



United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental Economic Accounting
Extraordinary Meeting
16 and 18 November 2020

Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) Way forward

Context

Tourism a social, cultural and economic phenomenon that relies on and has an impact on the economy, the natural and built environment, the local population at the places visited, and on visitors themselves. Owing to this range of impacts and the wide spectrum of stakeholders involved, there is a need for a holistic approach to tourism development, management and monitoring. This approach is supported by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in order to formulate and implement national and local tourism policies¹.

Tourism stakeholders are concerned with the sustainability of the sector itself, especially in the face of climate change and crises like Covid, but also with how tourism may support or deter efforts towards sustainable development more broadly.

With existing international standards for measuring tourism primarily focused on describing tourism activity by visitors and the related supply by tourism industries and economic impacts², there was a clear need for expanding tourism statistics into the environmental dimension and also to reconsider economic and social data related to tourism from the perspective of sustainability.

This was reinforced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where three Goals (Goal 8, 12 and 14) explicitly mention the role of sustainable tourism. With the UN General Assembly request that monitoring the SDGs be statistically-based came the responsibility for UNWTO, as the UN Specialized Agency in tourism, to develop the area of tourism statistics to better cater to the growing need for credible, comparable data on the sustainability of tourism.

¹ United Nations and World Tourism Organization, *International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008* (IRTS 2008), (New York, Madrid, 2008): https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/seriesm/seriesm_83rev1e.pdf

² The *International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008* (IRTS 2008: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/seriesm/seriesm_83rev1e.pdf) and the Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework 2008 (TSA: RMF 2008: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/Seriesf/SeriesF_80rev1e.pdf)

Process

The United Nations Statistical Commission at its forty-eighth session³ in 2017 “supported the development of the SF-MST⁴ by the Working Group of Experts on Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism of the World Tourism Organization, which will include the development of indicators for sustainable tourism, measurement at the subnational level and pilot projects”. Interventions from the African group of countries, CARICOM, Cuba, Indonesia, Mongolia, Malaysia, Mexico, Kenya on behalf of Africa, Austria, Belize, Oman, Morocco, Spain, Fiji, the Philippines and Guyana welcomed the work.

In the margins of this same session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, and on the occasion of the 2017 UN International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, UNWTO along with UNSD organized a special seminar on MST⁵ with high-level panellists representing the Statistical Institutes of Austria, Canada, Fiji, and the Philippines.

The Working Group of Experts on MST reports regularly on its progress to the UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA) and includes updates on its work in UNCEEA reports to the UN Statistical Commission. For example, at the United Nations Statistical Commission’s fiftieth session in, the UNCEEA tabled the final draft of *Linking the TSA and the SEEA: A Technical Note* prepared by UNWTO as a first stepping stone towards the MST Statistical Framework. It had been previously approved by both UNWTO’s Committee on Statistics and the UNCEEA, and provides countries with concrete guidance for measuring some key environmental aspects of tourism.

In its seventeenth meeting in 2017, the UNWTO Committee on Statistics approved the annotated outline of the SF-MST and the MST research programme, and noted the progress made by some pilot countries (Canada, Netherlands, Fiji, Mexico and Italy). These outcomes were all subsequently supported by the UNWTO Executive Council at its 105th session (May 2017).

Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism was the overall theme of the [6th International Conference on Tourism Statistics](#) held in Manila, Philippines, in June 2017. The Conference is considered a historical milestone for tourism statistics. It gathered over 1,500 leaders and experts from 88 countries including ministers, chief statisticians, policy experts, statisticians, private sector, academics, civil society and international organizations dedicated to this topic. The conference supported the 1st draft of the MT Statistical Framework and the roadmap towards its completion. The [Manila Call for Action on Measuring Sustainable Tourism](#) adopted there is a global commitment to creating a consistent statistical approach to measuring the full dimensions of tourism, and encourages presentation of the Statistical Framework for MST to the UN Statistical Commission.

³ 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](#)

⁴ The “Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism” was initially named “Statistical Framework for Measuring Sustainable Tourism”. The change in the name has been agreed upon by the Working Group of Experts on Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism at its 2nd meeting held on October 2018.

⁵ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/48th-session/side-events/20170308-2L-accounting-and-statistics-for-sustainable-tourism/>



In September 2017, the twenty-second session of the UNWTO General Assembly supported the development of the Statistical Framework for MST and endorsed the Manila Call for Action on Measuring Sustainable Tourism.

Sustainability in tourism, and its measurement, naturally cuts across a range of disciplines and institutions. For this reason, under auspices of the UNWTO Committee on Statistics and the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental Economic Accounting (UNCEEA), a multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder Working Group of Experts on MST was set up to lead the development of the Statistical Framework for MST.

This group engages experts from national statistical offices, national tourism administrations, sub-national tourism administrations and observatories, international organizations, academia and private sector. The Working Group of Experts has advanced various conceptual and cross-cutting research areas through thematic sub-groups and the drafting of more than 36 discussion papers that have fed the Statistical Framework.

An editorial board was established to periodically review and provide substantive advice in the development and finalization of the Statistical Framework for MST. It 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 Statistical Framework for MST has undergone various rounds of consultations, including a worldwide consultation coinciding with the Manila Conference. For transparency purposes as well as wide involvement not only of the statistical community in national statistical offices and international agencies but also the broader tourism and environmental communities, all information on the development of MST is available on the UNWTO website⁶ including the draft Statistical Framework, comments from the consultations, outcomes of the meetings, work of the sub-groups and pilot countries.

Several countries have carried out pilots to test the relevance and feasibility of the MST Statistical Framework under development including Austria, Canada, Fiji, Germany, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Philippines, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Thailand and Vietnam. UNWTO (2020) compiled some of these in [Experiences from Pilot Studies in Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism: A synopsis for Policy Makers](#) which shows that some pilots are already feeding policy discussions and initiatives such as Tourism Master Plans. Additional country pilots are in the pipeline.

The MST programme, through the Working Group of Experts on MST supported by the UNWTO Committee on Statistics, has also been active in the development of indicators for monitoring the role of tourism in the Sustainable Development Goals. Two of the indicators proposed have been included in the SDG Indicator Framework for Global Monitoring, and UNWTO reports the data it compiles from countries to the Global SDG Indicators Database:

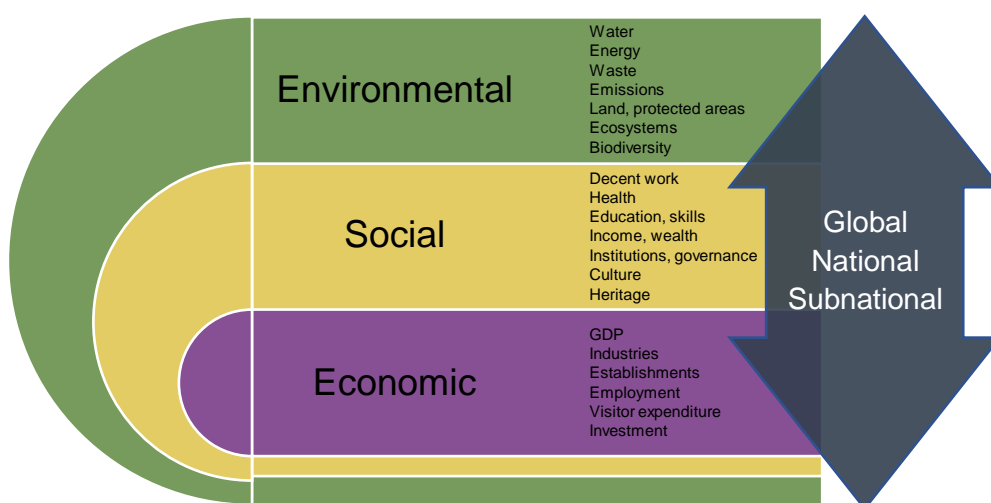
- 8.9.1 on Tourism direct GDP to supporting monitoring Target 8.9 on the promotion of sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products

⁶ <https://www.unwto.org/standards/measuring-sustainability-tourism>

- 12.b.1 on the level of implementation of standard accounting tools (i.e. the Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) and the System of Environmental Economic Accounts (SEEA)) to monitor the economic and environmental aspects of tourism sustainability in Target 12.b which calls for the development and implementation of tools to monitor sustainable tourism.

MST Framework

A visual summary of the MST framework under development is shown below, presenting the key measurement areas pertaining to tourism’s economic, social and environmental sustainability. Annex 1 shows the current structure of the MST Statistical Framework document.



The framework considers data for global, national and subnational levels. Of course, not all measurement areas will be equally relevant in all countries nor at all spatial levels. The Framework is comprehensive but aims to be sensitive to users’ needs, encouraging a modular implementation focused on priority areas.

Next steps

The approximate next steps in the development of MST are roughly as follows (all dates are tentative).

Tentative dates	Steps
Now – Dec 2020	Review by UNWTO and selected UNWTO constituents
Now - 2021	Continued development of new country pilots
Feb 2021	New version Statistical Framework for MST
Feb – Mar 2021	Consultation with Working Group of Experts on MST Incorporation of comments with Editorial Board
Mar 2021	Meeting of the UNWTO Committee on Statistics Side event on MST at UN Statistical Commission
Jun 2021	Meeting of the Working Group of Experts on MST + Editorial Board Meeting of the UNCEEA
Sep 2021	UNWTO General Assembly and Executive Council meetings

Sep-Oct 2021	Global Consultation
Oct 2021	Meeting of the London Group
Mar 2022	Presentation to UN Statistical Commission

It is expected that the global consultation be carried out jointly between UNSD and UNWTO and engage National Statistical Offices as well as UNWTO constituents (National Tourism Administrations and Affiliate Members from private sector, academia and civil society). Proposals for other stakeholder groups to engage in the consultations are most welcome.

The Statistical Framework for MST is expected to be finalized by the Editorial Board after the global consultation and agreed upon by the Working Group on MST which will submit it to the UNWTO Committee on Statistics for its endorsement before its presentation to the UN Statistical Commission.

The Technical Committee on the SEEA Central Framework is invited to review and provide comments to ensure consistency with the SEEA before the global consultation. Progress on MST, and the Statistical Framework, will be presented to the UNCEEA at its meeting in 2021.

The UNCEEA is kindly invited to:

1. Propose experts and/or stakeholder groups that may be interested in contributing to the development of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) and possibly joining the Working Group of Experts on MST;
2. Identify opportunities for carrying out additional pilots in countries (at national or subnational level) to test and feed the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism, potentially with regard to exploring the links between tourism measurement and ecosystem accounting;
3. Comment on the potential to explore links between tourism and ecosystem accounting, which could feed the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism.

Annex 1.

Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism Table of Contents (provisional)

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 - 1.2.1. History of sustainable tourism policy and measurement
 - 1.2.2. Challenges in measurement
- 1.3. A statistical approach to measuring the sustainability of tourism
 - 1.3.1. Approaches to measuring sustainability
 - 1.3.2. Measuring the sustainability of tourism
- 1.4. Overview of the SF-MST
 - 1.4.1. The nature and role of SF-MST
 - 1.4.2. Components of the SF-MST
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 - 2.3.2. Accounting for the supply and demand aspects of tourism activity
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- 3.3.5. Accounts for solid waste for tourism industries
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 - 4.2.2. Perspectives on the social dimension in tourism activity
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 - 5.2.2. Applying statistical practice at different scales
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 - 5.3.2. R-TIS Areas of measurement focus
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 - 5.4.2. Delineating local tourism destinations
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