

Madrid, 5 April 2023

UNWTO input on the thematic review of the HLPF 2023

On theme:

Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels

In review of SDGs:

- 6 – Clean water and sanitation*
- 7 – Affordable and clean energy*
- 9 – Industry, innovation and infrastructure*
- 11 – Sustainable cities and communities*
- 17 – Partnerships for the Goals*

- (a) *Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs.*
- (b) *Three key areas where transformative actions for accelerated progress have been successful, and three key areas where support is most urgently needed, with regard to the cluster of SDGs under review in July 2023.*
- (c) *Examples of specific actions taken to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic that also accelerate progress towards multiple SDG targets, including actions identified by your intergovernmental body, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving SDGs.*
- (d) *Assessment of the situation in the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body, and policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda.*
- (e) *Key messages for inclusion into the Political Declaration of the September 2023 SDG Summit.*

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the United Nations (UN) Specialized agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism.

In the COVID-19 aftermath, countries have had to face a new reality of the tourism and travel industry and have begun to make every possible effort to shape the sector accordingly. Countries have been advised try to make optimum utilization of available resources, knowledge and experience to put the sector back on the rails. In order to assist Member States to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector and develop an approach to recovery and to reinforcing tourism in the post COVID-19 framework, UNWTO has developed a "[COVID-19 Tourism Recovery Technical Assistance Package](#)". The Package is structured around three main pillars: 1) Economic Recovery; 2) Marketing and Promotion; and 3) Institutional Strengthening and Building Resilience.

Given that tourism is a major leader for the global economy and is at the center of the most disruptive innovation, UNWTO has also been active working with startups, enabling the sector to be able to implement diverse solutions to challenges such as digitalization, skills development, and sustainable investment. While they existed before COVID-19, the pandemic made innovation, education, and financing gaps more visible, but simultaneously enhanced the role of tourism to address them in a comprehensive manner.



The wide and cross-cutting value chain of the sector has also set a new vision from global stakeholders to the sector, making evident the need of tourism to achieve sustainability worldwide. The Organization's work has included numerous SDG-driven responses to and recovery from the COVID- 19 pandemic and the SDGs over the past year.

- **Innovation**

Identification of ready-to-implement solutions, considering the sector positive impacts on people, planet, and prosperity and an ecosystem perspective to boost the flow of knowledge and funding towards projects by working jointly with governments, institutions, the Academia, innovation hubs, corporations, investors, and entrepreneurs (startups and SMEs).

Since 2018, 20 editions of [UNWTO Startup Competitions and Innovation Challenges](#) have been carried out, gathering thousands of participants, from which top 250 have been actively involved in investments rounds or pilot projects in specific countries.

Against the background of COVID-19, UNWTO took innovation at the forefront of recovery, launching programmes beyond the travel scope, which means with an emphasis in tourism as a transversal sector:

- [UNWTO Healing Solutions for Tourism Challenge](#) (2020) at the initial phase of the pandemic with over 1,100 participants from 110 countries.
- [UNWTO SDGs Global Startup Competition](#) (2020-2021) with over 10,000 participants from 138 countries covering all 17 SDGs and UNWTO Awake Tourism Challenge (2022-2023) with over 2,000 participants from 120 countries in 6 categories:
 - Local community involvement
 - Green and blue economies
 - Ecological and Sustainable Capital Creation
 - Tourism Tech for Good
 - Tourism Education
 - Women Empowerment

Some key examples can be found below:

SDG 6:

- [Ecoloo](#) (Malaysia): odour-free, water-free, sewage-free, energy-free and hassle-free toilet.
- [Source](#) (United States of America): renewable drinking water system based on solar-powered hydropanels that makes, stores, and dispenses clean, mineralized water.
- [Radical Waters](#) (UK, Spain): works with ECA, a patented technology for natural hygiene solutions. The activation process uses water, salt and electricity and produces a potent and natural disinfectant and detergent.
- [Aguardio](#) (Denmark): facilitates changes in shower behavior without compromising bathroom fixtures and décor through a device. Also, a leak detector has been developed.

SDG 7:

- [Enexor](#) (United States of America): plug-and-play bioenergy system that helps solve organic and plastic waste problems. By simultaneously providing immediate energy and waste disposal cost savings, coupled with significant reductions in harmful greenhouse gas ("GHG") production.



- [BeFC](#) (France): Bioenzymatic Fuel Cells as eco-friendly energy solution to enable the next generation of low-environmental impact electronic solutions.
- [Swimsol](#) (Austria): affordable and durable offshore (marine) photovoltaics/solar power systems for the coastal tropics, where space on land is limited.

SDG 9:

- [DefinedCrowd](#) (United States of America): one-stop shop for Artificial Intelligence (AI) training data, offering solutions which all focus on making AI smarter.
- [Freed Group](#) (Hong Kong): travel and lifestyle AI Digital and Smart Merchandising Solution provider utilizing Artificial Technology (AI), Big Data and Machine Learning.

SDG 11:

- [Mabrian Technologies](#) (Spain): market intelligence for destination management.
- [Green Urban Data](#) (Spain): environment intelligence for healthy and resilient cities, including healthy routes.
- [Metrica6](#) (Spain): WAISENSE technology, an IoT innovation for water and energy saving, improve sustainability and quality of life/service.
- [Tobadaa](#) (Egypt): allows people to earn more cash by connecting travelers first to tour guides and locals using their own cars to book tours and activities instead of travel agencies, where the locals can find the opportunity to live better.
- [Weaveair](#) (Singapore): proactive end-to-end software & hardware solution for air distribution systems that prevents the spread of air contamination.
- [R3charge](#) (Germany): provides a selection of hotels with charging points. Find and book the perfect accommodation at an attractive price with the largest database of hotels with EV charging stations.
- [MyStreetBook](#) (Spain): hyper-personalization of routes based on Artificial Intelligence and digitization of the tourist offer of destinations, making possible the distribution of tourism flows in destinations.

SDG 17:

- [Nibi](#) (Colombia): social tech that transforms people's impact actions, like donations and high impact volunteer experiences, into virtual points they can exchange for discounts in sustainable brands.
- The need for recovery of the impact of COVID-19 on tourism in all economies is fully supported by the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, with the development of a Policy Brief (in 2020) on [COVID-19 and Transforming Tourism](#). The Brief, which is part of a series of UN SG policy briefs, provides an overview of the impacts of the pandemic on tourism including the millions of livelihoods it sustains. The brief was prepared at UNWTO's initiative as the lead author with 11 other UN entities. Most importantly the Brief provides an opportunity to mobilize the multilateral and bilateral development system to increase its support for tourism, for which the UNSDG teams at country level can be of a great support to join efforts with UNWTO.



With the aim to provide support not only to high-scalability business models, but to Small and Medium Enterprises which make up to 85%¹ of the sector's business landscape, the [UNWTO Digital Futures for SMEs Programme](#) has been launched as a capacity building driven initiative for digitizing 1 million tourism SMEs by providing a diagnostic tool which guides them select any of the following 5 digital paths: connectivity, business growth, e-commerce, Bog Data & analytics, and payments & security.

This vision on entrepreneurs has been confirmed by the [Marrakesh Call to Action on SMEs Digitalization](#) made by the UNWTO Executive Council in November 2022.

- **Education**

While the sector has contributed to 10% of global employment ², it still lacks a clear education path for vocational and professional careers. Also, informality and non-qualified work hardly affects the sector.

In order to increase affordable high-quality education opportunities for all, the [UNWTO Tourism Online Academy](#) has been set. This platform with 32 courses and over 20,000 students has also provided more than 6,000 scholarships since the start of the pandemic. It features topics from top universities on topics such as destination management, sustainability, technology, business management, entrepreneurship, and more.

In this same vein, the UNWTO Technical Committee on Tourism Online Education has created the first [Tourism Education Guidelines](#), a 7-step journey to support Member States in upgrading skills development at all levels: secondary schools, bachelor and masters degrees. Other than being a sole resource for advancing SDG 5, this document sheds light on the inclusion of the SDGs based on the impact of the sector.

As future steps, the Organization will:

- Kick-off its programme of International Academies in collaboration with UNWTO to support Member States up-skill their local workforce.
- Launch the UNWTO Education Toolkit with specific stages to enhance tourism education.

- **Investments**

While traditional investments fell due to COVID-19, the amount of funding towards the tourism tech sector remained not only stable but experienced an increase in 2020, demonstrating the confidence investors have in tourism³. For this reason, UNWTO has continuously called for promoting investments with a renewed perspective: investing for people, planet, and prosperity. This, specifically by promoting an investment framework with these pillars:

- Financial incentives
- Flexible regulation
- Impact on communities
- Incentives for innovation and technology
- Measurement of sustainable investments
- Investing in talent

UNWTO has:

- Carried out the capacity building programme on [Green Investments for Sustainable Tourism](#) partnering with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) for training on three

¹ OECD (2019).

² UNWTO (2019).

³ UNWTO (2021).



main areas: performance and efficiency; accreditations and certifications; and compliance and brand reputation.

- Launched the new service “[Tourism Doing Business – Investment Guidelines](#)” for specific countries, highlighting not only the importance of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for global recovery but also new sustainable financing mechanisms.

Key messages for inclusion into the Political Declaration of the September 2023 SDG Summit:

- Prioritize innovation and data-driven decision making in Member States to find ready-to-implement solutions to the most compelling challenges by including startups and innovators as part of transformation processes.
- Support and strengthen the overall innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem by creating specific programmes aimed at accelerating the flow of knowledge and funding towards new solutions.
- Promote innovative investment mechanisms to accelerate the implementation of technology and social impact solutions (startups, projects, business models) for the achievement of the SDGs.

• **Market Intelligence**

Data and market intelligence are essential to support tourism’s recovery and competitiveness. UNWTO leads in monitoring impacts and trends in tourism, with its [UNWTO World Tourism Barometer](#) and the [Tourism Data Dashboards](#), providing monthly updated information on international tourism and industry indicators including the most complete data on current travel restrictions in cooperation with the International Air Transport Association (IATA). The Dashboards are an example of **SDG 17** bringing together a series of private sector players and UNWTO to provide key market information while also supporting directly **SDG 9** – Industry, innovation and infrastructure - and **SDG 11** – Sustainable cities and communities.

On the occasion of the High-Level Meeting on Safe International Travel (Ibiza, Spain, July 2022), [UNWTO and OECD released an impact assessment of the pandemic on tourism](#) showcasing how the sector was among the most affected.

UNWTO also continued with technical assistance to its Members, including the UNWTO/ETC Data Lab initiative which was launched in June 2022 and has delivered a series of training to countries in Europe to enhance their capacity to

With the challenges emerging from the aggression of the Russia Federation to Ukraine UNWTO has also produced a series of regular [updates on its impact on travel and tourism](#).

• **Tourism and Rural Development:**

UNWTO’s launched in 2021 a new [Programme on Tourism for Rural Development](#) which aims to strengthen awareness, skills, knowledge, frameworks, and opportunities for rural areas through tourism, with the vision of making tourism a driver of rural development and well-being. The Programme, which has the [Best Tourism Villages](#) as one of the flagship initiatives, is developed around four main pillars, 1) advocacy and outreach, 2) skills development, 3) technical assistance and 4) knowledge creation and dissemination. The Programme is based in the UNWTO Regional Office in the Middle East within the Tourism Market Intelligence Department of UNWTO.

As per the above and with the vision of making tourism a positive force for transformation, rural development and community wellbeing, UNWTO launched the ‘Best Tourism Villages



by UNWTO' (BTV) in 2021. Currently the initiative has recognized around 75 villages around the world for their work. Villages recognized as BTV and those selected to participate in the Upgrade Programme are part of the Best Tourism Villages Network. Since its kick-off in March 2022 several Masterclasses with UNWTO Partners (Meta, TripAdvisor) as well as good practices sessions with villages have been organized. The Upgrade Programme includes customized mentoring with the 20 selected villages each year.

Following the strengthened relationship between UNWTO and the FAO Mountain Partnership, a report on quantifying Mountain Tourism is being prepared to be released end of April 2023. Preliminary findings were presented at the 6th Global Meeting of the Mountain Partnership in September 2022 and in the context of the International Year of Sustainable Mountains 2022.

Given its cross-cutting impact on communities these initiatives they contribute to all SDGs under review.

- **Tourism in the G20 Agenda – supporting a people center recovery:**

UNWTO has worked closely with the Indonesian Presidency of the G20 and the G20 Tourism Working Group to deliver the [G20 Bali Guidelines for Strengthening Communities and MSME as Tourism Transformation Agents: a People-centred Recovery](#). The Guidelines provide guidance for key policies that can create resilient and sustainable MSMEs and communities spanning five key pillars: 1) Human Capital, 2) Innovation, digitalization and the creative economy, 3) Women and youth empowerment, 4) Climate action, biodiversity conservation, and circularity, and 5) Policy, governance and investment. They also draw up over 40 cases studies from G20 members and guest countries focused on the promotion of MSMEs and communities. The guidelines contribute to the following SDGs under review: 7, 9, 11 and 17.

- **Coordination between UNWTO and WHO/Europe: Building on lessons learned**

Since the outset of the pandemic UNWTO has worked closely with the World Health Organization (WHO) at the highest coordination and technical levels on measures and messaging impacting on tourism. WHO has been also an active member of the UNWTO Crisis Committee. Moving forward, the "[Montenegro Statement](#)", released on the occasion of the eighth high-level meeting of the WHO/Europe Small Countries Initiative (SCI) held in Montenegro, recognizes that health and tourism are deeply interconnected in the globalized world, and the reopening of travel and tourism is crucial for economic recovery, jobs and livelihoods in small countries. In this meeting the creation of a coalition of partners on health and tourism, jointly coordinated by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and UNWTO, to elaborate the evidence for policy measures and facilitate country dialogue was agreed. This new initiative will allow to consolidate on the lessons learned and increase tourism preparedness to health crisis.

Key messages for inclusion into the Political Declaration of the September 2023 SDG Summit:

- Prioritize rural development as a means to ensure territorial cohesion, preservation of natural and cultural resources and communities' inclusion and wellbeing. This should be done through supporting infrastructure, including digital infrastructure, skills and capacity building, entrepreneurship, access to services and financing.
- Strengthen the use of data and intelligence tools by Member States to create monitoring system for the implementation of SDGs, grow preparedness and resilience to crises and the competitiveness of Member States, businesses and communities.

