

Small Island Destinations in Critical Need of Urgent Support as Tourism Plunges, UNWTO Warns

Madrid, Spain, 26 June 2020 – *Without strong support, the sudden and unexpected fall in tourism could devastate the economies of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has warned. Since tourism is a strong socio-economic pillar of many SIDS, the impact that COVID-19 is having on the sector places millions of jobs and businesses at risk, with women and informal workers the most vulnerable.*

In the second of its Briefing Note series on Tourism and COVID-19, UNWTO has highlighted the **severe impact the pandemic could have on livelihoods** in these destinations. According to the latest data from the United Nations specialized agency, tourism accounts for more than **30% of total exports in the majority of the 38 SIDS**. In some countries, this proportion is as high as 90%, making them especially vulnerable to falling tourist numbers.

Such a major shock translates into a **massive loss of jobs** and a sharp decline in foreign exchange and tax revenues, which curbs public spending capacity and the ability to deploy necessary measures to **support livelihoods** through the crisis, UNWTO further warns.

International Tourists dropped 47% in the first four months

In 2019, SIDS welcomed some 44 million international tourist arrivals and the sector earned US\$55 billion in export revenues. International tourist arrivals were **down 47%** in the first four months of this year.

UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said: “The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented disruption. International tourist arrivals have fallen dramatically, and destinations that rely on the sector for jobs and economic wellbeing such as small islands will be hit the hardest. As such, measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on these states and to stimulate the recovery of tourism are now more critical than ever.”

Informal workers and women at greatest risk

The United Nations estimates that SIDS economies could shrink by 4.7% in 2020 as compared to 3% for the world economy.

The UNWTO Briefing Note also highlights the risk posed to those working in the informal economy by the **sudden fall in tourist arrivals in SIDS**. As a sector, tourism is a leading global employer and, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), more than half of all workers in the accommodation and food services sector in most SIDS reporting data are women. In many, this proportion is even higher, including in Haiti and Trinidad and Tobago (70%+).

At the same time, **workers in the informal economy** are at risk of falling into poverty as the impact of COVID-19 is felt in SIDS and other low- and middle-income countries worldwide, UNWTO also warns.

Related Links:

[UNWTO Briefing Note – Tourism and COVID-19, Issue 2, Tourism In SIDS – The challenge of sustaining livelihoods in times of COVID-19](#)

[UNWTO Briefing Note – Tourism and COVID-19, Issue 1. How are countries supporting tourism recovery?](#)

[UNWTO Online interactive dashboard on country and international policy responses to COVID-19](#)

[UNWTO Data Dashboard – International Tourism and COVID 19](#)