

No Time for Timid Leadership - The Safe Restart of Tourism is Possible

The **cost of the restrictions on travel** introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic is there for all to see.

Between January and May, the sudden and rapid fall in tourist arrivals cost an estimated \$320 billion. That's **three times greater than the impact of the Great Recession of 2007-2009** on our sector – and this is just for the first five months of the year.

The **re-opening of borders** to tourism is a welcome relief to millions who depend on our sector. **But this alone is not enough**, especially in view of recent announcements and measures which seem further and further away from the **international coordination** that UNWTO has been calling for since the pandemic erupted.

In these uncertain times, people around the world need strong, clear and consistent messages. What they don't need are policy moves which ignore the fact that **only together are we stronger** and able to overcome the challenges we face.

Those in positions of leadership and influence have recognized the importance of tourism for jobs, economies and rebuilding trust. This is only the first step. Now, they must do everything they can to **get people travelling again**, following and implementing all the protocols which are part of the new reality.

As UNWTO has said from the start of this crisis, governments have a **duty to put the health of their citizens first**. However, they also have a responsibility to **protect businesses and livelihoods**. For too long, and in too many places, the emphasis has overly focused on the former. And we are now paying the price.

It doesn't have to be this way. As a sector, tourism has a long history of adapting and responding to challenges head-on.

In recent weeks, global **tourism has led the way in finding and implementing solutions** that will help us adapt to the new reality as we wait for a vaccine that could be many months away. Rapid but rigorous **testing** at ports and airports, and **tracing and tracking apps** have the potential to drive the safe restart of tourism, all of which builds on the **learning curve of the behaviour of individuals and societies** during these difficult past months.

These solutions need to be fully embraced, not just cautiously explored. To delay will be a catastrophe and risk undoing all the progress we have made to establish tourism as a true pillar of sustainable and inclusive development.

Moreover, it will be the **most vulnerable members of our societies who will be hit the hardest** as those most shielded from the economic and social consequences of tourism's standstill urge continued caution.

Short-sighted **unilateral actions will have devastating consequences** in the long run. By and large, people have learned how to behave in a responsible way. Businesses and services have put protocols in place and adapted their operations. Now it's time for those making the political decisions to close the gaps, so that we all can advance together

ZURAB POLOLIKASHVILI
SECRETARY-GENERAL