



**STATISTICS DIRECTORATE**

**National Accounts and Economic Statistics - International Trade Statistics**

**TOWARDS MORE TIMELY AND HIGH QUALITY DATA  
NOTE BY THE SECRETARIAT**

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*This document has been prepared by Mr. Andreas Lindner and Mr. Gregory Legoff, OECD, for information and discussion, under point a. of item 3 of the draft agenda : Recent Developments at OECD.*

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## TOWARDS MORE TIMELY AND HIGH QUALITY DATA

### NOTE BY THE SECRETARIAT

#### Introduction

One of the main objectives of the OECD Statistics Strategy<sup>1</sup> is the continuous enhancement of data quality by improving timeliness of data availability, data consistency and the relevance of metadata.

In the field of trade statistics, this has been a permanent cause of attention and management action as – inter alia – evidenced by the agenda items devoted to this issue at this meeting and at previous meetings.

This document briefly reviews the main aspects of timeliness and quality, separately by annual and monthly trade. As can be seen, considerable progress has been made over time.

The OECD Secretariat would like to thank member countries for their continued support and co-operation. Thanks to the excellent co-operation, which OECD also extends to partner International Organisations, trade statistics are considered by the international statistical community as one of the quite successful statistical areas with solid evidence for smooth and good co-ordination and co-operation.

#### 1. Annual data

##### 1.1. Timeliness

Timeliness of annual merchandise trade statistics has been regularly improved in the past and particularly in 2005. The joint efforts of the OECD and the UNSD to obtain trade data as early as possible from Member countries “paid off” for the 2004 data collection. In August 2005, only 3 out of 30 countries did not provide their data for reference year 2004. This is the first time since OECD collects trade statistics that 90% of OECD countries supply validated detailed trade data so quickly (see annex table 1).

As is well known, the OECD and UNSD have a formal arrangement by which all OECD member countries data are sourced from the OECD and provided to UNSD which in turn makes the data available to the World Trade Organization. The fact that these International Organisations have such an explicit data collection and re-dissemination policy is believed to be a major incentive to countries to do their best, since they know that not only the data is truly needed by the international user community but also that with one dispatch to OECD, the UN community automatically receives the same data. In doing so, optimal dissemination of trade data is ensured.

Year after year, user statistics show that trade data is requested earlier and earlier. Clearly there is an increasing demand for up-to-date and detailed trade statistics and which can be increasingly met.

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<sup>1</sup> See for a complete summary the PowerPoint presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> ITS Expert meeting, April 2004. Agenda item 3(d) General developments and initiatives at OECD regarding statistical information systems - OECD [OECD PowerPoint](#)

Considering the capability of countries to deliver early each year, a target reception date of OECD for annual data collection could be envisaged for the month of July (see table in Annex 1).

## **1.2. Data and metadata quality**

Data reconciliation is still ongoing, particularly in the framework of the Inter-Agency Common Data Set exercise coordinated by the WTO (see agenda items 5 (d)). After the reprocessing of US trade data back to 1991, the OECD is currently revising its historical series for New Zealand to include re-exports into export series. Historical series back to 2000 will be reprocessed for the United Kingdom in order to treat confidential data properly.

The submission of trade data at the HS 2-digit level with a complete partner country breakdown is a major improvement of data quality when confidential data are included at higher levels of the classification. Many countries have provided these data in reply to the joint UNSD/OECD request sent in February 2004. Other countries like Switzerland do not include confidential data at aggregated levels of the classification and consequently did not provide such data.

An update of methodological information has been carried out in 2004. In fact, many OECD member countries have provided up to date methodological information in reply to the joint UNSD/OECD letter. Metadata are regularly updated and available on electronic and paper publications of ITCS.

## **2. Monthly data**

### **2.1. Timeliness**

Timeliness continues to be a crucial issue for monthly trade statistics. Besides rapid availability of monthly data throughout OECD for economic analysis (the Economics Department is -among others- a regular key user), the Quarterly Trade Press Release constitutes another challenge, because of the need to have seasonally adjusted volume data ready, at least for all major OECD countries. It is against this background that OECD sent out end 2004 a data availability inquiry which, after analysis allowed to speed up the release date of the Press Release and also allowed faster monthly updates for a number of countries.

Concerning the process, monthly trade data are either provided to the OECD directly by countries (data files attached to emails) or downloaded from databases accessible on Internet sites or copied from electronic and paper publications. As detailed in table 1, it appears that some countries are issuing or transmitting their data with some delay, i.e. more than two months after the period covered.

In the field of trade indices, more improvements are needed. Firstly, five countries are not providing any index data. Secondly, among countries supplying index data, four of them – Mexico, Australia, the Czech Republic, and Spain - currently do not supply volume indices.

In the framework of the OECD database migration to a new software environment, it is planned to develop a more standardized and automated data collection process in co-operation with NSOs in order to improve timeliness, accuracy and reliability.

These data are published monthly in the publication “Monthly Statistics of International Trade” available both in a paper and as electronic files on OLIS.

Figure 1: Supply of Monthly Statistics to OECD

Member country	Source	Trade data by partner country	Trade data by SITC Section	Trade indices
Australia	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
Austria	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes (delay)
Belgium	CB	Yes (delay)	Yes	Yes
Canada	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
Switzerland	Customs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Czech Republic	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
Germany	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
Denmark	NSO	Yes (delay)	Yes (delay)	Yes (delay)
Spain	Customs, NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
Finland	Customs	Yes	Yes	Yes
France	Customs, NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
United Kingdom	Customs, NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
Greece		No data	No data	No data
Hungary	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ireland	NSO	Yes (delay)	Yes (delay)	Yes (delay)
Iceland	NSO	Yes		No data
Italy	NSO	Yes (delay)	Yes (delay)	Yes (delay)
Japan	Min., NSO, Prof. Ass.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Korea	NSO, CB	Yes	Yes	Yes (delay)
Luxembourg	NSO	Yes	Yes	No data
Mexico	CB	Yes	No data	Yes
Netherlands	NSO	Yes	Yes	No data
Norway	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Zealand	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
Poland	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
Portugal	NSO	Yes	Yes	No data
Slovak Republic	NSO	Yes (delay)	Yes (delay)	Yes (delay)
Sweden	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
Turkey	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
United States	Census	Yes (delay)	Yes (delay)	Yes

Note:

Source: **NSO** = National Statistical Office, **CB** = Central Bank, **Min.** = Ministry, **Prof. Ass.** = Professional Association.

Data: **Yes** = satisfactory, **Yes (delay)** = satisfactory on substance but delay in transmission, **No** = not satisfactory

## 2.2. Data and metadata quality

In addition to data input broken down by SITC sections and by partner countries, OECD also requests the total trade values in a separate file. However, at present, the total figure is most often calculated from detailed data instead of being provided as an aggregate. The submission of total trade values (provisional or final figures) would allow:

- Cross checks for a better tracking of data discrepancies;
- Earlier data availability for the Press Release (monthly Press Release?).

For practical reasons, total values would be managed separately from the MSIT database

The Secretariat emphasises the necessity of being continually informed about any methodological changes in order to provide proper information to users. The OECD has noticed that the methodology applied to trade indices is not always clear and up-to-date. An additional effort by both data providers in this area and the Secretariat would significantly help the Secretariat to improve the quality of metadata.

### **3. Towards a quality review of trade data**

As part of OECD's programme of quality reports for all existing and new databases, the Balance of Payments Activity has been reviewed recently and the final report issued in August 2005. The report will be given for information under agenda item 13(b).

Now that the activity of yearly and monthly trade is approaching completion of the migration process away from Oracle/ Express, a review of trade data is envisaged to start this year.

As the BoP (and other) reviews, the trade data quality review will follow a standard structure and process (self-assessment questionnaire, user consultation, etc.). Strength and weaknesses will be identified against the following quality dimensions

- Relevance
- Accuracy
- Credibility
- Timeliness
- Accessibility
- Interpretability
- Coherence and
- Cost-efficiency

In addition, an analysis will be carried out to identify and spell out opportunities as well as possible threats.

Priorities for improvement will be identified in the conclusions and recommendations part of the exercise and presented to the OECD Statistical Policy Group and the next Trade Expert Meeting in September 2006.

### **4. Conclusions**

In the present paper the Secretariat has summarized recent developments with regard to the timeliness and quality of yearly and monthly outlined different strategies to improve the timeliness and the quality of data and metadata:

- Submission of annual and monthly trade data as fast as possible according to the time schedule transmitted to the OECD. Despite a significant improvement of annual data timeliness, the Secretariat noticed the late reception of annual statistics for Hungary, Mexico and Spain.
- Submission of up-to-date metadata is a crucial and ongoing requirement for correct data processing and use of statistics.
- A particular request is addressed to data providers to send in advance of the more detailed monthly data monthly total trade values. This would enable the Secretariat to feed these data into the monthly "Main Economic Indicators" publication.

Delegates are invited to comment on these points in order to help the Secretariat to collect process and disseminate trade data more efficiently.

ANNEX Table 1: Reception dates of annual data for years 1998 to 2004

Country Name	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Australia	8-Sep-1999	30-Jun-2000	30-Jul-2001	12-Feb-2002	21-Mar-2003	25-Mar-2004	1-Feb-2005
Austria	29-Jun-1999	7-Apr-2000	23-Apr-2001	23-Aug-2002	12-Jun-2003	18-Jun-2004	26-Apr-2005
Belgium	15-Mar-1999	15-Mar-2000	28-Mar-2001	23-Mar-2002	17-Feb-2003 Fin 17-Feb-2004	21-May-2004	24-Jun-2005
Canada	27-May-1999	25-Mar-2000	21-May-2001	30-May-2002	8-Jul-2003	18-May-2004	16-Feb-2005
Czech Rep	9-Aug-1999	23-Mar-2000	16-May-2001	28-May-2002	21-Nov-2003 Fin 19-Mar-2004	26-May-2004	17-Jun-2005
Denmark	6-May-1999	5-Apr-2000	21-Mar-2001	4-Apr-2002	6-Mar-2003	Pre. 27-Jul-2004 Fin 22-Sep-2004	11-Aug-2005
Finland	29-Sep-1999	15-Jun-2000	14-Aug-2001	1-Mar-2002	21-Mar-2003	Pre. 19-Mar-2004 Fin 28-May-2004	07-Mar-2005
France	26-Feb-1999	13-Mar-2000	29-Mar-2001	20-Feb-2002	18-Jun-2003	22-Apr-2004	04-Mar-2005
Germany	9-Mar-1999	16-Mar-2000	11-Apr-2001	29-Jul-2002	21-Mar-2003	HS 02-Mar-2004 SITC 19-Mar-2004	04-Mar-2005
Greece	13-Jul-1999	10-Jul-2000	16-Feb-2002	3-Sep-2002	10-Feb-2004	22-Sept-2004	09-Jun-2005
Hungary	27-May-1999	2-May-2000	27-Mar-2001	13-May-2002	25-Aug-2003	8-Jun-2004	Expected for Sep.
Iceland	19-Feb-1999	19-Jun-2000	9-Jul-2001	4-Apr-2002	3-Jun-2003	31-Mar-2004	04-Mar-2005
Ireland	24-May-1999	26-Apr-2000	8-May-2001	13-Jun-2002	6-Aug-2003	15-Sept-2004	07-Jun-2005
Italy	20-May-1999	18-Sep-2000	10-May-2001	25-Apr-2002	9-May-2003 Fin 7-Jan-2004	7-May-2004	01-Jun-2005
Japan	20-May-1999	22-Mar-2000	9-May-2001	4-Apr-2002	8-Jul-2003	9-Jul-2004	11-Aug-2005
Korea	15-Apr-1999	12-Jul-2000	30-Aug-2001	27-Mar-2002	24-Jan-2004	1-Oct-2004	21-Jun-2005
Luxembourg	N/A	24-Apr-2000	17-Aug-2001	3-Sep-2002	12-Sep-2003	12-Oct-2004	21-Jun-2005
Mexico	16-Jul-1999	5-Jul-2000	26-Sep-2001	28-Jun-2002	29-Sep-2003	23-Sept-2004	Expected for Sep.
Netherlands	29-Jun-1999	20-Sep-2000	18-Sep-2001	26-Aug-2002	16-Sep-2003	27-Sept-2004	28-Jul-2005
New Zealand	7-Jun-1999	13-Mar-2000	7-Feb-2001	18-Jun-2002	25-Aug-2003	17-May-2004	12-May-2005
Norway	7-Jun-1999	25-Jul-2000	26-Sep-2001	18-Jan-2002	25-Jun-2003	18-Jun-2004	17-Jan-2005
Poland	22-Jul-1999	13-Sep-2000	21-Sep-2001	15-Jul-2002	25-Apr-2003	22-Apr-2004	17-Jun-2005
Portugal	20-Jul-1999	24-Oct-2000	20-Nov-2001	4-Feb-2003	6-Oct-2003	27-Oct-2004	12-Jul-2005
Slovakia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	8-Oct-2003	22-Apr-2004	22-Jul-2005
Spain	8-Jun-1999	11-Oct-2000	13-Jul-2001	14-Oct-2002	3-Oct-2003	9-Nov-2004	Expected for Sep.
Sweden	26-Jul-1999	12-Sep-2000	16-Mar-2001	22-Aug-2002	3-Apr-2003 Fin 6-Apr-2004	6-Apr-2004	01-Jul-2005
Switzerland	18-Feb-1999	23-Feb-2000	21-Feb-2001	6-Jun-2002	21-Mar-2003	9-Feb-2004	04-Mar-2005
Turkey	10-May-1999	14-Aug-2000	14-Jun-2001	10-Sep-2002	12-Jun-2003 Fin 31-Mar-2004	Pre. 30-Mar-2004 Fin 23-Jun-2004	17-Jun-2005
United Kingdom	29-Sep-1999	8-Mar-2000	8-Feb-2001	22-Apr-2002	6-Mar-2003	Pre. 3-Aug-2004 Fin 8-Nov-2004	12-May-2005
USA	16-Jun-1999	26-Jul-2000	19-Jul-2001	5-Mar-2002	6-Mar-2003	26-May-2004	07-Apr-2005