



General Assembly

Distr.: General
25 July 2025

Original: English

Eightieth session

Item 18 of the provisional agenda*

Sustainable development

Sustainable and resilient tourism and sustainable development in Central America and the Dominican Republic

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [78/145](#) on sustainable and resilient tourism and sustainable development in Central America and the Dominican Republic, provides an update on progress made since the previous report ([A/78/210](#)) of July 2023.

* [A/80/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. In resolution [78/145](#) on sustainable and resilient tourism and sustainable development in Central America and the Dominican Republic, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit an action-oriented report with recommendations to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As the specialized agency of the United Nations system responsible for promoting responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism, the World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) has prepared the present report.

2. The report draws on information provided by Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama in response to a request by UN Tourism in early 2025 for updates on sustainable and resilient tourism and on sustainable development since 2023. The report also includes contributions from United Nations entities, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and its representation in the Dominican Republic, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). These inputs are complemented by the technical expertise and experience of UN Tourism in promoting sustainable and resilient tourism across Central America and the Dominican Republic.

II. Advancing global sustainability: initiatives supporting the 2030 Agenda

3. Multilateral efforts are essential where bilateral or unilateral actions fall short in addressing complex, transboundary challenges. Sustainability and resilience require coordinated responses to global crises such as climate change, biodiversity loss and the growing impact of pollution and waste, which no single country can resolve alone. By leveraging collective knowledge, resources and policy alignment, multilateral cooperation supports the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

4. For the first time, tourism was formally included in the action agenda of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at its twenty-ninth session, which was marked by a dedicated thematic day on tourism on 20 November 2024. That same day, the first ministerial meeting on enhanced climate action in tourism was held, during which both the vulnerability of tourism to climate change and its contribution to global emissions were highlighted. This was followed by the endorsement of the Declaration on Enhanced Climate Action in Tourism by 70 Governments, including Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Nicaragua, establishing a strong political commitment to advancing climate action within the sector.

5. The inclusion of tourism at the Conference's twenty-ninth session reinforced the relevance of the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism, which guides national and sectoral alignment through five pathways: measure, decarbonize, regenerate, collaborate and finance. Coordinated by UN Tourism under the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme and supported by the United Nations Environment Programme and partners, this voluntary initiative is aimed at mobilizing the tourism sector to align with national climate policies. The 16 Central American signatories include 10 from Costa Rica, 2 from the Dominican Republic, 1 from Honduras and 2 from Panama. In 2024, the Ministry of Tourism of Honduras and the Costa Rican Tourism Institute reported on their progress in developing and implementing climate

action plans. In May 2025, the Secretariat of Central American Tourism Integration became a signatory.

6. The Global Tourism Plastics Initiative, led by UN Tourism and the United Nations Environment Programme with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, is part of the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme. Its goal is to stimulate the tourism sector to tackle plastic pollution by promoting circularity in plastic use. The initiative has 18 signatories from the region, including 2 from Belize, 6 from Costa Rica, 3 from the Dominican Republic, 2 from El Salvador, 2 from Guatemala and 3 from Nicaragua, with signatories such as the Costa Rican Tourism Institute and the National Council for Climate Change and Clean Development Mechanism of the Dominican Republic. Also focusing on circularity is the Global Roadmap for Food Waste Reduction in Tourism, which provides guidance for more sustainable food management and is currently available in Spanish.

7. During the fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2022, UN Tourism, the World Travel and Tourism Council and the World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance launched the Nature Positive Tourism Partnership to help the tourism sector to integrate biodiversity values and contribute to reversing biodiversity loss by 2030, in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. In October 2024, during the Conference's sixteenth session, in Cali, Colombia, a side event was co-hosted by UN Tourism, Nature Positive Tourism Partnership partners and Colombia on net positive commitments in tourism, with Costa Rica participating as Chair of the Committee on Tourism and Sustainability. The participation of the Nature Positive Tourism Partnership for the first time in the Business and Biodiversity Forum highlighted the role of tourism in regenerative governance and the positive social and economic impacts that it has on local communities.

8. Integrating sustainable tourism into traditional agricultural areas offers a strategic response to global challenges such as rural poverty, biodiversity loss and climate change. Agritourism in these rich landscapes provides climate-resilient income, diversifies livelihoods and conserves ecosystems, while advancing progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Since 2020, FAO and UN Tourism have been working in partnership to promote tourism-driven rural development and are developing a guidebook on sustainable tourism in Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems that is due to be released in late 2025. In Central America, countries such as Costa Rica and Honduras are preparing proposals for traditional farming systems to be recognized as Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems. The aforementioned guidebook will serve as a reference for communities seeking to leverage tourism for sustainable development in rural areas.

9. Following the adoption by UN Tourism in 2023 of the statistical framework for measuring the sustainability of tourism and its endorsement in 2024 by the Statistical Commission, the United Nations adopted Sustainable Development Goal indicator 8.9.2 in March 2025 to systematically track employment in tourism – which is a vital sector in Central America – using household labour force data. This will help Governments to measure the sector's true contribution to the economy, design policies to formalize work and protect vulnerable workers, benchmark sustainable tourism progress and attract funding linked to achieving the Goals. Regular data updates, overseen by UN Tourism, will support efforts to monitor recovery, address youth and gender gaps and foster inclusive growth.

10. The UN Tourism Best Tourism Villages initiative promotes rural development and resilience worldwide. The forthcoming monitoring report on the initiative, which will cover villages recognized in 2021, will include an assessment of nine key areas: cultural and natural resources; conservation; economic sustainability; social

sustainability; environmental sustainability; tourism development; governance; infrastructure; and health and safety. Findings indicate that 84 per cent of villages that are part of the initiative have experienced positive progress. There are four villages in Central America that are part of the initiative: two in Guatemala and two in Panama.

11. The UN Tourism International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories monitors the economic, environmental and social impacts of tourism at the destination level, underpinning the evidence-based approach of UN Tourism to sustainable, resilient sector growth. In 2024, the Network admitted the Petén Sustainable Tourism Observatory, which is the second entity in Guatemala to become part of the network, following the Antigua Guatemala Sustainable Tourism Observatory, which was admitted in 2019. Active engagement by Central American stakeholders continues, notably by the Guatemalan Institute of Tourism, which oversees both aforementioned observatories, and the Academic Observatory of Sustainable Tourism and Climate Change in Honduras, through active participation in Network events and initiatives.

12. The Tourism Law Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, a joint initiative of UN Tourism and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), launched its activities for 2025 on the basis of a survey conducted in 2024 of States members of UN Tourism in the Americas. Through its digital platform, the Observatory regularly analyses, updates and disseminates tourism laws and regulations across the region with the support of a network of academic collaborators.

13. Since 2017, Central American nations have submitted multiple voluntary national reviews, reaffirming their commitment to the 2030 Agenda and assessing progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Recent voluntary national reviews reflect varied yet aligned advances in governance, social protection, environmental resilience and economic transformation. Poverty reduction, inclusive social programmes, such as Red Solidaria, and the first voluntary local reviews were highlighted in the voluntary national review of Honduras. In the review of Guatemala, there were improvements in maternal health and gender inclusion but issues such as malnutrition and Indigenous inclusion remained challenges. The review of El Salvador showed advances in digital transformation, education, infrastructure and security. Costa Rica leads in institutional integration of the Goals, with participatory governance, data-driven planning and local implementation through the initiative of a network of cantons promoting the Goals. In the review of the Dominican Republic, improved governance, poverty reduction, fiscal reform and regional equity were highlighted.

14. As seen in their voluntary national reviews, tourism plays a core development role in El Salvador and the Dominican Republic, driving economic recovery, job creation and regional development. The “Surf City” initiative in El Salvador is aimed at leveraging sustainable tourism to boost local economies, with the support of infrastructure upgrades and international partnerships. The Dominican Republic links tourism development to environmental sustainability and regional inclusion despite coastal ecosystem threats such as sargassum. In both cases, tourism serves as a tool for territorial development and advancing towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially those relating to employment, infrastructure and environmental stewardship.

15. According to the UN Tourism World Tourism Barometer published in May 2025, international tourism maintained strong momentum, with arrivals up 5 per cent in the first quarter of 2025 compared with the same period in 2024 or 3 per cent above pre-pandemic levels. Over 300 million tourists travelled internationally between January and March 2025, which was 14 million more than in 2024. Export revenues from international tourism in 2024 reached a record \$2.0 trillion, showing 11 per cent real growth compared with 2023, which is 15 per cent above 2019 levels. Central

America welcomed 12.9 million international tourists in 2024, up 20.7 per cent from 2023 and 17.6 per cent above 2019. In the first quarter of 2025, arrivals declined slightly by 2.1 per cent compared with 2024 but remained 14.4 per cent higher than in 2019, reflecting sustained long-term growth. El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama showed particularly significant growth, with El Salvador experiencing an increase of 80.6 per cent above 2019 levels.

16. Such a recovery represents a critical turning point for the global tourism sector, which is re-emerging as a pivotal driver of economic growth, job creation and cultural exchange. As tourism rebounds, efforts are now focused on aligning growth with the Sustainable Development Goals, especially those related to climate action, responsible consumption and local development. Emerging trends, such as growing interest in sustainability and lesser-known destinations, highlight evolving traveller preferences and the opportunity to foster more inclusive and environmentally conscious tourism models across the region.

17. Services are a critical driver of economic output and exports in Central America and the Dominican Republic, surpassing the global average for developing economies, according to data from UNCTADstat. In 2022, services in most countries across the subregion contributed more to gross domestic product (GDP) than the developing economy average of 54 per cent. Similarly, in 2023, services accounted for a greater share of total exports than the 18 per cent average seen in developing economies, with the exception of Nicaragua. Tourism played a significant role: in 2023, the share of tourism-related services exports exceeded the 25 per cent developing economy average in all countries except Honduras. The Dominican Republic reported the highest contribution (76 per cent), followed by El Salvador (54 per cent) and Nicaragua (47 per cent). These figures show the central role of services, especially tourism-related services, in shaping the region's export structures and economic performance.

18. Despite the strong contribution of services and tourism to the economy, their actual economic impact is often underreported due to statistical gaps. Many developing countries lack comprehensive trade-in-services data; fewer than 10 developing countries regularly publish detailed statistics disaggregated by trading partner. While 96 per cent of developed economies report data across more than 12 service categories, only two thirds of developing economies do so. Measuring intangible and digitally delivered services remains a major challenge. To address these gaps, UNCTAD has launched a technical assistance initiative in selected Caribbean Community countries, providing statistical training, e-learning tools and policy advice to improve data systems, support evidence-based policymaking and strengthen economic resilience and transformation.

19. Efforts by UNESCO to support sustainability in the Caribbean are relevant to Central America and the Dominican Republic, where tourism drives the economy but also has an impact on the environment, especially through waste. The UNESCO Operational Strategy for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (2023–2029) aligns with the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States: A Renewed Declaration for Resilient Prosperity, and the Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on tourism, gender equality and youth participation. Launched in 2024, the IslandWatch and waste reduction initiatives enhance environmental monitoring and waste management in small island developing States. In the Dominican Republic, data and digital tools are used under the IslandWatch initiative, implemented through the UNESCO Associated Schools Network, to track biodiversity and hydrological risks beyond coastal zones, enabling timely conservation, enhancing ecotourism and supporting inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic development.

20. UNESCO promotes sustainable cultural tourism and heritage conservation in Central America and the Dominican Republic through two key initiatives. One is the European Union-funded Transcultural programme, which supports young entrepreneurs, artists and heritage professionals by providing training in cultural management, audiovisual production and heritage preservation and fosters cross-border collaboration and access to international markets. In 2024, the programme won the United Nations Small Island Developing States Partnerships Award for promoting social cohesion and economic integration through culture. The other initiative, on strengthening capacities for resilient communities through sustainable tourism and heritage safeguarding in Latin America and the Caribbean, supported by Saudi Arabia and being implemented during the period 2023–2026, supports tourism and urban heritage in 10 countries across the region through visitor management at world heritage sites, community cash-for-work programmes and intangible heritage safeguarding.

III. Driving sustainable development through tourism policy implementation

21. Advances in tourism policies are made when new regulations are developed and implemented effectively. In the Central American region and the Dominican Republic, this is acknowledged through an approach that focuses not only on the adoption of progressive policies but also on ensuring their practical application. By aligning tourism development with sustainable practices, these nations work to strengthen broader progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, integrating environmental, social and economic considerations into the tourism sector's growth. The present section highlights both policy advancements and the concrete actions taken to turn such commitments into meaningful outcomes.

A. Advancing biodiversity protection, cultural heritage preservation and community empowerment through tourism

22. The entry into force of Law No. 1210, the General Tourism Law, in August 2024, has strengthened the capacity of the Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism to promote, regulate and oversee tourism activities in all their forms. The Law introduces a list of officially recognized forms of tourism, including rural tourism, positioning them as a central component of efforts to diversify the national tourism offering. Its aim is to generate employment, provide visitors with unique, experiential and participatory opportunities and foster greater appreciation and sustainable use of the natural, cultural, ancestral and architectural heritage of Nicaragua.

23. The creation of the San Salvador Historic Centre Planning Authority marks a significant step in the cultural revaluation, reorganization and recovery of iconic public spaces in the city. As part of this initiative, waste management and heritage protection are central to advancing sustainable tourism in the city's historic centre. In parallel, the Salvadoran Institute of Tourism promotes a conservation-oriented approach across its park network, aligning with the "protected natural area" designation in order to safeguard biodiversity and encourage sustainable recreation.

24. In addition, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of El Salvador declared the coastal area of Maculís a protected natural area on 5 December 2024. The aim of the designation is to preserve marine biodiversity while enabling responsible tourism development. The area will offer diverse and sustainable experiences, including ecotourism and sun-and-beach tourism, that complement existing attractions for surfers and international visitors.

25. In Panama, work is ongoing to enhance visitor experiences and increase the country's competitiveness as a destination as part of efforts to coordinate public-private partnership actions for the establishment of tourist destination management committees, as outlined in the Sustainable Tourism Master Plan 2020–2025. These efforts are also part of the country's Tourism-Conservation-Research strategy, which positions Panama as a unique destination. The goal of the strategy is to ensure that tourism involves local communities and becomes a tool for improving the quality of life. At the time of writing, there were 10 active tourist destination management committees.

26. In 2023 and 2024, the Honduran Institute of Tourism and the Association of Municipalities of Montaña de Celaque National Park launched a joint project to support ecosystem restoration and agroforestry in the Cacique Lempira Señor de las Montañas Biosphere Reserve. Activities included equipping the Association's forest firefighters with specialized gear and establishing a plant nursery in El Naranjito in San Manuel de Colohete to produce 30,000 seedlings for agroforestry. In addition, the Honduran Institute of Tourism actively participates in the work of the national technical wetlands committee and the Bay Islands National Marine Park, reinforcing its commitment to sustainable tourism and environmental governance.

27. The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of Nicaragua conducts regular follow-up visits to tourism service providers with the aim of promoting sustainable ventures in protected areas. The Ministry's support has focused on the strengthening of capacities through environmental education sessions, the encouragement of responsible practices and the conservation of natural resources.

28. Costa Rica has long based its tourism value proposition on services and products that are aligned with strong environmental and social commitments. The country is recognized globally as a benchmark of sustainable tourism thanks to its rich biodiversity and its sustainable tourism development model, which is built on sustainability, inclusion and innovation. Promoted by the Costa Rican Tourism Institute, this custom-designed model supports national goals by tracking tourism growth and delivering benefits to local communities. It is implemented through the national tourism plan for the period 2022–2027, which was updated in 2024.

29. In the Dominican Republic, a project on mainstreaming the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services in productive landscapes in threatened forested mountainous areas, led by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources with UNDP support and \$8.2 million from the Global Environment Facility, promotes the sustainable management of fragile mountain ecosystems with a focus on ecotourism. Restoration, ecosystem stability and stronger conservation enforcement are priorities under the project. Sustainable land use is supported by using a landscape approach in three key mountain landscapes: the southern Sierra de Neiba (La Descubierta); ecological corridors linking Valle Nuevo, La Humeadora and Barbacoa (Rancho Arriba); and the Ozama River Basin (Yamasá). Under the project, agroecotourism is supported through the design of destination packages, the designation of a "cocoa route" and efforts to facilitate access to credit for local businesses, aligning economic growth with environmental sustainability.

30. Since 2024, Nicaragua has strengthened its community-based rural tourism strategy to promote sustainability, inclusion and cultural heritage. An update of the national inventory of rural and community-based tourism supported the improvement of targeted training and technical support and promoted the integration of that training and support into the national tourism offer. Tourism activity classification tools were revised and service providers were trained in sustainable tourism, digital marketing and heritage conservation. Audiovisual content, such as short films, reports and life stories, was produced to showcase community efforts and strengthen identity. A map

and catalogue of registered rural tourism providers were developed and a new logo and website for rural and community-based tourism were designed and launched to increase visibility and access. These actions position Nicaragua as a safe, diverse and authentic destination while empowering rural communities. In December 2024, the first regional meeting on rural and community tourism was held in Matagalpa, with broad regional participation.

31. In 2024, with support from Ayuda en Acción, a project on the promotion of the sustainable development of the tourism sector was launched in Nicaragua. The project was aimed at strengthening the national tourism offer, boosting the local economy and supporting tourism initiatives led by women and youth, with a focus on building technical capacities and providing equipment to ensure the quality and sustainability of those aims. The project has benefited 15 initiatives in the department of Madriz by delivering several crucial components, including a comprehensive needs assessment to identify local challenges and opportunities; targeted training programmes to build the skills of local stakeholders, particularly rural and Indigenous women and youth; and a tourism voucher programme designed to boost demand and support the participating enterprises.

32. Also in Nicaragua, rural and community tourism stakeholders were empowered to attend a virtual course on best practices for sustainable rural tourism in Latin America thanks to scholarships offered by the Latin American Model Forest Network and the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Centre. Held from 3 February to 12 March 2025, the course, coordinated by the Centre's agritourism education unit, is aimed at equipping participants with the skills to apply best practices in managing sustainable rural tourism services, including lodging, guiding, food, transportation and tour operations in rural and protected areas. This initiative helped to build local capacity and promote responsible tourism in Nicaragua.

33. In November 2023, Panama established its first reef committee to support the protection and awareness of marine ecosystems in line with legislation that sets out measures for the conservation, restoration, rehabilitation and sustainable use of coral reefs and associated species. Recognizing their ecological and economic value, Panama promotes reef conservation as a pillar of sustainable tourism.

34. In February 2024, the Panama Canal Authority reopened the Ecological Trail at the Agua Clara Visitor Centre, offering visitors an immersive experience in the country's rich biodiversity. This marks an important step in promoting sustainable tourism, environmental conservation and the natural beauty that is vital to the Canal's future.

35. In March 2024, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network certified several Panamanian beaches, including El Agallito and El Retén, as vital for shorebird conservation and ecotourism. Gathering in Chitré, Panama, they highlighted the ongoing arrival of over 30 bird species and the need for deeper research. Since 1980, studies have drawn global attention to the region, with recent findings estimating that nearly 100,000 migratory birds visit annually.

36. The *mesas ejecutivas* (executive round tables) methodology, developed by ILO, promotes tripartite social dialogue and strengthens coordination across institutions and sectors in order to boost productivity and decent work. Its aim is to address gaps between public and private actors within sectors or value chains, fostering synergies and collective action. In Costa Rica and Ecuador, ILO supported the creation of tourism dialogue platforms bringing together government, employer and worker representatives. Such platforms are helpful for identifying challenges and developing strategies to boost productivity and decent work opportunities in tourism.

37. On 30 September 2024, Panama enacted Law No. 442, adopting the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction. The law enables large-scale marine protection in international waters and supports the global goal of conserving 30 per cent of marine and terrestrial areas by 2030. In taking this step, Panama joins other signatories in the protection of marine ecosystems from threats such as pollution, overexploitation and climate change. The law underscores the country's commitment to environmental leadership and international cooperation, allowing for the designation of protected marine areas and sustainable use measures.

38. A marine turtle monitoring project at the San San Pond Sak Wetland, a protected area of international importance in Panama, strengthens the technical capacities of park staff and local communities to protect endangered species such as the leatherback sea turtle. Through community involvement, academic partnerships and conservation efforts, the project supports biodiversity while enhancing the area's appeal as a sustainable and responsible tourism destination.

B. Strengthening ecosystem protection, resource management and climate resilience in tourism

39. The Ministry of Environment and the Tourism Authority of Panama are partnering to promote the sustainable use of natural resources through tourism. As part of a pilot initiative, the districts of Bocas del Toro, Boquete, Tierras Altas, Soná and Taboga were selected for sustainable tourism development. The Ministry, in coordination with the Tourism Authority, announced the first five strategic environmental assessments, for territorial planning that would be focused on tourism and climate change. It also issued ministerial resolution No. 266 of 27 August 2024, listing policies, plans and programmes to be prioritized for strategic environmental assessment over the ensuing five years.

40. In addition, the Sendero Los Quetzales trail in Volcán Barú National Park in Panama has reopened after major rehabilitation under a project to support the conservation and management of cultural and natural heritage. The 6.5 km trail, which is known for its biodiversity, including sightings of quetzals, pumas, frogs and orchids, reinforces the country's commitment to ecotourism and conservation.

41. Costa Rica continues to strengthen its environmental leadership. In 2023, regulations were enacted to enforce Law No. 7896, which addresses plastic pollution and environmental protection. Effective as at 20 April 2024, the law prohibits the sale of plastic bags and straws in supermarkets and retail stores, encourages the use of biodegradable and reusable alternatives and mandates the implementation of recycling and waste management programmes.

42. Launched in 2019 as a public-private partnership, "Tu-MoDeLo" is a joint programme of Fundecooperación para el Desarrollo Sostenible, the Costa Rican Tourism Institute, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, local tourism associations and private sector partners. The programme promotes the sustainable and climate-resilient sourcing of local goods by connecting local agricultural producers with growing demand in the tourism sector. In 2024, the programme had enhanced institutional capacity and transitioned to being managed fully by the public sector, a change that broadened its impact to include job creation, economic development, the increased participation of women and improved climate adaptation in rural communities.

43. Since 2023, technical assistance has been provided to local committees in Honduras to support the implementation of the Ecological Blue Flag programme in key tourist destinations, including Gracias (Lempira Department); Roatán, Utila and Santos Guardiola (Bay Islands Department); Trujillo and Santa Fe (Colón Department); Tela and La Ceiba (Atlántida Department); and Lago de Yojoa and Amapala (Valle Department). Under the programme, community-led efforts in environmental conservation, climate action, sanitation and public health are recognized through the awarding of ecological distinctions.

44. In 2024, Costa Rica reinforced its role as a global leader in sustainable tourism by signing the Global Tourism Plastics Initiative and the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism. These commitments support international efforts to reduce plastic pollution and accelerate climate action in tourism. As a meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions tourism (MICE) destination, Costa Rica also seeks to offset the carbon footprint of such travellers through reforestation, watershed protection, natural regeneration and agroforestry. The MICE forest initiative now spans 650 ha of protected land, with over 36,750 trees planted and 70 per cent of the area undergoing environmental regeneration.

45. In 2020, the Costa Rican Tourism Institute and the National Forestry Financing Fund launched an online carbon footprint calculator allowing travellers to measure and offset their emissions by contributing to ecosystem restoration projects. The ongoing initiative is currently being redesigned to improve usability and enhance the overall user experience. Since the launch of the online tool, the tourism sector has successfully offset a total of 6,136 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent.

46. The Certification for Sustainable Tourism programme, launched by the Costa Rica Tourism Board in 1995, provides guidance to hotels and service providers on adopting sustainable practices and was recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council in 2020. Since 2018, over 330 certifications have been granted. Under the Ecological Blue Flag programme, which helps to protect coastal ecosystems and reduce beach pollution, a total 140 beaches in Costa Rica had been given awards as of 2024.

47. In 2023, Panama launched the region's first green public transport route in the Casco Antiguo (Old Town), a major tourist area in Panama City. Low-emission vehicles cover a route that has been optimized to reduce travel distances as much as possible, supporting the country's sustainability agenda. Green logistics focus on minimizing environmental impacts by improving the efficiency and sustainability of transportation and distribution systems.

48. In 2024, the Honduran Institute of Tourism signed the Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism. In addition, the Institute launched a national climate action plan for tourism, offering tools to tackle related national challenges. In partnership with the National Directorate of Climate Change and the United States Agency for International Development under its climate adaptation project, the Institute developed a methodology for analysing climate vulnerability for the tourism sector to inform preparedness and response to climate threats. As part of the National Environmental Impact Assessment System, the Institute issues technical reports and recommendations for tourism projects in certain areas. Through the Office of Environmental Evaluation and Control of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the Institute monitors and follows up on licensed projects, conducts site inspections and provides input on environmental licence renewals.

49. In September 2023, the Honduran Institute of Tourism organized the Sustainable Tourism and Climate Change Forum in La Ceiba, one of the country's top tourism destinations, in order to promote sustainable tourism as a means of preserving cultural

and natural heritage while addressing the vulnerability of communities that are particularly affected by climate change. During the forum, discussions were focused on sustainable tourism, climate change and cultural and natural diversity, and leading figures in the Latin American tourism industry delivered presentations. Participants drafted an outcome document, the “Charter of La Ceiba,” which included outlines of strategies for climate change mitigation and calls for international cooperation, knowledge-sharing, technological innovation and joint action to build a more sustainable and resilient future for the region.

50. In December 2023, a project aimed at monitoring and safeguarding mangroves in Panama was presented before the National Assembly. The project, emphasizing the critical role that mangroves play in environmental protection and ecosystem resilience, is aimed at raising public awareness about the importance of mangroves in the context of climate change in Panama.

51. In 2023, the Cordillera de Coiba in Panama received the prestigious gold-level Blue Park Award in recognition of its outstanding role in marine wildlife conservation. This award placed Panama among 27 Blue Parks that meet the highest science-based standards for conservation. In the Cordillera de Coiba Managed Resources Area, vital marine ecosystems are safeguarded, ocean health is supported and local communities benefit. The Area was expanded by 50,519 km², increasing the country’s total marine protected area to 98,228 km². As a result, Panama achieved the “30 by 30” target of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework ahead of schedule. In addition, Panama signed cooperation agreements with public and private entities, including the Panama Maritime Authority and the Aquatic Resources Authority of Panama, to promote nautical and fishing tourism that is aligned with conservation efforts.

52. In May 2023, two guides were released to support the newly established community of Isberyala, where climate migrants from Guna Yala Province have settled after relocating from the coast to the mainland, in adapting to environmental challenges. The local guide on legislation and good practices for the community of Isberyala aligns national environmental laws with Indigenous Guna cultural practices to promote sustainable living. The bilingual “Dii Agued Igar” (“care of water”) guide provides guidance on water conservation in the form of a traditional story which is also appropriate for children. Both guides were developed with direct input from the Guna community with a view to reflecting their language, customs and worldview. The Panama Tourism Authority supported efforts to identify tourism opportunities that raise awareness about climate change, boost economic resilience and diversify income through sustainable, innovative projects.

53. In 2025 and 2026, the Dominican Republic will launch important sustainability initiatives with UNDP support, including reducing plastic pollution and integrating ecosystem values into national planning. The Integrated Collaborative Approaches for Sustainable Tourism (iCOAST) programme will promote inclusive opportunities, supply chain reforms and improved coordination. In those efforts, which are backed by global partners, there is an emphasis on data-driven decisions, green investment and resilience.

C. Empowering people through tourism: social progress and community-led initiatives

54. In 2022, the UNDP country office in the Dominican Republic, in collaboration with the UNDP Strategic Innovation Unit and the Chôra Foundation, conducted a strategic analysis with a view to transforming the tourism sector to become more sustainable, resilient and inclusive. The Problem Space methodology was used in the

analysis to identify systemic challenges and opportunities with a view to promoting a multidimensional and intersectoral approach to support for innovation and co-creation. The six-phase process included data-gathering, market analysis and stakeholder engagement, producing a solution portfolio that was aligned with institutional capacities and post-pandemic needs. Tourism generates 15.3 per cent of GDP and 8.3 per cent of jobs; there were 8.06 million visitors in 2023, which is a 12.5 per cent increase on the previous year. Despite this growth, informality, especially for women and youth, and overreliance on the “sun and beach” model pose environmental and social challenges. A study conducted jointly by ILO and UNDP and published in 2023 supports a shift towards natural capital, green jobs and inclusive models, though regulatory and capacity barriers remain.

55. Since 2018, Costa Rica has used the Social Progress Index to track well-being and sustainable growth in 33 tourism development centres, with a second assessment in 2024. Unlike traditional models, the Index excludes GDP and economic variables, focusing on 12 indicators of basic human needs, social well-being and opportunities. It helps the Costa Rican Tourism Institute to demonstrate the benefits of its sustainable tourism model for local communities, including increased access to higher education, job creation, improved air quality and waste management, enhanced quality of life, stronger community security and the empowerment of women. In 2024, 89.2 per cent of households surveyed recognized tourism as a generator of employment and economic development.

56. In the area of risk management and emergency preparedness, the Ministry of Tourism of El Salvador, in coordination with affiliated institutions, including the Salvadoran Institute of Tourism, the Salvadoran Tourism Corporation and the San Salvador Historic Centre Planning Authority, has established coordinated response efforts for international events such as surfing tournaments. These efforts include integrating the Solidarity Fund for Health and rapid response protocols to ensure the safety of international and domestic tourists, as well as local communities.

57. El Salvador earned international recognition for its effective health management strategy during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The tourism sector played a central role by facilitating timely and safe care for foreign visitors. As part of preventive measures, hotels were repurposed to host and protect tourists and public health protocols were implemented, which helped to safeguard public health and strengthen the country’s image as a responsible and visitor-focused destination.

58. The commitment of El Salvador to sustainable, resilient infrastructure is evident in the strategic road projects led by the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, such as the La Libertad bypass and upgrades to highways in the western part of the country. These initiatives boost tourism connectivity and local economic development while respecting environmental standards. In addition, the Special Law for the Collection, Use and Final Disposal of Waste, which was strengthened by Decree No. 186, regulates waste management to protect public health, preserve the environment and promote a circular economy. It defines the responsibilities of stakeholders, including tourism businesses, to prevent pollution and encourage proper waste separation practices.

59. In the realm of digital transformation, a programme to support the recovery and expansion of the tourism sector in El Salvador, financed by IDB under operation No. 5590/OC, stands out for promoting the modernization of natural and recreational parks managed by the Salvadorean Institute of Tourism. In addition, through international cooperation, the “Digi-Chiquihuites” programme has been implemented to provide inclusive digital tools to small tourism businesses, thereby helping to reduce the digital divide and strengthen local competitiveness.

60. In March 2023, the Panama Tourism Authority, under its “Panamá por Naturaleza” campaign and in partnership with UN Tourism, launched a competition for innovative community tourism experiences to promote strategic alliances between tour operators and local communities to offer sustainable and unique tourism experiences. Twenty-five experiences were selected as finalists on the basis of their levels of innovation, quality, community empowerment, sustainability and heritage conservation. The initiative involved 18 national tour operators working with host communities. In its final evaluation, a panel that included UN Tourism, Tourism Cares and the Adventure Travel Trade Association selected the top five experiences for global market readiness.

61. From 17 to 19 May 2023, Panama hosted an event at the Panama Convention Centre on sustainable tourism in communities. The event brought together international speakers, communities, organizations, private companies and tour operators to highlight the importance of sustainable tourism and public-private collaboration. A key focus was the rising demand (among about 60 per cent of travellers) for experiences connected to local communities, cultures and nature. This trend offers a major opportunity to improve the quality of life of communities that are prepared to engage in tourism. During the event, the winner of an award for community-based tourism was chosen from 25 finalists.

62. With a view to strengthening local capacities within communities that have tourism potential, the Panama Tourism Authority, in collaboration with the Fundación Avifauna Eugene Eisenmann, has begun establishing a training centre for birdwatching tour guides. Existing unused structures will be repurposed as classrooms and lodging for scientists and students, thereby supporting ornithological tourism. In addition, the Authority has partnered with the private sector to train 20 community leaders from 11 regions (who are members of the Panama Alliance for Community Tourism) as part of a programme supporting host communities in providing sustainable tourism experiences that was recently approved by the National Tourism Council.

63. In the Dominican Republic, as part of a project supporting the inclusive, sustainable and resilient socioeconomic recovery of the tourism value chain in Samaná Province for the period 2021–2023, UNDP supported comprehensive development and resilience efforts. The project promoted inclusive economic recovery and gender equality with the collaboration of ILO, the Government, the private sector and Infosegura, which was established with the support of the United States Agency for International Development. Efforts focused on improving labour policies and integrating micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises into local markets, and working with the municipality of Las Terrenas to engage tourism actors and assess the participation of women. A significant outcome was the launch of a georeferenced mapping platform for such enterprises (76 per cent of which were women-led), supporting data-driven and inclusive economic strategies. Micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises in the municipalities of Las Terrenas, El Limón and Las Galeras received training, technical assistance and support for innovation and the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals. Public campaigns addressed gender-based violence and promoted safe tourism spaces.

64. Each year, the Panama Tourism Authority grants certified tourist guide credentials to dozens of Panamanians who pursue careers in tourism. In May 2023, the credential was awarded for the first time to a person with visual impairment, underscoring the country’s commitment to building a tourism sector that is resilient, inclusive and accessible, promoting equal opportunities and celebrating diversity within the industry.

65. In October 2024, Panama launched a programme to strengthen community tourism by encouraging hotels in Panama City to sponsor community-based accommodation. Under the programme, hotels donate lightly used items such as sheets, mattresses and lamps, and training is offered in culinary skills, food hygiene and basic finance. Depending on their capacity, hotels can support one or more establishments. The initiative fosters collaboration and solidarity across the tourism sector, promoting inclusive and sustainable development nationwide.

66. In November 2023, Panama reaffirmed its commitment to sustainable tourism as a driver of economic development at an international forum on climate change organized by the Veracruz Centre for Advanced Studies. The country emphasized education and community engagement as central to promoting environmental conservation and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through tourism-focused strategies.

67. Panama, through Law No. 290 of 2022, declared sustainable Indigenous tourism a national priority. The Law supports the comprehensive development of Indigenous Peoples by enabling them to manage tourism activities, including through destination planning and sustainable resource use, in their territories. It emphasizes Indigenous leadership and alignment with Indigenous cultural values. The Law is being regulated in coordination with the Panama Tourism Authority. In parallel, an Indigenous tourism strategy and road map for Guna Yala for the period 2024–2035 is being implemented with support from IDB. The initiative, which involves the Ministry of the Interior, stems from a cooperation agreement signed in 2020 between the Panama Tourism Authority and the Guna General Congress to guide tourism planning, promote sustainability and boost competitiveness.

68. In June 2024, Panama hosted the Global Meaningful Travel Summit, organized by Tourism Cares. During the event, communities identified destinations that blend culture, history, visits to UNESCO world heritage sites and nature. Locations such as Achiote, Portobelo and Santa Isabel in Colón Province and Valle de Antón and La Pintada in Coclé Province are being promoted worldwide as sustainable community tourism destinations. These areas offer rich cultural and historical experiences, biodiversity and a strong focus on sustainability, positioning Panama as a key player in meaningful travel.

69. In October 2023, as part of a programme for comprehensive urban development in cities with tourism potential in Panama, a \$3 million initiative to train tourism-oriented entrepreneurs in six tourist destinations across the country was launched. The objective is to continue building on the plans and programmes that have already been established to strengthen the country's sustainable tourism model by increasing local productive capacity. The programme is aimed at supporting business and sectoral development for tourism-related entrepreneurs and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises.

70. In the Dominican Republic, an FAO-led project on linking family farming to the tourism sector supports rural employment and economic diversification as part of the country's post-COVID-19 tourism recovery plan. Targeting the cities of Monte Cristi, Pedernales, Samaná and Higüey and the town of Constanza, the project has engaged 503 producers (of whom 32 per cent are women and 13 per cent are young people) in training and capacity-building. It connects family farming cooperatives (70 per cent of which are led by women) to premium markets, boosting incomes (up to \$500 per month per family), doubling annual sales to over \$110,000 and enabling exports to Canada. Through the provision of innovative technologies such as drip irrigation, biodigesters and hydroponics, the project fosters sustainability, crop diversification and gender equity, offering a scalable model for inclusive rural development.

IV. Tourism as a catalyst for regional integration and sustainable development in Central America

71. Tourism is an important driver of regional integration and economic diversification in Central America. In the Declaration of Montelimar II,¹ seven Central American countries, including Belize and Panama, recognized tourism's role in boosting regional competitiveness. Within the Central American Integration System, tourism, which is supported by specialized institutions and technical secretariats, is one of the fastest-growing sectors. Regional tourism initiatives align with national tourism policies, reflecting a shared vision to position tourism as a pillar of sustainable development, cross-border cooperation and investment.

72. In June 2023, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Panama received a \$16 million grant from the Global Environment Facility to conserve the Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor. The project is aimed at protecting 31.3 million ha of ocean through ecosystem-based management and regional cooperation. It will strengthen marine governance, improve coordination and boost blue economy investment in tourism and fisheries. The initiative is also focused on linking marine protected areas, safeguarding migratory species and promoting collaborative conservation across borders.

73. The Central American Integrated Quality and Sustainability System is the region's first tourism quality certification, designed specifically for micro-, small and medium-sized tourism enterprises in categories such as lodging, restaurants, vehicle rentals, tour operators and actions to promote sustainability. In Honduras, 16 companies (primarily hotels and restaurants) have achieved certification under the System, reflecting growing national alignment with regional standards for quality and sustainability.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

74. Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution [78/145](#) in 2023, Member States in the region have strengthened efforts to promote sustainable and resilient tourism and sustainable development in Central America and the Dominican Republic and have made continuous progress.

75. Member States have made advances in updating and harmonizing legal frameworks and are encouraged to continue embedding biodiversity safeguards, heritage-protection mandates and strategic environmental assessments into all tourism planning instruments in order to reinforce environmental protection, conservation and sustainability alongside cultural and heritage preservation.

76. The tourism sector across the region holds significant potential to evolve beyond the traditional coastal tourism model, developing new tourism products that balance economic growth with resource management and bolster local communities, thereby enhancing sustainable development and long-term resilience.

77. Holistic governance, anchored in empowered institutions and sustained stakeholder dialogue, is essential to align tourism with environmental, cultural and social goals. Policymakers are encouraged to establish or strengthen dedicated planning authorities to coordinate waste management, heritage protection, ecosystem stewardship and social-impact monitoring under a comprehensive institutional framework.

¹ [A/50/998-S/1996/497](#), annex.

78. Tourism continues to be a major economic driver across the region, with notable efforts increasingly focused on expanding the benefits beyond traditional coastal areas. Rural tourism is gaining importance as a tool for job creation, livelihood improvement and community empowerment.

79. There is growing emphasis on the inclusion of marginalized groups, such as women, young people and persons with disabilities; national tourism policies are increasingly incorporating accessibility measures. Stakeholders are encouraged to scale up capacity-building programmes, professional certification and vocational training centres that are tailored to underrepresented groups such as women, young people and persons with disabilities to ensure equitable participation and clear career pathways.

80. Protected areas and ecotourism assets are vital for sustainable tourism, offering authentic nature-based experiences. Preserving and enhancing these areas strengthens destination appeal, supports local livelihoods and meets growing demand for responsible travel. Member States are encouraged to expand terrestrial, coastal and marine reserves with comprehensive management plans and to restore degraded sites, including by investing in trail rehabilitation, agroforestry nurseries and community-led biodiversity monitoring.

81. Market-based incentives such as eco-certification and carbon-offset calculators have proven effective in rewarding responsible business practices. National authorities are encouraged to expand voluntary certification schemes and introduce circular-economy measures, such as phasing out single-use plastics and implementing comprehensive waste management across all tourism enterprises.

82. The Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism and related circular-economy initiatives are accelerating sustainable consumption and resilient growth. Member States are encouraged to promote circular models for regenerative tourism across business operations and conservation to reduce waste, optimize resource use and restore ecosystems. These commitments position tourism as a catalyst for sustainable, resilient and inclusive development.

83. Biodiversity and climate action contribute to sector resilience by safeguarding natural assets and diversifying tourism products. Member States are encouraged to explore science-based climate targets, integrate climate vulnerability assessments into tourism master plans and strategies and enhance access to green finance to support ecosystem restoration and low-emission mobility solutions.

84. The dedication of UN Tourism to sustainable and resilient tourism growth, exemplified by initiatives like the International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories, highlights the critical role of evidence-based management and monitoring in steering tourism development.

85. Digital transformation tools, such as georeferenced mapping platforms for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises and online carbon-footprint calculators, are empowering small tourism enterprises by providing market intelligence and performance tracking capabilities. Ongoing investment in inclusive digital infrastructure and accessible technologies supports greater local competitiveness and helps to bridge the digital divide.

86. Cross-border cooperation is key to boosting regional competitiveness. Member States are encouraged to further harmonize quality and sustainability standards, promote the region as a unified multi-destination and co-invest in transboundary conservation, such as marine corridor management, to strengthen branding and long-term resilience.

87. Engaging local and Indigenous communities as stewards of cultural and natural heritage strengthens tourism's role in supporting cultural identity, social cohesion and intergenerational knowledge transfer. To do so requires embedding recognition of Indigenous tourism governance within legal and policy frameworks, expanding material support for community-based accommodations and promoting equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms.

88. Innovation and community-driven tourism experiences are being increasingly embraced in response to traveller demand for local culture and nature. Governments and international partners are encouraged to promote collaborative approaches, such as co-learning workshops and community forums, that empower local communities, strengthen partnerships and foster sustainable and locally rooted tourism models.

89. Public-private partnerships continue to play a vital role in advancing conservation, heritage restoration and community development. Institutionalizing these alliances by building links between tourism authorities, environmental agencies, non-governmental organizations and private investors can strengthen support for equipment donation schemes, pooled funding for sustainable tourism projects and collaborative research on effective practices.
