UN Tourism

Executive Council

127th session
Abu Dhabi, UAE

23-25 November 2026

Supplementary agenda item 1

Proposal by Saudi Arabia: Modernization of Global Tourism Statistics

CE/127/Supp.2
Madrid, 20 November 2026
Original: English

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Executive Summary

On 10 November, Saudi Arabia sent to the UN Tourism Secretariat a proposal for a Strategic Initiative for the Modernization of Global Tourism Statistics and the Establishment of a Centre of Excellence in the UN Tourism Regional Office in Riyadh.

Note by the Secretariat

After consultation between the Chair of the Council and the Secretariat, it was agreed to propose that the Council mandate the Committee on Statistics to study the proposal by Saudi Arabia, as reflected in the draft decision.

DRAFT DECISION[1]

Supplementary agenda item 2
Proposal by Saudi Arabia: Modernization of Global Tourism Statistics
(documents CE/127/Supp/2 and CE/127/1 prov. suppl.)

The Executive Council,

Having taken cognizance of the Concept Note: Strategic Initiative for the Modernization of Global Tourism Statistics and the Establishment of a Centre of Excellence in The UN Tourism Regional Office in Riyadh proposed by Saudi Arabia,

Recalling resolution 780(XXVI) adopted by the General Assembly at its 26th session (Riyadh, November 2026),

Reaffirming the position of the Organization as the global authoritative source for comprehensive tourism statistics,

1. *Welcomes* the Saudi Arabia's initiative and *recognizes* its potential contribution to reinforcing and modernizing methodologies and frameworks for the development of tourism statistics;

2. *Mandates* the Committee on Statistics to study the proposal by Saudi Arabia;

3. *Requests* the UN Tourism Secretariat to assist the Committee in this work with the necessary consultations and preparatory arrangements;

4. *Encourages* interested Member States to contribute to this initiative by sharing relevant experiences, expertise and good practices; and

5. *Invites* the Secretariat to report on this initiative at a subsequent session of the Executive Council.

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

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HE Sheikha Al Nowais
Secretary-General
United Nations Tourism

November 5, 2026

Your Excellency,
I extend my warmest regards to Your Excellency and to the United Nations Tourism Organization, acknowledging your unwavering commitment to excellence.

Your Excellency,

We sincerely appreciate the efforts of UN Tourism in the organization of the upcoming 127th UN Tourism Executive Council Session to take place in UAE. On behalf of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and in our capacity as committed member state of UN Tourism, we would like to formally request the inclusion of a new agenda item for consideration during the upcoming session:

Strategic Initiative for the Modernization of Global Tourism Statistics and the Establishment of a Center of Excellence in The UN Tourism Regional Office in Riyadh

We hope that this item will provide all member states, and particularly those in the Middle East region, with a comprehensive statistical framework of the tourism sector's continuously dynamic nature. Such framework paves the way for actionable measures in our sector, eventually ensuring its sustainability.

With Your Excellency's needed support, I would be delighted to have this statistical vision come to full fruition during our upcoming Executive Council meeting through formal adaption of this agenda item.

As always, we remain available to provide any further details or documentation required

Kindly accept my personal regards.

Minister of Tourism

Ahmed bin Aqil Alkhateeb

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Concept Note:
Strategic Initiative for the Modernization of Global Tourism Statistics and the Establishment of a Center of Excellence in The UN Tourism Regional Office in Riyadh

Submitted by: Ministry of Tourism, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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1. Executive Summary

In accordance with the resolutions of the 26th General Assembly and the 2026-2027 Program of Work, this proposal outlines a comprehensive engagement to lead the global revision of the International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics (IRTS) and the Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework (TSA: RMF).

A central pillar of this proposal is the designation of the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East (Riyadh) as a Center of Excellence for Tourism Statistics. The Center will serve as a technical support hub for methodological research, drafting support, pilot-country coordination, capacity development, and knowledge dissemination, under the guidance of UN Tourism and the formal international statistical process. Additionally, the Center shall leverage the strategic partnership and in-kind expertise provided by the Ministry of Tourism of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to ensure the delivery of the IRTS and TSA standards.

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2. Strategic Objectives

The initiative seeks to transition global tourism statistics from the outdated 2008 frameworks to a modernized 2026 standard by achieving the following:

- **Technical Alignment:** Aligning tourism statistics with the latest international standards, including SNA 2025, BPM 7, ISIC Rev. 5, and CPC Ver.3.0.
- **Modernization of Data:** Integrating emerging data sources (mobile positioning, digital platforms, card and digital payment transactions, satellite imagery) and addressing the "sharing economy."
- **Data Privacy & Governance Guidelines:** Establish guidance on data governance, privacy protection, statistical confidentiality, access to private-sector data, quality assessment of non-traditional data sources, bias correction, calibration, and validation against official statistical sources.
- **Sustainability Integration:** Embedding the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST) and SDG-aligned indicators into the core recommendations.
- **Economic & Social Impact Expansion:** Preserve the TSA as the core statistical framework for measuring the direct economic contribution of tourism. Supplementary guidance should be developed on the use of supply and use tables and input-output tables, consistent with the Handbook on Supply and Use Tables and Input-Output Tables with Extensions and Applications, to estimate broader indirect and induced effects.
- **Global Comparability:** Providing capacity-building and technical assistance to ensure Member States can produce high-quality, integrated tourism data.

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3. The "Center of Excellence" Model & Resource Commitment

To ensure operational efficiency and high-level technical output, the Regional Office for the Middle East should be recognized as the Center of Excellence for Tourism Statistics. This center will coordinate the technical drafting and validation process.

The UN Tourism shall facilitate and fund the mobilization of the following resources:

- Dedicated team based in the Riyadh Regional office including the following competencies:
    1. Project management & Coordination (Minimum 1 FTE)
    2. Tourism Statistics Expertise (Minimum 2 FTEs)
    3. Administrative Support (Minimum 1 FTE)
- Specialized Short-Term Expertise: the engagement of short-term specialists for critical areas, including:
    - National Accounts & TSA (SNA 2025 integration).
    - Tourism Employment (updated classifications).
    - Trade in Tourism Services (BoP methodology).
    - Sharing Economy and New Data Sources.
    - Sustainability (MST and SDGs).
    - Dedicated Editorial and Secretariat support.

The Ministry of Tourism of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will commit the following resources on a voluntary basis (zero cost to UN Tourism's regular budget):

- Core Technical Support (In-kind Part-Time Experts):
    1. Principal Advisor (Project Lead): Providing overall leadership, coordination, and strategic oversight.
    2. Methodological Expert: Leading the development of the new frameworks and ensuring technical accuracy.

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4. Key Deliverables

The initiative is expected to produce the following key deliverables:

- Terms of Reference for the Expert Group and specialist task groups.
- Annotated outline of the revised IRTS and TSA: RMF.
- Issue papers on priority methodological topics.
- Updated tourism product and industry correspondence tables.
- Draft revised chapters of IRTS and TSA: RMF.
- Pilot-country methodological reports.
- Global consultation report.
- Capacity-development toolkit.
- Metadata and quality-assurance templates.
- Final submission package to the United Nations Statistical Commission.

In preparing these deliverables, a clear distinction should be maintained between the revised international recommendations, the TSA methodological framework, practical compilation manuals, and supplementary guidance notes. Core standards should remain concise and focused, while detailed operational guidance can be developed through separate manuals, toolkits, and technical notes.

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5. Governance Framework

To ensure global legitimacy and technical rigor, the project will follow a multi-tiered governance structure:

1. UN Tourism Committee on Statistics: Strategic oversight and steering.
2. Technical validation involving UNSD, OECD, IMF, ILO, Eurostat, and volunteer Member States/Academic Institutions.
3. Technical team (The Center of Excellence): The UN Tourism Statistical Department, technical Saudi-based UN Tourism statistical team, and the team of experts from the ministry of tourism in Saudi Arabia.
4. Specialist Task Groups: Short-term experts focusing on specific thematic updates (e.g. National Accounts, Sustainability, Sharing Economy, Employment).

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6. Desired High-Level Outcomes

- **Global Standard Setting:** The successful launch of IRTS 2028 and TSA: RMF 2028.
- **Institutional sustainability:** The establishment of a permanent capacity for statistical excellence within the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East.
- **Enhanced Policy Evidence:** A global system where tourism sustainability is measured with the same rigor as economic impact, enabling proactive, evidence-based governance following the latest global standards and establishing new global best-practices.
- **Capacity Development:** A structured capacity-development program will be developed to support Member States in implementing the revised standards, including training materials, diagnostic tools, pilot templates, e-learning modules, and regional technical workshops.
- **Reduced Member Burden**: A streamlined reporting process through the adoption of new data sources and automated validation.

7. Implementation Roadmap (2026-2029)

Summary Roadmap for the Revision of IRTS and TSA: RMF and the Establishment of the Riyadh Center of Excellence in Tourism Statistics

Phase	Timeline	Key Milestone & outcomes	Primary Driver
Initiation	2026	• Initiate the Center of Excellence in Tourism Statistics at the Regional office of the UN Tourism for the Middle East and The Expert Group • Staffing of regional office statistical team • Develop detailed scope and development plan to be presented to the UNSD in March 2027	UN Tourism/ Ministry of Tourism, Saudi Arabia
Development	2026-2027	• Develop Draft Versions of TSA and IRTS	UN Tourism Expert Group & UNT-SD
Validation	2027-2028	• Conduct capacity development workshops with member-states participating in the pilot. • Select pilot countries to reflect different regions, levels of statistical capacity,	UN Tourism with member states

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Phase	Timeline	Key Milestone & outcomes	Primary Driver
		tourism structures, data-source availability, and stages of IRTS, TSA, and SF-MST implementation. • Track and coordinate the production of Country-specific pilot reports showing updated indicators based on new methodologies and key challenges and lessons learnt	
Consensus	2028	• Finalize IRTS & TSA technical manuals. • Secure The UNT-SC, UNT-EC, and UNT-GA Resolution • Develop the capacity development program and operational plan for the statistical regional office in Riyadh	UN Tourism
Adoption	Early 2029	• Submit the revised IRTS and TSA: RMF to the United Nations Statistical Commission for endorsement/adoption, following technical review, global consultation, and coordination with relevant international organizations.	UN Tourism

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