



# **GSTC STANDARD-SETTING MANUAL**

***Version 3.0***

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The Global Sustainable Tourism Council

[www.gstcouncil.org](http://www.gstcouncil.org)

### **Document Control**

This is version 3.0 of the GSTC Standard-Setting Manual from April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023. It replaces the GSTC Public Standard-Setting System Report version 2.1 dated 11 December 2015.

This version includes a new format and revised numbering system.

The review and revision process for the Standard-Setting Manual takes place every four years.

The next review is scheduled for 2027.

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# FOREWORD

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) is a multi-stakeholder initiative formed in 2007, including amongst its founding partners UNEP, UNWTO, UN Foundation, Sabre Holdings and Rainforest Alliance, amongst others. It was formed in response to the challenges and opportunities of sustainable tourism, by merging two previous initiatives; the Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria and the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council (STSC). In 2014, GSTC merged with the Tour Operator Initiative (TOI) with TOI's operations and members joining the GSTC organization. Now that things have come to this, over 400 organizations from the public, private and voluntary sectors and from the world of tourism, environmental management and sustainable development have been contributing to the work of the GSTC and its two predecessor bodies. The GSTC is a Membership Council governed by a Board of Directors.

The mission of the GSTC is: "To be an agent of change in the world of sustainable travel and tourism by fostering the increased knowledge, understanding, adoption and demand for sustainable tourism practices." The GSTC fulfills its mission by providing guidelines for businesses and destinations of all sizes in the world and guidance for travelers and travel providers in choosing suppliers and sustainable tourism programs to become more sustainable. Working with media to provide a common denominator to recognize sustainable tourism providers, and with governmental, non-governmental and private sector organizations to have a framework for developing sustainable tourism requirements, helping certification and other voluntary programs ensure that their standards meet a broadly-accepted baseline, and providing guidelines for education and training bodies such as hotel schools and universities, with all these work will result in accomplish our mission.

The objectives of the GSTC Standard-Setting Manual are as follows:

- To ensure that the core values and elements of the GSTC Sustainable Tourism Criteria are included in the development of new global Criteria and the revision of existing Criteria.
- To ensure that GSTC Criteria development and revision procedures are followed in compliance with the ISEAL Standard-Setting Code of Good Practice (Version 6.0 December 2014).

The review and revision process for the Standard-Setting Manual takes place four years aligned with the ISEAL Standard-Setting Code review and revision cycle. The next review is scheduled for 2027. For each review and revision process, the GSTC Assurance Team prepares the draft revisions and coordinates the revision process. However, GSTC Public Standard-Setting Manual 3.0 is made mainly for the MICE Criteria Development in 2023 and a new version may be made according to the new ISEAL Code.

For more information, please visit the GSTC website: <https://www.gstcouncil.org>

# PART I - INTRODUCTION

## 1. The need for Sustainability of Tourism and Global Criteria

Prior to the pandemic in 2019, travel and tourism accounted for around 10% of the world's economic activity. Whereas the COVID-19 caused the loss of over 60 million jobs, the tourism sector saw the recovery of more than 18 million jobs<sup>1</sup>. Our future outlook is positive economically, however an unexpected massive outbreak in the world emphasized the necessity to consider social, cultural and environmental aspects in the business to pursue the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The significant relevance of tourism to most of the 17 SDGs has been recognized.

The UNWTO is working with governments, public and private partners, development banks, international and regional financial institutions, UN agencies and international organizations to achieve the SDGs, with a special focus on Goal 8 (economic growth), Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production patterns) and Goal 14 (marine resources) where tourism has been specifically featured.

The impact of travel and tourism on global and local environments and on host communities can be both positive and negative, providing both opportunities and responsibilities. Negative impacts and concerns associated with travel and tourism include: Its contribution to climate crisis, being responsible for an estimated around 8%-11% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions which is growing rapidly<sup>2</sup>; Depletion of natural and precious resources, such as the use of land and water; Creation of pollution of all kinds; Social changes and dislocation of traditional societies; Pressure on cultural heritage sites, natural environments and biodiversity; Poor labor conditions and exploitation in parts of the sector.

Travel and tourism can also deliver many positive benefits, including: A growing opportunity for enterprise development and employment creation, with low barriers for entry; Direct and indirect support for local communities, through the provision of jobs, income, services, and infrastructure; Awareness of natural and cultural heritage and support for their conservation; Health, wellbeing and educational benefits for tourists and hosts, which should be accessible to all. Sustainable tourism requires an approach to tourism development and management that recognizes and responds to these responsibilities and opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> World Travel & Tourism Council (2022). Travel & Tourism Economic Impact Global Trends 2022. <https://wttc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2022/EIR2022-Global%20Trends.pdf>, [Retrieved November 18th, 2022]

<sup>2</sup> World Travel & Tourism Council (2021). A Net Zero Roadmap for Travel & Tourism 2021. [https://wttc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2021/WTTC\\_Net\\_Zero\\_Roadmap.pdf](https://wttc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2021/WTTC_Net_Zero_Roadmap.pdf), [Retrieved November 18th, 2022]

Actions that encourage, identify, and promote a positive response from enterprises are crucial for the future of the tourism sector and the contribution it can make to sustainable development. The tourism sector is highly fragmented. While there are some important multinational players, many of the providers of tourism services are independent businesses and the majority are small and micro-enterprises. Tourism enterprises of all sizes are responding in different ways and to different degrees to the need for sustainable tourism.

## **2. History of Criteria Development**

### **2.1 History of the GSTC Industry Criteria Development and Revision**

The GSTC Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators (GSTC-HTO) were developed because there were more than 60 different sustainable tourism standards in the world, no mechanism for harmonizing them, and different certification and verification procedures for each. Consequently, there was little consumer recognition and confidence in these standards, no guarantee that they measured similar attributes, and complaints by hotels and tour operators that they were being asked to comply with different standards and had few tools for evaluating each standard and certification system. There was also concern that a number of standards evaluate only environmental aspects and do not address the social, cultural, and economic effects of tourism, both positive and negative.

A consortium of major organizations under the auspices of the United Nations developed a neutral platform to establish common ground among all the existing standards and international guidelines, incorporated and consulted stakeholders from the private sector (small, medium, and large businesses), social and environmental organizations, indigenous and community groups, and the public. Every effort was made to ensure that developed and developing countries were involved in the consultation process. There were four rounds of public consultation over a period of 15 months in several languages, and outreach to every continent. The first version of the Criteria was released in October 2008. The GSTC Industry Criteria was revised in 2011, incorporating suggested changes from the two years of additional open consultation after the release of the GSTC Criteria in 2008. An additional round of public consultation on the suggested changes took place in 2011-12, and the second version of the Criteria was released in March 2012.

The GSTC revised the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators version 2.0 (GSTC HTO) in 2015 and expanded it to become the GSTC Industry Criteria. The GSTC HTO are general sustainability aspects that apply more broadly to the greater tourism industry at the enterprise level. Within the content of the Sustainable Development Goals, the GSTC identified and responded to the need for a wider, multi-sector sustainable tourism norm by developing the GSTC Industry as an evolution of the globally accepted benchmark standard: the GSTC-HTO.

The GSTC adopted the ISEAL Alliance Code of Good Practice “Setting Social and Environmental Standards v5.0” as the framework for the revision of the GSTC-HTO and its integration into and development of the GSTC Industry. The GSTC set the strategy of amending the GSTC HTO to encompass all tourism enterprises and create a specific set of indicators for each sector – initial sector Hotels and Tour Operators.

The key steps of the revision process were: (i) resourced by the GSTC Technical Director, guided by the International Standard Working Group (GSTC-ISWG), (ii) Two round of public consultation, an initial call from December 2015 to February 216 based on the GSTC-I Terms of Reference, and the second consultation with a draft criteria from May-June 2016, (iii) the ISWG considered comments on the first round of consultation for development of the draft criteria and then considered comments on the draft criteria in finalizing the recommended criteria, and (iv) The final version of the GSTC Industry Criteria for Hotels and Tour Operators was revised and adopted by the GSTC Board of Directors by July 2016.

The GSTC developed a wide stakeholder database including national level and international tourism organizations, industry bodies, tourism sector groups, conservation NGO's and certification programs that were included in the consultation. Key tourism industry bodies such as PATA, TIES, WTTC, UNWTO and UNEP were invited to participate in the revision process.

The GSTC announced the release of the GSTC Industry Criteria in January 2017. The GSTC Industry Criteria served as the 3rd revision of the GSTC HTO v2.0, hence the reference to “version 3” in their formal name. To distinguish the Hotel Criteria and the Tour Operators Criteria from each other, the Industry Criteria included separate Performance Indicators for Hotels and Tour Operators, but the two share the same set of Criteria. The GSTC Industry Criteria is publicly available on the GSTC website.

## **2.2 History of the GSTC Destination Criteria Development and Revision**

The need for the **Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D)** was determined in late 2009 by the Destination Stewardship Think Tank co-convened by Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines and Sustainable Travel International. As a result, the GSTC Destination Working Group (the “Destinations WG”) was formed in February 2010. The methodology for the development of the GSTC-D was approved by the Working Group in July 2011, followed ISEAL Standard Setting Code - guidelines for the development of social and environmental standards.

A working draft of criteria and related performance indicators was proposed in October 2011, incorporating the shared principles from over 37 destination guidelines and standards from around the world. The GSTC Destinations and International Standards Working Groups (ISWGs) reviewed the draft and submitted recommendations to the GSTC Board, which approved draft 1 of the Global

Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D) on 7 March 2012. The criteria were subsequently submitted to a public consultation from 2 April – 4 August 2012 in English, Spanish, French, Mandarin, German, Catalan, and Russian, and they were pilot tested in six Early Adopter destinations in North America, Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and Asia between May and August 2012. The Draft 1 criteria were revised to incorporate the comments received from the consultation and from the early adopters. All comments were reviewed and addressed, although not necessarily adopted.

Draft 2 was approved by the GSTC Destinations and International Standards WGs in October 2012 and approved by the GSTC Board in November 2012. Draft 2 was published for public consultation from December 1, 2012 to April 15, 2013 in English, Spanish, and Mandarin, as very few comments were received to the first survey in other languages. A second round of early adopters was used to evaluate the Draft 2 criteria and indicators between March and August 2013. Once again, every comment and suggestion was evaluated, and Draft 3 of the criteria, incorporating the results of the second public consultation and the second round of early adopters, was submitted to the Destinations WG in September 2013. After incorporating the recommendations of the WG, the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D) was approved by the GSTC Board on 31 October 2013.

## 2nd Revision of the GSTC Destination Criteria

The GSTC Destination Criteria went through its first revision in 2018. Five years after the launch of the GSTC-D in 2012/2013, the importance of destination management and adherence to sustainability principles had been further underlined. Various trends in tourism development and activities, together with the new or increasing internal and external pressures, pointed to the need to review the GSTC-D to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.

A paper with the key requirements of the revision process for the GSTC-D was prepared for a meeting of the International Standards Working Group (ISWG) on 21 September 2018. The paper was seen as the first step in reviewing standard-setting procedures prior to consultation on the revision of the GSTC-D. Following the paper, the GSTC-D Terms of Reference was prepared in November 2018, including the context and the methodology of the revision of the GSTC-D. The TOR was discussed and approved by the ISWG and available on the GSTC website.

Two rounds of consultation were carried out as part of the revision of the GSTC-D Criteria: An initial consultation inviting stakeholders to have their say in the revision and development, leading to production of a first set of draft revised criteria. A second round of consultation inviting comments on the proposed draft criteria adopted by the ISWG following their meeting on 16th May 2019.

Based on the intended resolution of the comments received from the second round of consultation, a final draft of the GSTC-D was proposed and submitted to the Destination Working Group and ISWG



in October 2019. A final revision was carried out incorporating recommendations of the International Destination WG and ISWG, the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria for Destinations (GSTC-D) v2.0 was approved by the GSTC Board on 6th December 2019.

## 3. Scope and References

### 3.1 Scope

The Standard-Setting Manual specifies general requirements for transparent and accountable preparation, adoption and revision of GSTC Criteria. The Standard-Setting Manual applies in its entirety to all sustainable tourism Criteria that are already developed and will be developed by the GSTC.

### 3.2 References

**ISEAL Standard-Setting Code: 2014 (Version 6.0).** Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards.

**ISEAL Assurance Code: 2018 (Version 2.0).** Code of Good Practice for Assuring Compliance with Social and Environmental Standards.

**ISEAL Impacts Code: 2014 (Version 2.0).** Code of Good Practice for Assessing the Impacts of Social and Environmental Standards Systems.

**ISEAL Claims Good Practice Guide: 2015 (Version 1.0).** Good Practice Guide for Sustainability Claims. Sustainability Standards Systems' Guide to Developing and Managing Environmental, Social and/or Economic Claims.

**ISEAL Credibility Principles: 2021 (Version 2.0).**

### 3.3 Credibility Principles

The ISEAL Credibility Principles (2021: Version 2.0) provide the foundation for the normative sections of the GSTC Standard-Setting Manual. GSTC develops the Global Criteria based on the following principles.

Table 1. Credibility Principles of the GSTC Standard-setting

Terminology	Definition
Collaboration	<p>Governments, businesses, and civil society organizations, including other sustainability systems, that are working towards shared sustainability objectives.</p> <p>It actively seeks alignment, establishes partnerships and shares learning to improve efficiency and direct or systemic impacts.</p>
Continual improvement	<p>Objectives, strategies and performance of the tools and system are regularly reviewed by which the impacts and outcomes are evaluated. Lessons learned from the continual improvement process are for improvement purposes that responds to new evidence, stakeholder input and external changes, adapting its strategies to improve its impacts and remain fit for purpose.</p>
Measurable progress	<p>Quantitative or qualitative tools that are relevant to achieving sustainability objectives, whereby progress towards objectives are measured over time.</p> <p>The sustainability system of GSTC collects and analyzes the data it needs to measure and understand. Measuring the progress ensures that the user of the data is directed toward the sustainability objectives.</p>
Relevance	<p>Criteria or standards that are fit for purpose, which address the most significant sustainability impacts of a product, process, or service;</p> <p>only include requirements that directly contribute to their objectives; reflect best scientific understanding and relevant international norms; and are adapted where necessary to local conditions.</p>
Reliability	<p>Information is consistent and tools are designed in a way so that they can be implemented and assessed with consistency. Reliability ensures assessments of users' sustainability performance are competent and accurate and that these assessments support any claims it allows users to make.</p>
Rigour	<p>All components of a standard system are structured to deliver quality outcomes. Standards are set at a performance level that results in measurable progress towards the scheme's sustainability objectives, while assessment of compliance provides an accurate picture of whether an entity meets the standard's requirements.</p>
Stakeholder engagement	<p>The sustainability system of GSTC empowers stakeholders to participate in decisions and hold the system to account. Balanced and diverse group of stakeholders are involved in decisions that will affect the system (or the building of the Criteria of GSTC). Stakeholder engagement is essential and provides clear and transparent feedback that guarantees adaptation to the whole system. It shall be a fair, impartial and accessible mechanism for resolving complaints and conflicts.</p>
Sustainability impacts	<p>Results that deliver what achievements have been met to what has been measured. The sustainability impact communicates the strategies for achieving objectives involving social, environmental, economic and cultural aspects of current scientific evidence and international norms when relevant.</p> <p>It is adapted to local or sector-specific conditions where this helps improve impacts.</p>

Transparency	Important information is publicly available and easily accessible, while protecting confidential and private information. Stakeholders can further understand and evaluate the system's processes, decision-making, results and impacts. Through openness and honesty stakeholders have the necessary information and resources they need to actively participate in decisions or raise concerns.
Value creation	A credible sustainability system strives to create value that fairly rewards the effort and resources that it takes for users to participate in the system. It has a viable business model and it operates efficiently, minimizing costs for users and reaching more users by reducing other barriers to access. It supports users to implement its tools and it empowers users by demonstrating a clear business case for participating in its system.

## 4. Sustainability in the GSTC Criteria

### 4.1 Social, Economic, Cultural and Environmental Sustainability of each Criteria

The GSTC Criteria was conceived as the beginning of a process to make sustainability the standard practice in all forms of tourism. Some of the expected uses of the GSTC Industry Criteria include the following:

- Serve as the basis for certification for sustainability.
- Serve as basic guidelines for businesses of all sizes to become more sustainable, and help businesses choose sustainable tourism programs that fulfill these global criteria.
- Provide greater market access in the growing market for sustainable products, serving as guidance both for travelers and for travel agencies in choosing suppliers and sustainable tourism programmes.
- Help consumers identify sound sustainable tourism programs and businesses.
- Serve as a common denominator for information media to recognize sustainable tourism providers.
- Help certification and other voluntary programs ensure that their standards meet a broadly-accepted baseline.
- Offer governmental, non-governmental, and private sector programs a starting point for developing sustainable tourism requirements.
- Serve as basic guidelines for education and training bodies, such as hotel schools and universities.
- Demonstrate leadership that inspires others to act.

Some of the expected uses of the GSTC Destination Criteria include the following:

- Serve as basic guidelines for destinations that wish to become more sustainable.
- Help consumers identify sound sustainable tourism destinations.
- Serve as a common denominator for information media to recognize destinations and inform the public regarding their sustainability.
- Help certification and other voluntary destination level programs ensure that their standards meet a broadly-accepted baseline.
- Offer governmental, non-governmental, and private sector programs a starting point for developing sustainable tourism requirements.
- Serve as basic guidelines for education and training bodies, such as hotel schools and universities.

The criteria indicate what should be done, not how to do it or whether the goal has been achieved. This role is fulfilled by performance indicators, associated educational materials, and access to tools for implementation from public, NGO, and private sector providers all of which are an indispensable complement to the Destination Criteria.

Tourism destinations each have their own culture, environment, customs, and laws, the Criteria are designed to be adapted to local conditions and supplemented by additional criteria for the specific location and activity, and to be confirmed that there are specific performance-based criteria, as well as a sustainability management system to ensure that the performance benchmarks continue to be met over time.

The specific objectives are to:

**GSTC Industry Criteria**– oriented towards managing the actions that are under the control of a single enterprise.

- A. Demonstrate effective sustainable management.
- B. Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts.
- C. Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts.
- D. Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts.
  - D1 Conserving resources
  - D2 Reducing pollution
  - D3 Conserving biodiversity, ecosystems, and landscapes

**GSTC Destination Criteria** – oriented towards managing the cumulative impacts in the destination as a whole

- A. Sustainable management.
  - A(a) Management structure and framework
  - A(b) Stakeholder engagement
  - A(c) Managing pressure and change
  
- B. Socio-economic sustainability.
  - B(a) Delivering local economic benefits
  - B(b) Social wellbeing and impacts
  
- C. Cultural sustainability.
  - C(a) Protecting cultural heritage
  - C(b) Visiting cultural sites
  
- D. Environmental sustainability.
  - D(a) Conservation of natural heritage
  - D(b) Resource management
  - D(c) Management of waste and emissions

## **4.2 Sustainability issues addressed in each Criteria**

The criteria address environmental, social, cultural, economic, quality, human rights, health, safety, risk and crisis management issues in both the sustainability management system and in the performance-based criteria.

Legal compliance is required with all applicable local to international legislation and regulations (including, among others, health, safety, human rights, labor, and environmental aspects).

All issues in Criteria are essential. Some examples are addressed below but not limited.

Some example issues addressed are:

- Training of all personnel.
- Measuring and addressing customer satisfaction.
- Sustainable building and infrastructure
- Land and water rights, and property acquisition are legal, comply with local communal and indigenous rights, including their free, prior, and informed consent, and do not require involuntary resettlement.

- - Social and cultural interpretation and codes of conduct, particularly with respect to indigenous communities.
  - Labor rights of employees and equal opportunities for employment, training, and advancement of disadvantaged groups.
  - Access for all, including those with disabilities.
  - Opportunities for local small entrepreneurs to participate in the supply chain.
  - Protection of cultural heritage, including living cultures and their knowledge, customs, and traditional rights; as well as historical, sacred, and archaeological sites.
  - Protection of traditional livelihoods and access to sites of importance.
  - In environmental aspects, ensuring sustainable consumption, minimizing and properly treating solid and liquid wastes, reducing greenhouse gas and other emissions, and protecting biodiversity.

## **PART II - CRITERIA DEVELOPMENT**

### **5. Criteria Structure**

The GSTC Criteria are structured with a preface that explains the objectives of the standard, possible uses, and how to determine which criteria may not be applicable under given conditions. Adaptation of the criteria to local conditions and industry sectors is encouraged.

The criteria themselves express principles, under four general categories: sustainability management, socio-economic impacts, cultural impacts, and environmental impacts. Each criterion is divided into verifiable statements that form the benchmarking criteria for evaluating outside standards.

Suggested performance indicators are also published as guidance for each criterion, although these do not undergo a formal stakeholder evaluation process and are not considered part of the Criteria per se. The performance indicator sets are designed to be constantly updated as new information and innovations arise.

#### **5.1 Attributes of the Criteria**

The GSTC Criteria are developed with rigor understanding of the sustainability objectives the organization is pursuing and of the sustainability requirements of destinations and industries. These criteria ensure that the assessment is of high quality and ensures significant performance. The results from the assessments are reliable in that they are competent and accurate, which provide support to any claims the user makes.

#### **5.2 Stakeholder Identification**

Different sets of Criteria need to identify stakeholders and develop strategies for reaching out to them. The stakeholders among different group types are specified based on the standard's scope and their inputs and feedback will be sought during the development process.

Key stakeholders are those who are directly impacted by the Criteria through the implementation and adoption of the Criteria for any of the following activities: training materials, operational guidance, internal measurement, external evaluation, etc.

Other stakeholders who are indirectly impacted by the Criteria are also identified and reached out to be engaged in the Criteria development process.

Basically, these are examples of stakeholder for the GSTC Criteria:

Businesses in the tourism sector, civil societies including environmental NGOs, education and training institutes, consulting companies, individual practitioners and experts, relevant UN agencies, international cooperation agencies, national/local authorities (e.g., Ministry of tourism/environment/economic/culture/forest, etc), communities including indigenous groups, certification bodies, individual citizens, etc.

## **6. Criteria Development Process**

### **6.1 Criteria Development Process**

A new set of Criteria will be developed after assessment by the GSTC Board, membership, and working groups of the need for developing a new standard for a sector of the tourist industry.

Among the justifications to date have been:

- Multiplicity of standards in the marketplace.
- Lack of consensual guidelines for sustainability in an industry sector.
- Existing standards that consider only a small subset of sustainability criteria (e.g. environmental only).
- Demand by principal actors for a common set of criteria, including expanding geographic, cultural and economic diversity of the target.
- Evaluation of the existing standards and guidelines for the sector and related activities.

The development of a new Global Criteria is initiated by a full review by the GSTC Secretariat responding to the demands of stakeholders, followed by a resolution by the GSTC Board of Directors. The new Criteria will be developed in the way of either as a sub-sector of the existing Criteria for Industry or Destination or as a totally new set of Criteria. It will be decided during the development process based on preliminary study and consultation results.



The process of developing a GSTC Criteria is outlined in the following figure (Figure 1).

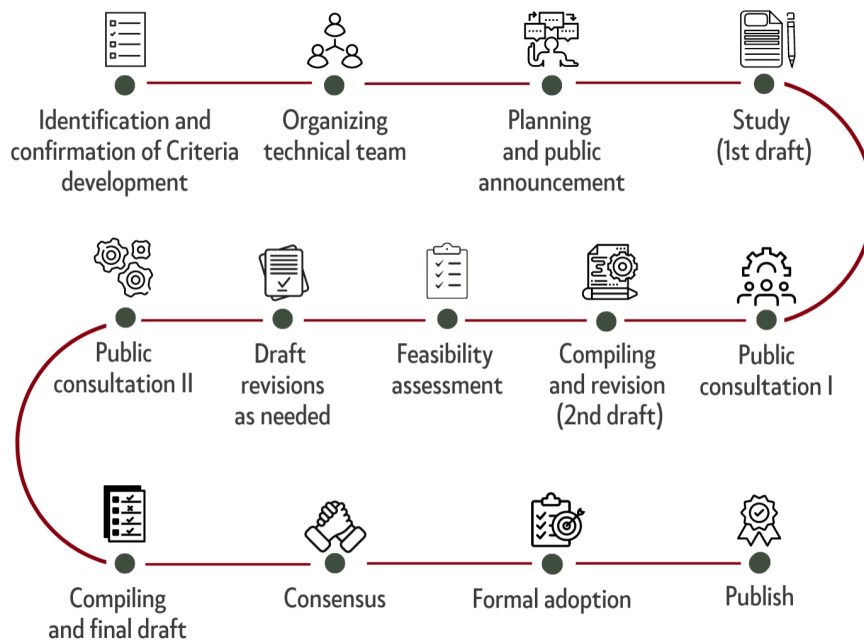


Figure 1. Criteria development steps and parties in charge

Table 2. Tasks for each Criteria development step

Step	Task	Party in charge
<p>1. IDENTIFICATION and CONFIRMATION OF CRITERIA DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>Identifying the need of expansion to new Global Criteria</p> <p>Confirming the initiative of a new Global Criteria with scope and timeline</p>	<p>GSTC Assurance Team's assessment on urgency, available budget and manpower, and other related administrative matters of the new set of criteria.</p> <p>GSTC Assurance Team's review of similar international standards and communication with the standard owners to share the plan for a new Criteria development and encourage their participation.</p>	<p>GSTC Assurance Team</p> <p>GSTC Board of Directors</p>
<p>2. ORGANIZING TECHNICAL TEAM</p> <p>Organizing a technical team working on the Criteria development</p>	<p>Identify required human resources and organize a team tentatively working on the criteria development.</p> <p>It could consist of GSTC internal staff and external organizations/expert(s).</p>	<p>GSTC Assurance Team</p>

<p>3. PLANNING AND PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT</p> <p>Developing Term of Reference following ISEAL Standard Setting Code (Clause 5.1)</p>	<p>The terms of reference (TOR) shall include the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed scope of the standard and the intended geographic application;</li> <li>• A justification of the need for the standard, including: an assessment of the most important sustainability issues falling within the scope of the standard; an explanation of whether the proposed standard will meet an expressed need; and documentation of other standards operating or in development that meet all or part of the expressed need;</li> <li>• Clear social, environmental and economic outcomes that the standard seeks to achieve and how those are linked to the GSTC's intended change); and</li> <li>• An assessment of risks in implementing the standard and how to mitigate these, including: identification of factors that could have a negative impact on the ability of the standard to achieve its outcomes; unintended consequences that could arise from its implementation; and possible corrective actions that could be taken to address these potential risks.</li> </ul> <p>Public announcement- sharing information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summary of the TOR for the Criteria Development, including the proposed scope, objectives and justification of the need for the standard;</li> <li>• Steps in the standard-setting process, including timelines and clearly identified opportunities for contributing; and</li> <li>• Decision-making procedures, including how decisions are made and who makes them.</li> </ul>	<p>Technical Team International Standards Committee (ISC) GSTC Secretariat</p>
<p>4. STUDY (1ST DRAFT)</p> <p>Preliminary study and preparation of a draft outline.</p>	<p>Compilation of the criteria for all known standards and guidelines for the sector and related activities to determine common elements.</p> <p>Sharing preliminary results (a draft set of criteria) with the GSTC internal expert groups and outside experts in the sector.</p>	<p>Technical Team</p>

<p>5. PUBLIC CONSULTATION I Public consultation on the 1st draft. (At least 60 days)</p>	<p>Stakeholder Identification. Develop or update lists of sectors that have an interest in the standard and key stakeholder groups within those sectors, based on the Criteria's scope and its social, environmental and economic outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key stakeholder groups include directly affected stakeholders (those who will be impacted by implementation of the standard) and may include indirectly affected stakeholders who have an interest in the application of the standard. Scope includes the sector and geographies to which the standard applies</li> </ul> <p>Online and Offline consultation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GSTC website (inviting all stakeholders' inputs);</li> <li>• Reaching out under-engaged and under-represented groups/</li> <li>• Focused group (i.e., practitioners in the relevant sectors); and</li> <li>• GSTC Conferences</li> </ul>	<p>Technical Team</p>
<p>6. COMPILING and REVISION OF DRAFT (2ND DRAFT) Compiling all comments. Refining the draft for feasibility assessment.</p>	<p>Compiling all comments from the consultation. Refining the draft for feasibility assessment.</p>	<p>Technical Team</p>
<p>7. FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT Applying the 2nd draft to the field and refining it. 3rd draft development for the public consultation.</p>	<p>The systematic analysis and thoughtful evaluation of a potential Criteria's benefits to the field as well as anticipated impediments to their adoption and implementation by the relevant sector(s).</p> <p>To manage these evaluations, the issues comprising feasibility have been sorted into factors.</p> <p>The essential issues to consider for the Criteria's successful adoption including technical and operational factors (feasibility and auditability of requirements in the draft Criteria).</p>	<p>Technical Team</p>

<p>8. PUBLIC CONSULTATION II Public consultation on the 3RD draft. (at least 30 days)</p>	<p>Online and offline consultation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GSTC website (inviting all stakeholders' inputs);</li> <li>• Reaching out disadvantaged groups;</li> <li>• Focused group (i.e., practitioners in the relevant sectors); and</li> <li>• GSTC Conferences</li> <li>• Information to be shared.</li> <li>• Public sharing of SYNOPSIS of the comments from the 1st public consultation and the GSTC responses and 2nd draft; and</li> <li>• Email to the first public consultation participants</li> </ul>	<p>Technical Team</p>
<p>9. COMPILING and Final DRAFT Compiling all comments from the public consultation. Refining the draft as a final draft.</p>	<p>Public sharing of SYNOPSIS of the comments from the 2nd public consultation and the GSTC responses.  Email to the public consultation participants.</p>	<p>Technical Team</p>
<p>10. CONSENSUS Consensus on the final draft.</p>	<p>Technical Team and ISC hold a meeting and agree on the final draft.</p>	<p>Technical Team ISC</p>
<p>11. FORMAL ADOPTION GSTC Board of Directors' formal adoption of the final draft.</p>	<p>Making sure that stakeholders' views are reflected in decision-making.</p>	<p>GSTC Board of Directors</p>
<p>12. PUBLISH</p>	<p>New Criteria are published promptly and made available for free in electronic format. Making hard copies of public summaries, standards and other related materials available upon request. Standards and supporting documents shall each include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact information on the GSTC;</li> <li>• The formal status of the document;</li> <li>• The official language(s) and</li> <li>• A note that, in the case of inconsistency between versions, reference shall default to the official language version.</li> </ul>	<p>GSTC Secretariat</p>

## 6.2 Criteria Review and Revision Process

### 6.2.1 Regular review and revision

GSTC invites comments and suggestions for the existing sets of Criteria on a continuous basis. At present, direct communication to the Secretariat focal point by e-mail is invited in the preface to the suggested indicators for each set of criteria and the information of channel for feedback is provided on the website at <https://www.gstcouncil.org/gstc-criteria/criteria-feedback-revision/>.

A Criteria's review considers information gathered from stakeholder input including the above approach, auditing results and organizational monitoring and evaluation, as well as new knowledge or practices that might require the Criteria to be updated.

If the review concludes that changes to the Criteria are required, then a Criteria revision is carried out according to the process outlined in the following Table 3.

Among the justifications to date have been:

Table 3. Criteria revision steps and parties in charge

Step	Party in charge
1. IDENTIFICATION and CONFIRMING Identifying the need of revision of the Criteria	GSTC Assurance Team GSTC Board of Directors
2. ORGANIZING TECHNICAL TEAM Organizing a technical team working on the Criteria revision.	GSTC Assurance Team
3. PLANNING AND PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT Developing Term of Reference following ISEAL Standard Setting Code (Clause 5.8).	Technical Team International Standards Committee (ISC) GSTC Secretariat
4. PUBLIC CONSULTATION I Public consultation on the revision of the Criteria. (At least 60 days)	Technical Team
5. COMPILING and REVISION OF DRAFT Compiling all comments from the public consultation. Developing a draft.	Technical Team

6. FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT (Optional) Applying the draft to the field and refining it. 2nd draft development for the public consultation.	Technical Team
7. PUBLIC CONSULTATION II Public consultation on the draft (either 1st draft or 2nd draft after the feasibility assessment). (at least 30 days)	Technical Team
8. COMPILING II and Final DRAFT Compiling all comments from the public consultation. Refining the draft as a final draft.	Technical Team
9. CONSENSUS Consensus on the final draft	Technical Team ISC
10. FORMAL ADOPTION GSTC Board of Directors' formal adoption of the final draft	GSTC Board of Directors
11. PUBLISH	GSTC Secretariat

### 6.2.2 Administrative and Non-substantive Changes

Administrative and non-substantive changes such as typographical errors, formatting, or organization of the document and minor inconsistencies may be made at any time at the discretion of the GSTC Assurance Team following approval by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

The Assurance Team may refer the proposed changes to the International Standards Committee (ISC) if the change is considered as non-substantive but, in all cases, the ISC will be notified.

The updated Criteria shall clearly identify the changes made, version number and date. The release of the revised Criteria shall be communicated to users, specifically where appropriate certification bodies, certificate holders, and other known stakeholders.

### 6.2.3 Urgent Substantive Revision

The Assurance Team can make a recommendation to the Board for an urgent revision, based on comments received in the interim period before a scheduled revision, or additional information from the Secretariat. Conditions under which an urgent revision can be triggered may include, but are not limited to:

- - Formal complaints raised by stakeholders that are deemed to have merit as per the GSTC complaints procedure;
  - Problems of implementation which affect multiple stakeholders; or
  - Perceived threats to the GSTC's credibility

The Assurance Team may revise the Criteria excluding the requirement for public consultation and/or feasibility assessment when the condition requires urgent revision of the Criteria.

The conditions for urgent substantive revision and the change will be reviewed and approved by the GSTC Board of Directors.

Meanwhile, the Assurance Team shall prepare and present the draft document to the International Standards Committee for their review and comment.

The Board will consider approving the change taking into consideration at least the following:

- The need for change;
- Ensuring the credibility of the documentation;
- Ensuring transparency, participation and fairness in the process; and
- Compliance with international best practice for standards development.

The updated documents shall clearly identify the changes made, version number and date. The release of the revised Criteria shall be communicated to users, specifically where appropriate certification bodies, certificate holders, and other known stakeholders.

## **7. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

### **7.1 Stakeholder Mapping**

Stakeholder mapping will be developed by identifying interested stakeholders, based on knowledge of those sectors that are influenced or potentially influenced by tourism activities in their communities and regions. Stakeholders should include, but not limited to public and private sectors, educational institutes, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, assurance related entities and disadvantaged groups. (see Table 4)

A particular effort will be made to use organizations that work with indigenous and community-based tourism to contact their bases, especially those without normal access to the Internet or those with language barriers, in order to receive their input.

The consultation process will have collaborations from United Nations programs, other international organizations and local organizations to locate interested stakeholders in all regions of the world.

Consultations will be conducted on every continent and in the principal languages used in the world including English, Spanish, French, Mandarin, German, Arabic, Russian, etc. with voluntary contributions of translation.

## **7.2 Stakeholder Participation, Comments and Responses**

Stakeholder mapping will be developed by identifying interested stakeholders, based on knowledge of those sectors that are influenced or potentially influenced by tourism activities in their communities and regions. Stakeholders should include, but not limited to public and private sectors, educational institutes, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, assurance related entities and disadvantaged groups. (see Table 4)

The development of a new Global Criteria is initiated by a full review by the GSTC Secretariat responding to the demands of stakeholders, followed by a resolution by the GSTC Board of Directors. The new Criteria will be developed in the way of either as a sub-sector of the existing Criteria for Industry or Destination or as a totally new set of Criteria. It will be decided during the development process based on preliminary study and consultation results.

### **7.2.1 General Strategy for Engaging Stakeholders**

Stakeholders will be informed of the development of the Criteria including the justification, objectives, and timelines through press releases, local stakeholders, workshops, and direct contact with key organizations with large international networks.

All interested parties will be invited to participate in online surveys of each criterion or to submit comments by email, through their local organizations, or in print.

Workshops will be held during the GSTC Regional and Global Conference or other GSTC events, All means of reaching out to the disadvantaged groups will be sought for in developed and developing countries; in urban, rural, and natural areas; ecotourism and mass tourism destinations; and in small island countries.

In each case, in-person meetings were held with representatives of all stakeholder groups in the relevant industries and destinations.



Every comment will be addressed, and resolved as accepted, rejected (with justification), or partially accepted. The origin of each comment will be maintained throughout the processes, in order to communicate the results to the participants.

See also Table 4 for stakeholder engagement strategies.

### 7.2.2 Strategy for Under-engaged and Under-represented Groups

The Disadvantaged Groups are defined as under-engaged and under-represented groups due to barriers such as linguistic, geographic, technical, and other difficulties/barriers. Disadvantaged groups will be reached out to get their input in the Criteria development process.

Table 4. Stakeholder mapping and strategy for engaging

Type	Examples	Strategy for engaging
Public sector	Management body for destination and industry and relevant agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online public consultation</li> <li>• GSTC Activities – Conference, workshop, meetings, working group discussion, etc.</li> <li>• Focus group interviews (especially for key stakeholders)</li> <li>• Other online/offline channels</li> </ul>
Tourism industry	Hotels, tour operators, attractions, MICE, transport providers, guides, online travel agencies, etc.	
Community	Destination communities including indigenous groups	
Education and training institutes	Universities, professionals, vocational schools, tourism training centers, etc.	
Consulting companies	Private consulting companies supporting tourism businesses' improvement in their sustainability	
UN agencies	UNWTO, UNEP, UNESCO, UNDP, FAO, etc.	
NGOs	WWF, IUCN, Rainforest Alliance, and other international/local civil societies	
Certification bodies	GSTC-Accredited Certification Bodies, Tourism Certification Bodies not accredited by GSTC	

GSTC-Recognized Standard owners (Non-certification bodies)	See current GSTC-Recognized Standard owners on GSTC website	
Practitioners & experts	Individually working in the field directly/indirectly with tourism businesses	
Citizens	Potential tourists and community members	
Disadvantaged groups	Under-engaged and under-represented groups due to some barriers	Identify disadvantaged groups per Criteria and reaching out them by in person, email, online call, etc. to get their input and feedback

## PART III - CRITERIA MANAGEMENT

### 8. Recognition of Other Standards

The GSTC Criteria sets are intended to be used to harmonize and evaluate standards developed by other standardization bodies, enterprises, or certification schemes. They may be considered "meta-standards" with which other standards should be unilaterally aligned (i.e. the outside standard should contain more, but not fewer, criteria than the GSTC Criteria). The criteria set is explicitly designed to be the minimum, not the maximum, that a standard for that industry sector should comply with to approach sustainability. A standard that is determined by the GSTC to be unilaterally aligned with the GSTC Criteria is "recognized" as equivalent and can be used for certification or verification processes that can potentially be accredited by an outside body and approved by GSTC.

All GSTC Criteria sets require compliance with all applicable legislation and international agreements. All standards for international use must be aligned with all criteria. Compliance is determined by evaluating the equivalence of each criterion of a standard with the corresponding GSTC benchmarking criterion. More than one criterion may be matched to a single GSTC criterion. Equivalence is determined by the expected outcome under local conditions, not equivalent wording.

In some cases, where a national or subnational standard owner demonstrates that a criterion is met within the scope of the standard by local legislation that is rigorously enforced, a standard can be recognized as aligned with the GSTC criteria in the absence of an equivalent criterion in a particular case.

In some cases, a standard owner may justify that a particular criterion is not applicable within the scope of that standard. For example, a standard that is used only for urban hotels in France might be exempt from requiring a code of conduct for interactions with indigenous communities.

The benchmarking matrix is evaluated by an expert chosen by the GSTC Secretariat. An initial evaluation is submitted to the standard owner, who is given the opportunity to respond to possible non-conformities by offering justifications, evaluation procedures that ensure compliance, or modifications to the standard.

Once the standard owner has responded, the equivalence matrix, the Secretariat's findings, and the supporting documentation are submitted to the GSTC Assurance Panel, which may accept or reject the Secretariat's recommendation for full recognition, conditional recognition (for up to six months and corrective actions), or rejection. This result is then communicated to the standard owner via email whether their standard has been recognized, recognized with conditions for future improvement, or rejected with an explanation of the areas that must be improved.

## **9. Member Engagement**

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council is a membership organization, and membership is required prior to the application for recognition, or accreditation of a sustainable tourism standard or certification process. Working group members must be GSTC members, but this is not a requirement for the independent Assurance Panel.

Mandatory membership requirements to the standard owner organizations or Certification body provide continuous access to the up-to-date information of GSTC's activities and policy changes, which are not limited to criteria issues but also their business in the market.

GSTC Criteria is for all and free to download. However, GSTC members will be potentially entitled to have opportunities to be part of the Criteria development process. Involving stakeholders who understand GSTC's activities through membership will be beneficial for the new Criteria development.

## **10. Complaints and Appeals**

The Secretariat follows the GSTC Grievance Mechanism to deal with complaints and appeals issued by stakeholders.

All records generated from complaints will be kept by the GSTC for a maximum of 5 years.

## **11. Criteria Review and Revision**

### **11.1 Ongoing Stakeholder Outreach and Consultation**

All the GSTC Criteria are available free of charge on the website at [www.gstcouncil.org/gstc-criteria/](http://www.gstcouncil.org/gstc-criteria/). They are further distributed by our member organizations, academic institutions, and industry organizations. GSTC staff and members conduct workshops and training in different parts of the world and make the criteria available in both digital and printed formats.

Comments and suggestions are invited on a continuous basis. At present, direct communication to the Secretariat focal point by e-mail is invited in the preface to the suggested indicators for each set of Criteria and the information of channel for feedback is provided on the website at <https://www.gstcouncil.org/gstc-criteria/criteria-feedback-revision/>.

## 11.2 Regular Review and Revision

All the GSTC Criteria are available free of charge on the organization's website at [www.gstcouncil.org/gstc-criteria/](http://www.gstcouncil.org/gstc-criteria/). Comments and suggestions are invited on a continuous basis. At present, direct communication to the Secretariat focal point by e-mail is invited in the preface to the suggested Criteria. These comments will be used for further revisions of the Criteria, programmed for every five years subsequently.

## 12. Transition Period

Following a Criteria Revision, the updated GSTC Criteria shall be published promptly, and made freely available in electronic form. The date of revision or reaffirmation of the Criteria and the transition period by which the revised standard will come into effect will be stipulated in the updated version of the Criteria.

Changes in the Criteria and transition period shall be communicated to all known sustainable tourism standard owners and certification bodies by electronic communication and posting on the GSTC website.

The certification bodies and certificate holders will be given adequate time and notice to comply with new requirements following Criteria Revision based on the relevant GSTC Accreditation Manual.

## 13. Records

The following records related to each standards development or revision process will be kept on file by the GSTC for a minimum of five years:

- Policies and procedures guiding the standard- setting activity;
- Lists of stakeholders contacted;
- Stakeholders involved at each stage of the process;
- Comments received and a synopsis of how those comments were taken into account;
- All draft and final versions of the standard

These records will be available to stakeholders upon request in order to refer to previous consultations to understand the basis for the standard's requirements.

# GLOSSARY

Terms listed in the glossary are directly adopted from ISO/IEC Guide 2:2004; OECD Glossary; ISEAL Impacts Code; ISEAL Standard-Setting Code of Good Practice Version 6.0; and adapted to the context of GSTC.

## **Certification**

Voluntary, third-party assessment, through an audit, of a tourism enterprise for conformity to a standard.

## **Consensus**

General agreement, characterized by the absence of sustained opposition to substantial issues by any important stakeholder group.

\* Consensus should be the result of a process seeking to take into account the views of interested stakeholders, particularly those directly affected, and to reconcile any conflicting arguments. It need not imply unanimity. (Adapted from ISO/IEC Guide 2: 2004)

## **Disadvantaged group**

Those who experience discrimination or barriers to equal opportunity. In the GSTC Criteria Development process, the Disadvantaged group is defined as those who are under-engaged and under-represented groups due to barriers such as linguistic, geographic, technical, and other difficulties/barriers in participating in the development of a set of GSTC Criteria and/or in applying the Criteria in their activities.

## **Feasibility**

Feasibility is the examination of the potential success within the cost, timeframe and scope. It also examines potential risks that may arise to determine whether they are worth taking.

## **Feasibility assessment**

A feasibility assessment is a study to test the requirements on the destination or object similar to that of the intended target. These tests can include field trials or audits, impact or risk assessments and product testing.

## **GSTC Accredited**

GSTC Accredited means that a Certification Body (CB) awards certification according to processes that comply with international standards and good practices. Businesses certified by an Accredited CB can — if they choose — use the GSTC logo along with the CB's mark, in accordance with GSTC licensing requirements. GSTC Accredited status is the most reliable and cost-effective way to ensure confidence and credibility of sustainable tourism certification, and worldwide acceptance. More information is available [here](#).

## **GSTC Recognition**

GSTC-Recognized means that a sustainable tourism standard or system has been deemed equivalent to the GSTC Criteria for sustainable tourism and is administered by a standard/system owner that meets GSTC requirements. More information is available [here](#).

## **ISEAL**

International non-profit organization that codifies best practice for the design and implementation of social and environmental standards initiatives. More information is available [here](#).

## **Outcome**

The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term results from the implementation of a standards system's strategies. (Adapted from OECD Glossary)

## **Output**

The product or service which results from the development or process. It also includes changes resulting from the process that contribute to the achievement of outcomes. Outputs include changes in knowledge, skills, or abilities produced by the activities (adapted from OECD DAC Glossary)

## **Publicly available**

Obtainable by any person, without unreasonable barriers of access.

\* Publicly available information can be viewed on an organization's website and can be found through a basic quick search. These information shall be referenced and can be used by the user suited to their needs. 'Available on request' is not the same as publicly available. (adapted from the ISEAL Impacts Code)

## **Public consultation**

Review process by key stakeholders on the determined common elements that were found during the compilation of the criteria for all known standards and guidelines.

## **Risk**

Risk is the uncertainty of an outcome, usually negative outcomes of an action, event or performance. These factors can be mitigated through an assessment of risk, which is the identification of factors that could have a negative impact on the outcome.

## **Stakeholder**

Interested individuals (and/or organizations) that are directly affected by the implementation of the Criteria.

## **Standard**

Document that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for products or related processes and production methods, with which compliance is not mandatory.

### **Standard Setting Organization**

The organization responsible for managing the development or revision of a standard.

### **Standard Systems**

The collective of organizations responsible for the activities involved in the implementation of a standard, including standard-setting, capacity building, assurance, labeling, and monitoring and evaluation. (ISEAL Credibility Principles)

### **Sustainable Tourism**

Sustainable Tourism refers to sustainable practices in and by the tourism industry. It is an aspiration to acknowledge all impacts of tourism, both positive and negative. It aims to minimize the negative impacts and maximize the positive ones. (GSTC definition)

\*Sustainable Management refers to the management of sustainable tourism.

#END#