

**Provisional programme
Thematic session**

As of 17/11/2021

**Thematic Session
24th session of the General Assembly
2 December, 10:00-13:00, Madrid, Spain**
Building for the Future: Innovation, Education and Rural Development

10:00 – 10:10 Opening

- H.E. Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General, UNWTO

10:10 – 10:50 Ministerial Debate on Policies to Foster Tourism for Rural Development

- Moderator: Sandra Carvao, Chief, Market Intelligence and Competitiveness, UNWTO

Advancing the contribution of tourism to rural development requires adequate policy frameworks and strategies. The ministerial discussion will aim to identify opportunities for shaping new policies and effective instruments to support inclusive and sustainable tourism development in rural areas including issues such as infrastructure, connectivity, value chain development and investment

10:50 – 11:00 Presentation of the UNWTO Digital Futures Programme

- Natalia Bayona, Director, Innovation, Education & Investments Department, UNWTO

The UNWTO Digital Futures Programme for SMEs will be launched to accelerate the economic recovery of the tourism sector by supporting Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and Travel Tech and Mobility Startups to unleash digital technologies to create jobs and enhance future resilience in the linkages of the tourism value chain post COVID-19.

The Digital Futures Programme focuses on 5 digital paths: Business Growth, Connectivity, E-Commerce, Big Data & Analytics, and Payments & Security in collaboration with technology corporations such as: Amadeus, Airbnb, Mastercard, Facebook, CISCO, Telefónica, Amazon Web Services. The Programme has the ambition to serve at least 1 million SMEs from 22 countries.

11:00 – 11:50 Ministerial and Entrepreneurial Roundtable on Innovation in Rural Tourism

- Moderator: Natalia Bayona, Director, Innovation, Education & Investments Department, UNWTO

This roundtable will showcase the five winners from each of the categories of the UNWTO Global Rural Startup Competition alongside four Ministers from UNWTO Member States across regions sharing their views on how entrepreneurship is making an impact in rural communities in their regions, offering insights and inspiration to future entrepreneurs and destinations. Prior to the roundtable we will also see a video compilation of the winning projects.

11:50 – 12:35 Empowering Future Tourism Leaders – The UNWTO Students' League

Award Ceremony of the 2021 Global UNWTO Students' League

Interactive Panel discussion: "Youth Meets Ministers"

- Moderator: Lucy Garner, Youth and Talent Development

Through UNWTO's youth and talent development initiative, the UNWTO Students' League students from around the world compete to give the tourism sector their best ideas to solve the challenges of the sector on subjects strongly linked to the UN SDGs.

Through an online competition, this powerful 360° tool enables, on the one hand, public and private sector stakeholders foster talent development and obtain innovative sustainable solutions for the challenges they face. And on the other hand, this tool bridges the gap between students' education and training and the realities of our sector and therefore not only gives students more insight on our sector but also enables these young people to then enter the labour market as highly qualified and skilled professionals capable of adapting to any situation that may arise.

This year's 2021 Global UNWTO Students' League Challenges have been created for 4 age and study categories, including students from ages 11 to 29. The students were asked to create innovative sustainable solutions and give us their best solutions for Rural Development and Plastics Pollution.

This event at the General Assembly will not only showcase the Teams and their winning solutions, but will also give the audience the opportunity to answer some of the concerns that these young future tourism professionals have and to hear inspiring insights regarding their opinions about the Tourism Sector, its future and their future within it.

12:35 – 13:00 Official Announcement Ceremony of the 2021 Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO

13:00 Closing remarks