



**Report of the 13th Meeting of the
OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum
(8 October 2025, Virtual Meeting)**

1. The 13th Meeting of the OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum was held on October 8, 2025 as a virtual meeting with the theme of “Tourism and Rural Development in OIC Countries”.
2. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Enis Uğur, Coordinator of Multilateral Relations Branch at the Directorate of EU and Foreign Relations in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye.
3. The Meeting agreed on the following Agenda items:
 - State of rural tourism and rural development in OIC Member Countries.
 - Integration of tourism with agriculture, gastronomy, and cultural heritage.
 - Community-based tourism and inclusive participation of women and youth.
 - Environmental sustainability and biodiversity protection in rural areas.
 - Digitalization and innovation in rural tourism enterprises.
 - Access to finance and capacity building for rural tourism actors.
 - Joint promotion and marketing of rural destinations.
 - Strengthening multilateral cooperation and knowledge sharing among OIC Members.
4. The Meeting was attended by the public and private sector representatives from the following Member and Observer States:
 - Republic of Azerbaijan
 - Kingdom of Bahrain
 - People's Republic of Bangladesh
 - Burkina Faso
 - Arab Republic of Egypt
 - Republic of Gambia
 - Republic of Indonesia
 - Islamic Republic of Iran
 - Republic of Iraq
 - Kingdom of Jordan
 - Kyrgyz Republic
 - State of Kuwait
 - Malaysia
 - Kingdom of Morocco



- Republic of Mozambique
 - Federal Republic of Nigeria
 - Sultanate of Oman
 - Islamic Republic of Pakistan
 - State of Qatar
 - Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
 - Federal Republic of Somalia
 - Republic of Togo
 - Turkmenistan
 - Republic of Türkiye
 - United Arab Emirates
 - Republic of Uzbekistan
5. In addition to the COMCEC Coordination Office (CCO), representatives from the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), UNDP Türkiye, SMIIC, UN Tourism and distinguished guests from member states attended the Meeting.
6. At the outset, Mr. Enis Uğur, Coordinator of Multilateral Relations Branch at the Directorate of EU and Foreign Relations in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye, delivered an opening speech and welcomed the participants to the meeting.
7. In the opening remarks, Mr. Gürkan Polat, Head of Department at the COMCEC Coordination Office (CCO), emphasized the multidimensional role of tourism in fostering economic and social development across OIC Member Countries. He highlighted that rural tourism contributes to economic diversification, cultural heritage preservation, and community empowerment, while also generating employment and preventing migration from rural to urban areas by strengthening local economies and promoting women's and youth participation in the workforce. Stressing that tourism remains a key driving force, Mr. Polat underlined the need for comprehensive national strategies integrating tourism and rural development.
8. In her opening statement, Ms. Gözde Şahin, Director of Directorate of EU and Foreign Relations, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Republic of Türkiye, welcomed the participants to the 13th OIC/COMCEC Private Sector Tourism Forum. She noted that the Forum provides a valuable opportunity for OIC Member States to exchange ideas, share experiences, and showcase good practices in rural tourism development. Ms. Şahin emphasized that tourism is much more than a leisure activity, serving as a major driver of economic growth, job creation, and social inclusion. Highlighting Türkiye's

experience, she noted that the country stands out as a model in rural tourism and development with its diverse landscapes, agricultural heritage, rich gastronomy, and vibrant rural culture. She added that Türkiye has implemented several successful initiatives with the support of public institutions and local stakeholders. Underlining the importance of addressing environmental, social, and economic dimensions of tourism together, Ms. Şahin stressed that OIC Member Countries share many similar challenges and opportunities in developing sustainable rural tourism. Concluding her remarks, Ms. Şahin expressed her gratitude to all speakers as well as to all participating country representatives, institutions, and interpreters for their valuable contributions.

9. In his opening statement, Mr. Enis Uğur, also the Moderator, underlined that as one of the world's fastest-growing industries, tourism is a vital pillar of economic growth and social development. He noted that tourism not only generates foreign exchange revenues but also creates employment, supports infrastructure development, preserves natural and cultural heritage, and helps reduce poverty and inequality by strengthening local economies. Referring to UN Tourism's World Tourism Barometer and SESRIC data, Mr. Uğur stated that international tourist arrivals reached 1.5 billion in 2024. He emphasized that, despite this positive progress, challenges such as infrastructure gaps, limited accessibility, and digital transformation remain. In this regard, he highlighted the potential of rural tourism to diversify tourism products, enhance regional connectivity, and promote balanced and sustainable growth across OIC Member States.
10. In his comprehensive presentation, Mr. Jost Neumann, Coordinator of the Tourism for Rural Development Programme at UN Tourism, emphasized that tourism today is a transformative force capable of bridging the rural–urban divide, empowering local communities, and preserving cultural and natural heritage. He highlighted that rural areas, which host 80% of the world's key biodiversity and the majority of communities living in poverty, face structural challenges such as depopulation, informal employment, and limited access to energy and digital infrastructure. In this context, the Tourism for Rural Development Programme, established in 2021, seeks to advance the role of tourism as a driver of inclusive growth through an integrated approach linking cultural heritage preservation, nature conservation, infrastructure and agricultural planning, entrepreneurship, and access to finance. Mr. Neumann underlined that only some of UN Tourism Member States explicitly integrate tourism into their rural development frameworks, which signals the need for stronger advocacy, capacity building, and policy coordination. Based on field experience, he shared several key recommendations: improving access to finance for rural communities, developing more innovative vocational training models that align with private sector needs, promoting agrotourism and adventure tourism to diversify rural livelihoods, and establishing interministerial coordination between tourism, culture, agriculture, and environment authorities to

design holistic strategies. He also highlighted ongoing initiatives such as the Best Tourism Villages and the Small Grants Programme, which aim to strengthen local capacity, enhance product quality, and connect rural destinations with tourism value chains. Mr. Neumann concluded by inviting policymakers and partners to collaborate with UN Tourism in scaling up these efforts to ensure that “no village is left behind” and that tourism truly becomes a force for balanced and inclusive rural development.

11. In her presentation, Ms. Aslı Çakın Dağlı, Project Manager at UNDP Türkiye, underlined that tourism has long been one of UNDP’s key tools for advancing inclusive economic growth, environmental sustainability, and community empowerment. She emphasized that sustainable and community-based tourism, when designed with local participation, has the power to reduce inequalities, generate income, and preserve both cultural identity and natural heritage. Ms. Çakın Dağlı noted that tourism’s success depends on strong public–private partnerships and the engagement of local communities, particularly in rural areas where tourism can help diversify economies, create employment for women and youth, and reduce migration to cities. She highlighted the growing importance of gastronomy and cultural tourism, which foster appreciation for local traditions and strengthen the connection between visitors and host communities. Drawing from UNDP’s field experience in Türkiye, she introduced the Sentrum Project in Birgi, a rural town recognized among UN Tourism’s Best Tourism Villages. The project serves as a model for transforming small-scale destinations into sustainable and resilient communities through energy efficiency, cultural preservation, and local entrepreneurship. Concluding her remarks, Ms. Çakın Dağlı emphasized that rural tourism, when supported by inclusive planning and environmental responsibility, can become a powerful driver for balanced regional development and a bridge between economic opportunity and cultural continuity across OIC Member Countries.
12. Ms. Yeşim Kantaş Erdoğan, Coordinator at the General Directorate of Agricultural Reform, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of the Republic of Türkiye, presented the IPARD Programme, implemented under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) of the European Union to support rural development and alignment with the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy. She explained that through IPARD’s Farm Diversification and Business Development Measure (M7), Türkiye has supported initiatives such as rural tourism and recreational activities, handicrafts, renewable energy, and aquaculture, contributing to the diversification of rural economies and job creation. Ms. Kantaş Erdoğan noted that since 2011, 1,012 rural tourism and recreational projects have been implemented with a total investment of around €242 million, including €128 million in public contribution. She also shared several best practice examples from different regions of Türkiye, demonstrating how small-scale

accommodation, eco-friendly infrastructure, and community-led initiatives have enhanced local entrepreneurship and supported sustainable rural development.

13. Ms. Cansu Durmaz, Product Marketing Manager at TGA, emphasized the importance of sustainable tourism in fostering local development and diversifying rural economies. She highlighted that TGA's initiatives aim to extend tourism beyond major destinations by promoting cultural routes, gastronomy, and community-based tourism that support rural livelihoods. Ms. Durmaz also underlined the role of Türkiye's Sustainable Tourism Program and participation in the UN Tourism Best Tourism Villages Initiative as key examples of integrating sustainability, heritage preservation, and local entrepreneurship into national tourism policy.
14. Eng. Adel El Gendy, Director General of the Strategic Department at Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, presented Egypt's approach to advancing rural tourism as a driver of sustainable development. He underlined the close interrelation between rural, wellness, and agritourism, all of which promote community participation, environmental protection, and awareness of local culture and traditions. Egypt's diverse natural and cultural assets — from the Nile Valley and Western Desert oases to Upper Egypt villages and protected areas such as Ras Mohammed and Wadi Al-Rayan — were highlighted as key resources for eco-friendly and authentic tourism experiences. Mr. El Gendy also discussed the main challenges facing rural tourism, including limited infrastructure, pollution, funding constraints, and the effects of climate change on agricultural landscapes and biodiversity. He emphasized that addressing these challenges requires stronger coordination among government bodies, the private sector, and civil society, as well as enhanced environmental education and policy implementation. He concluded by showcasing successful rural tourism examples, notably the selection of Siwa, Dahshur, Gharb Suhayl, and Abu Ghosoun villages under the UN Tourism "Best Tourism Villages" initiative, which reflects Egypt's growing commitment to sustainable, inclusive, and community-based rural tourism.
15. Dr. Putu Diah Sastri Pitanatri, Head of Research and Community Service Centre at Bali Tourism Polytechnic, shared insights on balancing rural tourism, agriculture, and sustainability in Indonesia, with a particular focus on Bali. She underlined that rural tourism in Bali is deeply rooted in the Tri Hita Karana philosophy, which promotes harmony with God, people, and nature—forming the foundation for culturally grounded sustainable development. Through case studies such as Jatiluwih and Taro villages, she illustrated how community-led governance, eco-farming, and cultural preservation can coexist with tourism growth. Dr. Pitanatri highlighted that rural tourism has created new economic opportunities through women-led cooperatives, youth eco-guides, and

agritourism enterprises, increasing family incomes and revitalizing rural livelihoods. She also noted policy efforts to manage growth—such as the 2024 hotel construction moratorium in South Bali, which redirected investment towards rural areas. Despite challenges like land conversion and youth migration, Bali’s experience shows that traditional wisdom and modern innovation can together drive inclusive, resilient, and environmentally responsible rural tourism development.

16. As the representative of Azerbaijan, Mr. Fariz Qarayev shared his country’s experiences in the field of rural development and tourism. He underlined that rural tourism plays an important role in socio-economic development of the regions in the country, creating additional income for the residents and stimulating local economies. He stated that Azerbaijan has created legal framework for rural tourism, consisting of both regional and national levels.
17. Mr. Enis Uğur, the Moderator, concluded the meeting by thanking all of the distinguished participants and speakers for their invaluable efforts and contributions. He wrapped up the previous sessions and presented the conclusions.
18. The participants highlighted the following items to develop and promote rural development and tourism:
 - The Forum emphasized that rural tourism serves as an important driver for sustainable and inclusive development, creating jobs, supporting local economies, and preserving cultural and natural heritage.
 - Participants underlined the importance of community participation and ownership to ensure that local populations, particularly women and youth, benefit directly from tourism development.
 - It was highlighted that linking tourism with agriculture, gastronomy, and handicrafts helps diversify rural economies and strengthen community resilience.
 - The Forum noted that environmental sustainability and biodiversity protection should remain central to all rural tourism strategies.
 - It was acknowledged that digitalization and improved infrastructure are crucial for increasing accessibility, competitiveness, and visibility of rural destinations in OIC countries.
 - The capacity building, technical assistance, and access to finance are key to empowering rural entrepreneurs and SMEs.
 - The Forum called for stronger cooperation between public and private sectors, international organizations, and local communities to exchange experiences and good practices.



- Finally, participants emphasized that joint international promotion initiatives, such as UN Tourism's Best Tourism Villages, could increase global visibility and support sustainable rural development in OIC Member Countries.

17. The meeting ended with vote of thanks.