

Agenda item 3(a)

Current trends and prospects of international tourismCE/112/3(a)
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**Executive summary**

The world is facing an unprecedented global health, social and economic emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the first time in history, between mid-March and mid-June this year, 100% of worldwide destinations had in place travel restrictions in response to the pandemic, whether by totally or partially closing their borders for tourists, suspending international flights or closing of borders in a more differentiated manner.

Travel and tourism is without any doubt among the most affected sectors. In an unparalleled shock, the COVID-19 pandemic has cut international tourist arrivals sharply down. According to the June update of the [UNWTO World Tourism Barometer](#), available data points to a double-digit decrease of 44% in the first four months of 2020, with arrivals in April down by 97%. This translates into a loss of 180 million international arrivals and about US\$195 billion in export revenues from international tourism in just four months. All industry indicators confirm this trend.

By regions, Asia and the Pacific, the first region to suffer the impact of the pandemic, saw a 51% decrease in arrivals in January-April 2020. Europe recorded the second strongest decline with 44% fewer arrivals, followed by the Middle East (-40%), the Americas (-36%) and Africa (-35%).

Current scenarios for the year point to declines of 58% to 78% in international tourist arrivals in 2020, depending on the speed of the containment, the duration of travel restrictions and the re-opening of national borders, although the outlook remains highly uncertain.

This would translate into a drop of 850 million to 1.1 billion international arrivals and a loss of US\$ 910 billion to US\$ 1.2 trillion in export revenues from tourism, the largest declines in the historical series. This shock to international tourism puts 100 to 120 million direct tourism jobs at risk.

As of mid-June, there are positive signs of a gradual, but still cautious, change in trend for the upcoming Northern Hemisphere peak summer season. This is reflected in the gradual lifting of travel restrictions in several countries around the world, particularly in Europe, and the resumption of some international flights.

Regular updates on international tourism are available at the [UNWTO Tourism and COVID-19 Dashboard](#).

DRAFT DECISION¹

Agenda item 3(a)

Current trends and prospects of international tourism
(document CE/112/3(a))

The Executive Council,

Having examined the report,

Requests the Secretary-General to continue closely monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on international tourism as well as supporting the Members States and the sector at large in their efforts to improve their tourism intelligence systems as a means to accelerate recovery, and to build resilience and evidence-based planning and managing of tourism.

¹This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Council, please refer to the Decisions document issued at the end of the session.

I. International tourism - January to April 2020

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented disruption to travel and tourism, both domestic and international, bringing destinations and outbound markets worldwide to a standstill.
2. International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) saw a decrease of 44% in the first four months of 2020 over the same period of last year, according to data reported in the June update of the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer. Arrivals in the month of April were down 97% following the lockdowns in many countries, widespread travel restrictions and the shutdown of airports and national borders, amid measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus.
3. This represents a loss of 180 million international arrivals in the first four months of 2020 compared to the same period of last year, which translates into US\$ 195 billion in lost international tourism receipts (export revenues).
4. By regions, Asia and the Pacific, the first region to suffer the impact of the pandemic, saw a 51% decrease in arrivals in January-April 2020. Europe recorded the second strongest decline with 44% fewer arrivals, followed by the Middle East (-40%), the Americas (-36%) and Africa (-35%). At the subregional level, North-East Asia (-56%) and Southern Mediterranean Europe (-52%) suffered the largest drop. Arrivals in South-East Asia, Oceania, North Africa, Northern Europe and Central and Eastern Europe were down 40% or more.
5. All industry indicators are at historic lows. In terms of international passenger seat capacity, ICAO data shows a sharp 49% drop up to May. IATA points to a decline of 43% in international passenger demand measured in revenue passenger kilometres (RPKs) in January-April, with a 98% drop in April, similar to the decline in international tourist arrivals. IATA forecasts global air passenger demand to end 2020 at -54%.
6. Data from ForwardKeys shows a massive 97% year-on-year drop in international air bookings made between 6 January and 14 June 2020 for travel in any period of the year. By departure region, Asia and the Pacific (-105%) suffered the biggest drop. Air bookings from the Americas (-96%), Europe (-94%), and Africa and the Middle East (-81%) all recorded severe decreases in the period covered.
7. STR indicates that the hotel industry continued to suffer large double-digit declines in revenue per available room (RevPAR) and occupancy, with unprecedented low levels across all world regions during April 2020. Occupancy in April reached record lows of 11% in Europe, 12% in Central and South America, 13% in Africa, 25% in the United States, 28% in Asia and the Pacific and 31% in the Middle East.

II. International tourism: scenarios for 2020

8. Prospects for international tourism in 2020 have been downgraded several times since the outbreak of the pandemic given the rapidly-evolving situation and high level of uncertainty.
9. Current scenarios point to possible declines of 58% to 78% in international arrivals this year, based on the speed of the containment of the disease, the duration of travel restrictions and the pace of re-opening of borders. This would be by far the largest decline in arrivals in the historical series, eclipsing the 4% drop in 2009 following the global economic crisis, or the mild decrease of 0.4% after the SARS outbreak in 2003.
10. The three scenarios described here are not forecasts and should not be interpreted as such. They are based on possible dates of lifting of travel restrictions and gradual re-opening of international borders. The scenarios reflect possible patterns of monthly year-on-year change in arrivals from April to December 2020 supposing that travel restrictions start to be lifted and national borders opened in early July (Scenario 1), in early September (Scenario 2) or in early December (Scenario 3). They are based on available tourism data for January-March 2020 and other information such as the shutdown of all national borders as of late April, though still in a context of high uncertainty.
11. This huge loss of demand for international travel could translate into a drop of 910 million to 1.1 billion international tourists, and a loss of US\$910 billion to US\$1.2 trillion in export revenues from tourism.

12. This is by far the largest crisis in tourism in recorded history and could put 100 to 120 million direct tourism jobs at risk, particularly in emerging economy destinations where tourism is more labour intensive. This crisis will also have a severe impact on economies which are highly dependent on tourism such as Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and countries with large tourism sectors.
13. As many countries start to open and restart tourism, considerable challenges remain ahead, starting with the unknown evolution of the pandemic, consumer and business confidence and a context of global economic recession and high unemployment levels. The global economy is projected to contract sharply by 4.9% in 2020, weighing on the travel and tourism outlook, though it is expected to pick up in 2021, according to the International Monetary Fund (June 2020).
14. Sentiment expressed by the UNWTO Panel of Experts between March and April pointed to a start of the recovery of international tourism demand by the fourth quarter of 2020 and mostly in 2021. According to Panel Experts from around the world, domestic demand would recover faster than international demand. Based on previous crises, leisure travel is expected to recover quicker, particularly travel for visiting friends and relatives, compared to business travel.
15. Countries around the world are implementing a wide range of measures to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, restart tourism and stimulate the recovery (for detailed information see <https://www.unwto.org/covid-19-measures-to-support-travel-tourism>).

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