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Eradication of poverty and other development issues

Promotion of sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty eradication and environment protection

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the report of the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization on the promotion of sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty eradication and environment protection, submitted in accordance with Assembly resolution [75/229](#).

* [A/77/150](#).



Report of the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization on the promotion of sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty eradication and environment protection

I. Introduction

1. The Secretary-General was requested to submit to the General Assembly at its seventy-seventh session, in collaboration with the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and other relevant United Nations agencies and programmes, a report on the implementation of resolution [75/229](#) on the promotion of sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty eradication and environment protection. As the specialized agency of the United Nations system responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism, UNWTO was tasked with preparing the present report.

2. The advances described in the present report reflect the results of a global analysis of national tourism policies undertaken by UNWTO in consultation with member States in 2022, as well as inputs received from other United Nations entities and international organizations and research in the field of sustainable tourism carried out by UNWTO through its work over the past few years. The report also builds on the discussions and conclusions from the high-level thematic debate on tourism, on the theme “Putting sustainable and resilient tourism at the heart of an inclusive recovery”,¹ which was convened by the President of the General Assembly in May 2022, in collaboration with UNWTO, with global participation by ministers of tourism, private sector representatives, academic institutions, experts, the United Nations system and civil society organizations.

II. Impacts of the pandemic on the tourism sector

3. Tourism has been one of the sectors hardest hit by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. For many developing countries, including least developed countries, small island developing States, countries in Africa and middle-income countries, tourism is a major source of income, foreign currency earnings, tax revenue and employment. For some small island States and developing countries, tourism accounts for over 20 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).² Tourism also accounts for over 30 per cent of total exports in the majority of small island developing States, reaching as much as 80 per cent in some.³ The sector supports millions of direct and indirect jobs all over the world, in particular for women and young people. An estimated 120 million direct tourism jobs were at risk in 2020.⁴ Considering that for every direct job in the tourism sector there are many indirectly linked jobs, the real estimate of tourism-related jobs affected by the pandemic is likely to be much higher.

4. The contribution of tourism to the world economy amounted to \$3.5 trillion in 2019, or 4 per cent of world GDP, measured in tourism direct GDP.⁵ The economic

¹ See www.un.org/pga/76/tourism.

² World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), “The economic contribution of tourism and the impact of COVID-19”, November 2021.

³ UNWTO, “Tourism in SIDS: the challenge of sustaining livelihoods in times of COVID-19”, UNWTO briefing note, Tourism and COVID-19, No. 2, June 2020.

⁴ UNWTO, “The economic contribution of tourism and the impact of COVID-19”.

⁵ Ibid.

contribution of tourism (tourism direct GDP) was estimated at \$1.9 trillion in 2021, higher than the \$1.6 trillion recorded for 2020 but still well below the pre-pandemic value of \$3.5 trillion. This would mean that the pandemic led to an accumulated loss of \$3.5 trillion in tourism direct GDP in 2020–2021.

5. Total export revenues from international tourism, including passenger transport receipts, amounted to \$1.7 trillion in 2019. Revenues dropped to \$649 billion in 2020 (a 63 per cent decrease from 2019), the first year of the pandemic, and to \$713 billion in 2021 (a 61 per cent decrease from 2019). Consequently, the total loss in tourism revenue exceeded \$2.1 trillion for 2020 and 2021. The weight of tourism in services exports also declined, from 28 per cent in 2019 to 13 per cent in 2020 and 12 per cent in 2021. Despite the loss in earnings, average spending per trip increased during the pandemic from \$1,000 in 2019 to \$1,300 in 2020 and \$1,400 in 2021 (current dollars), owing in part to longer periods of stay.⁶

6. Global tourism experienced a slight upturn of 5 per cent in 2021, with 18 million more international tourist arrivals compared with 2020, but levels remained 71 per cent below pre-pandemic arrivals in 2019.⁷ Greater understanding of the virus and increased vaccination rates have allowed for the relaxation of travel restrictions. This helped to release pent-up demand in 2021. There was a 79 per cent increase in international tourist arrivals in the period from March to December 2021 compared with the same period in 2020.⁸ While 163 destinations were closed to international tourists in May 2021 (75 per cent of all destinations worldwide),⁹ by November 2021 only 46 destinations were closed to international tourists (21 per cent of all destinations worldwide).¹⁰

7. The recovery trend from the pandemic continued in January 2022, with better performance compared with the start of 2021. Destinations welcomed almost three times as many international tourist arrivals as in the same period in 2021, with Europe leading the rebound. Despite the robust results, the pace of recovery in January was affected by the Omicron variant and the reintroduction of travel restrictions at several destinations. Major downside risks threaten the recovery of tourism in 2022, including geopolitical tensions in Eastern Europe coupled with a challenging economic environment. Inflation and rising food and energy prices threaten the already slow and uneven pace of recovery, with global disruptions in production and services and increasing poverty.

III. Overview of global sustainability advances and challenges

8. In 2021, as requested by Italy during its presidency of the Group of 20, and in partnership with the Group of 20 Tourism Working Group, UNWTO developed Recommendations for the Transition to a Green Travel and Tourism Economy, embodying a common vision for better tourism for people, the planet and prosperity. In a communiqué issued by ministers of tourism of the Group of 20 at their meeting in Rome, the Recommendations were identified as a key resource for progress in the policy area of the green transformation of the world's leading economies.¹¹

⁶ UNWTO, *World Tourism Barometer*, vol. 20, No. 3, May 2022.

⁷ UNWTO, *World Tourism Barometer*, vol. 20, No. 2, March 2022.

⁸ UNWTO, *World Tourism Barometer*, vol. 20, No. 1, January 2022.

⁹ UNWTO, "COVID-19 related travel restrictions: a global review for tourism", No. 4, 29 May 2020.

¹⁰ UNWTO, "COVID-19 related travel restrictions: a global review for tourism", No. 11, 26 November 2021.

¹¹ Communiqué dated 4 May 2021 issued by the Group of 20 ministers of tourism at the meeting held at Rome. Available at https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2022-06/G20-tourism-communication.pdf?VersionId=o_6cPzpF15GuN9ixsli23n4POiBVq5GP.

9. Because tourism connects people with nature, sustainable tourism has the unique ability to spur environmental responsibility and conservation. UNWTO regularly contributes to the work of the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and participates in the United Nations Environment Management Group. UNWTO contributed to the Group's 2021 report entitled "Supporting the global biodiversity agenda: a United Nations system commitment for action to assist Member States delivering on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework", as well as its report entitled *Advancing the Biodiversity Agenda: A UN system-wide contribution* and the United Nations common approach to biodiversity and nature-based solutions.¹²

10. UNWTO has continued to lead the implementation of the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme¹³ with the Governments of France and Spain as co-leads and in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It is one of the six programmes of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, the mandate of which was extended by the General Assembly in December 2021 in resolution 76/202. The programme has been identified as one of the high-impact sectors in the new global strategy for sustainable consumption and production.

11. The Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism was launched at the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2021 to raise the climate ambition of tourism stakeholders. The Declaration, implemented by UNWTO in collaboration with the Travel Foundation within the framework of the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme, has already welcomed more than 600 signatories, which have committed to supporting the halving of global emissions by 2030 and achieving net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest. A repository of tools and resources has been developed to support signatories to implement their commitments.¹⁴ In June 2022, the UNWTO Executive Council endorsed the Declaration as a voluntary commitment to accelerate climate action in tourism and encouraged all UNWTO member States to promote it.¹⁵

12. Since its launch in January 2020, the Global Tourism Plastics Initiative, led by UNEP and UNWTO in collaboration with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, has continued to gain recognition as a framework for transitioning to a circular economy of plastics and currently has 120 signatories from across the tourism value chain. It has curated a database to facilitate access to resources and tools for its signatories.¹⁶ It supports the tourism sector's readiness for the forthcoming international legally binding agreement to end plastic pollution and operates as the sectoral interface of the New Plastics Economy Global Commitment. In November 2021, the Initiative was endorsed by the UNWTO Executive Council, which encouraged member States to take an active role in it.¹⁷

13. Since 2019, UNEP has run a campaign to phase out problematic single-use plastics in collaboration with the Department of Tourism of the Philippines and the Philippine Center for Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development,

¹² See <https://unsceeb.org/un-common-approach-biodiversity>.

¹³ See www.oneplanetnetwork.org/programmes/sustainable-tourism.

¹⁴ See www.oneplanetnetwork.org/programmes/sustainable-tourism/glasgow-declaration/tools-resources.

¹⁵ UNWTO, Executive Council document CE/116/DEC, "Decisions taken by the Executive Council at its 116th session, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 7 June 2022".

¹⁶ See www.oneplanetnetwork.org/programmes/sustainable-tourism/global-tourism-plastics-initiative/tools-and-resources.

¹⁷ UNWTO, Executive Council document CE/114/DEC, "Decisions taken by the Executive Council at its 114th session, Madrid, Spain, 1 December 2021".

reaching over 100,000 tourism stakeholders in less than three years. The UNEP-led project Transforming Tourism Value Chains¹⁸ developed road maps and action plans using science-based approaches. The project identified hotspots in the tourism value chain and set concrete targets for the accommodation sector in the Dominican Republic, Mauritius, the Philippines and Saint Lucia. An accompanying tool is helping over 100 businesses to measure, report and reduce their key environmental impacts.

14. In September 2020, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and UNWTO to promote sustainable agrotourism and rural tourism for poverty reduction and economic development while maintaining biodiversity and ecosystems in rural areas. The memorandum envisages collaborative activities within the framework of the FAO Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems,¹⁹ the Coalition of Fragile Ecosystems²⁰ and the Green Cities Initiative,²¹ as well as other initiatives to foster innovation and entrepreneurship, such as the 1,000 villages project,²² which seeks to identify 1,000 villages across the world and convert them into digital villages.

15. Within the framework of the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems programme, many designated sites (65 sites in 22 countries) have been planning and promoting sustainable tourism, such as agrotourism, ecotourism, gastronomy tourism and study tourism. In this context, several webinars were organized in 2021 and 2022 with the participation of UNWTO, with the goal of learning good practices for agrotourism and how to establish good environmental practices to achieve sustainable tourism. Furthermore, in December 2021, the Mountain Partnership secretariat, jointly with UNWTO, launched a publication entitled *Mountain Tourism: Towards a More Sustainable Path* to highlight the role of tourism in the sustainable development of mountain regions.

16. In 2020, UNWTO launched its Recommendations on Tourism and Rural Development: A Guide to Making Tourism an Effective Tool for Rural Development, with the aim of supporting Governments, the private sector and the international community in developing tourism in rural territories in a way that contributes to inclusive, sustainable and resilient development. UNWTO also launched a rural tourism programme that includes the Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO initiative, a recognition aimed at advancing the role of tourism in valuing and safeguarding the cultural diversity, local values and biodiversity of rural villages and the overall sustainable development of tourism in rural destinations.²³

17. Efforts to contribute to bringing together competitiveness and the sustainable development of tourism include the World Economic Forum Travel and Tourism Development Index, to which UNWTO has contributed as a member of the advisory board for the revision and update of the new index and as a data partner for some of the indicators.²⁴

18. The development of the statistical framework for measuring the sustainability of tourism, supported by the Statistical Commission, is led by the Working Group of

¹⁸ See www.oneplanetnetwork.org/value-chains/transforming-tourism.

¹⁹ See www.fao.org/giahs/en.

²⁰ See www.fao.org/mountain-partnership/our-work/regionalcooperation/climate-change-and-mountain-forests/coalition-of-fragile-ecosystems-cofe/en.

²¹ See www.fao.org/green-cities-initiative/en.

²² See www.fao.org/news/story/es/item/1310435/icode.

²³ See www.unwto.org/tourism-villages/en.

²⁴ World Economic Forum, *Travel and Tourism Development Index 2021: Rebuilding for a Sustainable and Resilient Future* (Geneva, May 2022).

Experts on Measuring Sustainable Tourism,²⁵ which was established by the UNWTO Committee on Statistics in partnership with the Statistics Division and in coordination with the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting. As the framework develops, 55 countries have implemented, plan to implement or have expressed interest in undertaking a pilot for measuring the sustainability of tourism. The publication *Experiences from Pilot Studies in Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism: A Synopsis for Policy Makers* showcases some of the early pilot work. The statistical framework for measuring the sustainability of tourism will be a valuable tool for countries in better guiding decisions and policy with respect to sustainable tourism.

19. The International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories²⁶ seeks to support the continuous improvement of sustainability in the tourism sector through the monitoring of 11 common issue areas covering the economic, environmental and social impacts of tourism at the destination level. As of June 2022, the Network includes 32 tourism observatories worldwide that are strongly committed to the regular monitoring of tourism to better understand destination-wide resource use and foster the responsible management of tourism.

IV. Tourism and sustainability in national tourism policies

20. In preparing the present report, UNWTO collected national-level tourism policy documents, including policies, plans and strategies that would have been in effect in 2021. Policy documents from a total of 85 member States and six territories relating mostly to pre-pandemic tourism policies and strategies and some current early recovery responses were identified and analysed. Progress has been made on many fronts, with some major challenges still remaining, as illustrated below.

A. Ensuring reactivation, continuity and employment in tourism

21. The protection, recovery and promotion of economic efficiency and employment in the tourism industry during and after the pandemic, with high resilience and competitiveness, is one of the main strategic directions for the recovery of tourism in Cambodia in its 2021 road map for recovery. The country is also promoting the use of technology and innovation and prioritizing human capital development and has developed a strategic plan for human resources development for 2017–2025 to create long-term jobs for young graduates and skills development for employees and increase employment opportunities and mobility for tourism workers.

22. Human capital development is a crucial and integral part of many of the strategies reviewed for ensuring continuity and quality employment in tourism as well as contributing to the fight against poverty, as in the sustainable tourism master plan of Guatemala for 2015–2025, the tourism sector development strategy of Haiti for 2015–2035, the tourism development master plan of Algeria for 2025, the national strategy for culture and tourism of Burkina Faso for 2018–2027, the tourism policy of Liberia for 2020–2025, the national strategy for the sustainable development of the tourism sector of Honduras and the national plan for sustainable tourism of Uruguay for 2030.

23. Building capacity and generating quality employment and entrepreneurship opportunities through tourism development are highlighted in the tourism development plan of Kazakhstan for 2019–2021. Austria, in its tourism master plan,

²⁵ See www.unwto.org/standards/working-group-of-experts-on-mst.

²⁶ See <http://insto.unwto.org>.

is optimizing the quality of training to create appealing job profiles in the field of tourism, improving the transition from school to work and incorporating measures to improve working conditions. For Kiribati, efficient human resources are essential for the growth of the sector, and the country is working to match industry skill needs with training programmes and promote clear career pathways in tourism for employees. Data collection through continued training needs analysis and assessment of the industry is also an essential part of strengthening human resources in the sector in Kiribati, as detailed in its sustainable tourism development policy framework for 2036.

24. The sustainable tourism development master plan of Jamaica places communities at the heart of development. Tourism recovery and resilience are central to Jamaica. During the high-level thematic debate convened by the President of the General Assembly in May 2022, Jamaica highlighted some of the initiatives undertaken as part of a community-based tourism recovery strategy, including the Tourism Linkages Network, Community Tourism and the Tourism Workers Pension Scheme. Another initiative was the earmarking of dedicated units in housing developments for tourism workers in order to secure adequate and accessible housing. The strategic framework for managing the development of sustainable tourism in Croatia is to be established through a sustainable tourism development strategy for 2030 and a national plan for the development of sustainable tourism for 2027, to be adopted in 2023, both of which are aimed at strengthening resilience and competitiveness.²⁷

B. Incentives, measures and technical support for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises

25. During the hardest moments of the crisis, member States put in place ambitious safety nets and adopted fiscal stimulus measures intended to offer immediate financial relief for enterprises and job and income protection for workers, in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises and for informal workers in the sector. The pandemic presented member States with an opportunity to better develop and fine-tune policies so that they can address long-standing challenges and revive tourism, with a focus on building resilience, especially in tourism-dependent countries.

26. Government support for the tourism sector in France included setting up an exceptional system of emergency economic aid, such as partial activity and loans guaranteed by the State. With its Destination France plan of 2021, the Government of France laid the foundations for the tourism industry over the next 10 years. One of the four pillars includes engaging in the sustainable and digital transformation of the sector through the replenishment of the Sustainable Tourism Fund and support for the development of sustainable infrastructure, by supporting the digitization of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises and by creating a tourism technology community to support the development of start-ups in the tourism and events sectors.

27. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the tourism sector in India. The draft national tourism policy of 2021 considers the challenges in the sector that have been brought about by the pandemic as providing a chance to rethink and reset the direction of tourism and highlights that the country has come out with the resolve to become self-reliant. Over the next 10 years, the focus will be on digital tourism, green tourism, training and skills development in the hospitality sector, destination management and supporting tourism-related micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises.

²⁷ See <https://mint.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/NPOO/ANALIZA%20SCENARIJA.pdf>.

28. As highlighted in its general guidelines on the sustainable tourism strategy for 2030, Spain, a leading global destination, continues to consider tourism a major element of its development and employment, led mostly by small and medium-sized enterprises. During the high-level thematic debate, Spain provided details of the safety net that it had laid out to protect companies and workers in the tourism sector, which has contributed to tourism jobs and hotel overnight stays recovering to pre-pandemic levels. The country has also been a pioneer in the implementation of social sustainability plans in the tourism sector.

C. Participatory approaches, inclusion, empowerment and poverty reduction through tourism

29. Most of the tourism policies reviewed emphasize the country's commitment, focus and efforts to ensure that its tourism sector is grounded in protecting the environment, conservation and sustainability, including the protection of culture and heritage for tourism products and enhancing community participation. Canada, in "Creating middle class jobs: a federal tourism growth strategy", noted that tourism was becoming an important economic contributor and job creator for indigenous communities. The Canadian Experiences Fund would help indigenous peoples to present their intangible culture and modern values to the world, while generating new economic opportunities and supporting the growth of indigenous tourism in Canada.

30. Tourism is one of the priority economic sectors in many countries. The national tourism policy and strategy of the Gambia for 2022–2031 highlights the importance of tourism for the country as a major engine of growth, with many direct and multiplier effects for job creation and poverty reduction. It indicates that the tourism sector alone contributes approximately 16 per cent of the country's GDP, supporting over 42,000 direct jobs and 40,000 indirect jobs and generating around \$85 million in foreign exchange earnings, making it the largest earner of foreign exchange in the country, thereby intensifying the need to ensure its sustainability and resilience.

31. The need for further commitment to the sustainable development of tourism has been underscored across numerous policies. *Thrive 2030: The Re-imagined Visitor Economy*, the national recovery strategy for the Australian visitor economy, highlights the need for businesses to continue to adopt more sustainable practices and strengthen ongoing dialogue efforts so that communities and businesses can share the benefits. Inclusive and equitable growth are the guiding principles underpinning the vision for sustainable tourism in the tourism policy of Bhutan. While the country has benefited from growth in the tourism sector, it also faces challenges related to the considerable increase in the volume of tourists.

32. Accessibility is a central element of any inclusive and sustainable development policy and is steadily being incorporated into national tourism policies. The implementation of informative and interactive tourist signage, accessible for persons with disabilities or reduced mobility and translated into foreign languages, which will also improve services for international tourists, is one of the challenges set out in the national tourism plan of Brazil for 2018–2022. Accessibility is a social right in the Brazilian legal framework.

33. In the national tourism plan of El Salvador for 2030, strategic actions include the design and implementation of a plan for the incorporation of young people and women in the management and financing of innovative projects in the tourism sector so that they can be declared projects of national tourist interest and benefit from the fiscal incentives that the law on tourism grants for such projects. The country is working on the design and establishment of incentives and compliance monitoring

for infrastructure to allow people with physical disabilities to access tourist attractions.

34. Promoting the engagement of young people and empowering them to voice their concerns, needs and ideas on the development of sustainable tourism is vital for the future of the sector. The Sorrento Call to Action: Youth for Sustainable Tourism,²⁸ adopted at the first Global Youth Tourism Summit, held from 27 June to 3 July 2020 in Sorrento, Italy, and organized by UNWTO in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and the National Tourist Board of Italy, is the first step in that direction. Developed by young people from 57 countries, the call has three main pillars: people, the planet and prosperity.

D. Strengthening the need for sustainability and green transformation

35. National policies and plans reviewed for the present report underscore the urgency of protecting biodiversity and strengthening biodiversity conservation for sustainable tourism. Protected and conserved areas help to safeguard healthy ecosystems, which underpin innumerable cultural, natural and health values. Natural and cultural assets are seen as providing economic value to sustainable tourism, and vice versa, while nature-based solutions are increasingly adopted as mechanisms to address biodiversity loss.

Initiatives on biodiversity and nature-based solutions

36. Many of the strategies and core principles that guide national policies underline the potential of tourism to contribute significantly to the conservation, protection and restoration of existing ecosystems, favouring an integrated model of tourism planning. This is captured in the tourism sector development strategy of Haiti for 2015–2035, the tourism development plan of Fiji for 2021, the sustainable tourism development policy framework of Kiribati for 2036, the sustainable tourism master plan of Ethiopia for 2015–2025, the national tourism master plan of Lesotho, the national sustainable tourism growth and development strategy of Namibia for 2016–2026 and the tourism strategy of Azerbaijan for 2023 and its key projects for 2020, among others. As a part of the long-term reform measures of Croatia outlined in its national recovery and resilience plan, the country will develop a tourism sustainability satellite account, measuring not only direct and indirect contributions of tourism to the Croatian economy but also the costs and negative effects that tourism has on the environment, natural and cultural heritage and the quality of life of its residents.²⁹

37. Conservation strategies are advanced in many tourism policies to guide the management of national forests, protected areas, parks and other development interventions. Priority protected areas are identified and protected area management practices improved, in particular in areas of high biodiversity. In the federal tourism growth strategy of Canada, the trend has been to increase the amount of conservation areas in addition to allocating several millions of dollars for infrastructure and management improvement for the country's 46 national parks. Similarly, the national plan for tourism development of Costa Rica for 2017–2021 indicates that national parks and equivalent reserves, including private reserves, and the maritime terrestrial zone represent a large part of the country's tourism space protected by special legislation and that new public investments are being made in national parks.

²⁸ See <https://gyts.org/2022/07/08/sorrento-call-to-action-youth-to-play-an-active-role-in-tourisms-future>.

²⁹ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/recovery_and_resilience_plan_for_croatia_hr.pdf.

38. Protected areas play a strategic role for tourism development in the tourism master plan of Barbados for 2014–2023 as one of its strategic imperatives on mainstreaming environmental management. In the federal strategic plan for sustainable tourism of Argentina, tourism is seen as a driver of growth, development and the conservation of protected areas. In the tourism sector programme of Mexico for 2020–2024, one of the priority objectives is to support sustainable tourism through the promotion of sustainable community-based nature tourism projects in natural protected areas. Colombia, in its tourism sector plan for 2018–2022, seeks to develop nature tourism in a sustainable manner, with an emphasis on protected areas and areas with strategic ecosystems, such as the Amazon, in order to generate economic and productive alternatives for those territories that depend on the quality of their ecosystems for development.

39. The sustainable tourism master plan of Panama for 2020–2025 reactivates the tourism, conservation and research strategy implemented in the country more than 20 years ago, according to which the quality of a destination's natural and cultural attractions defines its competitive strength, largely because they are very difficult to replicate, placing the country's conservation and sustainability efforts at the forefront. The conservation and sustainable use of natural resources and biological diversity is promoted in the national tourism strategic plan of Peru for 2025, and actions are aimed at strengthening the environmental management of tourism. In 2019, Angola began to implement two initiatives, the *Apostar no Aviturismo* project and the programme for the development and promotion of rural tourist villages, with positive impacts on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, but the implementation was significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

40. Existing approaches to help to safeguard biodiversity and related ecosystem services include ecotourism, as reflected in the tourism development strategy of Tajikistan for 2030, in which the tourism segment is one of the main tourism products. The national strategy for sustainable tourism development of Albania for 2019–2023 highlights the country's parks and numerous natural reserves that are rich in biodiversity, which received over 2.4 million visitors in 2018. The way towards successful and sustainable tourism involves holistic and integrated management of biodiversity and ecosystems, promoting local guardianship, as shown by the experience of the National Trust for Nature Conservation, a Nepalese non-profit organization. As described in the country's national tourism strategy for 2014–2023, the Trust has successfully carried out over 200 small and large projects on nature conservation, biodiversity and ecotourism.

Rethinking the tourism sector and the need for transformative changes to reduce the risk of future pandemics

41. The pandemic has brought greater awareness of the impact that human activities have on nature and the connection between human health and biodiversity, raising awareness of the importance of a healthy environment as a natural barrier for future pandemics, notably in the case of the spillover of zoonotic diseases from wildlife to people, which in most cases originate from the unsustainable exploitation of nature.³⁰ It has also highlighted the urgent need to reduce the risk of the economic, social and environmental impacts of disasters and future pandemic outbreaks, many of which are exacerbated by biodiversity loss, the increased scale of poaching and the illegal use of and trade in wildlife and wildlife products.

42. The value of the One Health approach in addressing the cross-cutting issue of biodiversity and human health as an integrated approach consistent with the

³⁰ Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, *IPBES Workshop on Biodiversity and Pandemics: Workshop Report* (Bonn, 2020).

ecosystem approach that integrates the complex relationships between humans, microorganisms, animals, plants, agriculture, wildlife and the environment has been recognized in decision XII/21, on biodiversity and health, of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.³¹ The links between pandemic risk and biodiversity show the need for an inclusive, transdisciplinary and cross-sector One Health approach.

43. A strategic and holistic approach to preparing strategies and action plans, including COVID-19 recovery plans, through a multi-disciplinary, multisectoral approach to sustainable and resilient tourism is therefore needed. This requires the engagement of all actors in designing and implementing sustainable tourism strategies and models, not only to reinvigorate the tourism sector towards economic recovery but also to build on the powerful force of tourism for transformative change and lead the sector in preventing further environmental degradation, placing special emphasis on the protection and conservation of protected areas and thereby reducing the risk of further zoonotic outbreaks and building resilience through greater sustainability and inclusion.

Accelerating climate action in tourism

44. Strengthening the sustainability and resilience of the tourism sector by enhancing the climate ambition of tourism stakeholders is of the utmost importance for the sector to advance in line with international climate goals, specifically those set out in the Paris Agreement.

45. The Paris Agreement places great emphasis on transparency in the disclosure of progress as a means for effective implementation. Upon signing the Agreement, countries are requested to communicate their emissions reduction ambitions through nationally determined contributions or climate action plans, which are at the heart of the Agreement and the achievement of its long-term goals. In 2021, UNWTO analysed the nationally determined contributions of all 191 countries and found that 46 per cent (88 destinations) contained references to tourism. This was an increase from 42 per cent (77 destinations) in the 185 nationally determined contributions submitted in 2019. Of those 185 countries, 42 per cent contained explicit references to tourism, with 49 per cent defining tourism as an important sector, 51 per cent referring to it as a sector specifically vulnerable to climate change, 17 per cent underlining its responsibility for climate change and 64 per cent highlighting its potential to positively contribute to addressing climate change.

46. Nationally determined contributions have strong synergies with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. In 2019, of the 47 countries that presented voluntary national reviews, which are aimed at supporting a more effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda, 76 per cent acknowledged their commitment and initiatives to address climate change. As the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement are two mutually reinforcing and universal agendas, collective efforts on both fronts are contributing to positive global progress towards their effective implementation.

V. Tourism policy responses and recovery initiatives to boost tourism resilience in the context of the pandemic crisis

47. In May 2020, UNWTO released a technical assistance package on tourism recovery to offer guidance to member States in response to the pandemic and has been working as part of the wider United Nations response to it, emphasizing the role that

³¹ See www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=13384.

tourism can play in shielding developing countries and the most vulnerable members of society from the worst impacts of the crisis. UNWTO has also supported India, Indonesia, Jordan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Timor-Leste and the United Republic of Tanzania during the pandemic by reviewing COVID-19 protocols, advising on policies and recovery strategies and consulting on current tourism trends.

48. The series “COVID-19 related travel restrictions: a global review for tourism”,³² which was launched at the beginning of the pandemic, provides an overview and analysis of pandemic-related travel restrictions affecting international tourism. The reports were updated on a regular basis to support the mitigation and recovery efforts of the tourism sector. A similar analysis has been conducted to assess destinations according to their scores in the Environmental Performance Index, which reflects the state of sustainability at a destination. Destinations with lower scores tended to keep their borders more closed compared with destinations with higher scores.

49. On International Women's Day in 2021, in order to advance gender empowerment hampered by the pandemic, UNWTO released the “UNWTO inclusive recovery guide: sociocultural impacts of COVID-19”, No. 3, on women in tourism. With the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture of Malaysia, UNWTO co-organized the UNWTO Regional Conference on the Empowerment of Women in Tourism in Asia and the Pacific in November 2021.³³ In December 2021, UNWTO published the *Regional Report on Women in Tourism in the Middle East*, mapping the participation of women in the tourism sector prior to the pandemic. The report compiled good practices to mark the presidency of Saudi Arabia of the Group of 20 in 2020 and equipped stakeholders with specific tools needed to boost the empowerment of women in the region.

50. Early in 2022, UNWTO developed, with the support of the Federal Ministry for Economic Development of Germany, the German Agency for International Cooperation and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), new sets of guidelines – the gender-inclusive strategy for tourism businesses³⁴ and the gender mainstreaming guidelines for the public sector in tourism³⁵ – to help Governments and the private sector to address the needs of women in the tourism sector, ensuring resilient recovery. UNWTO organized a series of workshops in 2022 for Governments, the private sector and civil society to advance the implementation of different methodologies to measure tourism employment and obtain sex-disaggregated data.³⁶ The workshops also tackled the implementation of the Women's Empowerment Principles adapted to the private sector in tourism and practical introductory training on a rapid gender assessment targeting tourism administrations.

51. Since the pandemic began, UNWTO and its partners in organizations for persons with disabilities have launched two sets of recovery guides targeting national tourism administrations, destinations and the tourism industry in order to reopen tourism without imposing unnecessary obstacles for visitors with disabilities. Basic recommendations were set out in “Reopening tourism for travellers with disabilities: how to provide safety without imposing unnecessary obstacles”, while in the “UNWTO inclusive recovery guide: sociocultural impacts of COVID-19”, No. 1, on

³² See www.unwto.org/covid-19-travel-restrictions.

³³ See <https://www.unwto.org/news/unwto-in-kuala-lumpur-first-regional-conference-on-women-s-empowerment-in-tourism>.

³⁴ UNWTO, “Gender-inclusive strategy for tourism businesses”, February 2022.

³⁵ UNWTO, “Gender mainstreaming guidelines for the public sector in tourism”, February 2022.

³⁶ See www.unwto.org/events/workshop-women-employment-data-tourism.

persons with disabilities, the tourism sector was called upon to develop assistance protocols during pandemics for travellers.

52. In 2021, UNWTO, in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, developed the “UNWTO inclusive recovery guide: sociocultural impacts of COVID-19”, No. 2, on cultural tourism. Furthermore, with the World Indigenous Tourism Alliance and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, UNWTO prepared the “UNWTO inclusive recovery guide: sociocultural impacts of COVID-19”, No. 4, on indigenous communities, which insisted on a transition from “assisting” towards “enabling” indigenous entrepreneurship, strengthening skills, fostering digital literacy for tourism businesses and the acknowledgement by destination authorities and the tourism industry of the relevance of indigenous peoples and their cultural capital.

53. In June and July 2021, UNEP conducted a survey to understand the impacts of the pandemic on the tourism sector in the pan-European region. The resulting report, entitled *Transforming Tourism in the Pan-European Region for a Resilient and Sustainable Post-COVID World*, is aimed at describing the changes brought to the tourism sector by the pandemic, as well as opportunities, challenges and recommended measures for mainstreaming sustainable tourism. It focuses on impacts on the environment, climate, waste and water linked to changes in tourism and recommends 10 policy measures for the next decade to transform tourism development and build a resilient, inclusive, net-zero and resource-efficient sector.

54. At its 341st session in March 2021, the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization (ILO) endorsed the technical meeting on COVID-19 and sustainable recovery in the tourism sector,³⁷ which discussed current and emerging issues in the context of the pandemic, with a particular focus on policies, strategies and good practices for a safe and sustainable recovery and to advance decent and sustainable work in the tourism sector. The report prepared by ILO, entitled “The future of work in the tourism sector: sustainable and safe recovery and decent work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic”, served as the basis for discussions at the meeting. In June 2021, a virtual regional meeting on the future of work and the sustainable recovery of the tourism sector in Latin America and the Caribbean was held,³⁸ for which ILO prepared a technical note entitled “Hacia una recuperación sostenible del empleo en el sector del turismo en América Latina y el Caribe” (“Towards the sustainable recovery of employment in the tourism sector in Latin America and the Caribbean”) as the background document for the meeting.

55. In April 2022, the technical meeting on COVID-19 and sustainable recovery in the tourism sector stressed the importance of a just transition towards formality in the tourism sector, the promotion of decent jobs and sustainable enterprises, measures to ensure adequate protection for all workers and the improvement of the sector’s preparedness for future crises and underscored the importance of further implementing the ILO guidelines on decent work and socially responsible tourism issued in 2017³⁹ and supporting cooperation with relevant multilateral organizations. The meeting resulted in the approval of a set of conclusions, to be submitted for adoption by the ILO Governing Body at its 346th session in November 2022.

56. Initiatives to accelerate the economic recovery of the tourism sector include the UNWTO Digital Futures Programme for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise, launched in May 2022.⁴⁰ Investments can accelerate green transitions in the tourism sector; UNWTO collaborates with the International Finance Corporation on the

³⁷ See www.ilo.org/sector/activities/sectoral-meetings/WCMS_824066/lang--en/index.htm.

³⁸ See www.ilo.org/americas/eventos-y-reuniones/WCMS_808968/lang--es/index.htm.

³⁹ See www.ilo.org/sector/activities/sectoral-meetings/WCMS_546337/lang--en/index.htm.

⁴⁰ See www.unwto.org/digitalfutures.

promotion of green finance mechanisms to create new markets for green retrofits by providing integrated advisory and technical support and capital. As part of this, the TechEmerge programme focuses on sustainable cooling solutions to serve the hospitality sector in India.⁴¹ UNWTO has also been promoting private initiatives with private equity firms such as Destination Capital to promote a green hotel bond as a green finance mechanism and has also released the first report on the travel and tourism technology start-up ecosystem and investment landscape⁴² and a catalogue of the 100 top tourism start-ups and innovators⁴³ to guide stakeholders through the world of innovative solutions.

VI. Other sustainability efforts

57. Emphasizing that tourism is an important driver for job creation and entrepreneurship, digital technologies can open up new markets of consumers, create awareness about sustainable tourism options and offer new opportunities and additional revenue streams for local tourism actors, including women and rural communities. However, research by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) shows that 2.9 billion people remain offline, 96 per cent of whom live in developing countries.⁴⁴

58. Stressing that tourism is an important source of revenue for conservation efforts and protecting the natural environment are key to ensuring that destinations remain attractive for wildlife tourism. With the world's wildlife facing unprecedented threats, digital technologies are being deployed to protect animals and their habitats in innovative ways. From monitoring populations and raising public awareness to tracking the illegal wildlife trade, information and communications technologies (ICTs) can help to sustain healthy ecosystems for species to survive and thrive.

59. In the context of the World Summit on the Information Society Forum, the world's largest annual gathering of the ICT for development community, ITU has been drawing attention to exploring the positive impacts of digital technologies for wildlife protection and biodiversity conservation. The online sessions have brought together stakeholders to share best practices to leverage digital technologies for wildlife conservation, including online communities that allow citizen scientists to share data from wildlife sightings, computer vision and deep learning models to identify species and monitoring systems to track endangered species and intervene to curb trafficking. At the Generation Connect Global Youth Summit, ITU also drew attention to how citizens and young people can use digital and geospatial technologies to drive solutions for climate action. The session brought together polar scientists who are engaging tourists and polar guides to understand polar ocean and phytoplankton dynamics using field and satellite observations.⁴⁵

60. Recalling that in resolution [75/229](#) the General Assembly called upon the entities of the United Nations system to support efforts to enhance the available data with georeferenced, spatial components for the generation of more precise and timely information for tourism, ITU is coordinating the shared global use of the radio spectrum, promoting international cooperation in assigning satellite orbits. Measurements and images taken by satellite systems can be used for climate change

⁴¹ See www.techemerge.org/news/ifcs-techemerge-and-ihcl-to-pilot-sustainable-cooling-innovations-in-indian-hotels.

⁴² See www.unwto.org/travel-and-tourism-tech-startup-ecosystem-and-investment-landscape.

⁴³ See <https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2021-06/top-100-tourism-startups.pdf>.

⁴⁴ See www.itu.int/itu-d/reports/statistics/2021/11/15/internet-use.

⁴⁵ See <https://fjordphyto.ucsd.edu>.

modelling, weather monitoring and prediction and the tracking of human and animal population distributions. In addition, ITU, the World Meteorological Organization and the Digital Public Goods Alliance recently issued a call for action for weather, climate and hydrological data sets to be made open and freely available. Through United for Smart Sustainable Cities,⁴⁶ a global United Nations initiative, ITU is working with UNWTO and 16 other United Nations entities to publish a vital resource entitled “Smart tourism: a path to more secure and resilient destinations”, which will help to support cities and communities.

VII. Lessons identified from the pandemic

61. The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously hampered social and economic development and emphasized the importance of the sector in the global economy. Measures to support livelihoods and businesses, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises, which make up the majority of the sector, and safeguard jobs and income have proven to be fundamental for the survival of the sector. Women and young people have felt the brunt of the impact on jobs, in particular in lower-income countries where informality in the sector is also significant.

62. Rebuilding tourism after the disruption caused by the pandemic is an opportunity for transformation, with a focus on leveraging its impact on destinations, fostering community-based models and building more sustainable, resilient and inclusive communities and businesses through innovation and public-private partnerships to foster investments in sustainable travel and infrastructure, targeted training and human resources development.

63. The pandemic has emphasized the need to strengthen the resilience of the tourism sector, highlighted both the fragility of the natural environment and the need to protect it, as well as the intersections of tourism economics, society, health and the environment, and illustrated the need to advance a multi-disciplinary, multisectoral approach to sustainable tourism development and planning for a response that is integrated, holistic and data-based, with a special focus on making the sector more resilient, especially for tourism-dependent countries.

64. The pandemic has resulted in the acceleration of digital transformation and technology adoption throughout the tourism value chain, affecting jobs and skills in the sector. Public and private stakeholders have embraced innovation as a means of adapting to and coping with the effects. Nevertheless, the readiness of destinations to embrace change still needs a boost to increase the pace towards a more digitized world, demonstrating the urgency of bridging the digital divide and harnessing the potential of ICTs as a development policy tool. Good governance, sustainable financing mechanisms and digitization can build the sector’s resilience in order to regain its capacity to generate and maintain millions of jobs and promote inclusion and opportunities.

65. The pandemic has led to a notable fall in tourism-related emissions as restrictions and reduced demand have brought international travel to a near-complete standstill. Nevertheless, emissions are rebounding as tourism operations resume, highlighting the urgency for climate action to accelerate the shift towards an inclusive and net-zero future for the tourism sector and the decarbonization of tourism operations, with transformation and innovation needed along the entire tourism value chain.

⁴⁶ See <https://u4ssc.itu.int>.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

66. Major efforts have been undertaken since the adoption of resolution [75/229](#) in 2020 to promote sustainable tourism for poverty eradication and environmental protection, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting countries at different times, in different ways and to varying degrees, as reflected in their national tourism policies and strategies. Nevertheless, the pandemic has stressed the importance of the sector becoming more sustainable and resilient.

67. The disruption caused by the pandemic and the related health and travel restrictions have had a severe impact on tourism, livelihoods, economies and societies. Strengthening health and hygiene measures to boost the safety and confidence of travellers and enhance cross-border travel continues to be relevant. Rebuilding tourism is an opportunity for transformation, with a focus on leveraging its impact on destinations, fostering community-based models and building more sustainable, resilient and inclusive communities and businesses.

68. Tourism is among the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, but it has been a reliable and resilient driver of recovery, generating wide-ranging benefits that have transcended the sector, reflecting its broad-based economic value chain and deep social footprint. Member States in both developed and developing countries are devising road maps and strategic plans for the recovery of the sector as well as complementary policies necessary to rebuild it, calling for the need to strengthen public awareness of the critical role that the sector plays for a country's sustainable development, as well as the importance of advancing a multi-disciplinary, multisectoral approach to sustainable tourism.

69. Countries hardest hit by the pandemic face the urgent task of addressing concerns about the long-term sustainability of tourism while ensuring that the policies and measures adopted to support recovery also contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda. Tourism policies can deliver development if designed through a participatory and holistic approach, with the full participation of civil society, local communities and indigenous peoples.

70. As Governments address the impacts of the pandemic, they must consider the need for recovery actions to be aligned with the needs of people, the planet and prosperity in order to accelerate the transformation to a sustainable, low-carbon and socially inclusive tourism path. Successfully transitioning to a more sustainable and resilient tourism model will depend largely on public-private collaboration and partnerships. Enhancing collaboration between key stakeholders along the tourism value chain, internationally and at the destination level, is therefore crucial.

71. As seen in the national plans developed during the pandemic, some of the strategic directions for the successful recovery and resilience of the tourism sector include supportive fiscal measures for the protection and promotion of economic efficiency and employment in the sector, during and after the COVID-19 crisis, investment and finance for sustainable tourism, strengthening governance and administrative capacity, harnessing digital technology, fostering training and building human capacity.

72. Tourism policies reviewed for the present report underscore the urgency of halting biodiversity loss as well as the potential of tourism to contribute significantly to the conservation, protection and restoration of existing ecosystems. Tourism is a critical sector and actions necessary to sustainably use biodiversity must be taken, enhancing efforts to build resilience and stepping up policy dialogue and public engagements for better planning and implementation, in particular in the context of

the adoption in 2022 of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

73. The tourism policies reviewed highlight the national commitment, focus and efforts to ensure that the tourism sector is built around environment protection, conservation and sustainability, encompassing the protection of culture and heritage for tourism products. The sector is a priority economic sector in many countries, contributing to employment creation, in particular in rural areas, as well as improving livelihoods and enhancing community participation and opportunities and promoting broader participation for women, young people and persons with disabilities, with accessibility being steadily incorporated into national tourism policies.

74. Lessons learned from the pandemic underline the importance of a healthy environment, not only for the competitiveness of the tourism sector but also as a natural barrier for future pandemics. A healthy environment is also directly connected with the competitiveness of the tourism sector as the conservation efforts of many destinations depend largely on tourism revenue. A strategic and holistic approach that considers the One Health approach when preparing strategies and action plans, including COVID-19 recovery plans, through a multi-disciplinary, multisectoral approach to sustainable and resilient tourism is therefore encouraged.

75. The work of the International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories is based on the long-standing UNWTO commitment to the sustainable and resilient growth of the tourism sector through measurement and monitoring, supporting the evidence-based management of tourism. Working to strengthen the capacity to monitor the impact of the tourism sector and build evidence-based approaches to tourism development and measure the sector's progress towards sustainability is critical.

76. The Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism is contributing to raising the climate ambition of tourism stakeholders. The Global Tourism Plastics Initiative provides a global framework for action to address the root causes of plastic pollution and drive the tourism sector towards a circular economy of plastics. Integrating circularity and further advancing transformation and innovation along the entire tourism value chain represent an opportunity for the tourism sector to advance towards a sustained, sustainable and resilient economic growth pathway. Member States are encouraged to engage and see the commitments upheld.

77. The high-level thematic debate on tourism convened by the President of the General Assembly in May 2022, in collaboration with UNWTO, was an important milestone for UNWTO and for its member States to work towards a concerted approach at the highest level with the United Nations system, providing a unique opportunity to rethink and transform tourism, maximize its contribution to the sustainability agenda and ensure that it is given due consideration as a key driver of a sustainable and green recovery, and highlighting the relevance of holding such meetings as a regular feature of a statutory consultation on tourism within the United Nations system.
