

Report of the Regional Office for the Middle East**52nd UN Tourism Regional Commission for the Middle East**

10 February 2026

I. Executive Summary

1. The Regional Office for the Middle East (ROME), based in Riyadh, was established on May 26, 2021 to promote sustainable tourism, support capacity building, and drive the sustainable and inclusive development of the tourism sector across the region. By fostering strong partnerships among its 13 Member States (Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen), the office aims to enhance and develop the tourism sector throughout the Middle East and serve as a vital hub for sustainable tourism development in the region.
2. Programme implementation advanced in the areas of tourism for rural development, innovation, education and investment, legal frameworks and technical cooperation, in close collaboration with the Market Intelligence, Policies and Competitiveness (MIPC), Innovation, Education and Investments (IEI), Institutional Relations, Partnerships and Advocacy (IRPA), International Development and Cooperation (IDC), Human Resources (HR), Legal Affairs and International Standards (LAIS) and Ethics, Culture and Social Responsibility (ECSR) departments. The Regional Office also maintained and expanded its engagement with Affiliate Members (AM) in the region and contributed to their activities and strengthened cooperation within the UN system in the region and with regional partners.

II. Human Resources

1. **Internship Programme:** In 2025, the office launched its first Internship Programme, implemented in collaboration with universities in the region and in coordination with Human Resources Department at Headquarters. Three interns were welcomed during the year, contributing to programme implementation, communications, and administrative functions. Their integration into the team strengthened daily operations and enhanced the overall capacity of the office. The initiative also reflects the Organization's commitment to social responsibility by providing young professionals with opportunities to acquire practical experience in the United Nations system. At the same time, the engagement of interns has contributed to increased visibility and recognition of the Office within the regional community.
2. **Officials on Loan Programme:** In 2025, concrete steps were undertaken towards the establishment of an Officials on Loan Programme, in response to the interest expressed by Member States in the region to deepen their engagement with the work of the Regional Office. Developed in close coordination with the Human Resources Department at Headquarters, the programme will enable interested Member States to second government officials to the Regional Office on a temporary basis, in line with established internal guidelines. Officials on Loan may be assigned to key functional areas of the Regional Office, including Innovation, Education and Investments (IEI), International Development and Cooperation (IDC), Institutional Relations, Partnerships, and Advocacy (IRPA), and Market Intelligence, Policies and Competitiveness (MIPC), subject to organizational needs and mutual agreement. All costs related to the assignment, including salary and related emoluments, should be covered by the sponsoring Member State. Through this mechanism, Member States are offered a structured opportunity to strengthen institutional cooperation, enhance regional ownership of the Organization's work, and provide their officials with direct professional exposure to UN Tourism's activities at regional level.

III. Programmes and Activities

A. Market Intelligence, Policies and Competitiveness (MIPC) Department: Tourism for Rural Development Programme

Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism:

3. **BTV 2025 Edition:** The fifth edition of the *Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism* initiative was open for applications from 5 February-19 May 2025. Launched in 2021, the initiative aims to transform tourism into a driver of rural development and well-being by recognizing and preserving rural landscapes, cultural diversity, and knowledge systems while fostering innovative strategies aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this fifth edition, the initiative received more than 270 applications from 65 countries. In preparation to the 2025 edition a total of five sessions (in English, Arabic, Spanish and French) were delivered to Members States to support the candidacy preparation.

The *Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism – 2025 Ceremony and Network Annual Meeting*, was held from 17-18 October in Anji County, Huzhou City, China. 52 villages from 29 countries received the recognition on that occasion and joined a Network of 319 villages from 64 countries worldwide.

4. **Awareness-Raising and Outreach for Member States:** Two online sessions titled *Making Tourism Work for Rural Development: National Journey to the Best Tourism Villages Initiative* were organized for Member States on 2 April (English) and 8 April (Spanish) 2025. The sessions aimed to share good practices and success stories from Member States on the selection, management and monitoring of BTVs since the initiative's launch in 2021. Argentina, Peru and Romania presented their experiences, providing insights into innovative strategies, positive impact created, and lessons learned in the framework of the Best Tourism Villages initiative.
5. **BTV Upgrade Programme:** As a key component of the Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism Upgrade Programme, the mentorship activity was implemented from October 2024 to August 2025, supporting 17 villages from 13 countries selected in the 2023 BTV edition. Tailored recommendations reports were developed by international experts and shared with participating villages and Member States, providing practical guidance to improve sustainability practices,

operational performance, and tourism development strategies. A promotional campaign highlighting Upgrade results has been deployed in December across BTV social media. The Upgrade Programme for the 2024 edition kickstarted with online briefing sessions held on 29 and 30 July 2025 in English and Spanish. Villages have started working with their assigned mentors in December 2025.

6. **BTV Network – The Knowledge Series:** UN Tourism launched the quarterly *The Knowledge Series – Learn from the Experts*, designed to provide the BTV Network expert-led guidance to help local stakeholders develop tailored and sustainable tourism solutions. Three sessions were organized in 2025, gathering over 150 participants from 30+ countries. The sessions focused on *Implementing National Sustainability Goals at the Village Level* in collaboration with Green Destinations (February), *Intellectual Property for Rural Identity* in collaboration with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in May, and presented also the Self-Assessment Tool to Assist Rural Destinations (STAR) by UN Tourism featuring a guest speaker from the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism of Peru (August).
7. **BTV Network – Village Talks:** The *Village Talks – Voices from the Ground* public webinar series was launched to increase visibility and outreach of good practices by the Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism. Four sessions were organized in 2025 bringing together more than 350 participants from 45+ countries. These include *Heritage in Action: Innovating Cultural Preservation in Villages* (April), *Tourism for Nature: Conserving Natural Resources through Sustainable Rural Development* (July), *Cultivating Heritage: Agritourism Experiences in FAO GIAHS Villages* (September), and *Strengthening Communities: People-Centered Approaches to Rural Tourism* (December). These webinars provide a platform for villages to share practical examples of tourism-driven rural development and best practices, enhancing international visibility.
8. **BTV Monitoring and Evaluation Report:** The first BTV Monitoring Report has been published in English and will be available in Arabic. The report provides biennial monitoring for all villages recognized as BTVs. This edition covers all 43 villages recognized in 2021 and highlights the villages' progress across the nine areas of evaluation of the BTV initiative. Findings show that 84% of villages have experienced positive changes in several key areas following BTV recognition in particular in terms of economic opportunities, tourism management and development, and cultural awareness.
9. **STAR:** The Self-Assessment Tool for Assisting Rural Destinations (STAR) has over 360 registered users from 70+ countries, including BTV Network members. UN Tourism delivered one onboarding session, one knowledge session, and two presentations to strengthen the adoption of STAR amongst different stakeholders and integrate it into local tourism strategies. Feedback and interviews with STAR users informed further platform developments planned for 2026, including Arabic translation. Member State are invited to use the tool at the national level, providing an opportunity to receive a tailor-made assessment of their rural destinations. Peru was the first Member State to adopt the tool at the national level. Argentina and Chile have indicated interest to adopt the tool as well in 2026.

Capacity Building and Skills Development:

10. The Programme has launched its first-ever set of **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)** dedicated entirely to tourism for rural development. The two online courses focus on design thinking for rural tourism development (in English and Spanish) and tourism product development and marketing for rural areas (in English) – have been launched in October 2025. Designed to be practical, accessible, user friendly, the MOOCs equip those working on rural destinations with knowledge and tools to create more sustainable, inclusive, and community-led tourism experiences. These courses are available on the UN Tourism Online Academy and have garnered high interest in a period of two months with currently 479 and 284 users, respectively (among which 58 and 32 from the Middle East region respectively).
11. **Executive Training Course:** In preparation of 2026, the second Executive Training Course on Tourism for Rural Development for the Middle East Region was conceptualized in 2025 on the topic of agri-tourism. The training course targets officials at National Tourism Authorities (NTAs) or National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) from the 13 Middle East region Members States. An Outreach Session for relevant stakeholders in Saudi Arabia is scheduled alongside the training

to present the Tourism for Rural Development Programme, amplify results, and identify opportunities for collaboration and partnership at national and regional levels.

Research and Knowledge Creation:

12. **Reports and Publications:** The Arabic versions of the reports *Tourism and Rural Development: A Policy Perspective* and *Tourism and Rural Development: Understanding Challenges on the Ground – Lessons learned from the Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO Initiative* were launched in September, expanding outreach in the Middle East. The Spanish versions are also available.
13. The *Tourism for Rural Development Impact Report* has been updated to include the activities of 2025. The report was updated and printed ahead of the 26th General Assembly of UN Tourism that took place in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
14. The report *Regional Outlook on Policies for Rural Tourism Development: A Middle East Perspective* is currently under development. This report aims to provide insights, future pathways and recommendations on Tourism for Rural Development in the Middle East – examining policy frameworks, stakeholder roles, and regional challenges and opportunities – to inform evidence-based, integrated strategies that advance sustainability, community participation, and natural and cultural preservation. In December 2025, an informative Kick-Off Meeting with Member States in the region was organized to officially launch the research and present the project's objectives, methodology, and expected outcomes; a detailed survey will follow to gather structured inputs from Member States. A Global Policy Framework for Tourism for Rural Development is also planned for development in 2026.
15. A good practices series from the BTV Network is under development, with the first one on social sustainability planned for publication in Q1 2026. The collection and dissemination of these good practices aim to highlight the good examples from the BTVs, guide effective policymaking, support capacity building, and encourage peer learning across villages and countries. By showcasing innovative approaches and proven strategies, these will help rural communities replicate successful models, contributing to sustainable rural development and advancing the contribution of tourism to the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
16. The *Guidebook for Sustainable Tourism Development in Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS)* co-published with FAO will be launched in Q1 2026. The Guidebook provides practical guidance for communities, policymakers, and stakeholders on developing sustainable tourism while safeguarding agri-cultural heritage. It includes case studies, good practices, and recommendations based on UN Tourism expertise, particularly through the Tourism for Rural Development Programme and the Best Tourism Villages initiative. The Guidebook aims to support local livelihoods, promote conservation of traditional knowledge, and empower communities to leverage tourism as a driver for sustainable rural development.

On the Ground:

17. **T4RD-SGP:** The inaugural call for proposals of the *Tourism for Rural Development Small Grants Programme (T4RD-SGP)* enabled by the TUI Care Foundation, titled *Colourful Cultures*, was launched to empower artists and artisanal communities in ten African countries: Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, The Gambia, Tunisia, and Zambia. The call received 141 applications from all ten countries. Following a competitive selection process, six projects have been selected as eligible to receive grants of up to EUR 20,000 each along with capacity-building support. Project implementation is scheduled to begin in Q1 2026 and will run for 12 months. Future call for proposals are under discussion for the Middle East.

Partnership Development in Saudi Arabia: A series of outreach meetings were held with stakeholders based in the region and in Saudi Arabia specifically. Among the stakeholders met were FAO, UN Habitat, UNESCO, Souda Peaks, Red Sea Global, Emirates Council for Balanced Development, King Khalid University, Aseer Development Authority, World Bank, World Health Organization. Several partnership opportunities are considered for 2026.

Market Intelligence, Policies and Competitiveness - Other Areas of Work

18. **Wellness Tourism Workshop:** With the support of the Ministry of Tourism of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Wellness Tourism Workshop: Building Capacity for a Competitive Wellness Tourism Segment was held at the Regional Office for the Middle East on 9-10 September 2025. The workshop brought together representatives from National Tourism Administrations and Organizations (NTAs/NTOs) from 11 Middle East Member States, with more than 30 participants in total, alongside industry experts and key stakeholders from across the region. The workshop explored the growing potential of wellness tourism as a driver of economic growth, tourism diversification, and sustainability for the Middle East. This capacity building Workshop follows the recommendation of the 50th Meeting of the Regional Commission for the Middle East (CME) held in Muscat, Oman, on 22 May 2024.

B. Innovation, Education and Investments (IEI) Department:

19. **Human Capital Development Agreement by E-Learning with the Ministry of Tourism in Saudi Arabia:** The cooperation between UN Tourism and the Ministry of Tourism of Saudi Arabia continued to expand in 2025, strengthening national and international tourism human-capital development through online learning and institutional capability building.

The partnership delivered 10 MOOCs in 5 languages including Arabic with leading academic partners such as Les Roches, IE University, HSLU, SHL, and Ecole Ducasse, covering core areas including Train the Trainer, Destination Marketing, Digital Transformation, Culinary Arts, Hotel Operations, and foundational tourism management. Scholarship distribution reached a global scale, with 5,000 international scholarships allocated across more than 80 countries and an active use rate demonstrated through both initial and final redemption cycles. Unlimited scholarships distribution has been allocated to Saudi Residents until 31 March 2026.

The Tourism Faculty Development Programme (TFDP) matured into a full multi-track capability programme targeting academic managers, tourism faculty, hospitality educators, and Ministry officials. More than 300 enrolments were logged, with 268 certifications issued, marking a high completion and competency-building rate. TFDP 2.0 was introduced and completed as a blended structure combining online executive education, a two-week immersion at Les Roches, and final reflective assignments.

UN Tourism's TedQual initiative also advanced, supporting the first batch with mentoring and delivering ten new certifications to Saudi institutions.

Under the Tourism Labour Market Observatory (TLMO), two major analytical deliverables progressed. The Comprehensive Labour Market Report is under continued data collection, while the AI Impact on Tourism Jobs report is completed and delivered as a joint publication by UN Tourism and Ministry of Tourism. These reports will guide national workforce planning and future skills strategies.

A major marketing campaign for the Tourism Online Academy reached wide audiences between October 2024 and November 2025. It generated over 12,000 registrations, 20,000 enrolments, and 4,400 course completions, achieving 64 percent of its target. Platform upgrades were completed across usability, certificates, multilingual access, AI-based tools such as AI Tutor and AI Feedback Tool, partner visibility, community functions, dashboards, and integration capabilities.

20. **AI Global Report, "Implementing Artificial Intelligence in Tourism: Guidelines and Recommendations for the Public Sector" & Training Programme:** Artificial Intelligence is reshaping the global tourism sector by optimising operational efficiency, enhancing customer experiences and driving sustainable tourism practices. However, challenges such as regulatory gaps, workforce transformation, and policy development remain barriers to AI adoption. UN Tourism, through this Global AI and Recommendations Guide, aims to provide actionable insights and strategic guidance to member states, ensuring AI is integrated responsibly and effectively into national tourism governance. A comprehensive training programme will be conducted, including training modules, presentation slides, case studies, and practical exercises to enhance the capacity of Member State officials to implement AI recommendations and manage digital transformation in tourism effectively. This project was launched as an outcome of the UN Tourism General Assembly on November 7-11, 2025.

21. **UN Tourism Publication for “innovating undergraduates and graduate programmes in tourism – a multidisciplinary approach”:** This publication aims to support UN Tourism Member States by advocating for the modernisation of undergraduate and graduate tourism education to meet the evolving demands of the industry. Recognising that the traditional focus on hotel management is no longer sufficient, this initiative promotes a multidisciplinary approach that includes new majors such as tourism data science, sustainable tourism, and tourism business management. It also encourages integrating tourism as an elective in diverse academic disciplines like engineering and business to foster interdisciplinary learning and collaboration. With this information, Member States can develop and implement innovative educational frameworks and curricula that reflect the industry's multidimensional nature, address the imbalance in professional opportunities, and ensure that graduates are well-prepared to contribute to the sustainable growth and development of the global tourism sector.
22. **UN Tourism Middle East Communication Challenge:** Regional innovation challenge focused on strengthening communication resilience in the Middle East tourism sector. The project identified and supported startups offering tech-driven solutions such as AI storytelling, fact-checking tools, and crisis-communication systems to enhance destination reputation, preparedness, and community confidence. The initiative highlighted local talent and promoted scalable, homegrown innovations that can be replicated across the region.

C. International Development and Cooperation (IDC) Department

23. **Technical Cooperation Framework between UN Tourism and the State of Libya: Advancing Sustainable Tourism Development and Institutional Capacity:** this possible project represents a renewed commitment to supporting the country's tourism recovery and long-term transformation through the Regional Office, as the arm of the Organisation on the ground. Building on Libya's rich cultural and natural heritage - from prehistoric and Roman sites to vast desert and coastal landscapes - the initiative seeks to position tourism as a key driver of economic diversification beyond oil dependency. The cooperation focuses on strengthening institutional governance, promoting sustainable and responsible tourism, and enhancing human capital through targeted education and training. Core components include the establishment of an International Tourism Academy, the review of national strategies and legal frameworks, and the development of data, statistics, and marketing capacities. The framework also promotes innovation, entrepreneurship, and partnerships that reinforce Libya's image as a safe and attractive destination. With technical missions, expert workshops, and the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding under preparation, this cooperation aims to equip Libyan institutions with the tools and knowledge to lead a modern, competitive, and resilient tourism sector. The project is now under negotiation between UN Tourism and the Tourism and Handicrafts of Libya.
24. **GCC Working Group on Tourism Data Governance and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Innovation:** The GCC Working Group on Tourism Data Governance and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Innovation is a regional initiative jointly led by the Regional Office and the GCC Secretariat to advance digital transformation and responsible AI use in the tourism sector. The project aims to create a unified AI policy and governance framework for tourism data, aligned with GCC privacy laws and international standards, and to establish a standardized data collection methodology that ensures accuracy, comparability, and interoperability across Member States. By fostering collaboration among governments, academia, and the private sector, the Working Group will enhance evidence-based decision-making, improve destination resilience, and strengthen competitiveness in smart tourism management. The initiative adopts a phased approach - assessment, framework development, and adoption - culminating in the publication of two regional frameworks and a Next Steps Roadmap for future GCC-wide AI-powered data sharing, research, and capacity-building. Through this effort, the GCC positions itself as a global leader in ethical, AI-driven tourism governance, setting a benchmark for innovation and cooperation in the digital age. The Regional Office is currently finalizing the concept note of the first phase of the project in collaboration with IEI and MIPC and aims to sign the framework with the GCC secretariat at the beginning of 2026.
25. **Human Capital and Rural Tourism Development in Aseer:** Planned for rollout in partnership with the Aseer Development Authority, this multi-component initiative seeks to transform Aseer into a world-class, culturally distinctive tourist destination. It will deliver a comprehensive Human Resources Development Strategy, including needs assessments, leadership programmes, and

tailored training aligned with global best practices. A rural tourism package under the “Best Tourism Villages” programme will support the preservation and activation of historic villages, agritourism, and gastronomy-based experiences. A destination branding framework will guide Aseer’s positioning in the global market, ensuring consistency across infrastructure, services, and storytelling. The anticipated outcomes include elevated service quality, strengthened rural economies, and enhanced international visibility for Aseer. The project is in the preparatory stage, with the technical mission scheduled for 14 - 17 September 2025 to conduct on-site assessments and engage stakeholders. Following a mission to Aseer by the Director of the Regional Office for the Middle East, and representatives of the International Development Cooperation as well as the Market Intelligence, Policies, and Competitiveness departments.

26. **Engagements with Member States for Technical Assistance:** The Regional Office continues to expand its technical cooperation and policy dialogue with Iraq and Syria, recognising their growing commitment to tourism as a driver of national recovery, diversification, and cultural revitalisation. In Iraq, engagement focuses on aligning with the country’s Tourism Vision 2035 through tailored initiatives such as the development of a national tourism strategy and investment master plan, establishment of a tourism statistics and TSA system, and implementation of hotel classification standards. Drawing on successful models from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, the Regional Office aims to help Iraq strengthen governance, attract investment, and modernise its tourism infrastructure. In Syria, cooperation efforts centre on reactivating institutional frameworks and rebuilding capacity for sustainable tourism management, leveraging the country’s unique cultural and natural heritage to foster inclusive growth and community resilience. Both engagements exemplify the Regional Office’s commitment to supporting Member States in post-crisis recovery and sustainable development through evidence-based planning, capacity-building, and partnership mobilisation. The consultations with national authorities are ongoing to identify priority areas and resource mobilisation opportunities, with implementation to follow subject to funding availability.

D. Legal Affairs and International Standards (LAIS) Department

27. **Establish the Tourism Law Observatory for the Middle East:** Building on the success of the first Tourism Law Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, UN Tourism is currently establishing the Middle East region’s first Tourism Law Observatory, hosted by UN Tourism’s Regional Office for the Middle East, to strengthen and harmonize legal frameworks for the sustainable development of Tourism at a regional level. Endorsed by the Executive Council (decision 3 (CXXIII) and aligned with resolution 757(XXV), this digital platform will systematically collect, analyse and disseminate tourism laws and regulations while facilitating regional dialogue through resources, conferences, publications and expert networks, as well as services of technical assistance for the development and revision of tourism legislation, in accordance with the rules and regulations of UN Tourism for the extrabudgetary contributions. Key objectives include, among others, optimizing legal frameworks, enhancing regulatory cooperation among Middle Eastern States, and improving tourism governance models through multi-stakeholder engagement. This initiative represents a strategic step toward for the promotion of tourism law and the global harmonization of tourism legal frameworks, with its establishment currently underway as part of the Organization’s General Programme of Work in Tourism Law.
28. **International Code for the Protection of Tourists (ICPT):** Adopted by consensus through Resolution 732 (XXIV) at the twenty-fourth session of the General Assembly, the ICPT is a landmark legal instrument that sets out a comprehensive body of principles and recommendations on the protection of tourists in emergency situations, as well as on the rights of tourists as consumers, with a view to restoring confidence in travel and providing sufficient guarantees to international tourists in the post-COVID-19 environment. Promoted globally by UN Tourism, the Code is advanced with the support of the Legal Team at Headquarters, whose work has been actively supported by the Regional Office for the Middle East through outreach and engagement with Member States. To date, 32 Member States have adhered to the ICPT, including several from the Middle East region, such as Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates and, most recently, the Syrian Arab Republic, which adhered to the Code at this year’s General Assembly, reflecting growing support for its principles at global level. At its 125th session, the Executive Council established the technical committee of the International Code for the Protection of Tourists through decision 3(CXXV). This committee, which is subsidiary to the Executive Council, is composed of nine Member States, including United Arab Emirates for the region of the middle east.

E. Institutional Relations, Partnerships and Advocacy (IRPA) Department

29. **Coordination and Collaboration with the UN Resident Coordinator in Saudi Arabia:** Under the leadership of the Director of the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East, the Office has maintained structured coordination with the UN Resident Coordinator Office (RCO) in Saudi Arabia since 2024. Recognized by the Resident Coordinator for his strategic guidance, the Director for the regional office actively participated in the UN Country Team's quarterly meetings, ensuring tourism priorities are mainstreamed into the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. Also, the Regional Office of UN Tourism is providing requested data to the RCO (UNINFO) in a regular basis for upcoming UN joint programming opportunities in the Kingdom.
30. **Engagement with International and Regional Financial Institutions:** The Regional Office for the Middle East maintained active engagement with key international and regional financial institutions and development partners in the region, with a view to sustaining constructive relationships and exploring future cooperation opportunities. This engagement focused on presenting the mandate, priorities, and technical work of UN Tourism and the Regional Office, while identifying areas where tourism-related technical assistance could contribute to broader development objectives in Member States. Interactions included outreach and coordination with institutions such as the World Bank, the Saudi Fund for Development, the Islamic Development Bank, and other relevant partners. These efforts aimed to enhance mutual understanding, support future resource mobilisation, and create potential pathways for financial cooperation in support of tourism development initiatives in the Middle East and, where relevant, beyond the region.
31. **UNCT Retreat – Riyadh, 6- 8 October 2025:** UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East hosted the UN Country Team Retreat on 6- 8 October 2025, in close collaboration with the UN Resident Coordinator Office and partner agencies. This high-level convening had (1) strengthened inter-agency alignment with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and SDG implementation, (2) leveraged tourism's transformative potential for inclusive growth. Key outcomes include a joint workplan for 2025-2026 linking UN programming to national priorities, and enhanced synergies for sustainable tourism development. The Retreat has featured participation from Saudi ministers, UN agency heads, and development partners, building on the Kingdom's demonstrated commitment to multilateralism through its hosting of the Regional Office.
32. **11th UNAOC Global Forum – Riyadh, 14–15 December 2025:** UN Tourism participated in the 11th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Riyadh under the theme "Two Decades of Dialogue for Humanity - Advancing a New Era of Mutual Respect and Understanding in a Multipolar World." UN Tourism was represented at the UNAOC Group of Friends High-Level Meeting, where the Director of the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East intervened on behalf of the Organization during the General Debate with the support of IRPA department. The intervention highlighted tourism's role as a practical enabler of intercultural dialogue, people-to-people exchange, and mutual understanding, and reaffirmed UN Tourism's commitment to multilateralism and to supporting Member States through policy guidance, capacity-building, knowledge exchange, and partnerships. The Forum convened a high-level audience, including the United Nations Secretary-General, senior representatives of the host country, and high-level delegations from across the UNAOC Group of Friends, providing a valuable platform to strengthen UN Tourism's visibility within the UN system and to deepen cooperation with UNAOC.

F. Affiliate Members and Public-Private Collaboration (AM-PPC) Department

33. In 2025, the Regional Office continued to support and engage with the Affiliate Members community in the region, in line with the Organization's mandate to foster dialogue and cooperation between the public and private sectors. As of the end of 2025, the Middle East region counts 53 Affiliate Members, reflecting the admission of 10 new members during the year 2025. The Office provided support to existing members, engaged in outreach to potential new members, and facilitated collaboration opportunities aligned with the Organization's thematic priorities.
34. Throughout the year, the Regional Office hosted or participated in 6 key activities contributing to Affiliate Members' programmes and strengthening institutional linkages, more details are provided in **Annex I**.

G. Engagement and Strategic Participation by the Director of the Regional Office

35. Since his appointment, the Director of the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East has demonstrated exceptional commitment to advancing the mandate of the Regional Office. Through active participation in major conferences, forums, and high-level meetings held in Riyadh, across the region, and internationally, the Director has significantly enhanced the visibility and strategic influence of the Office and the Organization.
36. The Director has maintained close dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders, including ministers of tourism, ambassadors and senior officials from Member States, as well as representatives of the private sector and the leadership of regional and international organisations such as the GCC, UN agencies and relevant non-governmental entities, in addition to Affiliate Members. These engagements have supported Member States in advancing their tourism priorities, while fostering cooperation, knowledge-sharing and policy dialogue in line with UN Tourism's mandate.
37. The Director's engagement across regional and global platforms contributed to aligning the work of the Regional Office with the Organization's strategic objectives by translating corporate priorities into regional actions. These engagements supported the advancement of sustainable tourism development, the strengthening of regional competitiveness, and the integration of tourism considerations into broader economic and social development agendas, including through policy dialogue, technical cooperation, and partnerships with Member States and regional stakeholders. Taken together, these efforts reflect the role of the Regional Office as a trusted partner and facilitator for tourism development in the Middle East. A detailed overview of major events and high-level bilateral meetings is provided in **Annex II**.

IV. Annex I: Regional Office's contributions to Affiliate Members' programmes

1. **18th Vatel International Convention, Bahrain (February 2025):** arranged by Affiliate Member S.A.S. Institute Vatel. The Regional Office was invited to deliver a keynote speech, highlighting its engagement with the hospitality sector.
2. **Fujairah International Conference on Adventure Tourism, United Arab Emirates (May 2025):** organized by the Fujairah Adventure Centre, featuring UN Tourism's participation and contributions from 14 Affiliate Members across multiple sessions and panels.
3. **"We Are the Living Heritage", Saudi Arabia (May 2025):** organized by the Intangible Heritage Association and hosted by the Regional Office. The event emphasized the critical link between cultural heritage and tourism.
4. **"Applying Heritage to Hospitality: Advancing Gastrotourism in Saudi Arabia", Saudi Arabia (October 2025):** organized by Inaar Consultancy in collaboration with UN Tourism and hosted by the Regional Office, with participation from UNESCO, FAO, and five additional Affiliate Members. The event explored the linkages between heritage, gastronomy, and tourism development.
5. **Red Sea Global Workshop on Regenerative Tourism, TOURISE, Saudi Arabia (November 2025):** organized with the participation of UN Tourism Affiliate Members, including contributions from European Affiliate Members sharing experiences and approaches in regenerative tourism.
6. **Qatar Travel Mart, Qatar (November 2025):** organized by NextFairs. UN Tourism was represented by the Director of the Regional Office for the Middle East, who delivered an introductory speech during the Wellness and Medical Tourism session.

Annex II: Major Events and High-level Bilateral Meetings by the Director of the Regional Office in 2025

Major Events (Conferences and Summits):

1. Saudi Tourism Forum, Riyadh, 9 January 2025
2. Hajj Conference and Exhibition, Jeddah, 13–16 January 2025
3. 51st UN Tourism Regional Commission for the Middle East, Doha, 11-14 February 2025
4. 9th Meeting of GCC Tourism Ministers, Kuwait, 16–17 February 2025
5. Ministerial Roundtable on Investment in Tourism, Annual Investment Congress (AIM), Abu Dhabi, 7–9 April 2025
6. Italian Embassy event “Culture and Tradition for Health”, Riyadh, 21 May 2025
7. Launch ceremony organised by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Association, Riyadh, 21 May 2025
8. High-level roundtable on the Economic Outlook of the MENA Region, IMF Regional Office in Riyadh, 25 May 2025
9. Heilongjiang Provincial Tourism Development Conference and technical meetings with Heilongjiang authorities, Heilongjiang, China, 1–3 July 2025
10. Technical mission to the Aseer Region, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 14–17 September 2025
11. World Tourism Day celebration, King Saud University, 28 September 2025
12. Cultural Investment Conference, Riyadh, 29–30 September 2025
13. United Nations Country Team (UNCT) Retreat, Riyadh, 6–9 October 2025
14. 5th Accessible Travel and Tourism International Conference, Dubai, 7–8 October 2025
15. GCC 7th Regional Workshop on Measuring the Total Contribution of Tourism to the Economy, GCC statistical center, Muscat, 12 October 2025
16. UN Tourism Best Tourism Villages (BTV) 2025 Ceremony and 3rd Annual Network Meeting, Huzhou, China, 17–18 October 2025
17. 29th World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (WAIPA) World Investment Conference, Sharjah, UAE, 22–23 October 2025
18. Future Investment Initiative (FII9), Riyadh, 27–30 October 2025
19. INAAR Consultancy High-level Roundtable on Gastronomy, Riyadh, 28 October 2025
20. General Assembly of UN Tourism, Riyadh, 7–11 November 2025
21. Grand Finale of the UN Tourism Artificial Intelligence Challenge, Riyadh, 8 November 2025
22. High-level Tourism Investment Gathering organised by the Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with UN Tourism, TOURISE Riyadh, 12 November 2025
23. Red Sea Global Workshop on Regenerative Tourism, TOURISE, Riyadh, 12 November 2025

24. Georgia Tourism Roadshow hosted at the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East, Riyadh, 16 November 2025
25. Imam Abdulaziz bin Mohammed Royal Reserve Development Authority (IARDA) launch event of Arma Season, 19 November 2025
26. Qatar Tourism Awards 3rd edition, Doha, 24–27 November 2025
27. Qatar Travel Mart, Doha, 25 November 2025
28. 3rd International Seminar on Tourism Law, Havana, 9–14 December 2025
29. 11th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), Riyadh, 15 December 2025

High-level meetings including Ministers, Ambassadors, and GCC Secretary-General:

1. Meeting with H.E. Minister of Tourism and Handicrafts of Libya, 13 February 2025
2. Meeting with the Ambassador of Italy, 23 March 2025
3. Meeting with the Ambassador of Georgia, 25 March 2025
4. Meeting with the Ambassador of Pakistan, 26 March 2025
5. Meeting with the Ambassador of Guatemala to the United Arab Emirates, 7 May 2025
6. Meeting with the Ambassador of Viet Nam, 12 June 2025
7. Meeting with the Ambassador of Iraq, 31 August 2025
8. Meeting with the Ambassador of El Salvador, October 2025
9. Bilateral meeting with Ms Fatima Al-Sulaity, Qatar Museums, 8 November 2025
10. Bilateral meeting with H.E. the Minister of Tourism of Jordan, Riyadh, 9 November 2025
11. Bilateral meeting with H.E. the Minister of Tourism and Handicrafts of Libya, Riyadh, 10 November 2025
12. Bilateral meeting with H.E. the Chairman of Qatar Tourism, Riyadh, 11 November 2025
13. Bilateral meeting with H.E. the Minister of Tourism of the Syrian Arab Republic, Riyadh, 11 November 2025
14. Bilateral meeting with H.E. the Vice Minister of Tourism of China Riyadh, 11 November 2025

Other Meetings:

1. **UNCT** Regular Meetings once every month, UN House, Riyadh
2. Meeting with Hanan Hanzaz, Chief Regional Bureau for the Arab States of **UNIDO**, Riyadh, Feb 2025

3. Meeting with the CEO of Saudi Fund for Development (**SFD**), Riyadh, 10 November 2025
4. Meeting with Dr. Abdulhakim Elwaer, Regional Representative for the Near East and North Africa of **FAO**, Riyadh, 24 November 2025