



STATISTICS DIRECTORATE

National Accounts and Economic Statistics - International Trade Statistics

5 (a): Report from the Inter-Agency Merchandise Trade Statistics Task Force - WTO

17-19 September 2007
Salle des Nations
Tour Europe

This paper has been prepared by the WTO for information to delegates of the 8th OECD International ITS Trade Statistics Expert Meeting. It was reviewed and agreed by members of the Task Force.

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**TASK FORCE ON INTERNATIONAL MERCHANDISE TRADE STATISTICS
ROME
17-19 APRIL 2007**

SUMMARY OF THE MEETING

MAJOR OUTCOMES

- **The Task Force discussed the timetable and procedures for revising Concepts and Definitions of International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS, Rev. 3), to be finalised by 2009 and adopted by the Statistical Commission in 2010.**
- **It discussed an additional chapter in the forthcoming Manual on Export and Import Price Indices on the uses, advantages and disadvantages of unit value indices in merchandise trade statistics.**
- **The Task Force welcomed the new, interactive inter-agency Common Data Set, available since early March on the Task Force's website.**
- **The Task Force discussed its future role in the international statistical framework to redefine its terms of references for taking account of changed economic environments and emerging analytical needs.**

1. The meeting, hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization, was opened by Haluk Kasnakoglu, Director of Statistics. He highlighted the importance of inter-agency co-operation in data collection and highlighted the excellent co-operation of OECD, UNSD, and FAO in this respect. He also described FAO's implementation of a classification scheme based on the Harmonised System that allows to integrate related FAO statistics. Edward Gillin, Head of the Global Statistics Service, emphasized progress has been achieved in international co-operation in merchandise trade statistics but pointed out that changing environments would require an increasing collaboration to find adequate answers to interrelated questions.

2. The Agenda is shown in Annex 1, the list of participants in Annex 2, and Annex 3 lists available documents. Annex 4 summarises the decisions and Annex 5 includes the Provisional Agenda for the next meeting.

1. Adoption of the provisional agenda

The provisional agenda was adopted with following additions: item 10(b) on the Task Force's history and mandate and item 10(c) on the Task Force's archive.

2. Minutes of the meeting held in Santiago de Chile, 3-5 April 2006

The Summary report was accepted without any amendments.

3. Review of decisions of other international meetings with regard to merchandise trade

a. Report of the 38th UN Statistical Commission

This year's 60th anniversary saw an important number of events organized at political and technical level which both help to enhance the visibility of statistics as a public good. A number of technical issues were highlighted as impacting or being of interest to merchandise trade statistics: The consistent application of the change of ownership principle in SNA and BOP for its consequences on measuring intra-firm trade flows, the International Comparison Project for its experience in dealing with domestic and foreign trade prices, and SDMX as a standard for data and metadata exchange.

b. Report of the Inter-agency Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA, New York, February 2007)

Among the main points of interest to the Task Force, it was mentioned that the Committee adopted SDMX and requested the sponsors to further examine the implications in terms of resources needed as well as benefits for countries and international agencies that decide to implement it. The sponsors will conduct a cost-benefit assessment based on countries' experience, and present the results to the Committee at its next session in September 2007. The CCSA analysed various issues related to the quality framework within international statistical organizations, and training, to be revised at the next CCSA in September. The Committee also discussed the need to revise the classification of statistical activities. It was agreed that UNSD, assisted by the regional commissions and OECD, will propose a revised classification.

c. Trade and the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Declaration

The WTO released in March on the **dedicated website** the respective indicators on market access – the share of developed countries imports from developing countries and LDCs entering free of duty, and average tariffs imposed by developed countries on agricultural products, textiles, and clothing from developing countries. These calculations were jointly carried out by UNCTAD, ITC and WTO and the WTO thanked its partners for this effective inter-agency co-operation.

d. Report of the 7th OECD Trade Statisticians meeting

The OECD's report highlighted the effective UN/OECD co-operation to jointly process trade data which aims at eliminating duplication. This co-operation should serve as model for other domains. Furthermore, the OECD implemented in response to internal demand an additional module on ICT goods to its trade classifications to offer enhanced analytical possibilities. In accordance with OECD's strategy, its trade databases were scrutinized for its quality and quality reports thereof will be presented to the June 2007 OECD Committee on Statistics. This Committee will also be asked to endorse a proposal for upgrading the OECD Trade Statisticians meeting to a Working Party.

4. Concepts, Definitions and Methodology

a. Supplement to the Compilers' Manual for International Merchandise Trade Statistics

This publication is included in UN's 2006-2007 biennium publication programme. The timetable suggested for it is to post all complete draft chapters on the Task Force's EDG by end August 2007. The initial drafts should be sent to UNSD as soon as possible. Comments should be forwarded by end September for UNSD will edit and finalize the Supplement by early November. While the first part focuses on the Questionnaire on National Compilation and Dissemination Practices, the second part will be devoted to specific themes. A division of labour between agencies had been agreed upon as follows:

chapter 1	Revised Kyoto Convention and its implications	UNSD/WCO
chapter 2	Boundary between IMTS and BOP statistics	
chapter 2a	Bridge from IMTS to BOP	UNSD, IMF
chapter 2b	Goods for processing	WTO, UNSD, OECD, Eurostat
chapter 2c	Re-exports	UNSD
chapter 2d	Residents versus non-residents and change of ownership	WTO
chapter 2e	Experiences in compilation of fob imports	UNSD, OECD, WTO
chapter 2f	Travel	UNSD
chapter 2g	Government services nie	UNSD
chapter 3	IMTS and Structural Business Statistics	OECD, Eurostat
chapter 4	Intrastat: achievements and current challenges	Eurostat
chapter 5	Other issues	
chapter 5a	Origin of used goods, including antiques	UNSD
chapter 5b	Goods under financial and operational lease	UNSD, IMF
chapter 6	Reducing reporting burden of countries	OECD, UNSD, FAO

It was noted that chapters 2f and g would overlap with work of the inter-agency Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services. Eurostat presented its Intrastat draft for the Supplement describing the lessons learned with its system as well as the new Extrastat legislation. For Intrastat, it was highlighted that despite efforts to ease the process, enterprises would still complain on their reporting burden. Discussions focus on how to best respond to these complaints, for example, through using partner flows or increasing thresholds. Both strategies are possible but would result in less precise trade figures. In future, the new Extrastat legislation will make it more difficult for Member

States to compile trade flows according to national concepts. Best practices workshops are planned. The FAO pointed out that for customs declarations, the physical weight data are not asked anymore which it considered problematic, for example, for measuring the environmental impact of trade. FAO, OECD and UNSD agreed to jointly write to Eurostat, highlighting the importance of this variable for the trade community.

b. Revision of IMTS, Rev.2 recommendations

UNSD informed the Task Force of a detailed timetable for the revision process, to be supported by an Expert Group (EG-IMTS). The participants, invited to participate in this Expert Group, discussed a number of issues that should be tackled in the forthcoming revision such as vertical integration, intra-firm trade, trade plus production and other trade plus issues, trade by currency/invoice, enterprise-based trade statistics, etc. The first Expert meeting to discuss the scope and schedule process will be held in New York, 3-6 December 2007.

c. Interaction between BOP, SNA and external trade

Eurostat reported that it had elaborated a standard reconciliation table explaining the differences between customs and balance of payments figures. Against these tables and individual member countries data, recommendations for harmonising adjustment practices were developed, a number of special transactions in goods and their different treatment in Intrastat, Extrastat and Balance of Payments were described, and "fobisation" methods to identify best practices were assessed.

d. Handbook on Foreign Trade Indices

The IMF described the process for creating the Manual on Export and Import Price Indices through the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Price Statistics (IWGPS). The draft, available from IMF's website, has been reviewed by an Expert Group in September 2006 and comments sought from national statistical offices prior to that. A number of Task Force participants however raised concerns on the feasibility of compiling detailed price indices from surveys and their cost-effectiveness. Furthermore, the international statistical system usually recommends the development and use of administrative data, which should be an argument for including unit values in the Handbook. It was however highlighted that unit value indices do have several inherent characteristics (including changes in the mix of the heterogeneous items, poor quality of recorded data on quantities, and coverage limitations for countries in customs unions) that lead to inconsistencies and biases which limit their usefulness in representing price changes. The Task Force therefore recommended that the IMF includes a chapter in the draft Manual on the use of unit value indices. A draft of this chapter should be circulated to the Task Force. IMF agreed to do this noting that final decisions on the content and structure of the manual lay with the IWGPS.

5. Country and Product Classifications

a. Geo-nomenclatures and country groupings for use in international merchandise trade statistics

The previous CCSA's discussion in Montreal in 2006 focused on individual countries as building blocks for any grouping, deciding that UNSD should revise the publication on Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use, M 49, Revision 4, based on

information submitted by international organizations. As for country groupings, it was pointed out that "one size fits all" would not be possible as any grouping would depend on institutional and analytical needs. In addition, political groupings – e.g., regional trade agreements – are difficult to maintain due to changes in membership. The Task Force decided that for transparency purposes, participants should post their country classifications on the EDG for ease of reference.

- b. Revision of HS and SITC and
- c. Correspondences between classifications (HS, SITC, ISIC)

The use of the Harmonised System (HS) as the basic language for trade statisticians was highlighted while SITC would be considered an analytical tool. The HS is the legal framework for tariffs. The WCO reported that international agreements could be accommodated by for example creating sub-headings or aggregate lines as was done for the Rotterdam convention or customs/statistical agencies could be requested to make subdivisions at the national level, as was done for the Montreal Protocol on substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. It was highlighted that sometimes statistical long-term analysis could be hampered by different HS versions, for example, through the convergence of technology products over time -- a mobile phone may include functionalities of several other products (photograph, e-mail facility, navigation system, etc.). This could be ameliorated in the HS by clustering technology products into broader groups.

To date, about 65 of 128 WCO contracting parties have implemented HS2007. An initial time schedule for the next revision was tabled and any interest for new categories should be communicated to WCO. Changes to the 2012 version will have to be agreed upon by 2009. It was suggested that WCO includes statistical administrations in addition to customs in further review cycles. It was also considered important that WCO join technical assistance projects of other international organizations to improve co-operation between customs and statistics for the production of complete, high quality national data on merchandise trade.

6. Databases on international trade

- a. COMTRADE: status, technical issues, EDP strategies and joint arrangements

The UNSD reported that the joint processing system with OECD would deliver fully harmonised data for dissemination. Although this co-operation required an enormous initial investment to start off, both the duplication of work in the respective organizations and the national response burden had been reduced which has helped Comtrade's and OECD's ITCS status as a truly public good. Some users pointed out that it would be interesting to know the reasons of data sets reloaded to Comtrade. UNSD agreed to check the feasibility of inserting links to archives holding this kind of information. Another question was raised on the impact of increased regional trade agreements on Comtrade's data quality.

- b. Database developments in other organizations

Various organizations reported on their recent database developments. ECLAC described progress with CEPALSTAT, a new database including social, economic and environmental indicators, available free-of-charge through Internet. The FAO presented

its new FAOSTAT application, covering the 1990 to t -1 period. Its redesign started in 2004/5 and final implementation took place in 2006. The system has been completely recast and provides core as well as satellite data sets combining different indicators. For example, it can combine production, trade, and consumption data to derive food balance sheets for analysing under nourishment. It uses a modified HS list to combine the different statistical domains.

c. Common Data Set

The WTO presented the new online application of the inter-agency Common Data Set (CDS) on the Task Force's website. With this in place, the participants' discussion focused on how to best market the CDS and whether to use SDMX in maintaining it in the future. It was pointed out that this data set, by distinguishing official data from the best value according to international concepts and definitions, and the respective presentation of adjustments and estimations in the countries' metadata, would constitute an enormous value added created by international organizations for users. Thus, this project would bear a great potential for the future. The FAO reported that it already uses the Common Data Set values. The Task Force concluded that future activities should centre on disseminating the data and clarifying some of the terminology used such as "reconciled". The Task Force should also seek feedback from UN regional commissions close to their respective member countries, and send out a letter to national authorities to inform them of this new tool and to receive their comments. The CDS should be updated once a year in November. International organizations should provide links to the CDS on their respective websites and more generally encourage the use of the CDS for trade analysis. Albeit the CDS is a small data set, it was agreed to look further into the feasibility of using SDMX for its maintenance.

d. Trade Indicators

The ITC reported its intention to provide developing countries with free access to its Trade Map application. It agreed to send user ids and passwords to all participants. Eurostat pointed out that the Commission's DG Trade had developed similar tools. The OECD reported on its interactive, web-based trade indicators tool offering macro as well as micro indicators. This application, based on OECD's data warehouse, allows integrating data presentations (trade plus indicators) and receives great user interest. It offers XML downloads and a specific module on the ICT sector has been recently added, the latter being part of a larger OECD project on globalization indicators. The WTO reported on its new world tariff publication which offers for each country a number of tariff-related indicators at aggregate level. It will be released in print and online in the coming weeks and was produced in co-operation with ITC and UNCTAD. The FAO pointed out that the proliferation of indicators could also contribute to the users' confusion on how to select the best indicator.

e. Dissemination tools and policies of international organizations

The UNSD reported on its plans to develop a facility to create automatically world totals, for example, at 3-digit SITC level. Eurostat informed that all its applications, NewCronos, EasyComext, and the Analytical Comext were available free of charge, or on DVD or by FTP.

f. Task Force website and EDG

It was agreed that the website should also include databases that require subscription, on a separate page, to distinguish online databases freely available. Organizations were requested to provide links to their respective technical assistance activities and relevant material. Links to other relevant topics such as services, globalization, etc. should also be included to make the website a comprehensive reference.

7. Data Quality

a. Statistical metadata in merchandise trade

Educated users ask for more relevant metadata. Online tools such as Comtrade respond to these requests by developing relevant knowledge bases. Standard metadata such as the OECD's Metastore as a "live" database also allow to streamline processes and to integrate databases, in OECD's case more than 40, by offering unique coding systems and standardized concepts. SDMX and data quality assessment frameworks were also discussed as tools for developing standard metadata.

b. Data Quality Assessment Frameworks

The increased use of online tools for trade information demands an improved quality control. In this respect, the automatic processing and provision of metadata becomes important. Data quality can focus on either outputs or procedures. The various organizations reported on their different activities, for example, Eurostat asking countries to fill in questionnaires (Eurostat) to assess national data quality. The IMF has institutionalised specific procedures (ROSC) to assess the countries' data quality and to derive respective training needs afterwards for improving it. The OECD reported that its whole trade data processing was being reviewed by users, peers, etc. and the conclusions will be presented at the June CSTAT meeting in Geneva. The question on statistical indicators to measure data quality was raised and discussed. It was also stated that international organizations may assess national data quality but can not assure it.

8. Globalization and merchandise trade statistics

a. Multinational enterprises and

b. Links between business and trade statistics

The underlying question is "who is trading and what are the characteristics of trade operators?" A number of national projects are under way, steered and coordinated by Eurostat and the OECD for non-EU member states. Efforts are ongoing to link trade and business registers in order to derive the value of trade and the number of enterprises by activity sector, size class, geographical allocation, etc. Eurostat will publish this information for 18 Member states and 2 EFTA countries during the summer 2007. Other ongoing projects in Eurostat relevant to this topic are the EuroGroups Register (EGR) for registering multinational enterprises and a programme to modernise business and trade statistics (MEETS) in order to reduce response burdens and allow for the implementation of new technologies. These "new" types of trade statistics are considered important to analyse trade by degree of processing, intra-firm trade and value chains (trade by tasks), or to link trade statistics up with other domains such as labour, environmental issues, etc. to analyse globalization in general.

9. Technical Assistance

The organizations described their various activities. It was decided to develop a tracking system for all these missions and material. The Task Force's website should hold a table listing activities by year, organization and country. The WTO will contact organizations outlining a proposal for descriptors of individual activities. The WCO as the responsible organization for technical assistance in customs matters should be included in such a tracking system.

10. Other business

a. Time and place of next meeting

The Task Force thanked the FAO for its kind hosting and perfect organization of this year's Task Force. It followed an invitation of UNIDO to reconvene in Vienna from 28 to 30 April 2008.

b. The Task Force's history and mandate

Discussing this agenda item, there was unanimous support for the Task Force's excellent job throughout its existence. This group, well cooperating to identify issues for improving concepts and definitions, data production and quality while reducing national response burden has achieved substantive results and has set references in implementing models for joint data collection, processing and even dissemination. The exchange of experiences amongst participants and effective coordination of the organizations at working level also needs to be highlighted.

However, the Task Force thought it needed to reflect upon its future role in a broader setting of globalization and respective societal needs for information to develop a forward-looking strategy and decide upon an effective *modus operandi*. The Task Force's work will be for revision by the Statistical Commission in 2008 and it was considered a good opportunity to provide this body with a document specifying the future set up, work procedures and terms of references of the Task Force. The participants weighted the respective advantages/disadvantages of keeping the status quo or upgrading the Task Force to a more formal inter-agency status. The OECD, UNSD and WTO will prepare a draft for July, to be circulated for revision by other Task Force participants. The document should be finalised in accord with the Statistical Commission's deadlines for submission of documents (end October).

c. The Task Force's archive

UNSD informed the Task Force that it will make available publicly all its documents submitted to international bodies, including manuals, reports, background documents and other working papers. This would also include UNSD's submissions to the Task Force. However, the Task Force decided to continue its EDG as a repository for all its working documents.

ANNEX 1:

TASK FORCE ON INTERNATIONAL MERCHANDISE TRADE STATISTICS

Rome, 17-19 April 2007

Provisional Agenda

- 1) Adoption of the provisional agenda
- 2) Minutes of the meeting held in Santiago de Chile, 3-5 April 2006
- 3) Review of decisions of other international meetings with regard to merchandise trade
 - a. Report of the 38th UN Statistical Commission
 - b. Report of the Inter-agency Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities
 - c. The Millennium Development Goal Declaration
 - d. Report of relevant trade statistics meetings (OECD Trade Statisticians, etc.)
- 4) Concepts, definitions and methodology
 - a. Supplement to the Compilers' Manual for International Merchandise Trade Statistics (update by UNSD)
 - b. Revision of IMTS, Revision 2 recommendations
 - c. Interaction between BOP, SNA and external trade (update by Eurostat)
 - d. Trade Index Numbers and the Unit Value Approach (all organizations)
- 5) Country and Product Classifications
 - a. Geo-nomenclatures and country groupings for use in international merchandise trade statistics (update by UNSD)
 - b. Revision of HS and SITC (update by UNSD)
 - c. Correspondences between classifications (HS/SITC/ISIC)
- 6) Databases on international trade

- a. COMTRADE: status, technical issues, EDP strategies and joint arrangements (joint report of UNSD/OECD)
 - b. Database developments in other organizations (FAO, WTO, others)
 - c. Common Data Set (update by WTO)
 - d. Trade Indicators (update by OECD and WTO)
 - e. Dissemination tools and policies of international organizations (exchange of information)
 - f. Task Force website and EDG
- 7) Data quality
- a. Statistical metadata in merchandise trade (report by OECD)
 - b. Reports on Data Quality by International Organizations (exchange of information)
- 8) Globalization and merchandise trade statistics
- a. Multi-national enterprises, structural business and trade statistics
- 9) Technical assistance (updates by various international organizations)
- 10) Other business
- a. time and place of next meeting

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ANNEX 3: LIST OF AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

<i>Item</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Source</i>
3 d	Summary Report on the 7th ITS/TIS OECD Trade Expert Meeting OECD, 11-14 September 06	OECD
4 a	Supplement to the Compiler's Manual for International Merchandise Trade Statistics	UNSD
4 a	Draft - 4 the Intrastat system of the European Union	Eurostat
4 a	New Extrastat Legislation	Eurostat
4 a	Questionnaire 2006 on NCDP for International Merchandise Trade Statistics	UNSD
4 b	Third Revision of International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions	UNSD
4 d	Trade Index Numbers: Price survey and the Unit Value Approaches	UNSD
4 d	Progress Report on OECD Work on Developing Quantity Indices for Imports and Exports	OECD
4 c	Interaction between BOP, SNA and external trade -- Progress report	Eurostat
4 d	Calculation of unit value indices based on external trade data (Nice application)	Eurostat
4 d	Use and calculations of unit value and prices at WTO	WTO
4 d	Do Unit Value Export, Import, and terms of Trade indices represent or misrepresent Price indices	IMF
5 a	Geo-nomenclatures and country groupings for use in international merchandise trade statistics	UNSD
5 a	Geo-nomenclatures and country groupings for use in international merchandise trade statistics	WTO
5 b	The Standard International Trade Classification, Revision 4 (SITC, Rev.4) and HS2007	UNSD
5 c	Correspondences between the Classifications of HS, SITC, and BEC	UNSD
6 a	Comtrade: status, technical issues, EDP strategies and joint arrangements	UNSD
6 b	Cepalstat - Note by ECLAC	
6 c	Common data Set	UNSD
6 d	Trade Indices - Note by ECLAC	
6 d	Progress Report on OECD Trade Indicators Project (TIP)	OECD
6 d	World Tariff Profiles	WTO
6 e	Dissemination tools and policies of international organizations	UNSD
6 e	Institutes ranked by usage of UN Comtrade data	UNSD
	Policy on re-dissemination of UN Comtrade data	UNSD
6 e	Data dissemination practices	Eurostat
6 f	Maintenance of the Task Force website	WTO
7 a	Statistical metadata in merchandise trade	OECD
7 a	Statistical metadata in merchandise trade	UNSD
7 b	Data Quality - Note by ECLAC	
7 b	Draft Quality Report Edition 2007	Eurostat
7 b	Reports on Data Quality by International Organizations	UNSD
7 b	Data Quality	OECD
7 b	Reports on Data Quality by International Organizations	FAO
8 a	Multi-national enterprises, structural business and trade statistics - Eurostat's developments	Eurostat
8 a	Globalisation and merchandise trade statistics	OECD
9	Technical Assistance	UNSD
9	Co-operation programmes on International Trade statistics	Eurostat
9	Technical Assistance	ESCWA
9	Technical Assistance Activity on IMTS	FAO
10 b	History and Future of the Task Force on IMTS	UNSD
10 b	Future of the TF on IMTS	OECD
10 c	UNSD Trade Statistics Branch Web Site improvements	UNSD

ANNEX 4: SUMMARY OF ACTIONS DECIDED

Action	Who
item 4(a) Prepare drafts for supplement	see item 4 (a)
item 4 (a) Note on physical weight data to Eurostat	FAO, OECD, UNSD
item 4 (d) Draft chapter on unit values	IMF
item 5 (a) Post country classifications to EDG	All
item 6 (a) Add links to Comtrade explaining reasons for reloads	UNSD
item 6 (c) Send letter to NSOs on inter-agency CDS	WTO
item 9 Tracking system for Technical Assistance on Task Force's website	WTO
item 10 (b) Draft note on TF terms of reference and <i>modus operandi</i>	OECD, UNSD, WTO

ANNEX 5:

TASK FORCE ON INTERNATIONAL MERCHANDISE TRADE STATISTICS

Vienna, 28-30 April 2008

Provisional Agenda

1. Adoption of the provisional agenda
2. Review of decisions of other international meetings with regard to merchandise trade
(Statistical Commission, Inter-agency Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities, the Millennium Development Goals, OECD Trade Statisticians, etc.)
3. Concepts, definitions and methodology
 - a) Supplement to the Compilers' Manual for International Merchandise Trade Statistics (b)
Revision of IMTS, Revision 2
 - b) Trade Index Numbers and the Unit Value Approach
 - c) Interaction between BOP, SNA and external trade
4. Country and Product Classifications
 - a) Standard country area codes, groupings and geo-nomenclatures
 - b) Trade classifications (HS, SITC, etc.) and correspondences
5. Databases on international trade
 - a) Database developments in organizations
 - b) Common Data Set
 - c) Trade Indicators
 - d) Dissemination tools and policies of international organizations
6. Data quality
 - a) Statistical metadata in merchandise trade
 - b) Reports by International Organizations
7. Globalization and merchandise trade statistics
 - a) Multi-national enterprises, structural business and trade statistics
8. Technical assistance
9. Other business
 - a) Time and place of next meeting