Young People Must be Active Participants as we Rethink and Restart Tourism

Young people have always been an integral part of tourism. Countless destinations, in every global region, depend on them to support businesses and livelihoods, and the return of young travellers as the world opens up again brings hope for many millions of people. At the same time, young people also make up a significant proportion of the tourism workforce. Indeed, our sector is one of the leading providers of youth empowerment, providing opportunities for everyone, regardless of their backgrounds or academic attainment.

UNWTO recognizes the importance of youth. For this reason, youth empowerment, including through offering education and training opportunities as well as access to decent jobs, is one of our key priorities. But we are committed to going even further. Young people must not only be beneficiaries of tourism’s restart, but they must also be active participants in it. Now is the time to bring young voices on board as we make big decisions that will set the course for our sector for years to come.

The first UNWTO Global Youth Tourism Summit confirmed that the young talent is there. So too is the determination to make a difference. For one week in Italy, we brought together some of the brightest young minds, to hear their concerns, but above all, their vision for the sector. This was a landmark first – for the young people, for UNWTO and for the tourism sector as a whole. It put young people in the driving seat. And it gave them a unique opportunity to engage directly with the sector’s leaders, including business heads and Ministers of Tourism.

Out of the week came the Sorrento Call to Action, a call from the young participants to have a greater say in the decisions that will affect them whether as tourists themselves or as beneficiaries of the sector. While only signed by the delegates present in Sorrento, it is a true representation of the determination of global youth not to be left on the side-lines anymore. It also makes clear the priorities of the next generation of tourists and tourism leaders, namely accelerating the shift towards greater sustainability, most notably through the development and promotion of green transport, for greater inclusion and respect for human rights, and finally ensuring that the benefits tourism delivers are enjoyed as widely and fairly as possible.
To put these ideas and ambitions into action, young people need to be given a seat at the decision-making table. Youth-led organizations need to be invited to monitor and assess the development of tourism and, if necessary, be in a position where they can hold governments and businesses to account.

Every part of the wide global tourism ecosystem will benefit enormously from embracing the power of youth. Right now, the planet is home to around 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10-24— the largest generation of youth in human history. Almost 90% of them live in developing countries, and in many of them they make up the majority of the population. It's here that they can make the biggest difference, and tourism is without doubt the most powerful vehicle to drive transformation and growth.

As World Tourism Day 2022 makes clear in its theme, we now have an opportunity to rethink tourism – where we are and where we are going. Young people must be active protagonists in this vital process. The climate action movement has shown what can be achieved if young voices are brought on board. Here, young activists have helped set the agenda and pushed governments to raise their ambitions. Tourism must now do the same, and UNWTO is ready to lead by example.