IMPLEMENTING THE NEW INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TOURISM STATISTICS 2008

Keynote, Session I: Developing National Systems of Tourism Statistics

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Summary

In its Thirty-ninth Session, the United Nations Statistical Commission approved the International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008 after an intensive revision process of the 1993 Recommendations on Tourism Statistics which included different initiatives: (a) the creation and working of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Tourism Statistics, (b) the implementation of the World Tourism Organization electronic forum, (c) the conducting of the International Workshop on Tourism Statistics, (d) the organization of dedicated meetings of the World Tourism Organization Committee on Statistics and Tourism Satellite Account, (e) a meeting of the United Nations Expert Group to review and endorse the provisional draft of the International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008 and (f) the worldwide consultation with National Statistical Offices and National Tourism Administrations.

The International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008 update the 1993 version in a number of important ways and its approval has given way to a gradual implementation. The development of national Systems of Tourism Statistics and Tourism Satellite Accounts is quickly gaining prominence on the agendas of many countries and an increased number of World Tourism Organization Member States have expressed their desire to receive training in the development and management of Tourism Satellite Accounts. For this purpose, a Statistical Capacity Building Programme prototype has been initiated that involves intensive and highly technical training to national officials. To set up such a Programme, the support and cooperation has been found of Austria and South Africa that each act as a hub for the participation of 12 European and 13 African countries. The Programme will be expanded to the Middle East and Asia during 2009. In addition to these initiatives, the United Nations Statistics Division and World Tourism Organization will join efforts to complement the Statistical Capacity Building Programme with sub-regional Seminars.

The System of Tourism Statistics should be understood as that part of the National Statistical System providing reliable, consistent and appropriate statistical information on the socio-economic aspects related to tourism, integrated within all the economic and social statistics related to other fields, and at different territorial levels. The International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008, along with the Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework 2008, should be used as the reference in order to harmonize, coordinate and integrate the available tourism statistical information.
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INTRODUCTION

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) have presented a joint report at the United Nations Statistical Commission’s Thirty-ninth Session (26-29 February 2008) summarizing the activities they have carried out in response to the decisions taken by the Statistical Commission at its Thirty-fifth Session in the area of tourism statistics. At its Thirty-fifth session (2-5 March 2004), the Commission:

(a) Noted with satisfaction the progress achieved in the area of tourism statistics and acknowledged the work done by the UNWTO in developing standards, promoting the implementation of standards and disseminating tourism statistics;

(b) Acknowledged the efforts of UNWTO to improve the international comparability and quality of data on tourism and the assistance provided in training and capacity-building in new areas such as tourism satellite accounts;

(c) Noted the need for an international exchange of experiences in the compilation of tourism statistics and asked UNWTO to facilitate an exchange of best practices;

(d) Noted the intention of UNWTO to undertake consultations with countries regarding existing recommendations on tourism statistics and to explore the need for their updating, and emphasized that the consistency of a possible revision of standards on tourism statistics with the ongoing updates of the 1993 System of National Accounts (SNA) and the Balance of Payments Manual (BPM) had to be ensured;

(e) Stressed the need for stronger coordination in the field of tourism statistics and in the periodic revision of international recommendations, but recognized that different views had been expressed on the means to achieve it. Some delegates had recommended the creation of an inter-secretariat working group composed of UNWTO, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat), while UNWTO had felt that this aim could be more appropriately addressed in the framework of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, inasmuch as other relevant international and regional organizations were also represented on that Committee;

(f) Requested UNSD to facilitate the finding of an appropriate forum of coordination, to be decided on at the next meeting of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities.

In its 2008 session, the UN Statistical Commission approved the new International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008 (IRTS 2008) containing the full text of the revised recommendations endorsed by the United Nations Expert Group on Tourism Statistics.¹

¹ Also an updated version of the Tourism Satellite Account official document (Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework 2008) was presented to the Commission as a background document.
ORGANIZATION OF THE REVISION PROCESS OF THE 1993 RECOMMENDATIONS ON TOURISM STATISTICS

In implementing the Commission’s decisions, UNWTO began a process of consultation with the members of its Committee on Statistics and Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) and other countries on a draft list of issues and the scope of the revision of the 1993 Recommendations on Tourism Statistics, taking into account country experiences and the Commission’s recommendations contained in Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework approved in 2000 and published in 2001. At the same time, UNSD began to organize the revision process and to develop its views on the scope and content of the future revised recommendations. Below is a brief description of the revision process leading to the preparation of the draft IRTS 2008.

The revision process of the 1993 Recommendations on Tourism Statistics took place from September 2004 until November 2007 and included different initiatives: (a) the creation and working of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Tourism Statistics, (b) the implementation of the UNWTO electronic forum, (c) the conducting of the International Workshop on Tourism Statistics, (d) the organization of the dedicated meetings of the UNWTO Committee on Statistics and TSA, (e) a meeting of the United Nations Expert Group to review and endorse the provisional draft of the IRTS 2008 and (f) the worldwide consultation with National Statistical Offices and National Tourism Administrations.

Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Tourism Statistics

In accordance with the Commission’s request that UNSD facilitate the finding of an appropriate forum for inter-agency coordination, UNSD proposed to the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities the establishment of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Tourism Statistics (IACG on TS). The interested agencies reached agreement at the fourth session of the Committee (New York, 1-3 September 2004). The IACG on TS met for the first time in New York, 3 September 2004, and included as members Eurostat, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), OECD, International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC), UNSD, UNWTO and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The IACG on TS agreed that (a) the scope of its work would include the identification of issues on which coordination was required and the finding of mutually acceptable solutions; and (b) all members of the Group involved in the current cycle of revision of the conceptual frameworks relevant to tourism statistics (e.g., the 1993 SNA, the fifth edition of the BPM, the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, the Central Product Classification, the Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services) would give priority to the identification of those areas of the frameworks which might affect tourism statistics and to reviewing them in the quickest way.

From 2004 to 2007 the IACG on TS held six plenary and five technical meetings, focusing on a number of conceptual issues identified for either revision or clarification. These included the relationship between the concept of residence and that of usual environment; tourism and travel; the need for clarifying the definition of visitor, and business visitor in particular; and the possibility of a breakdown of the travel item in the updated version of the BPM. The Group’s proposals on the treatment of those issues provided valuable input for the revision process.
World Tourism Organization electronic forum

The main objective of the electronic forum was to ensure that National Tourism Administrations and National Statistical Offices were fully consulted and that their views on how to revise the international recommendations were clearly expressed and taken into consideration. The forum was active from April to October 2006.

International Workshop on Tourism Statistics

The International Workshop on Tourism Statistics was held at UNWTO headquarters in Madrid from 17 to 20 July 2006. The workshop concluded, inter alia, that the current revision of international recommendations on tourism statistics should be seen as a part of the effort to promote an integrated approach towards national statistics which requires, to the extent possible, the use of harmonized concepts, classifications and standardized data compilation methods in order to maximize efficiency and minimize the reporting burden, and that, in this connection, the application of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics was strongly supported.

World Tourism Organization Committee on Statistics and TSA

The UNWTO Committee on Statistics and TSA, in its capacity as an advisory body to the Executive Council, actively participated in the revision process and provided valuable contributions to the drafting process. The Committee's special session held in Lisbon in March 2007 was particularly productive in terms of finding solutions to a number of conceptual issues, including the definitions of tourism, visitor and main purposes of visit.

United Nations Expert Group on Tourism Statistics

The United Nations Expert Group clarified the statistical treatment of a number of issues and endorsed the draft International Recommendations. It was decided that the updated draft should be posted on the websites of UNSD and UNWTO for a worldwide consultation. The Expert Group established an editorial team consisting of its Chairpersons at its various sessions to coordinate the incorporation into the final draft of various amendments, including those received from countries during the worldwide consultation, prior to its submission to the Commission.

Worldwide consultation with national statistical offices and national tourism administrations

To ensure that national statistical offices and national tourism administrations had an opportunity to provide their comments during the preparation of the revised recommendations, UNWTO and UNSD organized two stages of a worldwide consultation. The first stage was held in Lisbon (26-28 March 2007) at the Eighth Meeting of the UNWTO Committee on Statistics and TSA, and resulted in 33 sets of comments. The second stage was conducted in September and October 2007, after the meeting of the United Nations Expert Group on Tourism Statistics, and 18 additional sets of comments were received. Countries' comments confirmed their broad endorsement of the draft recommendations, while also providing a number of concrete proposals to clarify the wording of some recommendations. The comments received were reviewed by the Expert Group editorial team and incorporated into the final version of the draft IRTS 2008.
OVERVIEW OF THE NEW INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDATION FOR TOURISM STATISTICS 2008
AND THE IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAMME

Overview of the new recommendations

The IRTS 2008 updates the 1993 recommendations in the following ways:

(a) By reformulating the definition of visitors to cover all travellers except those taking trips for
the purpose of being employed by a resident entity in the place visited and by explicit
inclusion of persons in transit entering the legal and economic territory of a country
(provided that they do not enter for the purpose of being employed by a resident entity in
the place visited);

(b) By clarifying the concepts of trips and visits, and their characteristics (origin, destination,
duration and purpose), for which specific definitions are now provided, and in particular
identifying the tourism trip as the basic concept with respect to which the tourism statistics
are compiled;

(c) By clarifying the treatment of vacation homes that are to be excluded from the usual
environment of an individual;

(d) By recognizing the travel party (visitors travelling together and sharing expenditure) as a
relevant observation unit in tourism statistics;

(e) By modifying the formulation regarding the different forms of tourism to take into
consideration the difference between the concepts of economic territory (a geographical
reference) and economy of reference (an economic reference);

(f) By modifying the classification of tourism-related purposes of trips to take into
consideration the changes undergone in tourism behaviour since 1993, in particular
regarding education and training, health and medical care and incentive trips;

(g) With regard to the classification of types of accommodation, through agreement that the
establishment of international recommendations would be pending the development of the
United Nations companion guide for the International Standard Industrial Classification of
All Economic Activities and the Central Product Classification;

(h) Through proposed classifications for characteristic tourism consumption products and
characteristic tourism activities and revision of the classification of industries proposed in
1993 in line with the Central Product Classification, second revision, and the International
Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, fourth revision;

(i) By recommending that basic tourism statistics focus on tourism expenditure rather than on
tourism consumption and that they be clearly differentiated, tourism consumption being a
broader concept for use in the tourism satellite account, covering imputations derived from
information beyond the scope of what can be collected directly from visitors (e.g., social
transfers in kind and imputed accommodation services provided by second homes on own
account);
(j) By including in tourism expenditure and tourism consumption the purchase of consumer durables and items of major unit value acquired on trips;

(k) By clarifying the relationship between forms of tourism and categories of tourism expenditure and tourism consumption;

(l) By considering tourism-related employment an integral part of tourism analysis and defining and incorporating into the recommendations variables related to employment in the tourism industries, an effort in which ILO played an important role;

(m) By providing recommendations on data sources and data compilation methods after the introduction of the recommended concepts;

(n) By making explicit the link with BPM statistics, including emphasizing the recording of expenditure on an accrual basis;

(o) By clarifying the relationship with the tourism satellite account, providing guidance on extensions of tourism statistics to the sub-national level and recognizing the need to collect data to address sustainability concerns;

(p) By providing recommendations in several new areas, such as metadata, data quality, dissemination of data, inter-agency cooperation, implementation programme and policy for future updates.

The implementation programme

Once the new IRTS 2008 was approved, the UNWTO launched the first initiative of the UNWTO Statistical Capacity Building Programme (SCBP) prototype. Right now, UNWTO has found the support and cooperation of Austria (Statistics Austria and the Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour of Austria) and South Africa (Statistics South Africa, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, South African Tourism and South African Reserve Bank) to set up such a Programme with the participation of 12 European and 13 African countries, respectively 2.

The development of national Systems of Tourism Statistics and TSA is quickly gaining prominence on the agendas of many countries and an increased number of UNWTO Member States have expressed their desire to receive training in the development and management of TSA. In order to be able to meet the needs of as many Member States as possible, the prototype of the SCBP will span a period of two consecutive years and involve intensive and highly technical training of officials from National Tourism Administrations (NTAs), National Statistical Offices (NSOs), Central Banks (CBs), and Migration Authorities (MAs) through collaboration with a regional hub which would serve as the training centre.

The programme started on 1 April 2008 in Vienna and on 9 June 2008 in Pretoria. It is structured around two training modalities: workshops are geared towards selected countries (a maximum of eleven UNWTO member States) while the regional seminar is open to all countries in the region (UNWTO

2 Countries participating in the UNWTO SCBP-Austria: Albania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia and Turkey.
member and non-member States, including those participating in the workshops, as well as United Nations Economic Commissions, Regional Statistical bodies and other international and regional bodies will also be invited to participate).

Candidate countries are selected based on the answers received to an ad hoc request for information and national commitments, according to the following criteria:

- the political determination of NTAs and NSOs in giving priority to the development of national System of Tourism Statistics;
- the present work carried out by the NTA on tourism statistics (and any concrete project for the next 3 years) as well as the number and qualification of staff assigned;
- the list of initiatives carried out by governmental organizations—mainly the NTA, NSO, CB and MA—in tourism related statistics;
- the development of metadata on basic tourism statistics using UNWTO formats.

Officials of the regional hub are the key players in the workshops: during the four days programme, these officials as well as country delegations will share their experience on the different issues tackled in the Agenda. The role of UNWTO during the workshops is marginal but has the responsibility to set up concrete tasks and initiatives to be developed by the selected countries between workshops.

The experience of the SCBP both in Austria and South Africa will be expanded during 2009 to the Middle East and Asia: while in the first case the regional hub will be the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in the case of Asia there will be no fixed hub. In addition to these initiatives, UNSD and UNWTO will join efforts to complement SCBP around the world with sub-regional Seminars.

TOURISM STATISTICS AS AN EXAMPLE OF INTEGRATED ECONOMIC STATISTICS

The National Statistical System (NSS) of a country encompasses a series of statistical functions, each of them corresponding to entities that conduct statistical observations on some of the fields belonging to the broader universe of socio-economic phenomena.

The overall objective of a NSS is to provide users with reliable, consistent and appropriate statistical data relative to the country’s main socio-economic variables, both in structure and change over time and at different territorial levels. Such data need to be comparable with similar data obtained in other countries. As a consequence, in addition to all the nationally required statistical sources existing at a given time, NSSs must include those methodological and instrumental elements that are required to meet the objective of international comparability.

On account of its objective and content, NSSs must therefore harmonize statistical information at the national (or federal, where appropriate), infra-national and international levels. For the purposes of this task, not only harmonization and coordination are required, but also integration, a function geared towards ensuring the connection and assembly of the different statistical information that is part of a NSS.
Regarding the *integration* function, it should be made of *instrumental elements* (concepts, definitions, classifications, data and indicators, national and international recommendations, etc.) on the one hand, and *integrated statistical information systems* (systems of national accounts and socio-demographic statistical systems based either on international or national standards) on the other. The System of National Accounts (SNA) is doubtless the more developed of the two.

There is a reciprocal relationship between those integrated statistical information systems and basic statistics: the former determine the basic statistics that are required for their design and compilation, and the latter have to be compiled using concepts, definitions and classifications that are part of the reference frameworks for both concepts and tables of results. Consequently, integrated systems become the centre of gravity for statistical work in all areas.

The System of Tourism Statistics (STS) should be understood as that part of the NSS providing reliable, consistent and appropriate statistical information on the socio-economic aspects related to tourism, integrated within all the economic and social statistics related to other fields, at different territorial levels.

The design of a national STS should be viewed as the basic coordination and integration framework of the statistical information produced by all tourism stakeholders. Concepts, definitions, classifications, data, indicators, aggregates and tables of results relating to tourism, all designed to provide an exhaustive description of the tourism phenomenon in all its aspects (physical, social, economic, etc.) and a measurement of its economic contribution within a context of international comparability, are a structural part of the NSS.

Regarding its socio-economic aspect, the STS can be defined as a set of components, made up of the statistical sources themselves and the corresponding data obtained (i.e. statistics drawn from census, sample surveys, collection of data from administrative records, derived statistical activity—in which data are estimated, modelled, or otherwise derives from statistical data sources—, and so forth), the specific tools, methodological references and instruments used at stages of the process entailed in the generation of statistics (as is the case of concepts, definitions, classifications, databases, etc.), and also the instrumental and organizational resources used in all these processes.

The development of a national STS is closely linked to the implementation of the Tourism Satellite Account (TSA). In fact, the TSA provides the conceptual framework and the organizational structure for the harmonization and reconciliation of most tourism statistics internally, thus within the tourism sector, as well as with other economic statistics. From this perspective, it should be seen as an instrument to assist countries in the identification of data gaps and to guide them during the revision of existing data sources as well as in the development of new sources.

The new IRTS 2008 and *Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework 2008* (TSA:RMF 2008) constitute the updated reference framework for the STS: both documents are mutually consistent in terms of concepts, definitions and classifications. As a consequence, they should be used as a reference for the harmonization, coordination and integration of available tourism statistical information; even though these recommendations might extend in the coming years beyond the still restricted domain they touch upon. Examples are: expanding the concept of consumption to include other components of demand (such as collective consumption and gross fixed capital formation), developing the sub-national perspective, and developing the link with other statistical systems (such as those on environmental issues).
A second component involved in the integrated status of tourism statistics refers to statistical production issues. UNWTO’s future *IRTS 2008 Compilation Guide* should be a relevant contribution in this perspective since, up to now, UNWTO has contributed in some initiatives that stand close to it. For instance:

- Identifying a more comprehensive set of tourism data and indicators for international comparability purposes referring to the key concepts of the new recommendations: visitors, trips, tourism industries and employment;

- Defining a model border survey which integrates statistical data with different types of administrative records (such as entry/exit cards, traffic control records for different modes of transportation, etc.);

- Proposing the use of administrative data linked to employment, fiscal as well as credit card records;

- Insisting on the fact that tourism statisticians should also move towards a culture of reconciling basic statistics in some key tourism industries and related products. This new culture will be an important input for increasingly warranting the compatibility of micro databases with macroeconomic accounts; and

- The above mentioned implementation of the Statistical Capacity Building Programme prototype.

A third and final component involves institutional issues. In previous paragraphs, it has been very clearly highlighted that the set up of different inter-institutional cooperation networks (both at the national and international level) are part of UNWTO strategic approach for developing national systems of tourism statistics and the TSA project.
REFERENCES


