

## UNWTO Commission for the Americas

64th meeting  
16 May 2019  
Provisional agenda item 6

CAM/64/6  
Madrid, April 2019  
Original: English

### Report on Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) project

#### Executive Summary

- The Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) project expands the field of tourism statistics beyond the measurement of volumes and economic effects to include also social and environmental aspects.
- It is a response to requests from UNWTO Member States and other stakeholders for guidance on measuring the complex phenomenon of sustainability in tourism.
- MST will help to better understand the status of tourism sustainability and monitor progress. This is especially relevant in the era of Sustainable Development Goals.
- MST takes a step-by-step approach:
  - Development of a Statistical Framework
  - Reaching international consensus and approval by the UN
  - Implementation in countries
  - Compilation into datasets
- MST is supported by the UN, ILO and Eurostat among others.
- The 2017 Manila Call for Action on Measuring Sustainable Tourism affirmed global commitment to MST at political and technical level.
- The **Statistical Framework for MST** has undergone various drafts and consultations, as well as pilot testing in countries. Two global consultations are planned before finalizing the document in the course of 2019.
- It is planned to present the Statistical Framework for MST for UN approval in March 2020, at the fifty-first session of the UN Statistical Commission.
- **UNWTO calls upon Members of the UNWTO Regional Commissions to support the international consensus building effort towards UN approval, notably by liaising with their National Statistical Institutes at the highest level.**

#### Background

1. Tourism measurement has come a long way over the past 20 years. The year 2008 marked the approval of the two current UN statistical standards on measuring tourism: the *International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics* and the *Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework*. Together, these statistical frameworks enable countries to produce data that is credible and comparable across countries, in time and with other standards-based data. They help organize data for the derivation of important indicators such as Tourism Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
2. However, the scope of these standards is national and largely economic. This not only limits the ability of tourism stakeholders to engage more broadly but also reduces the

ability to inform on tourism's role in sustainable development, certainly with respect to environmental and also social dimensions. In addition, it is becoming increasingly relevant for certain key data to have some degree of harmonization at national and sub-national levels to facilitate policy coherence, more effective management and benchmarking.

3. Concerned that the predominant economic focus in tourism statistics did not serve well the reality and ambitions of a sector that heavily relies on the environment and society. UNWTO Member States and other stakeholders called upon the Committee on Statistics to launch an initiative towards Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST). The need for this line of work became especially evident with the arrival of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those SDG targets that relate directly to tourism.
4. 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 with a unique mandate in tourism statistics, to develop the area of tourism statistics to better cater to the growing need for credible, comparable data on the sustainability of tourism.
5. And so, in its sixteenth meeting (Tbilisi, Georgia 2016<sup>1</sup>) the UNWTO Committee on Statistics launched the project Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST). It did so with the strong support from countries and from the UN Statistics Division, acknowledging the long-term goal to propose international statistical standards for measuring the sustainability of tourism.
6. Sustainability in tourism, and its measurement, naturally cuts across a range of disciplines and entities. For this reason, the Committee requested UNWTO to, jointly with the UN Statistics Division, set up a multidisciplinary and open Working Group of Experts on MST to lead the development of MST. This group engages experts from national statistical offices, national tourism administrations, sub-national tourism administrations and observatories, international organizations, academia and private sector.
7. The primary task of the Working Group is to develop a Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST), which 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. The SF-MST has as a central, but not exclusive, feature the linking of two established UN standards: the Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA).
8. The Working Group of Experts on MST had its first meeting in October 2016. Over 50 representatives participated in the two day working session. The group discussed eight working papers prepared for the occasion. The main conclusion was that beyond being a technical exercise, developing and subsequently implementing a statistical framework for MST is very much a strategic endeavor requiring stakeholder engagement, inter-institutional coordination and political leadership.

### **MST in the UN System**

9. Work on MST is closely aligned with the UN System and integrated within the global statistical system. UNWTO has an explicit mandate in the area of tourism statistics and is recognized as “the appropriate organization to collect, to analyse, to publish, to standardize and to improve the statistics of tourism, and to promote the integration of these statistics within the sphere of the United Nations system”<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Documents and list of participants available at: [http://statistics.unwto.org/event/16th\\_meeting](http://statistics.unwto.org/event/16th_meeting)

<sup>2</sup> Agreement between the United Nations and the World Tourism Organization, available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/508/44/PDF/N0350844.pdf?OpenElement>

10. UNWTO is quite active in the UN System through its work in statistics. With MST, the collaboration with the UN Statistics Division (UNSD) in New York has intensified. The Working Group of Experts on MST engages leading UN Agencies and other international organizations such as UNSD, ILO, UNEP, UNCTAD, World Bank, WTO and Eurostat.
11. More importantly, UNWTO received the full support of the highest decision-making body in statistics globally, the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC)<sup>3</sup>. At its forty-eighth session the Commission<sup>4</sup>:

*Supported the development of the SF-MST<sup>5</sup> 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.*

12. Indeed, appreciation was expressed also in 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.
13. In the margins of the forty-eighth session of the UNSC, and on the occasion of the 2017 UN International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, UNWTO along with UNSD organized a special Seminar on MST<sup>6</sup>. Top-level panellists included the heads of the Statistical Institutes of Austria, Canada, Fiji, and the Philippines.
14. The Working Group of Experts on MST coordinates closely with the UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA). UNCEEA reports annually to the UN Statistical Commission and includes updates on MST.
15. This year at the UNSC's fiftieth session, the UNCEEA tabled the final draft of the technical guidance document *Linking the TSA and the SEEA: A Technical Note* which was prepared by UNWTO and previously approved by both UNCEEA and UNWTO's Committee on Statistics. UNCEEA has overseen the development of a number of technical notes as part of the suite of materials on the System of Environmental Economic Accounting. The technical note on tourism helps to mainstream tourism in this influential area of measurement. Above all, it provides countries with concrete guidance for measuring some key environmental aspects of tourism.
16. In its seventeenth meeting in 2017, the UNWTO Committee on Statistics 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). These outcomes were all subsequently supported by the UNWTO Executive Council at its 105th session.
17. 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 tourism leaders and practitioners from across the globe. It was the first time that a UNWTO event united ministers, chief statisticians, policy experts, statisticians, private sector and academics dedicated to the measurement of sustainable development and tourism. On board were also UNSD, ILO, Eurostat, Asian Development Bank and OECD among others. All parties fully supported the 1<sup>st</sup> draft Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism and the roadmap towards its completion.

<sup>3</sup>The UN Statistical Commission is the highest decision making body for international statistical activities especially the setting of statistical standards, the development of concepts and methods and their implementation at the national and international level.

<sup>4</sup> 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](#)

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/48th-session/side-events/20170308-2L-accounting-and-statistics-for-sustainable-tourism/>

18. The relevance and feasibility of MST 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 developed statistical systems.
19. The Conference adopted the **Manila Call for Action on Measuring Sustainable Tourism** which represents a global commitment to creating 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 UN Statistical Commission at its fifty-first session, to be held in 2020.**
20. 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. 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.
21. In response to the UNWTO General Assembly, the UNWTO Secretary General included the development of the Statistical Framework for MST in the Organization's vision and priorities for the period 2019-2021.

### Progress

22. Throughout 2018, an important component of the work of the Working Group of Experts on MST was the advancement of the research agenda and implementation activities of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST). Various conceptual research areas and cross-cutting research areas were 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.
23. A first round of consultation on the updated draft SF-MST 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. All the comments received were incorporated in an updated version of the draft Statistical Framework for MST.
24. At its eighteenth meeting in 2018<sup>7</sup>, the UNWTO 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 SF-MST by the end of 2019. Pilot studies results, including an example of policy applications, were presented by Canada, Italy, Mexico, Philippines and Saudi Arabia.
25. The UNWTO Executive Council at its 108th session supported the Committee's work on MST, 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 commended the pioneering work of countries and subnational regions in developing pilot studies on MST. It also encouraged the Committee on Statistics, 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.

<sup>7</sup> Documents and list of participants are available at: [http://statistics.unwto.org/committeests\\_a\\_18thmeeting](http://statistics.unwto.org/committeests_a_18thmeeting)

26. The second meeting of the Working Group of Experts on MST took place in October 2018 gathering around 50 experts from a wide range of disciplines and agencies with a good geographical coverage. The participants reviewed and discussed methodological developments in the different draft chapters of the Statistical Framework.
27. The subgroup on tourism SDG indicators focuses 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). It 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 Committee on Statistics and the Working Group of Experts on MST took place (November 2018), all comments are made available online and will be taken into account for a subsequent update of the Statistical Framework.
28. An editorial board has been established to provide advice to the UNWTO Committee on Statistics with regards to the development and finalization of the Statistical Framework for MST. 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.
29. 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.
30. 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 website<sup>8</sup> including the draft Statistical Framework, comments from the consultations, outcomes of the meetings, work of the sub-groups and pilot countries.

### **MST on the ground**

31. A number of countries have or are currently in the process towards pioneering the implementation of MST through pilot studies. These include: Austria, Canada, Cabo Verde, Fiji, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Philippines, Saudi Arabia and Sweden. The pilot studies serve two main purposes: (1) to test the framework under development from the perspectives of both relevance and feasibility, and (2) to feed the ongoing development of the framework with lessons and novel or pragmatic solutions encountered on the ground.
32. The work of the sub-group on implementation is led by Canada. At the recent nineteenth meeting of the UNWTO Committee on Statistics<sup>9</sup>, the subgroup presented a proposed structure for a staged implementation strategy for MST. This included the outline for an implementation toolkit that should comprise: an introductory module on MST in capacity building and technical cooperation initiatives, core tables and indicators, an implementation roadmap for countries, a readiness assessment tool, identification of testing methods, and support for implementation.

### **Process ahead**

33. A roadmap on the development of the SF-MST has been agreed upon by the Working Group of Experts on MST and the UNWTO Committee on Statistics in view of the submission of the SF-MST to the Statistical Commission at its fifty-first session in March

<sup>8</sup> <http://statistics.unwto.org/mst>

<sup>9</sup> Documents and list of participants are available at: [http://statistics.unwto.org/committeestat\\_19thmeeting](http://statistics.unwto.org/committeestat_19thmeeting)

2020. The consultation process is an important component of this roadmap. Two rounds of global consultation are foreseen in 2019 to engage and seek views from both the tourism community and the statistical 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.

34. In view of getting the broadest possible involvement of the tourism community, MST is being presented in each of the six UNWTO regional commissions that will take place in the first half of 2019 as well as in the UNWTO's General Assembly planned in September 2019. This will provide an opportunity to promote the MST project, gather rich information on country experiences and allow discussions on implementation.
35. 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.

### **Role of the Regional Commissions**

36. **Statistical data can provide credibility to the tourism sector, support advocacy, foster dialogue and collaboration, feed more effective and coherent policy, and promote transparency and stronger institutions. "What you can't measure, you can't manage". This is especially so when tourism is just one among many policy areas which governments must consider in working towards sustainable development.**
37. The UNWTO Committee on Statistics has led the development of the only two international standards available in tourism<sup>10</sup>, and it is now pioneering what could become the third: the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism.
38. **The development of any statistical standard is as much a political endeavour as it is a technical development. National Tourism Administrations can play an important role in promoting the Statistical Framework. Liaising with respective National Statistical Institutes becomes pivotal because it is precisely these institutions which, through top level representation in the UN Statistical Commission, will be tasked with the decision to approve the MST Statistical Framework in March 2020.**
39. It is worth noting that MST has involved National Statistical Institutes in the Working Group of Experts on MST. Presidents of National Statistical Institutes have been kept informed through reports to the UN Statistical Commission<sup>11</sup>, some of whom have publically supported MST<sup>12</sup>. In addition, the two planned global consultations on the Statistical Framework for MST to be carried out jointly by UNSD and UNWTO will be directed to National Statistical Institutions in addition to UNWTO's constituency.
40. **Members of the Regional Commission are encouraged to support the international consensus process towards approval by the UN of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism by:**

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<sup>10</sup> The *International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008* and the *Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework 2008*.

<sup>11</sup> For example, the Report of the World Tourism Organization on tourism statistics presented at the forty-eighth session (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/48th-session/documents/2017-17-TourismStats-E.pdf>) and the Report of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting presented at its fiftieth session (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/50th-session/documents/2019-15-EnvironmentalAccounting-E.pdf>).

<sup>12</sup> For example during the aforementioned 6<sup>th</sup> UNWTO International Conference on Tourism Statistics: *Measuring Sustainable Tourism* and the Seminar on MST at UN headquarters

- a. **Liaising with their country’s respective National Statistical Institute at the highest level to raise awareness and garner support in preparation to the UN Statistical Commission’s fifty-first session in March 2020.**
- b. **Becoming active at any stage in the MST project**, through for example:
  - i. Nominating experts for partaking in the Working Group of Experts on MST and sharing relevant experiences;
  - ii. Ensuring their country’s contribution to the global consultations in 2019;
  - iii. Pioneering the implementation of the SF-MST through the development of a pilot study.

