

## **Recovering from Covid-19, building a sustainable tourism sector across Europe**

The COVID-19 crisis has tragically proven the vulnerability of those European countries, regions and communities for which tourism, including congress tourism, is either an essential or an important factor in their economy or economic development. This is especially true when it comes to the coastal and remote areas of larger countries or entire island states, such as Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain.

Mass tourism as we know it, with its high environmental impact and exploitative practices, must end. The economic model upon which it is based is economically, socially, and environmentally unsustainable. The recovery from the COVID-19 crisis must lead the sector to build back better. With the active involvement of all stakeholders, local communities, tourists, businesses, business coaches and local authorities, a new form of tourism must be developed: a holistic, just, resilient and sustainable one that respects the planet, connect communities and people and promotes rather than destroys the diversity of cultures and ecosystems.

Hence, as emergency measures to compensate for the brutal reduction in the economic incomes linked to tourism especially in the Mediterranean, but also in other regions in Europe as European Greens, we call for:

- Assistance measures for seasonal workers as part of the EU's recovery packages, especially for women and young people who make up the majority of workers in tourism but, on average, are paid lower wages and thus are at greater risk of crisis-driven poverty; special attention should also be given to micro, small and family businesses that have less resources to transition to a sustainable tourism model. Financial support and guarantees for tour-operators should be provided on the condition that they commit to shifting to a more sustainable tourism model adapted to countries' specific situations and which protects the rights of European travellers;
- Conditionalities to the EU recovery assistance measures, to promote the shift to a sustainable tourism model by:
  - Developing a circular economy model and providing incentives for the consumption of km0 products;
  - Promoting participatory, cooperative and collaborative business models with all the actors involved, including local communities;
  - Generating green investment schemes to compensate for the carbon footprint in local destination areas (renewable energy production, reforestation, eco-agriculture, etc).
- The enforcement of compliance with high standards of social and environmental protection, including fair contracts and job security in the tourism sector, and ensuring that all tourism destinations, products, and services follow international and recognized standards of accessibility so that they can be enjoyed by all people, regardless of disabilities or age.

It is also crucial that we raise awareness across Europe on the impact our citizens have when travelling in and outside our borders, and that the EU promotes a global model of sustainable tourism worldwide.

To ensure the transition to a more sustainable tourism, and by keeping in mind that tourism should remain accessible to all, not just a small elite, as European Greens, we call for:

- A halt to all airport extensions as well as reducing and/or stopping regional subsidies for airport constructions and extensions; a quick and high taxation of kerosene and a ban on the most polluting cruise ships;
- The relaunch of night trains across Europe and acceleration of the development of European green cycling routes;
- The development of concrete plans to sustainably connect islands to mainland Europe;
- The promotion of not-for-profit 'peer-to-peer' accommodation, sustainable agritourism, and the support to local communities with the knowledge and means to realise their strengths, away from mass tourism, and utilise them to their own benefit;
- The support to digitalisation of art collections and development of online tours in European museums and other cultural landmarks;
- The limitation of Airbnb accommodation to one accommodation per owner for a limited number of nights to prevent the erosion of the rental housing market and competition with the original small scale 'peer to peer' accommodations, and regulated working arrangements to avoid exploitation of workers in this grey zone;
- Ensure that municipalities and regions can take such necessary regulatory measures to prevent the negative ecological and socioeconomic impacts of the current touristic model, without hindrance from higher tiers of government and counterproductive legislation;
- The implementation of the Protocol to the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution and developing national plans to combat pollution in coastal areas and restore them;
- The promotion of cultural and gastronomic tourism, with a focus on the connection between culture and tourism, in Mediterranean countries with the Mediterranean diet as a nutritional model that reflects the people living around this region. This can be achieved by using local products, reviving local traditional recipes and encouraging visitors to participate in activities based on local customs and traditions, to learn more about the rich history and heritage of the area they are visiting;
- Assistance for a just transition to other sectors for people and communities currently dependent on unsustainable tourism.

Despite the important role of tourism in contributing to local economies, the proliferation of mass tourism, particularly through cheap flights has a drastic environmental impact. This is why it is imperative to shift from mass tourism to sustainable tourism, and therefore apply green practices and standards across the sector. Likewise, tourism can also contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals. The COVID-19 recovery plan offers the opportunity to accelerate this shift and ensures that a sustainable tourism sector is built across Europe.