Identifying Tourism Statistics: Basic References

I. The System of Tourism Statistics and its links with the National Statistical System

1. The National Statistical System (NSS) of a country encompasses a series of statistical functions, each of them corresponding to entities that conduct statistical observations on some of the fields belonging to the broader universe of socio-economic phenomena. The term statistical activity refers to all those activities that are required for statistical information to be produced; it spans from planning and programming statistical operations to the dissemination of information and includes for instance the design of the procedure, the collection of the data, the production, processing, compilation, and storing of the data, etc.

2. The coverage and extension of a NSS at any given moment in time are determined by a series of factors, such as:

   - the organization and legal structure of the entities that produce statistical information (mostly public);
   - the legally established links and administrative mechanisms that exist for coordination and integration, usually through specific procedures between these bodies and a Central Unit (usually the National Statistical Office –NSO);
   - the human and material resources assigned to statistical activities in each of these entities.

3. The overall objective of a NSS is to provide users with reliable, consistent and appropriate statistical data relative to the country’s main socio-economic variables, both in structure and change over time and at different territorial levels. Such data need to be comparable with similar data obtained in other countries. As a consequence, in addition to all the nationally required statistical sources existing at a given time, NSSs must include additionally those methodological and instrumental elements that are required to meet the objective of international comparability.

4. On account of its objective and content, NSSs must therefore harmonize statistical information at the national (or federal, where appropriate), infra-national and international levels, through appropriate coordination and integration procedures, that require the existence of a Central Unit.

5. For the purposes of this task, harmonization is taken to mean the controlling activity that makes it possible to ensure that a particular statistical process meets the purpose assigned to it within the NSS; coordination is taken to mean the function that serves to balance different statistical programmes from the twofold standpoint of activities and projects of those bodies that produce statistical information; and integration is a function geared to ensuring the connection and assembly of the different statistical information that are part of a NSS.

6. Regarding the integration function, it should be made of instrumental elements (concepts, definitions, classifications, data and indicators, national and international recommendations, etc.) on the one hand, and integrated statistical information systems (systems of national accounts and socio-demographic statistical systems based either on international or national standards) on the other.

7. The System of National Accounts (SNA) is doubtless the more developed of the two. In this respect, it would be desirable for countries to achieve a greater balance between the two systems in the future, insofar as they share some concepts, definitions and classifications, and because
splitting economic statistics from social statistics is in part conventional since many statistical variables are at the same time of an economic and social nature, or affect both economic and social issues without distinction.

8. There is a reciprocal relationship between those integrated statistical information systems and basic statistics: the former determine the basic statistics that are required for their design and compilation, and on the other hand, the latter have to be compiled using concepts, definitions, classifications that are part of the reference frameworks, both of the concepts and of the tables of results. Consequently, integrated systems become the centre of gravity for statistical work in all areas.

9. The System of Tourism Statistics (STS) should be understood, as that part of the NSS providing reliable, consistent and appropriate statistical information on the socio-economic aspects related to tourism, integrated within all the economic and social statistics related to other fields, at different territorial levels (national –or federal, where appropriate-, infra-national and international).

10. The design of a national STS should be viewed as the basic coordination and integration framework of the statistical information produced by all tourism stakeholders. Concepts, definitions, classifications, data, indicators, aggregates and table of results relating to tourism, designed so as to provide an exhaustive description of the tourism phenomenon in all its aspects (physical, social, economic, etc.) and a measurement of its economic contribution within a context of international comparability are a structural part of the NSS.

11. Regarding its socio-economic aspect, the STS can be defined as a set of components, made of the statistical sources themselves and the corresponding data obtained (i.e. statistics drawn from census, sample surveys, collection of data from administrative records, a derived statistical activity – in which data are estimated, modelled, or otherwise derived from statistical data sources -, etc.), the specific tools, methodological references and instruments used at some stages of the process that the generation of statistics entails (as is the case of concepts, definitions, classifications, databases, etc.), and also the instrumental and organizational resources used in all these processes. As a consequence, the STS encompasses in particular the technical aspects of field operation, the creation of statistical infrastructure, the elaboration of the results, and the completion of work leading to an integration of the data into a system of information.

12. It is worth recalling that the general guidelines for most of its work on the international harmonization of tourism concepts and statistics were determined at UNWTO’s fifth General Assembly held in New Delhi in 1983. The 1993 Recommendations on Tourism Statistics (adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission –UNSC– in 1993 and published in 1994) represent the first international recommendation; a second one (the 2000 Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework) was adopted by the UNSC in 2000 and published in 2001. Both recommendations determine the basic foundations of the System of Tourism Statistics. Since then, there have been many contributions from institutions and individuals alike, finally enabling the necessary basis for enhancing the credibility of the measurement of tourism’s economic importance to be constructed.

13. The development of a national STS is closely linked to the implementation of the Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSAs). In fact, the TSA provides the conceptual framework and the organizational structure for the harmonization and reconciliation of most tourism statistics internally within the sector as well as with other economic statistics. From this perspective, it should be seen as an instrument to assist countries in the identification of data gaps and to guide them during the revision of existing data sources as well as in the development of new sources.

in terms of concepts, definitions and classifications. As a consequence, they should be used as a reference for the design of new statistical sources as well as for the harmonization, coordination and integration of available tourism statistical information, even though these recommendations might extend in the coming years beyond the still restricted domain they touch upon. Examples are expanding the concept of consumption to include other components of demand (such as collective consumption and gross fixed capital formation), developing the sub-national perspective, by developing the link with other statistical systems (such as that on environmental issues), etc.

15. Although it is each country's responsibility to carry out the development of the STS, the UNWTO recommends this development should follow the Basic Principles of Official Statistics approved by the UNSC (11/15 April 1994) as indicated in IRTS 2008 chapter 9.

16. Those principles provide guidelines for establishing and maintaining a credible STS and therefore, the use of such principles should be understood as a necessary condition to maintain users' confidence in tourism statistics and, particularly, to help guarantee the integrity, transparency and confidentiality of the individual data as well as the public access to the available consolidated statistics.

17. The information system created by national STS, i.e. basic tourism statistics and TSA, should be the foundation for a reliable and accurate national Tourism Information System (TIS). The TIS might also include complementary statistics, non-statistical information, and additional types of indicators. This new set of information should be designed for national purposes only. Special attention should be given to the following set of indicators:

a) **‘early warning’ indicators** could be derived from sources such as credit card records as well as air traffic slot allocation data. Both types of data are administrative information (as arrivals figures are) and some countries have already experience in deriving these indicators which have proved of great interest for analysis. Spain (regarding slot allocation data) and New Zealand (using credit card data to evaluate the production performance of commercial accommodation) are just some examples;

b) **short-term performance indicators of tourism industries’ turnover and employment** could be derived from administrative records produced by official sources such as fiscal sources and social security schemes. The following document produced by UNWTO provides different examples already in place in OECD countries [http://www.unwto.org/statistics/sts/strengthening/oecd.pdf](http://www.unwto.org/statistics/sts/strengthening/oecd.pdf); and

c) **business cycle indicators** could be derived from business tendency surveys. This type of qualitative information (based on answers of staff personnel in some key tourism industries such as accommodation or travel agencies) is widely used in most countries for non-service sectors. UNWTO has identified its application in countries like France, Spain, Canada, Brazil and New Zealand. UNWTO is also using this methodology in its UNWTO World Tourism Barometer through the UNWTO Panel of Experts Confidence Index.

18. Consequently, the development by National Tourism Administrations of a **system of indicators for monitoring purposes** should be characterized by an increasingly closer relationship between planning, management and evaluation/control of the effects generated by the adopted strategies, and by a flexible structure capable of being relevant to any development or policy plan.
II. Information needs for crisis Management: UNWTO initiatives

1. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the United Nations (UN) specialized Agency for tourism and its members are National Tourism Administrations as well as a significant number of private and public stakeholders of the tourism sector worldwide (integrated as Affiliate Members). This is clearly an exception in the constituencies of Intergovernmental Organizations and marks the difference of UNWTO vis-à-vis the rest of UN System Agencies.

2. Since the terrorist attack of 11 September, an important number of external shocks hit the tourism sector in different parts of the world. The magnitude of these highlighted once again the volatility of tourism as a social phenomena and the recognition that tourism is playing an increasingly relevant role in national economies of all kind.

3. Well before the Global Impact Vulnerability Alert System (GIVAS) was created (as an agreement after the G20 Summit of 2 April 2009), UNWTO developed in May 2003 – after the terrorist attacks 11 September 2001– a business tendency survey named UNWTO Panel of Tourism Experts. It integrated more than 300 specialists from over 100 countries in order to provide high frequency indicators to keep track of actual performance of international tourism, as well as perceived short-term prospects that can be compared over time.

4. With the impact of the global economic crisis on tourism becoming ever more evident, the Tourism Resilience Committee created in October 2008, has once again proved how useful the UNWTO Tourism Confidence Index –based on the results obtained by means of an e-mail survey from the Panel of Tourism Experts– truly is.

The UNWTO Tourism Confidence Index

The UNWTO Tourism Confidence Index is based on the results of an email survey conducted by the UNWTO Secretariat among selected representatives of public and private sector organizations participating in the UNWTO Panel of Tourism Experts. The survey has been repeated every four months since May 2003 in order to keep track of actual performance, as well as of perceived short-term prospects, of the tourism sector. This allows performance and prospects to be compared over time, and also provides a comparison of the actual performance of the past four months with prospects forecast for the same period four months earlier. Results are also broken down by region and by industry. These breakdowns should, however, be interpreted with caution as they may in some cases be based only on a relatively small number of responses.

How to read this data

Members of the Panel are asked once every four months by email to answer the following two simple questions:

- What is your assessment of tourism performance in your destination or business for the four months just ended (or about to end) as against what you would reasonably expect for this time of year?

- What are the tourism prospects of your destination or business in the coming four months compared with what you would reasonably expect for this time of year?

Participants are asked to select one of the following five options: much worse [0]; worse [50], equal [100]; better [150], much better [200]. Results are averaged and broken down by region and by activity. A value above 100 means that the number of participants who evaluate the situation as “better” or “much better”, outnumber the participants who reply “worse” or “much worse”.

In addition, participants are also invited to include a qualitative assessment in their own words. The analysis contained in the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer is in large part based on their comments.
5. As complementary information, arrival figures (for which most countries have monthly data) are also well known indicators for international tourism. Nevertheless, the international recognition of the suitability of arrival figures (as well of slot allocation data in the case of air traffic) as high frequency indicators came with the present crisis context. In effect and in accordance with the G20 Summit agreements of 2 April 2009 regarding “the establishment of an effective mechanism to monitor the impact of the present crisis”, the UN Statistics Division (UNSD) organized three International Seminars (in Ottawa, Scheveningen and Durham, respectively) that covered as one of the key topics “the availability, periodicity and timeliness of high frequency statistics in accessible and analytical useful formats allowing their use in the early detection of turning points of financial and economic trends”. It is the Ottawa template of high frequency indicators includes which, for the first time ever, includes “tourist arrivals” amongst its key 8 indicators measuring the “Production and turnover” of national and regional economies.

6. In this context, UNWTO strongly supports the need for developing a set of short-term indicators that are of special interest to key stakeholders in the tourism sector. These should be based on administrative records as well as on statistical surveys that need not necessarily qualify as official data. Our own experiences as well as those shared by leading countries in the field of statistical development in tourism has shown that, in constructing such complementary indicators required in the short term follow up of performance, the basic sources should be:

   a) business tendency surveys;
   b) improvements in arrival figures (both in terms of the way they are obtained and the usefulness to complement them with border surveys);
   c) slot allocation data (as an air traffic leading indicator); and
   d) credit card records.