

The external dimension of EU tourism policy

The European Union is the most visited tourist destination in the world, and EU tourists are one of the largest groups travelling to third countries. In order to maintain and increase these tourist flows in a sustainable way, the EU cooperates with a number of international bodies and third countries.

Background

With [139 million overnight visitors](#) from source markets outside its boundaries in 2016, the EU is the most visited region in the world. Tourists from EU countries are also one of the largest groups travelling to third countries, accounting in 2016 for 50 million arrivals in destinations beyond the EU.

Regulatory framework

The EU has limited competence for international cooperation in the field of tourism. According to the Treaties, it can only 'support, coordinate or supplement Member States' actions', and cannot harmonise national legislation on tourism. However, many EU policies and financial instruments influence the external dimension of EU tourism policy. For instance, the Schengen area allows tourists to move freely across 22 EU countries. Furthermore, events such as the [European Year of Cultural Heritage](#) and the fact that a number of countries use a common currency have favoured international tourism to Europe. However, the [recent temporary reintroduction of border controls](#) at Schengen area internal borders has provoked a reverse effect in some destinations such as [Tyrol in Austria](#), where the number of tourists has dropped significantly.

Cooperation with international organisations

The EU cooperates with several international bodies, such as the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the Council of Europe (CoE). These bodies help the EU deepen its knowledge of the tourism sector. For example, the UNWTO has published an analysis on '[European Union Tourism Trends](#)' with the cooperation and financial support of the EU.

Cooperation with individual countries

As mentioned in the [2010 strategy paper on tourism](#), the European Commission considers that it is necessary to promote Europe as a tourist destination, especially in emerging economies. To this end, the Commission is encouraging joint promotional actions for Member States through the launch of initiatives such as the [visiteurope.com](#) website and the [European tourism brand](#) (with the help of the [European Travel Commission](#)).

More recently, the EU decided to designate 2018 as the [EU-China Tourism Year](#). China is one of the EU's biggest and fastest-growing source markets. The Year aims to promote lesser-known destinations, improve travel and tourism experiences, foster economic cooperation and encourage progress on visa facilitation and air connectivity. Various [events](#), including conferences, business summits and meetings, as well as webinars and public events for Chinese visitors and investors, are taking place throughout the year.

The European Parliament's Tourism Intergroup and its Committee on Transport and Tourism hold occasional discussions with representatives of international tourism bodies. During the latest meeting with the UNWTO Secretary General in February 2018, the Parliament and the UNWTO [signed](#) a memorandum for cooperation focused on advancing sustainable tourism across Europe. The Intergroup has also [called](#) for a more consistent tourism policy, and raised the issue of a separate EU budget line for tourism. In a 2015 [resolution on tourism](#), the Parliament encouraged the Commission to continue to deepen the promotion of Europe as the top tourist destination. It furthermore emphasised the importance of the European tourism brand and called for increased cooperation with international bodies to develop new transnational and pan-European tourism products.

