

EFFAT's Vision for a New, Sustainable, and Socially Responsible Tourism

Orientation Paper – November 2025

Background

EFFAT is the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions, and also represents domestic workers. It is the only one European Trade Union Federation in the hospitality sector and a recognised EU social partner.

The **tourism sector is one of the main pillars of the EU economy**. Representing around 10% of the EU's GDP and employing over 11.2 million workers in the EU (10% of all workers), the tourism sector is vital for the economy and employment of many European countries.

With a significant proportion of the tourism workforce being young people (11%), foreign citizens (16%) and women (58%)¹, tourism plays a vital role in helping **young people enter the labour market** and in **integrating migrant workers**. Furthermore, it promotes gender equality. Tourism also has the potential to stimulate regional development and contribute to growth in other sectors.

For a long time, the travel and tourism sector has pursued permanent growth at a global and European level. However, the sector's development has mainly relied on an economic model based on **short-term financial interests and profit maximisation**.

We also saw it during the summer of 2025. Despite the fact that prices for consumers in tourist destinations are increasing greatly, to the point where it is almost unbearable for many families to go on holiday, **working conditions in the sector remain precarious and wages are still too low**. This means that the **wealth generated is not being distributed at all**. In the hospitality sector, we also face high levels of undeclared or under-declared work.

In many places, unsustainable tourism development has resulted in the destruction of natural habitats. **Tourism is a major contributor to global CO₂ emissions and global warming**.

Digitalisation and the use of AI are also growing trends.

The **increasing marketing of tourist accommodation via unregulated platforms** has led to unfair competition, exacerbated **housing shortages** in urban centres and tourist hotspots, and contributed to **overtourism**, resulting in protests against tourists.

The future of the sector cannot be based on the same paradigms as in the past. We must strive for **a sustainable and socially responsible tourism model** based e.g. on quality services, stable employment, investment in human capital, visitor loyalty, a diverse range of offerings, reduced seasonality, innovation, environmental sustainability and **fairer distribution of benefits** among all stakeholders, including companies, workers and local communities.

To achieve that, the EU must play its part. EFFAT believes that tourism should **become a shared competence of the EU** to ensure a resilient and sustainable European tourism model capable of dealing with future challenges. The EU should assess the impact on tourism workers of any initiative launched in the sector, including the [Tourism Transition Pathway](#), the [EU agenda for Tourism 2030](#) and the upcoming EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

Based on [2020 EFFAT orientation paper](#), this document aims to outline **EFFAT's vision and proposed actions to ensure the transition of the tourism sector towards a new, sustainable, and socially responsible model based on quality jobs**.

¹ [Eurostat](#)

Actions To Be Taken

1. Actions in the Field of Employment

Since the pandemic, a **lack of skills and a shortage of workers** have been amongst the main challenges facing the hospitality sector. EFFAT and its affiliates are calling for a [series of actions](#) to make hospitality and tourism jobs more attractive and overcome labour shortages in the sector.

In a [joint declaration](#), EFFAT and HOTREC agreed that social dialogue and collective bargaining can play a crucial role in addressing labour and skills shortages by negotiating attractive salary and working conditions, promoting education and training, and providing protections for migrant workers from third countries.

Although tourism has recently been a rapidly growing sector and an important source of employment, precarious work remains the norm and even jobs that were once considered relatively secure are now at risk. It is therefore essential to **guarantee quality, permanent employment in the sector**, including through:

- **Strengthening sectoral collective bargaining** and raising wages including through the proper implementation of the Minimum Wage Directive which requires a minimum collective bargaining coverage of 80%.
- Banning zero-hour contracts and tackling involuntary part-time work as well as undeclared and under-declared work.
- Ensuring seasonal workers have access to social protection and unemployment benefits between seasons.
- Tackling **abusive subcontracting practices and unregulated labour intermediation** including through an [EU Directive as requested by EFFAT](#).
- **Promoting direct employment and tackling bogus self-employment**, which is prevalent among platform companies, particularly food delivery services. We are calling for the swift and proper implementation of the [Platform Work Directive](#).
- Promoting **workers' information, consultation and participation rights** at all levels including by ensuring a swift transposition and proper implementation of the revised EWC Directive.
- Ensuring a just transition in the sector through an **EU Directive on Just Transition** to ensure the anticipation of change in restructuring processes linked to the green and digital transitions.
- **Protecting workers from the risks linked to climate change** for their jobs, income and health and safety (floodings, fires, heatwaves, lack of snow etc).. EFFAT also calls for a [binding initiative on maximum working temperatures and extreme weather events](#)
- **Preventing and combating violence and harassment at the workplace**, especially by third parties. EFFAT and HOTREC have committed themselves to combating violence and harassment by third parties in the hospitality sector by adopting [a multisectoral guidelines](#).
- **Abandoning the Talent Pool** and any similar initiative that risks promoting an additional source of precarious labour, as explained in the [EFFAT position](#). The EU should focus primarily on raising labour standards and ensuring equal treatment for migrant workers already employed in the tourism sector.
- **Promoting vocational training and lifelong learning**, including investing in improving digital and green skills, through close cooperation between governments, educational establishments, companies/employers and trade unions. All workers should have access to qualifications and training, including **those in atypical jobs and seasonal workers**, who could undertake training during the off-season. Qualifications and skills should be transferable between companies.
- **Promoting quality apprenticeships programs** in line with the [Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality Apprenticeships](#) and the [ILO Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 \(No. 208\)](#)

2. Actions to Address Long-Standing Systemic Issues of the Sector

The central paradigm of the new tourism model must be sustainability in a threefold sense: economic, environmental, and social, the latter including greater attention to the stability and quality of employment. The following actions should be implemented:

- **Addressing growing financialization and concentration** in the sector which leads to short-termism and may create low cost models, with little investment in the workforce, and growing precarisation of employment, as highlighted in the [outcomes of the recent project](#) “Strengthening Democracy at Work and Managing the Impact of Financialization in EFFAT Sectors”.
- Addressing **unfair competition from short term rental accommodation platforms** with regard to working and employment conditions, safety standards, legislative and fiscal obligations, permits, registration of guests, consumers’ rights, etc. This should be achieved also by monitoring and strengthening the application of [EU regulation on short-term rentals](#).
- Reducing seasonality and investing in more proximity-based tourism.
- Focusing on the **excellence of tourism services**, based on stability and quality of employment and visitor loyalty
- **Promoting social tourism programs** e.g. for elderly or young people, families, disadvantaged groups, etc., as this could foster domestic tourism as well as travel in the low season and hence contribute to combatting seasonality.
- Including **employment standards in existing labelling initiatives** (e.g. stars, ecolabels). Social labelling campaigns such as [Fair Hotels and Restaurants](#) should be further developed.
- Implementing **the EU Due Diligence directives**. Trade unions and worker representatives should be fully involved throughout the whole due diligence process.

3. Actions in the Field of Economic Support for the Tourism Sector

EFFAT doesn’t oppose support for the sector including through public money. However, the **economic support of the sector should always be conditional to the respect of labour standards and workers’ rights**. Moreover, economic support should be provided only to those employers who invest in quality jobs.

Public funding of tourism is often aimed at attracting more visitors without taking into account sustainability objectives. To promote responsible travel, the EU and its Member States should direct funding towards local and short-distance tourism, which is more sustainable and can help reduce seasonality.

With this in mind, EFFAT considers necessary:

- Ensuring **dedicated support for the tourism sector** in the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), with a ring-fenced budget.
- Fostering **collaborative synergies between the public and private sectors** through public-private investment initiatives is key to developing and enhancing both physical and digital infrastructure, as well as preserving cultural heritage and the environment.
- **Promoting Research, Development, Innovation, Excellence, and Training (R+D+I+E+F)** as interconnected and strategic pillars is essential for the sustainable evolution of the tourism sector.

Conclusions

The transformation of the tourism sector must be based on a model that prioritises **social justice, sustainability and decent work**. Persistent challenges such as precarious work, environmental degradation and unfair competition demand a **decisive shift away from short-term thinking**.

EFFAT is calling for a future in which tourism contributes to inclusive economic growth, respects workers' rights and fosters resilient local communities. This requires strong social dialogue, robust labour standards and targeted public investment that supports employers committed to decent work.

The EU must play a leading role in guiding this transition, ensuring that its tourism-related initiatives, including the EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy, integrate the rights and voices of workers. **It is time to move towards a tourism model that is economically viable, environmentally sound, socially responsible, and fair for all.**