



European Economic and Social Committee

REX/521

International trade and tourism - A global agenda for sustainable development

OPINION

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International trade and tourism – A global sustainable development agenda
[own-initiative opinion]

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1. Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.1 The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) strongly underlines the complex ties between tourism and international trade in general. As tourism is growing at a faster rate than the overall economy, it is clearly an important driver of employment and economic growth. As such, tourism and international trade are determining factors in achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs)¹. It therefore proposes that the stakeholders responsible in the economic sectors concerned be explicitly involved in achieving the SDGs through relevant statements of commitment, for example by creating decent and sustainable jobs as part of SDG 8.
- 1.2 The EESC draws attention to the importance of financial planning for implementing political priorities and underlines the significance of budgets as the most efficient means of implementing policy. It therefore calls for consideration to be given to the importance of tourism, not least by revising the latest proposal for the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework (MFF) to incorporate a separate budget line for tourism.
- 1.3 The EESC finds it regrettable that a separate objective for tourism has yet to be included in the European Structural and Investment Funds regulations, and that tourism has only been taken into account as a means or sector. The fact that the regulations provide for investment opportunities in smart tourism is to be welcomed but, in the EESC's view, this does not go far enough to take account of the macroeconomic, social and cultural importance of tourism, including in terms of its external impact. The EESC therefore calls for tourism to be included as a thematic objective under the European Structural and Investment Funds.
- 1.4 The relatively low barriers to market entry in the tourism sector must not be economically and socially detrimental to those working in tourism.

¹ Sustainable development goals:
Goal 1: No poverty
Goal 2: No hunger
Goal 3: Good health and well-being
Goal 4: Quality education
Goal 5: Gender equality
Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation
Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy
Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth
Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure
Goal 10: Reducing inequality
Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities
Goal 12: Sustainable consumption and production
Goal 13: Climate action
Goal 14: Life below water
Goal 15: Life on land
Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions
Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals

- 1.5 The EESC calls for measures to harmonise or recognise training, professional standards and vocational qualifications in tourism, that consolidate efforts to introduce a European vocational qualifications passport and promote lifelong learning in tourism.
- 1.6 Since it is clear that international tourism, aside from being important economically, also plays a significant role in promoting understanding among peoples and breaking down prejudices and therefore strongly supports the external impact of the EU, particular forms of tourism such as cultural tourism and social tourism should be supported through specific measures. Furthermore, the EESC draws attention to the need to promote tourism relating to health, sport, agriculture, the environment, etc.
- 1.7 It is of utmost importance and crucial to guarantee decent and sustainable jobs in this sector, through collective agreements and in line with SDG 8. The EESC asks for all forms of illegal and or precarious work in the tourism sector to be eradicated.
- 1.8 The sustainability of tourism is also heavily dependent on choosing forms of transport that are as environmentally friendly as possible; particular attention should therefore be paid to the prudent and responsible use of means of transport.

2. **Introduction**

- 2.1 With this opinion, the EESC wishes to stress the close link between tourism and international trade and underline their shared importance in achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs).
- 2.2 International trade has a long tradition, but its particular social and political significance has increased substantially over the course of history. While international trade has traditionally been governed by bilateral treaties, multilateral treaties have become increasingly common since the Second World War. Since the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO), a trading framework has been in place to regulate international trade. In the context of this framework the European Commission has, since 2011, been supporting the EU's external trade through a new generation of trade agreements that aim to strengthen economic and trade relations with certain trading partners.
- 2.3 The tensions between free trade and protectionism also show that international trade can also be used as an element of political influence.
- 2.4 Tourism is the third largest sector in the international balance of trade: it accounts for 10.4% of global GDP (10.3% in the EU) and creates 313 million jobs around the world. One in every eleven jobs worldwide is linked to tourism. For a third of developing countries, tourism is the main export commodity and therefore has a considerable bearing on these countries' economies.
- 2.5 Tourism is therefore instrumental in achieving the sustainability goals, though it should be borne in mind that global tourism is responsible for 8% of greenhouse gas emissions.

- 2.6 At global level, tourism contributes to economic and social integration in rural areas and the outermost regions. However, undesirable knock-on effects such as the loss of agricultural land, threats to nature conservation and air pollution must be taken into account and avoided insofar as possible.
- 2.7 In 2017, international tourism accounted for 1.32 billion arrivals worldwide (+ 7%) and 671 million arrivals across Europe, with Europe's market share being 51% (+ 8%). However, according to a long-term prospective study by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism in Europe will grow less strongly in the period up to 2030, with an estimated 744 million tourists (+ 1.8%) and an overall market share of 41.1%.
- 2.8 The Lisbon Treaty (1 December 2009) created the EU's own legal basis for tourism². Accordingly, in 2010 the Commission published a communication entitled "Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe"³. However, neither the current 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework (MFF), nor the latest proposal for the 2021-2027 period provide for a separate budget line for tourism.
- 2.9 Nevertheless, given that in recent years employment and thus economic growth in tourism in the EU has been continually stronger than in other economic sectors, then – on the basis of the available data – further steps to consolidate the external tourism policy as well as corresponding budgetary measures at Community level are not only justified, but also urgently needed.
- 2.10 The Committee warmly welcomes the Council's conclusions of 27 May 2019⁴ in which, in the light of the challenges faced by the tourism sector (digitalisation, sustainability and sector-specific knowledge and skills), it sets out concrete proposals with regard to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and calls for appropriate measures to support tourism in order to maintain the EU's role as a world market leader in tourism.
- 2.11 Tourism has great potential to create jobs. The fact that, globally, the tourism sector employs on average more women and young people than other sectors is also important when it comes to achieving the sustainable development goals, particularly numbers 5 and 10.
- 2.12 Wages and salaries in the tourism and hospitality sector are below the median wage in most countries. Appropriate measures should therefore be put in place to ensure adequate remuneration across all categories of employment in the sector. This is all the more important as working conditions in the tourism sector are often extremely harsh, and the social partners' agreements on minimum wage and maximum working time as well as the rules on occupational safety and health are in practice often not respected. It is therefore urgently necessary to create decent and sustainable jobs in the sector in line with SDG 8. In order to so do, in the

² Article 195 of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#).

³ [COM\(2010\) 352 final](#).

⁴ Council document 9707/19 of 27 May 2019, "[The competitiveness of the tourism sector as a driver of sustainable growth, jobs and social cohesion in the EU for the next decade](#)".

Committee's view, it is necessary to improve the basic conditions, agree clear collective agreements and support the digitalisation of the sector.

3. **Tourism and the economy**

3.1 The importance of tourism as a key driver of economic growth therefore goes far beyond the tourism sector itself and touches on international trade and distribution, but also all areas of the public and private sectors, as well as agriculture and transport.

3.2 Furthermore, for many regions – such as small islands or isolated mountain areas – tourism is one of the very few and in some cases the only economic activity in today's international division of labour.

3.3 Moreover, tourism has helped many regions to breathe new life into areas that have gone into decline.

4. **Tourism and sustainability**

4.1 Tourism's competitiveness is closely linked to its sustainability, as the attractiveness and quality of a tourist destination depend to a large extent on both its natural and cultural environment and its integration into local infrastructure.

4.2 The sustainability of tourism is based on several factors, such as:

- the responsible use of natural resources (particularly water);
- the use of clean energy sources;
- consideration of the environmental impact of tourism activities; (e.g. waste disposal, increased pressure on land and water);
- the conservation of biodiversity;
- the protection of cultural heritage;
- the preservation of high-quality sustainable jobs created by tourism;
- taking account of the impact on the local population;
- staff development
- transport.

4.3 Sustainable tourism was identified as a key sector in the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production (10YFP). Accordingly, as a sector of the future, sustainable tourism has the potential to become not only the standard for the industry as a whole, but also to get national economies across the world involved⁵.

In the Committee's view, this potential should be used by those responsible for international trade and tourism in order to find ways and means of contributing efficiently to achieving the

⁵ See the 2017 report of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD): "[Tourism for Transformative and Inclusive Growth](#)".

sustainable development goals (in this context particularly goals 3, 6, 7, 12, 14 and 15) and to work towards partnerships in line with goal 17.

- 4.4 The economic importance of tourism, which accounts for a 17% share of employment worldwide (of which 44% is female), plays a major role in many areas of sustainability policy.
- 4.5 As an overarching economic activity, tourism has an environmental, social and cultural dimension in addition to an economic dimension, and is therefore a key factor in achieving the sustainability goals. In this connection, the revenues generated from the sector can have an instrumental role in supporting the sustainable management of the tourism areas.
- 4.6 One approach to be adopted involves not only analysing the negative impact of tourism, but also looking at its positive influence in various areas (environmental, social, etc.). This form of "impact tourism", which was developed in Slovenia and is based on 10+1 "impact indicators", also takes into account the positive impact of tourism in all key areas of life⁶.
- 4.7 New technologies have led to structural changes in the economy, particularly for smaller organisations. In the context of tourism, this concerns not only the services that are on offer, but also marketing and booking behaviour.
- 4.8 A particular problem for the tourism sector as a whole is the worldwide increase in bookings on various private platforms. This new form of marketing undisputedly offers advantages for non-professional operators and areas that are underdeveloped or entirely undeveloped in terms of tourism. However, from a macroeconomic point of view, it is not acceptable for private operators to obtain competitive advantages owing to the fact that they may pay no or only minimal taxes or that they are not bound by the usual strict hygiene and safety requirements in place in the tourism sector. As such, it would be necessary, for example, for registration obligations and evaluation criteria applicable to those providing commercial accommodation also to apply to these providers.

5. **Tourism and the environment**

- 5.1 In principle, a sustainably successful tourism policy and effective environmental protection are not contradictory, and should be understood and implemented as complementary and mutually supportive measures.
- 5.2 A clear problem associated with growing international tourism is the use of various means of transport (ships, planes, buses and cars) and their environmental impact.
- 5.3 Large tour operators should be reminded of and required to play their role as part of a responsible sustainability policy, and should employ dedicated staff to address environmental issues, who take into account sustainability objectives when giving advice and planning.

⁶ <https://www.impact-tourism.net/>

- 5.4 "Overtourism" has already become a problem for some regions, jeopardising not only the quality of life of the local population but also the environment. Since there is no uniform definition of "overtourism", the term remains vague and cannot be easily applied. However, the problem is not new. Between 1980 and 1990, the concept of the "Mallorca effect" was employed to come up with ideas for how to fit as many people as possible onto a beach without excessive side effects. International tourism organisations primarily work on giving examples of best practice so as to provide points of reference and guidance to the regions concerned.
- 5.5 The Committee also suggests that the major international tourism associations also agree on a code of conduct on the marketing of tourist destinations. This code of conduct should take into account the environment and sustainability, but also tackle overtourism, which has implications for the environment and sustainability, among other things.

6. **Tourism and ethics**

- 6.1 Tourism refers to national as well as transnational and international flows of people and services and, in addition to being relevant economically, it also has an impact on the social and cultural life of people who are not involved in the sector in tourists' countries of origin and destination.
- 6.2 The UNWTO, which is an international forum for tourism policy and an interface for international communication between relevant public authorities, took up this point and in 1999 published a "Global Code of Ethics for Tourism"⁷, which includes 10 principles and 49 paragraphs dealing in detail with the very diverse aspects of global tourism⁸. The Code of Ethics is therefore also referred to as the "rules for ethical conduct in tourism".
- 6.3 The provisions of this Code of Ethics reflect the complexity of the sector by addressing not only economic, social and cultural aspects, but also respect for fundamental and human rights (see measures against child abuse, child labour and sexual exploitation of children in tourism).
- 6.4 As this Code of Ethics is only a recommendation and signatories are not obliged to comply with it, in September 2017 the UNWTO put forward the International Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics⁹, which was signed by more than half of its members. This convention is

⁷ www.tourism-watch.de/content/globaler-ethik-kodex-für-den-tourismus-der-welttourismus-organisation-wto.

⁸ Principles of the Global Code of Ethics:
Article 1: Tourism's contribution to mutual understanding and respect between peoples and societies
Article 2: Tourism as a vehicle for individual and collective fulfilment
Article 3: Tourism, a factor of sustainable development
Article 4: Tourism, a user of the cultural heritage of mankind and contributor to its enhancement
Article 5: Tourism, a beneficial activity for host countries and communities
Article 6: Obligations of stakeholders in tourism development
Article 7: Right to tourism
Article 8: Liberty of tourist movements
Article 9: Rights of the workers and entrepreneurs in the tourism industry
Article 10: Implementation of the principles of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism

⁹ [UNWTO Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics](#)

inspired by the Code of Ethics and is not substantially different, but has the advantage that signatories are obliged to comply with it.

7. Tourism and culture

- 7.1 One of the main drivers of tourism is the cultural goods of the destination country.
- 7.2 Cultural tourism increases interest in foreign cultures, promotes understanding among peoples and helps break down prejudices.

8. Tourism and demography

- 8.1 Demographic trends also have an impact on tourism: the age pyramid, with a significant proportion of increasingly mobile older people in predominantly secure income groups, has led to an upswing in travel by older people. Travel by older people now makes up a significant proportion of tourism, particularly group tourism, and in some areas has also led to changes in how travel companies design their offers. This is also due to the fact that older people often book longer holidays and are dependent on the seasons only to some extent. This was also taken into account at the summit of the World Tourism Organization, with particular attention paid to tourism for older people.
- 8.2 Through its "Calypso – Tourism for All" initiative, the European Commission has contributed to the sustainable growth of social tourism by supporting measures to develop tourism for older people, as well as for underprivileged groups. This has led to new tourism offers but also to greater use of off-season periods. In this regard, it would be useful to share this experience with partners outside the European Union and to promote tourism on both sides.
- 8.3 In addition to the current demographic factors, other specific forms of tourism have also developed, such as pilgrimages.

9. Tourism and training

- 9.1 In view of market developments and rising consumer expectations, the tourism sector in its diversity has special training requirements ranging from relevant language and computer skills to economic skills and gastronomic knowledge.
- 9.2 Many EU countries have different forms of education and training paths of varying duration, which makes mutual recognition more difficult. Setting certain training standards could improve the career opportunities of various professionals both in the Community and abroad. It will only be possible to permanently reduce the shortage of skilled workers in the sector through generally binding training requirements in conjunction with the abovementioned improvements to basic conditions in the industry.
- 9.3 Promoting the value of jobs in tourism as a long-term career option would also be beneficial insofar as working conditions in tourism are often more difficult than in other sectors.

10. **Tourism and digitalisation**

- 10.1 Digitalisation has far-reaching implications for the tourism sector, not only for the behaviour of tourists, but also for tourism operators.
- 10.2 Online tourism is becoming increasingly popular, as are online evaluations: in Germany alone, 40% of all trips were booked online in 2017. This will open up new markets for SMEs, which will, however, also need financial support for this innovation.
- 10.3 At the same time, electronic networks and digitalisation have also had a huge influence on the internal processes of tourism businesses: for example, nowadays even small businesses are usually required to offer their visitors internet access at the very least.
- 10.4 Digitalisation will also play an important role in innovative forms of cooperation in the area of tourism, which in turn can have a significant impact on how tourist destinations develop. Many modern technologies (e.g. AI, VR, AR, blockchain) can help the most remote locations to become interesting destinations. In order to take advantage of the new opportunities, the tourism sector needs to be more focused on research and development.
- 10.5 Cultural tourism could also benefit from digitalisation as virtual reality could also provide incentives to travel.

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