Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism: Closing the gap between policy and statistics

High-Level side event in the framework of the United Nations Statistical Commission 55th session
Co-organized by Statistics Austria, National Statistics Institute of Spain, World Tourism Organization and in collaboration with the UNCEEA

📍 **Conference Room A, UN Headquarters, NY**

🕐 **Tuesday, 27 February 2024   (13:45-14:30)**

Background

In a growth spurt that outpaced economic growth, tourism reached nearly 1.5 billion tourist arrivals globally in 2019. Accounting for 4.2% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that year, roughly the same share as agriculture, tourism was the world's 3rd largest export earnings category after fuels and chemicals.

This changed abruptly when the COVID-19 pandemic provoked the deepest crisis for tourism in recorded history. Global GDP from tourism nearly halved within one year to 2.3% in 2020. Millions of businesses, jobs and livelihoods around the world were severely impacted. In the European Union (EU) alone, Eurostat estimates that the fall in tourism may have accounted for 184 billion of the 440 billion drop in gross value added: 42% of total losses [1].

The COVID-19 pandemic also evidenced tourism's role beyond economic development. Poaching increased with the loss in tourism income. The cultural exchange, social cohesion and wellbeing facilitated by tourism also suffered. Policymakers ached for better data to inform urgent economic and social policies for a sector sometimes overlooked.

Post-pandemic, building back a better tourism became a priority to avoid mistakes of the past. As tourism made its comeback in 2023 amid geopolitical instability, climate change and economic uncertainty, visitors enjoyed and destinations benefitted once again. Headlines celebrated record visitation numbers, but also revisited issues of overcrowding and local discontent. Tourism provides valuable income to sustain livelihoods, revitalise remote areas and protect environmental and cultural heritage, but it can also lead to environmental degradation and social tension.

Tourism stakeholders have been involved with the sustainability of the sector for decades. A polluted beach or a crowded city centre are not very competitive tourism destinations. For this reason, the sector itself has often been keenly aware of the need to sustain the basis for its prosperity: the tourism destinations. Beyond tourism, interest has grown in understanding how tourism can support or deter efforts towards sustainable development, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Against this backdrop, the need to better understand the complex relations between tourism and sustainability is higher than ever.

[1] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/7870049/16527548/KS-FT-22-011-EN-N.pdf/c0fa9583-b1c9-959a-9961-94ae9920e164?version=4.0&t=1683792112888 (20/12/2023).

About Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism

Upon the request of Member States, the Committee on Statistics of the World Tourism Organization, in partnership with leading countries, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), International Labour Organization (ILO), Eurostat, the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), and others launched in 2016 the development of a Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST).

The Manila Call for Action adopted at the International Conference on Measuring Sustainable Tourism (21-24 June 2017, Manila, the Philippines) uniting 1,500 participants including Ministers and Chief Statisticians, represented a global commitment to create a consistent statistical approach to measuring the full impact of tourism.

A first-of-its-kind integrated framework, MST aims to guide the production of key data on tourism's economic, social and environmental aspects, at global, national and sub-national levels.

The development of the Statistical Framework for MST has benefitted from wide engagement and a transparent, consultative, and consensus-building process. Led by the multidisciplinary Expert Group on MST—and supported by an Editorial Board and several research teams—the development of the Statistical Framework for MST was enriched by the experiences of 29 pilots in countries and various rounds of consultation.

> "The *Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism* will offer us more data and a better insight into challenges we are trying to solve."
>
> President of the 77th session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, Mr. Csaba Körösi, at the High-Level Political Forum on the SDGs, July 2023.

The Statistical Framework for MST has been recognized in national, regional and international strategic policy frameworks across the globe, including the European Parliament, the Pacific Tourism Organisation and the G20. Moreover, it was recently adopted by the World Tourism Organization General Assembly in a historical consensus among the tourism policy community and with the view to its presentation to the statistical community at the 55th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission for its endorsement [2].

About the Side Event

Back on the agenda of the United Nations Statistical Commission since 2017, tourism statistics has undergone important developments amidst particularly challenging times for the sector. The side event will introduce the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism, present pioneering country experiences that showcase its relevance and feasibility, and reflect on the lessons learnt from the integration of economic, environmental and social dimensions that characterize the framework.

[2] See item 4(a): Tourism Statistics of the agenda. Report of the World Tourism Organization (E/CN.3/2024/17).

Provisional Programme
Tuesday, 27 February 2024
13:45 - 14:30 - United Nations Headquarters (Conference Room A)

Moderator:

Ms. Clara van der Pol, Director a.i, Statistics Department, World Tourism Organization

Speakers:

Ms. Zoritsa Urosevic, Executive Director, World Tourism Organization

Ms. Elena Manzanera, President, National Statistics Institute (INE), Spain

Mr. Tobias Thomas, Director General, Statistics Austria

Ms. Graciela Márquez Colín, President, National Institute of Statistics and Geography, Mexico

Mr. Claire Dennis Mapa, National Statistician, Philippines Statistics Authority

Mr. André Loranger, Assistant Chief Statistician, Statistics Canada and Chair of the UNCEEA