

UNWTO launches its top priorities for boosting rural tourism development

- A Monitor Desk Report

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UNWTO has launched a new report to determine the status of rural tourism in its Member States and identify the main challenges and opportunities for tourism as a driver for rural development from a policy perspective.

“Tourism and Rural Development: A Policy Perspective - Results of the UNWTO Survey on Tourism for Rural Development to Member States” represents the first baseline document of UNWTO on tourism and rural development undertaken with the participation of Member States worldwide.

More than half of all Member States (59pc) stated that rural tourism is a priority. Almost all Member States (96pc) foresee a better future for rural tourism in the upcoming years.

The creation of new jobs, improvement of livelihoods and fighting depopulation were the most frequently-cited opportunities offered by tourism for rural areas. Member States also identified the conservation and promotion of cultural heritage and environmental protection as among the biggest potential benefits of rural tourism.

Main Challenges in Rural Areas

The UNWTO research also identified three main challenges associated with realizing the potential of tourism for rural development:

The “infrastructure gap” in rural areas: Deficiencies in roads, ports, airports and other infrastructure that allow access to rural areas remain a challenge for the surveyed countries.

Rural depopulation: Seasonality and product competitiveness add to this challenge, increasing the instability of rural businesses, which prevents the retention of population and human resources.

The lack of education and training, as well as skills development, in addition to the capacity to attract and retain workforce talent.

Other challenges include limitations in accessing financial systems, restrictions in the development of innovative tourism products in rural areas, managing the impacts of degradation of natural resources, and limitations in handling data, digitalization, and knowledge management.

UNWTO: Advancing Tourism for the SDGs

In terms of how tourism can help in supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UNWTO Member States emphasized the potential of rural tourism for advancing SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

The report was launched during the 118th Session of the UNWTO Executive Council in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. It forms part of the work of UNWTO’s Tourism for Rural Development Programme, established to develop initiatives and programmes to grow the sector in size and relevance as well as to monitor it in destinations worldwide.

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