

**Seventh Meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group  
On the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators**  
10-12 April 2018  
Vienna, Austria

## **Contribution from the countries in the Committee on Tourism Statistics and Tourism Satellite Account<sup>1</sup> of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)**

### **What is the Committee?**

The Committee on Statistics and Tourism Satellite Account was established in the early 1990's and has since demonstrated a strong track record of professionalism and of leading worldwide consensus building in tourism measurement.

The Committee is a subsidiary body of the UNWTO Executive Council and it acts in matters related to:

- The design and implementation of tourism statistics international standards;
- Promoting international comparability of tourism statistics by proposing initiatives relative to the collection, homogeneity, processing and dissemination of data;
- Supporting member countries in their initiatives to improve their national systems of tourism statistics
- Coordination within the international statistical system, liaising with countries and other international bodies active in related international statistics and within sphere of the UN system.

The Committee has 12 Member States<sup>2</sup> elected through the UNWTO Regional Commissions, and counts on an active participation by many more countries as observers as well international organizations, representatives from sub-national administrations, academia and private sector. In its recent Eighteenth meeting in Madrid, Spain, the Committee gathered 24 countries<sup>3</sup> and over 70 participants.

The Committee is formally recognized by the UN Statistical Commission, to which it reports regularly with progress on its work.

The Committee led pioneering initiatives such as the development of only two UN international standards related to tourism:



*International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008*: for measuring physical and monetary flows of tourism



*Tourism Satellite Account (TSA): Recommended Methodological Framework 2008*: for measuring tourism as an economic sector

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<sup>1</sup> UNWTO is the UN Specialized Agency for tourism and acts as the Secretariat of the Committee on Statistics and Tourism Satellite Account. The Terms of Reference of the UNWTO Committee on Statistics and TSA are available at <http://statistics.unwto.org/content/committee-statistics-and-tourism-satellite-account>.

<sup>2</sup> The members of the Committee are elected by UNWTO's Regional Commissions. Argentina, Canada, Italy, Mexico, The Netherlands, Macao-China, Morocco, Oman, Sweden are also represented, as well as international and supranational organizations, representatives from academia, civil society, the private sector and subnational administrations.

<sup>3</sup> Argentina, Austria (chair 2016-2017), Belarus, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Egypt, France, Georgia (vice chair), Germany, India, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Oman, Peru, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain (chair 2018-2019) and Sweden.

These UN standards are the current basis for countries around the world to produce data on tourism that is credible, comparable, and coherent with the way we understand other economic activities like agriculture, mining or finance.



Presently, the Committee, in partnership with the UN Statistics Division and with the support of the UN Statistical Commission, is propelling the development of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST). This aims to expand the measurement of tourism, which currently is mostly focused on economics, to include also environmental and social considerations. This will become a valuable guiding tool for countries to produce credible, comparable and integrated data to better guide decisions and policy with respect to sustainable tourism—including the SDGs. This work is being led by the UNWTO/UNSD Working Group of Experts on Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism under the auspices of the Committee.

The Committee stands ready to support the Inter-Agency and Expert Group in the steering of the tourism related SDG indicators towards more conceptually precise and feasible monitoring solutions that best respond to the targets. To best facilitate these dialogues, a special sub-group “Tourism SDG Indicators” has been formed under the leadership of Austria.

## What is tourism?

According to the internationally agreed UN definition, “tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon related to the movement of people to places outside their usual place of residence”. These people are referred to as visitors, which can be day visitors or tourists (over-night visitors).

Tourism comprises the activities of all categories of visitors, including those travelling for holiday, leisure and recreation, business, health, education or any other main purpose other than to be employed by an entity resident in the destination.

Tourism has an impact on the economy, on the natural and built environment, on the local population at the destination and on the tourists themselves<sup>4</sup>.

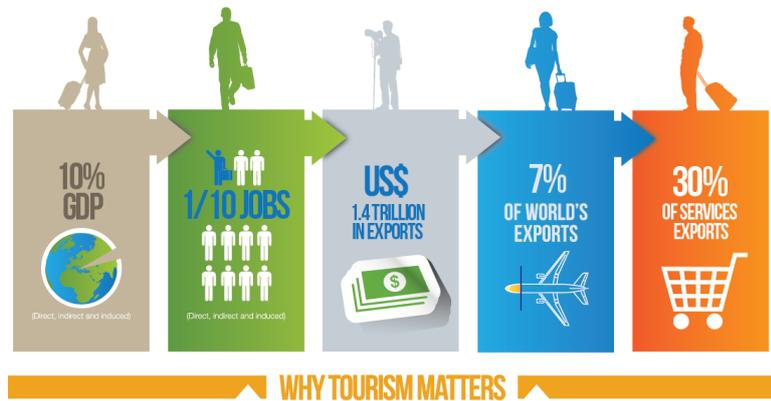
Tourism is one of the fastest-growing socio-economic sectors, amounting to significant shares of GDP, employment and exports worldwide. These shares can be considerably larger in countries and sub-national regions where tourism is a key economic sector and political priority.

As an economic sector, tourism is the sum of the parts of various industries that cater directly to visitor demand (that typically produced tourism characteristic products and for which an important share of their main output is consumed by visitors). For international comparability purposes, 10 tourism characteristic industries are identified.

1. Accommodation for visitors
2. Food and beverage serving activities
3. Railway passenger transport
4. Road passenger transport
5. Water passenger transport
6. Air passenger transport
7. Transport equipment rental
8. Travel agencies and other reservation service activities
9. Cultural activities
10. Sports and Recreational activities

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<sup>4</sup> International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008: [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/SeriesM\\_83rev1e.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/SeriesM_83rev1e.pdf)



With the declaration of 2017 as International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development by the UN General Assembly Resolution recognized tourism as an efficient instrument to contribute to sustainable development, especially addressing global challenges such as poverty eradication, environmental protection, and economic empowerment<sup>5</sup>.

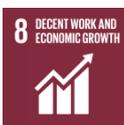
## Tourism in the Sustainable Development Goals

Tourism is featured in three of the 17 SDGs, namely Goal 8, 12 and 14 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, sustainable consumption and production, and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, respectively.

Tourism has the potential to contribute, directly and indirectly, to all the 17 Goals in view of its cross-cutting nature and because it can stimulate inclusive economic growth, create jobs, attract investment, fight poverty, enhance the livelihood of local communities, promote the empowerment of women and youth, protect cultural heritage, preserve terrestrial and marine ecosystems and biodiversity, support the fight against climate change, and ultimately contribute to the necessary transition of societies towards greater sustainability.



## Current status of tourism SDG indicators



**Target 8.9: By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products**

**Indicator 8.9.1: Tourism direct GDP as a proportion of total GDP and in growth rate (Tier II: internationally agreed methodology exists and data is produced by several countries; so far OECD collects this in its database and UNWTO has plans to embark on data collection at worldwide level)**

- **The Committee supports this indicator** if it can be complemented by 2 additional indicators covering the social and environmental aspects of tourism.

<sup>5</sup> UN General Assembly resolution 70/193 of 22 December 2015, which proclaimed 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development

**Indicator 8.9.2: Proportion of jobs in sustainable tourism industries out of total tourism jobs** (Tier III: no data for this indicator is currently available and its methodology is still under development)

- **The Committee has identified challenges with this indicator:** There is no statistical definition of “sustainable industries” nor of tourism jobs. Even if agreement on definitions for “tourism jobs” could be reached, the Committee acknowledged the difficulty to define “sustainable industries”. For this reason, the Committee does not consider feasible nor conceptually warranted the development of any statistical framework or statistical infrastructure from which this indicator could be derived.

**Additional indicator 8.9.3 proposed by IAEG to be discussed (Agenda item 8): Sustainable tourism plans/programmes.**

- **The Committee has identified challenges with this indicator:** There is no international methodology available for this indicator, nor data, nor plans to develop these. This indicator suffers from the same challenges as the current indicator for 12.b.1 (see below).



**Target 12.b: Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products**

**Indicator 12.b.1: Number of sustainable tourism strategies or policies and implemented action plans with agreed monitoring and evaluation tools** (Tier III: no data for this indicator is currently available and its methodology is still under development)

- **The Committee has identified challenges with this indicator:** There is no internationally agreed statistical methodology nor concepts that can be used to define a “sustainable tourism strategy or policy and action plan”, nor what the relationship/boundary may be between the three different instruments (e.g. a tourism master plan may contain elements of all three - thus would this count as 1 or 3 actions?). In addition, there is currently no international dataset collecting this information, nor any plans to do so, and it would seem difficult to incorporate into existing statistical infrastructures due to the above mentioned issues.



**Target 14.7: By 2030, increase the economic benefits to small island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism**

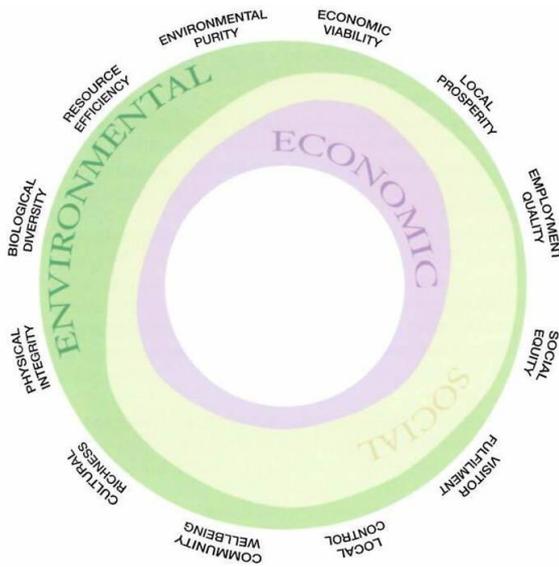
**Indicator 14.7.1: Sustainable fisheries as a proportion of GDP in small island developing States, least developed countries and all countries** (Tier III: No data for this indicator is currently available and its methodology is still under development)

- **The Committee supports this indicator and encourages complementing it with an indicator on the economic contribution of tourism, i.e. Tourism Direct GDP** (the same as the current indicator for 8.9.1).

**Additional indicator 14.7.1 proposed by IAEG to be discussed (Agenda item 8): The economic impact of sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, tourism and other coastal marine resources uses**

- **The Committee supports this additional indicator if one of its measures would constitute the economic contribution of tourism, i.e. Tourism Direct GDP** (the same as the current indicator for 8.9.1), amongst others.

## What is sustainable tourism?



The SDG targets that explicitly mention tourism always do so with specific reference to “sustainable tourism”. It seems important therefore for the indicators tracking these targets, to be narrowly aligned with the definition of sustainable tourism.

From a policy perspective, sustainable tourism is “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industries, the environment and host communities [...] It is a continuous process and requires constant monitoring of impacts”<sup>6</sup>

This definition acknowledges that sustainable tourism is a multi-faceted concept. Clearly a single, simple measure is not sufficient to monitor sustainable tourism development. The Committee has always stressed on that “sustainable tourism” measurement requires measures on the three dimensions (economic, social and environmental).

## The Committee’s proposal

### Towards the 2020 Comprehensive Review

#### Indicator for Target 8.9: Progress towards sustainable tourism

It is proposed to substitute 8.9.1 and 8.9.2 with a single indicator: "Progress towards sustainable tourism". The indicator would be composed of 3 sub-measures that provide a good (conceptually precise and feasible) indication of the 3 dimensions of sustainable tourism (economic, social and environmental):

- a) Tourism Direct GDP: This is defined in an international statistical standard adopted by UNSC ([Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework 2008](#)) and many countries are already producing data for this indicator. OECD collects it as part of its database, and UNWTO also has plans to include it as part of its worldwide data compilation from countries.
- b) Employment in the tourism industries: This is defined in an international statistical standard adopted by UNSC ([International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008](#)) and several countries are producing data for this indicator which is currently being compiled by UNWTO as part of its worldwide database.
- c) Energy use by the tourism industries: This is defined within the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) under development and planned for discussion by the UNSC in 2020, as well as in the already developed System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) Technical Note on Tourism. Pilot studies in countries have shown that this indicator is feasible in countries, especially given the relative good stage of development of energy statistics and accounts in Europe and many other countries. Pilot studies and conceptual work on the MST framework have also shown that it provides a helpful representation of the environmental effect of tourism (and that indeed tourism has a significant share of total energy consumption in the economy). Reductions in energy use relative to the level of tourism activity indicate a decoupling

<sup>6</sup> *Making Tourism More Sustainable - A Guide for Policy Makers*, UNEP and UNWTO, 2005

of tourism activity from energy use. In turn this would imply a lower environmental footprint. Reduction of energy consumed will have major environmental benefits, primarily through reducing consumption of natural resources and lowering associated greenhouse gas emissions.

Rationale: While Target 8.9 has many parts, within the context of Goal 8 it is understood that its main focus is about "promoting sustainable tourism". "Sustainable tourism" is defined as covering economic, social and environmental dimensions. Thus, an indicator that tracks the progress towards sustainable through measures of its 3 dimensions is most appropriate. Also, and as is the case for other targets and their indicators, it is believed that for actual attainment of the target, indicators that track "outcomes" are more valuable than indicators that track "intentions" (i.e. policies).

### **Indicator for Target 12.b: Stage of implementation of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism**

It is proposed to substitute current indicator 12.b.1 with: "Stage of implementation of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism".

Rationale: Targets 8.9 and 12.b are very complementary and the indicators should reflect this. While Target 12.b also has many parts, the focus of the Target is on "develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable [tourism]". The indicator proposed by the Committee provides the opportunity to track to what degree countries have the necessary foundation to credibly and comparably monitor sustainable tourism outcomes, and this nicely complements the proposed indicator for 8.9 which already captures "sustainable tourism" (outcomes).

In the context of the SDGs, it is very important that countries implement an internationally agreed measurement tool to ensure that their progress towards sustainable tourism can be monitored in a way that allows comparison between countries and is also nested within the wider statistical system to ensure coherence, consistency and comparability with data on other economic/social/ environmental phenomena.

The proposed indicator would have the added advantage of not only monitoring and encouraging attainment of the target, but of also supporting the monitoring other targets related to tourism (notably 8.9 and 14.b) by providing the tools to do so.

It is worth noting that the Committee, supported by the UN Statistical Commission, has been working hard since 2015 to develop such a tool to monitor sustainable tourism: the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST). MST is rooted in the Tourism Satellite Account and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounts standards, as well as other relevant statistical frameworks and methodologies. MST is already being implemented in countries through Pilot studies (Canada, Fiji, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, etc.) and we expect accelerated implementation in the years to come given the enthusiasm with which it is being received by countries at both technical and ministerial levels. The countries in the Committee have always believed that the "tools to monitor" mentioned in target 12.b should be aligned with this international, country-driven effort towards an internationally agreed statistical tool to measure and monitor sustainable tourism.

It should also be stressed out that the current indicator for 12.b has no underlying internationally agreed conceptual framework, nor do countries produce internationally comparable data on this, and the Committee is not aware of any plans for doing so. On the other hand, the Committee plans to complete the MST framework in 2019 for presentation to the UNSC in 2020 and, as mentioned above, countries are already piloting its implementation.

### **Use of proxy indicators to monitor targets where indicators are currently Tier III**

Between now and the completion of the Comprehensive Review, the Committee proposes that following “proxy indicators”, understanding that the IAEG-SDG is using a fairly wide definition of “proxy”).

**Proxy indicator for 8.9.2:** "Employment in the tourism industries" (described above).

**Proxy indicator for 12.b.1:** "Stage of implementation of the Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism statistical framework" (described above). This "proxy" solution is in fact already alluded to in the current work plan for 12.b available on the IAEG-SDG webpage.

Both of these "proxies" have the advantage of coinciding with proposals for the Comprehensive Review, making a coherent plan and one that reinforces the feasibility of the proposals made.

### **A final word of thanks**

The Committee thanks the IAEG-SDG for its kind consideration of these proposals and looks forward to a continued collaboration into the future. The Committee stands ready to support at any point in the process towards more conceptually precise and feasible tourism related SDG indicators that that best respond to the targets.