Since December 2009, tourism policy has had its own legal basis. However, it still does not have a separate budget under the ongoing multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021-2027.

**LEGAL BASIS**

Article 6(d) and Title XXII, Article 195 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

**OBJECTIVES**

The EU’s tourism industry in the strict sense of the term (traditional providers of holidays and tourism services) is made up of 2.3 million businesses, primarily small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), employing an estimated 12.3 million people. In 2018, the ‘travel and tourism’ sector directly contributed 3.9% to EU GDP and accounted for 5.1% of the total labour force (which equates to some 11.9 million jobs). When its close links with other economic sectors are taken into account, the tourism sector’s figures increase significantly (10.3% of GDP and 11.7% of total employment, which equates to 27.3 million workers).

In 2019, the number of international tourist arrivals reached 1.5 billion worldwide (+4%), 745 million of which, or 50% of the market, were in Europe. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, with its toll of uncertainty with regard to travel bans and sanitary obligations, represents today the most crucial challenge for the future of the tourism sector.

Tourism policy is also a means by which the EU can pursue broader employment and growth objectives. The environmental dimension of tourism will gain in significance over time. This is already reflected in projects involving sustainable, responsible and ethical tourism. In 2018, the European Parliament published a study on ‘Overtourism: impact and possible policy responses’.

**RESULTS**

A. General policy

Since the European Council meeting of 21 June 1999 on ‘tourism and employment’, the EU has paid more attention to tourism’s contribution to employment in Europe. In a communication entitled ‘Working together for the future of European tourism’ (COM(2001)0665), the European Commission proposed an operational
framework and measures to boost the EU tourism industry. The Council resolution of 21 May 2002 on the future of tourism endorsed the Commission’s approach and, having set the goal of making Europe a top tourist destination, quickly resulted in closer cooperation between public and private stakeholders in the EU tourism industry. On that basis, the Commission then implemented a wide range of measures. The following are examples of the fruits of this strategy:

— Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSA) for each Member State, with the ultimate aim of presenting the first European satellite account;

— The launch of a portal to promote Europe as a tourist destination;

— A European Tourism Forum (ETF) held annually since 2002 and co-organised with the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union during the second half of the year. In 2019, the 18th forum was held in Helsinki, Finland, on the topic 'Digital transformation as the engine of sustainable growth for the EU tourism sector'. The 2020 ETF meeting was held virtually from Berlin and focused on ways of resolving the crisis and reorienting tourism in Europe. The 2021 meeting was held online from Slovenia and focused on the sustainable and digital transitions of the EU’s tourism industry and destinations. The 2022 event in Prague brought together representatives of the tourism industry and destinations to discuss best practices.

Since 2001, the Commission has published several communications, the most recent one in 2014, setting out its policy guidelines for the development of the tourism sector. These are:

— (COM(2007)0621) of 19 October 2007 – Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism – which set out how sustainable development could ensure the long-term competitiveness of tourism and announced a three-yearly set of preparatory activities;

— (COM(2010)0352) of 30 June 2010 – Europe, the world’s No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe – which analyses the factors that make the European tourism industry competitive and the obstacles to its sustainable development;

— (COM(2012)0649) of 7 November 2012 – Implementation and development of the common visa policy to spur growth in the EU – which seeks to bring about an increase in the number of tourists from non-EU countries visiting the EU by establishing a common visa policy;


B. Special measures

1. In the interests of tourists (travellers and/or holidaymakers)

These measures include steps to make border crossing easier and protect both the health and safety and the material interests of tourists. Among them are Council Recommendation 86/666/EEC on fire safety in hotels, Directive 2008/122/EC on
timeshare properties, and Directive (EU) 2015/2302 on package travel and linked travel arrangements. In addition, regulations have been adopted on passenger rights in all areas of transport (2.2.3). Directive 2006/7/EC of 15 February 2006 on the management of bathing water quality exemplifies the connection between tourism and other areas of EU competence. It also repeals Directive 76/160/EEC of 8 December 1975 with effect from 31 December 2014.

At Parliament’s request, the Commission has launched initiatives in the form of five preparatory programmes on targeted topical issues for European tourism.

The ‘EDEN’ initiative focuses on promoting European tourist ‘destinations of excellence’, in other words little-known or emerging destinations that observe sustainability principles. The funding for this preparatory programme expired in 2011, but the Commission has continued to implement the initiative under the programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME).

The ‘Calypso’ initiative focuses on social tourism for senior citizens, underprivileged young people, disadvantaged families and persons with reduced mobility. The programme enabled the co-financing of several transnational partnerships aimed at creating social tourism cooperation and exchange mechanisms. Among other actions, the EU supported the setting up of an e-Calypso platform linking supply and demand for socially inclusive tourism holidays.

The ‘Sustainable Tourism’ programme includes the ‘Green Belt’ (6 800 km of paths from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea), the aim of which is to promote the transformation of the former Iron Curtain into a cross-border network of walking and cycle paths. For an assessment of the ‘Eurovelo’ circuits – a network of 14 long-distance ‘veloroutes’ managed by the European Cyclists’ Federation – see the updated version (2012) of Parliament’s study on the network of European cycle paths.

The ‘DiscoverEU’ programme, among several other programmes on the promotion of tourism, allows 18 year-old Europeans to travel across the EU and learn more about the diversity of Europe.

The EU is also co-financing cross-border sustainable tourism projects to diversify tourism options in Europe. For example, a recent invitation to tender (19 July 2018) was launched under COSME to support the development and promotion of transnational thematic tourism products, exploiting synergies between tourism and the cultural and creative industries. Under the COSME umbrella, various other initiatives have been launched. They include:

— Supporting competitive and sustainable growth in the tourism sector (2017);
— Promoting and developing products and services in the sport and wellness sectors as well as supporting Europe’s cultural and industrial heritage (2015);
— Facilitating EU transnational tourism flows for senior citizens and young people in the low and medium seasons (2014); and
— Maximising cooperation between tourism and high-end and creative industries (2014).
2. In the interests of the tourist industry and the regions, and for responsible tourism

The Commission also supports the creation of networks between the main European tourist regions. In July 2009, NECSTouR, an open network of European tourist regions, was established to serve as a platform for exchanges of knowledge and innovative solutions in the area of competitive and sustainable tourism. The EU offers a range of funding sources to help tourism contribute to regional development and employment: the European Regional Development Fund for sustainable projects linked to tourism, the Interreg programme, the cohesion fund for environmental and transport infrastructure, the European social fund for employment, the Leonardo da Vinci programme for professional training, the European agricultural fund for rural development for the diversification of the rural economy, the competitiveness and innovation framework programme (CIP), and the 7th framework programme for research. In that connection, under the multiannual financial framework (MFF) for the period 2021-2027, the single market programme has taken over from the CIP and Horizon Europe from Horizon 2020.

Harmonised statistics on tourism have been compiled in the EU since 1996. Regulation (EU) No 692/2011 of 6 July 2011 established a common framework for the systematic development, production and dissemination of European statistics on tourism collected in the Member States. In 2013, the Commission created a Virtual Tourism Monitoring Centre to coordinate the collection and storage of data and to guarantee a greater degree of synergy between the levels at which tourism policy decisions are taken. In its communications of 27 November 1996 (COM(1996)0547) and 26 May 1999 (COM(1999)0262), the Commission announced and developed an EU campaign against sex tourism involving children (for prevention and violations see more in the section below).

In April 2022, the Commission adopted a proposal for creating an EU-wide system on the protection of geographical indications of non-agricultural products (such as handicrafts) (COM(2022)0174). These products are often significant for local identity and attract tourism. One of the aims of revising the regulation is to boost regional economies and tourism in these areas. It is currently awaiting Parliament’s position at first reading.

In October 2022, the Commission launched the EU tourism dashboard, a tool to assist regional and national policy makers in directing policies and strategies in the tourist sector by increasing the accessibility of tourism statistics, and aiding destinations and public agencies in monitoring their progress in the green and digital transitions. This is one of the proposed measures in the Commission’s ‘transition pathway for tourism strategy’ of 2022 (more details on the strategy below).

In November 2022, the Commission adopted a revision of Regulation (EU) 2018/1724 on data collection and sharing related to short-term accommodation rental services (COM(2022)0571). With a focus on SMEs in particular, this initiative seeks to develop responsible, transparent and fair growth in short-term rentals as part of a well-balanced tourist ecosystem.
3. Other focused measures

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. This initiative aims to promote lesser-known destinations, improve travel and tourism experiences, foster economic cooperation and encourage progress on visa facilitation and air connectivity.

The European Commission also organised a Showcase Conference on Tourism that took place in Brussels on 19 March 2019.

In 2023, the Commission is planning to adopt a regulation on digitalising travel documents. This would make travelling easier, as digital travel documents are simpler to issue, which would benefit the tourism industry.

**ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

As long ago as in December 1996, Parliament lent its backing to an EU tourism measure by approving the first multiannual ‘Philoxenia’ programme (1997-2000), which was later abandoned as a result of the Council’s failure to reach a unanimous decision.

In its resolution of 30 March 2000 on the implementation of measures to combat child sex tourism, Parliament called on the Member States to introduce universally binding extraterritorial laws that would make it possible to investigate, bring legal proceedings against, and punish people who, while abroad, commit illegal acts involving the sexual exploitation of children. On 27 October 2011, it adopted its position on the proposal for a directive combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children. Under the terms of Directive 2011/93/EU of 13 December 2011, child sex tourism is now a criminal offence throughout the EU; in particular, Article 21 of the directive makes provision for national measures to prevent or prohibit the organisation of travel for the purpose of committing this type of offence.

Well before the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, Parliament had adopted a series of resolutions on the Commission guidelines and initiatives concerning tourism, the most noteworthy of which are those of 8 September 2005 on ‘New prospects and new challenges for sustainable European tourism’, of 29 November 2007 on ‘A renewed EU tourism policy: Towards a stronger partnership for European Tourism’, and of 16 December 2008 on the regional development aspects of the impact of tourism on coastal regions. Parliament thus addressed the impact that visa policy has on tourism and supported the promotion of European tourist destinations.

It also proposed the creation of a European Heritage label and the establishment of a cross-border cycle route along the former Iron Curtain, and encouraged the sector to diversify its supply of services in order to respond to seasonal fluctuations in tourist numbers.

After the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force, on 27 September 2011 Parliament adopted a resolution based on an own-initiative report entitled ‘Europe, the world’s No 1 tourist destination’. While supporting the 21-point policy strategy presented by the Commission, Parliament wishes to promote competitive, modern, high-quality and sustainable tourism that is accessible to all by focusing on Europe’s multiculturalism. MEPs stressed the importance of measures taken in other sectors,
such as employment, taxation or consumer rights, which could have a decisive impact on tourism.

Parliament’s call for a specific programme for tourism under the 2014-2020 MFF was rejected by the Council, however. Similarly, in December 2014, the Commission was forced to withdraw a recommendation on a set of non-binding European principles on the quality of tourism services, which it had presented to the Council in February 2014. This was despite the fact that it had Parliament’s support for a ‘European tourism quality label’ (paragraph 25 of the resolution of 27 September 2011 and paragraph 53 of the resolution of 29 October 2015) on new challenges and concepts for the promotion of tourism in Europe.

On 27 October 2015, Parliament adopted a position at second reading with a view to the adoption of a new directive which seeks to enhance the protection of travellers undertaking package tours and repeals Directive 90/314/EEC. On 29 October 2015, Parliament adopted a resolution on new challenges and concepts for the promotion of tourism in Europe. It concerns the digitisation of distribution channels, the development of the new sharing economy sector, changing consumer behaviour, the need to attract and retain skilled staff, demographic change, and seasonality. In it, Parliament calls on the Commission to present a new tourism strategy to replace or update the communication of 30 June 2010 entitled ‘Europe, the world’s No 1 tourist destination’, and calls for the creation of a budget line for tourism in the next multiannual financial framework. It also encourages the European executive to work in partnership with the European Travel Commission to maintain Europe’s primacy in the tourism industry, potentially through the creation of the label ‘Destination Europe 2020’.

The European Parliament’s Tourism Intergroup, its Committee on Transport and Tourism and its Tourism Task force (TTF) hold occasional discussions with representatives of international tourism bodies. During the meeting of February 2018 with the Secretary-General of the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Parliament and the UNWTO signed a memorandum for cooperation focused on advancing sustainable tourism across Europe. The TTF has also called for a more consistent tourism policy, and raised the issue of a separate EU budget line for tourism. In its resolution of 29 October 2015, 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. Recently, Parliament published a study on ‘European tourism: recent developments and future challenges’.

MEASURES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

Europe is the world’s leading tourist destination. The tourism industry is a vital part of the EU’s economy and accounts for 10% of its GDP, which is why the EU is committed to reviving this sector.

The impact of the global health crisis is becoming clear with European tourism growth expected to remain below 2019 levels until 2023. During the first four months of 2020, Europe saw a dramatic 44% decline in international tourist arrivals compared to the
same period in 2019 – a decrease in line with global performance. Tourism job losses in Europe in 2020 were monumental, ranging from 14.2 million to 29.5 million.

The Commission deployed different rapid-response tools: a proposal to suspend the rules obliging airlines to use their allocated slots at EU airports (COM(2020)0111); guidelines on EU passenger rights (C(2020)1830) and border checks (C(2020)1753); and assistance in the repatriation of EU travellers during the lockdown lasting from March to May 2020.

In May 2020, the Commission put forward its communication entitled ‘Tourism and transport in 2020 and beyond’ (COM(2020)0550), bringing together guidance and recommendations to safely restore unrestricted free movement and reopen internal borders; safely restore transport, connectivity, and tourism services, in particular hospitality, address the liquidity crunch and rebuild consumer confidence, and issued recommendations on vouchers. Parliament, in turn, debated the COVID-19 outbreak during its plenary sessions of 10 March, 26 March and 17 June 2020. During its extraordinary plenary session of 26 March 2020, Parliament adopted its position on three legislative proposals: launching the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative; extending the EU Solidarity Fund to cover public health emergencies; and temporarily suspending airport slot rules (please see also COM(2020)0111 above). Moreover, at its plenary session of 19 June 2020, Parliament adopted a resolution on tourism and transport in 2020 and beyond, calling for rapid, short-term and long-term support for the transport and tourism sectors to ensure their survival and competitiveness, and stressing that the current crisis represented a historic opportunity to modernise tourism in the EU, making it more sustainable and more accessible to people with disabilities.

In July 2020, the Commission adopted an ‘Action plan for fair and simple taxation supporting the recovery strategy’ (COM(2020)0312). In this plan, the Commission outlines its goal to revise the VAT Directive, in particular the VAT special scheme for travel agents. This scheme includes special arrangements for travel agents and tour operators and are not applied uniformly in the Union, which leads to distortions in competition between EU and non-EU travel agencies. In the fourth quarter of 2023, the Commission is planning on adopting this revision. The aim of the initiative is to revise the special VAT scheme for travel agents, VAT rules on passenger transport and the VAT exemption regime for non-EU travellers. Given that the tourism industry was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, the initiative might involve additional measures to support the tourism and travel industry.

In March 2021, Parliament adopted a resolution entitled ‘Establishing an EU strategy for sustainable tourism’, in which it calls on the Member States to fully implement common and coordinated criteria for safe travel without delay. This includes a common vaccination certificate and a system of mutual recognition of vaccination procedures for medical purposes, while facilitating the deployment of the EU Passenger Locator Form, digitally where possible, with full respect for data protection rules.

Member States are called on to establish a common and non-discriminatory EU Health Safety Protocol for testing before departure, which should be reliable and affordable, and include rapid testing technologies, PCR tests and others. Parliament also regrets the lack of sufficient budgetary and financial assistance, and invites Member States to
temporarily set reduced VAT rates on travel and tourism services, accompanied by a special stimulus package for micro-enterprises and SMEs for the 2020 to 2024 period. On 17 March 2021, Commission put forward a communication entitled ‘A common path to safe and sustained re-opening’ (COM(2021)0129), as well as a proposal for a regulation on a framework on the issuance, verification and acceptance of interoperable certificates on vaccination, testing and recovery to facilitate free movement during the COVID-19 pandemic (Digital Green Certificate) (COM(2021)0130), and a similar framework applying to third-country nationals staying or residing legally in the territories of the Member States (COM(2021)0140).

The EU Digital COVID Certificate is accepted in all Member States, helping to ensure the right to freedom of movement for all EU residents. The Digital COVID Certificate Scheme was extended until June 2023, following a revision of the regulation and adoption by Parliament and the Council (Regulation 2022/1034).

In February 2022, the Commission adopted its plan entitled ‘Transition Pathway for Tourism’. The updated EU industrial strategy stressed the need to strengthen the tourism sector’s resilience and accelerate the digital and green transitions in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The transition pathway identifies 27 areas of measures for the green and digital transitions, and to make the EU’s tourism industry more resilient. Among other things, it calls for improved data sharing for more cutting-edge services, more accessible services and a more circular and environmentally friendly tourism sector. In response to this plan, the Council adopted the ‘EU agenda for tourism 2030’ in December 2022. The agenda focuses on five priorities: the green and digital transitions; resilience and inclusion; skills and support; and the governance and policy-enabling framework, with several actions included under each priority.

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