

Report on the state of the Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) initiative

World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

Introduction

The Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) initiative is expanding tourism statistics beyond the traditional measurement of physical volumes (e.g., arrivals) and economic aspects (e.g., tourism GDP, tourism industries) to include also social (e.g., decent work and human capital, perceptions and experience, accessibility) and environmental aspects (e.g., flows, assets incl. ecosystems, transactions, green employment) related to the sustainability of tourism.

The standard-based approach of MST supports the production of more reliable, robust, comparable and credible data. This is especially relevant for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a matter of fact, the Committee's recommendation to launch MST was, to an important degree, also motivated by the need to track tourism's contribution to the SDGs.

MST is supported¹ by the United Nations Statistical Commission, which recognizes it as the framework for the derivation of indicators on sustainable tourism as well as for measurement at the subnational level. The 2017 [Manila Call for Action on Measuring Sustainable Tourism](#), ratified at the 6th International Conference on Tourism Statistics which gathered over 1,500 participants, affirmed global commitment to MST at the highest level in both tourism and statistical communities.

With MST, the ambition is to achieve the third international standard in tourism after the International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics and the Tourism Satellite Account.

MST is integrated within the global statistical system and it follows the long-term process generally applied and recommended by United Nations Statistical Commission including:

- Development of a statistical framework;
- Building international consensus and reaching UN endorsement of the statistical framework;
- Supporting countries in their implementation of the statistical framework for the production of data, through capacity building and compilation guides;
- Compilation of data produced by countries into international datasets, to inform policy and decision-making, and supporting various users of this data.

Leading these intertwined stages of MST development is the Working Group of Experts on MST, set up jointly by UNWTO and the UN Statistics Division. This is a multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder group that engages experts from national statistical offices, national tourism administrations and ministries of environment representing 24 different countries, sub-national tourism administrations and observatories, international organizations, academia and private sector.

Current state of the Statistical Framework for MST

The development of the Statistical Framework for MST (SF-MST) is well underway. It will act as an agreed standard framework for collecting, organizing and disseminating data. It dedicates a chapter to each of the core dimensions for understanding sustainability in tourism: economic, environmental and social (including institutions).

¹ Decision 48/115 on Tourism Statistics in the Report on the forty-eighth session of the UN Statistical Commission ([E/2017/24-E/CN.3/2017/35](#)) which was taken to ECOSOC.

In each of these core chapters, the framework builds on existing measurement standards and state-of-the-art developments. For example, in the environmental chapter, the link is made between the Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA). The SF-MST will also make use of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting framework for measuring the impact and dependencies of tourism on ecosystems.

An Editorial Board has been established as a part of the Working Group to periodically review and provide substantive advice in the development and finalization of the Statistical Framework. The editorial board is composed of experts from Austria, Cabo Verde, Canada, Mexico, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Spain, the Statistical Office of the European Commission (Eurostat), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN Statistical Division (UNSD) and UNWTO.

The SF- MST has undergone various rounds of consultations and is currently² under revision. The process ahead includes further consultations with the Working Group and the Editorial Board before a global consultation is conducted. A global consultation is foreseen in 2020 to engage and seek views from both the tourism community and the statistical community and beyond. The results of the global consultation will be considered by the editorial board and recommendations put forward to the Committee on Statistics.

Implementation of the MST

Pilot countries pioneering the implementation of MST include: Austria, Canada, Fiji, Germany, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, and Sweden. The pilot studies serve two main purposes: (1) to test the framework for relevance and feasibility, and (2) to feed the framework with lessons and novel or pragmatic solutions encountered on the ground.

Further, a number of countries in the Asia-Pacific have been identified as potential pilot studies, including Samoa, Thailand and Viet Nam. In the context of the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership, these countries have focused on measuring the impact of tourism on the ocean economy and related resources. These initiatives are being considered to be incorporated as pilot studies for improving and feeding into the SF-MST, while advancing its implementation. In particular, Thailand is currently in the process of becoming a member of the Working Group on MST.

Finally, the first MST training session was held through a joint effort between ESCAP and UNWTO in the Asia-Pacific region in December 2019³. This is an extremely important first step towards the capacity building efforts that are needed for the implementation of the MST at the regional and global scales.

² As of June 2020

³ Information on this workshop can be found at <https://communities.unescap.org/asia-pacific-economic-statistics/economic-statistics-events/training-workshop-tourism-satellite>