

## World Tourism Day 2020: 'Tourism and Rural Development' message by the UNWTO Secretary-General

For the past 40 years, World Tourism Day has highlighted the power of tourism to touch on almost every part of our societies. Right now, this message is more important than ever.

The theme of World Tourism Day 2020 - Tourism and Rural Development - is particularly relevant as we face up to an unprecedented crisis.

Tourism has proven to be a lifeline for many rural communities. However, its true force still needs to be fully deployed. The sector is not just a leading source of employment, particularly for women and youth. It also provides opportunities for territorial cohesion and socio-economic inclusion for the most vulnerable regions.

Tourism helps rural communities hold onto their unique natural and cultural heritage, supporting conservation projects, including those safeguarding endangered species, lost traditions or flavours.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the world to a standstill. Our sector is among the hardest hit with millions of jobs at risk.

As we join forces to restart tourism, we must live up to our responsibility to ensure that tourism's benefits are shared by all.

This crisis is an opportunity to rethink the tourism sector and its contribution to the people and planet; an opportunity to build back better towards a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient tourism.

Placing rural development at the heart of tourism policies through education, investment, innovation and technology can transform the livelihoods of millions, preserve our environment and our culture.

As the ultimate cross-cutting sector, tourism contributes directly or indirectly to all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Harnessing tourism as a driver of rural development will keep the global community on track to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, our ambitious plan for people and planet.

As we mark the 75 years of the United Nations, it is time to really fulfil tourism's massive potential, including its unique ability to drive development for rural communities, backing up our pledge to leave nobody behind.

Happy World Tourism Day!

**ZURAB POLOLIKASHVILI**  
SECRETARY-GENERAL

**WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION (UNWTO) - A SPECIALIZED AGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

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