UNWTO
World Tourism Organization

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE TRANSITION TO A GREEN TRAVEL AND TOURISM ECONOMY

Developed by UNWTO and the G20 tourism working group on the occasion of Italy's presidency of the G20 in 2021

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinions whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the World Tourism Organization concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)	Tel.: (+34) 915 678 100
Calle Poeta Joan Maragall, 42	e-mail: **info@unwto.org**
28020 Madrid, Spain	Website: **www.unwto.org**

CEDRO, Centro Español de Derechos Reprográficos	Tel.: (+34) 913 08 63 30
Calle Alcalá, 26, 3º	Fax: (+34) 913 08 63 27
28014 Madrid	Website: **www.cedro.org**
Spain	E-mail: **cedro@cedro.org**

Recommendations for the Transition to a Green Travel and Tourism Economy

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Tourism is one of the hardest hit sectors by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, international arrivals dropped by 74% given the widespread of travel restrictions and socio-economic challenges, representing an estimated loss of USD 1.3. trillion in export revenues and around 120 million direct jobs at risk.[1] Women, who make up the majority of the tourism workforce, youth, and migrant workers with limited or no access to social protection, are among the most vulnerable to the impact of COVID-19 on tourism[2]. There are additional impacts, which are still difficult to quantify, such as plastics pollution from personal protection equipment at destinations or threats to the conservation of wildlife and biodiversity, which relies on tourism revenue.

Travel restrictions started being introduced gradually since the beginning of the pandemic. By May 2020, 75% of destinations worldwide had their borders completely closed to international tourism. Since then, destinations started easing travel restrictions, with November 2020 registering the lowest number of complete border closures (27% of destinations worldwide) before the trend reversed. As of February 2021, 32% of borders are again completely closed, making it difficult to foresee when tourism operations will fully recover.[3]

> *"It is imperative that we rebuild the tourism sector in a safe, equitable and climate friendly manner" UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres[4]*

Before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector had registered continuous growth over decades, creating significant benefits in terms of socio-economic development and employment. At the same time, this growth represented important challenges related to the consumption of natural resources and impacts on climate change, as well as to the carrying capacity of destinations, which could re-emerge as tourism restarts and therefore should be at the heart of recovery plans.

> *"Sustainability must no longer be a niche part of tourism but must be the new norm for every part of our sector" UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili[5]*

Against this background, there is now a growing consensus among tourism stakeholders as to how the future resilience of tourism will depend on the sector's ability to balance the needs of people, planet and prosperity. People, Planet and Prosperity are the overarching priorities of Italy's G20 Presidency and reflect the commitment to steer the inclusive transformation of tourism improving the impact tourism has on local communities, with particular focus on environmental sustainability.

With the objective to contribute to the G20 Rome Guidelines for the Future of Tourism, in particular to the policy area on green transformation as requested by the Italian Presidency, UNWTO is presenting the Recommendations for the Transition to a Green Travel and Tourism Economy that lay the foundations for more balanced, sustainable and resilient models of tourism development. The recommendations do not call for the establishment of new agreements but are developed to deepen the understanding and stimulate the action in the policy recommendation on green transformation.

1   https://www.unwto.org/news/2020-worst-year-in-tourism-history-with-1-billion-fewer-international-arrivals
2   ILO Sectoral Brief. The Impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector, 2020.
3   https://www.unwto.org/covid-19-travel-restrictions
4   https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-08/SG-Policy-Brief-on-COVID-and-Tourism.pdf
5   https://www.unwto.org/covid-19-oneplanet-responsible-recovery

From a Collective Vision...

The One Planet Vision for a Responsible Recovery of the Tourism Sector was developed by UNWTO building on the UNWTO Global Guidelines to Restart Tourism[6] endorsed by the Global Tourism Crisis Committee with the objective to support tourism to emerge stronger and more sustainable from the COVID-19 crisis.

The Vision, which was released in June 2020 on World Environment Day, presents recommendations for a recovery of the tourism sector from the COVID-19 crisis to be founded on sustainability, calling for the transformation of the tourism sector to ensure its future resilience. The Vision, which was widely consulted, is the shared Vision of the members of the Sustainable Tourism Programme of the One planet network and partner organizations.

The Vision recommends six lines of action, which represent several key elements capable of guiding a responsible tourism recovery for people, planet and prosperity, namely: public health, social inclusion, biodiversity conservation, climate action, circular economy and governance and finance.

...to Recommendations for Action

In the past months, numerous tourism stakeholders have embarked on salient efforts aiming at making the transition towards a more sustainable tourism model become tangible. All those efforts have in common that they leverage on the unprecedented sense of unity and interconnectedness that the crisis has awakened and look forward to enhancing social inclusion and the restoration and protection of the environment through tourism.

The following sections present the recommended lines of action and showcase initiatives of destinations, tourism businesses and civil society which are leading by example integrating sustainability in their recovery plans and strategies. These frontrunning initiatives represent just a few examples of the amount of sustainability action that tourism stakeholders are managing to advance while going through the worst crisis in the history of the sector.

We see the different examples of ongoing actions as proof of concept for the transition to a green travel and tourism economy to be recognized as the pathway for sustainable and resilient growth. Therefore, we would like to encourage the members of G20 to adopt the lines of action as Recommendations for the Transition to a Green Travel and Tourism Economy.

Given the magnitude of the crisis, there is still a strong focus on allocating recovery funds towards business survival. Nevertheless, 2021 will be the year that will determine whether the tourism sector could redefine the way it operates. The commitment of stakeholders is there. Scaling up concerted action would be essential to unlock the necessary political and financial support to build back a more sustainable and resilient tourism sector

The Recommendations for the Transition to a Green Travel and Tourism Economy represent a common vision for better tourism for people, planet and prosperity.

---

6   https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-05/UNWTO-Global-Guidelines-to-Restart-Tourism.pdf

Green Transition of Tourism for Planet

Biodiversity conservation:

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised awareness of the importance of a healthy environment as a natural barrier for future pandemics, notably in the case of zoonotic diseases.[7] A healthy environment is also directly connected with the competitiveness of the tourism sector and in many destinations conservation efforts largely depend on tourism revenue. Supporting such conservation efforts can enable a greener recovery.[8]

---

7   https://ipbes.net/pandemics
8   https://parksjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Hockings-et-al-10.2305-IUCN.CH .2020.PARKS-26-1MH.en -1.pdf

© XXX | Dreamstime.com

- **Capture the value of conservation through tourism:** While the reduction of economic activity during COVID-19 has to some extent reduced the pressures on the environment, there are many destinations where the conservation of marine and terrestrial ecosystems, protected areas and species largely depends on tourism revenue and operators. Supporting voluntary monitoring mechanisms that would regularly capture such contribution and the value of ecosystem services through tourism at destination level would enable the tourism sector to capitalize on its conservation efforts.

- **Support conservation efforts through tourism:** The risk of poaching, encroachment or overexploitation are growing in wildlife destinations as tourism is on hold, directly threatening the very assets upon which the tourism sector needs to be rebuilt. The role of tourism to sustain conservation and fight illegal wildlife trade as well as the need to reduce the movement of invasive alien species through tourism[9] should therefore be acknowledged in recovery plans and support made available for conservation efforts by tourism stakeholders to continue. Tourism also contributes to the preservation of cultural and historical sites.

Brazil's GDP reduced by USD 575 million in 2020 due to lower visitation to protected areas

In Brazil, the 334 federally managed protected areas, covering 170 million hectares, reported about 15.9 million visits in 2019. Though all were closed to visitation in March 2020, most reopened between August and October, and overall registered a loss of 5 million visits over the year. The reduced number of visitors has led to a loss of USD 1.6. billion in sales working directly and indirectly with tourism around protected areas. It also means that 55,000 permanent or temporary jobs will be lost and employees and businesses will lose USD 410 million.

In addition, the protected areas reported a **reduction in management capacity and effectiveness of conservation** actions throughout 2020. At the same time, concern about rebounding visitation raised after lockdowns were eased, as changed patterns of visitation were registered and community impacts and ecosystem responses were detected.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed how dependent some conservation areas and many local communities are on tourism, and also the physical and mental health benefits of nature for visitors.

Alien Species Awareness Programme in Italy: involving travellers to prevent the spread of invasive alien species

The introductions of invasive alien species (IAS) are rapidly increasing as a result of the growing movement of goods and people around the world due to globalization, causing serious impacts on biodiversity. Also tourists can concur to this problem transporting IAS, either intentionally or accidentally, during their travels.

Within the **Life ASAP project** (LIFE15 GIE/IT/001039), co-financed by the European Union and aimed to increase the awareness and the active participation of citizens to a better prevention and effective management of IAS, a communication campaign to travellers, especially those interested in outdoor activities, named **"Be aware, think, travel"**, was launched.

An information desk was active in 2018 and 2019 at the Fiumicino Airport (Rome) for promoting among travellers the **"10 rules for the aware traveller"**. The ASAP team, composed by park rangers, biologists and communicators, interacted with people coming from 112 countries, raising awareness on the issue, showing videos and distributing leaflets, luggage tags and other gadgets.

---

9   https://rm.coe.int/european-code-of-conduct-on-international-travel-and-invasive-alien/168075e833

The campaign was also promoted by major Italian tour operators with a special attention to ecotourism and was displayed in public and media events allowing an effective dissemination of the message across Europe.

Conservation gains at risk as COVID-19 reduced the number of patrols in Indonesia

Misool Private Marine Reserve was established in 2008 in partnership with the local community to create a no-take zone in what used to be a notorious shark-hunting ground. The reserve is located in the Raja Ampat Islands and extends over 300,000 acres (the size of New York city) of coral reefs where nowadays the largest populations of mantas and sharks in the area thrive.

The reserve is jointly managed by the Misool Foundation and Misool Resort and follows a business model where tourism funds critical conservation work. Misool has managed to continue its conservation efforts throughout COVID-19, including their **routine patrols** which have encountered commercial boats fishing illegally in a number of occasions since the crisis started.

As overfishing is the primary threat to shark and ray populations, much is at risk. Economic valuation studies published in April 2020 point at the **potential loss of over USD 120 million in tourism income by 2027** should shark and ray populations decline.

Misool Private Marine Reserve is a member of The Long Run.

- **Invest in nature-based solutions for more sustainable tourism**: Nature-based solutions have potential to drive innovation in tourism towards sustainability and, besides mitigating the environmental impacts of tourism activity, result in better management of scarce natural resources such as water, coral reefs, wetlands, mangroves, posidonia meadows, coastlines and foster disaster resilience both in urban and natural environments[10]. Investments in nature-based solutions also respond well to the expectations of a growing demand for experiences in nature.

Iberostar Group invests in nature-based blue carbon offsets through mangrove restoration in Mexico

Iberostar announced in October 2020 **their strategy to offset their carbon footprint** by protecting and restoring nature in destinations where the companies' resorts and hotels are operating.

The company plans to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 in line with the Science Based Targets Initiative Business Ambition for 1.5˚C, increasing energetic efficiency and sourcing increasing renewables. Instead of focusing on traditional carbon credits, Iberostar would re-invest in their destinations by focusing on the protection and restoration of mangroves and other seascape ecosystems. In line with Iberostar's current carbon footprint, that represents up to 1,400 hectares of mangroves protected per year, with a fifth of that portfolio located in the Riviera Maya in Mexico - one of the world's largest remaining and highly threatened mangrove ecosystems.

Iberostar sees this as a critical step towards recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic to build resilience in destinations now more vulnerable to future crises such as those expected from climate change.

Iberostar is the Co-Chair of the Tourism Action Coalition for Sustainable Oceans.

---

10   https://platform.think-nature.eu/system/files/thinknature_handbook_final_print_0.pdf

Red Sea Project

The Red Sea Project is a flagship sustainable development which will generate SAR 22 bn for Saudi Arabia's economy upon completion. The coral reefs and beaches of the Red Sea Project will be some of the world's first destinations which have been designed with sustainability built in from the very beginning. The project is grounded in environmental considerations and sustainability, with architectural design firms producing plans for state-of-the-art eco-friendly hotels and resorts, informed by the area's natural habitat and rare wildlife.

The Red Sea Project is developing a complex regulatory framework comprising innovative policies and strategies to facilitate Saudi Arabia's ambitious sustainability and regeneration commitments. This includes the regulation of fisheries, removal of invasive species in the area, conservation zones and the expansion of green and blue habitats to encourage regeneration and carbon sequestration.

It is leaving 75 percent of its island archipelago untouched as part of its goal to achieve a 30 percent net conservation benefit over the next two decades. It is set to be the world's largest tourism destination powered solely by renewable energy, 24 hours a day, and this achievement is underpinned by the creation of the world's largest battery storage system.

Climate action:

According to UNWTO/ITF research released in December 2019, the tourism sector was estimated to increase its CO_2 emissions by at least 25% by 2030.[11] While the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a 7% reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions globally[12], it is expected that emissions from tourism could rapidly rebound as operations restart and therefore the need to transform tourism operations for climate action continues to be of utmost importance for the sector to remain in line with international goals.

- **Monitor and report CO_2 emissions from tourism operations:** Strengthening the measurement and disclosure of CO_2 emissions from tourism, while ensuring that MSMEs are not facing unnecessary burden. Promoting the introduction of science-based targets is necessary for the sector to effectively contribute to the implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement. Developing monitoring mechanisms that would allow destinations to understand CO_2 emissions across the value chain and the CO_2 implications of investments has potential to trigger a shift towards climate-aware tourism development.

The decarbonization of tourism in action: The case of Valencia

As part of its response to COVID-19, **Visit Valencia** has taken action towards becoming a carbon neutral destination by 2025 by using the SDG compass, a dashboard of indicators based on a broad international reference framework, which will guide the achievement of respective objectives and identify areas of improvement for the achievement of the SDGs.

Valencia is implementing the **roadmap for tourism decarbonization** which comprises 3 phases: initial calculation of the footprint of the destination and its actors, implementation of a digital management system, and development of compensation projects in the territory. This strategy can also expand profitability to the social and environmental levels, contributing to the protection and enhancement of cultural and natural heritage and minimizing negative impacts, promoting the improvement of the quality of life of residents and perception of tourism activity, and applying the knowledge, experience and resources of all actors involved in this common challenge of fighting climate change.

---

11   https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789284416660
12   https://www.carbonbrief.org/global-carbon-project-coronavirus-causes-record-fall-in-fossil-fuel-emissions-in-2020

- **Accelerate the decarbonization of tourism operations:** Enhancing mitigation efforts to reduce emissions in the tourism sector, including through investments to develop low-carbon transportation options and greener infrastructure, is key to resilience. Additionally, a growing number of consumers are demanding that the tourism sector takes responsibility for its CO_2 emissions and would like to take part of these efforts.[13] As a subsidiary option to emissions reduction, tourism companies and organisations can be involved in carbon trading markets. For instance, in the EU the latter (Posidonia meadows as carbon sinks of the Mediterranean, transplanting, reforestation and operations to counter wild anchorage of vessels) can contribute to the EU policy on accounting rules on greenhouse gas emissions and removals resulting from activities relating to land use, land-use change and forestry and on information concerning actions relating to those activities, as well as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the General Union Environment Action Programme to 2020. Small and medium-sized businesses would need technical and financial support to accomplish decarbonization.

The "Ecological Beach" Model in Italy: the Bargain project

The accumulation of Posidonia oceanica dead leaves on the beaches of the Mediterranean shores is a natural phenomenon. They are either temporary or permanent structures (banquettes) and represent a valuable resource, with important ecosystem functions including coastal protection against erosion. Banquette can reach thickness of up to 2.5 m, protecting the beaches from erosion by swell and waves, particularly during winter storms. Moreover, a rich macrofauna (gastropods, crustaceans, annelids and insects) inhabits the banquette, especially the "aged" ones, established for some years, and the residual nutrient content of P. oceanica dead matter represents an important input of nitrogen and carbon, contributing to the formation of the dune and its colonization by psammophilous vegetation.

Nevertheless, the perception of these plant accumulations by beach managers, local administrations and tourists is often negative. They consider these deposits a malevolent waste to be removed, rather than a natural and valuable component of the coastline.

The BARGAIN project funded by Lazio Region and the IEV CT Italy-Tunisie 2014-2020 has implemented an integrated management model for posidonia deposits, called ECOLOGICAL BEACH. It promoted the preservation of posidonia beach casts on site, with a balanced coexistence of natural and anthropic elements for best coastal preservation. To this end, the BARGAIN project developed awareness raising activities for students, tourists, public administrations and beach managers.

The BARGAIN project was supported by the Italian Ministry for the Ecological Transition (MiTE).

VisitScotland embraces a low-carbon pathway for tourism

VisitScotland recognises tourism is not exempt from the causes and impacts of climate change, despite the immense challenges the industry faces due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Sustainable practices have become a core part of **VisitScotland's operations**, including the decarbonisation of the tourism sector.

Since 2015 its **Quality Assurance** programme, which is joined by around 5000 tourism businesses, incorporates sustainability advice on issues such as energy efficiency, food waste and low carbon transport. Certification schemes like **Green Tourism**, with over 800 Scottish business members, also highlight the range of sustainable best practice within the sector. And last year, VisitScotland became the first National Tourism Organisation to join the **Tourism Declares initiative,** confirming its **commitment to addressing the climate emergency** working collaboratively with industry, destination communities and international partners.

---

13   https://skift.com/sgf-magazine-2019/

- **Engage the tourism sector in carbon removal**: Supporting the engagement of the tourism sector in adaptation to climate change and carbon removal, through both natural and technological methods is necessary. The use of natural systems for carbon removal through the restoration of high carbon density ecosystems as well as engaging with carbon removal technologies would be necessary if the sector is to cut emissions by 50% by 2030 to remain in line with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's most recent recommendations[14], and to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

Reforesting oceans and regenerating a healthy climate: the Australian Marine Permaculture project

COVID-19 is at the top of our minds as it poses a huge threat to the viability of tourism, but we must not lose sight of the global environmental changes that drive biodiversity loss and climate change. The COVID-19 crisis is highlighting how much more we could be doing to combat the climate crisis. It is proven what can be achieved when governments work together, find funding, and take action. It has also shown us how much is possible if we have the will to change.

In the fight against climate change, one unlikely hero is making waves: seaweed. Together with The Climate Foundation and the University of Tasmania, The Intrepid Foundation supported an innovative **marine permaculture initiative** aimed at regenerating kelp forests. As seaweed draws CO_2 from the ocean, it allows more to be absorbed from the atmosphere. In short, the process de-acidifies sea water and lowers carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, helping reverse climate change. Although the Tasmania kelp forest regeneration project is local, the effects will be seen globally as the atmosphere's carbon levels are reduced. Supporting kelp forest reforestation projects using these floating structures sends a powerful message to the rest of the world: we must act now before there is no time left.

Intrepid Travel is a member of the Tourism Action Coalition for Sustainable Oceans.

---

14   https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/

Green Transition of Tourism for Prosperity

Circular economy:

The COVID-19 crisis has raised awareness of the importance of local supply chains and the need to rethink how goods and services are produced and consumed, both key elements of a circular economy. Integrating circularity and further advancing resource efficiency in the tourism value chain represent an opportunity for the tourism sector to embrace a sustainable and resilient growth pathway.

- **Invest in transforming tourism value chains**: Circular economy processes such as reducing and reusing (user to user), repairing, refurbishing and remanufacturing (user to business) and recycling and repurposing (business to business) can reduce economic leakages in the tourism value chain as well as waste and pollution.[15] Supporting the integration of circular economy processes in tourism is an opportunity, which can promote innovation, the creation of new sustainable business models and green jobs added value for customers and local economic development.[16] The efficient use of energy and water are essential measures.

- **Prioritize sustainable food approaches for circularity**: Food represents an entry point for circularity in tourism value chains through sustainable procurement (local and organic sourcing, sourcing from market surplus or collective procurement), sustainable menus (including healthy and plant-rich dishes) and food waste and loss reduction and management. Mainstreaming food loss and waste reduction in tourism has potential to support the recovery of small and large businesses as it presents an opportunity to reduce costs and improve efficiency while curbing CO_2 emissions.

TUI Group is taking concrete actions to integrate circularity into its business

As an integral part of TUI Group's Sustainability Strategy, TUI has intensified with the beginning of this COVID-19 pandemic its ambition regarding resource and waste management and took concrete actions to integrate circularity more into its business by focusing stronger on products and materials that are made out of recycled materials and can be kept in the cycle by proper recycling after use.

Reducing single-use plastic and food waste as well as increasing the ratio of renewable energy are key aspects for TUI. Examples for TUI Group's ambitions are that more than 300 million single-use plastic items have been saved in the past three years, TUI Cruises has saved 17% of food waste in its main restaurant on board of the 'Mein Schiff 4' by implementing appropriate measures and the ROBINSON Club Apulia in Italy is running one of the largest solar panel systems of a hotel in Europe, with 3,280 solar panels across a total area of 5,500 square meters.

As this pandemic has made it clear how important sustainability is for the resilience of our activities, the TUI Group is committed even more to increase its commitment towards a Circular Economy in the coming years by intensifying collaboration with partners, policy makers and destinations.

China includes food waste prevention in industry standards

During the **review of tourism accommodation and tourist attraction standards** carried out by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in August 2020, the prevention of food waste was prioritized as the Ministry aims at strengthening its supervision and support to tourism stakeholders in order to curb waste in cultural and tourism activities.

The Ministry also presented plans to carry out activities to raise the awareness of industry associations, tourism workers as well as tourists on the importance to achieve food conservation and green consumption. This development is in line with the national campaign promoting conservation habits to create a proud atmosphere to reject the spoilage of resources, such as food, and leverage on the fine Chinese tradition of diligence in the context of COVID-19 recovery.

---

15   https://buildingcircularity.org/

16   ILO **COVID-19 and the world of work. Jump-starting a green recovery with more and better jobs, healthy and resilient societies**, 2020.

- **Shift towards a circularity of plastics in tourism**: Around 13 million tons of plastic end up in the sea each year, costing the global economy US$13 billion in lost revenue from ocean activities, notably threatening jobs in the fishing and tourism industry.[17] Addressing plastic waste and pollution can be a catalyser of circularity in tourism through the elimination of unnecessary plastics, integrating reuse models safely, engaging the value chain to advance the use of recyclable and compostable plastics and collaborating to increase recycling rates for plastics.[18] The increased use of personal protective equipment during the pandemic has exacerbated the need to take action on plastic pollution. Supporting the shift towards a circularity of plastics can reduce marine litter and plastic pollution, preserve the attractiveness of destinations and trigger multi-stakeholder precompetitive collaboration on topics such as waste management at destination level, which in turn can have a positive effect on health.

France supports the Global Tourism Plastics Initiative in COVID times

The Global Tourism Plastics Initiative recently welcomed a new group of **signatories** on the occasion of ITB Berlin Now in March 2021, bringing the total number to 61 tourism organizations which have committed to address plastic pollution by building a circular economy of plastics. Signatories include accommodation providers (large and small), suppliers of guest amenities, waste management platforms, online platforms and tour operators, etc., in line with the Initiative's ambition to work across tourism value chains and scale up solutions at industry level. The Initiative is led by UNEP and UNWTO in collaboration with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and operates within the umbrella of the **One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme**.

The French Government, in its role of co-lead of the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme, has been actively supporting development and implementation of the Initiative as well as the production of knowledge materials on circular economy of plastics in tourism. The Global Tourism Plastics Initiative is aligned with the vision of circular economy of plastics of the **National Pact on Plastic Packaging adopted by the French Government in 2019** and the **European Plastics Pact** that France initiated jointly with several European countries in 2020.

---

17   Plastic Waste Causes Financial Damage of US$13 Billion to Marine Ecosystems Each Year as Concern Grows over Microplastics", press release, 14 June 2014

18   https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development/global-tourism-plastics-initiative

Governance and finance:

During the COVID-19 crisis, the exchange of information across levels of government, the private sector and internationally has been crucial for decision making and managing the pandemic. Capitalising on lessons learned will be key to implement recovery plans efficiently and enhance global resilience. More inclusive and smart destination management and partnerships can lead the way for sustainability to play a pivotal role in the recovery of tourism.

- **Measure beyond economic impacts**: Generating regular and timely data to support decision making towards sustainability in tourism is crucial for the recovery to be aligned with ambitions on resource efficiency, climate change and biodiversity as well as to ensure that the needs of host communities, including public health, are well integrated in destination management. Digital technologies can assist these efforts. Measuring beyond the economic performance of tourism is essential to mobilise more inclusive stimulus, financial support and investments.

A framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism, beyond economic aspects

The Tourism sector has traditionally focused on economic and physical metrics, such as tourism GDP and international tourist arrivals. UNWTO is leading the development of a statistical framework for **Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST)** which includes elements from the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability and that is set to become the international standard once approved by the United Nations Statistical Commission.

As the tourism sector looks to restart and overcome the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a growing interest to support this recovery based on a wider evidence based and advancing the implementation of the MST.

The publication **"Experiences from pilot studies in measuring the sustainability of tourism"** shows how several countries have started piloting elements of MST. For example, Saudi Arabia estimated CO_2 emissions produced by transport in domestic tourism and accommodation services; Canada computed water and energy use and air emissions in tourism; while Germany and Austria compiled several indicators on social sustainability of tourism, such as acceptance rate of the local population and the gender pay gap.

- **Steer recovery funds towards better tourism**: Financing for the recovery of tourism should aim to balance the urgent support needed for business survival, job retention and the restart of tourism operations with longer-term goals such as the protection of ecosystems and climate change which not only underpin the global economy but also offer opportunities for creating green and decent jobs.[19] Innovative financing solutions and blended public-private approaches would be needed, including accompanying accommodation facilities towards more sustainable environmental criteria (for instance, such as adopting the EU Ecolabel) which also lead to economic efficiency in management.

The European Green Deal and the COVID-19 recovery

The recently adopted Recovery and Resilience Facility of the EU is rooted in the aim of achieving competitive sustainability and cohesion through the European Green Deal (EGD) and in line with the SDGs. It provides a large-scale financial support to EU Member States to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 pandemic for a more sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery, while ensuring adequate focus of required investments and reforms and promoting the green and digital transitions, key elements of a modern and diverse EU tourism ecosystem.

The **EGD** is a transformation strategy to make the EU's economy more sustainable, by turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities and making the transition just and inclusive for all. The success of the EGD requires a framework of regulation and legislation, setting clear overarching targets alongside financing mechanisms and incentives to encourage private sector investment (**Sustainable Europe Investment Plan**), with action plans for key sectors and goals.

The EU commitment to support the tourism sector's recovery is reaffirmed in the European Commission communication on '**Transport and tourism in 2020 and beyond**' which puts **tourism at the heart of the EGD.** It recognises sustainability as the guiding principle of the development of a modern and diverse EU tourism ecosystem and takes advantage of the wider green and digital transformation pursued by the EGD.

---

19   **COVID-19 and the world of work: Jump-starting a green recovery with more and better jobs, healthy and resilient societies**, July 2020, see at: **https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_751217.pdf**

- **Consolidate partnerships for implementation**: Successfully transitioning to a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient tourism model will largely depend on public private collaboration and partnerships. Enhancing collaboration and social dialogue between government, employers and workers organizations as well as other key stakeholders along the tourism value chain, internationally and at destination level as well as prioritizing inclusive participatory approaches is crucial to ensure an efficient implementation of recovery plans.

Argentina chairs the Group of Friends for Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP)

Unsustainable consumption and production are broadly recognized as key drivers of the major planetary crises of pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change. Chaired by Argentina, the Board of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes (10YFP) and Group of Friends for SCP are advancing a new strategy for multilateral cooperation on SCP beyond 2022, building on **the One Planet network**. Mindful of the connection between ecological degradation and zoonotic diseases[20], the strategy focuses on addressing the root causes of planetary crises and thus plans to build on science for policy action through a value chain approach in high-impact sectors including food, plastics and construction.

The tourism sector, as a service sector, can have strong impacts on the whole food value chain and is advancing in a coordinated way in the fight of plastic pollution through the Global Tourism Plastics Initiative. At the same time, the sector is also committed to enhancing resource efficiency and reduction of CO_2 emissions in the built environment and therefore, would play a key cross-cutting role in the implementation of SCP.

Member states represented in the discussions so far include: Bhutan, Costa Rica, Denmark, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mauritius, Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.

---

20   https://wedocs.unep.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/34948/MPN.pdf

Green Transition of Tourism for People

Public health:

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the strong connection among tourism, public health and the environment. The tourism sector has proven to be of assistance by putting its infrastructure, supply chains and staff at the service of public health and humanitarian aid. Creating long lasting synergies between public health and tourism is an investment in preparedness in relation to future crises and contributes to confidence and trust.

© XXX | Dreamstime.com

- **Integrate epidemiological indicators in tourism**: Epidemiological indicators are in the process of being connected with tourism monitoring mechanisms. Strengthening monitoring mechanisms in this direction has potential to lead the way for tourism to recover as an economic activity, ensuring that the easing of travel restrictions or introduction of new measures and policies is based on evidence. If well planned and managed, tourism can make a responsible contribution to the health and wellbeing of those working in the sector and local people.

INSTO Observatories monitoring health for a responsible restart of tourism

Consideration of human and environmental health plays a key role in the responsible restart and sustainable development of tourism. The two observatories of Yukon (Canada)* and South Tyrol (Italy), member of **UNWTO's International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories**, are among the first to cooperate and develop approaches for monitoring and safeguarding them.

The observatory of South Tyrol identified three dimensions in which human and environmental health can be monitored: infrastructures, services and perceptions. An integrated perspective and action in all three dimensions are crucial to restore mobility—a prerequisite for tourism recovery—and create healthier, more sustainable and resilient destinations.

Yukon's observatory[21] has focused on monitoring resident perceptions of human and environmental health. One initiative underway is to understand resident sentiments towards travel and tourism in order to ensure that health measures, such as travel restrictions, align with these sentiments – this is particularly important for tourism recovery. Another initiative is to understand resident perceptions of tourism's impacts on the natural environment so that impacts can be mitigated if necessary. For the future, the two observatories are planning to continue their collaboration in this field, aiming to integrate global expertise on health monitoring with local knowledge on tourism and health issues.

---

21   Yukon is in the process of applying for INSTO membership.

- **Connect hygiene with sustainability**: Tailored guidance and occupational safety and health protocols for tourism operations and workers to resume timely and safely shall reflect the outcomes of collaboration between governments, employers' and workers' organizations, and other tourism stakeholders, the scientific community and health authorities. It is essential that such protocols integrate sustainability principles as much as possible, to prevent decision-making and changes in processes in connection to hygiene which could have harmful effects on the environment without measurable gains with regards to health. Introducing new social distancing measures and safety protocols should not suppose new barriers[22] for people with disabilities and seniors.

Recommendations for the tourism sector to continue taking action on plastic pollution during COVID-19 recovery

The tourism sector's response to the pandemic has placed a strong focus on public health and hygiene. As this has often resulted in an increased demand for disposable plastic items, which in many cases are unrecyclable, UNEP, UNWTO and the Ellen MacArthur developed specific **COVID-19 Recommendations** to raise awareness of the importance to consider the environmental impact of health and hygiene measures.

The document was produced in consultation with private sector representatives and taking into account the latest guidance from the World Health Organization. It highlights how single-use plastics are not sanitization measures in themselves and require the same level of sanitization than reusables. It also points at the advantages that eliminating unnecessary plastics represent to reduce cross contamination touch points and calls for measures leading to the re-introduction of plastics to be treated as temporary and reassessed regularly, among other aspects.

The Recommendations are available in **Arabic**, **Chinese**, **English**, **French**, **Russian** and **Spanish**.

---

22 https://www.unwto.org/covid-19-inclusive-response-vulnerable-groups

- **Restore trust through communication**: To address the public health concerns of tourists, employees and host communities and restore trust, transparent and proactive communication on the measures put in place and current developments within businesses or destinations is key. Destinations shall send clear, consistent and consolidated messages to their source markets and adjust to their perceptions and needs to regain visitor confidence and to encourage increasingly responsible choices by consumers, given the importance and current sensitivities towards public health and its relation with the environment.

Clear Communications to Restore Trust

Communications has been at the forefront of UNWTO's COVID-19 response, based on a clear, consistent, and unhurried strategy which proved critical in facing up to uncertainty and a stream of conflicting information.

UNWTO's meaningful content prioritises data over opinion in order to build trust, the foundation for tourism's return.

Trusted tourism intelligence

UNWTO did not bow to pressure to make predictions on the potential impact on the tourism economy. Instead, a renewed 'tourism for development' narrative was established: people-centred, with strong visuals and based on the sector's proven development impact.

Coupled with UNWTO's monitoring of global policy responses, the resulting communications products were propelled into the mainstream by top-tier media and further boosted by heightened awareness of tourism's relevance beyond its economic importance.

From #TravelTomorrow to #RestartTourism

Early into the pandemic, UNWTO's call to stay home today to #TravelTomorrow united the sector behind a message of solidarity and stressed the responsibilities of individual tourists. Shifting the narrative to #RestartTourism, UNWTO addresses the cornerstones of rethinking tourism to grow back better, structured around sustainability, inclusivity and innovation.

Validating the timeliness of this approach, CNN International broadcast both campaigns at no cost to hundreds of millions of households in Africa, Asia & Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and Latin America.

Part of the UN's response

UNWTO's plays an active part in the wider United Nations' communications response to COVID-19, including the 'Verified' initiative, delivering trusted information and fact-based advice.

UNWTO's messaging was amplified through UN channels and received unprecedented repeated recognition by UN Secretary-General António Guterres who also issued the 'Policy Brief: COVID-19 and Transforming Tourism' (co-authored by UNWTO).

Clear communications support Member States and partners while reassuring tourists and tourism businesses.

Social inclusion:

The potential of green jobs in tourism is yet to be fully realized[23] and the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to promote the development of a more sustainable and inclusive tourism and to create green jobs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented jobs crisis and is having sweeping consequences on tourism jobs and enterprises, notably on small and medium enterprises, which account for around 80% of tourism businesses globally.[24] With the drastic fall in economic activity, workers are facing devastating reductions in working time, potential job losses and growing decent work challenges.[25] The ILO estimates a loss of 225 million jobs worldwide in 2020[26] and very many are in the tourism sector. Women, young people, and migrant workers, the backbone of the tourism workforce worldwide, are particularly vulnerable and bear the brunt of the jobs crisis. Many tourism employers are nevertheless taking the lead in supporting their workers and helping the communities in which they operate.[27] Capitalising on these practices can repurpose tourism as a supporter for the community.

- **Support and involve vulnerable groups**: Many tourism jobs represent the main source of income of local communities and the livelihoods of youth, women, rural population, indigenous and other vulnerable groups, including those in the informal economy. Excessively long working hours, low wages, lack of social protection and gender-based discrimination, are most pronounced in the informal economy[28] where many tourism business operate. Therefore, targeted support which caters for their needs

should allow for a more inclusive recovery and should help maintain long-term growth.[29] The principles of decent work[30] and occupational safety and health at work should guide measures aiming at enhancing job security in tourism, reducing inequalities and facilitating the transition from the informal to the formal economy, while respecting workers' fundamental rights and ensuring opportunities for income security, livelihoods and entrepreneurship.[31] However, since the restart of tourism appears to take longer than expected, the main concern of tourism workers is to keep their jobs or get rehired.[32]

Guidelines to support an inclusive recovery from COVID-19, leaving no-one behind

UNWTO is issuing a series of thematic inclusive recovery guides reflecting the sociocultural impacts of COVID-19. The Organization collaborated with relevant partners to help governments and businesses craft an inclusive response, leaving no-one behind. The guides build up on a set of recommendations issued in spring 2020, focusing on the imminent risks of exclusion of traditionally marginalized groups, whose livelihoods are interconnected with tourism.

The already released guidelines address the issues of **Persons with Disabilities**, the **Cultural Tourism** stakeholders and **Women in Tourism**. The UNWTO's focus will be expanded to other underrepresented groups, such as Indigenous Peoples and Youth, among other demographics.

---

23   ILO **Skills for a greener future: A global view,** 2019.

24   **https://www.unwto.org/news/covid-19-statement-zurab-pololikashvili**

25   ILO Monitor 3rd edition: COVID-19 and the world of work, 2020.

26   See: **ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. 7th edition**, 25 January 2021

27   **https://www.unwto.org/news/research-shows-strength-of-tourism-sectors-support-for-workers-and-communities**

28   ILO Sectoral Brief: The impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector, 2020.

29   **https://www.unwto.org/covid-19-inclusive-response-vulnerable-groups**

30   **https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/ed_dialogue/sector/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms_546337.pdf**

31   **ILO Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204)**

32   In line with the **ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work,** It is important to build back better towards a more inclusive, human centred and resilient industry that provides decent work for all tourism workers

- **Focus on the needs of micro, small and medium size enterprises (MSMEs)**: Targeted support beyond initial relief measures will be needed for MSMEs to continue operating[33] and to ensure that destinations maintain a diverse and attractive offer. Embracing digital technologies and developing capacity building and training programs can contribute to business continuity. In those destinations where tourism has become almost the sole economic activity, supporting businesses to diversify their customer base and revenue streams will enhance their resilience.

- **Repurpose tourism as a supporter for the community**: Capitalising on the new services that tourism businesses and creative industries[34] have been providing to destinations in times of crisis brings an opportunity to create stronger ties with local communities, integrate local wisdom and enhance local satisfaction with tourism. Communities may need business mentorship for their local entrepreneurship ventures to improve their supply chain inclusion. Furthermore, stronger local value chains bring social and economic benefits to local communities, reduce dependence on foreign suppliers while supporting the circularity of tourism operations.

> **Canada develops stimulus grant to support indigenous tourism businesses**
>
> **The Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC)** has facilitated the COVID-19 Development Stimulus Grant, with the support of the Government of Canada. 678 indigenous tourism businesses, mostly SMEs, have received non-repayable grants since the pandemic onset.
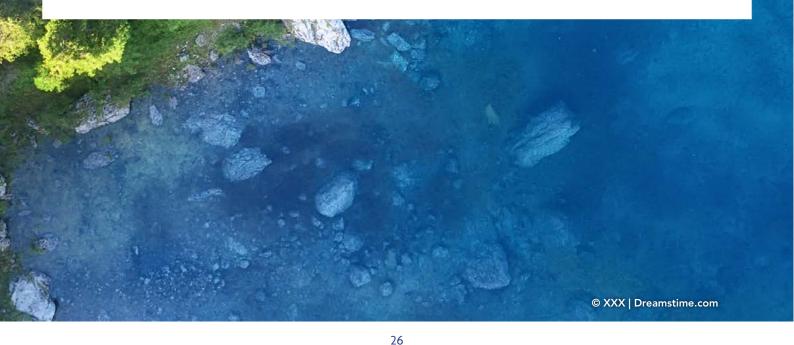>
> For instance, the restricted visitor flows have decimated the revenues of the indigenous artists working for the grantee "**Homalco Wildlife & Cultural Tours**". The company benefitted from the grant to keep supporting their performers, recording performances and posting them online and encouraging their storytellers to keep sharing the community's culture and history. In the absence of foreign visitors, the company is expanding its ecotourism operation with new boats and visitor centre, to meet the growing domestic demand, while implementing sanitary protocols. These changes drive local employment and upskilling to address the latest market trends. ITAC is also providing support in diversifying product development, and designing marketing, sales and business development programs for indigenous-run tourism businesses in Canada.

---

33   https://www.oecd-forum.org/users/406151-lamia-kamal-chaoui/posts/rescuing-smes-from-the-covid-storm-what-s-next
34   https://www.unwto.org/cultural-tourism-covid-19

Conclusions

The commitment of the tourism stakeholders to transform the sector is supported through these *Recommendations for the Transition to a Green Travel and Tourism Economy*. They are the synthesis of the growing consensus that recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic must also tackle the underlying reasons and sustainability challenges. With this focus, the G20 economies are making a historical step forward for the transformation of the tourism sector, a step which should not be underestimated in its importance.

The Recommendations provide a framework to ensure that political and financial voluntary support from the G20 economies to build tourism back better is coordinated and coherent to maximise its impact. At the same time, the Recommendations offer the possibility to carry out regular and voluntary "sharing of experiences" to track progress and achieve what it is aimed for – a more resilient and inclusive tourism model built on the principles of sustainability for people, planet, and prosperity.

Transforming Vision into Action
Repository of Inspiring Initiatives, Tools and Strategic Thinking

TRANSFORMING VISION INTO ACTION - POLICY AND GOVER

MACHU PICCHU CARBON NEUTRAL

Machu Picchu: World's First Carbon Neutral Wonder

URDAIBAI AND SITGES CARRYING CAPACITY

Spanish destinations Urdaibai and Sitges measuring their carrying capacity during COVID-19 to enhance planning

NOMY WHITE

y in Travel and eptual framework for ilient and future ansition

TOMORROW'S AIR COLLECTIVE

Tomorrow's Air: Pioneering Collective for Carbon Removal with Permanent Storage

TOURISM TAXES BY DESIGN

Funding for a regenerative future – could tourism taxes be part of the answer?

EFORM CENTERS IN VIETNAM ND MYANMAR

GROOTBOS FOOD SCHEME SOUTH AFRICA

NOMAD LAB AMAZON FOREST

Transforming Vision into Action – a Repository of Inspiring Initiatives, Tools and Strategic Thinking

The **repository** contains a collection of cases from tourism stakeholders leading by example. It aims to serve as inspiration for others wishing to take transformative action as well as a reminder of how this transition is driven by many actors which are following the Recommendations.

If you are interested in co-creating the repository, please contact **oneplanetstp@unwto.org**

UNWTO
World Tourism Organization

COVID-19
RESPONSE