

THE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS HIGHLIGHTED BY THE 10TH MEETING OF THE TOURISM WORKING GROUP

The COMCEC Tourism Working Group (TWG) has successfully held its 10th Meeting on September 21st, 2017 in Ankara, Turkey with the theme of “Risk and Crisis Management in Tourism Sector: Recovery from Crisis in the OIC Member Countries.” During the Meeting, Tourism Working Group, made deliberations on risk and crisis management in tourism sector and the recovery strategies. Accordingly, the participants has come up with some policy recommendations.

The Member States of the TWG are kindly invited to communicate their final observations on the said policy recommendations, if there is any, to the COMCEC Coordination Office by October 13th, 2017. The comments received before October 13th, 2017 will be able to be incorporated into the Document. After incorporating the Member States’ contributions, this document will be submitted to the 33rd Ministerial Meeting of the COMCEC to be held on 20-23 November 2017 in İstanbul, as an outcome of the 10th TWG Meeting.

Policy Advice 1. Establishing a national committee/task force with the responsibility for tourism risk and crisis management, which will be formed by the national tourism authority of each country and include representation from the stakeholders.

Rationale:

Resilience is the ability of a system to reduce the chances of a crisis occurring, to mitigate the impacts of a crisis should it occur, and to recover quickly. The public sector needs to have the long-term view and balanced approach towards all stakeholders to provide the strong leadership essential for ensuring resilience, to deploy the planning resources needed to prepare for crisis, and to bring the different stakeholders together.

The tourism risk and crisis management unit must be aware of the different categories of disaster and crisis (environmental, societal-political, health-related, technological, economic) which can affect the tourism industry.

The unit should also maintain close links with national-level disaster risk reduction bodies, which make necessary preparations for risks affecting the country generally but do not always take account of the specific needs of the tourism industry.

Furthermore, a Crisis Headquarters needs to be designated which would be activated in the event of a crisis.

Policy Advice 2. Increasing awareness of resilience and crisis, including the identified stages of a crisis and how to prepare for and respond to each stage.

Rationale:

The preparedness and ability of a tourism system to respond to, cope with and adapt to crises or other significant changes will ensure its resilience and ability to maintain its essential functions.

The key elements of a resilient tourism system are: strong institutional leadership (generally provided by the government); the ability to understand and harness market forces, including awareness of market trends and how to adapt to them; and strong networks, i.e. collaboration between different elements of the industry in partnerships or associations.

Destinations and individual businesses should ensure resilience, prepare for crises, and - in the event of a crisis occurring - address recovery in line with the six recognised phases of the Crisis

Management Framework. These are: Pre-crisis, Prodromal (warning signs), Emergency, Mid-term Recovery, Long-term Recovery, and Resolution.

Training at all levels should be led by the public sector and implemented through workshops (including action planning sessions), and online discussion and advisory forums. Academic institutions should be involved in order to ensure the robust preparation of future employees.

Policy Advice 3. Analyse and understand the risks and plan for crisis, both in terms of external crises and risks affecting the tourism industry generally and individual businesses.

Rationale:

The most important phase of the six-stage Crisis Management Framework is the first, i.e. pre-crisis contingency planning, since carefully devised plans involving relevant stakeholders will flow into effective responses should a crisis occur. Furthermore, individual businesses are the primary interface with the customer and must have contingency plans for dealing with emergencies.

During this phase, key actions are to recognise potential threats and prioritise those most likely to occur, according to the five categories of crisis noted in Policy Advice 1. This can be done by understanding crises affecting tourism and via scenario planning. A contingency plan for each potential risk should be prepared.

In addition to the categories in Policy Advice 1, tourism can be negatively affected by incidents in the public realm (e.g. death or injury due to drowning, traffic accidents, or crime), or events on business premises (e.g. food poisoning, accidents, fire, or malfunctioning of IT systems). Risk assessments should be carried out by individual businesses to understand the likelihood of these occurring and establish a plan of action to mitigate the risks.

Good channels of communication must exist between the national crisis management unit and individual businesses, especially via trade associations. It is the responsibility of business owners and managers, association leaders and the government unit to maintain these communications.

In the event of a crisis, consistent messages should be disseminated by both public and private sector. Draft press releases should be prepared in advance.

Policy Advice 4. Ensuring market awareness and positive destination perceptions, and developing new markets and products.

Rationale:

The Analytical Study prepared for the 10 TWG Meeting has shown that destinations withstand and recover from crises more effectively if there is strong awareness by stakeholders of market trends and of the characteristics of different market segments, and when there is an existing loyal customer-base.

In this respect, destinations should maintain awareness of how different market segments react to various crises and in the event of a crisis should highlight new products and target more robust markets, such as regional, domestic or diaspora tourists.

Destinations and individual businesses should foster positive relations with the travel trade and media in order to make it more likely that news stories will be sympathetic and that tour operators and airlines will quickly resume packages and flights after a crisis. Similarly, maintaining warm relations with past and intending customers, particularly through social media, will hasten their return, or – in the case of a long-running crisis - that the trade and travelling public will continue to support the destination.

Instruments to Realize the Policy Advices:

- **COMCEC Tourism Working Group:** In its subsequent meetings, the Working Group may elaborate on the above-mentioned policy areas in a more detailed manner.
- **COMCEC Project Funding:** Under the COMCEC Project Funding, the COMCEC Coordination Office calls for projects each year. With the COMCEC Project Funding, the Member Countries participating in the Working Groups can submit multilateral cooperation projects to be financed through grants by the COMCEC Coordination Office. For the above-mentioned policy areas, the Member Countries can utilize the COMCEC Project Funding and the COMCEC Coordination Office may finance the successful projects in this regard. These projects may include organizing seminars, training programs, study visits, exchange of experts, workshops and preparing analytical studies, needs assessments and training materials/documents.
- **OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum:** In its meetings, the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum may elaborate on the above-mentioned policy areas and the sub-areas from the private sector perspective.