Message of the Executive Director

With the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic and its impact on the tourism industry, the first quarter of 2020 has been a busy and challenging one for the UNWTO Technical Cooperation and Silk Road Department as can be expected. The world was faced with an unprecedented global health crisis, the repercussions of which are being felt in all sectors of society and the economy. Health institutions and governments worldwide are doing their utmost to combat COVID-19.

In order to assist Member States in developing this gradual approach to tourism recovery, the UNWTO Technical Cooperation and Silk Road Department has designed the “COVID-19 Tourism Recovery Technical Assistance Package”. The package offers guidance to both public and private tourism sector stakeholders in their crisis response by, firstly, outlining UNWTO’s range of technical assistance, and, secondly, detailing potential areas of intervention, including impact assessment, roles and responsibilities. In the COVID-19 aftermath, countries have to realize a new reality of the tourism and travel industry and make every possible effort to shape the sector accordingly.

Interest from Members States and potential partners alike have poured in following the release of the “COVID-19 Tourism Recovery Technical Assistance Package” and UNWTO is working hard to streamline the many requests received with the available resources and support from interested partners, with the European Bank for Reconstruction for Development (EBRD) being among the first to collaborate with UNWTO in the implementation of its COVID19 Tourism Recovery Package.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce the new Director of UNWTO Technical Cooperation and Silk Road Department, Mr. Suman Billa, who joined UNWTO in December 2019 and has since lead the Department with effectiveness and integrity. Prior to joining the UNWTO, Mr. Billa was the Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism of India and Secretary of Tourism of Kerala State.
The worldwide outbreak of COVID-19 has brought the world to a standstill, and tourism has been the worst affected of all major economic sectors. UNWTO is leading the restart of tourism and has designed the COVID-19 Tourism Recovery Technical Assistance Package to support governments, the private sector and donor agencies to face the impacts of this unprecedented socio-economic emergency.

Alongside the set of recommendations already released by UNWTO to call for action to mitigate the socio-economic impact of COVID and endorsed by the UNWTO Global Tourism Crisis Committee, the package identified three potential areas of intervention to accelerate the recovery of tourism: economic, promotional and institutional.

I. ECONOMIC RECOVERY: through measuring the quantitative and qualitative impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism sector and preparing research-based recommendations for economic recovery and support to tourism-related businesses, in particular to MSMEs.

II. MARKETING AND PROMOTION: through the review of marketing and promotion strategies, identifying and targeting markets that can help accelerate recovery, addressing product diversification, and recommendations and guidelines in terms of pricing and packaging.

III. INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING AND BUILDING RESILIENCE: especially aimed at assisting tourism governments and tourism businesses to adapt their services to meet the post COVID-19 working conditions in terms of health, safety, and restoration of consumer confidence; and promote tourism governance, public-private partnerships and collaborative efforts for tourism recovery, including crisis preparedness and management systems, protocols and skills.

COVID-19 Tourism Recovery Technical Assistance Package

The Tourism Recovery Package includes a comprehensive list of technical assistance activities that UNWTO can provide, including both activities of a longer duration and with a wide scope, such as the development of new strategies, and activities of a relatively short duration with a specific focus, such as advice and training on selected topics. Depending on the situation in a country, Member States may need different technical assistance activities at various stages of the COVID-19 mitigation and recovery process. In consultation with individual Member States, and if requested, based on rapid assessment missions to countries, tailor-made packages can be prepared with one or more technical assistance activities for the short- and medium term.

At this critical stage, we must act responsibly and sustainably, in consonance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contained therein. With tourism directly being referenced in SDGs 8, 12 and 14, on ‘Decent Work and Economic Growth’, ‘Responsible Consumption and Production’, and ‘Life below Water’, our sector can be linked, either directly or indirectly, to all 17 goals. Hence, by acknowledging the SDGs within our proposed actions, we underline our central message: Customized Solutions to Global Challenges.

Member States interested in COVID-19 Tourism Recovery technical assistance activities, please contact: teco@unwto.org

COVID-19 Tourism Recovery Technical Assistance Package:

In the light of COVID-19, UNWTO stands committed to continue providing technical assistance to the tourism sector. UNWTO has widely disseminated its Technical Assistance Package for COVID-19 Tourism Recovery, and Member States from all regions have expressed their interest in the package.

Several donors have also expressed their interest in collaborating with UNWTO in implementing this Recovery Package, most prominently the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) with whom UNWTO already signed an Agreement to implement the TA package in 13 EBRD countries.

At the beginning of 2020, UNWTO had a large technical assistance portfolio with activities planned for ongoing and new projects in all regions of the world. The COVID-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions have had an impact on the possibilities to field expert missions to the projects; yet, where possible, UNWTO is making arrangements to continue project activities through teleworking.

In consultation with National Tourism Administrations and other project partners, in several countries possibilities are also explored to integrate COVID-19 tourism recovery components in planned projects. Often, good opportunities exist for this, as the approach used and the expertise and experience shared in the traditional technical cooperation projects match well with the new activities presented in UNWTO’s Technical Assistance Package for COVID-19 Tourism Recovery. In this way, arrangements can be made to integrate components of the Tourism Recovery package in ongoing projects, such as addressing “measurement of the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector” in tourism statistics projects, “development of a tourism recovery plan” in tourism master plan projects, or “resilience building of tourism enterprises to adapt to the COVID-19 reality, including safety and hygiene” in hotel classification projects.

UNWTO Technical Assistance in COVID-19 Context

In the following countries, projects are already being adapted to include elements related to COVID-19 Tourism Recovery:

- Algeria (UNDP) – Tourism Marketing Strategy
- DRC (Government) – Tourism Policy
- Liberia (ITC) – Surf/coastal tourism project
- Malawi (AfDB) – Tourism Statistics
- Republic of Congo (UNDP) – Hotel Classification
- Seychelles (Government) – Tourism Statistics and TSA
- South Africa (Government) – Tourism Training
- Peru (WB) – Tourism Statistics
- Myanmar (ITO) – Tourism Statistics
- Myanmar (LuxDev) – Tourism Planning
- Nepal (UNDP) – Tourism Statistics and TSA
- Sri Lanka (Government) – Tourism Statistics
- Mongolia (Government) – Tourism Planning
- Tajikistan (ADB) – Tourism Statistics and Planning
- Turkmenistan (UNDP) – Training and Visa Facilitation
- Uzbekistan (EBRD) – Tourism Planning
- Greece – Silk Road Tourism Development in the Region of Central Macedonia (together with Google Greece)
- Qatar – Tourism Experience Awards

In addition, UNWTO also provided feedback to the following countries on measures that they are taking for COVID-19:

- India: feedback provided to the operational recommendations for several subsectors that UNWTO received from the Ministry of Tourism.
- Maldives: feedback provided to the guidelines that UNWTO received from the government of the Maldives on restarting tourism.
The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), as part of the measures taken under its Crisis Solidarity Package, will be collaborating with UNWTO in providing technical assistance to a selected group of countries in the fast recovery of their respective tourism sectors post COVID-19.

Crises require responses on multiple levels and partnership with like-minded institutions is key for effective delivery. UNWTO is already a partner of the EBRD, with whom it signed a Memorandum of Understanding for cooperation in 2015, which has been subsequently renewed in 2019. A framework agreement was signed to expand on the existing cooperation within the context of UNWTO’s COVID19 Tourism Recovery Package with the aim to deliver Country Assignments in Croatia, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia in a first phase, and may include other eligible countries such as Georgia, Uzbekistan, Greece, Montenegro, Armenia, Turkey, Albania and Lebanon in the second phase.

Main areas of collaboration in the Country Assignments are:

- Perform a quantitative analysis for the measurement of the impact of COVID-19
- Develop country-specific tourism recovery plans
- Develop support programmes for tourism MSMEs
- Develop incentives programmes to stimulate travel
- Build resilience of tourism enterprises to adapt to the COVID-19 reality, including safety and hygiene

Each Country Assignment is expected to be implemented within 6 months.
UNWTO has continued providing technical assistance to three long-term projects in China, focusing on International Tourism Marketing for the southern provinces of Yunnan and Hainan, and on Tourism Master Planning and the development of a Snow and Ice Tourism Strategy for the northern province of Heilongjiang.

At the end of 2019, UNWTO had presented the International Tourism Marketing Strategy for Yunnan Province, as well as a specific source market strategy for the French outbound market, to a delegation from the Yunnan Tourism Authority that visited the UNWTO head office in Madrid. Subsequently, in January 2020, UNWTO delivered a training seminar in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province, to present the strategies to key stakeholders from the public and private sector involved in tourism marketing.

For Hainan Province, UNWTO had prepared the International Tourism Marketing Strategy in 2019, which served as the basis to develop three specific source market strategies for the Australian, German and Indonesian markets. In each of the three markets, in-depth market research was carried out to prepare the strategies, and the final versions of the source market strategies were submitted to the Hainan Provincial Tourism Authorities in April 2020.

For the preparation of the Inclusive Tourism Development Plan and Snow and Ice Tourism Strategy for Heilongjiang Province, in 2019, a multi-disciplinary expert team had undertaken four missions to the Province to carry out field research during the different tourist seasons, and to organize several events with tourism stakeholders, including a Symposium in September 2019 to share relevant best practices from successful tourism destinations around the world on topics as ski resort development, mountain rescue, city marketing, self-drive tourism and green competitiveness.

In January 2020, the expert team undertook a concluding mission to the provincial capital Harbin to hold final consultations with the Provincial Tourism Authority for the Inclusive Tourism Development Plan and the Ice and Snow Tourism Strategy. During the mission, a meeting took place with the Governor to verify the main findings and recommendations of the Plans, and a training seminar was delivered to senior tourism officials and private sector representatives on the pilot projects and strategic actions presented in the Plans. With the final feedback received from Provincial Tourism stakeholders, UNWTO completed both Plans by March 2020 and submitted these to the Heilongjiang Tourism Authority.

As a next step, UNWTO is providing guidance to the Heilongjiang Government on the implementation of the Plans. Based on the strategic recommendations provided, the Heilongjiang Provincial Tourism Authority has made a short list of tourism projects to be developed, and UNWTO started preparing an overview of best practices from similar tourism projects in leading destinations around the world, which will serve to share useful experiences and give inspiration to Heilongjiang tourism stakeholders to plan and develop priority tourism projects.
Reorienting UNWTO’s Silk Road Initiative: New Objectives and Work Pillars

Within a constantly evolving tourism context, UNWTO has been re-assessing the purpose, objectives and long-term goals of our Silk Road initiative. The result is a redefinition of our work under three key areas: (i) Silk Road knowledge creation; (ii) Silk Road development strategies; and (iii) Silk Road investments and stakeholder mobilization. Currently, Silk Road Member States and tourism partners are contributing valuable feedback, which will be reflected in the new Silk Road Action Plan. To guide our work throughout the coming years, the new Silk Road Action Plan will be released during the second half of 2020.

9th UNWTO International Meeting on Silk Road Tourism – New Dates!

We confirm new dates for the upcoming 9th UNWTO International Meeting on Silk Road Tourism. The 2-day event, jointly organized by UNWTO, the State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijan Tourism Board, will take place in Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan on 20-21 May 2021. More information to follow in due course.

Uzbekistan: Integrated Cultural Heritage Framework – Capacity Building for Tourism Development in Khiva and the Khorezm Region, a Joint Project between UNWTO and the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)

As part of our on-going efforts to advance tourism development within Khorezm, a unique Silk Road region of Uzbekistan, UNWTO, supported by EBRD, has been implementing a region-wide Visitors Study focused on demographic data, traveller expectations and satisfaction levels; travelling and expenditure patterns; regional activities and their Silk Road travel connection. Acknowledging that locals are intrinsic to the Silk Road travel identity and development outlook, UNWTO is also conducting a qualitative study for the Residents of Ichan Kala, Khiva. If interested in knowing more or in developing similar research activities within your destination, please contact UNWTO’s Silk Road initiative.

New “Western Silk Road Experience” Online Course

The European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (FEG) and Athina Training Centre Skills Academy are inviting tourist guides on a trans-European journey with the new “Western Silk Road Experience” online course. The new course offers tourist guides the opportunity to explore a new guiding theme capable of enriching the overall travel experience. Currently only available for FEG qualified tourist guides, and for qualified tourist guides of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, information on this training course can be accessed here.
The Technical Cooperation and Silk Road Department is responsible for the identification, implementation and review of field projects, in cooperation with all operational UNWTO Departments according to the nature of such projects (SDT, TSA, marketing, PPP, poverty reduction, etc.). It assists Member States in achieving a high degree of sustainability and quality in their tourism development process and in promoting local economic development through tourism.

Objectives:

- To contribute, in collaboration with the regional departments, to the balanced allocation of UNWTO technical assistance between developed and developing countries;
- To establish a clear framework document and methodology for the formulation of tourism strategy;
- To define and develop a set of UNWTO technical cooperation products for Member States;
- To help regional departments build and maintain a dashboard of the main missions and projects undertaken in each country; and
- To help developing Member States in integrating tourism into their poverty reduction strategies papers (PRSPs);

UNWTO’s Silk Road initiative functions as a collaborative platform designed to enhance sustainable tourism development along the historic Silk Road routes. 34 Member States from Europe, the Middle East and Asia and the Pacific, plus various UNWTO Affiliate Members, participate in the initiative. The Silk Road initiative aims to maximize the benefits of tourism development for local communities, stimulate investment and promote the conservation of the route’s natural and cultural heritage by focusing on 4 key areas of work:

- Marketing and promotion;
- Capacity building and destination management;
- Travel facilitation, and
- Silk Road tourism research