

CALL FOR ACTION : FOR AN EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM

..... EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2024

The International Social Tourism Organisation (ISTO) brings together actors working towards Fair and Sustainable Tourism for All, with over 180 organisations from 45 countries representing entities from the Social and Solidarity Economy, public authorities, private operators as well as academic and research institutions. ISTO's main mission is to promote equal access to tourism for everyone and to support forms of tourism that benefit people, communities and territories.

Today, ISTO affirms that the social sustainability pillar of tourism is the major axis of its sustainable development, and the fundamental lever for activating the other two pillars, economic and environmental.

With the European elections coming up, ISTO is putting forward a call for action for an effective implementation of the social sustainability axis of tourism - that is to say: the need of all stakeholders to take into account the social and societal impact of tourism activities for the resident populations of the destinations, the workers in the tourism sector as well as the visitors themselves, in a perspective of sustainability and well-being.

This consideration must be measurable and in particular take the form of the development of indicators that can be used by political decision-makers to ensure balanced tourism development in all its dimensions, as well as positive impacts for all stakeholders.



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The importance of new indicators for Sustainability in tourism

The topic of the sustainability of tourism and the importance of better measuring its social, economic and environmental evolution figures in the European Union's agenda, which translated into a number of key texts adopted by the European instances over the past two years.

The **Transition Pathways for Tourism** published by the European Commission in February 2022 which presents the necessary measures and achievements to accelerate the green and digital transitions and improve the resilience of the tourism ecosystem, was one of these examples.

This topic also figures in the **European Programme for Tourism 2030** and the conclusions of the Council of the European Union adopted on December 1st 2022. The Council encourages the Commission to cooperate with the Member States to provide solid statistical data on tourism, with indicators on social, economic, cultural and environmental sustainability.

During the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, the ministers of tourism also took a stance on this topic with the adoption on the 31st of October 2023 of the **Palma Declaration : The path towards social sustainability of tourism in the EU**.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that on 8 March 2024, the UN adopted a new **Global Standard to measure the sustainability of tourism**, and that this statistical framework has since become the international reference framework for measuring the economic, social and environmental dimensions of tourism.



Developing indicators for the social sustainability of tourism

Considering that the development of indicators on the sustainability of tourism is at the heart of the concerns of the EU as well as those of numerous Member States - and that the current statistics cannot properly picture certain phenomenon - one of the issues is to study how it is possible to concretely accelerate the implementation of these indicators.

As part of the work realized by the expert group composed of several renowned stakeholders of the European tourism ecosystem for the implementation of the Transition Pathway for Tourism and other organisations, one of the key findings was that the social pillar of sustainability was probably the least documented, hence the need to invest in research and to rely on experimenting.

Social sustainability in tourism, as defined by ISTO[1], is articulated around 5 main axes, with criteria of evaluation for local populations, tourism workers, visitors, the operational sector in tourism and public authorities.

Whether it is the degree of social acceptability by the population of the tourist activity, reception and accommodation conditions for seasonal workers, non-participation in tourism, leisure and holiday activities or the accessibility of tourist sites for all without discrimination; all these elements require common indicators, comparable ones, in order to establish how tourism can contribute to sustainable development as a whole.

[1] The International Social Tourism Organisation (ISTO) presented in November 2023 a reference text, to which several stakeholders and European regions contributed, titled « Brussels Addendum – Towards social sustainability of tourism”.



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3 Proposals for action

In view of the information presented and the positive impact that the development of social sustainability indicators for tourism could have in accelerating the dual digital and green transition, **the European institutions are asked to support initiatives and pilot projects in favor of the development and implementation of social sustainability indicators for tourism** with the following objectives:

- **prioritizing some social sustainability indicators** and identifying ways to measure them on the basis of specific criteria and data used in various EU regions and Member States;
- **testing with several Member States and pilot regions** in the EU the implementation of said indicators over a specific period;
- following, using and absorbing the work of other **international institutions** to find the best method to measure these indicators;
- carrying out a **benchmarking analysis** of indicators in an evolution perspective;
- providing the European Commission and the T4T Expert Group **recommendations**;
- regularly spreading information on the actions taken in the scope of a **report on trends and policies** in terms of the social sustainability of tourism in the EU.