

### **TUI Care Foundation and Plan International: Empowering Dominican Youth through Education**

- *TUI Academy in the Dominican Republic offers career path in tourism industry for young people*
- *Safety network: Children empowered to protect themselves from (re)victimisation of commercial sexual exploitation*

**Berlin, 1 November 2017.** TUI Care Foundation and Plan International team up to bring education and employment opportunities in tourism to young people in the Dominican Republic. Together, the two organisations launched the TUI ACADEMY. Through this initiative 150 disadvantaged girls and boys will receive, throughout a period of three years, a one-year vocational training course preparing them for work in the field of tourism. Furthermore, a top-up educational programme will be offered which, beyond providing employment skills, will also include education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender related issues, work safety and financial literacy. This way TUI Academy will help young people to protect themselves from exploitation and make better informed decisions about their future life.

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The training includes an internship at Blue Diamond resorts where, among other things, they will be coached by experienced practitioners in their personal progression and development. Upon successful completion of the training, students receive a certification from INFOTEP –the official Dominican institute for vocational training. To support their first steps in the tourism industry, TUI Academy graduates are given working contracts of at least 6 months in duration.

Through TUI Academy, 150 adolescents in 3 communities in Punta Cana will be socially and economically empowered. The first group of 50 students currently undertaking TUI Academy's educational programme are between 17 and 24 years old and more than half of them are girls. The latter are particularly vulnerable to sex exploitation – currently the teenage pregnancy rate in Dominican Republic is at 21 per cent, doubling the world average – reason why this program aims to have enrolled approximately 70 per cent female participants by the end of it. Day-care services are at the students disposal and a big focus is being put in those communities surrounding the hotels where they would do their internships. Both measures are key to support participants and hinder abandonment rates.

Jeremy Ellis, Member of the Board of Trustees of TUI Care Foundation, says: "TUI Care Foundation is proud of his long-lasting partnership with Plan International. Together, we can open up new perspectives for young women and men in the Dominican Republic and combat multifaceted and complex issues such as exploitation and unemployment. Prevention and education are key in order to create opportunities for the citizens of tomorrow, and our TUI Academies offer the right environment for this to take place. They contribute substantially to a sustainable development of destinations and by that to empower local communities."

Missing education and the lack of employment opportunities for young people drive many of them to the informal sector. Desperately looking for income opportunities some of them end up in the sex industry and find themselves in highly unsafe and dangerous situations. A comprehensive educational and vocational programme as offered at TUI Academy can be their chance for a way out of poverty, unemployment and further. The educational program is linked to the initiative "Down to Zero", a broader programme financed by the Dutch Ministry of foreign affairs which focuses on combating the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in touristic destinations. The initiative follows a holistic approach targeting regulations and law enforcement to the strengthening of local NGOs. Its backbone is the training of "Agents of Change": Child victims and children at risk are enabled to protect themselves from (re)victimisation of commercial sexual exploitation by identifying and reporting cases. They also are engaged in campaigning and decision making, while educating their peers in the community. This gives not only a voice to those unheard but a safety network in which they can rely and use to help each other while preventing new cases. The same approach was tested by Plan International and TUI Care Foundation in the north of Brazil from 2010 to 2014.

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Monique van 't Hek, CEO of Plan International Netherlands, explained: "Plan International Netherlands has a long time, intensive and excellent relationship with the TUI Care Foundation, related to the combat of commercial sexual exploitation of children, and the social, economic and personal empowerment of adolescents and youth at risk of commercial sexual exploitation. The TUI Academy in the Dominican Republic is a perfect example of our partnership, by offering 150 adolescents a vocational training, combined with an internship and a 6 months job guarantee at one of TUI's Blue Diamond Resorts: the resorts need good, qualified and motivated staff and the students will become socially and economically empowered, able to protect themselves from commercial sexual exploitation and have access to decent work."

#### **About TUI Care Foundation**

Building on the potential of tourism as a force for good, the TUI Care Foundation supports and initiates partnerships and projects which create new opportunities for the young generation and contribute to thriving destinations all over the world. Connecting holidaymakers to good causes, the TUI Care Foundation fosters education and training initiatives to open up new opportunities and perspectives for young people, the protection of the natural environment in holiday destinations and sustainable livelihoods in thriving destinations where local communities can benefit even more from tourism. TUI Care Foundation works global and acts local - it builds on strong partnerships with local and international organisations to create meaningful and long lasting impact. The charitable foundation values transparency and the efficient use of funds. Therefore; 100% of the donations go to partners and projects with all operating costs of the foundation covered by TUI. TUI Care Foundation was founded by TUI, the world's leading tourism business, in 2011 and is based in the Netherlands.

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