

Agenda item 4(c)
Report of the Committee on Statistics

CE/112/4(c)
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Executive summary

The UNWTO Committee on Statistics has renewed its composition in 2019 and has planned a meeting at the end of 2020. It reports on its priority areas of work, notably the Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) initiative.

Through MST, the Committee on Statistics is advancing an international standard that will bring this much needed comparability to the measurement of tourism's sustainability. Not only economic but also environmental and social aspects are considered—for national and subnational scales. MST will thus guide countries and other data producers to deliver better data on the sustainability of tourism, and it will also support various data users with a conceptual framework for analysis. The importance of this has become more evident than ever in the context of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

From UNWTO's experience with the development and UN approval of previous international measurement standards (the International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics and the Tourism Satellite Account), the technical and political processes must go hand in hand. An international standard is a global consensus, and as such requires political leadership on various fronts.

Members of the Executive Council can play an important role in leading a political process within their countries to garner support for UN approval. The Committee recommends that the Council encourage the Members to support this process, in particular, by partnering with National Statistical Institutes to voice their country's support for MST at the United Nations Statistical Commission, in addition to contributing with pilot studies and feedback in the consultation on the MST framework.

DRAFT DECISION¹

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(document CE/112/4(c))

The Executive Council,

Having examined the report of the Committee on Statistics,

1. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue with the Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) initiative propelled by the Committee on Statistics in view of demands for better, and notably more comparable, data on the sustainability of tourism; and
2. *Invites* all Members, including States and Affiliate Members, to contribute to the MST initiative and its process of approval by the United Nations, in particular, by partnering with National Statistical Institutes to voice their country's support for MST at the United Nations Statistical Commission, in addition to contributing with pilot studies and feedback in the consultation on the MST framework.

¹ This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Council, please refer to the Decisions document issued at the end of the session.

I. Background and composition

1. The Committee on Statistics supports the Secretariat in its fulfilment of the foundational Agreement² with the United Nations whereby the World Tourism Organization became a specialized UN agency, which states that “The United Nations recognizes UNWTO 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” (Article 13).
2. The UNWTO Committee on Statistics monitors and guides the work of the UNWTO Department of Statistics in charge of executing this mandate, and it is a subsidiary organ to the UNWTO Executive Council, to which it provides advice on management and programme content.
3. The Committee on Statistics recently renewed its membership, following the elections that took place at UNWTO’s Regional Commission meetings in 2019.

II. Meetings of the Committee

4. The Committee on Statistics held its most recent meeting in February 2019 (on which it has already reported to the Regional Commissions and the Executive Council). It is expected that its next meeting will be held in the last quarter of 2020, at UNWTO Headquarters in Madrid, at which time the new Chair and Vice-Chair will be elected. Until then, and to ensure the continuation of the year-round work of the Committee, Austria and Spain remain as Co-Chairs and Georgia as Vice-Chair.

III. Priorities of the Committee

5. “What you can’t measure, you can’t manage”. This holds also for the sustainability of tourism. While much progress was made over the past decades through several initiatives, mostly at subnational level, the measurement of sustainability in tourism lacked a standard framework for deriving data that is comparable.
6. Comparability is important to position tourism vis-à-vis other sectors, to benchmark performance between destinations, to have more coherent policy between international, national and subnational levels, and to reach common ground amongst stakeholders. Comparability is also a requirement to monitor tourism’s contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals. All in all, comparability sustains the credibility of the sector’s evidence base.
7. The Committee on Statistics propelled the launch by UNWTO of the Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) initiative at its 16th meeting in Tbilisi, Georgia (2016). It has since been very active in this priority area. The Committee’s recommendation was motivated by requests from UNWTO Member States and other stakeholders as well as requests from the international statistical community, for guidance on better measuring the complex phenomenon of sustainability in tourism.
8. Consequently, MST is expanding tourism statistics beyond the measurement of physical volumes (e.g., arrivals) and economic aspects (e.g., tourism GDP, tourism industries) to include also social (e.g., decent work and human capital, perceptions and experience, accessibility) and environmental aspects (e.g., water use and emissions from the tourism industries) related to the sustainability of tourism. Additionally, MST can provide a framework for the timely production and analysis of data in relation to the impact of external shocks, such as natural disasters or health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic, on tourism beyond the economic dimension.
9. The standard-based approach of MST supports the production of more reliable, robust, comparable and credible data. This is especially relevant for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a matter of fact, the Committee’s recommendation to launch MST was, to an important degree, also motivated by the need to track tourism’s contribution to the SDGs.

² Resolution A/RES/58/232 adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on 23 December 2003.

10. MST is supported³ by the United Nations Statistical Commission⁴ which recognizes it as the framework for the derivation of indicators on sustainable tourism as well as for measurement at the subnational level. The 2017 [Manila Call for Action on Measuring Sustainable Tourism](#), ratified at the 6th International Conference on Tourism Statistics which gathered over 1,500 participants, affirmed global commitment to MST at the highest level in both tourism and statistical communities.
11. With MST, the ambition is to achieve the third international standard in tourism after the International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics and the Tourism Satellite Account.
12. MST is integrated within the global statistical system and it follows the long-term process generally applied and recommended by United Nations Statistical Commission including:
 - (a) Development of a statistical framework;
 - (b) Building international consensus and reaching UN endorsement of the statistical framework;
 - (c) Supporting countries in their implementation of the statistical framework for the production of data, through capacity building and compilation guides;
 - (d) Compilation of data produced by countries into international datasets, to inform policy and decision-making, and supporting various users of this data.
13. Leading these intertwined stages of MST development is the Working Group of Experts on MST, set up jointly by UNWTO and the UN Statistics Division. This is a multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder group that engages experts from national statistical offices, national tourism administrations, sub-national tourism administrations and observatories, international organizations, academia and private sector.
14. The development of the statistical framework for MST is well underway. It will act as an agreed standard framework for collecting, organizing and disseminating data. It dedicates a chapter to each of the core dimensions for understanding sustainability in tourism: economic, environmental, social (including institutions) and subnational.
15. In each of these core chapters, the framework builds on existing measurement standards and state-of-the-art developments. For example, in the environmental chapter, the link is made between the Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA).
16. An Editorial Board has been established as a part of the Working Group to periodically review and provide substantive advice in the development and finalization of the Statistical Framework. 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.
17. The Statistical Framework for MST has undergone various rounds of consultations. A global consultation is foreseen in 2020 to engage and seek views from both the tourism community and the statistical community and beyond. The results of the global consultation will be considered by the editorial board and recommendations put forward to the Committee on Statistics.
18. Pilot countries pioneering the implementation of MST include: Austria, Canada, Cabo Verde, Fiji, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Sweden. The pilot studies serve two main purposes: (1) to test the framework for relevance and feasibility, and (2) to feed the framework with lessons and novel or pragmatic solutions encountered on the ground.
19. In order to build consensus around MST and achieve United Nations endorsement, both technical and political commitment are paramount. National Tourism Administrations (NTAs) play a vital role herein as leaders of their national tourism sectors and key users of tourism data.

³ 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](#)) which was taken to ECOSOC.

⁴ 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.

20. The UNWTO Committee on Statistics recommends that NTAs liaise with their respective National Statistical Institutes to raise awareness about MST and jointly work towards a common stance for the UN Statistical Commission. Indeed, the support of National Tourism Institutes for MST is paramount because their highest-level representations make up the UN Statistical Commission, the highest UN body with a mandate to decide on the adoption of standards.
21. The UNWTO Committee encourages active participation of UNWTO Members in the MST initiative: from providing technical feedback in the consultations on the MST framework and joining the Working Group of Experts on MST, to launching a pilot study for pioneering the implementation of MST in their country (at national or subnational level), to leading a political effort in partnership with the National Statistical Institute.
22. As a crucial step towards obtaining the broadest possible outreach amongst its Members, the Committee on Statistics recommends to present MST at each of the six UNWTO Regional Commissions and the Executive Council.

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