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**Working Papers on Tourism**

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**SECTION I**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

With its huge potential, tourism can be a powerful tool for regional development, as it stimulates new economic activities and has a positive economic impact on employment and community development in reducing inequalities. The ECO Vision 2025 considering the huge potential of tourism industry as a driver for economic and social development has afforded prime significance to this industry as one of the main priority areas of regional cooperation and therefore has set the strategic goal of establishing a peaceful and green tourism destination with diverse products and high quality services in the region.

Tourism has over the last few decades become one of the largest and fastest growing industries. According to WTTC, before the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism and travel had become one of the most important sectors in the global economy accounting for almost 10.3% of the global GDP and creating more than 330 million jobs across the world. During the past five years, one in four of all new jobs created across the world have been in Travel & Tourism. Prior to the corona virus outbreak, the global tourism sector had seen almost uninterrupted growth for decades.  However, according to UNWTO, global tourism suffered its worst year on record in 2020, with international tourist arrivals declining by 74% in 2020 compared to 2019 and international tourism receipts performing a 64 % decline in 2020, which is 80% down when compared to the same period of pre-pandemic year 2019. That equates to a decline of around 1 billion international arrivals, bringing the industry back to levels last seen in the late 1980s.

According to WTTC’s annual research, the travel and tourism sector suffered a loss of almost US$4.5 trillion to reach US$4.7 trillion in 2020, with the contribution to GDP dropping by a staggering 49.1% compared to 2019; relative to a 3.7% GDP decline of the global economy in 2020. In 2019, the travel and tourism sector contributed 10.4% to global GDP; a share which decreased to 5.5% in 2020 due to ongoing restrictions to mobility. In 2020, 62 million jobs were lost, representing a drop of 18.5%, leaving just 272 million employed across the sector globally, compared to 334 million in 2019. The threat of job losses still persists as many jobs have been supported by government retention schemes and reduced hours, which without a full recovery of travel & tourism could be lost. Domestic visitor spending also decreased by 45%, while international visitor spending declined by an unprecedented 69.4%.

In the first five months of 2021, the countries have reported very weak revenues due to continued travel restrictions. After a weak start of the year, international tourism displayed a modest improvement during the months of June and July 2021 which was underpinned by the reopening of many destinations to international travel, mostly in Europe and the Americas. The relaxation of travel restrictions to vaccinated travelers, along with progress made globally with the gradual increase in vaccination rates contributed to loosening of travel restrictions, lifting consumer confidence and gradually restoring safe mobility in mot of the world.

According to UNWTO, despite the relative increase over the low levels of 2020, international tourism remained well below 2019 levels in 2021. International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) dropped by 40% in January-July 2021 compared to the same period of 2020. Yet, this was still 80% below the levels of pre-pandemic year 2019. This sharp decline represents a loss of some 677 million international arrivals compared to the same seven months of 2019, or 110 million compared to 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on individual countries and destinations are changing continuously depending on the level of spread and quarantine restrictions. It is estimated that the recovery of the sector will likely start with rising demand on the side of the travelers for domestic tourism due to the fear of getting infected or being left quarantined in a distant destination while travelling. While governments have extended some support so far to prevent the effects of the pandemic on tourism and travel, it remained mostly domestic and interventions focused on retaining jobs and ensuring key businesses survive.

Looking ahead, according to UNWTO projections, a rebound is expected in the second and third quarter of 2022, induced by the long suppressed demand. While most of the experts project a potential rebound in 2023, many experts forecast a return of international arrivals to 2019 levels in 2024 or later.

**TOURISM IN THE ECO REGION**

Despite the recent challenges exposed in tourism sector, prior to COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism industry had been the fastest growing sector globally surpassing the world trade and economy for the past decade. According to the latest figures, one out of ten jobs worldwide was directly connected to tourism. Showing a similar upward trend during the last decade, international travel to the ECO region in 2019 exceeded 87 million people, holding a total of 6 percent share in worldwide tourism arrivals. Considering the region's potential and population, the ratio between tourist arrivals and total international tourism expenditures is still relatively modest. It is also reflected in the tourism revenues as the ECO region has received an international tourism receipt of around 49.3 billion dollars, which account for only 2.72 percent of the global tourism receipts. The average total contribution of travel and tourism sector to GDP in ECO region in 2019 was 7 percent, which is below the global average. In 2019, 10.3 percent of global GDP accounted for travel and tourism industries. Turkey was the main tourist destination in ECO region, registering the highest number and share of international tourist arrivals (11.3 percent) followed by Kyrgyzstan (8.3 percent) and Azerbaijan (7.2 percent).

Chart.1 Visitor Arrivals to ECO Region by Country of Destination, 2015-2019 (Thousands)

Source: National Statistical Offices of Member States, WB, UNWTO, WTTC

According to WTTC, more than 10 million individuals were employed in travel and tourism industry in 2019 within the ECO region accounting for around 6.9 percent of total employment. Around 10.7 percent of total export of the region in 2019 has been international tourism receipts.

In 2019, the intra regional tourist flows between ECO Member States accounted for more than 24 million with its total share standing at 27.5 percent, which is far below the potential. In 2019, Uzbekistan has registered 35.16 percent of the intra regional tourism followed by Kyrgyzstan at 12.81 percent, Azerbaijan at 12.51 percent and Kazakhstan at 11.53 percent.

Table.1 International Arrivals to ECO Region by Country of Origin, 2015-2019

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **2018** | **2019** |
| **Total** | 61,119,418 | 50,831,377 | 60,923,140 | 78,028,959 | 87,240,915 |
| Africa | 579,289 | 520,804 | 618,207 | 841,739 | 1,022,990 |
| Americas | 1,384,785 | 839,759 | 705,381 | 944,978 | 1,157,738 |
| East Asia and The Pacific | 1,742,915 | 1,146,119 | 1,332,684 | 1,695,945 | 1,992,871 |
| Europe | 43,469,785 | 35,016,907 | 42,873,243 | 55,972,361 | 62,701,824 |
| Middle East | 5,768,381 | 4,234,054 | 5,222,239 | 7,528,938 | 8,638,243 |
| South Asia | 3,068,977 | 3,262,373 | 4,376,124 | 4,217,587 | 4,867,775 |
| Others | 5,105,286 | 5,811,361 | 5,795,262 | 6,827,411 | 6,859,474 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Afghanistan | 590,468 | 783,938 | 850,264 | 1,127,261 | 1,396,075 |
| Azerbaijan | 1,726,380 | 1,766,778 | 1,786,494 | 2,578,475 | 3,004,062 |
| Iran | 1,874,167 | 1,944,933 | 2,886,061 | 2,260,915 | 2,373,918 |
| Kazakhstan | 4,558,447 | 4,251,541 | 4,974,547 | 2,775,619 | 2,768,412 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 1,726,592 | 1,742,966 | 1,842,660 | 2,571,215 | 3,076,097 |
| Pakistan | 305,380 | 302,493 | 377,770 | 459,633 | 617,950 |
| Tajikistan | 579,219 | 651,120 | 990,314 | 1,762,621 | 2,256,536 |
| Turkey | 929,688 | 925,587 | 1,010,312 | 1,263,165 | 1,673,965 |
| Turkmenistan | 543,732 | 413,151 | 499,973 | 641,940 | 973,086 |
| Uzbekistan | 2,809,353 | 2,973,307 | 4,355,861 | 8,642,133 | 8,439,984 |
| Intra ECO | 15,643,426 | 15,755,814 | 19,574,256 | 21,960,147 | 24,007,586 |
| Share | 25.6% | 31.0% | 32.1% | 28.1% | 27.5% |
| Extra ECO | 45,475,992 | 35,075,563 | 41,348,884 | 56,068,812 | 63,233,329 |
| Share | 74.4% | 69.0% | 67.9% | 71.9% | 72.5% |

Chart.2 Intraregional Arrivals to ECO Region by Country of Origin, 2019

In 2019, the number of visits from non-ECO countries was more than 63 million, accounting for a total of 72.5 percent. Around 71.87 percent of international visits were realized from Europe. This indicates the popularity of ECO region for Europeans as a tourist destination.

Chart.3 Visitor Arrivals to ECO Region by Region of Origin, 2019

There is limited data for 2020, yet the regional tourism sector was one of the hardest hit industries by the corona virus pandemic. The revised scenarios made by international tourism organizations indicate that the regional tourism sector shrank by 60 to 80 percent in 2020. It remained still in survival mode in 2021 until July when the global widespread use of vaccines has boosted hopes for recovery. It is estimated that post-pandemic recovery of tourism sector to 2019 levels in the region will be slow. Looking ahead, the measures taken today regionally will shape tourism of tomorrow. The current obstacles will turn into opportunities for recovery of tourism sector only with the active support and coordination among both public and private stakeholders nationally and regionally by jointly revitalizing regional travel. Only then the regional tourism sector will adjust and come stronger through the process.

As the ECO Member States look to recover from the pandemic, they increasingly recognize the economic and social benefits associated with tourism growth and the fact that there is a need to take the initiative to improve the tourism potential of the region and seek new ways to attract tourists and most importantly promote the exchange of tourists within the ECO region. With this aim, ECO Vision 2025 has set some objectives to help strengthen the tourism potential including strengthening ECO-Tourism brand, reviving Silk Road tourism, Visa facilitation, diversification of tourism activities, utilization of electronic media, human resource development and capacity building, adoption of relevant rules and procedures, establishment of standardization and accreditation bodies, establishment of sustainable and green tourism monitoring mechanisms, strengthening involvement of private sector and local community in the tourism activities and development of diverse means and new solutions to address emerging issues and range of markets to best serve the ideals and goals of sustainable tourism in the region.

While the impacts of COVID-19 on Tourism are still felt at every tourism destination, ECO Member States may try to turn the current challenge into an opportunity by working for a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient tourism sector. In order to prepare and respond effectively, it is time to plan regional tourism activities through clear objectives and an integrated approach bringing together all the stakeholders. The recovery must aim for investing in sustainable tourism to improve the relation of the sector with the local people, the economy and the natural environment to ensure a fairer distribution of tourism’s assets.

In the light of the emerging situation of Covid-19, ECO Secretariat prioritized the calendars of events to ensure they are held in virtual or in-person. Due to the restrictions of COVID-19 imposed in all Member States, the Member States couldn’t host ECO events, so most of the events planned for 2021 has not been held, however ECO delegation actively participated in the following 3 events:

**Meetings of the ECO Affiliated Bodies with ECO Secretariat Participation &**

**Non-ECO Events**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Event/Activity** | **Venue** | **Date** |
|  | 14th Tehran International Tourism and Handicraft Exhibition | Tehran, Iran  (Virtual/physical) | 23 - 26 February 2021 |
|  | International Festival titled "Dushanbe - ECO Tourism Capital" | Tajikistan  (Virtual/physical) | 29 August 2021 |
|  | International Forum on Agro-Tourism Development in Tajikistan | Tajikistan  (Virtual/physical) | 30 August 2021 |

**ECO Vision Guiding Lines:**

Guiding line for tourism development reflected in Serial no. i - x of Section 3D of ECO Vision 2025 as follows:

1. The ECO-Tourism brand through effective mediums at the regional, national and international levels will be strengthened in order to attract first-time and repeat visitors.
2. Silk Road tourism through cooperation with the international community and relevant organizations will be revived.
3. Visa facilitation for the citizens of the region.
4. Tourism activities will be diversified into various niches including; health/medical, ecological, culture, winter, sea, mountain sports, climbing, skiing, desert and religious.
5. In tourism promotional activities, utilization of electronic media will be increased.
6. Tourism related human resource development and capacity building activities will be promoted.
7. Relevant rules and procedures in tourism sector will be adopted in the ECO Region.
8. ‘Standardization and accreditation bodies’ and ‘sustainable and green tourism’ monitoring mechanisms will be established and improved in collaboration with international tourism bodies.
9. Private sector and local community involvement in the tourism activities will be strengthened.
10. Diverse means and new solutions will be developed and utilized to address emerging issues and range of markets to best serve the ideals and goals of sustainable tourism in the region.

**ECO VISION 2025**

**Implementation Framework on Tourism Sector**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **S. No.** | **Expected Outcome** | **Activities/Actions  to achieve the outcome** |
| **3D**  **i** | **The ECO-Tourism brand through effective mediums at the regional, national and international levels will be strengthened in order to attract first-time and repeat visitors** | 1. International and national consultants will be procured for developing a Draft Strategy |
| 1. Strategy on tourism, logo and motto will be adopted |
| 1. Strategy will be implemented |
| **3D**  **ii** | **Silk Road tourism through cooperation with the international community and relevant organizations will be revived.** | 1. Cooperation with members of the Silk Road will be enhanced |
| 1. Workshops on preservation of the ancient Silk Road monuments and cultural heritages will be organized |
| 1. ECO-Silk Road related events, exhibitions and festivals will be organized |
| 1. Close cooperation with international organizations will be established |
| **3D**  **iii** | **Visa facilitation for the citizens of the region.** | 1. Meetings of concerned authorities on moving toward visa free regime will be organized |
| 1. Electronic visa application will be encouraged |
| **3D**  **iv** | **Tourism activities will be diversified into various niches including; health/medical, ecological, culture, winter, sea, mountain sports, climbing, skiing, desert and religious.** | 1. Meetings on health tourism, ecotourism, religious tourism will be organized |
| 1. Data bank of specialized tourism destinations will be established |
| 1. Workshops\events on niche tourism activities will be conducted |
| 1. Unique in its kind World Nomad Games, initiated by Kyrgyz Republic on regular basis, will be held |
| **3D**  **v** | **In tourism promotional activities utilization of electronic media will be increased** | 1. Presence in the social media will be improved |
| 1. Collaboration with travel related advisory websites like Trip Adviser will be realized |
| 1. Specialized tourism website will be established |
| 1. GIS System for tourism destinations will be applied |
| **3D**  **vi** | **Tourism related human resource development and capacity building activities will be promoted** | 1. Workshops and training courses will be organized |
| 1. On-line training will be developed and promoted |
| 1. Leading tourism Member States will be encouraged to offer scholarships to less developed ones |
| **3D**  **vii** | **Relevant rules and procedures in tourism sector would be adapted in the ECO region** | 1. Easing of visa regulations will be encouraged |
| 1. Tourism friendly policies in the Member States will be encouraged |
| **3D**  **viii** | **‘Standardization and accreditation bodies’ and ‘sustainable and green tourism’ monitoring mechanisms will be established and improved in collaboration with international tourism bodies** | 1. Quality standards in the region will be institutionalized |
| 1. International standards will be adopted |
| 1. Training on international standards will be conducted |
| **3D**  **ix** | **Private sector and local community involvement in the tourism activities will be strengthened** | 1. Tourism business unit within the ECO- CCI will be established |
| 1. Tourism Agencies Federation of ECO will be established |
| 1. ECO tourism events in various cities of ECO Region will be organized |
| **3D**  **x** | **Diverse means and new solutions will be developed and utilized to address emerging issues and range of markets to best serve the ideals and goals of sustainable tourism in the region.** | 1. 1. Technical meetings for development of diverse means and new solutions will be conducted |

**SECTION II**

**PRIORITY AREAS**

**Priority Area 1**

**Cooperation for marketing, promotion and branding tourism activities**

1. **ECO Vision approach and target**

*“3Di- The ECO-Tourism brand through effective mediums at the regional, national and international levels will be strengthened in order to attract first-time and repeat visitors.*

*3Dx- Diverse means and new solutions will be developed and utilized to address emerging issues and range of markets to best serve the ideals and goals of sustainable tourism in the region.”*

*The activities to achieve this target are as follows:*

* *International and national consultants will be procured for developing a Draft Strategy*
* *Strategy on tourism, logo and motto will be adopted*
* *Strategy will be implemented*

A concerted common action by ECO Member States to embark on a joint tourism programme is imperative to provide the ECO region a more attractive, competitive, powerful and recognizable product image as a tourism destination and a strong institutional boost to highlight the attractiveness and variety of ECO tourism experience. Despite its unique natural and cultural assets, tourist arrivals to the ECO region are below its potential and it is a relatively less popular tourism destination internationally, while its image and hence potential is unsteady. In that regard, a common approach for marketing, promotion and branding regional tourism activities is critical and a regional collective promotion and marketing programme to promote the region, as a single destination must have to be developed with the collaboration of the tourism Ministries and private stake holders of the region.

1. **Background information**
2. **Tourism Core Documents: Tourism Charter, Strategy, and ECO Regional**

**Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development**

To achieve the tourism vision and outcomes laid in the Eco Vision 2025 and the implementation framework requires a concerted common systemic approach and action among the Member States. Isolated activities of the Member Countries have not served the regional tourism development in general. To utilize the great potential of the region, diversification and easement of tourism activities, availability of quality services and visibility of the area is a necessary requirement. In that sense, the primary requirement to achieve the ECO Vision aims in tourism sector is a regional harmonized systemic approach to coordinate cooperation among the ECO Member States through an action plan defining the strategic key areas based on the current needs and priorities of the Member States. The plan of action is to serve as a road map to achieve the objectives envisioned in the ECO Vision 2025 defining actions and implementation time lines focusing on the region’s main strengths, addressing its weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

In order to achieve a sustainable tourism development, the project of “ECO Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development” was considered by the 5th High Level Expert Group Meeting (HLWGM) on Tourism within the framework of 3rd Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in Khujand in 2019. The Khujand Declaration on tourism underlined the importance and the necessity of undertaking planned action to promote cooperation in the field of tourism among Member States through harmonized policies. Henceforth, the project concept was as well considered at the level of ECO’s Council of Ministers (COM) where it was endorsed as part of document set by the 24th COM on 8-9 November 2019 in Antalya (Turkey). The budgetary aspects of the project were also approved in due time by the 30th Regional Planning Council Meeting on 11-14 January 2020 in Tehran (Iran), upon which the project was included as part of ECO’s Work Program 2020 and 2021.

1. **Recent developments, latest decisions and progress since the 30th RPC**

This project is still currently under consideration. Draft of Term of Reference (ToR) has been prepared for hiring a Specialist to prepare the feasibility study of project. This ToR configures the scope of work as commensurate to the preparation of the full feasibility study. Selection of Specialist follows the procedures stipulated by Functional Methodology of ECO for this subject matter. The amount of US$10,000 has been requested to prepare the feasibility study of the project.

The main outputs expected to result from the preparation of the feasibility study are as follows:

1. **Feasibility study on the ECO regional action plan for sustainable tourism development**

* Feasibility study (economic/social/integrational/environmental) of the development of specialized tourism (health/medical, industrial, rural, ecotourism, cultural, winter, sea, mountain desert, religious) with sub-sectoral strategies identified and potential destinations determined.
* Assessment of current statuses of the traditional tourisms’ development in the ten ECO Member States, and also, of their legal frameworks set for standardization/accreditation/tourism monitoring mechanisms to be under the ECO framework.
* Preparing ECO Tourism compendium
* ECO tourism databank
* Assessment of capacities of local communities and private sector tourism entities of ECO countries to be potentially involved in regional tourism development under the ECO framework

1. **Preparing core Documents on Tourism**

* Draft ECO Tourism Charter
* Draft ECO Tourism Strategy and Action Plan

1. **Roadmap i.e. Action Plan for ECO regional sustainable tourism development**

* Set of Recommendations of ECO Member States on the Action Plan
* Strategy of ECO regional sustainable tourism development
* Harmonization among National Tourism Plan of Action of MSs
* Action Plan for ECO regional sustainable tourism development
* Introduction of Priority projects at ECO regional level

Due to the emerging global crisis brought about in the tourism sector by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretariat has taken up the chance to reconsider the direction of the regional tourism sector. ECO Secretariat through Note Verbale No. T/Tourism Project/2020/ 435 dated September 23, 2020, requested Member States to convey their views, plans and priorities in the relevant areas of tourism with special consideration of the circumstances developed in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic. Till now ECO Secretariat have received NVs of 6 Member States including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan and circulated their replies via 3 Notes Verbale No. T/Tourism Project/2020/ 531 dated October 6, 2020, No. T/Tourism Project/2020/ 597 dated November 5, 2020 and No. T/Tourism Project/2020/ 657 dated November 26, 2020 among the Member States.

**15th ECO Summit (November 28, 2021)**

In the Ashgabat Consensus for Action declared during the 15th ECO Summit held on 28 November 2021 in Turkmenistan, the Member States have “assigned Tourism Ministers of the Member States to take urgent measures in coping with serious challenges of the ECO tourism industry arising from covid-19 pandemic in line with other regional and global post-COVID initiatives.”

In that regard, to step up recovery of the regional tourism industry a “Draft Plan of Action on Elimination of Covid-19 Pandemic Consequences in the Tourism Sector for Facilitating Recovery in the ECO Region” has been prepared by the Secretariat to be used as a general framework for cooperation in tourism sector among the Member States to enable a targeted regional support and collaboration among the Member States and assist the recovery and regrowth of the regional tourism sector following the devastating impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was circulated for the proposals and views of the Member States via NV No: T/Tourism Plan of Action 2022/2021/1205 dated 4 November 2021. The proposals and views of the esteemed Member States would be incorporated in the proposed Plan of Action on tourism for consideration of the 6th HLEG Meeting on Tourism to be adopted by the 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism to be held in Bukhara, Uzbekistan in 2022.

1. **ECO Tourism Capital**

The Khujand Declaration adopted in the third ECO Ministerial Meetings on Tourism held on 4th October 2019, announced Dushanbe the Capital of the Republic of Tajikistan as ECO Tourism Capital for the years 2020-2021. Cities of Sari and Ardabil in the Islamic Republic of Iran are decided as the next ECO Tourism Capital(s) for the years 2022-2023 respectively.

**Recent developments**

International Nowruz Festival of "Dushanbe - ECO Tourism Capital" was held on 29-30 August 2021 in Tajikistan.

1. **Expected outcomes for 2022 and Secretariat’s recommendations**

a. The Council may appreciate the Republic of Uzbekistan for offering to host the 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting and 6th HLEG Meeting on Tourism in Bukhara city in 2022.

b. The Republic of Uzbekistan may kindly announce the exact dates of the event to enable the Secretariat to coordinate the preparations of the meeting on time.

c. Islamic Republic of Iran may kindly announce their arrangements for holding events within the framework of Cities of Sari and Ardabil as the ECO Tourism Capital in years 2022-2023.

d. The Council may request the contribution of MSs on the “Draft Plan of Action on Elimination of Covid-19 Pandemic Consequences in the Tourism Sector for Facilitating Recovery in the ECO Region” at earliest convenience to be finalized in the 6th HLEG Meeting on Tourism and adopted by the 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism to be held in Bukhara, Uzbekistan in 2022.

e. The Council may request the ECO Secretariat to take necessary action for conducting and finalizing a project for drafting tourism core documents including ECO Tourism Charter, ECO Tourism Strategy and ECO Tourism Action Plan based on the prepared Terms of Reference by recruiting specialist to be submitted to the 4th Ministerial Meeting on Tourism.

f. Considering that this issue has been pending with no tangible outcome over the years, the Council may task the Secretariat to prepare a draft ECO Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development as a zero draft to expedite the process. The project may be availed to develop a more comprehensive plan of Action with the contributions and inputs of the Member States based on the zero draft proposed by the Secretariat.

g. The Council may encourage the Secretariat to consider seeking technical assistance from relevant international organizations i.e. UNWTO, UNIDO, UNESCO, UNEP in this connection.

**Area Conclusion**

“Draft Plan of Action on Elimination of Covid-19 Pandemic Consequences in the Tourism Sector for Facilitating Recovery in the ECO Region” is ready and the most important thing is active contribution of MSs to finalize the document and to start the recovery of the sector in 2022.

With regards to the project, the draft TOR is ready and MSs may decide on conducting the study and hiring a Specialist to prepare the feasibility study of the project. The Secretariat may also develop a Draft Eco Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development based on the strategic key areas defined in the ECO Vision 2025 after a SWOT Analysis of the ECO Regional Tourism Sector. The Council may also task the Secretariat to prepare and circulate a draft ECO regional action plan for sustainable tourism development for comments and proposals of the Member States for further development.

**Priority Area 2**

**Cooperation in Promotion of Silk Road Tourism**

1. **ECO Vision approach and target**

“3D ii. Silk Road tourism through cooperation with the international community and relevant organizations will be revived.”

The activities which were supposed to achieve this target are as follows:

* Enhancing Cooperation with members of the Silk Road.
* Organizing Workshops on preservation of the ancient Silk Road monuments and cultural heritages.
* Organizing ECO-Silk Road related events, exhibitions and festivals.
* Establishing close cooperation with international organizations.

The Ancient Silk Road, which was the first global trade route in history, went from China to Eastern Europe. The Silk Road was important for generation of trade and commerce and served as the connection between East and West. This also facilitated the spread and interaction of ideas, culture, religion, art, inventions, and unique products across much of the settled world. Throughout its existence of over two thousand years, the Silk Road provided a vital link enabling people of diverse cultures to interact with each other.

With the rise of interest, in 1993 UNWTO started the Silk Road tourism initiative. UNWTO Silk Road initiative currently includes more than 34 countries and all ECO Member States are situated along this ancient route. UNWTO is trying to advocate the Silk Road tourism routes as a transnational tourism experience.

In light of the enduring legacy of the Silk Roads in connecting civilizations throughout history, the UNESCO Silk Roads Programme also aims to revive and extend the historic networks in a digital space, bringing people together in an on going dialogue and fostering a mutual understanding of the diverse and often inter-related cultures that have sprung up around these routes.

Building on the increasing international recognition of the Silk Road and reviving the historic silk routes in the region, ECO region has an extensive opportunity for developing sustainable tourism along the Silk Road. To maximize opportunities of the Silk Road Tourism initiative, while it is essential to create opportunities for research, exposure and collaboration to protect endangered cultural heritage sites along the Silk Road, there is a need to address some challenges including connectivity and visa facilitation among the ECO Member States and the target markets. To achieve the Silk Road Tourism objectives require dedicated engagement and support from the public and private stakeholders in the region and collaboration at the international level.

1. **Background information**

For promotion of regional Silk Road culture and traditions, the 25th RPC welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran for organizing the First ECO-Silk Road Food Festival in Zanjan, Iran. Variety of cuisines from several Member States, as well as Silk Road countries were served to a huge number of visitors during the events. The Festival is planned to take place on annual basis at the host city (Zanjan). The First International ECO - Silk Road Food Festival was held in 2015 in Zanjan. The Fifth International ECO - Silk Road Food Festival was held on 18-21 April 2019 in Zanjan.

ECO Food Festival held on 18-21 April 2019 in Zanjan was a successful experience in this regard. Gastronomy is about much more than food. It reflects the culture, heritage, traditions and sense of community of different peoples. It is a way of promoting understanding among different cultures, and of bringing people and traditions closer together. Gastronomy tourism is also emerging as an important protector of cultural heritage, and the sector helps create opportunities, including jobs, most notably in rural destinations.

The 27th RPC requested the Member States to form a contact group on the sidelines of Silk Road related meetings, conferences and events to effectively pursue the collective interests of ECO Region and enhance the role of ECO in international tourism market. The ECO Secretariat was also requested to participate in Silk Road related meetings, conferences and events and coordinate participation of Member States in such events within and outside the ECO Region.

1. **Recent developments, latest decisions and progress**

The worldwide outbreak of COVID-19, led to the cancellation of the 6th International ECO - Silk Road Food Festival in 2020 and 2021.

1. **Expected outcomes for 2022 and Secretariat’s recommendations**

a. The Council may advise the Member States to form a ECO Silk Road Task Force to increase cooperation and coordination to publicize Silk Road Tourism initiative with the cooperation of the Member States, international community and relevant organizations and promote ECO-wide Silk Road cultural heritages in all available platforms. The ECO Silk Road Task Force may come up with proposals to hold meetings, conferences and events to effectively pursue the collective interests of ECO Region and enhance the role of ECO in such arenas.

b. The Member States may appoint their focal points to the ECO Silk Road Task Force.

c. The Member States may decide on holding a regional meeting to create an effective Silk Road brand strategy, enhancing collaboration between Silk Road destinations and increasing consumer awareness.

d. The Council may request the Member States to hold international workshops, meetings, seminars, forums, fairs, exhibitions on gastronomy tourism and any other events to promote ECO-wide Silk Road cultural heritage. The interested Member States may propose to hold the Sixth ECO - Silk Road Food Festival in their countries along with the Meeting on Culinary Tourism.

d. To promote and revive tourism in the region in 2022, the Council may request the Member States to cooperate on preparing joint ECO Silk Road tour packages to bring regional and international tourists together with the unique cultural, spiritual, historical and gastronomic life of the traditional Silk Road.

e. The Member States may consider holding an annual competition of ECO Silk Road Tourist destinations to increase to publicize and promote ECO Silk Road tourism.

f. The Member States may consider holding ECO Silk Road Mayors Forum in 2022.

g. ECO Cultural Institute (ECI) may cooperate with the Secretariat and include this initiative in their program in 2022 to enhance the visibility of the ECO Silk Road destinations in their publications, exhibitions and events.

**Area Conclusion**

In line with the mandate of ECO Vision 2025 to promote regional Silk Road tourism and enhance cooperation with members of the Silk Road and international organizations, the active involvement and support of the Member States is essential. The Member States may appoint their focal points to the ECO-Silk Road Task Force and come up with concrete proposals for 2022 for holding Silk Road related meetings, conferences and events.

**Priority Area No. 3**

**Travel and Tourism Facilitation**

1. **ECO Tourism Visa:**
2. **ECO Vision approach and target**

*“3D iii. Visa facilitation for the citizens of the region.”*

*“3D vii. Relevant rules and procedures in tourism sector would be adapted in the ECO region*

The activities to achieve this target are as follows:

* Organizing Meetings of Visa Officials of the Embassies of ECO Member States in Tehran and concerned authorities on moving toward visa free regime which leads to developing the Roadmap
* Electronic visa application will be encouraged
* Easing of visa regulations will be encouraged
* Tourism friendly policies in the Member States will be encouraged

1. **Background information**

Major objective of defining ECO Tourism Visa is Tourist Visa Facilitation for non-ECO nationals for travelling to ECO Countries. The increase in tourism receipts resulting from visa facilitation is the product of the increased international tourist arrivals and the average spending per tourist. Tourism spending fuels Job creation in the travel and tourism sector. The spending of the additional tourists resulting from visa facilitation in ECO destinations directly supports jobs in tourism industries, including hotels, restaurants, retail stores, transportation, entertainment and recreation. The employment impacts are not limited to tourism industries. Indirect jobs are created through the supply chain of tourism industries and induced jobs are generated as employees spend their incomes in other sectors of the economy.

Visa and travel procedure facilitation for the citizens of the ECO and Non ECO regions has been always one of the important goals in Tourism Sector. In this regard and with respect to the purposes of the ECO Vision 2025, effective cooperation of all Member States are needed to promote tourism industry regionally.

The objective is to initially facilitate the process of travelling to ECO countries for the Non ECO citizens with the aim of tangible increase in tourism receipts and related revenues in ECO region. That’s mean for the third country citizens getting a tourist visa from a member states may be valid for travelling in other ECO countries, which may facilitate to ECO tour package. In other words a unified Tourist visa regime should be developed within the ECO region to extend tourist visa sticker with a specific label to the foreigners visiting ECO region. The mechanism should facilitate the process of obtaining tourist visa from any country of the ECO region and it should be valid for whole region for a specific period.

1. **Recent developments, latest decisions and progress**

The project of “**Pre-feasibility study of planning a mechanism for issuing ECO Tourist Visa for Non ECO Nationals**” was considered and approved by the 5th High Level Expert Group Meeting (HLWGM) on Tourism and supported by 3rd Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in Khujand in 2019. Henceforth, the project concept was as well considered at the level of ECO’s Council of Ministers (COM) where it was endorsed as part of document set by the 24th COM on 8-9 November 2019 in Antalya (Turkey). This project was also approved by the 30th Regional Planning Council Meeting on 11-14 January 2020 in Tehran (Iran), and the project was included as part of ECO’s Work Program 2020 and 2021.

It’s pertinent to mention that the ECO Transport Directorate has also followed up the issue of ECO Visa for drivers in recent years. During the **Consular Officials Meeting of Embassies of ITI and KTAI en-route Member States** which was held on 9 February 2020 at the ECO Secretariat in Tehran, the Senior Consular Officials from the Embassies of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kyrgyz Republic, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Republic of Tajikistan and Republic of Turkey discussed about the **"Visa Pilot Scheme"** among the KTAI & ITI Road Corridor en-route Member States.

As per Article 13 of the said Meeting, the Senior Consular Officials of Member States suggested **“if this Visa Pilot Scheme is successful among the en-route Member States, the ECO Secretariat would closely work with all the Member States to establish a uniform visa scheme as “ECO Visa” for citizens of all Member States traveling within the ECO region. Further it could be extended for non- ECO citizens/tourists entering the ECO region.”**

So signing and ratification of any ECO Agreement on Simplification and Harmonization of Visa Procedure for businessmen and drivers, can pave the way for following up the General ECO Visa.

ECO High Level Expert Meeting on Visa Facilitation, which was scheduled to be held in 2021, was not held due to the pandemic and ongoing global travel and visa restrictions.

1. **Expected outcomes for 2022 and Secretariat’s recommendations**
2. The Council may request the Member States to host ECO High Level Expert Meeting on Visa Facilitation to move towards a visa free travel regime in the region.
3. The meeting may discuss initiation of smart visa policies including electronic visa applications, changes to the method of visa issuance, including Tourist Visa on Arrival (VoA), immigration on board, introduction of other forms of travel authorization and improve processes and remove barriers to ease visits to ECO region by minimizing the deterrence to legitimate travelers whether for leisure or professional purposes and consider reducing fiscal and administrative burdens by setting up a common set of rules applying to people crossing the ECO borders, including automation and harmonization of entry requirements and the rules on issuance of visas for short stays
4. The Council may request the MSs to share with the Secretariat an informative report on their tourist visa regimes and procedures to ECO MSs and non-ECO MSs to prepare a report on the issue and distribute it among MSs before the 4th Ministerial Meeting on Tourism.
5. **Area Conclusion**

Active contribution of Consular Officials of Member States and close cooperation of Tourism and Transport directorates of the Secretariat are the most important factors regarding the implementation of ECO Tourism Visa.

1. **Travel Facilitation**

The Khujand Declaration adopted in third ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism, held on October 4, 2019, in Tajikistan the Tourism Ministers of ECO Member States have agreed to:

**“*Take initiatives*** *to develop coordination between transit transport, tourism sectors and strengthen intra-regional and international connectivity through all modes of transportation in order to ensure comfortable, economical, accessible and secure travel in ECO Region;*

***Develop*** *ECO tourism destinations particularly in the well known tourist-destinations of the Member States, creating a joint network to attract the tourists flow in the region;”*

1. **Background information**

Travel facilitation is closely linked with the development of Tourism and is a key contributor to the overall appeal of a destination, which can lead to increased demand and sustained tourism performance. Therefore, accessibility of the ECO region is the primary requirement for promoting tourism to and within the region. The development of the tourism industry throughout the region needs intra regional and international connectivity through all modes of the transportation in order to ensure comfortable, cheaper, accessible and secure travel in ECO Region. There is an immediate need for cooperation in the ECO region for making travel into and within ECO region easier and more efficient. Development of easy and cost effective air connectivity among all the ECO Member States will boost tourism flow within and to the region.

Due to inter linkages between transport and tourism sector to achieve the targeted aims for facilitation of mobility and accessibility of the region and tourism attractions, a cross-sectoral cooperation, consultation, planning, synchronization and harmonization of transport and tourism policy synergies and coordination of action among all the Member States and relevant stakeholders in public and private sector is strongly needed. To ensure smooth and cost-effective accessibility of the region and stimulate travel flows and tourism growth, Member States may collaborate on enhancing connectivity and route development via collaboration with the public and private airlines, tourism and transport ministries of the ECO Member States.

Air-travel being the most convenient and fastest way of travel, to promote trans boundary travel and dispersal of travel, the region would highly benefit holding meetings of transport, tourism and other relevant authorities for increasing aviation capacity and regulations to promote cost-effective air travel arrangements among Member States, with the broader objective of introduction of new air routes to lucrative priority markets, direct air links between potential regional tourism destinations, increased flight frequencies and improved travel connectivity overall.

The meetings of relevant authorities for improving land and rail connectivity to enhance accessibility and travel time between the main cross-border tourism attractions and cities among the Member States would also facilitate cross-border regional tourism activities.

In this context, railway transport occupies a core position in ECO’s overall transport sector. While there is a definite need to further improve the existing capacities of railway connections across all the borders in the region, even with the existing established routes and train capacities, there is a potential for increasing cooperation among the railways of ECO Member States to enhance connectedness of the region and facilitate tourism. To enhance domestic, intra-regional and international tourism as a cost-friendly travel alternative, the Tourism Directorate has prepared the proposal on ECO Regional Rail PASS initiative as a proposal enclosed as **Annex II**.

1. **Expected outcomes for 2022 and Secretariat’s recommendations**
2. The Member States may kindly review the Secretariat’s proposal with regards to ECO Regional Rail PASS initiative and come up with their comments and suggestions about its feasibility in their countries in collaboration with their National Railway Authorities.
3. Member States may host a joint meeting of aviation sector with the participation of transport and tourism officials from public and private stakeholders.
4. Similarly Member States may organize a joint meeting of railway and land transport authorities with the participation of transport and tourism officials from public and private stakeholders.
5. **Tourism Destination Chain and Connectivity**

There are several criteria/factors have been identified as most important to the choice of Tourism Destination. These criteria/factors include examination of the destination from perspectives such as culture, economic and political situations, climate, and accessibility of attractions (e.g., cultural events, monuments, and festivals), as well as from the viewpoint of the customers, their age and sex, family and socioeconomic status, the size of the domicile location, their financial and physical well- being, etc. These characteristics are often interrelated, thus create an even broader platform of preferences, and associated constraints. The identification of particular attractions related to the promotion of the destination is important to the identification of efficient marketing efforts focused on a particular group of customers.

Providing Tourism Destination Chain and Connectivity among ECO Countries, has a key role on Tourism development of ECO Region. It can be helpful for travel agencies and those responsible for the development of tourism infrastructure, as well as for the organization of further studies on the subject.

1. **Recent developments, latest decisions and progress**

In this regard for easing the process of selecting the Tourism Destinations for MSs, ECO Secretariat in collaboration with related specialists has developed the list of the most important criteria of Tourism Destination Choice as bellow and circulated it to Member States before the 30th RPC Meeting for their feedbacks

It’s worth mentioning that the criteria have not been classified into priorities. The MSs were requested to consider these criteria for selection and Introduction of Tourism Destinations in their countries. Each Member States should evaluate its cities based on these criteria and classify them according to the score they will reach. Ultimately Each Member States should introduce at least five top-rated cities as a Tourist Destination in ECO Region.

The Secretariat has conveyed two NVs (NV No: T/ Tourism Destination/2021/238 dated March 4, 2021 and No: T/ Tourism Destination /2021/644 dated 16/6/2021) to the MSs requesting their choice of tourism destinations. So far response was received from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Pakistan.

1. **Expected outcomes for 2022 and Secretariat’s recommendations**
2. The Council may request the Member States that have not communicated their Tourism Destination Choice in their country to the Secretariat to send their choice according to the said criteria.
3. The Council may request all the Member States to send data including information about the tourism activities in the destination choice selected by the Member States along with high resolution photos to be compiled by the Secretariat to establish a databank on selected ECO tourism destinations.

**Priority Area No. 4**

**Diversification of Tourism into various niches**

1. **ECO Vision approach and target**

*“3D iv. Tourism activities will be diversified into various niches including; health/medical, ecological, culture, winter, sea, mountain sports, climbing, skiing, desert and religious.”*

In order to achieve this target:

* Meetings on health tourism, ecotourism, religious tourism should be organized
* Data bank of specialized tourism destinations should be established
* Workshops\events on niche tourism activities will be conducted
* Unique in its kind World Nomad Games, initiated by Kyrgyz Republic on regular basis, will be held

The ECO region constitutes a rich and unexplored network of destinations capable of providing unique experiences catering to various tourism segments such as business, culture, nature and adventure, sun and beach holidays, and health and wellness, among others. Diversifying products, services and market in the tourism sector is essential to avoid dependence on a single activity or market. Building on partnerships to develop enhanced tourism experiences with a view to optimizing key assets for the benefit of tourism and economic development through increasing regional spread, season extension and promoting sustainable growth has huge benefits for increasing the demand to the ECO region. Tourism is currently highly seasonal in the region but there is scope for developing alternative multi-seasonal activities to enrich the tourism offer during the off-season. The businesses require investments in capacity and quality to reduce their seasonality and improve their profitability. Based on its capacity, the ECO region can diversify tourism services and products into diverse segments. To achieve the ECO Vision 2025 objectives to help address seasonality, regional experiences that combine different tourism products and experiences that provide year-round tourism opportunities in the region across Member States needs to be developed. Achieving this mandate regionally requires action at the national level and close cooperation among the tourism Ministries of the Member States.

1. **Background information**
2. **Health Tourism**

As per the decision of 21st RPC Meeting, to promote regional health tourism, 2nd Coordination Committee Meeting on Health Tourism Cooperation in ECO Region was held on 27 November 2013 in Mashhad in collaboration with the ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ECO-CCI) on the sidelines of the 4th Conference on Health Tourism in Islamic Countries.

The Islamic Republic of Iran in cooperation with ECO-CCI and ECO Secretariat hosted the 1st ECO Confobition (conference + exhibition) on ECO Health Tourism in August, 2014 in Ramsar. The Second ECO Confobition (Conference + Exhibition) on Health Tourism was held on 18-20 June, 2019, in Ardabil, Iran. The event was attended by the vast majority of ECO Member States namely Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and had 4 panels.

Although medical tourism kept operating during the pandemic, many major medical tourism sources and destination countries were negatively affected due to travel restrictions and suspensions of flights. In the current circumstances, to promote health tourism in the region, considering and evaluating the following emerging issues in ECO Region is deemed significant:

* Challenges and opportunities in the fields of Health Tourism during the Corona virus outbreak
* The role of Telemedicine, teleconsultation during the Corona virus outbreak
* Programmes/ Projects of the governments or private sector to deal with the Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Health Tourism

1. **Ecotourism**

The Republic of Azerbaijan as coordinator of Ecotourism prepared a Plan of Action in field of Ecological Tourism and hosted the 2nd Experts Group Meeting on Ecotourism on 10-12 June 2010.

The 3rd Experts Group Meeting on Ecotourism and “ECO Regional Ecotourism Development Training Program” were held on 17-21 September 2012 in Antalya, Turkey. The meeting reviewed the related issues and agreed on some points as under:

i. Establishment of database for Ecotourism (Iran will follow it up)

ii. Training program, field works and capacity building for promotion of ecotourism in ECO member countries (it will be prepared by Turkey).

iii. ECO region’s ecological tourism catalogue (it will prepared by Turkey)

The 23rd RPC Meeting welcomed the offer of the Republic of Turkey to prepare an Ecotourism Catalogue for the ECO region and requested all Member Countries to provide the necessary information for its preparation of this catalogue to the relevant Turkish authorities by 15 August 2013.

The 24th RPC Meeting reiterated its request to the Member States to provide the relevant information for the Ecotourism Catalogue to be prepared by Turkey.

Iran informed the 25th RPC Meeting that it has developed a questionnaire for collecting information to establish ecotourism database. The council requested Iran to circulate it to the Member States for completion.

Turkey and Turkish Cypriot State offered to co-host the 4th EGM on Ecotourism on 21-23 December 2017, in Nicosia to keep the pace of sustainable cooperation in this important field.

The 4th Experts Group Meeting on Ecotourism has not been held so far due to the ongoing pandemic. The meeting was scheduled to be held in Nicosia in the 4th quarter of 2021 and it was re-scheduled for the 3rd quarter of 2022.

1. **Agro-tourism**

International Forum on Agro-Tourism Development was held back to back with the International Nowruz Festival of "Dushanbe - ECO Tourism Capital" on 29-30 August 2021 in Tajikistan in hybrid format. Considering that holding such events facilitate cooperation and promotion of agro tourism in the ECO region, the Member States had the opportunity to discuss the development of agro-tourism in the their respective countries and exchanged views on progress and problems in this area.

In the COEs for 2021 a Meeting on Tourism Business Development was included but not held due to the pandemic and lack of interest from the Member States. Meeting on Tourism Business Development can be held back to back with Forum of ECO Head of Tourism Associations, Unions and other Tourism Stakeholders planned to be held in Iran in 2022.

**ECO Region Databank /Catalogue of Specialized Tourism Products and Services**

In the ECO Vision 2025, one of the mandates in tourism sector is to prepare a Data bank of specialized tourism destinations. In that regard, the 28th RPC requested the Islamic Republic of Iran to circulate a questionnaire on ecotourism for establishment “Ecotourism Catalogue for the ECO Region” to be prepared by Turkey. The Secretariat via NV No: T/Ecotourism /2021/162 dated February 18, 2021, requested MSs to share the necessary information. Response from Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan providing all the necessary information (with high resolution photographs is still awaited. The other Member States may also consider updating the information prepared due to passage of long time.

The Council may request the Member States to send data on other specialized tourism segments and destinations in their countries (health tourism, sports tourism, mountain climbing, cycling, culinary tourism, urban tourism, religious tourism, heritage tourism, agro tourism, winter tourism, wellness tourism, meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) tourism, nature and adventure tourism, sun and beach tourism etc. to be compiled by the Secretariat to establish an ECO Region Databank /Catalogue of Specialized Tourism Products and Services based on the information received from Member States. To facilitate compilation of the data in each segment the Council may request the MSs to prepare a table of requested data along with the required visual materials.

1. **Expected outcomes for 2022 and Secretariat’s recommendations**
2. The Council may request Iran to consider holding the Third conference on Health Tourism in 2022.
3. The Council may request the Member States to offer their views/ proposals in order to contribute the Agenda of the 3rd ECO Conference on ECO Health Tourism.
4. The Council may request the Member States to virtually convene the First Meeting of Major Hospitals Authorities in the region active in health tourism.
5. The Council may request the need to prepare a framework document for investigating and identifying the potential and opportunities for diversification of intra-regional tourism to broaden the regional tourism offer by joining efforts to bring out lesser-known or niche destinations and identifying all available and potentially available tourism resources and facilities in various tourism segments to the next Ministerial Meeting on Tourism for consideration. To this end an ad-hoc specialized working group may be established among the Member States to prepare the document before the Ministerial Meeting.
6. The Council may request Turkey and Turkish Cypriot State to announce the exact days of the 4th EGM on Ecotourism in 2022 to keep the pace of sustainable cooperation.
7. The Member States may consider holding other events, workshops and seminars for enhancing regional collaboration in other specialized tourism segments.

**Area Conclusion**

It is crucial that Member States take steps to support the regional tourism sector to expand into niche products or markets where there are demonstrable benefits to the regional economy, its people and the sustainability of the tourism industry.

**Priority Area No. 5**

**Enhancing utilization of digital technologies and social media in tourism sector across ECO region**

1. **ECO Vision approach and target**

*“3D v. In tourism promotional activities utilization of electronic media will be increased.”*

In order to achieve this target:

* Presence in the social media will be improved
* Collaboration with travel related advisory websites like Trip Adviser will be realized
* Specialized tourism website will be established
* GIS System for tourism destinations will be applied

1. **Background information**

The technological innovations and the digitalization of the tourism sector have introduced new business models of tourism. It has transformed the expectations and behaviors of the consumers, opening up new and highly creative ways of delivering tourism services to enhance the visitor experience. As the vast majority of tourists internationally now use the Internet as their primary means of research, marketing and promotion through various Internet platforms has become a cost-effective and convenient option for reaching the consumers and promotion of tourism offerings and destinations. While some ECO Member States have considerably enhanced their virtual promotion and global reach through the digital platforms, there are significant differences in the uptake of digital technologies in tourism across ECO region, which still exhibits a huge unused potential in integration of digital technologies into the sector. With tourists increasingly using digital technologies to search, plan and book travel, it is essential that ECO Member States engage meaningfully to incorporate advanced digital technologies and prioritize accelerating the move to a more seamless and contactless end-to-end travel and tourism experience through new technologies to compete favorably with best-in-class tourist destinations around the world. Integration of advanced commonly preferred digital technologies into the regional tourism activities and portals has the potential to facilitate competitiveness and global reach of the ECO region and promotion of its diverse tourism offerings. As the sector fast tracks this transition globally, the ECO Member States may pursue the following actions to enhance the presence and initiatives of the regional tourism sector in digital platforms to expand their market reach and sharpen their competitive edge:

1. **Expected outcomes for 2022 and Secretariat’s recommendations** 
   1. The Council may request the Secretariat to prepare a user-friendly, specialized ECO Tourism Website for easy access to information on tourism offerings, programmes and events in ECO Member States and promotion of the region. The website could be designed for use by the tourists and the tourism professionals and agencies.
   2. The Council may request the Member States to cooperate with the Secretariat and technical and financial support in preparation of the website.
   3. The Council may consider tasking the Secretariat to hire a consultant to develop the ECO Tourism Website.
   4. The Council may request the Member States to send data regarding their specialized tourism attractions to be compiled as a digital catalogue of all the tourism destinations of ECO Member States to be hosted in the ECO Tourism Website.
   5. The Council may task the Secretariat to look for ways collaborate with travel related advisory websites like Trip Advisor, Trivago, Expedia, Booking.com to promote regional tourism destinations. The main tour operators and tourism agencies of the Member States may collaborate with the Secretariat to enhance presence and initiatives of the tourism sector in digital platforms to expand regional market reach and sharpen its competitiveness.

**Priority Area No. 6**

**Strengthening human resource and capacity building for increase of the quality of the services**

1. **ECO Vision approach and target**

*“3D vi. Tourism related human resource development and capacity building activities will be promoted.”*

In order to achieve this target:

* Workshops and training courses will be organized
* On-line training will be developed and promoted
* Leading tourism Member States will be encouraged to offer scholarships to less developed ones

1. **Background information**

Professional and qualified workforce is essential to the success of any tourism business or destination. With the rapid growth of tourism sector, the need to develop a well-trained, customer and service-oriented tourism workforce for the tourism industry has become imperative. Many ECO Member States face the problem of lacking resources and trainers for human resource development in tourism sector. There is considerable scope for collaboration among the Member States in enhancing the human resource capacity of the Member states for providing high standards and quality in the tourism services of the region. Providing specialized skills training in the sector will help ensure the quality of future service delivery is stronger in the region and the tourism workforce has the right high quality skills to interact safely with future travelers. In that regard, continued emphasis in tourism training is necessary, not only to sustain ECO region’s competitive advantage, but for the upgrading of skills to address the demand for improved levels of quality, service and professionalism in the tourism and travel industry.

1. **Expected outcomes for 2022 and Secretariat’s recommendations**
2. The Council may request the Member States to conduct training needs assessment, to ascertain HRD and skills requirements in their tourism sector. The results may be shared with the Secretariat to coordinate training activities in the region.
3. The Member States may consider cooperation in HRD activities (tourism education and training), by sharing resources, skills and training facilities, such as networking of tourism training centres/institutes, provision of technical assistance and experts, emphasis on new job skills and new technologies, training of trainors, etc.
4. Member States with more resources and experience in tourism sector may consider leading and sharing their experiences with those Member States who are in need of qualified tourism workforce

**Priority Area No. 7**

**Cooperation in quality development and harmonization of rules and procedures for sustainable tourism**

1. **ECO Vision approach and target**

*“3D viii. Standardization and accreditation bodies’ and ‘sustainable and green tourism’ monitoring mechanisms will be established and improved in collaboration with international tourism bodies”*

In order to achieve this target:

* Quality standards in the region will be institutionalized
* International standards will be adopted
* Training on international standards will be conducted

1. **Background information**

Development and implementation of harmonized service quality and environmental standards that can help protect the environment and bring tangible benefits to local communities and aligned with international best practices, including those related to safety, health and environment protocols are essential to increasing the competitiveness of the region as a global tourism destination, and attracting tourists from international markets. The establishment of a common ECO regional tourism brand as a high-quality tourist destination also requires essentially defining the common harmonized safety, hygiene, environment and minimum service quality standards in tourism services, facilities, hotels, restaurants, heritage sites, transport systems etc. to improve its global profile and image. This objective requires member countries to work in a coordinated and collaborative manner to protect and foster its brand value through regionally harmonized quality standards and regulations while carrying out programmes to ensure the preservation, conservation and promotion of the natural, cultural and historical heritage of Member States.

1. **Expected outcomes for 2022 and Secretariat’s recommendations**
2. To promote ECO region as a brand with uniform tourism standards, the Council may request the Secretariat to set up a working group from the representatives of the public and private tourism sector to develop and implement ECO tourism standards and certification programmes with measurable standards and indicators for each of the tourism areas while addressing and monitoring the essential requirements of facilities and services for visitors, the industry infrastructure, the environment and local communities and make them transparent to the tourists to help with their choices.
3. The Council may request the working group to develop an ECO regional tourism standards certification system aligned with international best practices and the policy and regulatory framework of the Member States.
4. The Council may request the working group to develop ECO Tourist Protection Guidelines.
5. The Council may request the working group to develop a regional inspection mechanism to ensure standards compliance.
6. The Council may request the Member States to hold regional trainings and workshops on the quality standards.
7. The Council may request the Secretariat to collaborate with international tourism organizations such as UNWTO and UNIDO to harmonize and institutionalize “Regional Standardization and Accreditation bodies’ and ‘sustainable and green tourism’ monitoring mechanisms’.

**Priority Area No. 8**

**Strengthening Private Sector and Local Community in tourism activities**

1. **ECO Vision approach and target**

“3D ix. Private sector and local community involvement in the tourism activities will be strengthened.”

In order to achieve this target:

* Tourism business unit within the ECO- CCI will be established
* Tourism Agencies Federation of ECO will be established
* ECO tourism events in various cities of ECO Region will be organized

1. **Background information**

Tourism is a people oriented sector and its major activities depend on human resources. The sector is underperforming in some ECO countries as tourism development often takes place without the participation of communities, leading to unsustainable projects and few economic gains for the local communities. Due to the crosscutting nature of the tourism sector, a close coordination across various national stakeholders in the private sector including tour operators, tourism agencies, and tourism organizations is essential to reach the regional tourism objectives. The development of community-based tourism in the region including tourism initiatives that involve local people in all kinds of tourism activities and allow visitors to interact with locals and to encourage rural communities to utilize the tourism resources for their livelihoods has the potential to generate greater economic benefits to the local communities especially for poverty reduction and job creation. The private sector also has a key role to play in tourism industry. While governments make policies and plans for development of tourism in terms of national economic objectives and priorities, tourism is an economic activity largely carried out by the private sector in many countries. As various stakeholders have different interests in the sector, the Member States encouraging greater participation and cooperation with the private sector and local communities have more chances of achieving efficiency in reaching their tourism objectives.

There is considerable scope and benefits for strengthening and promoting regional cooperation for reaching these objectives collectively with the public and private stakeholders and the inclusion of the local communities. There is a need for a clear mandate from the Member States to facilitate appropriate roles for the various stakeholders and a close coordination across various national stakeholders in the private sector including tour operators, tourism agencies, and tourism associations and local communities is essential to reach the aims of the ECO Vision 2025.

Coordination among the local cultures and communities at the international level can be achieved with the collaboration of the private sector through the national tourism organizations and tour operators. National tour operators and travel agencies are key for involving the local communities into tourism activities and the development of community-based tourism, especially in ECO countries, where many tourism attractions are difficult to reach, connections with the local population is hard. In that regard, joint cooperation and developing a network among major tour operators huge potential and efficient outcomes for promotion of regional sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Establishment of a network among major tour operators in ECO region for providing ECO Tourism Package would facilitate increasing number of tourists and the amount of tourism revenues. Promoting integrity within the tour operator industry in ECO region provides professional services by setting up an appropriate platform of dialogue, cooperation, data exchanges and experience sharing to use all capacities and opportunities in ECO region as a rich area in cultural heritage and history.

During the 27th RPC meeting, the council requested the Member States to encourage the private sector involvement in the regional tourism activities through participation in the relevant meetings/events/initiatives. And in this connection, the ECO CCI was requested to explore the possibility of setting up regional tourism platforms to coordinate the activities of the national private sector associations/forums/federations with the purpose of sustainable tourism promotion and propose to the 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism.

1. **Recent developments, latest decisions and progress**

In order to achieve the above said goals, the project titled **“Tour Operators’ Network in ECO Region**” was considered and approved by the 5th High Level Expert Group Meeting (HLWGM) on Tourism and supported by 3rd Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in Khujand in 2019. Henceforth, the project concept was as well considered at the level of ECO’s Council of Ministers (COM) where it was endorsed as part of document set by the 24th COM on 8-9 November 2019 in Antalya (Turkey). This project was submitted to 30th Regional Planning Council Meeting on 11-14 January 2020 in Tehran (Iran), and approved by the council and the project has become part of ECO’s Work Program 2020 and 2021.

Also in the final report of the 30th RPC, the Council welcomed the offer of the Islamic Republic of Iran to host the First Forum of ECO Heads of Tourism Associations, Unions and other tourism stakeholders from June 29 to July 01, 2020. This Forum could provide the good opportunity to connect the tourism agencies, tour operators, airliners, Hoteliers and all the Tourism related industries of the ECO region.

In fact the said Forum, as a unique event, can pave the way for implementation of the Tour operators network project by introducing the Focal Points to each other, providing the Network of the 10 most important Tour operators from 10 MSs, sharing data and knowledge among the Member States regarding Tour operators and finally Introducing at least 3 main Tourist Route packages.

Unfortunately in the light of the emerging situation of Covid-19, Most of the events including this Forum approved in the 30th and 31st RPC could not be held due to travel restrictions, however we hope this event can be organized by the host in 2022.

1. **Expected outcomes for 2022 and Secretariat’s recommendations**
2. Iran may consider holding the Forum of ECO Heads of Tourism Associations, Unions and other tourism stakeholders in 2022 for developing cooperation between the tour operators, hoteling associations and other stakeholders for benefiting the opportunities of tourism activities between ECO member countries and as a good platform for considering and discussing on Tourism Destination Chain and Connectivity among ECO Countries. The Council may request the Member States to convey their Focal Points in this regard.
3. The Council may encourage Member States to hold a joint ECO and ECO-CCI Tour operators Forum to discuss facilitation of joint packages for tourists from the ECO region with low prices and airfares by each and every ECO Member State.
4. The Council may encourage the Tourism Ministries of the ECO Member States to cooperate in forming a **“Tour Operators’ Network in ECO Region**”. Nominating voluntary tour operators and associations to the network from each Member State may facilitate preparation of regional tour packages to revive the tourism sector in 2022. The Council may request the Member States to nominate at least one tour operator from each country to expedite the establishment of the network. The Secretariat may work with the volunteer tour operators to develop ECO region tour packages for 2022. The network may pave the way for establishment of **ECO Tourism Agencies Federation** as envisioned in the ECO Vision 2025.
5. The Council may encourage the ECO-CCI to hold the meetings of Tourism Committee of ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry regularly and task the ECO CCI Secretariat to work out a report on ways and means of cooperation in tourism among the member countries.
6. The Council may urge the ECO–CCI to set up a business unit specifically for promotion of tourism within the ECO- CCI and hold ECO-wide promotional tourism events such as fairs, exhibitions, sports games within the region and internationally.
7. The Council may urge ECO CCI Secretariat to share information about conferences, seminars or summits on tourism that take place in ECO Member Countries in order to generate participation from the ECO countries and encourage the private sector to take initiative for marketing the joint tourism packages on the occasion of these tourism events.
8. The Council may urge ECO-CCI to upload tourism events in the ECO CCI website for promotion of regional tourism sector.
9. The Council may encourage the non-governmental organizations\entities\ associations involved in tourism sector to contribute to regional tourism development through organizing joint activities and projects.
10. The Council may request the Member States to encourage active involvement of their main Tour operators in the ECO tourism programs and events.

**Area Conclusion**

There is a need for more intense collaboration among the public and private stakeholders in regional tourism sector. Joint cooperation will facilitate new opportunities for the development of regional tourism.

**Priority Area No. 9**

**Tourism Fund**

1. **ECO Vision approach and target**

The ECO Tourism Promotion Fund was proposed with the main aim providing adequate financial resources and budgetary support in financing Tourism projects. This financing helps to reach the tourism mandates of the ECO Vision 2025 such as:

* joint promotion and marketing of regional tourism sector
* exhibition and promotion of ECO tourism potentials to the world
* encouraging the intra -regional tourism
* enhancing sustainable development of the ECO region by generating new tourism related businesses
* promoting healthy collaboration among businesses actively engaged in tourism sector through useful interaction
* organizing regular meetings and cultural and social activities to promote the regional tourism

1. **Background information**

The 1st ECO High Level Experts Group Meeting on Tourism held on 11-13 December 2006 in Tehran proposed the establishment of the Fund to finance the development of the tourism sector in ECO region. This was approved by the 1st Ministerial Meeting on Tourism on October 20, 2008 and the Modality for establishment of ECO Tourism Promotion Fund was approved by the 18th Council of Ministers (COM) on March 9, 2009 in Tehran.

1. **Recent developments, latest decisions and progress**

Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey had declared to provide financial contribution to this Fund as soon as it becomes operational.  Iran has pledged US$50,000. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan joined them by announcing to contribute US$20,000 to the Fund during the 2nd Ministerial Meeting. Kazakhstan has also announced that it will participate in the activities of the Fund. The Secretariat asked concerned Member States to transfer their pledged contributions to the secretariat account and to appoint their representatives to the Board of Trustees at the earliest. Turkey and Iran have approached the Secretariat to finalize their payment procedures to the Fund. However, no amount has been transferred to the Secretariat.

During the 26th RPC Meeting, about the pledged amount to the Tourism Promotion Fund, Turkey informed that the allocation is in final stages and will be transferred at the earliest. Iran also informed that it will be transferred and the Meeting of Board of Trustees will be hosted respectively. The Council reiterated its request to the ECO Trade and Development Bank (ECO-TDB) to contribute to tourism development projects in the region in close consultation with the ECO Secretariat and the Member States.

Due to low contribution of the Member States, no amount has been transferred to the Secretariat so far**.** So this project has been suspended for the past years and for making it activate again, the most important issue is high contribution of the Member States in order to transfer their pledged amount to the Secretariat.

The third Ministerial meeting recommended the CPR to allocate funds for implementation of two projects titled "ECO Tourism Visa" and "ECO Tours Operators Network". Tourism fund can also be utilized to finance these projects if established.

1. **Expected outcomes for 2022 and Secretariat’s recommendations** 
   1. The Council may request the Member States to join and contribute to the Fund and participate in its activities.
   2. The Council may request the Concerned Member States to nominate their Representatives to Board of Trustee of the Fund.

**Area Conclusion**

All the platforms for reactivation of Tourism Fund are ready and just contributions of Member States with positive view on funding tourism projects are needed. In this regard the issue of reactivation of Tourism Fund may be raised in one of the CPR Meetings for review of Member States' comments and final conclusions.

**Priority Area 10**

**Investment Generation and Facilitation**

1. **ECO Vision approach and target**

As investment is essential for a competitive tourism sector, it has been given specific attention and included as a priority area to better mobilize and target investment to tourism sector to promote ways to increase the regional tourism appeal and facilitate development of the regional tourism sector as envisioned in the ECO Vision 2025.

Tourism sector is one of the priority sectors for generation of domestic and foreign direct investment (FDI). Engendering investment in this sector is also inclusively crucial for the other sectors of the ECO Member States for stimulating economic growth and enhancing poverty reduction. While investment instigates the transfer of technology and facilitates improvements in productivity, tourism is the only sector that its product and service is consumed at the same location where it is produced. Therefore by providing products and services to the businesses through the value chain, and directly to the tourists through various means, it also stimulates local economies in creating jobs, increasing per capita income and elevating overall standards of living of the local people. The implementation of tourism infrastructure development projects can help upgrade or reposition destinations, while creating jobs for many. In order to compensate the decrease in investment in the sector during the pandemic, member States may take active policies to incentivize and restore investment in the tourism sector to maintain the quality of the tourism offer and promote a sustainable recovery.

1. **Background information**

The first meeting of the Tourism Committee of ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry, hosted by Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines (ICCIM) was held on January 17, 2011, in Tehran, I. R. Iran. The meeting called the Member Chambers to present reports on the capacities, potentials, ways and means of investment in tourism of their respective countries and requested the ECO CCI Secretariat to undertake a study for the tourism potential of the ECO region.

1. **Expected outcomes for 2022 and Secretariat’s recommendations**
2. The Council may recommend the Secretariat to organize a Tourism Investment and Business Conference/Forum in coordination with the ECO-CCI in 2022 to raise awareness of the ECO region’s investment potential and marketing regional tourism investment opportunities.
3. The Member States may be requested to host the forum to facilitate investment into regional tourism projects.
4. The Council may consider developing initiatives to facilitate investment into regional tourism projects including a possible ECO regional tourism investment promotion framework.
5. The Council may request the Secretariat to develop a regional Tourism Investment Guide to provide a compendium of policies, laws, incentives and opportunities in the ECO tourism sector. The Member States may be requested to furnish the Secretariat with country information, investment climate, economic indicators and policies, financial framework, statutory requirements, relevant agencies along with all the tourism projects, investment opportunities and incentives to be compiled for identification and promotion of investment initiatives in regional tourism sector as a guide.
6. The Council may consider setting up a specific section for Investment promotion in the ECO Tourism Website where investors can access information on ECO wide investment opportunities in various tourism segments i.e. infrastructure development for transport and telecommunications, hotels, resorts, marinas, golf clubs, spas, boutique hotels; infrastructure for medical tourism such as specialized medical centres and hospitals; entertainment and theme parks etc.
7. The Council may request the Secretariat to prepare a report on the issue of Joint Introduction of Public Private Partnership (PPP) System to facilitate tourism investments in the ECO Member States.

**Priority Area 11**

**Relations with Regional / International Organizations / Agencies**

1. **ECO Vision approach and target**

According to the ECO Vision 2025, close cooperation with international organizations should be established. MSs may decide to instruct the Secretariat to expand bilateral cooperation with the relevant organizations through MoU or any other format in line with the mentioned goal and may recommend the (CPR) to allocate a sufficient budget to carry out activities in this regard.

1. **Background information**

The 24th RPC asked the Secretariat to start establishing relations with the relevant international organization in the field of tourism industry i.e. UNWTO and other relevant national and regional development agencies for cooperation and funding its activities and projects. The Secretariat has been mandated by CPR to negotiate a MoU for bilateral cooperation with UNWTO and thus has exchanged a draft MoU with the latter.

1. **Recent developments, latest decisions and progress**

The Secretariat has recently sent a letter to Secretary General of UNWTO to enhance bilateral cooperation between the two organizations. In the letter, while following the conclusion of MoU between the two Organizations, UNWTO's assistance has been requested in designing and implementing the ECO Plan of Action on elimination of COVID-19's consequences on the region's tourism sector and facilitating its quick recovery.

The Secretariat is also following reviving collaboration with UNIDO, which was initiated through a Working Arrangement signed between the ECO Secretariat and UNIDO.

1. **Expected outcomes for 2022 and Secretariat’s recommendations**
2. The Council may recommend the Member States and the Secretariat to actively participate in the international conferences and meetings with the aim of introducing the tourism potentials of the ECO Region and also to increase the role of ECO in the international community.
3. The Council may recommend the Secretariat to expand its cooperation with the relevant international organizations in tourism sector.
4. The Council may request the ECO Member States that are in UNESCO Executive Board (Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Turkey) to assist involvement of ECO heritage sites in its annual events and programmes to promote and enhance the image of the region globally.

**Area Conclusion**

Close cooperation with regional/international organizations is essential for sustainable development of any organization. ECO is no exception and in tourism sector getting technical and financial support of other organizations has vital role.

**SECTION IV**

**Annexes**

**(Annex-I)**

**PROJECTS**

Directorate of Tourism submits the following projects for kind consideration of the 32nd RPC:

* **Ongoing project**

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| :**Tourism** | **1. Project Category/Code:** |
| **ECO Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development** | **2. Project Title** |
| **The main goal of the project is to draw up a Roadmap to meet strategic objective (s) set out under tourism section of the ECO Vision 2025. It should be in line with the ECO Principles for Sustainable Tourism Development and contributing towards sustainable socioeconomic development of the ECO countries focusing on the realization of natural and cultural tourism resources of the region as well as vast unexploited relevant potential of the Member States.** | **3. Project Objectives** |
| **-** | **4. Project Budget (US$)** |
| **ECO Secretariat in collaboration with** **IDB** | **5. Project Funding Source** |
| **ECO Secretariat** | **6. Project Coordinator** |
| **ECO Secretariat (Coordinating Agency)**  **UNIDO (Technical Assistance)**  **UNWTO (Technical Assistance)**  **IDB (Financial Assistance)** | **7.International/Regional Partner** |
| **6 Months** | **8. Duration of Project** |
| **2022** | **9. Project Starting Time** |
| * **The Project has approved by the decision bodies of the ECO.(MM on Tourism & COM)** * **Draft ToR of the Project has been prepared by the Tourism Directorate of the Secretariat.** * **The info inquiry process from MSs has been started and 5 out 10 of MSs have sent their replies.** * **The proposed list of specialist is being completed and in the near future the qualified one will be selected for signing the contract.** | **10. Project Progress** |
| **11. Background:**  In the 13th ECO Summit in the first quarter of 2017 all ECO members welcomed the ECO Vision 2025 and had agreed to emphasize the need to augment cooperation in the area of tourism as identified in the Vision.  Strategic objective of the Vision on Tourism is to establish a peaceful and green tourism destination with diverse products and high quality services in the region.  The composite details of this project were considered and approved by the 5th High Level Expert Group Meeting (HLWGM) on Tourism and supported by 3rd Ministerial Meeting on Tourism in Khujand in 2019. Henceforth, the project concept was as well considered at the level of ECO’s Council of Ministers (COM) where it was endorsed as part of document set by the 24th COM on 8-9 November 2019 in Antalya (Turkey). The budgetary aspects of the project were also approved in due time by the 30th Regional Planning Council Meeting on 11-14 January 2020 in Tehran (Iran), upon which act the project has become part of ECO’s Work Program 2020. The latter Program is currently being implemented. The amount of US$10,000 has been endorsed by COM to prepare the feasibility study of the project.  The Member States countries’ strategic approach in the tourism sector has been to work together on issues that are of common concern to them in order to strengthen the contribution that tourism can make to their socioeconomic development, while protecting the valuable natural and cultural heritage on which the tourism sector depends. In recognition of the important contribution that tourism could make toward socioeconomic development, especially poverty reduction and conservation of natural and cultural heritage during the preparation of the ECO Vision 2025 tourism was selected as one of the main cooperation areas.  Geographical contingency, good neighborly relations and peaceful environment are the natural endowments of the region on which a solid foundation of sustainable tourism cooperation can be build step by step. Cultural commonalities and numerous historical and overlapping heritages provide the region with an enormous potential for proximity of the ordinary people of the Member States passionate for embracing peace and prosperity.  ECO region with an area of more than 8 million square kilometers stretching from central to south and to south-west Asia and a population of around 460 million inhabitants is well-known for its natural beauty, as well as diversity of its historical-cultural heritage. In this respect the region has a significant potential to be one of the major tourism destinations in the world. The Region is one of the world’s richest in terms of historical and cultural heritage and echoes memoires of the ancient Silk Road.  The Project should also consider the increase of the share of tourism sector in national and regional GDP and economic growth of Member States, taking into account the conservation of region’s cultural and environmental heritage. Moreover, this would further contribute to income-generation, poverty eradication, sustainable use of natural resources, protection of vulnerable groups enhancing life standards of indigenous as well as local communities within the ECO tourism destination.  It should also support regional tourism industry and facilitate investment in tourism sector creating a chain of ECO Tourism destinations. This would accelerate the facilitation of tourism activities across the land borders and along the economic corridors, expanding community-based tourism approach to attract locals’ participation in tourism-related supply and value chains.  The project would also address the need for raising the skills of tourism public sector at all levels, improving service and hygiene standards among staff in small to medium hospitality enterprises in the ECO tourism destination and enhancing locally generated private sector participation in small and medium tourism enterprise investment and operation.   1. Harmonization of National Tourism Action Plan of Member States and increasing synergy in the region on tourism development; 2. Follow up the strategic objective of the Vision on tourism and preparation of a roadmap for implementation its annual program (s); 3. Developing a framework and guidelines for sustainable tourism development at ECO tourism destination; 4. Increasing capability and quality of regional tourism industry as well as regional tourism institutions, local communities and government institutions to be able to enhance share of this sector on regional GDP and capability to compete with outside tourism industry; 5. Providing coordination mechanisms in all tourism sectors including tour operators, accommodation sector and hotels, airlines, etc.; 6. Preparation the ground for fund raising and credit facilitation for the implementation of the Action Plan. | |
| **12. Necessary Actions and Assistance Needed:**   1. A feasibility study of the process of Tourism Policies integration in the region 2. Establishing a network of Tourism potentials and attractions in ECO region. 3. Assessment of current statuses of the traditional tourisms’ development in the ten ECO Member States, and also, of their legal frameworks set for standardization/accreditation/tourism monitoring mechanisms to be under the ECO framework. 4. Preparing ECO Tourism compendium 5. Preparing ECO tourism databank 6. Assessment of capacities of local communities and private sector tourism entities of ECO countries to be potentially involved in regional tourism development under the ECO framework. 7. Holding the Meetings which are related to key areas of Tourism by the Member States. | |
| **13. Expected Outcomes of the Project:**   * Draft ECO Tourism Charter * Draft ECO Tourism Strategy and Action Plan * Set of Recommendations of ECO Member States on the Action Plan * Strategy of ECO regional sustainable tourism development * Harmonization among National Tourism Plan of Action of Member States * Action Plan for ECO regional sustainable tourism development * Introduction of Priority projects at ECO regional level | |

* **Proposed Project:**

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| **Tourism** | **1. Project Category/Code:** |
| **ECO Tourism Routes and Packages** | **2. Project Title** |
| **Main goal is establishing a network among major tour operators in ECO region for providing ECO Tourism Package that would be so useful for increasing number of tourists and tourism revenues. The final outputs of the Project are as follows:**   * **Achieving a high level of professionalism and developing sustainability in ECO Tourism industry** * **Identification of the best cities of ECO countries in Cultural/ Historical, Scientific, Industrial/Business, Nature-Based, Religious, Health and Mass Tourism separately.** * **Improving the relation of industrial and scientific bodies of the member states such as factories, universities, science and technology parks and study centers in order to attracting the industrial/ scientific tourists From inside or outside of ECO countries.** * **Optimizing use of existing resources and capacities in order to have less costly and high quality trips in the ECO region** * **Increasing number of tourists and the amount of tourism revenues**   **Promoting ECO Region as one of the best tourism destinations are** | **3. Project Objectives** |
| **Subject to proposed TOR** | **4. Project Budget (US$)** |
| **ECO Secretariat, UNWTO or any other Regional or International Organizations may be explored for full or partial financing of the project.** | **5. Project Funding Source** |
| **ECO Secretariat** | **6. Project Coordinator** |
| **ECO Secretariat (Coordinating Agency)**  **UNWTO or any other Regional or International Organizations (Technical Assistance)**  **Official National Organizations of the Member States**  **National agencies/associations of (private) tourism companies/operators/etc** | **7.International/Regional Partner** |
| **8 months** | **8. Duration of Project** |
| **2022** | **9. Project Starting Time** |
|  | **10. Project Progress** |
| **11**. **Background**:  The Strategic Objective which was defined for Tourism sector in ECO Vision 2025 is establishing a peaceful and green tourism destination with diverse products and high quality Services in the region. One of the Expected Outcomes of Tourism sector in ECO Vision 2025 is strengthening Private sector and local community involvement in the tourism activities. Also, we have Forum of ECO Heads of Tourism Associations, Unions and other tourism stakeholders in ECO Calendar of Events 2020 which shows the importance role of this area in Tourism industry growth.  Underlining the unfamiliar situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the rapid spread of corona virus around the world which has had a massive impact on many sectors of the global economy, with tourism being among the hardest hit. So that according to analysis by UNWTO, all worldwide destinations introduced restrictions on travel in response to Covid-19, an unprecedented act. This makes the important role of the small sized projects even more apparent.  Before Covid-19 Pandemic, there was another similar project in ECO Tourism sector called “ECO Tours Operators Network” which was approved by the 3rd ECO Ministerial Meeting of Tourism in Khujand, Tajikistan on October, 2019 as well as the 30th ECO Regional Planning Council (RPC) on January, 2020. Considering the above said main goal on tourism and in order to achieve the best results during the Corona virus crisis, ECO Secretariat decided to review previous projects and define Small Sized Projects in order to adapt them to the current situation. ECO Tourism Routes and Packages project with the aim of introduction main Tourism routes including Cultural/ Historical, Scientific ,Industrial/Business, Nature-Based , Religious, Health and Mass Tourism among the ECO countries, is going to focus on different areas of tourism especially on Industrial and Scientific tourism which its desired destination includes industrial sites peculiar to a particular location. The most obvious industrial tourism destinations are cities and regions with a solid industrial base.  It seems that making a network among Tourism related industries in ECO region would be so useful to provide ECO Tourism Routes and Packages. The primary purpose of the project is providing coordination mechanisms as well as promoting integrity in all tourism sectors including major Tourism Agencies, Tour Operators accommodations sector and Hoteliers, Airlines, etc in ECO region. In other words, we are seeking Tourism sustainable development in various fields especially in Industry and science aspects. This coordination mechanisms will lead to professional services on Tourism Routes and Packages by setting up an appropriate platforms of dialogue, cooperation, data exchanges and experience sharing to use all capacities and opportunities in ECO region as a rich area in cultural heritage and historical.  Following the better Tourism and better life, ECO Tourism Routes and Packages project is committed to promote tourism for peace, sustainable development and poverty reduction based on mutual trust and respect, mutual benefit and win-win outcomes. | |
| **12. Necessary Actions and Assistance Needed:**   1. Implementation of the part of ECO Vision 2025 in Tourism sector with respect to strengthening Private sector and local community involvement in the tourism activities; 2. Preparing the required ToR for recruiting an international consultancy team by the Secretariat. 3. Allocation of ECO financial contribution for recruitment of consultant by CPR or COM based on recruitment policy and procedures of ECO 4. Encourage relevant international organizations to assist ECO secretariat, financially and technically 5. Gathering the information from Member States about the cities which are famous for having tourist attractions, infrastructures and facilities related to Cultural/ Historical, Scientific, Industrial/Business, Nature-Based, Religious, Health and Mass Tourism and other required information. 6. Sharing data and knowledge among the Member States regarding Tourism related industries. | |
| **13. Expected Outcomes of the Project:**   * Establishing the Network of Tourism related industries of ECO countries. * Providing ECO Tourism Routes and Packages in Cultural/ Historical, Scientific ,Industrial/Business, Nature-Based , Religious, Health and Mass Tourism by the Network of ECO Tourism related industries * Introducing at least 3 main Cultural/ Historical, Nature-Based Tourism Routes among the ECO countries. * Providing ECO Health Tourism Packages with using the top ECO Medical Tourism Destinations which have health facilities such as equipped hospitals, Mineral groundwater resources, clean weather, etc. * Providing ECO Industrial/ Scientific Tourism Routes with passing at least 3 main Industrial cities of the ECO countries with high level of development and progress in the special part of industry or science. | |

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| **Tourism** | **1. Project Category/Code:** |
| **Tour operators chain and connectivity** | **2. Project Title** |
| **Main goal is establishing a network among major tour operators in ECO region for providing ECO Tourism Package that would be so useful for increasing number of tourists and tourism revenues. Achieving a high level of professionalism within the tour operator industry, developing sustainable tourism industry in the ECO region, optimizing use of existing resources and capacities in order to have less costly and high quality trips in the ECO region, increasing number of tourists and the amount of tourism revenues, promoting ECO Region as one of the best tourism destinations are the final outputs of the ECO Vision Projects.** | **3. Project Objectives** |
| **Subject to proposed TOR** | **4. Project Budget (US$)** |
| **ECO Secretariat, UNWTO or any other Regional or International Organizations may be explored for full or partial financing of the project.** | **5. Project Funding Source** |
| **ECO Secretariat** | **6. Project Coordinator** |
| **UNWTO or any other Regional or International Organizations** | **7.International/Regional Partner** |
| **18 months** | **8. Duration of Project** |
| **2022** | **9. Project Starting Time** |
| **-** | **10. Project Progress** |
| **11.** **Background:**  The Strategic Objective which was defined for Tourism sector in ECO Vision 2025 is establishing a peaceful and green tourism destination with diverse products and high quality Services in the region. One of the Expected Outcomes of Tourism sector in ECO Vision 2025 is strengthening Private sector and local community involvement in the tourism activities.  It seems that making a network among major tour operators in ECO region to provide ECO Tourism Package would be so useful. The primary purpose of the project is promoting integrity within the tour operator industry in ECO region. Tour operators network is going to provide professional services by setting up an appropriate platforms of dialogue, cooperation, data exchanges and experience sharing to use all capacities and opportunities in ECO region as a rich area in cultural heritage and historical.  Achieving a high level of professionalism within the tour operator industry requires a set of professional standards which include representing all facts, conditions and requirements. Tour operators’ network could include 10 major tour operators from ECO Member States which will introduce at least 3 main Tourist Roads such as Tabriz-Baku-Istanbul.  Following the better Tourism and better life, tour operators’ network in ECO region is committed to promote tourism for peace, sustainable development and poverty reduction based on mutual trust and respect, mutual benefit and win-win outcomes. | |
| **12. Necessary Actions and Assistance Needed:**   1. Implementation of the part of ECO Vision 2025 in Tourism sector with respect to strengthening Private sector and local community involvement in the tourism activities; 2. Nomination of Focal Points on industry; 3. Sharing data and knowledge among the Member States regarding Tour operators; 4. Introducing at least 3 main Tourist Roads; 5. Encouraging concerned Member States for actively involvement. | |
| **13. Expected Outcomes of the Project:**   1. Preparation of Terms of References of establishing a Tour operators network in ECO region 2. Providing ECO Tourism Package; 3. Establishment of Networking of the 10 most important Tour operators from 10 MS. | |

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| **Tourism** | **1. Project Category/Code:** |
| **Development of ECO Tourism Website** | **2. Project Title** |
| **Main goal is to design a user-friendly specialized ECO Tourism website as a regional tool for sharing and consolidating tourism-related information and generating business and investment opportunities for the private sector in ECO Member States for easy access to information on tourism offerings, programmes and events in ECO Member States and promotion of the region. The portal will complement the national tourism websites by allowing a more systematic process for users to collect and view the information they are looking for. The website will be designed for use by the tourists and the tourism professionals and agencies. The traveller access part of the website will take advantage of e-marketing in order to create a global marketing network and sharing tourism related information, tour packages, hotel and tour bookings and other relevant data promoting the services of private sector tourism providers in the region whilst facilitating accessibility to various regional and national tourism opportunities under the same platform as a user-friendly portal for visitor enquiries.**  **The part used by the tourism professionals and agencies will be a tool for linking regional partners and promoting information sharing, including on tourism projects, business opportunities, investment initiatives, investment related information, tourism data and statistics, events, and educational and training resources. The sections of the portal targeting potential and actual travellers will focus on providing information about the countries, regions, and tourism attractions, whilst promoting the services of private sector tourism providers in the region.** | **3. Project Objectives** |
| **Subject to proposed TOR** | **4. Project Budget (US$)** |
| **ECO Secretariat, or any other Regional or International Organizations may be explored for full or partial financing of the project.** | **5. Project Funding Source** |
| **ECO Secretariat** | **6. Project Coordinator** |
| **UNWTO or any other Regional or International Organizations** | **7.International/Regional Partner** |
| **10 months** | **8. Duration of Project** |
| **2022** | **9. Project Starting Time** |
| **-** | **10. Project Progress** |
| **11.** **Background:**  The technological innovations and the digitalization of the tourism sector has introduced new business models of tourism suppliers, as well as improved and connected operations along global tourism value chains. It has transformed the expectations and behaviors of the consumers, opening up new and highly creative ways of delivering tourism services to enhance the visitor experience. As the vast majority of tourists internationally now use the Internet as their primary means of research, marketing and promotion through various Internet platforms has become a cost-effective and convenient option for reaching the consumers and promotion of tourism offerings and destinations. ECO region still exhibits a huge unused potential in integration of digital technologies into the sector. With tourists increasingly using digital technologies to search, plan and book travel, it is essential that ECO Member States engage meaningfully to incorporate advanced digital technologies and prioritize accelerating the move to a more seamless and contactless end-to-end travel and tourism experience through new technologies to compete favorably with best-in-class tourist destinations around the world. Integration of advanced commonly preferred digital technologies into the regional tourism activities and portals has the potential to facilitate competitiveness and global reach of the ECO region and promotion of its diverse tourism offerings. As the sector fast tracks this transition globally, the ECO region may enhance the presence and initiatives of the regional tourism sector in digital platforms to expand their market reach and sharpen their competitive edge through a common virtual platform for marketing and promotion of regional tourism destinations, natural, historical and cultural assets and tourism activities for enhancing marketing, promotion of the region in the international arena.  A user friendly website is essential to effectively position the ECO region globally, by marketing and promoting ECO region’s assets extensively in the areas of history, nature, religion, archaeology, living culture, cuisine and hospitality. The website can further be availed to generate business and investment opportunities for the private sector. | |
| **12. Necessary Actions and Assistance Needed:**   1. Design of ECO Tourism Website as specified in the TOR; 2. Design one part for travelers including data for each MSs Tourism attractions and means to promote the private sector tourism agencies’ initiatives including tour packages, and promotions. A section could be added to incorporate the comments and reviews of the travelers along with links to social media and blogs. 3. Upload all the required data on specialized tourism segments in each Member State, and tourism attractions in collaboration with the Member States and links to national tourism websites, museums and any other tourism resources. 4. Design one part of the website for tourism professionals and tour agencies including data for country wise and regional tourism statistics, tourism investment related information, events, fairs, forums, HRD Training activities 5. Make the Website operational | |
| **13. Expected Outcomes of the Project:**   1. Preparation of a dynamic and interactive user-friendly ECO Tourism Website that is completely operational | |

**Annex-II**

**PROPOSALS**

Directorate of Tourism submits the following proposals for kind consideration of the 32nd RPC:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Concept Note** | |
| **ECO Regional Rail PASS Initiative** | **1. Proposed Title** |
| **2. Background on the issue and Justification:**  Transport connectivity is closely linked with the development of Tourism and is a key contributor to the overall appeal of a destination, which can lead to increased demand and sustained tourism performance. Therefore, accessibility of the ECO region is the primary requirement for promoting tourism to and within the region. The development of the tourism industry throughout the region needs intra regional and international connectivity through all modes of the transportation in order to ensure comfortable, cheaper, accessible and secure travel in ECO Region. There is an immediate need for cooperation in the ECO region for making travel into and within ECO region easier, cost effective and more efficient that will boost tourism flow within and to the region.  Development of easy and cost effective air, land and rail connectivity among all the ECO Member States will boost tourism flow within and to the region. In this context, railway transport occupies a core position in ECO’s overall transport sector. While Railway transport connectivity across the borders has missing links, the ECO Member States are working on developing cost effective intra-regional rail transport corridors for enhancement of regional mobility.  The Tourism Directorate has studied the cross border rail connections and countrywide railway transport systems and it was observed that most ECO Member states have established domestic railway transportation systems in different capacities and some countries even had established bilateral cross-border rail transport services. While there is a definite need to further improve the existing capacities of railway connections across all the borders in the region, even with the existing established routes and train capacities, there is a potential for increasing cooperation among the railways of ECO Member States to enhance connectedness of the region and facilitate tourism. To enhance domestic, intra-regional and international tourism as a cost-friendly travel alternative, the Tourism Directorate has prepared the proposal on ECO Rail PASS initiative. | |
| **3. Overall Objective:**  The strategic objective of this initiative is to empower the local people and tourism businesses through a railway travel arrangement that will facilitate regional mobility and enhance tourism. | |
| **4. Proposal:**  To meet the tourism enhancement objectives, the Secretariat proposes to initiate ECO Rail PASS arrangement in the ECO region. The initiative will allow rail passengers travelling in ECO Member States’ regional railways to buy a pass ticket for different options that will permit tourists travel as much as they want on participating ECO train networks for a set amount of travel days. The initiative has several benefits to the region through enhancing mobility and regional cross-border travel. It affords the opportunity to serve as an economical travel option within the ECO region as a good means to provide tourism accessibility to all groups of people. The pass will be available in two options for ECO and non-ECO travellers. The pass may be designed in different options including regional pass, one country pass or two countries pass. The pass can also be designed to involve domestic tourists inside the countries with special promotions for residents of the country. Special attention could be given for resident passes of the same country to prevent misuse. It is worth noting that while the initiative could be operational in all willing Member States at the outset, it could also be initially operationalized as a pilot among some willing Member States and could be extended to others later. | |
| Transport Ministries of ECO Member States  Tourism Ministries of ECO Member States  Railway Authorities of ECO Member States  Private Tourism Stakeholders including tourism associations, tour agencies and tour operators  Travelers from ECO and non-ECO Member States  Local businesses and local people in the ECO Member States including tourism businesses that include mainly hotel and restaurant owners | **5. Potential stakeholders:** |
| **6. Required Activities to be undertaken to launch the initiative:**   * Sign a regional cooperation Agreement on facilitating the initiative and in each MS * Planning and coordination of available functional passenger train links in the region * Fares determination   The ECO Regional Rail Pass could be available as a one-country pass or regional pass open to ECO and Non-ECO citizens in different fares and different set of timings. It could also be available in four age-based categories. Up to two children aged 4 to 11 may travel free of charge when accompanied by a full-fare adult:  Child: under age 12  Youth: ages 12 to 27  Senior: over age 60   * Coordination of local transportation and bus services for easy access to tourism destinations and attractions in each MS * Marketing and promotion * Design of brochures of the ECO Rail Pass Initiative (A regional competition could be held for its design) * Preparation of informative booklets and guide books about the Eco Rail Pass initiative * Preparation of brochures for tourism destinations accessible via the rail route * Preparation of alternative tour packages via railway along the rail routes in collaboration with the local tourism agencies and tour operators | |
| **7. Potential opportunities and benefits to the region:**  The impact of transport connectivity on regional development is known to be difficult to verify empirically, yet there seems to be clear positive correlation between transport connectivity endowment and regional growth. The envisioned advantages, opportunities and benefits of the initiative both for the travelers and the Member States are outlined as below:   1. no financial implications for the Member States. It can be collectively coordinated among the Railway Authorities of the Member States willing to participate through administrative arrangements 2. for interested travelers, as a continuity to Interrail and Eurail initiatives for European countries, will provide an access to ECO Member States stretching up to central Asia 3. enhance regional and international travel and tourism 4. improve regional mobility and regional connectivity 5. enhance domestic tourism 6. stimulate economic development 7. enhance global visibility of the ECO region 8. enhance global visibility 9. enhance promotion of Silk Road tourism destinations along the rail routes 10. enhancing tourism accessibility among less privileged groups and enabling all people to participate in and enjoy tourism experiences will provide an alternative economic travel option to economically disadvantaged segments of the society i.e. youth, families with low economic income and older age groups 11. links and tour packages via road transport could be developed for tourism destinations that are not reachable via rail system 12. positive impacts on local businesses and local communities 13. generate employment   xi. generate investment | |
| **8. Risks**  The risks that surround the development of these undertakings include:   1. All the ECO Member States may not be interested in the initiative and it may cause disconnection among the rail roads in the borders, 2. Potential security problems in the borders, 3. Potential visa issues, 4. Missing railway stations close to the tourism destinations, 5. Lack of local transportation for the travelers to reach the tourism destinations, 6. Lack of facilities in the tourism destinations, | |
| **9. Assumptions:**  Assumptions related to the initiative include:   1. The local communities and local businesses will have an interest in this arrangement due to enhanced travel and mobility directed towards various local tourism destinations via railways, 2. The social-economic benefits of the arrangement for low budget travelers will allow for acceptability of the initiative among the tourists as an alternative budget friendly tourism option, 3. The practicality of the initiative will allow smooth implementation initially among the interested Member States with the collaboration of available train networks, 4. The Missing links could be facilitated through road or air transport for interested travelers, 5. The global accessibility of the initiative will allow easy marketing and promotion of the ECO regional tourism potential, 6. The initiative could be initiated among the interested Member States, 7. The local tourism businesses can facilitate and attract more travelers through alternative joint tour package arrangements for tourism destinations, | |

**ANNEX-III**

**Draft Calendar of Events/Meetings for 2022**

*(Subject to revision and approval by the 32nd RPC)*

**E. SECTOR: TOURISM**

**ECO Events**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Event/Activity** | **Venue** | **Date/Status** |
| 1 | 4th ECO Ministerial Meeting on Tourism | Uzbekistan Bukhara | 2022 |
| 2 | 6th High Level Experts Group on Tourism (HLEG) Meeting | Uzbekistan Bukhara | 2022 |
| 3 | 6th International ECO/ Silk Road Food Festival | Iran, Zanjan | 2022 |
| 4 | Meeting on Culinary Tourism | Iran, Zanjan | 2022 |
| 5 | The 4th Experts Group Meeting on Ecotourism | Nicosia | the 3rd Quarter of 2022 |
| 6 | Forum of ECO Heads of Tourism Associations, Unions and other Tourism Stakeholders | Iran | 2022 |
| 7 | 1st ECO Tourism Investment and Business Forum | TBD | 2022 |
| 8 | Workshop on Tourism Business Development | Iran | 2022 |
| 9 | ECO High Level Expert Meeting on Visa Facilitation | TBD | 2022 |
| 10 | 3rd Confobition (conference + exhibition) on Health Tourism | Iran | 2022 |
| 11 | First Meeting of Major Hospitals Authorities in the region active in Health Tourism | TBD | 2022 |
| 12 | Tehran International Tourism and Handicraft Exhibition | Iran | 2022 |
| 12 | High Level Experts Group Meeting on Tourism for coordination of the Tourism Plan of Action on Elimination Of "Covid-19" Pandemic Consequences in the Tourism Sector for Facilitating Recovery in the ECO Region” | TBD | 2022 |
| 13 | First ECO Silk Road Mayors Forum | TBD | 2022 |
| 14 | Launch of Sari as ECO Tourism Capital for 2022 | Sari-Iran | 2022 |
| 15 | ECO Tour operators Forum | TBD | 2022 |
| 16 | 1st ECO International Tourism Market Fair | TBD | 2022 |
| 17 | Eco Regional Workshop on HRD | TBD | 2022 |

**Non-ECO Events**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Event/Activity** | **Venue** | **Date** |
|  | 13th Tourism Investment and Business Forum for Africa | TBD | 2022 |
|  | UNWTO World Meeting on Rural Tourism | Mexico | 2022 |
|  | World Tourism Forum | Pakistan | 2022 |
|  | WTTC & TTYD Destination Future Turkey: Tourism Investment Forum | Turkey | February 2022 |
|  | WTTC's Global Summit | Manila | 2022 |
|  | 7th UNWTO World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism | Nara | 2022 |
|  | Tourism Session of the 38th Session of the COMCEC | TBD | 2022 |