

Draft Policy Recommendations

to be discussed by the COMCEC Tourism Working Group, in its 25th Meeting

(15th -16th September 2025)

“Improving the Quality and Sustainability in Heritage Tourism in OIC Countries”

There will be a moderation session during the Working Group Meeting under the title of “Formulation of Policy Recommendations for the 41st COMCEC Ministerial Session” on “Improving the Quality and Sustainability in Heritage Tourism in OIC Countries” on 1-4 November, 2025. This document has been prepared to enrich the discussions on improving the quality and sustainability in heritage tourism in OIC to come up with concrete policy recommendations for policy approximation among the Member Countries. It has been drafted in accordance with the main findings of the research report conducted for this meeting.

The policy recommendations are as follows:

Policy Advice 1. Strengthening legal protection, governance, and risk preparedness by establishing and updating tangible/intangible heritage inventories, legislation, monitoring systems, and risk and crisis management protocols.

Rationale: Sustainable heritage tourism requires a solid legal and institutional foundation. It is important to have comprehensive heritage conservation and safeguarding legislation that covers both tangible and intangible assets, aligning international standards, and combat smuggling and illicit trade. Smuggled heritage items should be followed through various formal and informal channels and brought back to where they belong. This approach also involves identification and regular updating of national inventories, with systems to monitor and assess their condition periodically. Local heritage councils can play an important role in coordinating across ministries and local authorities, while ensuring community consultation so that residents have a meaningful voice in decision-making. Standardized inspection and maintenance schedules, backed by dedicated budgets, can help guard against neglect and degradation of heritage. Integrating risk and crisis management protocols into heritage

frameworks can strengthen resilience against climate change, earthquakes, floods, and other potential hazards. An OIC wide digital platform to facilitate knowledge transfer, register, manage and showcase both tangible and intangible heritage is also suggested.

Policy Advice 2. Securing sustainable funding for conservation, and safeguarding through funds, tax allocations, partnerships, and transparent mechanisms.

Rationale: Considering the vast amount and variety of heritage assets in OIC and challenges in protection of these assets and resources, it is important to place safeguarding and conservation at the forefront before pursuing tourism expansion. Allocating budgets for stabilization, renovation, and preventive management, guided by updated inventories and monitoring is essential. Once the foundation of preservation is secured, sustainable financing mechanisms can be introduced. Establishing dedicated heritage conservation and safeguarding funds—drawing on tourism levies, tax allocations, private sponsorship, tax incentives, and international grants—can provide a more stable resource base. Moving beyond sole reliance on state budgets, public–private partnerships can also be encouraged to support restoration and adaptive reuse projects. Transparent revenue-sharing approach can help to ensure that funds are reinvested directly into conservation, safeguarding and community development, preventing economic leakages and building long-term sustainability.

Policy Advice 3. Diversifying heritage tourism products including new heritage elements in emerging destinations, and managing visitor demand aligned with carrying capacities of the respective tourism destination

Rationale: Various heritage assets in OIC have already been attracting millions of visitors and such over tourism at iconic sites has led to congestion, degradation, and reduced visitor satisfaction. Carrying capacities, zoning restrictions, and reservation systems, supported by digital monitoring and ticketing technologies, to balance visitor flows may help to address these challenges. At the same time, demand can be distributed more evenly through diversification of heritage offerings. This includes the development of new heritage sites such as new excavations, thematic heritage tours such as faith circuits, gastronomy trails, and craft villages, along with regional heritage corridors. Diversification can highlight intangible heritage—festivals, oral traditions, performing arts, and local food and culinary

practices—ensuring that heritage tourism not only conserves monuments but also safeguards the living traditions of OIC societies.

Policy Advice 4. Promoting, branding, and improving visitor experience through marketing communications, storytelling, infrastructure improvements, and smart technologies.

Rationale: Effective branding is essential for competitiveness in global tourism markets. Storytelling-based campaigns that highlight cultural identity and authenticity, promoting both monuments and living traditions could be very instrumental in this manner. Marketing strategies can be tailored to diverse niche segments such as cultural, faith, culinary, and educational tourism through digital channels and traditional media. Visitor experience can be enhanced through facilities, signage, rest areas, and reliable transport connections, with inclusive services. Technology could play a central role, including AI-based monitoring, immersive VR/AR interpretation, e-museums, digital ticketing platforms, apps and maps which improve both engagement and visitor management. Combining branding with visitor experience ensures that OIC destinations deliver authentic, high-quality experiences. Various international listings (e.g. UNESCO Tangible / Intangible Heritage Assets, Creative Cities, CittaSlow, Michelin Stars etc.) can also be encouraged not only to conserve and safeguard these sites and resources but also branding and positioning them in the market.

Policy Advice 5. Empowering communities through awareness, involvement, providing incentives for local employment, and developing benefit-sharing mechanisms.

Rationale: Heritage resources are often shared assets, and their conservation, safeguarding and monitoring become more effective when local communities are actively involved. Institutionalizing community consultation and participation within tourism planning, ensuring that residents are involved in decision-making process are also important. Local hiring opportunities and employment schemes can help deliver direct economic benefits to communities, while transparent benefit-sharing approaches can ensure that revenues from ticketing and concessions are reinvested into community projects and small enterprises. Creating awareness and capacity-building programs, events, festivals can further strengthen local ownership of heritage, while youth engagement through entrepreneurship, creative industries, volunteerism, and training may ensure intergenerational continuity, particularly

concerning intangible cultural heritage. Embedding communities at every stage of heritage tourism strengthens livelihoods and preserves cultural identity.

Instruments to Realize the Policy Recommendations:

COMCEC Tourism Working Group: In its subsequent meetings, the Working Group may elaborate on the above-mentioned policy areas in a more detailed manner. Working Group may work on a prioritization and sequencing of the policy areas.

COMCEC Project Funding: Under the COMCEC Project Funding, the COMCEC Coordination Office calls for projects each year. With the COMCEC Project Funding, the Member Countries participating in the Working Groups can submit projects to be financed by the COMCEC. For the above-mentioned policy areas, the Member Countries can utilize the COMCEC Project Funding and the COMCEC Coordination Office can support financing the successful projects in this regard. These projects may include training programs, study visits, workshops, organizing seminars, peer-to-peer experience sharing, needs assessments and producing promotional materials/documents.