

## Mission

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The International Social Tourism Organisation (ISTO), initially created under the name International Bureau for Social Tourism (B.I.T.S.) in 1963, is an international non-profit making organization whose mission is to promote access to leisure, holidays and tourism for all i.e. young people, families, senior citizens and disabled people. In addition, it wants to stimulate the realization of this goal and the ensuing means that follow with the stakeholders who share this responsibility, i.e. the states, social organisations and operators. It also wishes to promote sustainable and solidarity tourism to the benefit of the local population and with respect for natural and cultural heritage.

## Actions

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The ISTO has two main goals. The first is to raise awareness among governments, international institutions and local and regional authorities competent for social policies in tourism and best practices which facilitate holidays for all. The second is to become a true platform for exchanges and services for the members by stimulating the exchange of experiences, know-how and project development.

The ISTO bases its organization on the principles defined by [the Montreal Declaration](#), “Towards a Humanist and Social Vision on Tourism”, adopted in September 1996 and the Addendum of Aubagne, adopted in May 2006.

On an international level, the ISTO is a member of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the World Youth Student & Educational Travel Confederation (WYSE-TC) and collaborates with the Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Cooperative Alliance.

On a European level, the ISTO mainly occupies itself with maintaining relations with European institutions such as the European Commission to strive for the inclusion of “Tourism for All” in policies and programmes. The ISTO also maintains relations and partnerships with several organizations such as the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT), the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Network of European Regions for a Competitive and Sustainable Tourism (NECSTouR), the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT) and the European Alliance for Responsible Tourism and Hospitality (EARTH).

On the level of exchange and services, the ISTO mainly focuses on the distribution of information through its website [www.oits-isto.org](http://www.oits-isto.org) and publications (e-newsletters, *Social Tourism International* magazine), the realisation of the Social Tourism European Exchange Platform ([www.ecalypso.eu](http://www.ecalypso.eu)) financed by the European Commission, research and studies, and the participation in projects. The ISTO also organizes a global conference every two years as well as regional and themed meetings and workshops aimed at stimulating business opportunities between members and partners.

## Members

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The members of the ISTO are private and public organizations that are either profit-making or non-profit-making. These include tourist organizations, such as owners of holiday centres or villages, youth hostel networks, agencies and operators, trade unions, cooperatives, NGOs, educational institutions and official tourist organizations, all of which perform an activity that is useful to social tourism.

The ISTO currently has [150 members](#) in 35 countries in Europe, the Americas and Africa, including about a dozen states and over 30 local and regional authorities.

## Organisation

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The ISTO is governed by the General Meeting which assembles annually, the Board of Directors which is elected for four years, the Executive Committee which implements the decisions of the Board and the Head Office in Brussels.

In order to answer to the needs of its regional members, the ISTO has established regional sections. An office for the Americas ([ISTO Americas](#)) was established in Montreal in 1994 and is in charge of promotion, contacts, coordination and exchange for South, Central and North America.

The European branch ([ISTO Europe](#)) ensures promotion and development of social tourism in Europe and maintains contacts with the bodies of the European Union (the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions).

In the same vein, the ISTO established an Africa branch in 2004 ([ISTO Africa](#)), which is aimed at aiding the development of social tourism in Africa where useful to the benefit of the local population and the development of solidarity tourism in Africa.

Beyond the regional structure, workgroups consisting of members with shared interests have also been created.

This is the case of the Network of Local and Regional Authorities in Social Tourism which was created in 2006 with the purpose of stimulation of partnerships and exchange of best practice between the local and regional stakeholders active in these sectors.

Another example is the [Trade Union Taskforce](#), which was established in 2007 with the ETUC in order to strengthen the synergy between trade unions active in the sector.

Finally, an [Alliance for Training and Research in Social and Solidarity Tourism](#) was founded in 2010. It is composed of academic researchers and organizations that are interested in these issues. Its goal is to support the activities of the ISTO with analyses, studies and research.