

## **THE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS HIGHLIGHTED BY THE 6<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE TOURISM WORKING GROUP**

Distinguished Members of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group,

The COMCEC Tourism Working Group (TWG) has successfully held its 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015 in Ankara, Turkey with the theme of “*Effective Tourism Marketing Strategies: ICT-Based Solutions for the OIC Member Countries.*” During the Meeting, Tourism Working Group, made deliberations for policy approximation among the Member Countries regarding ICT-based tourism marketing. The Room Document, prepared in accordance with the main findings of the analytical study conducted specifically for the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the COMCEC Tourism Working Group titled “*Effective Tourism Marketing Strategies: ICT-Based Solutions for the OIC Member Countries*” 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, was the main input for the discussions. 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.

The Member States of the TWG are kindly invited to communicate their observations on this document, if there are any, to the COMCEC Coordination Office by September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The comments received before September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015 will be able to be incorporated into the Document. After incorporating the Member States’ contributions, this document will be submitted to the 31<sup>st</sup> Ministerial Meeting of the COMCEC to be held on 23-26 November 2015 in İstanbul, as an outcome of the 6<sup>th</sup> TWG Meeting.

The Tourism Working Group underscored the importance of:

### ***1- Building and Strengthening a Skilled Workforce on ICT-Based Tourism Marketing in the Member Countries***

**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.

### ***2- 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.

### ***3- Developing comprehensive and effective digital marketing strategies in the Member Countries***

***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.

#### ***Instruments to Realize the Policy Recommendations:***

- ***COMCEC Tourism Working Group:*** In its subsequent meetings, the COMCEC Working Group may elaborate on the above mentioned policy areas in a more detailed manner.
- ***COMCEC Project Funding:*** Under the COMCEC Project Funding, the COMCEC Coordination Office calls for project 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, the Member Countries can utilize the COMCEC Project Funding and the COMCEC Coordination Office may finance the successful projects in this regard. The projects may include seminars, training programs, study visits, exchange of experts, workshops and preparing analytical studies, needs assessments and training materials/documents, etc.
- ***Capacity Building Activities:*** With the COMCEC Coordination Office’s resources and Member Countries’ own resources, some capacity building and technical assistance programs on the aforementioned policy areas can be organized in the Member Countries. These activities 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 next meetings, the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum may elaborate on the above mentioned policy areas from the private sector perspective.