initiatives to promote the transition to a circular and green economy. These include measures to increase the use of renewable energy, reduce waste, and increase the efficiency of resource use.

Overall, the Baltic countries and Finland have made significant strides towards transitioning to a circular and green economy. They have all adopted ambitious targets and implemented policies and initiatives to reduce their environmental impact and promote the efficient use of resources.

Best practices from the Baltic countries - focusing on the interviews

A total of 12 interviews were carried out across Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. For a detailed questionnaire for the interview, please see Annex 2.

A detailed summary of the interviews of the organizations spanning in the sectors including food, transport and logistics, event management, ICT, industrial design, textile, manufacturing, construction, and hospitality is presented below highlighting current and future skill gaps related to green jobs and technologies. And finally the conclusions and recommendations are drawn.

The overview includes the Compendium “Best practices in green and circular economy of Baltic countries”, which may be helpful to find some ideas on circular economy and/or green skills approaches and elements already existing in Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Please refer to Annex 1.



Kamupak (ICT):

The organization offers a circular takeaway packing concept with a digital deposit system. Currently employed by 50 establishments across Finland, including restaurants, cafes, and supermarkets. The packaging is designed for reusability. Users can return the packaging to any participating location and opt for either clean replacements or refunds.

Martela Oyj (industrial design):

The company specializing in modular office furniture design and manufacturing. They engage in product development discussions with employees and customers, focusing on both – products and services. The company embrace the “Workplace as a Service” concept and emphasize the remanufacturing of used office furniture, reflecting their commitment to sustainable practices.

Touchpoint Oy (textile):

The company offer close-loop options where old workwear is collected and repurposed into new materials through mechanical recycling. Their “Workwear as a Service” approach emphasizes functional, durable, and sustainable workwear, focusing on both – material efficiency and extended product lifecycles.



ESTONIA

A le Coq (food):

The company's commitment to sustainability is evident through various initiatives. Package waste is recycled, including broken cans and glass. Fort Aura water bottles utilize 100% recycled PET. Environmentally friendly packaging materials like CO2-neutral plastic and certified cardboard are used. Small juice packages feature paper straws instead of plastic. The company co-founded Eesti Pandipakend, which handles the recycling of deposit-subjected packaging. They partner with NGO Eesti taaskasutusorganisatsioon to ensure packaging is returned to the recycling cycle. Glass is extensively reused, and recycling bins are widespread throughout the building. Flea markets within the company promote reusing personal items. The company runs on 100% green energy, monitoring energy use closely. A biogas station cleans wastewater, while spent grain benefits local farms. Spent yeast from beer is sold to a biomethane station. Long-term computer rentals and electric truck leasing reflect sustainability practices. Bike stops and electric car charging stations encourage greener transportation for employees. The company's upcoming code of conduct emphasizes human rights, following partner companies' lead.

Tartu Smart Bike Share (transport and logistics):

The organization providing cycling for citizens. Bike use during 2017-2018 had been 4,5% and this year growth had been 8%, but it should be even faster.

The European Capital of Culture Tartu 2024 (event management):

Tartu is actively pursuing carbon neutrality by 2030, aligning with 100 EU cities sharing this commitment. The city has introduced guidelines for event organizers, which are gaining traction in other Estonian cities. The municipality incorporates green concepts into grant applications and administration. An initiative to reduce waste involves quarterly analysis of leftovers to curtail excess orders. Collaboration with art schools and institutions is planned to repurpose materials for creative projects. Tartu sharing best practices with neighboring municipalities in South Estonia. The city has sourced decorations from companies repurposing waste, highlighting their commitment to sustainability.

The organization is actively engaged in sustainable practices – prioritizing recycling and internal reusability, notably with label collection. Arranging training for both – employees and partners. Forming a focus group that will drive themed months, focusing on educating about water, waste, energy, and transportation. Appointing an environmental coordinator within the office. Hosting 3 seminars to raise awareness about greenwashing.



**LATVIA****Schwenk Latvia (manufacturing):**

The company stands out for its commitment to sustainability and efficiency. They utilize a groundbreaking zero-waste technology, achieving 98% efficiency in using alternative fuels like non-hazardous waste and shredded tires, instead of fossil fuels. This approach not only reduces waste but also utilizes ash byproduct in production. The company also employs an alternative-fuel dryer to optimize resource usage. In terms of distribution, Schwenk Latvia utilizes a mix of rail, sea and land transportation logistics to ensure the most efficient delivery of products to customers.

Within the organization there is a focus on sustainability and employee training. All employees take mandatory "Mission Zero" training, which covers labor protection and sustainability. Environmental and sustainability goal are integrated into each departments annual deliverables, promoting accountability and alignment with company – wide objectives.

Manta North (constructions):

Manta North specializes in sustainable house construction, focusing on energy efficiency and eco-friendly materials. Houses are built to grade A energy efficiency standards and comply with passive house requirements, prioritizing quality, comfort, and energy conservation. Houses are constructed using cross-laminated timber (CLT), a renewable and environmentally friendly material. Each house features an integrated Sun Bird renewable energy system, consisting of solar PV panels and battery pack that stores generated energy, providing up to 7kW of solar power and 6.8 kWh of battery storage. Energy saving features include triple-glazed aluminium windows and smart kinetic switches controlled via an app to minimize energy waste. The use of Kingspan PIR panels ensures durability, high thermal performance, and resistance to fire and smoke. The selection of CLT material results in minimal waste during manufacturing, utilizing 100% of the wood. Thorough treatment of wood surfaces reduces maintenance requirements.





LATVIA

Balticfloc Ltd (paper, pulp, waste recycling):

An organization underwent a gradual evolution of its project idea into waste paper recycling. The company's current mission encompasses a commitment to the concept of a circular economy.

The company had started an initiative aimed towards the general public. Collection of waste, including collection of waste paper is a paid service offered by public utility/waste management companies. Balticfloc set up boxes for paper waste at residential areas and community centres thus providing a free service of collecting waste paper to people. The initiative was designed to promote green behaviors and have educational impact. However, it was not sufficiently popular (apparently not enough people sort waste) and was causing financial losses to the company.





LITHUANIA

Hilton Garden Inn Vilnius City Centre (hospitality):

Hilton Garden Inn Vilnius City Centre is dedicated to sustainability and responsible travel, aligning with Hilton's global "Travel with Purpose" strategy that encompasses environmental, social, and governance goals. The company aims to reduce emissions intensity in its managed and franchised portfolios significantly by 2030, create learning and career growth opportunities, impact communities positively, and promote responsible conduct throughout its value chain.

The hotel itself embodies sustainability through various practices and technologies. It employs energy-efficient solutions, including solar energy, and complies with sustainable building standards and certifications. A Building Management System ensures intelligent and cost-efficient building operations. The LightStay program, designed to offset environmental impact, tracks resource consumption and carbon footprint, exchanging carbon credits for renewable energy quotas.

In addition to environmental efforts, the hotel prioritizes diversity and inclusivity by employing individuals of various age groups, supporting social projects, and collaborating with disability-related initiatives. Waste reduction initiatives include minimizing paper use, using dispensers instead of plastic bottles, and recycling amenities for donation or repurposing. Furthermore, the hotel actively engages with the community, visiting elderly individuals and partnering with social projects. In summary, Hilton Garden Inn Vilnius City Centre exemplifies a commitment to sustainability and social responsibility, positively impacting both the environment and society.

Mano Guru (hospitality, includes catering):

The company minimize plastic usage, opting for paper or bamboo packaging. An emphasis is placed on in-house coffee consumption over takeaways aiming to educate customers about the environmental impact of single-use cups and encourage mindful choices. While takeaways are offered, the café takes the opportunity to raise awareness about sustainability.



**Mantvida (textiles):**

Waste sorting is a key practice, involving separation of materials like paper and textiles in the company. Automatic cutting is employed to minimize fabric waste during the production process. Electric heating is used along with temperature-sensitive sockets, optimizing energy use by automatically turning off heating when desired temperature is reached. Water consumption is targeted for efficiency. Energy usage is monitored by staff - Lights are controlled to be switched off when not needed; LED lighting is implemented for reduced electricity consumption; Upgrading to new equipment contributes to energy savings; Modern machines consume electricity only during operation; Scraps and leftover materials are repurposed when possible, reducing waste. "Mantvida" demonstrates a comprehensive approach to sustainability in their textile operations, focusing on resource optimization and waste reduction throughout their processes.



Current and future skill gaps related to green jobs and technologies

Kamupak (ICT):

✓Digital skills:

As digital technologies become more integrated into green industries and technologies, there is an increasing demand for workers with skills in data analysis, software development, and other digital skills.

✓Environmental policy and regulation expertise:

As environmental regulations become more complex, organizations need professionals with expertise in environmental policy and regulation to help them navigate regulatory frameworks and compliance requirements.

Martela Oyj (industrial design):

✓Digital skills:

As green industries and technologies continue to adopt digital advancements, the need for professionals proficient in data analysis, software development, and similar digital competencies is on the rise.

✓Circular economy skills:

As more organizations adopt circular economy practices, there is a need for workers with skills in waste management, recycling, and upcycling.

✓Environmental policy and regulation expertise:

With the growing intricacy of environmental regulations, companies require individuals who possess specialized knowledge in environmental policy and regulation. These experts play a crucial role in guiding organizations through the intricate maze of regulatory frameworks and ensuring compliance with evolving requirements.

✓Soft skills:

Green jobs and technologies require workers with strong communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, as well as an ability to adapt to new and changing circumstances.

Touchpoint Oy (textile):

✓ Circular economy skills:

As more organizations adopt circular economy practices, there is a need for workers with skills in waste management, recycling, and upcycling.

✓ Environmental policy and regulation expertise:

As environmental regulations become more complex, organizations need professionals with expertise in environmental policy and regulation to help them navigate regulatory frameworks and compliance requirements.

A le Coq (food):

✓ Knowledge about the green field.

Tartu Smart Bike Share (transport and logistics):

✓ General knowledge there is but details are missing.

Methodology is missing how to evaluate long term impact on the environment.

The European Capital of Culture Tartu 2024 (event management):

✓ There is a lack of understanding that nature has to be put first.

We should ask if there is another way to communicate our messages without producing more and reuse and recycle as many as possible. Information doesn't circulate as fast as needed.

✓ Soft skills:

Green jobs and technologies require workers with strong communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, as well as an ability to adapt to new and changing circumstances.

Schwenk Latvia (manufacturing):

✓ To raise awareness among staff and people.

Externally, at the government level, there is a lack of unity on this issue and a lack of control (in our situation, we understand much more about our sector than policy makers). There is a Green Deal regulation that everybody follows, but in Latvia as such, there is no single regulation.

Manta North (constructions):

- ✓ Technical skills in the renewable energy field.
“Green” construction skills: architects, engineers, construction workers with knowledge of sustainable materials, “green” building certification and the design of energy-efficient buildings.
Specialists (architects, engineers) who work with new materials.

Balticfloc Ltd (paper, pulp, waste recycling):

- ✓ There is no sufficient infrastructure to support green choices, and similarly – skills.
- ✓ Circular economy skills: As more organizations adopt circular economy practices, there is a need for workers with skills in waste management, recycling, and upcycling.
- ✓ Environmental policy and regulation expertise: As environmental regulations become more complex, organizations need professionals with expertise in environmental policy and regulation to help them navigate regulatory frameworks and compliance requirements.
- ✓ Leadership and management skills: As organizations transition to more sustainable practices, they need leaders and managers with the skills to implement and manage sustainability strategies effectively.

Hilton Garden Inn Vilnius City Centre (hospitality):

- ✓ First of all, we need awareness about this question
Personal initiatives are very important - infect others and do it.

Mano Guru (hospitality, includes catering):

- ✓ How to put things together productively. How to organize it in a sensible way that doesn't add extra work for the person.

Mantvida (textiles):

- ✓ There are not the specialist staff that you could bring in to deal with the implementation of the strategy, because textiles is an area that does not generate a very high income, so it is the tailor's shop that could hire those professionals.

Summary of key findings

The summarized information emphasizes the widespread adoption of sustainable practices across various sectors in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland.

These organizations demonstrate a shared commitment to environmental responsibility, incorporating a variety of strategies and practices to achieve their sustainability goals and contribute positively to their communities and the planet.

Organizations are actively implementing initiatives that address waste reduction, eco-friendly materials, energy efficiency, and community engagement to contribute positively to both the environment and society.

The main differences among the organizations are:

- ✓ Each industry requires different approaches to sustainability and has unique challenges.
- ✓ Each organization has distinct initiatives and practices that reflect their industry and mission. For example, A le Coq focuses on sustainable packaging, Tartu Smart Bike Share promotes cycling, Kamupak offers circular takeaway packaging, Manta North specializes in sustainable construction, and Hilton Garden Inn Vilnius City Centre emphasizes responsible travel.
- ✓ Some organizations heavily integrate technology into their sustainability initiatives, like Kamupak's digital deposit system.

These differences showcase the diverse range of industries, practices, and strategies that organizations employ to integrate sustainability into their operations and contribute positively to the environment and society.

Common themes in environmental responsibility and sustainable practices across the organizations

While these organizations operate in diverse industries and contexts, they share common challenges, goals, and strategies related to environmental responsibility and sustainable practices. The main similarities among these organizations are:

Many organizations across different industries and countries are facing skill gaps related to green jobs and technologies. These gaps indicate a need for individuals with expertise in sustainability, renewable energy, waste management, circular economy, and environmental policy.

Several organizations highlight the importance of raising awareness and educating both staff and the public about environmental issues. This indicates a shared recognition of the need for informed decision-making and behavior change to achieve sustainability goals.

Organizations in various sectors mention challenges related to navigating environmental regulations and policies. This common theme underscores the complexity of regulatory frameworks and the need for professionals who can understand and navigate these regulations effectively.

Many organizations emphasize the adoption of circular economy practices, such as waste management, recycling, and upcycling. This shared focus on circularity reflects a broader trend toward sustainable resource management.

Soft skills such as strong communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and adaptability are highlighted as essential for green jobs and technologies across different industries and roles.

Digital skills are mentioned as important for several organizations. As digital technologies become more integrated into green industries and technologies, workers need skills in data analysis, software development, and other digital areas. Many organizations emphasize the importance of using sustainable materials, technologies, and practices in their respective industries to reduce environmental impact and promote eco-friendliness.

Various organizations engage with their communities to raise awareness about sustainability and environmental issues. This reflects a shared commitment to fostering positive change beyond organizational boundaries.

Conclusions and recommendations

While all organizations acknowledge skill gaps related to green jobs and technologies, the specific skills they require vary. For instance, organizations like Kamupak, Martela Oyj, and Touchpoint Oy highlight the need for digital skills due to the integration of technology, whereas Manta North emphasizes technical skills in renewable energy and green construction.

Organizations in different countries (Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania) navigate varying regulatory and policy landscapes. For example, Schwenk Latvia and Baltic Floc Ltd mention challenges related to regulatory unity and control, while Hilton Garden Inn Vilnius City Centre in Lithuania highlights the need for awareness and personal initiatives.

Economic factors play a role in shaping organizational approaches. "Mantvida" in Lithuania notes the challenge of attracting specialist staff due to the relatively low income generated in the textiles sector.

In general, the conclusions highlight the need for a diverse set of skills, including technical, digital, circular economy, and environmental policy knowledge, to address the growing demands of green jobs and technologies. There's also an overarching theme of raising awareness, both among employees and the broader community, and the challenges associated with integrating sustainable practices into various industries.

GREEN LEADERSHIP

Baltic Green Leadership: VET Students as Agents of Change

Promote VET role and
leadership in green transition



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