

Tourism's Recovery Strategies Highlighted at WTO 'Aid for Trade' Event

Geneva, Switzerland, 26 March 2021 - *The Asian Development Bank (ADB) partnered with the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) to lead a conversation on what the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on global tourism means for development across the Asia-Pacific region. Held as part of the World Trade Organization's Aid-for-Trade Stocktaking Event, the special session brought key sector representatives together to assess how the sector can be transformed to drive recovery and build sustainability.*

According to the latest data from UNWTO, the pandemic led to a **73% fall globally in international tourist arrivals in 2020**. The drop has been even steeper in Asia-Pacific where ADB estimates a decline of over 80% for 2020, as many Asian countries continued to impose strict travel restrictions. This sudden fall has placed the sector's ability to drive sustainable development forward on hold.

Building Sustainability and Resilience

The special event at WTO, moderated by Anna Fink, Economist at ADB, explored how 'aid-for-trade' can be used to build greater sustainability and resilience in the tourism sector. Joining Matthias Helble Senior Economist at the Asian Development Bank and Zoritsa Urosevic Director of Institutional Relations and Partnerships at UNWTO were representatives from the governments of Azerbaijan and New Zealand, and Suzanne Becken, a tourism expert from Griffith University.

ADB's Matthias Helble shared that, according to latest ADB estimates, a full recovery for the sector is only expected by 2023 at the earliest. Promotion of domestic tourism, as well as the creation of 'travel bubbles' that would **allow travel to resume between certain destinations**, were highlighted as potential strategies for driving recovery in the short-term. The introduction of vaccine passes could further accelerate recovery. However, these measures should only be temporary, and countries ultimately need to prepare for a full opening.

Short and Long-Term Support for Tourism

ADB's Matthias Helble stressed that a prolonged pandemic puts the survival of large parts of the tourism sector at risk. To help governments finance policy measures that facilitate targeted aid to households and firms most severely affected by the pandemic, ADB launched a **\$20 billion support package** in April 2020. By the end of 2020, ADB

had committed \$16.3 billion of this package in the form of grants, technical assistance, and loans to developing member governments and the private sector. At the same time, UNWTO has expanded on its support to Member States across the region, including through the launch of the UNWTO Tourism Recovery Technical Assistance Package, delivering expert support to destinations across the historic Silk Road.

For longer-term recovery, UNWTO's Zoritsa Urosevic stressed the importance of **developing a new finance architecture** to adopt and build innovative, low carbon, circular, safe, and inclusive business policies, and instruments for recovery. At the same time, both ADB and UNWTO reiterated the importance **of international cooperation and the harmonization of policies**, both to restart international tourism and then to monitor and guide future growth to ensure the sector delivers on its potential to drive sustainable development.

Related Links:

[UNWTO: COVID-19 Response](#)

[2020: Worst Year in Tourism History with 1 Billion Fewer International Arrivals](#)