8th Session of the Technical Committee on Tourism Online Education

Format: Online

MINUTES OF MEETING

23rd September 2026 — 15:00 – 16:30

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1. Attendees

Member States

Africa

- Mr. Afonso Vita, Angola

Americas

- Ms. Angie Almendras, Under Secretariat, Chile

Asia and the Pacific

- Dr. Wonhee Lee, Korea Culture Institute, Republic of Korea

- Mr. Mohammadreza Mehrandish, Deputy Director General of the Office of Tourism Studies, Education and Planning, Iran

Europe

- Ms. Yvona Havel, Ministry of Tourism of Czechia
- Ms. Ana Paula Pais, Head, Turismo de Portugal, Portugal — Chair

Middle East

- Ms. Razan Al Eyed — Deputy of Tourism Capabilities Development, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Private Sector

- Bella Vista Institute of Higher Education Switzerland — Affiliate Member
- CETT Barcelona School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy — Affiliate Member
- IE University — Affiliate Member
- Sommet Education
- Oakland University
- Cornell University
- University of Ljubljana
- Porto Business School
- Arden University
- Swiss Education Group
- École Ducasse

Observers

- Urs Wagenseil, HSLU — Affiliate Member
- Ana Godinho, Universidade Nova Lisbon
- Dilshod Narzikulov, Samarkand International Academy
- Patrick Torrent Queralt, Agencia Catalana de Turisme — Affiliate Member
- Daniela Thiel Ellul, Universidad Nebrija — Affiliate Member
- Moez Kazem, Conseil Québécois des ressources humaines en tourisme — Affiliate Member
- Otavio Leite, Fecomercio RJ — Affiliate Member

- Ali Raza Hussain, College of Tourism & Hotel Management Dubai — Affiliate Member
- Kenza Mezache, Higher Institute for Tourism and Hospitality Saudi Arabia — Affiliate Member
- Katevan Maghlakelidze, Enko Education
- Heba Alantably, Bunyan for Training Company — Affiliate Member
- Sorina Enachiuc, HighEdu
- Carlos Ruiz, CM ESM
- Giorgi Schinava, European School
- Vivian Tawadros
- Joanna Witwicka, EdKompas
- Alexandra Dache, Cambridge Romania
- Aiman Nuarbekova, Khassiyat Saidiganiyeva

UN Tourism

- Mr. Antonio López de Ávila, Director, Innovation, Education and Investments
- Ms. Paula de Blas, Senior Specialist, Innovation, Education and Investments
- Mr. Alejandro Gutiérrez, Senior Specialist, Innovation, Education and Investments

2. Approved Agenda

15:00 – 15:10 Welcome Remarks by UN Tourism

15:10 – 15:30 UN Tourism results on Education 2026 by Antonio López de Ávila, Director, Innovation, Education and Investments, UN Tourism

15:30 – 15:35 Introduction of Samarkand International Academy in collaboration with UN Tourism by Dilshod Narzikulov, Director

15:35 – 15:45 Presentation of UN Tourism services to invited UN Tourism Affiliate Members by Paula de Blas, Senior Specialist, Innovation, Education and Investments, UN Tourism

15:45 – 16:00 Open discussion with participation of the rest of the Members of the Committee

16:00 – 16:05 Communication of change of name and Decision on the extension of the agreement of the BSc in International Sustainable Tourism Management by Urs Wagenseil, Head of Competence Centre, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HSLU)

16:05 – 16:10 Presentation of “El-Yurt Umidi” Foundation by Gulnoza Ismailova, Director

16:10 – 16:20 Decision on UN Tourism Online Academy scholarships package distribution for 2026/27 period

16:20 – 16:30 Closing Remarks by Antonio López de Ávila, Director, Innovation, Education and Investments, UN Tourism

3. Minutes

Introduction

Ms. Ana Paula Pais, Chair of the Technical Committee on Tourism Online Education, opened the eighth session by welcoming Committee Members, representatives of Member States, private-sector representatives and invited participants.

The Chair introduced the main areas to be addressed during the session, including UN Tourism’s progress and current initiatives in tourism education, potential cooperation opportunities with Affiliate Members, the Samarkand International Academy, the BSc in International Sustainable Tourism Management in cooperation Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HSLU), the allocation of sholarships for the 2026/27 academic year, and the El-Yurt Umidi Foundation.

Ms. Ana Paula Pais emphasized the importance of continued cooperation in strengthening tourism education, capacity building, and skills development across the sector.

Welcome Remarks

Mr. Antonio López de Ávila, Director of Innovation, Education and Investments at UN Tourism, welcomed participants to the eighth session of the Technical Committee on Tourism Online Education.

He conveyed the apologies of H.E. Ms. Shaikha Alnuwais, Secretary-General of UN Tourism, and Ms. Natalia Bayona, Executive Director of UN Tourism, who were unable to attend the session.

Mr. Antonio López de Ávila emphasized the importance of connecting education with the needs of the tourism sector and creating opportunities for young people and professionals. He also highlighted UN Tourism’s efforts to expand access to education through innovative and accessible learning formats, including thematic courses delivered through WhatsApp.

He outlined the principal subjects to be addressed during the session, including UN Tourism’s education results for 2026, the Samarkand International Academy in

collaboration with UN Tourism,opportunities for cooperation with Affiliate Members, the future of the BSc in International Sustainable Tourism Management with HSLU, potential cooperation with the El-Yurt Umidi Foundation, and the distribution of scholarships for the 2026/27 period.

UN Tourism Results on Education 2026

Mr. Antonio López de Ávila presented the progress and results achieved by UN Tourism in the field of education since the previous Committee meeting.

He began by providing an overview of the tourism sector and highlighted the continued need to address skills and qualification gaps. Tourism represented more than 270 million workers, equivalent to approximately 8.2% of the global workforce in 2024. He also highlighted staff shortages as one of the challenges identified by the UN Tourism Panel of Experts and stressed the importance of vocational education and training in preparing the sector for future employment needs.

Mr. Antonio López de Ávila presented UN Tourism's 360-degree approach to tourism education, covering six principal areas: secondary education, higher education, executive education, online education, international academies and quality assurance.

Regarding secondary education, he presented progress under the Schools Embracing Tourism initiative. Since December 2025, three proposals and corresponding needs analyses had been developed for the United Arab Emirates, Zambia and the Latin America and Caribbean region. He also reported progress in cooperation with the International Baccalaureate Organization, including the signing of an MoU and ongoing curriculum development.

Mr. Antonio López de Ávila provided an update on the BSc in International Sustainable Tourism Management developed in cooperation with HSLU. The programme currently comprises three cohorts, with 27 students in the first cohort, 37 in the second and 28 in the third. He also highlighted the support provided by Member States to participating students, including sponsored students from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

He further presented the development of high-impact education partnerships and co-branded programmes with academic institutions. These partnerships currently provide 26 scholarships per year, worth more than EUR 200,000, with further initiatives under development.

Regarding executive education, he reported that more than 5,000 people from 53 Member States had been trained through over 100 programmes since 2019. Since December 2025

alone, more than 700 people had participated in 16 programmes. He also highlighted capacity-building initiatives related to artificial intelligence in tourism.

Mr. Antonio López de Ávila reported the continued expansion of the UN Tourism Online Academy, which had reached more than 67,000 students through 50 courses, 20 academic partners and content available in five languages. More than 4,250 scholarships had been provided to Member States for the 2025/26 period, worth over EUR 208,250.

He also presented the initial results of UN Tourism's artificial intelligence-powered e-learning courses delivered through WhatsApp. Since December 2025, more than 6,000 learners had been reached through courses implemented in El Salvador, Chile and Spain. Based on the positive feedback received, further courses were being developed in areas including tourism communication and tourism ambassadors.

Regarding international academies, Mr. Antonio López de Ávila highlighted progress at the Samarkand International Academy in collaboration with UN Tourism. Since December 2025, two Tourism Faculty Development Programmes had been implemented for 60 teachers, together with two retraining programmes benefiting up to 200 students. A strategy for 2027–2030 had also been developed and submitted, while the 2027 Academic Programme of Work was under development. of Work was under development.

He also referred to initiatives for the establishment of additional international academies in Zimbabwe, Zambia, the Dominican Republic, Bulgaria and Iran, for which Memoranda of Understanding had been signed.

Mr. Antonio López de Ávila reported that 150 programmes from 67 institutions had been certified in 2026 through the UN Tourism TedQual Certification System.

Finally, he presented UN Tourism's work on knowledge creation and research in tourism education. He highlighted publications and ongoing research addressing innovation in undergraduate and graduate tourism programmes, the impact of artificial intelligence on tourism jobs and the future of tourism, and the connection between tourism graduates and employment opportunities.

The findings presented highlighted digital transformation, competency integration, sustainability and ethics in curriculum design as important priorities for tourism education, while also identifying the need to strengthen cooperation between academia and the tourism industry.

Introduction of the Samarkand International Academy

Mr. Dilshod Narzikulov, Director of the Samarkand International Academy in collaboration with UN Tourism, presented the Academy's vision, objectives and principal areas of work.

He explained that the Academy was established in response to the growing needs of Uzbekistan's tourism sector and the demand for qualified professionals trained according to international standards. Its training model aims to bring global best practices into the local context, with a strong emphasis on practical learning and industry experience.

Mr. Dilshod Narzikulov highlighted the development of hospitality management programmes in cooperation with international partners and referred to the Academy's practice-based learning environment in Samarkand. The facilities presented included a library and research center, accommodation for international and out-of-town participants, and digital infrastructure supporting online and blended learning formats.

The Academy provides both short-term upskilling courses and longer-term programmes and seeks to create further opportunities for talented tourism professionals. Mr. Dilshod Narzikulov also expressed interest in expanding international cooperation through joint academic programmes, exchanges, and research.

Looking ahead, the Academy aims to strengthen its cooperation with UN Tourism and further establish Samarkand as a hub for tourism education in Central Asia.

Presentation of UN Tourism Services to Affiliate Members

Ms. Paula de Blas, Senior Education Specialist at UN Tourism, presented the education-related services and opportunities for cooperation available to UN Tourism Affiliate Members. She highlighted the particular significance of the eighth session as the first meeting of the Committee opened to Affiliate Members, with the objective of creating additional opportunities for collaboration between UN Tourism, Member States and the wider education sector.

Ms. Paula de Blas outlined six principal avenues for engagement: high-impact education partnerships (co-branded programmes); the UN Tourism Online Academy with the development of MOOCs; executive and vocational education; the UN Tourism TedQual Certification System; joint research; and student and faculty mobility.

Through high-impact education partnerships (co-branded programmes), interested institutions may contribute academic expertise, recommendations, guest faculty and educational resources. In return, participating institutions are expected to contribute through scholarships or applied research, supporting UN Tourism's objective of democratizing access to quality education.

For the UN Tourism Online Academy, Affiliate Members with relevant expertise were invited to collaborate in the development of new MOOCs. UN Tourism can provide support in areas

including course and instructional design, quality assurance, global distribution, learning analytics and visibility.

Ms. Paula de Blas then presented opportunities in executive and vocational education, through which UN Tourism works with Member States to identify their priorities and develop tailor-made training and capacity-building programmes. Academic institutions and private-sector organizations may contribute knowledge, data and expertise to the delivery of these initiatives.

She also introduced the UN Tourism TedQual Certification System as an opportunity for academic institutions seeking international quality certification for their tourism education programmes. In addition, Affiliate Members were encouraged to contribute expertise to joint research and knowledge-development activities.

Finally, Ms. Paula de Blas presented the planned student and faculty mobility programme, which aims to establish a framework for scholarship funding and facilitate international mobility and knowledge exchange between countries and institutions.

Interested Affiliate Members were invited to express their interest directly to UN Tourism. Potential areas of cooperation would then be assessed, followed where appropriate by the formalization of an agreement and implementation of the corresponding activities.

Open Discussion

Following the presentation, Ms. Ana Paula Pais opened the floor for discussion among Committee Members and invited participants.

Several participants expressed interest in strengthening cooperation and improving access to information on UN Tourism's education initiatives. One discussion focused on the availability of data concerning participation in programmes developed with academic partners. UN Tourism indicated that it would work towards providing partners with more regular information on programme uptake and interaction.

A representative of Universidade Nova de Lisboa highlighted the establishment of a new school dedicated to tourism and expressed interest in developing programmes and exchanges with UN Tourism and other participating institutions. Particular emphasis was placed on strengthening knowledge transfer between the public sector, academia and industry and on anticipating how changes in the tourism labour market may affect future professional roles.

Ms. Megan Epler Wood presented an opportunity linked to Cornell's sustainable tourism destination management course, which had previously been distributed with support from GIZ. She explained that funding had been obtained to develop a Spanish-language version

of the course and expressed interest in exploring cooperation with UN Tourism for its distribution across the Spanish-speaking world.

Another participant asked whether courses available through the UN Tourism Online Academy could be accessed freely by students and institutional teams. Mr. Antonio López de Ávila clarified that the learning content and MOOCs are available free of charge and that users can create individual accounts to access the courses. A fee applies only when a participant wishes to obtain formal certification.

Ms. Rita Marques, Porto Business School, congratulated UN Tourism on the progress achieved and emphasized the need to strengthen the communication, promotion and visibility of its education initiatives. She noted that reaching more students and increasing awareness of the available programmes would contribute to achieving more tangible results and invited participating institutions to support UN Tourism in disseminating its courses and initiatives through their respective networks.

Following Ms. Rita Marques's intervention, the Chair acknowledged the challenge of ensuring that educational opportunities reach the intended beneficiaries, particularly those who may not already have access to UN Tourism's information networks. Participants suggested strengthening communication channels and preparing concise information materials that participating institutions could disseminate through their own networks.

Ms. Yamel Henriksen highlighted the availability of 100 scholarships under the partnership with UN Tourism, particularly targeting high-school and vocational students. She invited interested participants to explore opportunities related to the professional hotel and restaurant management certification pathway and offered to provide further information to interested institutions.

Mr. Mehdi Alamdar, Director of International Relations at the Touring and Automobile Club of Iran, proposed the development of a comprehensive geographical mapping of education and training programmes funded or co-funded by UN Tourism. He noted that a regional overview could help Affiliate Members identify opportunities for collaboration, address geographical gaps and better align their national training strategies. UN Tourism indicated that further information would be provided to support potential cooperation.

Ms. Angie Almendras, Chile, shared the country's experience with the online course on accessible and inclusive rural tourism. She highlighted its value in providing training opportunities to people working in rural tourism, including those in remote areas where access to such opportunities may otherwise be limited. She reported positive engagement and results from the initiative, particularly in strengthening human capital and capacity building.

The Chair concluded the discussion by emphasizing the value of collaboration and knowledge exchange among Committee Members, Affiliate Members and participating institutions.

Communication of Change of Name and Decision on Extension of the Agreement of the BSc in International Sustainable Tourism Management

Mr. Urs Wagenseil, Head of Competence Centre at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HSLU), presented the joint bachelor's programme developed by UN Tourism and HSLU and explained the reasons for extending the existing agreement. The proposed extension required the Committee's approval before being submitted to the Executive Council in November.

Mr. Urs Wagenseil recalled that the initiative originated in 2022 with the objective of complementing the UN Tourism Online Academy through an internationally recognized bachelor's programme. The programme was subsequently developed and launched in Madrid in September 2024. It follows a three-year full-time structure combining studies in Madrid, an online academic period incorporating a four-month full-time internship, and a final academic year in Lucerne. Its curriculum integrates tourism, sustainability, management and industry practice, with contributions from UN Tourism experts.

He explained that the current agreement expires in 2029, while the cohort beginning in September 2027 would continue its studies until 2030. Extending the agreement was therefore considered necessary to provide an appropriate legal framework and long-term certainty for students, families, institutional partners and scholarship providers.

A change to the programme's name was also presented. The original title, BSc in International Sustainable Tourism, was updated to BSc in International Sustainable Tourism Management to better reflect the programme's substantial management and business components and the professional profiles for which students are being prepared. Existing students were offered the choice between the former and revised degree titles, and all opted for the new title.

Mr. Urs Wagenseil additionally highlighted the programme's practical component, noting that 25 students had undertaken internships across nine countries, with positive feedback from participating organizations regarding students' performance, commitment and ability to apply their academic knowledge in professional environments.

Following the presentation and subsequent consideration by the Committee, the extension of the agreement and the change of programme name were approved by the Committee, allowing the proposal to proceed to the next stage.

Presentation of the El-Yurt Umidi Foundation

Ms. Gulnoza Ismailova, Director of the El-Yurt Umidi Foundation, introduced the Foundation and its role in supporting the development of Uzbekistan's human capital through international education.

The Foundation, operating under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, supports up to 500 talented Uzbek students each year in pursuing education at leading universities worldwide. Its programmes cover undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate studies, as well as targeted international traineeships for working professionals. Cooperation with international universities is also being expanded through joint and dual-degree programmes and collaboration with professors and researchers.

Tourism and services were identified as priority sectors. Since 2019, 36 El-Yurt Umidi scholarship holders have pursued programmes in tourism and related services: 25 at undergraduate level, six at master's level and five at doctoral level, across institutions in Switzerland, Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom and France.

Ms. Gulnoza Ismailova emphasized that the Foundation seeks to create a complete human-capital cycle by identifying talent, facilitating access to international education, supporting scholars during their studies and enabling them to bring their expertise back to Uzbekistan. Scholarship recipients are expected to return and contribute professionally to the country's development.

She expressed interest in strengthening cooperation with UN Tourism and the academic institutions represented at the meeting, including through the UN Tourism Online Academy, scholarships, professional training, executive education, institutional exchanges and joint financial support. The objective would be to expand opportunities not only for students but also for young professionals working in Uzbekistan's tourism and hospitality sectors.

Decision on UN Tourism Online Academy Scholarships Package Distribution for the 2026/27 Period

Mr. Antonio López de Ávila presented the proposed distribution of 2,000 UN Tourism Online Academy scholarships for the 2026/27 academic year. He explained that the proposed allocation was informed by the UNDP Human Development Index and followed the approach used in previous years.

The proposed regional distribution was:

- Africa: 50% — 1,000 scholarships
- Asia and the Pacific: 30% — 600 scholarships
- Americas: 20% — 400 scholarships

Mr. Antonio López de Ávila explained that UN Tourism Online Academy was also considering improvements to the allocation and monitoring process. Particular attention would be given to Member States that effectively promote and redeem their allocated scholarships, with the possibility of providing additional scholarships to countries achieving a redemption rate above 50%.

To strengthen the programme's impact, UN Tourism Online Academy proposed closer engagement with Member States in promoting the scholarships and a more structured selection process, potentially including motivation letters from applicants. This would provide greater insight into applicants' objectives, how they intend to use the knowledge acquired and the longer-term impact of the scholarships on their professional development.

The revised approach would also seek to collect testimonials, feedback, and information on beneficiaries' outcomes to better measure the impact of the scholarship programme. Due to available resources, implementation would take place progressively by region during the year.

Ms. Megan Epler Wood supported the proposed approach based on her experience managing a similar programme. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that partners actively disseminate opportunities, establishing appropriate mechanisms for reviewing applications, and monitoring not only scholarship uptake but also course completion rates.

The Committee subsequently expressed its agreement with the revised process for distributing and monitoring the UN Tourism Online Academy scholarship package, alongside its approval of the HSLU agreement extension and programme name change.

Outcomes of the Session

In closing the session, Ms. Ana Paula Pais summarized the principal outcomes, including the presentation of UN Tourism Online Academy's education results for 2026, updates on the Samarkand International Academy in collaboration with UN Tourism Online Academy and the El-Yurt Umidi Foundation, and the exchanges among
Committee Members and participating institutions.

The Chair highlighted the importance of the suggestions received during the discussion, particularly those concerning improved information sharing, communication, and outreach to ensure that educational opportunities reach their intended beneficiaries. She thanked participants for their active engagement, feedback, and proposals.

The Committee confirmed its agreement on two principal decisions: the extension of the agreement and change of name of the BSc in International Sustainable Tourism

Management, and the revised approach to the distribution and monitoring of the UN Tourism Online Academy scholarship package.

Mr. Antonio López de Ávila thanked Committee Members, Affiliate Members and participating institutions for their continued cooperation and emphasized the importance of translating education initiatives into tangible impact. Ms. Ana Paula Pais concluded by reiterating the value of collective action in developing the skills and opportunities required by young people in tourism and confirmed that further information would continue to be shared among members and participating institutions.

5. Takeaways and Next Steps

The Committee approved the extension of the agreement for the BSc in International Sustainable Tourism Management, as well as the change of the programme's name to reflect its management component. The proposal will proceed to the Executive Council for consideration.

UN Tourism will proceed with the 2026/27 UN Tourism Online Academy scholarship package, comprising 2,000 scholarships distributed across Africa (1,000), Asia and the Pacific (600), and the Americas (400).

The scholarship distribution process will be strengthened to improve uptake and impact, including closer engagement with Member States, consideration of motivation letters, greater attention to scholarship redemption and completion rates, and improved collection of beneficiary feedback and testimonials.

UN Tourism will continue strengthening the communication and promotion of its education initiatives, with participating institutions encouraged to support dissemination through their respective networks.

Opportunities for further cooperation with Affiliate Members and academic institutions will be explored across online education, scholarships, professional and executive education, research, mobility and other education initiatives.

Cooperation opportunities with the El-Yurt Umidi Foundation will be further explored, particularly in relation to tourism education, scholarships, online learning and professional development in Uzbekistan.

UN Tourism will continue sharing information and documentation with Committee Members and participating institutions to support cooperation and follow-up on the proposals discussed during the session.