WHAT IS MST?

UNWTO, in collaboration with the UN Statistics Division, is propelling the development of the MST (Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism) program to provide all countries in the world with a common framework to measure the impacts and contributions of tourism on the economy, society and the environment.

The Statistical Framework for MST (SF-MST) is a valuable guiding tool for countries to produce credible, comparable and integrated data to better guide decisions and policy with respect to sustainable tourism. It is recognized by the UN Statistical Commission as the main tool to monitor the contribution of tourism to the Sustainable Development Goals. It can be used to derive specific indicators for this purpose at the global, national and sub-national levels. The SF-MST aims to become the third international standard on tourism after the International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics and the Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework.

The MST program goes beyond the development of the SF-MST. A Working Group of experts representing 24 countries from all global regions and from more than ten organizations representing the international statistical and tourism communities and academia, has been tasked with not only developing the framework but also advancing its implementation. This Working Group reports to the UNWTO Committee on Statistics.

1 More information at: https://www.unwto.org/Measuring-Sustainability-Tourism

The United Nations Statistical Commission is the highest body of the global statistical system bringing together the Chief Statisticians from member states from around the world. It is the highest decision making body for international statistical activities, responsible for setting of statistical standards and the development of concepts and methods, including their implementation at the national and international level.
WHAT ARE THE MST PILOT STUDIES?

One of the main means of advancing the implementation of the framework is through pilot projects in countries or destinations. These are key to testing the framework for MST on the ground. They will help produce specific policy-related questions from authorities, while also allowing them to provide feedback on the framework with critical information for its improvement.

As of August 2020, a total of 11 MST pilot studies have been conducted in the following countries: Austria, Canada, Fiji, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Sweden and Thailand. In addition, Samoa and Vietnam have undertaken projects aimed at measuring the sustainability of tourism using tools that are in line with the SF-MST.

This publication presents the work conducted by some of these countries, with a focus on the results obtained and the policy implications of the studies. These initiatives respond to specific relevant questions from the policy perspective. In many cases, they were developed through collaboration between the tourism statistics and policy communities. They are excellent examples of cooperation within a country and highlight what can be achieved in relation to measuring the sustainability of tourism.

This document covers 11 of the 13 available MST pilot studies and related initiatives. The following studies are included:

- **Austria**: A pilot study that culminated in a Masterplan in Tourism
- **Fiji**: A roadmap to measuring the sustainability of tourism
- **Germany**: A new “Tourism-Sustainability Satellite Account” (TSSA)
- **Italy**: Measuring the impact of tourism-related air emissions
- **Mexico**: Identifying areas of influence for measuring the sustainability of tourism
- **Philippines**: Estimating water and energy consumption in tourism
- **Samoa**: An extended TSA pilot exercise
- **Saudi Arabia**: Estimating the environmental effects of tourism
- **Sweden**: A method for estimating GHG emissions in tourism
- **Thailand**: A regional pilot that resulted in a National TSA-SEEA System of Accounts
- **Vietnam**: Land-based pollution in the Quang Ninh province

The main goal of this publication is two-fold: a) to showcase the excellent work conducted by pilot countries in advancing the implementation of MST, and b) to encourage other countries and destinations to join this important effort. If interested in becoming an MST pilot, please contact the UNWTO’s Statistics Department at sttc@unwto.org.
In the face of the health pandemic, and as tourism restarts with sustainability as the new normal, being able to properly measure the sustainability of the sector has become even more essential for monitoring relevant policies. The SF-MST is the main international tool for this end, and its implementation should no longer be regarded as a just long-term objective.

UNWTO has asked MST pilot countries to indicate how COVID-19 has impacted the key priority of developing data for sustainable tourism policy. Out of eight responding countries, three indicated that this had become more important, while two indicated that it was now less important (the remaining three indicated the priority level remained unchanged).

Needless to say, these are countries that have taken part in MST pilot studies and, as a result, already identify data for sustainable tourism as an important need. However, changes in resource allocation prompted by the pandemic, and related changes in short-term priorities in terms of tourism related data, may have resulted in some countries placing reduced importance on the measurement of the social and environmental impacts of tourism. While understandable in the short-term, it is important that it does not continue into the medium and long terms. The support of the tourism policy community is vital in this regard.
Main Challenges faced by Pilot Studies

Nine of the countries participating in this publication also provided additional information on the pilot studies through a brief questionnaire. The pilots were self-funded by the institutions leading them in the majority of the cases, specifically in six of the nine responding countries. The remaining three were either funded by international organizations or by another national body.

In this context, funding seems to be an important challenge faced by countries in advancing the implementation of the MST. Six of the nine responding countries reported lack of funds as one of the main challenges they have faced in furthering the development of data for sustainable tourism policy.

The second most commonly mentioned challenge is the lack of support or interest from the policy community, with four countries identifying this as a relevant factor. Initiatives such as this publication aim to raise the profile and visibility within the tourism policy community of the efforts that the tourism statistical community, often jointly with other stakeholders, is doing on developing trustworthy measurement system for smart tourism management. It is important that the results are shared and communicated properly to ensure that this work is supported at all levels and by all relevant stakeholders.

Finally, another important challenge mentioned by pilot countries is the lack of methodological guidance and technical skills. This underlines the need for the development of the MST statistical framework. In addition, it reinforces the suitability of a progressive approach whereby lessons from pilots are incrementally incorporated into the SF-MST to ensure it is both technically feasible and policy relevant. Finally, this finding points to the pivotal role that regional and international capacity development and technical cooperation will play in having better data for more sustainable tourism.

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