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Fiftieth session

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Items for discussion and decision: environmental-economic accounting

Background document

Available in English only

Advancing the Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) Project

Prepared by United Nations World Tourism Organization

Advancing the Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) project

Background document to the Report of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental Economic Accounting to the fiftieth Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, March 2019.

Introduction

1. In 2015 the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), with the support of UNSD, initiated the project Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST¹). A key motivation for the MST project is developing tourism statistics to support measurement of progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and particularly those SDG targets that relate directly to tourism and in response to the demand of Member States and a wide range of stakeholders.
2. Work on MST is being led by the Working Group of Experts on Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (the most recent meeting was held on 24-25 October 2018²) composed of experts from national statistical offices, national tourism administrations, international and regional organizations, academia and the private sector. The Working Group of Experts on MST was established by the UNWTO's Committee on Statistics in collaboration with UNSD and works in coordination with the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA).
3. It is the primary task of the Working Group to develop the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST), which consists of a standard framework for collecting, organizing and disseminating relevant information. The SF-MST integrates tourism statistics with other economic, social and environmental information and provides a coherent base for deriving indicators that are relevant to the monitoring and analysis of sustainable tourism. To achieve this, the SF-MST will have as a central feature the linking of the Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) with the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA).
4. At its forty-eighth session, the Statistical Commission adopted decision 48/115 on Tourism Statistics³ in which it:
 - 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, and noted the interest of a number of countries in participating in these pilot projects.
 - Agreed with the proposal to prepare a technical note linking the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) and the Tourism Satellite Account under the auspices of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting, the Committee on Statistics and the Tourism Satellite Account of the World Tourism Organization.
5. Regular reporting on the MST project is incorporated in the annual report of UNCEEA to the UN Statistical Commission. The UNCEEA report to the fiftieth session of UNSC includes a brief summary of progress on MST. This background document provides additional detail on the progress achieved in the MST project and describes the process

¹ <http://statistics.unwto.org/mst>

² http://statistics.unwto.org/event/wge_mst_2ndmeeting

³ 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.

to advance the development of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST) which is one item for discussion under the UNCEEA report.

6. In addition to this background document, a second background document has been tabled for UNSC that provides the final draft of a technical guidance document *Linking the TSA and the SEEA: A Technical Note*. A short introduction to this technical guidance is provided at the end of this document.

Progress achieved in the Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism project

7. In its 2017 meeting, the UNWTO's Committee on Statistics⁵ approved the annotated outline of the SF-MST, the annotated outline on linking the SEEA and TSA, the MST research programme and noted the progress made by some pilot countries (Canada, Netherlands, Fiji, Mexico and Italy)⁶. These outcomes were all subsequently supported by the UNWTO Executive Council at its 105th session⁷.
8. Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism was the overall theme of the 6th International Conference on Tourism Statistics⁸ held in Manila, Philippines, in June 2017. The Conference is considered a historical milestone for tourism statistics. It gathered over 1,500 tourism leaders and practitioners from across the globe to set the roadmap to the first draft of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism. It was the first time ever that a UNWTO event united ministers, statistical chiefs, policy experts, statisticians, private sector and academics dedicated to the measurement of sustainable development and tourism. All parties fully supported the first draft Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism. An entire session was dedicated to linking the TSA and the SEEA, of which the Technical Note was the central paper.
9. The relevance and feasibility of work on linking these two areas of measurement was highlighted in a series of country presentations. Examples from Canada, Fiji, Mexico, Saudi Arabia and the Philippines showed that the development of the framework is not limited to those countries with statistical systems that are considered to be more developed. Indeed, working directly on issues of policy relevance is possible in all countries.
10. The Conference concluded with the adoption of the *Manila Call for Action on Measuring Sustainable Tourism* which represents a global commitment to create a consistent statistical approach to measuring the full impact of tourism. It recognizes that effective sustainable tourism policies require integrated, coherent, comparable and robust data. It also encourages UNWTO to present the Statistical Framework for MST to the United Nations Statistical Commission for its consideration at its fifty-first session, to be held in 2020.
11. In September 2017, the UNWTO General Assembly (composed of 158 countries) supported the development of the SF-MST and endorsed the *Manila Call for Action on Measuring Sustainable Tourism*⁹. The UNWTO General Assembly also encouraged the UNWTO's Secretary-General to address statistics, including the MST project, as a strategic priority for the Organization in order to be able to fulfil the Organization's UN mandate and worldwide expectations in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicators. In response to the UNWTO General Assembly, the newly elected UNWTO's Secretary General included the development of the Statistical Framework for MST in its vision and priorities for the period 2019-2021¹⁰.

⁵ <http://statistics.unwto.org/committeests17thmeeting>

⁶ Other pilot countries are: Austria, Germany, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Sweden. More information at: http://statistics.unwto.org/studies_experiences

⁷ http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/pdf/ce105_decisions_en.pdf

⁸ <http://statistics.unwto.org/mstconference>

⁹ http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/pdf/978-92-844-1894-5_conf_philippines_call_for_action_web_4.pdf

¹⁰ http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/pdf/ce108_5_b_management_vision_and_priorities_rev1_en.pdf

12. During 2018, an important component of the work of the UNWTO's Committee on Statistics was the advancement of the research agenda and implementation activities of the SF-MST. Various conceptual research areas and cross-cutting research areas have been identified: (1) the social sustainability of tourism, (2) employment in tourism industries, (3) defining spatial areas, (4) implementation strategy, (5) communication strategy and (6) tourism SDG indicators. For each area, a sub-group has been established with a lead author supported by a small number of experts to provide substantive contributions to the resolutions of the conceptual issues and advancement of cross-cutting areas.
13. A first round of consultation on the updated draft statistical framework was launched among members of the UNWTO Committee on Statistics and members of the Working Group of Experts on MST from 5 February 2018 to 9 March 2018. Comments were received from 19 countries, international agencies, academic institutions and related initiatives¹¹. All the comments received were incorporated in an updated version of the draft Statistical Framework for MST.
14. At its 2018 meeting¹², the UNWTO's Committee on Statistics discussed the draft Statistical Framework for MST prepared for the consultation as well as an initial proposal for an implementation strategy and a timeline on the steps ahead, including the plan to complete the Statistical Framework by the end of 2019. Another key feature of the meeting were the presentations of results from pilot studies such as Canada, Italy, Mexico, Philippines and Saudi Arabia including an example of policy applications.
15. The UNWTO Executive Council at its 108th session¹³ supported the Committee's work on Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism¹⁴, including the development of a statistical framework according to the timeline presented, the design of an implementation strategy, and the steps taken towards extending the UNWTO database to incorporate MST data including SDG tourism indicators. It also commended the pioneering work of countries and subnational regions in developing pilot studies on Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism. It also encouraged the Committee, with the support of the Secretariat, to continue liaising with the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) to ensure the technical soundness and feasibility of indicators for monitoring the role of tourism in the SDGs.
16. The UNCEEA endorsed the technical note on TSA and SEEA at its thirteenth meeting¹⁵, which had been previously reviewed by the SEEA Central Framework Technical Committee.
17. A meeting of the Working Group of Experts on MST¹⁶ took place on 24-25 October 2018 which gathered around 50 experts from a wide range of disciplines and agencies with a good geographical coverage: national statistical offices, national tourism administrations, international and regional organizations as well as subnational entities and the academia. The participants reviewed and discussed methodological developments in the different draft chapters of the Statistical Framework including a new chapter on combined presentations, indicators and applications.
18. The subgroup on tourism SDG indicators which mainly focus on the conceptualization and development of SDG indicators in coordination with the formal process of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG (IAEG-SDG) proposed a set of indicators for goals and targets beyond those explicitly mentioning tourism for discussion in the Working Group of Experts on MST. A second round of consultation among the members of the UNWTO's Committee on Statistics and the Working Group of Experts on MST took place

¹¹ Comments are publicly available at: http://statistics.unwto.org/sf_mst

¹² Documents and list of participants are available at: http://statistics.unwto.org/committeesta_18thmeeting

¹³ <http://imd.unwto.org/event/executive-council-108th-session>

¹⁴ http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/pdf/ce108_decisions_en_0.pdf

¹⁵ https://seea.un.org/sites/seea.un.org/files/unceea13_conclusions.pdf

¹⁶ http://statistics.unwto.org/event/wge_mst_2ndmeeting

(November 2018), all comments are made available online and will be taken into account for a subsequent update of the Statistical Framework.

19. An editorial board has been established to provide advice to the UNWTO's Committee on Statistics with regards to the development and finalization of the Statistical Framework for MST. The editorial board is composed of experts in Tourism Satellite Account, tourism statistics, national accounts and SEEA 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.
20. The mandate of the editorial board is to (a) review the papers prepared by the various sub-groups working on the conceptual issues; (b) review the draft statistical framework for MST before it is submitted for global consultation; (c) review the comments received through the different rounds of consultations; (d) ensure that the comments received are taken into account; and (e) strive for consensus on solutions on the identified issues. It plays a key role in carrying out the MST project in a transparent way and ensuring that it is a world-wide undertaking.
21. 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 the MST project is made available on the UNWTO website¹⁷ including the draft Statistical Framework, comments from the consultations, outcomes of the meetings, work of the sub-groups and pilot countries.

Process proposed to finalise the drafting of the Statistical Framework for MST

22. A roadmap on the development of the SF-MST has been agreed upon by the Working Group of Experts on MST in view of the submission of the SF-MST to the Statistical Commission at its fifty-first session in March 2020. The consultation process is an important component of the development of the SF-MST. The roadmap includes two rounds of global consultations in 2019 to engage and seek views from both the statistical community and tourism community and beyond to include academia and the private sector. The results of the global consultations will be summarized and considered by the editorial board and recommendations will be put forward to the UNWTO's Committee on Statistics. A progress report will be also submitted to the UNCEEA for its consideration.
23. In view of getting the broadest possible involvement of the tourism community, it is planned to present the SF-MST in each of the six UNWTO regional commissions that will take place in spring 2019 as well as in the UNWTO's General Assembly planned in autumn 2019. This will provide an opportunity to promote the MST project, gather rich information on country experiences and allow discussions on potential implementation challenges.
24. Progress on each of the conceptual research areas and cross-cutting research areas is being made by the Working Group of Experts on MST and the various subgroups in accordance with agreed timeline and deliverables and will be subsequently reviewed by the editorial board. The UNWTO Committee on Statistics will review the recommendations from the editorial board and the draft Statistical Framework for MST and upon its approval submit it to the United Nations Statistical Commission.

Technical guidance document – Linking the TSA and the SEEA: A Technical Note

25. A second background document on the MST project is the final draft of the technical guidance document *Linking the TSA and the SEEA: A Technical Note*. This technical note describes approaches to linking information from the System of Environmental-Economic

¹⁷ <http://statistics.unwto.org/mst>

Accounting (SEEA) and Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSA) frameworks. This document forms a core part of the current Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) project of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the UN Statistics Division. The interrelationships between economic and environmental aspects are in fact one main focus of MST whose broader objective is to improve the organization and dissemination of information regarding tourism and sustainable development. Overall, the MST initiative will provide a strong statistical base to support monitoring progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of the 2030 Development Agenda.

26. The development of a Technical Note was endorsed by the UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA) at its June 2016 meeting and by the UNWTO Committee on Tourism Statistics and TSA at its meeting in January 2017. An initial draft Technical Note was presented at the UNWTO International Conference on Tourism Statistics in Manila in June 2017.
27. A revised draft was discussed at a meeting of the SEEA Central Framework Technical Committee in June 2018 and the incorporation of comments from this committee formed the basis of the final draft presented here. Based on the recommendations of that Technical Committee, the Technical Note was endorsed from an environmental-economic accounting perspective by the UNCEEA at its meeting in June 2018.
28. The substantive points incorporated in the final version of the Technical Note relative to the draft considered by the SEEA Central Framework Technical Committee were:
 - to clarify the intended focus on supporting discussion of the environmental aspects of tourism activity's sustainability
 - to note the potential to develop links between the recording of environmental activities (i.e. environmental protection, resource management and the environmental good and services sector) and the TSA
 - to recognise that the focus on environmental flows in the Technical Note is only a partial assessment with respect to environmental sustainability that highlights the pressures that tourism activity places on the environment. A more complete assessment requires consideration of both changes in environmental assets and the balance of pressures from resident and non-resident activity.
 - to note the potential to record GHG emissions by source of emissions (e.g. vehicles, accommodation facilities) in addition to data by emitting industry.
29. The UNCEEA has overseen the development of a number of Technical Notes relating to various components of the SEEA Central Framework. The Technical Notes that have been developed to date cover accounting for water, energy, air emissions, material flows, environmental protection expenditure and the environmental goods and services sector. This SEEA-TSA Technical Note follows the same general structure including the description of core accounts, discussion of indicators and provision of general compilation guidance.