

Together for EU Tourism



Webinar “Tourism Strategies towards Resilience”

28 June 2024 | Online

Webinar Summary

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Introduction

Scope and objectives of the webinar



Target audience

All tourism sector stakeholders including EU level and national policy makers, local authorities, tourism businesses and associations, community groups, travel companies and tour operators, who are interested in enhancing knowledge about new approaches to tourism management as a pathway to enhanced sustainability and economic efficiency.

Scope

This webinar aimed to raise awareness around two key elements of tourism strategy which are of increasing importance in a European context:

- How to improve social sustainability strategies for tourism at the destination level with commensurate benefits for communities, for visitors and for businesses.
- How to empower public authorities and local decision-makers in rural areas to evaluate, benchmark and enhance their tourism strategies and policies.

Objectives

The objectives of the webinar were to:

- Raise awareness of how traveler behaviour and responsible travel practices can be integrated into tourism strategies.
- Highlight the importance of measurement and data in assisting rural destinations to sustainably plan and manage their tourism offer and services.
- Provide guidance to tourism stakeholders on implementing effective strategies to enhance resilience in tourism, at both rural and destination levels.
- Showcase best practices that inspire new approaches to destination planning and tourism strategies.

Agenda (1/2)

Welcome and introduction of the webinar

- 10:00 – 10:05
- **Moderator:** Raymond Keaney, Lecturer in Tourism Policy TU Dublin and T4T Resilience, Skills & Inclusion Subgroup - Taskforce 4 Comprehensive Tourism Strategies Development Chairperson
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Topic 1 - Social Sustainability of Tourism

How to Communicate and Encourage Responsible Travel Behaviours

- 10:05 – 10:25
- Miguel Gallego, Head of Marketing, European Travel Commission
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Catalan Commitment for Responsible Tourism

- 10:25 – 10:35
- Patrick Torrent, Executive Director of the Catalan Tourist Board, Vice-Presidency NECSTouR
-

Socially sustainable Tourism in Action: Visit Flanders' Strategic Approach

- 10:35 – 10:45
- Marjan Nauwelaert, Sustainability Manager, Visit Flanders
-

Irish Tourism – Delivering Sustainable Growth

- 10:45 – 10:55
- Eoghan O'Mara Walsh, CEO, Irish Tourism Industry Confederation
-

Q&A

10:55 – 11:00

Break

11:00 – 11:05

Agenda (2/2)

Topic 2 – Tourism Strategy for Rural Areas

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|---------------|---|
| 11:05 – 11:25 | <p>Knowledge in Action: Evidence from Recent Studies on Tourism for Rural Development and the Self-Assessment Tool to Assist Rural Destinations (STAR)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Juan Carlos Izurieta, Senior Project Specialist, Tourism for Rural Development Programme, UN Tourism |
| 11:25 – 11:35 | <p>Management and Planning of Tourist Destinations in Rural Areas: Tourism Strategy of Rupit (Best Tourism Village 2022 by ONU Tourism)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anna Costa, Tourism & Culture Specialist, Municipality of Rupit i Pruit, Spain |
| 11:35 – 11:45 | <p>The European Charter of Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. How it contributes towards tourism resilience in rural areas?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teresa Pastor Ramos, Policy and Project Manager, Sustainable Tourism Manager, EUROPARC Federation |
| 11:45 – 11:50 | <p>Q&A</p> |
| 11:50 – 12:00 | <p>Closing and next steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raymond Keaney, Lecturer in Tourism Policy TU Dublin and T4T Resilience, Skills & Inclusion Subgroup - Taskforce 4 Comprehensive Tourism Strategies Development Chairperson• Elfa Kere, Policy Officer – Tourism, European Commission, DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs• Vanguelis Panayotis, CEO MKG Consulting & Hospitality ON / MRICS, Chair of the T4T Resilience, Skills & Inclusion Subgroup |
-

Speakers



Miguel Gallego,
Head of Marketing,
European Travel
Commission



Patrick Torrent,
Executive Director of the
Catalan Tourist Board,
Vice-Presidency
NECSTour



Marjan Nauwelaert,
Sustainability Manager,
Visit Flanders



Eoghan O'Mara Walsh,
CEO, Irish Tourism
Industry Confederation



Juan Carlos Izurieta,
Senior Project Specialist,
Tourism for Rural
Development Programme,
UN Tourism



Anna Costa,
Tourism & Culture
Specialist, Municipality of
Rupit i Pruit, Spain



Teresa Pastor Ramos,
Policy and Project
Manager, Sustainable
Tourism Manager,
EUROPARC Federation



Elfa Kere,
Policy Officer – Tourism,
European Commission,
DG Internal Market,
Industry,
Entrepreneurship and
SMEs



Vanguelis Panayotis, CEO
MKG Consulting &
Hospitality ON / MRICS,
Chair of the T4T
Resilience, Skills &
Inclusion Subgroup

Moderator



Raymond Keane,
Lecturer in Tourism Policy
TU Dublin and T4T
Resilience, Skills &
Inclusion Subgroup -
Taskforce 4
Comprehensive Tourism
Strategies Development
Chairperson

Webinar in numbers



234 Participants

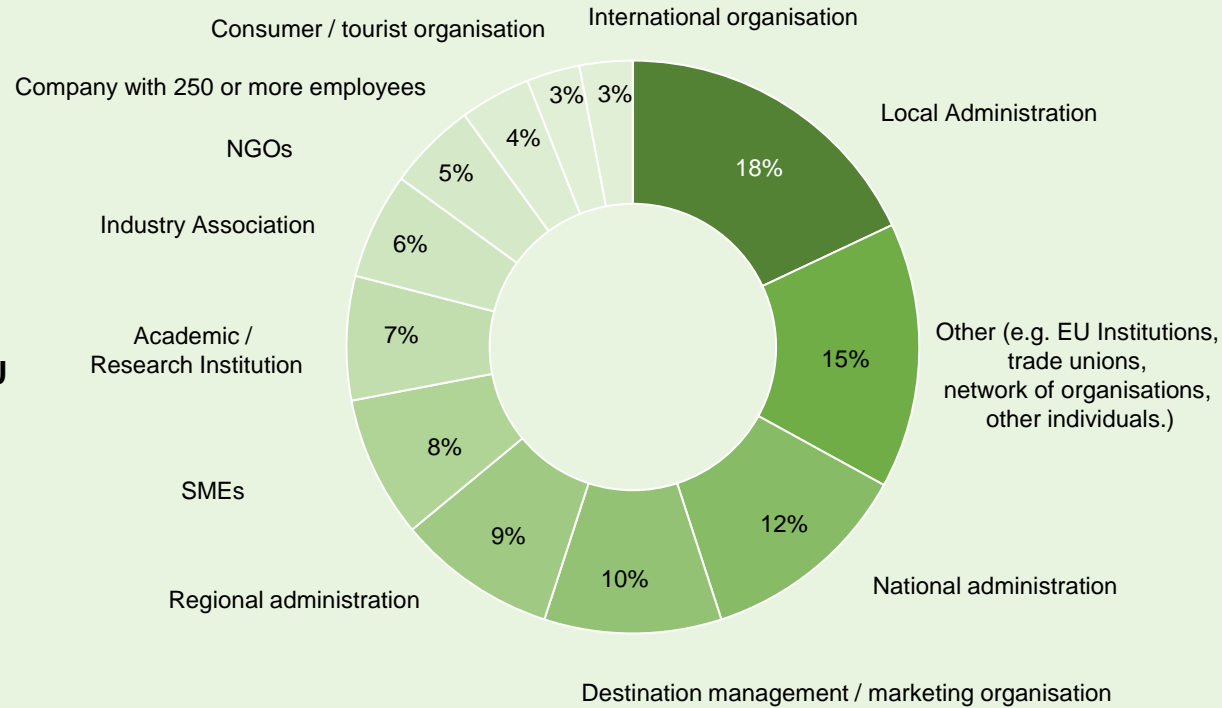


Participants from **24 EU MS** and **5 non-EU** countries



9 Speakers

Participants' Organisations



Results of the post-webinar survey



Overall **80%** of the respondents were very satisfied/satisfied with the webinar.



The majority of respondents found that the webinar provided useful information, with **97%** of them considering it as extremely useful/useful.



97% of the respondents feel that they have obtained a better understanding and knowledge of the topic after attending

Key discussion points (1/7)

Representatives from the **European Travel Commission, Catalan Tourist Board, Visit Flanders, Irish Tourism Industry Confederation, UN Tourism, Municipality of Rupit i Pruitt, and EUROPARC Federation**, discussed the following:

1

Communicate and Encourage Responsible Travel Behaviours:
communication campaign about responsible travel practices and behaviours

- Tourism brings positive impacts as well as challenges for destinations especially for local communities. Europe is a destination of choice for 50% of the world's tourist arrivals, 1 in 3 stays in Europe concentrates in the months of July and August and in some destinations tourists outnumber locals by 1600:1 during certain times of the year. For Europe to be a competitive, sustainable and inclusive travel destination, there is a need to change people's behaviours to encourage sustainable and responsible travel. However, organisations face three main challenges when communicating the message of sustainable and responsible travel in their audiences. These challenges are: i) the behavior gap, the disconnection between people's ambitions and their actions on the ground (e.g. studies found that 50% of travelers would like to visit places that are less crowded by only half of them do it); ii) travelers feel overwhelmed when navigating all the options they have to change their behavior; iii) there is language barrier of what it means to be a sustainable traveler and the definitions given do not connect with the audience.
- The European Travel Commission (ETC) developed a global communication campaign to encourage responsible travel behaviors, which is funded by the EU. The communication campaign speaks about responsible travel instead of sustainable travel with the aim to make the audience accountable for their choices and impacts of their actions. The ETC identified four behaviors to promote and encourage responsible travel among visitors: travel off season, go off beat by visiting less known destinations, travel green by using rail and public transport in destinations, love local by supporting local businesses. It defines responsible travel as "Promoting behaviours that benefit visitors and locals, while minimising negative impacts on the environment and communities". In the communication campaign, ETC developed a narrative to show that responsible travel can benefit travelers by using a tone that is positive, emotive, directional and memorable. The key message it communicates to travelers is that "responsible travel can "upscale your stay in ways you'd never imagine". This translates into the following communication message "unlock an unexpected upgrade".

Key discussion points (2/7)

2

Catalan Commitment for Responsible Tourism:
vision about the social sustainability of tourism

- Catalonia identified challenges in its destinations during the COVID-19 pandemic that led it to create a vision for a new model of tourism for the future. In this reflection, it firstly identified its purpose which was to “provide well being to the community through the values of traveling”. It has then identified the opportunity to create a new strategic plan, a new marketing plan, and a new law for tourism. To build these and to ensure that the community is working in the same direction to change the tourism model, it signed a national commitment for responsible tourism with all social agents involved with the visitors economy (i.e. in total 227 affiliated entities). The Catalan commitment for responsible tourism has 4 axes: environmentally sustainable tourism, more socially fair tourism, territorially more balanced tourism and tourism based on innovation.
- There are 10-15 initiatives that focus on residents facilitating a more sustainable tourism in terms of the social impact in the communities:
 - **Environment:** Catalonia created programs supporting the transformation of the travel industry to guarantee the saving of the water in its establishments, taking into consideration that it suffers from drought and there is a need for responsible behavior in water consumption by visitors. It has signed the Glasgow Declaration, created a Climate Action Plan for tourism to be developed in all destinations; and promotes the need of the creation of a regenerative tourism model as a pillar of a new regenerative production model.
 - **Socially fair tourism:** Catalonia based its initiatives on the Barcelona declaration “better places to live, better places to visit”, that has five pillars to work in a more sustainable model in the destinations. It decided to consider visitors as temporary residents as if not it would have been difficult to speak with the same rules for residents and for visitors. It works on improving the working conditions in the sector by having a “Socially Fair Label” to identify good practices to explain the benefits of tourism to the residents and it has identified the need of having accessible “Tourism for all” to develop products through tourism that benefit residents.
 - **Territorially balanced tourism:** Catalonia works with the 4D model tourism (i.e. de-seasonation, de-concentration, diversification, distribution of the wealth of tourism) to minimise negative tourism externalities. It creates products that help to avoid high concentrations of flows of tourism and seasonality. Examples of products include the Grand Tour of Catalonia that helps to distribute the benefits of the visitor economy in the territory and the World Region of Gastronomy 2025 that helps to build the regenerative model of tourism in the future. Catalonia also works in attracting events congresses, conventions and meetings that could help other sectors to develop as well.
 - **Innovation for tourism:** Catalonia focuses on innovative governance including residents deciding on tourism to build the strategy and marketing plan with the support of residents. It has a new generation of indicators measuring social sustainability and it is adapting the social progress index in their destinations to evaluate the impact of tourists in terms economic and social impacts. Besides, it has developed the SuperDApp Catalonia Card that uses blockchain technologies to create decentralised autonomous organisations (DAOs) in the territory to avoid intermediations.

Key discussion points (3/7)

3

**Socially sustainable
Tourism in Action:**
Visit Flanders strategic
approach

- The Visit Flanders vision is “travel to tomorrow” showing that tourism is not an end but a mean to create positive impact for their destination. Visit Flanders works on ecological sustainability, that includes: i) a transition program to guide entrepreneurs in becoming sustainable; ii) research on the ecological impact of tourism; iii) integration of the ecological side of sustainability in product development and marketing. It also works on inclusion and liveability focusing on: “why holidays matter”, accessible tourism, and resident perception and involvement.
- **“Why holidays matter”:** People should experience at least one holiday in their lives in Flanders, even if it is difficult because of financial barriers or physical barriers. Visit Flanders promotes Flanders in destinations abroad but the target group is in Flanders. It makes a lot of effort to contact people that have these barriers to make sure they experience a holiday in Flanders. That is why, it has created more than 100 booking agencies all over Flanders where people can go and book their holidays with a limited price.
- **Enhancing accessible tourism:** Visit Flanders supports the tourism sector in becoming more accessible, which is an action that has started over 20 years ago with a Decree from the Flemish government. In particular, it is providing coaching to the tourism sector, publications and guidance on how to enhance accessibility. In this respect, it has accessibility labels for accommodations and meeting venues. For instance, it has over than 340 labels for accommodation in Flanders where people with disabilities can go to and be sure that their accommodation is accessible.
- **Listening to the residents:** Every two years, it carries out a resident survey in art cities and touristic areas, in collaboration with the cities to make sure that residents share their opinion about tourism in their destination. Topics included in the survey are: support for tourism, positive and negative impact of tourism, involvement in decision making, desired types of tourism. The survey of 2023 found that 75% of respondents would like to communicate to others what their city has to offer, which shows that people are proud of their city. Visit Flanders also creates tourism projects where the participation of residents, associations, entrepreneurs, visitors is considered a key element.

Key discussion points (4/7)

4

Irish Tourism – Delivering Sustainable Growth:
overview of how Irish tourism has recovered post-pandemic and looking to secure sustainable growth

- Tourism is very important to Ireland, it is the largest domestic industry and the biggest regional employer. The biggest value market is North America while the biggest single volume market is Britain. However, continental Europe is particularly important to the country as well. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the tourism industry as the international travel was banned, therefore, it had to rely on the domestic market which is a small proportion of Irish tourism. In the summer of 2024, Ireland examined the air access by looking how many flights are coming into Ireland as an indicator of how tourism will perform and the analysis showed that air access has increased by 4% compared to last summer, which means that Ireland has recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a very strong connectivity in Ireland and one of its strengths is air access as in terms of city pairs there are many cities that have direct flights into Ireland.
- However, there are challenges to tourism and hospitality sector related to cost capacity and competitiveness. The cost of business is very high and it is putting low margin businesses in this sector under a lot of pressure. Also, Dublin airport has a passenger cap at the moment and many hotel bedrooms are given by the government to Ukrainian refugees and international asylum seekers which may pose a problem in the growth of sector. According to a survey that looks at businesses overall profitability, 57% report that their profitability is down compared to last year.
- In the area of sustainability and resilience, there will be a national tourism policy due very soon. The policy needs to match the responsible ambition that the Tourism Industry Confederation has laid down that says that tourism can grow its revenue by 50% by 2030 whilst being environmentally responsible. Ireland has committed by law to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030 and be net zero by 2050 and the Irish tourism sector is committed to play its role on that. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that by 2030 there will be a 29% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions compared to 2018. This shows that progress is slow to achieve the 51% target.
- The country has secured EUR 68 million from the Just Transition Fund for sustainable initiatives. Investments will be performed in the Midland area to establish tracks and trails, visitor attractions and tourism will replace the old foster fuel industry and create jobs and economic activity. One of the main features of the Midland area is the Shannon river, where visitors can do boat cruises. As of this year, all the boat cruisers are moving from diesel fuel to hydrotreated vegetable oil, performing a 92% reduction in the carbon emissions of the Shannon boat cruisers.

Key discussion points (5/7)

5

**Knowledge in Action:
Evidence from Recent
Studies on Tourism for
Rural Development and the
Self-Assessment Tool to
Assist Rural Destinations
(STAR):**

UN tourism research findings
on tourism and rural
development

- The UN created the Tourism for Rural Development Programme, a dedicated program for rural areas, considering the challenges that rural areas face (i.e. economic gaps, employment gaps, rural areas depopulation, education and skills gaps, infrastructure connectivity and digitalisation gaps, gaps in gender and other vulnerable groups) as well as the fact that they contain invaluable natural cultural resources, lifestyle, and heritage. The mission of the program is to advance the role of tourism, evaluate, serve and protect rural villages along with the associated landscapes, knowledge systems, biological and cultural diversity, local values and activities. UN's vision is to make tourism a driver for world development and wellbeing. It has thus developed a research agenda that focuses in policies at national and regional level, but also studies at local level.
- In 2023, the UN conducted a Tourism for Rural Development Survey, in which 79 countries (19 countries from Europe) participated. The survey asked countries if rural tourism is a priority directly or indirectly in tourism planning and the results for Europe showed that 95% of countries define rural tourism as a priority. The six most common topics that countries prioritise in rural tourism include: improving the competitiveness of destinations and visitor experience, diversifying the set of existing products and routes, creating an improvement regulatory framework, improving governance systems, improving infrastructure and supporting financial institutions. These priorities come with challenges and countries report that the top challenges are infrastructure, population and economy, and human resources and training. In the survey question, by the end of this decade what are the prospects for rural tourism in your country, the majority of respondents said that the conditions and the enabling factors behind rural tourism are going to be better or much better than now.
- At local level, the UN has developed the Best Tourism Villages initiative that recognises outstanding examples of rural destinations that implement tourism in a sustainable way. The initiative started in 2021 and until now they have recognised 129 villages in 55 countries. Every time a village presents a candidacy, UN makes an analysis and research of the opportunities and challenges that the village has in promoting tourism as a driver for sustainable development. The results of more than 200 candidacies show that challenges include: conservation of cultural and natural resources, education and skills development, infrastructure and conflicts.
- The UN recently launched the STAR tool whose objective is to allow rural destinations to take a self assessment questionnaire and then based on their current situation, make a link to relevant sources of information and learning opportunities within the UN ecosystem. The tool will benefit governments to have enough information to take decisions. It is a modular self assessment, which means that inside the tool there are different modules that rural destinations can access and respond individually while responses can be saved and completed in several sessions. The tool ultimately generates a tailored recommendation guide that it is based on the current situation of each destination pointing to learning resources in the UN ecosystem or other relevant links and resources. When a critical mass of respondent is achieved, the tool will use aggregated data to allow destinations and countries to make global and regional comparisons and benchmarks. The tool is open to public authorities, DMOs or their delegates in rural destinations within UN Tourism Member States.

Key discussion points (6/7)

6

Management and Planning of Tourist Destinations in Rural Areas: Tourism Strategy of Rupit

- Rupit is a town in the northeast of Spain in Catalonia with 280 inhabitants which has a unique natural and cultural heritage. Key tourism facts for Rupit include: more than 180,000 annual visitors, more than 800 restaurant seats, more than 600 beds, more than 60,000 cars annually and more than 370 buses annually.
- In 2015, the city decided to change the municipal tourism management so it prepared a strategic plan for tourism jointly with the Barcelona and established the basis for the tourist model based on excellence, responsibility and sustainability. Outstanding actions that have led Rupit to be an example in sustainable management in rural environments include: declaration an area with a quality night sky, pioneering regulation of tourist short term accommodation rental services, working with the Farmlab Week for the promotion of new technologies to the rural world, development of joint projects with the neighboring municipalities of l'Esquirol and Tavertet. Another action is the traffic control that Rupit applies in the weekends or specific holidays that it has a lot of tourists. An additional action of Rupit is the heritage conservation, it restores and opens visits to the bell tower, it is working with Can Rovira which is a unique blacksmith shop in Europe from the 17th century and it is working on the rehabilitation of the 10th century Rupit castle. Rupit has also adapted all tourist information for groups with hearing, visual and cognitive difficulties. All these actions led the village to have an international recognition by receiving the prize of Best Tourism Village by the UN Tourism in 2022.
- In terms of future initiatives, the aim is keep working for being a Smart Tourist Destination to improve governance, technology, sustainability in accessibility, innovation. The main challenges are to consolidate the strategic lines implemented and continuous the improvement of the destination based on sustainability.

Key discussion points (7/7)

7

The European Charter of Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. How it contributes towards tourism resilience in rural areas?:

a model of governance that delivers Protected Areas as sustainable nature-based tourism destinations

- Tourism related with nature on protected areas is one of the sectors that can contribute to ensuring living vibrant and resilient rural areas but at the same time it needs to be well managed to minimise the negative impacts towards biodiversity and avoid conflicts with local communities. More than 30 years ago EUROPARC published a report entitled “loving them to death” which alerted of the risks of not managing tourism properly and pointed out the need of creating positive alliances between tourism and network conservation. This is how the European Charter of Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas programme was born to support protected areas plan for a tourism of quality. For instance, for the Kemer National Park in Latvia, one of the awarded protected areas with the Charter, the Charter is a “Roadmap to genuinely sustainable development, where all parties work together as one team”. The decision of a destination to be sustainable it does not depend on a single business but it needs to be a territorial choice.
- The main aspect of the programme is the set up of a permanent sustainable tourism forum to engage with all the types of stakeholders, led by the protected area, but were local municipalities, conservation organisations, community organisations representing the neighbors and the whole tourism sector can participate. The aim of the forum is to develop a guiding long term strategy and a practical action plan for five years for the protected area with actions to: protect the nature and support conservation; reduce impacts on carbon footprint, water footprint, and waste reduction; promote social cohesion and community prosperity; ensure safety and accessibility; build the capacity to communicate about sustainability and environment. The programme also involves an external evaluation on the work that is done to offer advice on the criteria for a continuous improvement. Networking partnership communication is also a seminal to the process so a networking event is organised every two years - this year it will be held in Ireland at the end of October, and a ceremony in the European Parliament to award areas and give them visibility before EU Institutions.
- Currently EUROPARC has 87 protected areas from 12 countries and the aim is to expand in all Europe. Organisations that can apply to the programme are those managing protected areas (i.e. parks authorities, municipalities, regions, national bodies, NGOs, foundations).

Conclusions

- 1 The importance of leadership and governance structures for tourism at destination level was highlighted. These need be proactive and forward looking to enhance destination management and stewardship. 
- 2 It is essential to adopt integrated policies which involve the industry and the community to inform policy and strategy. 
- 3 Promote responsible travel behavior that benefit locals and visitors and create a tourism model that puts the community at the center. 
- 4 Destinations are executing environmental, socially fair, territorially balanced, innovative initiatives to transform the tourism sector. 
- 5 Bi-annual resident surveys can be a valuable source of information to enhance decision making at local level. 
- 6 The tourism sector is significant in terms of jobs, but from a business sustainability the challenge is profitability, particularly for SMEs. 
- 7 Many people in rural areas face challenges, the vision of making tourism a driver of rural development and wellbeing globally is crucial. 
- 8 Raising awareness of the actions and benefits of being the Best Tourism Village can bring lessons learned to other destinations. 
- 9 The existence of a “permanent sustainable tourism forum for protected areas” strategically facilitates on-going consultation with all stakeholders. 
- 10 The transition pathway calls tourism strategies to focus on sustainable development, including economic, environmental & social sustainability. 
- 11 Organisations are encouraged to submit more pledges on this topic to help progress in this area. 

Thank you!

The document has been prepared for the European Commission in the context of the project “Transition Pathway Stakeholder Support Platform: Implementation for Tourism Ecosystem” (the Project) in accordance with the signed contract No EISMEA/2022/OP/0018. This report reflects the views and results of the webinar discussion between the tourism stakeholders and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission. The action recommendations, however, do not necessarily represent the position or endorsement of all stakeholder groups nor the position of individual Member States or the European Commission.