

UNWTO World Tourism Organization

Secretary General

Zurab Pololikashvili

World Tourism Day
September 27, 2020

Open Letter: COVID 19 – now is the time to transform tourism

Dear Mr. Secretary General,

We appreciate the farsightedness and courage of UN General Secretary António Guterres, to call this COVID-19 pandemic crisis an opportunity for transformation in tourism by launching the Policy Brief on **“COVID-19 and Transforming Tourism”**.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its vision to transform our world to a just, equal and inclusive one, continues to serve as a guiding set of principles as we navigate through the upheavals caused by the climate crisis and the catastrophe of growing social and economic inequalities that are being deepened and accentuated by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have hit the tourism industry and governments at a time, when the resistance to the destructive growth of tourism has been getting louder. In recent years, local inhabitants in many communities have protested against over-tourism. Workers movements and organizations of informal workers have been continuously demanding better and decent working conditions, and millions of young people are calling for immediate climate action. Obviously, the promises of tourism to be a key contributor to sustainable development have not been fulfilled. The crisis now serves as a burning lens and shows that the current tourism model is, also in economic terms, neither resilient nor sustainable. It is far away from making a key contribution to the future we all need and want.

Transforming tourism is the demand of the hour. It is more than fixing the old, unsustainable growth-based tourism model. It requires a systematic approach to analyze, understand, and address the consequences that unsustainable tourism practices have on people and our planet.

As the pandemic is amplifying the exposure of the weakest in tourism we want to reinforce the demands that we published in our [***Berlin Declaration on Transforming Tourism, 2017***](#). Until today more than 70 institutions from civil society, academia and peoples movements have signed it together with more than 500 individuals from all continents across the globe.

Addressing the challenges of tourism in the context of COVID 19 means:

- Upholding the “leave no one behind”-principle in recovery plans: Governments are requested to provide urgent and efficient support to the most vulnerable groups in the tourism sector, who are the workers in the formal and informal economy. Among them are migrant workers and women, who face particular discriminations and vulnerabilities.
- Ensure that mistakes from the past are not repeated now that domestic and rural tourism are growing more intensively. Encourage destinations, tourism planners and companies to develop concepts to define local carrying capacities in a participatory way, in order to avoid a repetition of the over-tourism crisis. On the contrary, support tourism strategies that contribute to inclusive economic and social development.
- The recession is likely to lead to new investments in tourism. Guarantees in contracts and planning permissions should ensure that social and environmental sustainability and disaster preparedness are at the core of any new investments and that they do not harm traditional land use patterns.
- Support destinations to implement truly resilient tourism models that serve people in host communities and destinations. Thousands of communities active in tourism have proved, even in a deep crisis such as COVID-19, that their model is more resilient to external shocks and so better equipped for a world characterized by more and more uncertainties. Motivate your members' countries not to opt for a debt-induced tourism model, because it increases the dependency of destinations instead of contributing to their resilience.

Whilst the most urgent measures to fight the social and economic impacts of COVID 19 are the highest priority, we need also to initiate **long-term measures to transform tourism**. These include:

- Develop mechanisms that measure the effects of tourism on people and the planet including the ecological and social costs of tourism and allowing for fair and just pricing. Only tourism that contributes to the wellbeing of people and protects the environment is a viable development option.
- Ensure that precariousness and segmentation of labour in tourism is addressed by adopting and fully adhering to the ILO Decent Work Principles. These include respect for fundamental labour rights, such as freedom to organize and the eradication of all forms of labour discrimination, forced labour, and child labour.
- Remind all tourism stakeholders from both the public and private sectors that tourism should facilitate an economic and social ecosystem that allows diverse and complementary sets of livelihoods in communities and destinations to co-exist and thus to generate local well-being, cooperation and fair trade.
- Ensure that tourism makes honest and ambitious efforts to combat climate change by reducing its absolute emissions and its use of fossil fuels, globally, nationally and locally e.g. by avoiding non-essential flights; structurally reducing plastic use; adopting and contributing to responsible waste management practices; and ensuring true-cost pricing of fossil fuels.
- Ensure that tourism protects natural landscapes and biodiversity. Develop strategies and practices for sustainable development, which are rooted in a region and which respect its natural and cultural resources as well as its carrying capacities.

The demand to transform tourism, which General Secretary António Guterres referred to in his speech and the policy brief on “COVID-19 and Transforming Tourism”, has to be mainstreamed in all UNWTO policies and programmes. Achieving our joint vision of the 2030 Agenda and overcoming the incomparable global crisis that COVID-19 causes need the support of every stakeholder. Community groups, civil society organizations, people’s movement, academic institution, tourism planners, tourism practitioners as well as tourism policy makers must engage in the tourism decision-making process as equals.

We are concerned that the lack of inclusiveness in the institutional processes of the UNWTO is a barrier for this and a severe burden for the upcoming process to truly transform tourism. Only inclusive institutions will be able to navigate us all through the crisis and provide the essential vision and principles to enable us to transform tourism together.

In this regard, we urge the UNWTO to open its doors for representatives of people’s movements and members of the informal sector as well as independent NGOs and academic institutions that decide not to become affiliate members of UNWTO. We are ready to contribute to this and are looking forward to discuss strategies to democratize tourism development at the global level with you.

We are expectant for your timely commitment and support to transform tourism and look forward to your response to our sincere recommendations.

Sincerely yours,

Antje Monshausen on behalf of the signatories

Alba Sud, Spain	Fresh Eyes – People to people travel, UK
Association Sénégalaise des Amis de la Nature	Imagine Peace, South Korea
Brot für die Welt – Protestant Development Service, Germany	Institute of travel and tourism of the Gambia
College of Technology/CLASE, University of San Agustin, Philippines	International Alliance of Inhabitants
COMUNITUR, Colombia	International Center for Responsible Tourism, West Africa
Defence for Children – ECPAT, Netherlands	Kabani – the other direction, India
ECPAT International	Labor Movens Study Group, Brazil
ECPAT, Germany	Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute
Equality in Tourism, UK	National Fisheries Solidarity Movement, Sri Lanka
Equitable Tourism Options – EQUATIONS, India	respect_NFI (Naturefriends International)
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