

Extraordinary G20 Tourism Ministers' Meeting

Friday, 24 April 2020

Final remarks delivered by ILO Director General, Mr Guy Ryder

Ministers,

Thank you for the chance to contribute to your important meeting.

I can see three particular reasons for focusing on the tourism industry within the overall global response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Firstly, tourism is recognised as being critically important for job creation around the world and for global development. Directly or indirectly, tourism provides about 10% of all employment and that proportion is growing. And tourism's role is explicitly referenced in the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Secondly, tourism has been decimated by the necessary measures taken to contain the pandemic. International tourism has practically stopped. So, of the 195 million full time job equivalents that the ILO estimates to have been lost to date – very many are in your sector. And it seems unlikely that the sector will be one of the early returners once recovery does begin.

And thirdly, both the enterprises of the tourism sector – many of them SME's, and those who work in it, many of them young, women, migrants, and in seasonal or informal jobs, are extremely vulnerable.

This means that the immediate imperative is to assure the survival of tourism enterprises through the large scale public support without which they will disappear before the virus does. And that support must extend to the workers concerned who would otherwise have no income or social protection.

The message we receive from the industry is that even when important assistance is announced by Governments, it does not always get quickly to those who so urgently need it. So effective delivery is crucial.

And trade unions underline that protecting the health and safety of workers who continue to work, or who do return through provision of protective equipment, training, and work arrangements must be an absolute priority.

Dialogue with the industry's employers' and workers' organizations is the best way to identify practical and fair solutions.

Finally, while it is entirely possible to close borders, airports, hotels and tourism facilities unilaterally, it makes no sense to try to re-open them unilaterally. There is an obvious asymmetry between the lockdown and the unlocking of the sector.

And the unavoidable conclusion, therefore is that we need much greater international cooperation than we have seen so far in responding to the pandemic.