

THE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS HIGHLIGHTED BY THE 8TH MEETING OF THE TOURISM WORKING GROUP

The COMCEC Tourism Working Group (TWG) has successfully held its 8th Meeting on September 1st, 2016 in Ankara, Turkey with the theme of “*Muslim Friendly Tourism (MFT) Developing and Marketing MFT Products and Services in the OIC Member States.*” During the Meeting, Tourism Working Group, made deliberations for policy approximation among the Member Countries regarding developing and marketing MFT products and services. The Room Document, prepared in accordance with the main findings of the analytical study conducted specifically for the 8th Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group titled “*Muslim Friendly Tourism (MFT) Developing and Marketing MFT Products and Services in the OIC Member States*” and the answers of the Member Countries to the policy questions sent to the COMCEC Tourism Working Group focal points by the COMCEC Coordination Office. During the Meeting, the participants agreed on the policy recommendations included in the Room Document. The existing document includes these policy recommendations highlighted during the Meeting.

Policy Advice 1. Developing a national Muslim Friendly Tourism strategy that links to the country’s overall tourism goals through focusing on building stakeholder awareness, establishing a dedicated MFT body/committee and developing a national MFT products/services and marketing development strategy

Rationale:

The role of government is very crucial for developing Muslim friendly tourism (MFT) sector. In the OIC Member Countries, the governments provide support and guidance to the private sector in varying degrees. These efforts vary from raising awareness on MFT market potential and Muslim consumer needs among tourism product and service providers, to supporting providers in developing and certification of MFT products and services or engaging in destination marketing. However, for developing effective MFT products and services development and marketing policies, a national MFT strategy should be developed as part of the country’s overall tourism goals and strategy. In this regard, the Analytical Study proposes the following steps to successfully apply a sustained and high impact MFT products and marketing strategy:

- 1. Build internal stakeholder awareness within government tourism stakeholders*
- 2. Establish a dedicated MFT body or committee that reports to the Ministry of Tourism*
- 3. The dedicated body should develop and drive national MFT products/services and marketing development strategy and initiatives.*

Policy Advice 2. Conducting government-led MFT-focused destination marketing through developing an MFT branding and positioning for the benefit of local service providers and measuring the potential of a destination for MFT by funding/organizing short-term campaigns.

Rationale:

In tourism sector, cooperation and network among the different stakeholders is crucial for the destination marketing. Governments play a key role in destination marketing as an aggregator as well as a platform provider for communication for the various stakeholders. In MFT sector, one of the most rapidly growing sub-sector in tourism area, the *Analytical Study* identified government-led destination marketing policies as a key area of public policy gaps and

opportunity areas. Accordingly, national MFT destination marketing efforts bear particular importance kick-start and build momentum for successful MFT product/service development and marketing.

For an effective destination marketing, common branding led by governments enables tourism industry to improve their marketing positioning and create joint marketing and promotional initiatives. In this respect, the national tourism bodies in the member countries should develop a MFT branding and positioning for the local service providers and suppliers. Moreover, in order to promote a destination of an MFT brand, there is a need to test its MFT potential. In this respect, launching/ organizing government-led short-term campaigns can facilitate testing that potential.

Policy Advice 3. Supporting SMEs through developing training and mentorship programs

Rationale:

Governments provide a wide range of support for tourism SMEs in mainstream tourism sector. However, in MFT sector, as a relatively new area in the tourism field, there is still need for providing support to SMEs particularly through developing training and mentorship programs. Training programs help enhance the human capacity of the MFT industry on tailoring their products and services to the MFT market as well as on effectively marketing their products and services. Furthermore, mentorship programs is an important instrument for developing the skill and expertise of the tourism industry by pairing each SME with a mentor.

Policy Advice 4. Developing bilateral tourism cooperation within the OIC through technical knowledge exchange and joint promotion efforts for MFT destinations

Rationale:

According to the analytical study, some OIC countries have well-developed halal ecosystems and adequate awareness. Nonetheless, while many member countries have low awareness level despite having halal ecosystem (such as halal food, Islamic heritage), others do not have well-developed MFT ecosystem and have low awareness about MFT. In this regard, the *Analytical Study* has identified bilateral cooperation as a crucial mechanism for technical knowledge exchange in the area of MFT. Technical knowledge transfer among the well-developed and other OIC Member countries would increase the MFT awareness and capacity for catering to the MFT market.

Instruments to Realize the Policy Advices:

- ***COMCEC Tourism Working Group:*** In its subsequent two meetings, the COMCEC Working Group will elaborate on the above mentioned policy issues in a more detailed manner. The 9th Meeting of the Tourism Working Group will be held with the theme of “*Muslim Friendly Tourism (MFT): Regulations for Accommodation Establishments in the OIC Member Countries.*”
- ***COMCEC Project Funding:*** Under the COMCEC Project Funding, the COMCEC Coordination Office calls for project proposals each year. With the COMCEC Project Funding, the Member Countries participating in the Working Groups can submit multilateral cooperation projects to be financed through grants by the COMCEC Coordination Office. For the above mentioned policy areas and their sub-areas, the Member Countries can utilize the COMCEC Project Funding and the COMCEC Coordination Office may finance the successful projects. The projects may include seminars, training programs, study visits, exchange of experts, workshops and preparing analytical studies, needs assessments and training materials/documents, etc.
- ***OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum:*** In its meetings, the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum may elaborate on the above mentioned policy areas and the sub-areas from the private sector perspective.