



## CONCEPT NOTE

### **COVID-19 and the Tourism Sector: “Inclusive response to vulnerable groups in the Euro-Mediterranean Region”**

**Friday, 2 October 2020 at 12.30 -14.00hrs**

#### **Context**

The pandemic crisis has taken its toll on our society, our lives and economy. On a global level, many countries decided to close their borders, and international and national travel institutions decided to put people first by imposing travel restrictions due to health measures. Tourism, being one of the fastest growing economic sectors has been the most affected one, with a current decline of 60% which could potentially increase to 80%, if recovery is delayed until December 2020 (OECD). The worst affected countries during the COVID-19 crisis are those particularly positioned on both shores of the Mediterranean Sea, accounting for 1/3 of the income of international tourism.

Although tourism will eventually bounce back stronger and healthier, contrary to many optimistic perceptions, the recovery of travel and tourism will not be easy nor rapid. The world will remain hesitant and fearful from traveling the way we used to, especially vulnerable groups such as senior citizens, those with underlying and chronic health issues, pregnant women, the socially emarginated, people with disabilities and the homeless. National authorities are turning first to domestic tourism as alternative destinations which could give them the opportunity to focus on an immediate response to the need of an adapted tourism experience and policy for these vulnerable populations that require a risk-free environment. Although all travelers will need to take precautions and follow health and safety protocols from national authorities, a regional coordination in safety and health measures in travelling could be paramount to rebuild the sector. This may be a time for reflecting, redefining and redeveloping tourism as a sustainable quality activity rather than the quantitative industry that resulted in “overtourism” and environmental problems.

From another perspective, during the pandemic, healthcare workers, medical teams, homeless people and domestically abused victims needed to be provided with alternative housing or shelters to safeguard themselves, their co-workers or their family members from either catching the virus or from further spreading it. In several Euro-Mediterranean countries the travel and tourism services succeeded to demonstrate their flexibility through tangible measures in response to the crisis by offering housing, hospital infrastructure, food donations and educational programmes to vulnerable groups.

#### **Objectives**

The COVID-19 implications have shown that the most vulnerable groups are being hit the hardest. Bearing in mind SDG 10, this webinar aims to analyse the challenges faced by vulnerable groups in our societies due to the pandemic from a human perspective within the tourism related sector. The discussion will bring together stakeholders from the public sector such as DMOs and DPOs, local tourism



entities, and national and international tourism organizations, as well as stakeholders from the private sector including representatives from the hospitality and leisure industry. The objective of this online webinar is twofold:

1. Firstly, the need to explore, share knowledge and showcase what exactly regional and national tourism institutions have been doing and plan to do, in order to assure safe mechanisms for an inclusive tourism while travelling.
2. To underline in which way the travel and hospitality sectors have succeeded in playing an important role in alleviating hardships and repairing lives within local communities, despite the unprecedented existential crisis they are facing.