

Turning Point for Tourism: UNWTO Executive Council Looks Beyond Recovery

Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 8 June 2022: *The Executive Council of UNWTO has met to advance the recovery of tourism around shared goals and a common vision for the sector.*

Held for the first time in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the 116th session was the largest meeting of the Executive Council since the start of the pandemic, with more than 200 participants and 32 countries represented. Members noted that the meeting came at a pivotal point for the sector as it learns from the lessons of the pandemic while at the same time looking ahead to a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient future.

Advancing priorities in challenging times

“We have faced up to a triple crisis: an ongoing pandemic, a climate emergency and now the return of war in Europe,” UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said. He stressed that “tourism is united and determined like never before, and UNWTO is guiding it forward, with inclusivity and sustainability at the very heart of all our work”.

In his report to Members on achievements since the previous Council meeting six months ago, the Secretary-General illustrated how UNWTO is seizing tourism’s unprecedented relevance, including within the United Nations, in national recovery and growth plans and within the wider public and media conversation.

Tourism’s restart

UNWTO laid out its plans to keep advancing the priorities around fostering sustainability, promoting tourism jobs and education, growing tourism investments and accelerating its digital transformation.

The Minister of Tourism of Saudi Arabia and host of the Executive Council, Ahmed Al Khateeb, said: “Tourism’s restart in many countries around the world offers a unique chance to rethink tourism governance, communications and beyond. We have an incredible opportunity to set a new way forward, to create a strong future for the global tourism sector, and we must embrace it.”

The recognition of tourism's importance was further echoed by the Minister of Tourism and Leisure of Cote d'Ivoire, also serving as Executive Council Chair, Siandou Fofana, who noted that "tourism is united to face future challenges", while stressing the importance of cohesion in planning and policymaking as the sector recovers to drive wider social and economic recovery.

Members agreed to hold the 117th session of the UNWTO Executive Council in Morocco, in the second half of this year. With two countries offering to host the 118th session, Members voted in favour of the Dominican Republic holding the first Council of 2023.

Onto Riyadh, emerging tourism hub

Members of the Executive Council were provided with an update on the work of the UNWTO Regional Office for the Middle East, opened in the capital of Saudi Arabia in May 2021. The office in Riyadh is set to emerge as both a regional and global hub for the sector, with a special focus on tourism education and tourism and rural development, exemplified by the first major project to come out of the office, [Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO](#).

From Jeddah, the UNWTO leadership will visit Riyadh to formally welcome personnel.

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