

-Opinion article-

TOURISM WILL ALSO COME OUT OF THIS CRISIS

Barcelona, 14 April 2020 – By Anwar Zibaoui, General Coordinator at [ASCAME](#) –

Tourism will be **one of most affected sectors** by the Covid-19 pandemic, since this sector cannot be isolated from the local, national or global context in which it operates. Many jobs are being threatened around the world, especially in the Mediterranean region, because whether it is epidemics, pandemics, war, economic crises or natural disasters, what happens in the environment also affects tourism.

Due to its cross-cutting nature, the **tourism sector impacts 70 other economic activities** and represents **10% of GDP** and 10% of employment in the world. Of the 7.200 million inhabitants in the planet, 1.5 billion crossed a border in 2019 for leisure trips. Tourism revenue increased to \$ 1.7 billion, reaching nearly \$ 5.000 million a day: a record figure. In the last decade, tourism has grown at a fast pace with 69% more international tourists and the consequences of all this will depend on the type of management implemented. If it is responsible, tourism will stimulate inclusive growth, create jobs and SMEs, attract investment and boost the economy.

The **Mediterranean is the main tourism area** in the world with nearly 400 million tourists: 32% of all international tourist arrivals and 30% of tourism income worldwide. It represents 13% of all exports, 23% of the service industry and employs more than 20 million people. In the Mediterranean, tourism is a locomotive for growth and it can also be for economic recovery, as it can lead to job creation and cover the need for external financing due to a greater foreign influx. This ability to drag other sectors and its collateral benefits undoubtedly become multipliers.

In the past, the tourism sector has demonstrated its ability to overcome crisis periods and adapt to change, boost growth and create jobs, despite economic, geopolitical, terrorism or natural disaster challenges. Optimism is key, but a change is necessary. The crisis forces us to **rethink the current economic model**. It is necessary to examine how things are made and find new ways of commercialisation, reinvention and grow. We must work together with territories, revise social tourism and take care of the heritage; in short, bet on sustainable tourism. In fact, climate change perspective poses a serious threat to development and sustainability. There are many determining future challenges, particularly concerning tourism management, climate, environment and sustainability. It is urgent to promote the

existing offer in all Mediterranean countries, because of its cultural diversity and of its historical importance, giving particular emphasis to its great biodiversity.

Getting out of this deep crisis and placing value on Mediterranean tourism seems the most obvious answer. But, what is the strategy to follow? What tools will economic actors and communities implement? The exchange of best practices and coordination between countries in the two Mediterranean shores should be the priority.

Governments, the private sector and the international community must work together to overcome COVID-19 and the unprecedented social and economic crisis it has caused. However, the stimulus capacity will vary considerably from one country to another. Various factors will come into play, such as infrastructure, human resources, the economic capacity, and even political factors. There is an urgent need to mitigate the impact of the crisis, guarantee the recovery of tourism and allow the sector to play a leading role in the overall recovery.

To accelerate the recovery, it is necessary to **promote stimulus policies and provide financial incentives for investment**, tourist exploitation and preparation for the future. For example, giving incentives for job retention, supporting SMEs and sectoral startups and protecting the most vulnerable groups, or reviewing taxes and regulations that affect transport and tourism. Also guaranteeing consumer protection and trust, promoting events and conferences, new jobs and skills acquisition, especially in the digital area. Including tourism in economic emergency mechanisms at a national, regional and global level to restore confidence and stimulate demand is also essential, as well as creating crisis management strategies. In conclusion, prioritising tourism in national, regional or international recovery programs and in development aid.

Despite the alarming situation, the general image is not so bleak. There is great capacity, an enormous potential for the sector to regain the essential place in national economies within the framework of priorities for sustainable development. **The pandemic is an unprecedented opportunity to reconfigure the sector** and guarantee, not only its growth but its sustainability, with inclusion and responsibility as key factors. It is time to diversify markets, products and services, and also invest in market analysis systems, economic intelligence, digital transformation, human capital and talents.

Until now, national tourism interests and competitiveness among Mediterranean countries have prevailed. The time has come to **bet on regional cooperation** and on the will to join forces to emerge stronger from this pandemic.

We need to carry on. It is possible to face challenges and uncertainties, pandemics and the challenge of climate change better and with better prospects, if we are well organised. Once again, **tourism will also emerge from this crisis.**