

# Marrakesh Call to Action

## on SMEs Digitalization

**We, the Ministers and representatives of national tourism administrations of the Members of the Executive Council of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), gathered on the occasion of the 117th Session of the Executive Council of the UNWTO, in Marrakesh, Morocco, on 23-25 November 2022,**

### Recalling

The [UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1](#) of 25 September 2015 on Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals,

The One Planet Vision for a [Responsible Recovery of the Tourism Sector](#), which provides guidance on key lines of actions for responsible tourism recovery for people, planet and prosperity,

The United Nation's Policy Brief "[COVID-19 and Transforming Tourism](#)", launched by the UN Secretary-General on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism, which provides recommendations to policymakers for socio- economic recovery measures to integrate decisive and innovative responses for the broad and complex tourism ecosystem,

Recommendations for the [Transition to a Green Travel and Tourism Economy](#), developed by UNWTO and the G20 tourism working group on the occasion of Italy's presidency of the G20 in 2021,

[The Glasgow Declaration: A Commitment to a Decade of Climate Action in Tourism](#),

The [Digital Futures Programme for SMEs](#), launched during the Executive Council on 30 November 2021,

High-Level Thematic Debate on "[Putting sustainable and resilient tourism at the heart of an inclusive recovery](#)", organized by the United Nations General Assembly on 4 May 2022,

The report on [Rethinking Tourism: From Crisis to Transformation](#),

[The G20 Bali Guidelines for strengthening Communities and MSMEs as Tourism Transformation Agents – A People-Centered Recovery](#)

## Noting

That the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has been working along with its member states, the private sector and with other key stakeholders to develop different initiatives, frameworks and strategies to enhance coordination and cooperation to promote digitalization and innovation initiatives to advance economic recovery, inclusiveness, sustainability, job creation and retention and resilience post-COVID-19.

That before the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism sector was the 3rd largest export category representing US\$ 1.7 trillion in exports and US\$ 3.5 trillion in direct tourism GDP; this represented about 4% of the world's GDP. In 2021, direct tourism GDP is estimated to have been cut to US\$ 2.2 trillion while exports were down to US\$730 million<sup>1</sup>. Tourism and other consumer-focused businesses especially small, and medium-sized enterprises have been hit particularly hard by the pandemic. Globally, the sectors with the most business closures were: travel or tourism agencies (54% closed) hospitality and event services (47%), education and child care services (45%), performing arts and entertainment (36%), and hotels, cafes and restaurants (32%), according to the World Bank<sup>2</sup>.

That as recovery gathers pace, we now face a double challenge of a tough economic environment coupled with and exacerbated by geopolitical instability which are having a major global economic impact, exacerbating high energy prices and interest rates and inflation, and disrupting international supply chains, which results in higher transport and accommodation costs for the tourism sector. At the same time, together with rising consumer inflation and uncertainty as well as workforce shortages represent growing challenges for tourism to address while FDI into the tourism industry remains on a downward trajectory in the first half of 2022.

## Reaffirming

Our strong commitment to design and implement policies and concrete programmes to expedite an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient tourism recovery and assist the sector's transformation through uptake of digitalization and innovation.

## Believing

That SMEs are at the forefront of tourism recovery and that embracing digitalization and harnessing innovation throughout the tourism ecosystem will catalyze SME's ability to build resilience by fostering digital technologies, and at the same time it will provide opportunities and develop strategies to retain and upskill human capital and increasingly go digital.

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1. UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, September 2022, <https://www.unwto.org/unwto-world-tourism-barometer-data>  
2. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/global-state-small-business-during-covid-19-gender-inequalities>

That investments in digitalization and its cross-sectorial impact have a multiplier potential to not only strengthen strategic large global and regional projects, but also stimulate the tourism recovery and safeguard jobs by supporting the survival of SMEs, mitigating the economic systemic impact, sustaining employment, and creating the conditions needed for future growth, post pandemic.

That digitalization can play an important role in supporting SMEs achieving their green objectives<sup>3</sup>. Digitalization can drive markets outreach, business operations, enhance transparency, promote security and safety standards and increase awareness and promote best practices among SMEs and entrepreneurs.

That digitalization and innovation programs are a strategic priority to support particularly young people, which are critical to upskill the tourism sector's workforce. Moreover, the global need to promote programs to support and incentivize entrepreneurship and generate opportunities for innovations are highly need it in the tourism sector.

**Therefore, member states undertake to enhance and strengthen their efforts to accelerate digital transformation of their tourism SMEs and to support a sustainable and resilient recovery by:**

#### **1. Investing in SMEs digitalization for People:**

- To support and strengthen the overall entrepreneurship ecosystem by creating specific and tailor- made trainings programmes for SMEs and strongly support the work and activities of the UNWTO Online Academy,
- To stimulate tourism solutions by supporting local incubators and accelerators dedicated to the tourism sector and scaling up new partnerships through the application of technologies, deep tech and emerging technologies by supporting the organization of country specific Startup Competitions and Innovation Challenges,
- To create unique platforms through the UNWTO Tourism Tech Adventures (TTAs) for entrepreneurship and tourism innovation in order to create and boost synergies between the different actors, exchange best practices and encourage the culture of venture capital investment.

#### **2. Investing in SMEs Digitalization for Prosperity:**

- To accelerate economic recovery of the tourism sector by scaling up SMEs to unleash digital technologies to create jobs and enhance future resilience in the linkages of the tourism value chain by endorsing and disseminating the UNWTO Digital Futures for SMEs Programme,
- To support the creation of Innovation Hubs with the objective to provide tools and relevant resources needed to support and enable entrepreneurs and start-ups in developing forward-thinking and innovative business models and tourism services,

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3. Berlingieri, G. et al. (2020), "Laggard firms, technology diffusion and its structural and policy determinants", *OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Papers*, No. 86, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/281bd7a9-en>.

- To integrate local tourism SMEs into international value chains and digital business ecosystems to contribute to the shift towards more sustainable consumption and production while allowing them to experiment with digital tourism business models to increase income,
- To implement specific investment guidelines and promote investment attraction to accelerate digitalization and innovation adoption by SMEs in the context of a post-COVID-19 recovery,
- To promote entrepreneurship, innovation and diversity in the tourism sector with the aim of contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and SDG9 in particular.
- To create unique platforms through the UNWTO Tourism Tech Adventures (TTAs) for entrepreneurship and tourism innovation in order to create and boost synergies between the different actors, exchange best practices and encourage the culture of venture capital investment.

### **3. Investing in SMEs Digitalization for Planet:**

- To promote catalyzing financial resources from the public and private sector with the objective to encourage financing and investment schemes for sustainable tourism development especially of SMEs, while taking into account national and regional contexts and circumstances,
- To develop capacity building initiatives and educational programmes through partnerships with strategic partners and relevant stakeholders with the objective to educate and sensitize SMEs about transformation through digitalization, sustainable policies within the global framework of Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals,
- To promote innovative financing for SME's to enhance digitalization readiness and sustainability across the whole of the tourism value chain.