



Exchange event: Tourism in the times of COVID-19

Introduction

With the objective to have an exchange of tourism related projects in the West Balkans region on the topic, an online exchange event has been taken place on 09.06.2020.

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC

e+i | employment and
income network

Proposed Agenda

- Opening remarks: Ms. Rahel Jus from SDC e+i network
- Round 1: **In our country – SCOs / projects**: What is the situation regarding "Tourism in times of COVID-19", with special emphasis on the tourism sector in your country?
- Round 2: **We as projects**: How do we support businesses / the tourism sector, by facilitating and ensuring that tourism is safe and follows the standards?
- Round 3: **We as SCOs / projects**: How to foster a close coordination between policy makers and private sector (e.g. hospitality, food & beverage, transportation...)?
- Q&A / exchange
- Feedback / How to continue?
- End of the event 11:30h

6

Carsten Schulz
Moderator

Summary on Round 1: Situation of the tourism sector in Western Balkans

All countries share similar symptoms in terms of tourism drop out but we can notice differences in the response depending on the access (open borders, transportation), the importance of the tourism sector (contribution to GDP), the impact of COVID-19 in the country and the internal pressure to open for the summer season.

Summary on Round 2: Supporting businesses in the tourism sector

Several projects are assisting businesses in reopening with a more important focus on domestic tourism and diaspora. The first concern for product development and promotion is to ensure safety and standards requirements, although there are no international measures apart from [UNWTO recommendations](#).

A short-term response is needed regarding access and long-term measures should tackle the economic crisis, but we should not forget the medium term disruption regarding [customer behavior and expectations, as well as shift in consumption patterns](#). Marketing is key but the challenge is [to find the right narrative](#). Moreover, the impact of travel decline goes beyond purely tourism ventures as many sectors (ex. agricultural products) are interlinked with tourism revenues.

On the other side, some projects identified emerging business opportunities with local service providers following the Market System Development (MSD) approach and the possibility to co-invest in these new ventures. This includes business consultants, on-demand human resources, marketing and online/sales services or even [certifications](#). Apart from the demand, [the lack of clarity regarding government restriction and support is the biggest challenge for reopening](#).

Summary on Round 3: Fostering a close coordination between policy makers and private sector

As for other sectors, we can observe some confusion in the tourism response. Governments are trying to support SMEs, but they often lack information on the ground reality. Taking part in the political process to improve framework conditions is also part of the answer and associations coming up with recommendations would facilitate dialogue. In UK, the [proposal to the government is a good example](#). Some administrations unblocked rescue packages but [adapting policies](#) requires coordination within the sub-sectors in order to share evidence-based information and support advocacy. Collecting data through surveys and regularly reassessing the demand will be required. Finally, a disruption in the market also represents an opportunity for projects to bring stakeholders together, as they are more concerned about joining forces.