Policy Recommendations adopted by 31st Session of the COMCEC

- **Encouraging visa facilitation among the Member States**

Rationale: Visa policies are some of the most important government policies influencing international tourism. Visa facilitation will enhance both tourism and economic growth. In the analytical study, it was pointed out that the establishment of standards and procedures for visas is closely linked to the development of tourism sector. In the OIC Member Countries, existing visa and entry policies limit the potential to build closer economic ties and take advantage of broader business opportunities with important tourism source markets. Visa facilitation was also highlighted in the responses of the Member Countries to the policy questions as one of the important policies that would facilitate travel in the Member Countries.

Some important areas for visa facilitation are given below:

- *Improving the delivery of information:* Information on entry formalities need to be provided timely, user-friendly (i.e. available in multiple languages, have simple instructions), reliable and accessible.

- Facilitating the processes for obtaining visas: There is a need to improve the efficiency of the application process through better usage of modern information technologies by service providers rather than using traditional methods like personal interviews, official documents or certificates, and long waiting periods.

- Lowering or eliminating visa application fees: Reducing the costs of travel can help to generate additional travel demand. Lowering or eliminating visa and other entry fees is one of the available and effective policy option to facilitate travel.

- Differentiating treatment to facilitate tourist travel: Visa processes can be facilitated for certain type of visitors including tourists arriving by cruise ship or chartered planes or easing visa restrictions for business people, etc.

- Promoting eVisa programs: An eVisa can be obtained easily anywhere with an internet connection and its saves time that the traveler would otherwise spend on visa applications at the country's missions or at the ports of entry into the country. It is especially beneficial for destinations without a widespread network of embassies or consulates.

- **Developing air linkages and increasing the airline capacity**

Rationale: Air travel development is an increasingly vital aspect of travel facilitation. Expanding the capacity for air travel by improving aviation infrastructure and creating new air routes between destinations has played a key role in the development of the global tourism market. The Analytical Study highlighted the need to create new air routes and increase airline capacity in the Member Countries to facilitate travel. In the Policy Questions circulated to the Member Countries by the CCO, "Insufficient air linkages" was one of the most frequently mentioned challenges faced by the Member Countries. Some important areas for developing air linkages among the Member Countries and the rest of the world and increasing the airline capacity in the Member Countries are given below:

- Partnering with airlines to expand access to visitor markets: Working with airlines to add additional routes, through Air Service Agreements or new infrastructure, can be beneficial to both the airline and the destination. Benefits include greater air passenger flows and revenues for airlines and airports, as well as the opportunity for the destination to expand its visitor market.

- Incorporating airlines into the destination's tourism profile: Partnering with airlines for destination promotion can improve available funding, expand reach into key source markets and increase visitation, recognizing the joint benefits of such partnership. Facilitating visa processes for transit passengers, for example, can increase visitation and spending while also creating a clear link between airline and destination for travelers.

- Making better use of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in airport infrastructure: Improving aviation infrastructure is a crucial means of improving visitation, including the physical airport infrastructure, alongside a raised profile and increased routes. Use of PPP is a proven way of raising necessary funding with returns evident for all parties, including higher visitation and spending for the destination as a whole.

- **Building and strengthening a skilled workforce on ICT-based tourism marketing in the Member States**

Rationale: The diffusion and usage of ICT tools in tourism sector has resulted in increasing demand for high quality IT staff, new skills and managerial requirements as well as courses, certificate programs and on-the-job trainings for the use of the technology. The Analytical Study highlighted that digital literacy is a critical component in the efficient implementation of ICT-based tourism marketing solutions. It was stressed that most of the OIC Member Countries have large skill gaps in the ICT-skilled workforce in tourism sector. Skill gaps are seen as the most consistent barrier for tourism businesses and destination marketing organizations to fully optimize their digital marketing strategies. For most of the OIC Member States, training curriculums do not include ICT related issues specifically applied to the tourism sector. Therefore, it is essential to develop specific policies and programs in the Member Countries to build and strengthen ICT-based tourism marketing skills. "Lack of skilled ICT-Based Tourism Marketing Workforce" is highlighted in the responses of the Member Countries to the policy questions as an important challenge faced by Member Countries in usage and diffusion of ICT-tools and services in tourism marketing.

- **Enhancing cooperation between the government and private sector on ICT usage and diffusion in tourism marketing**

Rationale: ICT usage is essential for enhancing the competitiveness of the tourism SMEs in the Member Countries since it enables their access to global markets. The analytical study pointed out that public sector can create an enabling environment for ICT-based tourism marketing through regular and proactive collaboration with the Private Sector. In this respect, governments may implement some policies and provide some incentives to raise awareness of the private sector as well as stimulate their interest for the ICT usage in tourism marketing. In the responses of the Member Countries to the policy questions, "limited collaboration among stakeholders" is stressed as one of the challenges faced by the Member Countries.

- **Developing comprehensive and effective digital marketing strategies in the Member States**

Rationale: A comprehensive and effective marketing strategy, which integrates multiple online marketing channels and articulates marketing goals, responsibilities, and measures for success, is a foundation for efficient ICT-based tourism marketing. The Analytical Study pointed out that considering the speed of changing trends and availability of new online platforms, without a well-planned strategy, ICT-based tourism marketing can easily be unfocused, resource-intensive and ineffective. It was stressed that the Member Countries need comprehensive and effective digital marketing strategies to better implement the ICT- based solutions in their tourism marketing efforts. In the responses to the policy questions, "Lack of digital marketing strategy" is also highlighted as one of the challenges faced by the Member Countries.