

Cycle of Events
Co-organized by the UNDP and the EU-LAC Foundation

“Good practices and recommendations to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and sustainably transform tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union”

- Concept note (version 01/09/2021) -

Background

Following its mandate to promote dialogue between decision-makers and civil society representatives on priority issues for the countries of the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean, the EU-LAC Foundation has promoted, since the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, various spaces for the analysis of national, regional and multilateral approaches used to address the effects of the pandemic and to shed light on policies and good practices, as well as bi-regional cooperation instruments, associated with the recovery from the pandemic that promote the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.¹

In the same way, the Latin American and Caribbean offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in line with their mission to help countries develop policies, skills and institutional capacities to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda, have developed a database that is continuously updated with policy responses from each government, as well as multiple documents, reports and events focused on providing support and sharing solutions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic in the region.²

Taking into account the imperative need to identify viable and effective measures, instruments and practices to address the effects of the pandemic - which often exacerbated pre-existing structural weaknesses in our societies - and mindful of the fact that these should be resilience-oriented and transformative in the different dimensions of sustainable development, the EU-LAC Foundation and the UNDP have agreed to focus on tourism as a sector severely affected by the pandemic and to jointly organise a cycle of events to foster dialogue and the articulation of bi-regional perspectives on policies and initiatives employed in the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean for the sustainable recovery of this sector.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all economic and social sectors around the world, resulting in the loss of millions of lives and an economic downturn with severe impacts on production and supply chains, service delivery, financial markets, and investment, as well as labour markets. The tourism sector has been severely impacted due to its intrinsic dependence on the mobility of people, which was significantly limited due to restrictions imposed by governments to control the virus, leaving borders closed to non-essential travel in many countries for several

¹ See publications: <https://eulacfoundation.org/en/new-multilateralism-age-covid-19-perspective-european-union-latin-america-and-caribbean-relations> ;
https://eulacfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/report_webinar_democracy_lac_eu_final.pdf ;
https://eulacfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/l%20EU-LAC%20Policy%20Brief_EN_o.pdf ;
webinars videos: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPb2yrBDBlq_zz7z2ae12og/featured

² See database: <https://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/en/home/coronavirus.html> .

months in 2020 and 2021, leading in turn to a 73% drop in international tourist arrivals in 2020 and a 64% contraction in international tourism receipts in real terms (local currencies, constant prices).³ Around 62 million people employed in the travel and tourism sector around the world lost their jobs in 2020.⁴ According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2020 was the worst year on record for international tourism since 1950, ending a 10-year period of sustained growth since the 2009 financial crisis.⁵

The situation affects most severely those countries, regions and communities that are most dependent on tourism, as is the case in the Caribbean. In the small island developing states as a whole, tourism accounts for 27% of employment, but this number varies between 20% and 80% between countries, which, when added to tourism's contribution to GDP and exports, characterises several Caribbean countries as among the most tourism-dependent in the world.⁶ In 2020, the contribution to GDP from the travel and tourism sector in the Caribbean region contracted by 58%.⁷ In Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, tourism contributions to GDP have been above 40%.⁸ Meanwhile, the Dominican Republic stands out for a very high number of tourist arrivals to the country in pre-pandemic times (5.8 million per year on average between 2014 and 2018). The region is also heavily dependent on international tourists, which, in addition, are concentrated in people coming from a few countries (particularly: United States, Canada, France, United Kingdom, The Netherlands)⁹, and by the fact that around half of tourist stays are linked to excursionists visiting the region via cruise ships¹⁰ - both factors highlighting the sensitivity and reduced resilience of the tourism sector in this region.

Meanwhile, in Latin America, the contribution of the travel and tourism sector to the GDP in the region fell by 41.1% in 2020, according to data from the World Travel and Tourism Council.¹¹ Around 10% of employment in the region is directly linked to the tourism sector, but compared to the Caribbean, domestic visitors play a more important role: in Mexico, this group represents almost 75% of all tourists, while in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Peru, this proportion exceeds 50%.¹² Among Central American countries, Belize demonstrates the highest degree of dependence on tourism, given that in 2019 this sector contributed 37% to GDP and 39% to employment, while Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala showed indicators above 10%. Other countries for which tourism has played a significant role in terms of its contribution to GDP and employment (according

³ UNWTO 2021: World Tourism Barometer and Statistical Annex. Available in: <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/abs/10.18111/wtobarometereng.2021.19.1.3>

⁴ WTTC 2021: Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2021. Global Economic Impact & Trends 2021. Available in: <https://wtcc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2021/Global%20Economic%20Impact%20and%20Trends%202021.pdf?ver=2021-07-01-114957-177>

⁵ UNWTO World Tourism Barometer May 2020. Special focus on the Impact of COVID-19. Available in: <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284421930>

⁶ ECLAC 2020 a: Evaluación de los efectos e impactos de la pandemia de COVID-19 sobre el turismo en América Latina y el Caribe: aplicación de la metodología para la evaluación de desastres (DaLA). Documentos de Proyectos (LC/TS.2020/162). Available at: <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/46551-evaluacion-efectos-impactos-la-pandemia-covid-19-turismo-america-latina-caribe>

⁷ WTTC 2021 (see Fn 4).

⁸ Mooney, Henry and Zegarra Maria Alejandra 2020: Extreme Outlier: The Pandemic's Unprecedented Shock to tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean. IDB Policy Brief N°339. Available at: <https://publications.iadb.org/publications/english/document/Extreme-Outlier-The-Pandemics-Unprecedented-Shock-to-Tourism-in-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean.pdf>

⁹ See ECLAC 2020 a (see Fn 6).

¹⁰ See <https://www.onecaribbean.org/resources/> and <https://www.caribbeannewsdigital.com/es/turismo/cto-el-turismo-en-el-caribe-cayo-un-65-en-2020>

¹¹ WTTC 2021 (see Fn 4).

¹² ECLAC 2020 b: Recovery measures for the tourism sector in Latin America and the Caribbean present an opportunity to promote sustainability and resilience. Covid Reports-19. July 2020. Available at: https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45767/4/S2000440_en.pdf

to 2018 and 2019 data) are Mexico, Uruguay, Peru, Argentina, and Chile.¹³

In the European Union, the effect of the pandemic on the tourism sector was also notable, but asymmetric among its member countries. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council,¹⁴ the contribution of travel and tourism to GDP fell by 50% in 2020, and the total number of people employed in the sector fell from 23.52 in 2019 to 21.52 million in 2020. In terms of contribution to GDP, countries such as Croatia, Greece, Portugal, Italy, Austria, and Spain stand out. Although European tourism benefits greatly from inbound tourism from other regions of the world, the region is not as dependent on it, with intra-European transit of tourists and travellers accounting for 65% of spending in 2019 and 72% in 2020. However, the closed borders within the Union itself from much of 2020 and part of 2021, implemented to control the transmission of the virus, have caused significant losses, which could not always be sufficiently compensated by the domestic flow of tourists, especially for small countries such as Malta, Croatia, Cyprus.¹⁵

In both regions, tourism has an important multiplier effect on several sectors of the economy, due to linkages with agriculture, food, construction, transport, creative industries, among others, which have also been deeply affected by the pandemic. It should also be noted that the pandemic has exacerbated the pre-existing socio-economic vulnerability of people employed in tourism - a sector characterised by a high demand for low-skilled labour, precarious working conditions and social protection, and high levels of informality. As in other sectors, the pandemic has contributed to increasing inequalities between men and women, given the presence of a female-dominated workforce in the sector, often in the lowest-skilled and lowest-paid positions.¹⁶

Objectives

Despite the severe impacts of the pandemic and the uncertainty that remains high, due among other reasons, to the uneven and slow deployment of vaccines against COVID-19 and the emergence of new variants, the UNDP and the EU-LAC Foundation are convinced that we are at a propitious moment to involve the stakeholders who design policies, invest in tourism, research this issue, manage tourism offers and work in this branch in Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union, in joint reflections on the necessary conditions and ways to move towards a social, economic, cultural and environmentally more sustainable, resilient and inclusive tourism sector, strengthening the capacities of all stakeholders involved and, in so doing, contribute to the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda.

For this end, it seems essential to build alliances for coordination and cooperation in the context of socio-economic recovery, transversally involving various sectors of governance, the private sector and civil society that allow for the implementation of consensual, efficient, responsible and safe openings, with integrated and agile structures, which assign the required political priority, are committed to adaptations in the tourism offer and value chains, and which encourage the training of employees with new and essential skills.

In fact, several countries, regions and communities have designed comprehensive concepts and plans not only to address health issues and create a safe environment for the reopening of the sector in the short term, but also to coordinate responses and solutions aimed at the transition towards a tourism whose growth is not an end itself, but rather an instrument to foster the holistic development of the tourism sector and the communities in which they are settled, applying the principles of circularity, digitalization, innovation and cooperation, and whose day-to-day operations

¹³ See ECLAC 2020 a (see Fn 6). Mooney, Henry and Zegarra María Alejandra 2020 (see Fn 8).

¹⁴ Report available at: <https://wtcc.org/Research/Economic-Impact>

¹⁵ See <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/jobs-risk-coronavirus-impact-eu-tourism-sector>

¹⁶ See ECLAC 2020 a (see Fn 6).

are efficient in the management of resources, reducing the consumption of water, energy, carbon emissions and the generation of waste, thus promoting the protection of ecosystems and eco-responsible behaviour in both the suppliers and the consumers of touristic offers.

Therefore, the series of events “**Good practices and recommendations to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and sustainably transform tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union**” has the following objectives:

- To provide spaces for the exchange of bi-regional perspectives on the **effects of the pandemic on the tourism sector**, including the analysis of similarities and differences between Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean in this regard;
- To address the **challenges and opportunities associated with the recovery of more socially, economically, culturally and environmentally sustainable tourism**, taking into consideration the differentiated conditions (geographical, infrastructural, labour, social, etc.) of touristic destinations in both regions;
- To focus on presenting public, private and public-private **promising initiatives** in Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union to develop and invest in sustainable tourism models, focusing on the conservation of ecosystems, the taking advantage of technical and digital innovations, and the training of staff and practices for the achievement of gender equality;
- To explore existing and new **regional, triangular, and bi-regional cooperation mechanisms and instruments** to enhance technical capacities, provide funding and promote a sustainable transition of tourism.

Thematic focus of the cycle of events

Theme 1 - HEALTH RESILIENCE

Focus: safe tourism and regaining the trust of tourists, through efficient sanitary protocols at all stages of a tourist trip, starting with communication with the tourist; international certification and national seals that accredit the compliance of establishments with sanitary standards and rules (e.g. “Clean & Safe” - Portugal); digital strategies (communication on web portals, social media, development of apps, tracking of essential data, alert systems); measures for transport systems, hotels, restaurants, places of interest, etc.); local medical care and access to tests and vaccines; travel insurance.

Theme 2 - SOCIAL RESILIENCE AND DECENT WORK

Focus: financial support to alleviate the difficult situation of employees in the tourism sector; measures to build capacity and strengthen the knowledge and skills employed for the creation of value-added jobs and for the diversification of income sources of tourism-dependent communities (topics: health protocols, customer care, administration, marketing, communication, digital skills, green tourism), strengthening their resilience to future emergencies and their financial sustainability outside the major seasons; addressing in particular issues of gender, precariousness and informality, for the creation of decent jobs with access to social protection.

Theme 3 - FINANCIAL-ENTREPRENEURIAL RESILIENCE

Focus: measures to financially and technically strengthen, increase the resilience and develop more sustainable tourism offers of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) which constitute the core of businesses involved in tourism, making up around 80% of this contingent worldwide, with 30% of the workforce employed in businesses with up to 10 employees¹⁷ and which can be considered more susceptible to the negative effects of the coronavirus, given their limited human and financial

¹⁷ UN (2020) Policy Brief. Covid19 and the transformation of tourism. Available at: https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_tourism_august_2020.pdf.

resources, as well as their often greater difficulties in accessing support.

Theme 4 - ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE

Focus: environmentally sustainable tourism practices and models (circular procurement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve resource efficiency; water management, waste management, food, transport, construction...); diversification of tourism supply by reducing seasonality of demand while strengthening local communities and the local cultural sector (cultural, community-based tourism); promotion of intra-national/regional tourism; raising awareness and encourage more sustainable tourist behaviour.

Theme 5 - DIGITAL AND INCLUSIVE INNOVATIONS

Focus: instruments and programs to promote innovation and digitalisation in the tourism sector that are people-centred and promote inclusion, and that are developed, e.g. to better understand and track travellers' needs and trends, to create new ways to promote and market tourism offerings and products, to manage flows, to protect communities and ecosystems, as well as to foster "matching" between investors and managers of tourism offerings and to inject liquidity into businesses, among others.

Guiding questions for each of the events

1. **What are the mayor challenges or bottlenecks?**
2. **What can or should be done differently?**
3. **What is needed and how can we fill the gaps?**
4. **How can LAC and the EU strengthen and innovate their regional, triangular, and bi-regional cooperation instruments to promote a green and economically robust transition of the tourism sector, offering decent jobs and furthering the integral development of local communities?**

Participants of the events

Among the participants of this series of events, the following stakeholders will be invited:

- Tourism employees and representatives of their associations;
- Managers of micro, small and medium-sized tourism enterprises and representatives of their associations;
- Researchers and consultants with expertise in the field;
- Representatives of international organisations and regional/international banks;
- Officials from national/regional ministries, secretariats and tourism agencies from Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Commission.

Format of the event cycle

Should the health situation and national and local regulations allow for it, the cycle of events will be implemented through **five digital or hybrid events in the months of September, October, and November 2021, where the face-to-face modality will be distributed - tentatively - between UNDP offices in New York, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Belize, and Greece, or other venues suggested by the host countries.** In the case that the implementation of the activity would not be possible in a hybrid format, the event will be organised in an entirely digital format.

Each event of the cycle will last 1.5-2 hours and will deal with a particular theme, with 7-9 Caribbean, Latin American and European speakers with outstanding expertise in the field, representing the tourism sector, ministries and public agencies, international and financial organizations, as well as researchers and consultants.

The events will be moderated in tandem by representatives of the Latin America and Caribbean offices of UNDP and the EU-LAC Foundation and will have the following structure:

- Inauguration;
- Brief introductory presentation by a leading guest expert who introduces the topic of focus;
- Short speeches of 8-10 minutes by guest speakers;
- Questions and interaction between the speakers, the audience and the moderators;
- Conclusion.

The hybrid format implies that each of the events of the cycle will take place at an UNDP country office or a distinct venue in the selected country where a **limited number of people will be offered the possibility of attending the event in person**. To this end, invitations to participate on-site will be extended to representatives of the country where each of the events will take place, as well as to the speakers invited to the respective session. Simultaneously, **the event will be broadcasted live on a digital platform**, thus facilitating the remote participation of the speakers and the public interested in the subject matter, who will receive links to connect to the platform. In addition, there will be **collaboration with the University of the West Indies (UWI) to use their television channel** to reach a wider audience in the Caribbean.

The events will have a **simultaneous translation service between English and Spanish**. The events will be open to the interested public, either through registration on the digital platform used for the realization of the events, or through **live streaming** of the events. Also, the UNDP and the EU-LAC Foundation will make the recorded videos of the events available to the interested audience.

A **Policy Brief** based on the dialogue on policies, practices and proposals generated during this cycle of events will be elaborated by a contracted consultant. The content of the policy brief will be presented in a user-friendly and innovative way on the websites of the EU-LAC Foundation and the UNDP Latin American and Caribbean offices.

Expected results

- To identify, through a bi-regional exchange of perspectives and knowledge, effective and context-specific practices, instruments, and policies to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the tourism sector;
- To generate a dialogue on innovative policies and practices aimed at building resilience and moving towards a more socially, economically, culturally and environmentally sustainable and inclusive tourism sector that can contribute to the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda;
- To develop a policy brief that brings together the most relevant lessons and proposals articulated throughout this cycle of events on the issue and disseminate it widely among stakeholders in Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union.