



COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Topic 1: The question of developing guidelines to mitigate the social and cultural harms of overtourism

Chairs: Kailun Zheng and Brian Deng

Committee overview

The Council of the European Union is a committee composed of national ministers from the 27 member nations of the European Union. The purpose of the council is to negotiate and adopt legislations related to the European Union. The council is also responsible for coordinating member states' policies in economic or social fields.

Background on the topic

Overtourism refers to when the tourism carrying capacity is passed leading to negative consequences. Overtourism is a major problem plaguing major European capitals such as Rome and Paris. This is partly influenced by the spread of social media. This can lead to decreases in standards of living for local citizens. Tourism can raise costs for food, transportation and even for housing (homesharing/Airbnb). The end result of this is that protests have arisen in major European cities (ABC News). However it is impossible to completely remove tourism as it makes up a large portion of many European country's income. Tourism can also cause the socio-economic and cultural development of many cities. The Covid-19 pandemic caused a downturn in tourism although it has picked up and skyrocketed since.

Key terms and definitions

Tourism Carrying Capacity: The maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time without causing destruction of the physical, economic and sociocultural environment and a decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction. (UNWTO, p.3)

Limits of Acceptable Change: Specific targets which can be measured by quantitative indicators such as the number of visitors or the percentage of tourists. (Publications Office of the EU, p.13)

Overcrowding: An aspect of overtourism which reflects a psychological response to density due to a lack of privacy with an excess of people in an area. It can cause infrastructure to be overloaded and affect local residents. (Publications Office of the EU, p.14)

Urban Destinations: Major metropolitan cities. The facilities in these places are not primarily intended for tourists and thus must be shared between the tourists, workers and residents. However, these locations tend to have well-developed infrastructure and transportation so can find it easier to support large tourist populations. They tend to have many services such as restaurants or shops and accommodations which attract tourists. (Publications Office of the EU, p.15)

Tourist Attraction: A place/feature/event which attracts visitors for a range of reasons. These can be natural wonders or man-made attractions.

Tourism Intensity: The number of nights spent at tourist accommodations divided by the resident population. (General Publications)

Tourism Seasonality: Number of nights spent in the three most visited months in relation to the total number of nights spent. Seasonality tells us the temporal concentration of tourism and whether it is focused on a certain period of time or if it is spread out through the year. (General Publications)

Relevant UN bodies and resolutions

- Goal 11 of the Sustainable Development Goals - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
- EU report - Unbalanced Tourism Growth at Destination Level: <https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/publications/study-unbalanced-tourism-growth-destination-level>
- EU report - When Too Much Becomes Harmful: Rethinking Unbalanced Tourism in Europe: <https://transition-pathways.europa.eu/tourism/articles/when-too-much-becomes-harmful-rethinking-unbalanced-tourism-europe>
- EU Press Release - First Transition Pathway co-created with Industry and Civil Society for a Resilient, Green and Digital Tourism Ecosystem: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_850
- EU Tourism Dashboard: <https://tourism-dashboard.ec.europa.eu/?lng=en&ctx=tourism>

Major actors and their relevance

Countries

- The countries with the highest number of nights spent by tourists are Spain, France and Italy. (General Publications)
- Greece and Croatia are the countries with very high tourism seasonality. (General Publications)

Non-state actors

- **UNWTO (World Tourism Organization)** - Executive summary on overtourism (<https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284420070>) with a list of strategies on addressing overtourism.
- **Travel Foundation** - International sustainable tourism organization which is dedicated to ensuring that tourism has a positive impact on destinations.

Guiding questions

- 1. Is overtourism exclusive for large cities or is it a universal problem?
- 2. What is the physical impact of tourism besides the social/cultural harms?
- 3. What are some benefits associated with large tourist populations?
- 4. How can we ensure freedom while still addressing the problem?
- 5. What are some necessary investments in order to mitigate overtourism?

Bibliography

ABC News. "Protests Connected to Tourism Erupt around Europe." YouTube, 8 Aug. 2025, www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAVRL-c0b4A.

European Union. “Unbalanced Tourism Growth in Europe: Understanding Pressures, Impacts and Sustainable Pathways.” Europa.eu, 2018, transition-pathways.europa.eu/tourism/articles/unbalanced-tourism-growth-europe-understanding-pressures-impacts-and-sustainable.

General Publications. “Unbalanced Tourism: Which European Destinations Are Potentially Vulnerable?” Mobility and Transport, 29 Apr. 2025, transport.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/unbalanced-tourism-which-european-destinations-are-potentially-vulnerable-2025-04-29_en.

Publications Office of the EU. “Unbalanced Tourism Growth at Destination Level - Publications Office of the EU.” Publications Office of the EU, 2022, op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/816f1561-3a32-11ed-9c68-01aa75ed71a1/language-en.

UNWTO. “‘Overtourism’? - Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism Growth beyond Perceptions, Executive Summary.” vol. 2, 17 Sept. 2018, <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420070>.

“What the Council Does.” Consilium, 2024, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/what-the-council-does/.