



UN Tourism

The Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism



Background

Tourism has the potential to propel socio-economic development, foster cultural exchange, and contribute to peace building while motivating environmental protection and sustain the basis for future prosperity and well-being.

Tourism stakeholders have been concerned with the sustainability of the sector for decades. A polluted beach or a congested city center are hardly competitive destinations, and so it is clearly in the interest of the sector itself to sustain the basis for its prosperity.

These concerns have been exacerbated in the face of global challenges including the recovery from the pandemic, the climate emergency, and geopolitical conflicts. In tourism and beyond, there is increasing awareness of the ability of tourism to advance – or even deter – progress towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon. It relies on and has an impact on the economy, the natural and built environment, the local population at places visited and on visitors themselves. Owing to this range of impacts and the wide spectrum of stakeholders involved, there is a need for a holistic approach to tourism measurement.

Against this backdrop, the UN Tourism Committee on Statistics launched in 2016, a program of work on Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) that integrates economic, environmental and social measurement and across relevant spatial levels (global, national and subnational). In partnership with leading countries, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and others, MST became a co-design and consensus building process for more meaningful, comparable metrics on a key sector.

The Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST)

SF-MST is the internationally agreed reference framework for measuring the economic, social and environmental aspects of tourism.

It provides the main concepts, definitions and data organization structures to guide the production of data on the sustainability of tourism at the global, national and subnational levels.

The SF-MST covers the main measurement themes that are relevant to tourism policy and decision-making, providing a “menu” that enables selecting measurement themes in line with country priorities and circumstances. This, in turn, helps to focus efforts on developing the data that matters most and taking advantage of available data sources and statistical infrastructure. As such, SF-MST can be implemented in a flexible, modular and incremental fashion.

Following the adoption by the UN Tourism General Assembly at its 25th session (16–20 October 2023), SF-MST has been endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its 55th session (27 February – 1 March 2024). This historical milestone marks a level of global consensus that involves not only the tourism community, but also the measurement community, the whole UN System and all 193 UN Member States.

Download the framework:

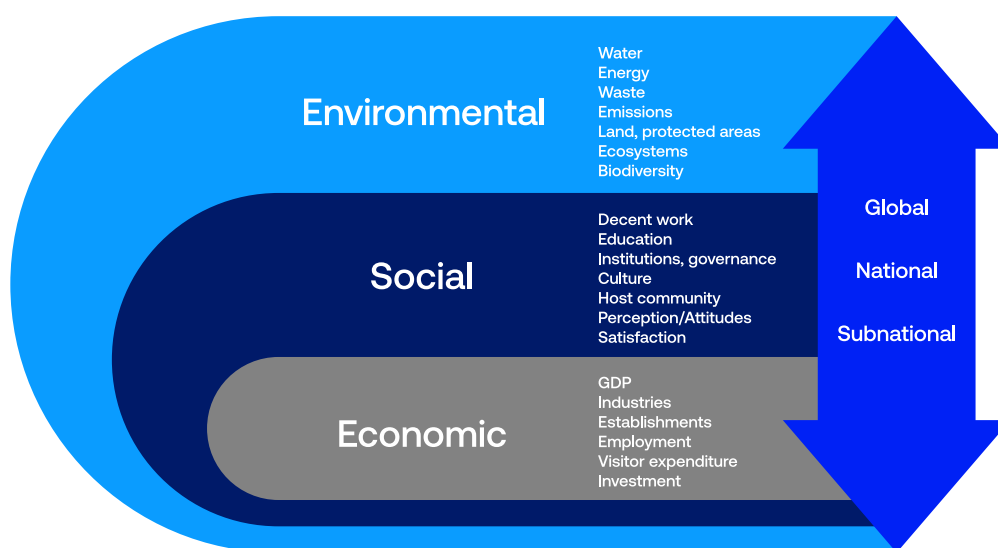


“The UN Tourism’s Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism will offer us more data and a better insight into challenges we are trying to solve”

Mr. Csaba Körösi
(President of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly)

“Tourism is a powerful force for positive change when managed responsibly and sustainably. The Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism marks a paradigm shift, going beyond GDP by enabling the measurement of what matters most to people and planet”

Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili
(UN Tourism Secretary-General)



Process

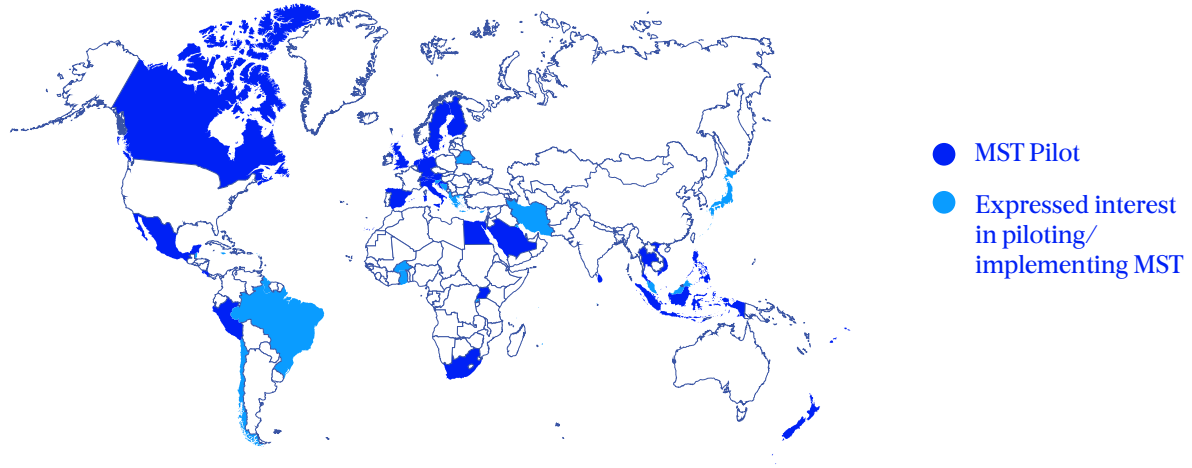
As a program of work, Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism follows the established UN process for the development of statistical frameworks and their implementation. With respect to the development of the Statistical Framework for MST, a multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder Expert Group was tasked with leading its development. The group, set up under the auspices of the UN Tourism Committee on Statistics and in close coordination with the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA), is chaired by Austria. The Expert Group is composed of representatives of national statistical offices and ministries in charge of tourism in 40+ countries covering all world regions, as well as representatives of 30+ international and regional organizations, subnational authorities, academic institutions and the private sector.

The development of SF-MST benefited from wide engagement and a transparent, consultative and consensus-building process. With the support of an Editorial Board and several research teams, the Expert Group took into account the experiences of numerous pilots and comments from various rounds of consultation.

UN Tourism will proceed to draw up an implementation strategy for the SF-MST working in partnership with countries, international organizations and others key stakeholders. The strategy will follow UN established procedures and is likely to include the compilation of best practices and compilation guidance, capacity development support for countries in the form of trainings and workshops, the development of a core set of SF-MST based indicators, and the subsequent setting up of an international dataset with country reporting mechanisms.

Pilots Implementations

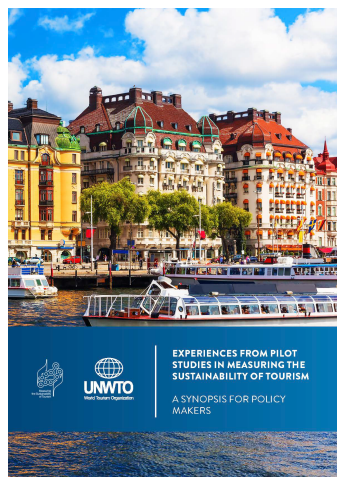
An essential strategy for advancing the development of SF-MST has been through pilots in various countries. Pilots contributed real-world lessons that tested the conceptual direction presented in the framework from the perspectives of both policy relevance and technical feasibility. Over the past years, 29 pilots have been carried out.



Pilots have been implemented in a stepwise and modular approach, whereby different pilots focused on implementing different parts of the MST framework and at different territorial scales, in line with priorities and circumstances.

All in all, these experiences show that it is possible to measure in a comparable way the full breadth of elements that comprise the sustainability of tourism within a single integrated framework.

The outcomes of some of these pilots have been summarized into two publications:



Recognition in Policy

The Statistical Framework for MST has been recognized in national, regional and international strategic policy frameworks across the globe, including the UN Tourism General Assembly, the European Parliament, the Pacific Tourism Organization and the G20.

For more information

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<https://www.unwto.org/tourism-statistics/measuring-sustainability-tourism>