

**STATISTICS DIRECTORATE**

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

**TOWARDS MORE TIMELY AND HIGH QUALITY DATA**

*OECD INTERNATIONAL TRADE STATISTICS MEETING (ITS) AND OECD-EUROSTAT MEETING OF EXPERTS IN TRADE IN SERVICES STATISTICS (TIS)*

*Château de la Muette, Paris*

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*Room 6*

**Provided for information and discussion under Item 3 c) of the draft agenda: Recent developments at OECD.**

## **TOWARDS MORE TIMELY AND HIGH QUALITY DATA**

**- Note by the Secretariat -**

### **Introduction**

Improvement in the quality of OECD statistics is one of the main objectives of the Statistics Strategy. This objective has been carried out for trade statistics improving the timeliness and the consistency of the data but also providing more relevant metadata.

Timeliness has become a more crucial issue for monthly trade statistics because of the Quarterly Press Release. That is why the OECD sent out an inquiry which is being analysed to investigate ways to improve the timeliness of the Press Release.

Concerning annual trade statistics, timeliness has been regularly improved in the past except in 2003.

### **1. Annual data**

#### **1.1. Timeliness**

In 2003, the reported 2002 data were received very late for some countries because of exceptional circumstances but the joint effort of the OECD and the UNSD to obtain trade data early seems to pay off for 2003: 9 member countries have already sent their data to the OECD before mid April 2004.

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

To improve the consistency of US trade data provided in the International Trade by Commodity Statistics (ITCS) database, the OECD is currently revising historical data back to 1991. This work is ongoing. Updated Extrastat statistics for EU 15 should be available in the database this year.

A metadata comparison is currently on going between the OECD and the UNSD. The results of this work will be sent to OECD member countries for reviewing as announced in the joint OECD/UNSD letter sent in February 2004 (see item 5.c. of the agenda). Reviewed metadata will be included in the paper and electronic versions of the ITCS publications.

### **2. Monthly data**

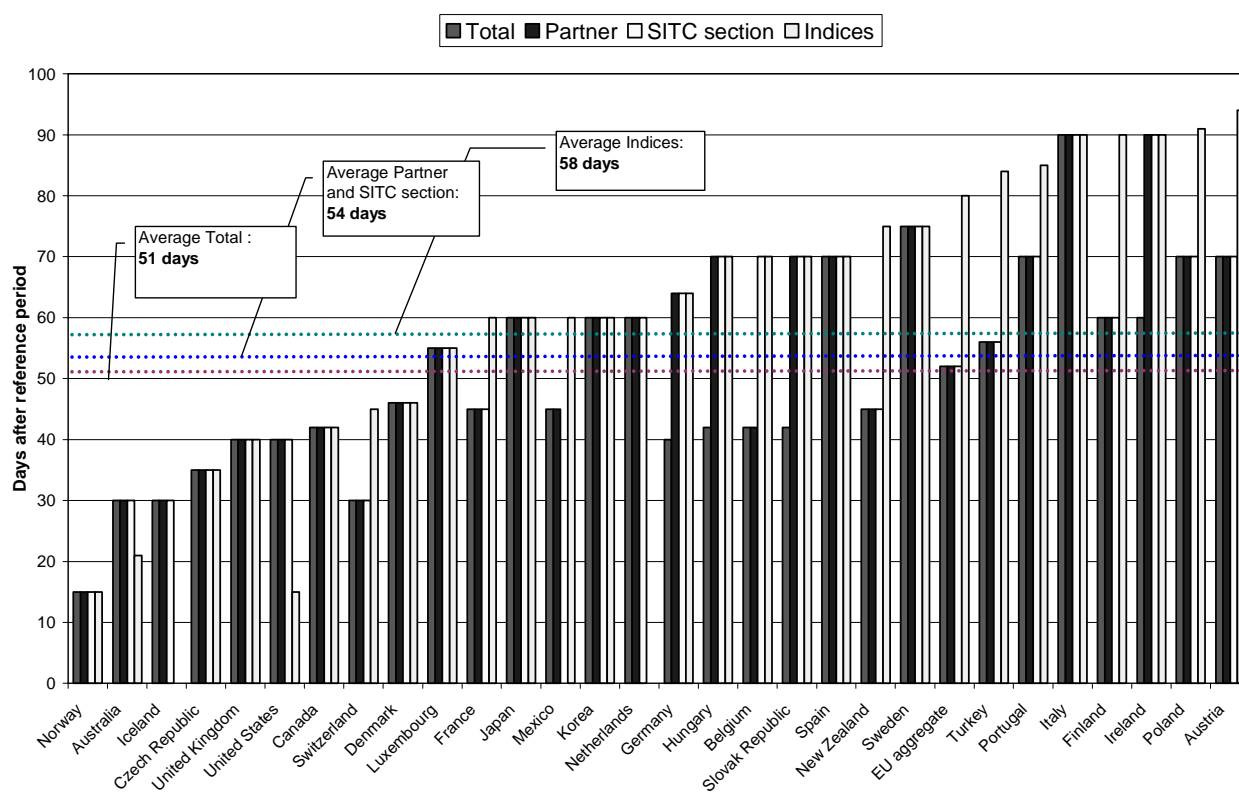
#### **2.1. Timeliness**

In February 2004, data providers were requested to inform the Secretariat about their data release schedules in order to adjust the OECD's data processing and data dissemination activities accordingly. The analysis of the results of this inquiry will enable to improve the timeliness of both Quarterly Press Release and Monthly Statistics of International Trade (MSIT) database (see item 8.a. of the agenda).

By monitoring closely the delay in receiving the data, the OECD will be able:

- To react quickly in case of late reception of monthly trade statistics;
- To try to establish cooperation with data providers in order to reduce the time lag between the data reception and the reference period.

**Figure 1: Monthly Statistic Data Schedules**



(\*Note: Greece is not included, the OECD do not receive data for a while.

This figure shows the results of this inquiry, for the four groups of data needed in the MSIT publication.

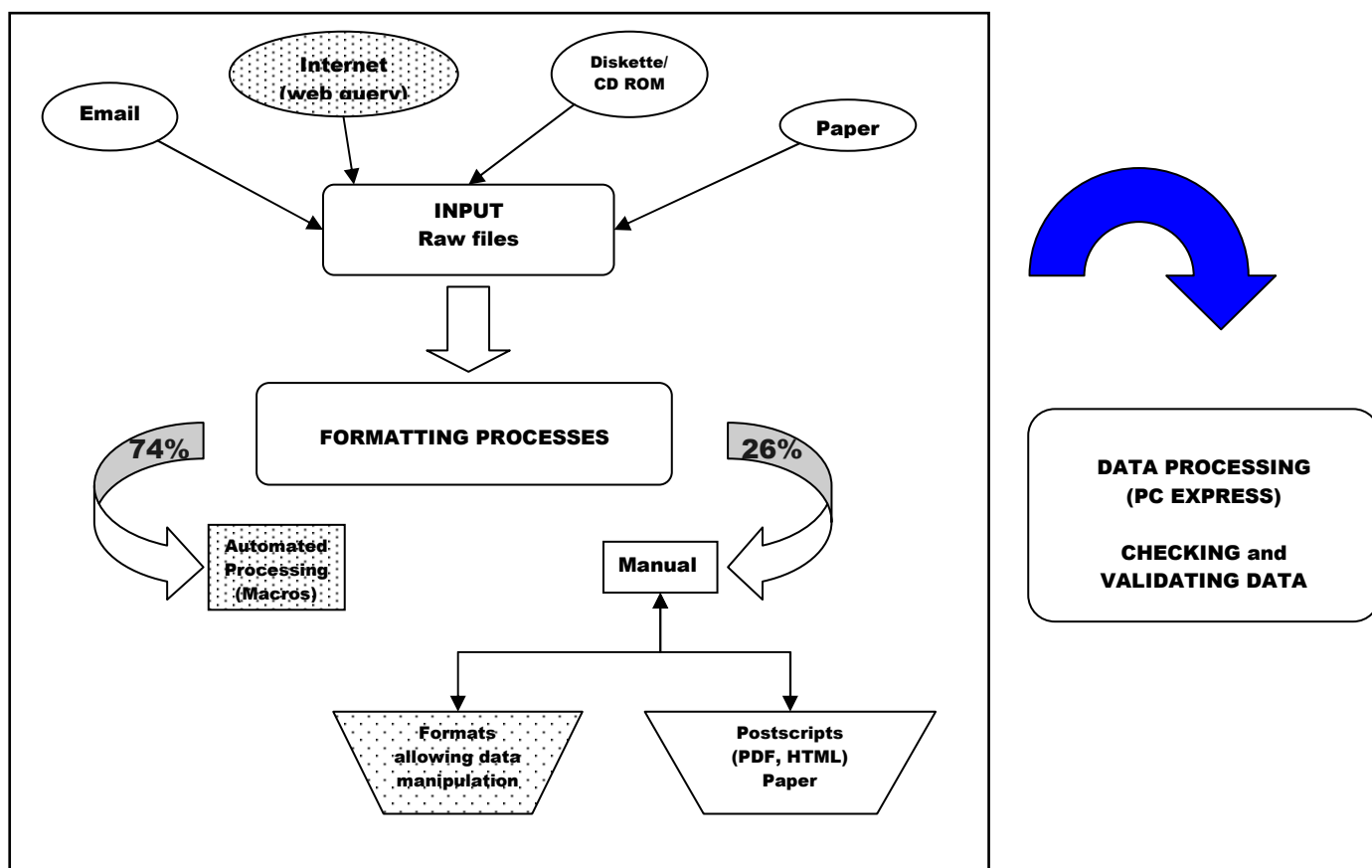
The Secretariat would like to thank data providers for the very good feedback they provided. 20 member countries plus Eurostat (for EU aggregate) responded to this inquiry. For the other member countries which did not reply, estimations were made based on the dates of e-mails received or on information found on their Internet sites.

## 2.2. Automatic procedures implementations

Because of the periodicity of the MSIT publication, automation of data access and data formatting is a key issue to obtain up to date data.

As mentioned in the item 3.b. of the agenda, the number of automatic procedures for data formatting as well as online accesses for data updating has significantly increased in 2003: more than 74% of raw data files are currently formatted with macros.

Figure 2: Automatic procedures implementation in the MSIT data capture



This figure highlights areas where automatic procedures have been implemented (i.e. dotted items):

- Data capture: Web queries allow an automatic download of data;
- Formatting: Macros allow an automatic formatting of raw data files.

One last category of data files currently formatted manually could be processed with macros in the future. It concerns all formats other than .pdf and .html which cannot be edited and thus automatically processed.

Changes in web sites or data files formats create difficulties in maintaining these automatic procedures and cancel their efficiency gains.

### 2.3. Data and metadata quality

In addition to data input broken down by SITC sections and by partner countries, the 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

Transmission of monthly figures as fast as possible is a crucial issue especially for the Press Release as mentioned in the item 8.a. of the agenda.

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

### **3. Conclusions**

In the present paper the Secretariat has 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. For that purpose, the Secretariat is interested in being informed of any new possibility for data or metadata access;
- Submission of up to date metadata useful for the data processing and for a proper use of statistics;
- A particular request is addressed to data providers to obtain monthly total trade values.

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