

**21st meeting of the Committee on Statistics
7-8 November 2025, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**

Meeting Minutes

I. Introduction

1. The twenty-first meeting of the Committee on Statistics was held in the framework of the 26th session of the UN Tourism General Assembly, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from 7 to 8 November 2025.
 - (a) Full Members: Austria (co-Chair), Costa Rica (co-vice Chair), India, Morocco, the Philippines, Portugal (co-vice Chair), Saudi Arabia (co-Chair), Seychelles and Spain.
 - (b) Invited observers from Member States: Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Greece, Malaysia, Mexico, Sao Tome and Principe, Tunisia.
 - (c) Invited observers from non-Member States: Denmark.
 - (d) Invited observer entities: Córdoba Sustainable Tourism Observatory (Argentina), easyJet holidays, Eurostat, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf (GCC-STAT).

II. Overview of the programme of work, including recent milestones and discussion on future work areas

2. The Secretariat outlined progress under the key pillars of work of the Statistics, Standards and Data Department of UN Tourism. Key milestones included the endorsement by the UN Statistical Commission of both the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST) and a new official SDG indicator on tourism, as well as progress towards the development of a harmonized Framework for tourism businesses to report on their Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) impacts.
3. Capacity building efforts have expanded the implementation of the tourism international statistical standards globally, while the modernization of the UN Tourism Statistics Database included a new unified questionnaire and automated processes. Looking ahead, the priorities identified in the UN Tourism Programme of Work for 2026-2027 include updating the foundational measurement standards (*International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics (IRTS)* and *Tourism Satellite Account (TSA): Recommended Methodological Framework*) further capacity building initiatives for strengthening countries' statistical capacity, and continuing the modernization of the UN Tourism Statistics Database, including its expansion to incorporate sustainability indicators. The Programme of Work for 2026-2027 is ambitious and resource-intensive, and led to calls from Member States for adequate resourcing and member support.
4. The Committee expressed support for the future revisions of the IRTS and the TSA manuals to align them with global statistical developments, evolving data sources, and new realities in the tourism sector.
5. The importance of modernization, enhanced use of alternative data sources, and strengthened national coordination was underscored, alongside the need for strengthened resources and collective efforts to support the implementation of the Programme of Work.

6. Saudi Arabia shared, for the Committee's consideration, a draft resolution to be proposed to the General Assembly to "encourage the Secretary-General to strengthen the resources of the Organization in the area of tourism statistics [...] in accordance with the Organization's UN mandate." The Committee had no further remarks on the proposed resolution. The draft resolution was subsequently submitted to the relevant bodies (first the Programme and Budget Committee, then the Executive Council) and was ultimately adopted by the General Assembly (decision [A/RES/780\(XXVI\)](#)).

III. Modernizing UN Tourism's statistics and upgrading Systems of Tourism Statistics worldwide

7. The Secretariat reported on ongoing modernization efforts aimed at simplifying and improving UN Tourism's data processing systems. These efforts included the streamlining of questionnaires into a single, more coherent format better aligned with Eurostat and OECD questionnaires; the introduction of pre-filled data from Eurostat, ILO and IMF; and a transition towards automated processes and greater flexibility in year-round reporting. Future plans include moving towards open data access, improved metadata, and integration of sustainability indicators based on the SF-MST.
8. Morocco outlined its modernization project with new estimation models, new system for data collection, and a new platform for data dissemination. Mexico highlighted its Information System for compiling the Tourism Satellite Account and the International Traveler Surveys. Overall, the emphasis was on innovation, capacity building, and collaboration to ensure timely, high-quality, and comparable tourism statistics worldwide.
9. The Committee emphasized the need to strengthen data dissemination and accessibility, including through open data approaches, noting that the impact of statistics depends on their effective communication to decision-makers. The importance of enhancing coverage of outbound and domestic tourism was also raised.
10. Discussions further underscored the growing complexity of data ecosystems, including the use of big data sources and the role of artificial intelligence, alongside the need to ensure transparency regarding data sources and confidence levels, particularly when using non-traditional data.
11. Delegates agreed that modernization requires not only technical upgrades but also strong governance and policies to ensure timely and open data sharing. Overall, the interventions underscored that modernization is a continuous process requiring collaboration, capacity building, and clear communication to make data accessible and actionable for policy.

IV. Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST)

A. Country developments

12. The session highlighted how countries are applying the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism at national and sub-national levels.
13. Saudi Arabia reported on national implementation efforts, aligning indicators with its Vision 2030, and covering economic, social, environmental, and governance dimensions through cross-government partnerships and SDG mapping. Argentina shared that its subnational observatory in Entre Ríos applies SF-MST principles to monitor tourism supply, demand, and sustainability while addressing data gaps and informal services through training and coordination.
14. Denmark presented its work on measuring tourism's carbon footprint across 20 Danish destinations, and its progress on coordination of SF-MST implementation in the Nordic countries.
15. GCC-Stat introduced a regional framework with 18 harmonized indicators across economic, social, and environmental dimensions, aiming to expand implementation and integrate tourism with environmental and social data.

16. Overall, the implementation of SF-MST in countries and subnational destinations is increasing worldwide. Delegates emphasized the relevance and applicability of SF-MST as a key framework for comparability and evidence-based planning and policymaking.

B. Supporting implementation

17. The session on supporting the implementation of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism focused on the social dimension, with a special emphasis on the topic of resident perceptions. The Secretariat presented a model questionnaire designed for use at national and subnational levels to harmonize the measurement of host community perceptions of tourism.
18. It included a core set of simple, comparable questions on tourism impacts, benefit-cost balance, and overall residents' support for tourism, plus optional modules on satisfaction and governance. The aim is to provide countries a practical tool to facilitate the measurement of this critical policy issue, while supporting international comparability of the data collected.
19. Country examples illustrated on-going initiatives to measure resident perceptions. Austria has embedded tourism acceptance measurement into its official statistics demand survey, producing annual results and a tourism acceptance score at municipality level. A regional project in the Austrian region of Zell am See-Kaprun used participatory processes to design a detailed survey, combining quantitative and qualitative insights to guide local strategies.
20. Spain shared its national-to-local approach using online surveys and mobile data to link perceptions with tourism intensity, revealing nuanced attitudes and key drivers such as housing costs and quality of life. All presentations stressed that understanding resident perceptions is critical for managing sustainable tourism policy and that a standardized tool will improve comparability, benchmarking and decision-making.
21. The discussion emphasized the importance of using perception data as a policy instrument to address overtourism and manage community acceptance. Members highlighted that SF-MST ensures comparability and consistency, moving beyond fragmented local approaches, and stressed the importance for rigorous, harmonized data and effective communication of tourism's impacts. There was broad agreement that while experimentation is useful, building a rigorous and comparable knowledge base requires adopting common implementation tools such as the model questionnaire presented.
22. The Committee invited countries to provide written feedback on the model questionnaire and requested the Secretariat to finalize the tool, encouraging countries to pilot its implementation.

C. Indicators for international comparability

23. The discussion focused on developing a core set of tourism sustainability indicators to ensure global comparability and reporting alignment. UN Tourism outlined plans for 10-15 indicators covering economic, social, and environmental dimensions, designed to be flexible yet ambitious, and aligned with the internationally agreed Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST).
24. The process involves the creation of a Task Team and close coordination with OECD and Eurostat to produce a common core set of indicators while still allowing flexibility for each organization to produce complementary indicators as considered appropriate in light of their mandate and constituencies. Both of these organizations shared their progress: OECD has identified 12 indicators and is piloting them with volunteer countries, while Eurostat is working on a harmonized set based on readily available official statistics. All parties emphasized the need for alignment to reduce reporting burdens, maintain comparability, and support evidence-based policy, with a timeline targeting consensus and publication by 2027.
25. Austria and Portugal stressed the urgency of alignment across organizations to achieve a "single truth" in sustainability measurement and reduce complexity for countries. They jointly reported on an informal coordination meeting on tourism sustainability indicators that brought together

representatives from Austria, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, and Slovenia, the European Commission (DG MOVE, Eurostat, Joint Research Centre), OECD and UN Tourism. In that meeting, participants reaffirmed the approach agreed by the Expert Group on Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism and emphasized that the core set will constitute a common indicator set between Eurostat, OECD, and UN Tourism. Portugal, Saudi Arabia and Seychelles expressed strong interest in joining the dedicated MST task team and highlighted the importance of interagency cooperation. All parties agreed that harmonization will strengthen global comparability and support evidence-based policy.

26. The Committee invited countries to nominate experts for the indicators task team. It encouraged OECD, Eurostat and UN Tourism to continue in a coordinated fashion and share progress on their respective initiatives, and requested the Secretariat to convene the task team and finalize the draft core indicator set, with a view to pilot testing of indicators in 2026 and presentation to the UN Statistical Commission.

V. High-level segment Tourism Statistics – Elevating the Role of Evidence in Policy

27. The high-level segment emphasized the critical role of evidence-based policymaking in advancing more sustainable tourism.
28. Leaders from Antigua and Barbuda, the Philippines, Spain, and Seychelles shared national experiences, all underscoring that reliable data are essential for resilience, competitiveness, and sustainability. Antigua and Barbuda stressed the need to leverage data to manage tourism concentration and resource constraints, including the use of incentives to promote green practices. The Philippines showcased progress since the Manila Call to Action, including the development of national and regional Tourism Satellite Accounts, the implementation of digital border systems, and plans for AI-driven analytics, as well as reaffirming its commitment to host the 2027 International Conference on Tourism Statistics. Spain focused on modernizing official tourism statistics through the use of mobile phone data, web scraping, and links to environmental accounts. Seychelles illustrated how Tourism Satellite Accounts and big data combined can guide policies like hotel developments and approaches to cruise tourism.
29. Across all interventions, the message was clear: data transforms tourism governance from reactive to proactive, supporting efforts toward long-term sustainability and shared prosperity.

VI. Building a harmonized ESG Framework for Tourism Businesses

30. The session focused on the development of a global framework for sustainability reporting by tourism businesses, bringing the benefits of data harmonization from the macro level (official statistics) to the micro level. The Secretariat provided an update on the progress towards the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Framework for Tourism Businesses and outlined next steps, including the creation of an Expert Group and further elaboration of the Framework to include detailed indicators, with a draft expected in 2026. The ESG Framework addresses fragmented ESG systems and aims for harmonized, comparable and actionable data that take into account the particularities of the tourism industries.
31. easyJet holidays emphasized the importance of harmonized ESG reporting as an integral component of business strategy, focusing on education, collaboration, and rapid implementation, and stressed that measurement is essential for accountability and progress. The presentation underscored the Framework's role in creating consistency, comparability and actionable insights for both businesses and policymakers.
32. Austria welcomed the initiative, stressing the need for benchmarking to monitor progress at business level and offered to join the expert group. Portugal supported the framework and shared its national program, which incentivizes SMEs to adopt ESG practices and report through an online tool. Mexico suggested including positive environmental contributions (e.g., conservation spending, ecosystem services) alongside negative impacts. Saudi Arabia highlighted its national efforts to embed sustainability in tourism law and expressed interest in contributing to the

technical work. Malaysia confirmed its commitment to ESG adoption and requested continued collaboration with UN Tourism.

33. All agreed that harmonization will reduce fragmentation, support SMEs, and strengthen global comparability. The Framework was seen as key to bridging public–private collaboration and accelerating sustainability across tourism.