

UNWTO Executive Council Backs Strong, United Plan for Global Tourism

Madrid, Spain, 17 September 2020 – *The Executive Council of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has met in-person and virtually for its 112th session. This was the first major in-person event involving tourism and the United Nations held since the COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. The Executive Council was able to gather 170 delegates from 24 countries, who all agreed to support the Tbilisi Declaration with its commitment to making international travel safe again. The Council also decided to open a new UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East.*

The Executive Council of the United Nations specialized agency ensures that the Organization fulfils its **programme of work and adheres to its budget**. After the session was opened by the Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Gacharia, UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili outlined the **accomplishments of the past 12 months**. This included the provision of technical support to Members, **tourism advocacy at the very highest political level**, and furthering the sector's contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals from within the wider **United Nations** system.

Tourism during and beyond COVID-19

Opening the meeting, the **Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gacharia** said: "**The post-crisis era presents an opportunity** for our tourism sector to showcase the uniqueness of Georgia and make the country into a leading destination, with the many social and economic benefits this will bring".

In his welcoming remarks, **Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili** underscored "that the restart of tourism must be properly managed and that our sector lives up to its unique potential". He added that "this crisis has made clear the important role tourism plays in every part of our lives", laying the ground to "**work together to build a tourism sector that works for everyone, where sustainability and innovation are part of everything we do**".

Further proving tourism's global recognition, **for the first time ever the UN Secretary-General** sent a message of support to the Executive Council, remembering tourism's key role for people and planet. António Guterres said that "tourism can be **a force for good in our world**, playing a part in protecting our planet in its biodiversity, and celebrating what makes us human". He further stressed that "this Executive Council is

an important platform for collaboration, to explore the way forward and to support the future of tourism”.

Saudi Arabia to host UNWTO Regional Office in the Middle East

The Members of the Council warmly welcomed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s offer to establish and host a **UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East**. As the Kingdom works to increase tourist arrivals, including through the relaxation of visa rules for visitors, the new office will provide UNWTO with a base from which to guide tourism’s development across the whole region.

His Excellency Ahmed Al Khateeb, Minister of Tourism for the Kingdom, commended UNWTO for “its leadership during this challenging period. We are honoured that Saudi Arabia has been approved as the location for the UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East. This collaborative approach will help drive growth and build resilience across the tourism sector at national and regional levels.” He announced that the Regional Office for the Middle East will be opened between the end of 2020 and 2021.

The Tbilisi Declaration for Sustainable Tourism

The Executive Council agreed to the [Tbilisi Declaration: Actions for Sustainable Recovery](#). The Declaration recognizes tourism as one of the worst-affected of all sectors by the pandemic and identifies the global standstill as a chance to **realign the sector towards a more sustainable and inclusive future**.

Members also unanimously accepted **Spain’s proposal to host the 113th session of the Executive Council**, during which the elections for the Secretary-General for 2022-2025 period will be held (19 January 2021).

To conclude the Session, UNWTO held an **Investment Forum**, bringing together experts from across the public and private sector to explore opportunities and challenges for investments in tourism in the post-pandemic landscape.

Related Links:

[‘Tbilisi Declaration: Actions for Sustainable Recovery’](#)

[Executive Council – 112th session](#)

[UNWTO Investment Forum](#)

[International Tourism Numbers Down 65% in First Half of 2020](#)