



COVID-19  
RESPONSE



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# UNWTO Inclusive Recovery Guide

## Sociocultural Impacts of COVID-19

### Issue 3: Women in tourism

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**UNWTO Inclusive Recovery Guide – Sociocultural Impacts of Covid-19, Issue 3: Women in tourism**

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# UNWTO Inclusive Recovery Guide

## Sociocultural Impacts of COVID-19

### Issue 3: Women in tourism

**#buildbackbettertourism**

**#womenempowerment**

**#genderequality**

## Acknowledgements

This set of guidelines has been developed by the [UNWTO Ethics, Culture and Social Responsibility Department](#), in collaboration with [UN Women](#). It is a response to the continuing crisis caused by COVID-19 and an update on the initial recommendations issued by UNWTO in May 2020. UNWTO extends special thanks to UN Women for contributing with their valuable technical input and expertise.

## Note

The *UNWTO Inclusive Recovery Guides* on the sociocultural impacts of COVID-19 are living guidelines, subject to revision as the health situation evolves and more information becomes available on the most effective ways to make tourism inclusive and accessible for all.



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## An inclusive response for women in tourism

**Women, who make up the majority of the tourism workforce (54%),<sup>1</sup> have felt the economic shock to the tourism sector caused by COVID-19 more acutely and quicker than their male counterparts.**

In tourism, women are often concentrated in **low-skilled or informal work**, which affords them **less access to social protection** and puts them in a precarious position during a global pandemic. In addition, women are responsible for most single-parent households while earning and saving less, which further **limits their capacity to absorb economic shocks.**<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, an increase in women's economic and social insecurity, unpaid care work and domestic violence has been observed.<sup>3</sup> These factors, amongst others, have meant that women – who have often been cut off from social and institutional support – have been **disproportionately affected by the devastating effects of the pandemic on the tourism sector.**

**The tourism sector, however, has historically provided women with opportunities for empowerment** and consistently contributed

towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goal 5 – the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.<sup>4</sup>

**Tourism's immense potential for advancing women's economic empowerment can be further unleashed by developing and implementing adequate policies and strategies to advance training and leadership in the sector.** Achieving gender equality and providing equal opportunities to women at all levels in the tourism sector would result in more benefits to all, as inclusive societies and economies are more resilient and able to **better respond to adverse economic shocks.**

This guide provides recommendations to policy- and decision makers, as well as businesses in tourism, for designing **gender-responsive measures in response to the ongoing pandemic.** The guidelines also aim to ensure that the previous gains towards gender equality are maintained as tourism is built back better, **leaving no one behind.**

1 World Tourism Organization (2019), *Global Report on Women in Tourism, Second Edition*, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420384>.  
2 International Labour Organization (2017), *Guidelines on decent work and socially responsible tourism*, ILO, Geneva.  
3 United Nations (2020), *Policy Brief: The impact of COVID-19 on women*, UN, New York.  
4 World Tourism Organization (2019), *Global Report on Women in Tourism, Second Edition*, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420384>.

# Recommendations

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## Provide adequate and targeted assistance during pandemics

### Do not leave informal tourism workers behind.

Targeted stimulus and aid packages must ensure that people in **informal employment, many of whom are women, are eligible for relief and support measures** to avoid adversely disadvantaging the female workforce. These measures can curb the instability and lack of legal and social protections inherent to informal employment, leaving women exposed to a sharp downturn in tourism trade and receipts. A gender blind approach to fiscal stimulus can result in an inefficient allocation of resources, and risks exacerbating existing inequities.<sup>5</sup>

**Make key information available to all.** A substantial divide persists between women and men and between girls and boys in Internet access and use. Tourism should be part of the solution to enable women's access to the Internet, which is often limited due to illiteracy, financial or domestic concerns. When women and girls have access to the Internet and the skills to use information and communications technologies, they have the opportunity to start new tourism businesses, sell products to new markets, find better-paid jobs and access education as well as health and financial services.<sup>6</sup> Taking into account the digital gender divide, **information on COVID-19 aid and recovery packages** for the tourism sector should be disseminated through a variety of communication channels, and should **especially target mothers, youth and older women.**

**Ensure women in tourism's access to affordable, quality and equitable healthcare,** including sexual and reproductive healthcare.

The health of women and girls is of particular concern because in many destinations they are disadvantaged by discrimination rooted in sociocultural factors.<sup>7</sup> Measures taken to **facilitate access to healthcare** must include provisions that cover **vulnerable women, including migrants or seasonal workers,** who face precarious working conditions in many tourism destinations.

## Develop gender-responsive policies for post-COVID-19 tourism

### Engage in effective gender-mainstreaming.

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of **assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action,** including legislation, policies and programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women, as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, **so that women and men benefit equally,** and inequality is not perpetuated.<sup>8</sup> Because women have been greatly affected by the pandemic, a gender perspective in post-COVID-19 tourism policies and programmes must be undertaken to ensure they are gender-responsive.

**Tackle gender-based violence.** Address sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) in the tourism sector. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased instances of GBV. This should be met with **increased legal protections** for all forms of GBV, including labour or sexual exploitation, which take place in the tourism sector.

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5 World Economic Forum (2020), *Here's how to achieve gender equality after the pandemic*, WEF (online), available at: [www.weforum.org](http://www.weforum.org) (17-02-2021).

6 International Telecoms Union (2019), *Bridging the Gender Divide*, ITU (online) available at: [www.itu.int](http://www.itu.int) (17-02-2021).

7 World Health Organization (n.d.), *Women's health*, WHO (online) available at: [www.who.int](http://www.who.int) (17-02-2021).

8 World Tourism Organization (2020), *AIUla Framework for Inclusive Community Development through Tourism*, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284422159>.

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Underlying causes of GBV such as gender inequality, harmful gender stereotypes and social norms must be tackled.

### Ensure decent employment for women in tourism

**Adopt flexible working conditions.** Maintain and expand the more flexible working conditions during the tourism recovery process that **many employers have already introduced during the pandemic.** This measure will **reduce the existing barriers for women to access job opportunities** within the tourism sector and increase their retention in the workforce.

**Address informal work in community-based tourism.** Assist women who are engaged in community tourism experiences and local creative industries to formalize their working conditions and businesses, in case they wish to do so. Women's participation in community-based tourism is high worldwide, but these **businesses owned and managed by women could bring even greater benefit to their families and communities if they were entitled to social and legal protection.**

**Empower women in tourism through social protection systems.** Establish or strengthen inclusive and gender-responsive social protection systems, including floors, to ensure full access to social protection for all without discrimination of any kind, and take measures within the tourism sector to progressively achieve higher levels of protection, including facilitating the transition from informal to formal work.<sup>9</sup>

### Develop diverse skills for a post-COVID-19 world

**Develop training programmes targeting women in tourism.** Governments, national tourism administrations, the private sector and women's grassroot organizations should develop targeted capacity building programmes on **IT skills, soft skills, networking and high-level training for women's career progression.** The training becomes more effective when **gender-equality and gender-sensitivity training** are made available to tourism policy-makers, managers and employees.

**Foster academic education in tourism.** Encourage the participation and mentorship of female students and graduates in tourism studies and qualifications at all levels. Consider **work-life balance** concerns that may present barriers to women in their education and training progression.

**Diversify women's market access and fair trade.** Many tourism products and services crafted and commercialized by women would benefit from support to expand their market access. Enhanced access to digital technologies, online platforms and improving women's digital skills can **enable them to reach new markets and advertise their services to wider audiences.**

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9 UN Women (2019), *Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls*; 2019 Commission on the Status of Women, Agreed Conclusions, UN Women, New York

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## Redefine tourism's gender balance and foster diversity

**Promote female inclusion at senior leadership levels.** Encourage and improve access for women to **decision-making positions** within the tourism sector's workforce and public authorities. To ensure that women are an integral and equal part of the recovery, they must be an **equal part of shaping the sector's response**. Equal participation of women and men in the response to the pandemic is also vital to ensuring a gender-inclusive, post-COVID tourism sector.

**Boost entrepreneurship and leadership.** Tourism's recovery will provide a unique opportunity for more women to attain leadership positions and become wealth creators within the private sector. Governments should reduce legal barriers and increase financial literacy and access to finance to boost women's entrepreneurship. In parallel, existing businesses should look to **design and implement recovery** programmes which offer **opportunities for women's career progression and retention**.

**Raise awareness on diversity and inclusion.** Tourism destinations, companies and trade associations should promote enhanced participation of women in all their diversity. Building a strongly inclusive culture that respects everyone regardless of gender, age, race, disability or sexual orientation can benefit tourism.

## Improve data collection and measurement for better policies

**Produce data on women in tourism.** The data that exists on women in the tourism sector is extremely scarce, greatly hampering efforts by the private and public sectors to drive gender equality and women's empowerment in the sector. The needs of women remain invisible when gender data are incomplete or missing. Governments and the private sector should encourage the **systematic collection, production and reporting of reliable data** on the tourism sector that is disaggregated by sex.

**Implement statistical standards.** Encourage wider implementation of the *International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008* (IRTS 2008) and the *Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework 2008* (TSA:RMF 2008), as well as participating in the development of the new Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism standard to **increase the production of sex-disaggregated data**.<sup>10</sup> Governments should provide **adequate capacity building and funding** to boost compliance.

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10 For detailed information please consult: United Nations; Commission of the European Communities, Eurostat; World Tourism Organization and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2010), *Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework 2008* (online), available at: [www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789211615203](http://www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789211615203). United Nations (2010), *International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008* (online), available at: [www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789211615210](http://www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789211615210). World Tourism Organization (n.d.), 'Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism' (online), available at: [www.unwto.org](http://www.unwto.org) (23-02-2021).





## Facts and figures

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[Global tourism suffered its worst year on record in 2020](#). With international arrivals dropping by 74% in 2020, destinations worldwide welcomed **1 billion fewer international arrivals than in the previous year**, due to an unprecedented fall in demand and travel restrictions:<sup>18</sup>

The collapse in international travel results in an estimated loss of USD 1.3 trillion in export revenues. The crisis has put between 100 million and 120 million direct tourism jobs at risk, many of them in small and medium-sized enterprises.<sup>19</sup>

Due to the evolving nature of the pandemic, many countries are reintroducing stricter travel restrictions. These include mandatory testing, quarantines and in some cases a complete closure of borders, all weighing on the resumption of international travel. The gradual rollout of a COVID-19 vaccine is expected to help restore consumer confidence, contribute to the easing travel restrictions and normalize travel in the year ahead.<sup>20</sup>

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 54% of the global tourism workforce was made up of women.<sup>11</sup>

The gender wage gap was smaller in tourism with women earning 14.7% less in the sector compared to 16.8% less in the broader economy.<sup>12</sup>

In 2019, 23% of tourism Ministers were women compared to 21% of all ministerial posts.<sup>13</sup>

Investing in skills training for women and gender equality training in tourism leads to greater outcomes for gender equality.<sup>14</sup>

Women in the Middle East carry out 4-6 times more unpaid care and domestic work than men.<sup>15</sup>

The global cost of violence against women was estimate at USD 1.5 trillion prior to the pandemic – a figure that can only be rising in line with the increase in gender-based violence.<sup>16</sup>

Europe is the only world region in which a majority of countries systematically produce sex-disaggregated data on tourism employment.<sup>17</sup>

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11 World Tourism Organization (2019), *Global Report on Women in Tourism, Second Edition*, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420384>.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 World Tourism Organization (2020), *Regional Report on Women in Tourism in the Middle East*, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284422371>.

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18 World Tourism Organization (2021), *2020: Worst Year in Tourism History with 1 Billion Fewer International Arrivals*, UNWTO press release, 28 January 2021, UNWTO (online), available at: <https://www.unwto.org/news/2020-worst-year-in-tourism-history-with-1-billion-fewer-international-arrivals> (17-02-2021).

19 World Tourism Organization (2021), *UNWTO World Tourism Barometer*, volume 19, issue 1, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/wtobarometereng>.

20 Ibid.



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## Useful links

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