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Background document
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Items for discussion and decision: environmental-economic accounting

Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism: Progress and way forward

Prepared by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-third session, held from 1 to 4 March 2022, the Statistical Commission adopted the following decisions¹ with regards to Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism:
 - On the Statistical Framework, the Commission:
 - a. “Encouraged the finalization of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism for future submission to the Commission and, noted the strong interest from countries in this work” (Decision 53/115 (j)).
 - On the work of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators (IAEG-SDG) with respect to the MST-based indicators to monitor tourism in the SDGs, the Commission:
 - b. “Noted that the CARICOM countries expressed concern that indicator 8.9.2 [employment in the tourism industries] was deleted as a result of the 2020 comprehensive review” (Decision 53/102 (p));
 - c. “Requested the IAEG-SDGs to work in close coordination with the custodian agency [UNWTO] on a proposal for indicators on sustainable tourism to better monitor target 8.9” (Decision 53/102 (q));
 - d. “Approved the proposed work programme of the [IAEG-SDG] Group and requested the inclusion of the work on sustainable tourism” (Decision 53/102 (r)).
2. Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) aims to provide an internationally agreed statistical framework to measure the impacts and dependencies of tourism on the economy, society and the environment—at national and subnational levels. The Statistical Framework for MST will support efforts to produce data that is more comparable, integrated and credible and to better guide decisions and policy with respect to sustainable tourism, including the Sustainable Development Goals and beyond.
3. Launched in 2016 by UNWTO, in partnership with leading countries, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), MST is a living example of moving beyond GDP and embodies tourism’s response in this sense.
4. The Expert Group on MST in charge of leading the development of the Statistical Framework for MST, was established by the UNWTO Committee on Statistics in collaboration with UNSD and works in coordination with the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA).

¹ https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/session_53/documents/2022-41-FinalReport-E.pdf



5. MST includes five inter-related lines of work:
 - Developing the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST) led by the Expert Group on MST;
 - Engagement and consensus-building across the tourism and statistical communities with the view to present SF-MST to the UN Statistical Commission for its endorsement;
 - Supporting piloting and implementation of SF-MST in countries;
 - Developing a set of indicators derived from SF-MST for international comparability purposes. This includes liaising with the UN Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals indicators (IAEG-SDG) for alignment with the SDG indicators; and
 - Setting up an global dataset and country data reporting processes.

6. The present document provides a summary of key developments on MST since the 53rd session of the UN Statistical Commission (1-4 March 2022), providing further details to what is presented in the Report of the Committee of Experts on Environmental Economic Accounting² to the 54th Session (paragraph 13) and further elaborates on the outcome of the 3rd meeting of the Expert Group on MST held on 15-16 December 2022 and the Symposium on Country Experiences held back-to-back to the expert group. Through the UNCEEA report, the 54th Session of the UN Statistical Commission is invited to express its views on “the progress made in country testing and finalizing the statistical framework for measuring the sustainability of tourism, with a view to its presentation to the Commission”.

II. Finalization of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism

7. The Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST) consists of a standard framework for collecting, organizing and disseminating relevant information. SF-MST integrates tourism statistics with other economic, social and environmental information and provides a coherent base for deriving indicators that are relevant for monitoring and analysing the sustainability of tourism.

8. The 3rd meeting of the Expert Group on MST³, held on 15-16 December 2022, gathered over 110 representatives from 26 countries from all regions of the world, international organizations such as UNSD, ILO, OECD, regional organizations, sub-national authorities, academia and the private sector.

9. On that occasion, a new version (3.0) of the SF-MST was discussed thoroughly chapter by chapter (the provisional table of contents is available in Annex I). A period of consultation among the Expert Group was launched (concluding on 31 January 2023) to allow time for a more careful review from participants in light

² https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/session_54/documents/2023-11-UNCEEA-E.pdf

³ <https://www.unwto.org/events/symposium-countries-exp-3rd-meeting-eg>

of those discussions and to provide the opportunity for experts who could not attend the meeting to provide input. At the meeting, some key technical issues were identified for further development (such as defining produced assets in tourism, a list or classification for tourism occupations, allocation of transport related GHG emissions) and it was decided that small, dedicated research teams will work on these.

10. Also, a roadmap for the finalization of SF-MST was agreed by the Expert Group with the intent to submit the SF-MST to the UN Statistical Commission at its fifty-fifth session in March 2024, according to the table below.

Table: Approximate Roadmap for the finalisation of SF-MST

December 2022 / January 2023	>Expert Group Consultation of the draft (3.0) of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST)
February 2023	>Set-up small research teams on outstanding issues + Relaunch the Editorial Board
March / April 2023	>Work on incorporating comments from the Expert Group consultation and preparing a new (4.0) version for SF-MST for Global Consultation >Establish a research agenda
May / June	>4 th meeting of the Expert Group + Editorial Board, potentially coinciding with the 20 th meeting of the UNWTO Committee on Statistics >Review of the chapter on the environmental sustainability of tourism by UNCEEA Technical Committee(s) >Presentation of new draft (4.0) SF-MST at UNCEEA meeting
June / August	>Global Consultation in partnership with UNSD (involving UNWTO and UNSD contacts)
September/October	>Incorporation of comments from Global Consultation into new (5.0) version + meeting (online) of the Editorial Board >Report on MST to the UNWTO General Assembly
November/December	>New (5.0) version to UNWTO Committee on Statistics >Subsequently, submit (5.0) version of the Chapter on the Environment sustainability of tourism to UNCEEA >Submission to UNSC Secretariat of the Report from UNWTO/Committee summarizing UNWTO's programme of work on statistics and the process and progress on MST with the request for the UN Statistical Commission to endorse SF-MST
January 2024	>Submission to UNSC Secretariat of the background document containing the SF-MST
February / March 2024	>Presentation at UN Statistical Commission and discussion >High level side event on MST on the margins of UN Statistical Commission

11. The consultation process is an important component of the finalization of the SF-MST. The roadmap includes a global consultation to engage and seek views from

the statistical community, the tourism community and beyond, including academia and the private sector. The results of the global consultation will be summarized and made publicly available. The editorial board will consider the feedback and put forth recommendations to the Expert Group on MST.

III. MST piloting around the world

12. One of the main means of advancing implementation of the SF-MST is through pilot projects in countries and sub-national destinations. These experiences contribute to incorporating lessons and feedback from practical experiences, ensuring that the SF-MST is policy-relevant and technically feasible, and supporting consensus-building efforts.
13. Pilots are usually implemented in a stepwise and modular approach, whereby different pilots focus on implementing different parts of the SF-MST and at different territorial scales, in line with countries' priorities and circumstances.
14. To date, 52 countries and sub-national destinations from all regions of the world have implemented or have expressed interest in undertaking an MST pilot. More specifically, 26 countries and sub-national destinations have piloted MST, of which 10 in Europe, 8 in Asia and the Pacific, 4 in the Americas, 3 in Africa and 1 in the Middle East (a full list of pilots is presented in Annex II). Collectively the pilots showcase that it is possible to measure in a comparable way the breadth of elements that comprise tourism's sustainability—from environmental, to social to economic aspects, at national and sub-national levels—with a single integrated framework.
15. A Symposium on Country Experiences⁴, held back-to-back with the 3rd meeting of the Expert Group on MST, showcased pioneering work by countries and subnational destinations. Pilots shared their practices and findings on measuring the social, environmental and economic sustainability of tourism, as well as governance, institutional and data availability issues.
16. On the occasion of the Symposium, UNWTO also launched the publication *Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism: Lessons from pilots*⁵ that showcases seven new pilots as well as new findings from five existing pilots, in the following destinations and countries from all regions of the world: Arab countries, Austria, Canary Islands, Costa Rica, Fiji, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden and Uganda.
17. UNWTO has already initiated capacity development and technical assistance activities for advancing on the measurement of tourism's sustainability, UNWTO has been involved in the following activities:

⁴ <https://www.unwto.org/events/symposium-countries-exp-3rd-meeting-eg>

⁵ <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/9789284424061>

- a. Building on the MST pilot in the Philippines (that focused on water consumption and energy consumption, and the generation of greenhouse gas emissions by the tourism industries), UNWTO provided a training workshop (held on 29 March 2022) to national stakeholders to support the expansion of the pilot with the aim of producing indicators across the three pillars of sustainability (social, economic and environmental).
 - b. Supporting Sri Lanka in assessing the impact on tourism of the X-Pearl oil spill disaster using the SF-MST as a basis for the organisation of the underlying information and framing of the connections between the environment, local communities and the economy.
 - c. Recognizing the need for better sex-disaggregated and gender data in tourism to strengthen the sector's contribution to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment, two workshops were delivered to English-speaking countries in both Africa and the Middle East, as well as in Spanish-speaking countries in the Americas. These 'Introductory workshops on women's employment data in tourism'⁶ were implemented with the support of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany, and UN Women.
18. Also, under the MST umbrella, substantive progress has been made in the Pacific region under the leadership of the Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO) and its partners. SPTO and its member countries have, over the past three years, developed a sustainable tourism policy framework, completed an assessment of the available statistics to measure the sustainability of tourism, and are in the process of finalizing a set of agreed MST-based indicators that can be implemented throughout the region.
19. More capacity development in MST, in form of workshops and seminars, is expected to take place in 2023 for the South Asian, Middle East and potentially for the West African Economic and Monetary Union countries. The intention is for these gatherings to not only provide technical training for statisticians and compilers but to also include a high-level segment for raising awareness on MST among Ministers of Tourism and Chief Statisticians.

IV. Development of indicators derived from SF-MST

20. UNWTO is currently leading the development of an agreed set of indicators derived from the SF-MST for international comparability purposes with the view to initiate an international dataset and country reporting. The set of indicators will be presented to UNWTO's constituency for its endorsement. As a first step, a mapping of the most commonly used indicators on tourism's sustainability has been elaborated and will serve as an input for the identification of a set of relevant

⁶<https://www.unwto.org/events/workshop-women-employment-data-tourism>
https://www.unwto.org/es/Taller_datos_de_empleo_en_turismo_desagregados_porsexo

and available indicators. The process will also include the launch of a consultation among the members of the Expert Group on MST and the submission of the set of indicators to the UNWTO Committee on Statistics for endorsement. UNWTO has expanded its economic and employment related data collection from countries in 2022-2023 and plans further expansions in 2024 to extend the inclusion of MST-based data and indicators in international datasets.

21. The agreed set of indicators derived from SF-MST builds on UNWTO's Tourism Statistics Database⁷ that covers key data and indicators on inbound, domestic and outbound tourism, the tourism industries, employment in the tourism industries, tourism as a trade in services, as well as economic data like tourism consumption and expenditure, Tourism Direct Gross Value Added, Total Gross Value Added of the tourism industries and Tourism Direct Gross Domestic Product. The expansions aim to respond to the increasing demand for more tourism economic data from stakeholders in tourism and beyond.
22. In parallel, UNWTO is liaising with the Task Team on Sustainable Tourism of the IAEG-SDG to develop a proposal for sustainable tourism indicators to support the monitoring of Target 8.9 (in addition to existing indicator 8.9.1) that will be considered for the 2025 comprehensive review on the SDG indicators.

⁷ <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-statistics/tourism-statistics-database>

Annex I.

Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism Table of Contents (provisional) - Version 3.0 (December 2022)

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Annex II.

Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST): Pilot countries (as of January 2023)

Implemented (26 countries and sub-national destinations)

- Austria
- Canada
- Costa Rica
- Denmark
- Egypt
- Fiji
- Germany
- Indonesia
- Italy
- Kyrgyzstan
- Mexico
- Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Peru
- Philippines
- Samoa
- Saudi Arabia
- South Africa
- Spain
- Sri Lanka
- Sweden
- Thailand
- Uganda
- Vietnam
- Wales
- Canary Islands

Expression of Interest (26 countries):

- Albania
- Belarus
- Belize
- Bosnia & Herzegovina
- Brazil
- Burkina Faso
- Chile
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- Dominican Republic
- Ghana
- Greece
- Guyana
- Iran



- Jamaica
- Japan
- Kuwait
- Malaysia
- Maldives
- Mauritius
- Monaco
- Rwanda
- St Kitts
- Seychelles
- Slovenia
- Switzerland

