Establishing an EU Strategy for Sustainable Tourism

2020/2038(INI) - 25/03/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 577 votes to 31, with 80 abstentions, a resolution on establishing an EU strategy for sustainable tourism.

The tourism and transport industries were among those most affected by COVID-19 outbreak. Restrictions on travel introduced in response to the pandemic continue to hit global and European tourism hard, with an estimated 70 % fall in international tourism arrivals in 2020.

COVID-19 impact response plans

Parliament stressed that the COVID-19 outbreak has paralysed the EU tourism sector, putting its ecosystem under unprecedented pressure. Continued short-term financial support is essential to the survival of the sector, especially in light of the second and third wave of the pandemic.

The current crisis should lead the Commission and Member States to fully acknowledge the importance of the tourism industry, to fully integrate it into European and national development plans, to enhance the quality of its offer, to make it more sustainable and accessible for all, and to launch long-overdue public and private investment in the digitalisation and overall modernisation of the sector.

Common coordinated criteria

Parliament called on Member States to fully implement, without delay, common and coordinated criteria for safe travel, while facilitating the deployment of the EU Passenger Locator Form, digitally where possible, with full respect for data protection rules. They stressed the importance of voluntary, interoperable and anonymised tracking, tracing and warning apps, making use of the Commission's interoperability gateway, with none of the data used for other purposes, such as commercial or law enforcement purposes, and of setting common hygiene criteria at the main transport hubs.

Member States are called on to establish a common and non-discriminatory EU Health Safety Protocol for testing before departure, which should be reliable and affordable, including rapid testing technologies, PCR tests and others.

The resolution urged that quarantine should remain an instrument of last resort, but where applicable, its duration should be reduced to a minimum number of days, which should be harmonised throughout the EU.

Parliament called for the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) to monitor and continue to publish the colour coded map of EU countries and regions with a view to offering travellers and businesses a coordinated and efficient response.

Common vaccination certificate

Members called on the Member States to develop as a matter of priority a common vaccination certificate and a system of mutual recognition of vaccination procedures for medical purposes, which should be rolled out in parallel with the distribution of vaccines, while preserving individuals' rights to privacy and data protection. Once vaccines have been made available to the general public and there is sufficient

scientific evidence that vaccinated persons do not transmit the virus, the certificate could be considered for travel purposes as an alternative to PCR tests and quarantine requirements, while retaining the need to respect current sanitary measures, such as wearing face masks in public and observing social distancing.

Parliament stressed that it is necessary and important to re-establish freedom of movement in the EU and ensure a gradual return to normality for the transport and tourism sectors. Members also welcomed 'Re-open EU' portal and urged EU countries to send clear information on the application or lifting of future restrictions on free movement to the Commission.

EU hygiene certification

The resolution also urged the Commission to introduce the EU hygiene certification seal, which could certify minimum COVID-19 virus prevention and control standards and could help to restore consumer's trust in tourism and travel sectors.

Financial assistance

Parliament regretted the fact that the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) does not include a dedicated line for sustainable tourism and that tourism has not yet been included as an independent objective in the regulations for the European Structural and Investment Fund or in the Single Market Programme.

Furthermore, Members called on the Commission to encourage Member States to temporarily set reduced VAT rates on travel and tourism services, accompanied by a special stimulus package for all micro enterprises and SMEs for the 2020-2024 period, to minimise the number of bankruptcies and preserve jobs and workers' rights in the European tourism industry, while utilising investments to foster the transition towards a more digital and sustainable tourism ecosystem.

European Agency for tourism

The resolution called on the Commission to set up a European Agency for Tourism in the next MFF and to devise a short-term solution by creating a tourism department in one of the existing executive agencies, in particular the Executive Agency for SMEs (EASME) or the upcoming Health and Digital Executive Agency.

Sustainable, responsible and smart tourism

Stressing that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a shift in the nature of travellers' demands towards safe, clean and more sustainable tourism, Parliament called for the swift development of a roadmap for sustainable tourism that includes innovative measures to reduce the climate and environmental footprint of the sector by developing more sustainable forms of tourism, diversifying the offer, boosting new initiatives for cooperation and developing new digital services.

Sustainable tourism action plans at national and regional level should be devised and full use should be made of the Next Generation EU funds to finance the tourism transition action plans.