Tourism has been one the sector's most affected by COVID-19. The impact has been particularly acute among Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSEMs) which are the backbone of the sector and have seen existing challenges in the areas of liquidity and financing, human resources or digitalization accelerated by the pandemic.

Representing around 80% of all businesses in tourism worldwide, and in some G20 economies as much as 98%, MSMEs are vital for the sector’s competitiveness, job creation and transition to a more sustainable model. Supporting SMEs as agents of transformation in tourism will lead the way towards a more inclusive, resilient and sustainable sector. The importance of digitalization for SMEs needs to be accelerated for economic recovery of the tourism sector by supporting SMEs to unleash digital technologies to create jobs and enhance future resilience in the linkages of the tourism value chain post COVID-19.

At the same time, as recovery consolidates workforce challenges have become more evident as the pandemic also accelerated a series of shifts happening in the world of work, adequate new skills, education, and training. Tourism businesses previously faced some challenges filling jobs that were sometimes perceived as being low-wage and low-skilled, with little chance of career advancement or steady employment; with pandemic shutdowns, laid-off employees in the tourism appear to be moving into other sectors, leaving many tourism jobs unfilled. Indeed, the increasing challenges related to the attraction and retention of talent in tourism mean the sector needs to promote value-added jobs, improve job-related conditions, including life-work balance, tackle inequalities and focus on career development especially for women, youth and people in vulnerable situations.

Challenges identified by G20 economies, which relate as well to overall countries, include

For SMEs

- Lack of access to finance
- Lack of access to market intelligence
- Market uncertainty
- The volatility of the working force
- Changing consumer trends and needs
- Low level of innovation
- Need to strengthen sustainability-orientation and developing new sustainable product

For talent development

- Need to review national policies and strategies to ensure adequate human capital in tourism
- Increase level of skills and qualification
- Improve the attractiveness of the tourism sector
- Support labour and skills upgrades through digitization
- Improve business adoption of new technologies and leveraging of new trends and meeting new consumer needs
  - Up-skill workers and incentivize employers to hire and retain workers.
Programme

15 mins  Opening remarks:
           H.E. Fatim-Zahra Ammor Minister of Tourism of Morocco
           Mr Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

20 mins  The jobs of the Future
           WEF (TBC)

50 mins  Talent - Panel discussion
           Moderator: Ms Sandra Carvao, Director Market Intelligence and Competitiveness, UNWTO

50 mins  SMEs & Digital Futures Panel discussion
           15 mins  Moderator & Introductory Presentation: Ms. Natalia Bayona, Director Innovation, Education Investment, UNWTO

20 mins  EC117 Marrakesh Digital Futures Pledge: Enabling the diffusion of digital technologies for SMEs to accelerate economic recovery of the tourism sector
           H.E. Fatim-Zahra Ammor, Minister Ministry of Tourism, Kingdom of Morocco
           H.E. Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

           The pledge will encourage to contribute to the closing of the technology skill gap in the tourism SMEs by identifying 10.000 SMEs per respective country to take the digital diagnostic tool and implement specific training programs fostering partnerships with the large technology companies to accelerate digital transformation, and innovative solutions for SMEs and the tourism Sector.

           Closing & Video announcement of the UNWTO Startup Competition for Morocco, powered by SMIT