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National Accounts - International Trade Statistics

SUBMISSION AND AVAILABILITY OF YEARLY AND MONTHLY DATA TO OECD

-Note by the Secretariat-

Paper prepared by Statistics Directorate, OECD - France

*3rd OECD MEETING ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE STATISTICS
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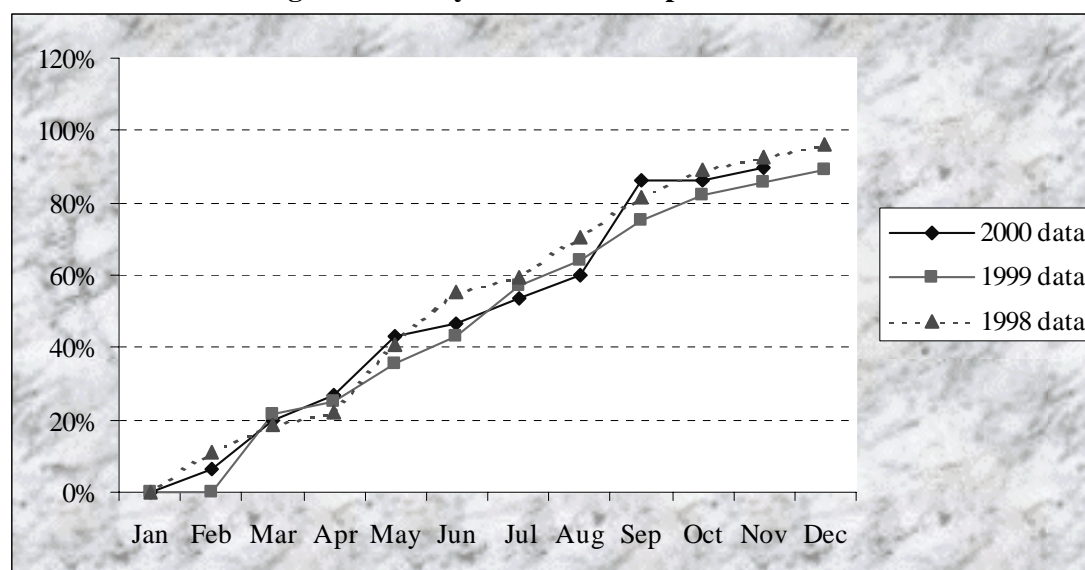
Introduction

1. This paper is to inform the participants of the 3rd International Trade Statistics meeting about recent developments at OECD with respect to the collection and publication of merchandise trade statistics. A similar update was given at the second trade Statistics meeting.
2. The purpose of this reporting is to enhance transparency and accountability. This is considered to be all the more important in a context where OECD closely co-operates with national and international bodies and shares data with UNSD.
3. Over the past two years, significant improvements have been noticed in data reception with increased regularity in data transmission. A complete set of detailed trade statistics is an important element for sound economic analysis and forecasting in a global, rapidly moving world.
4. Both the situation and outlook for yearly and (much more aggregated) monthly trade data will be briefly addressed below, including an outline of current and future developments.

1. Yearly data availability

a) Current status of data submission

5. Following the first and second International Trade Statistics meetings, OECD receives annual trade data on a much quicker basis than in previous years. The length of the data reception period for all Member countries has stayed stable at around 13 months since 1998 data. The situation is almost the same for 2000 figures. After a period of significant improvements, the situation is now more stable for the last two years. As shown in the figure 1, most OECD Member countries transmit trade data in the same period. The data reception for 2000 has the same profile than that of the 1998 figures, which in themselves were very good. By the time of drafting (beginning November), about 90 % of 2000 data of OECD Member countries are available, compared to almost 80 % last year.

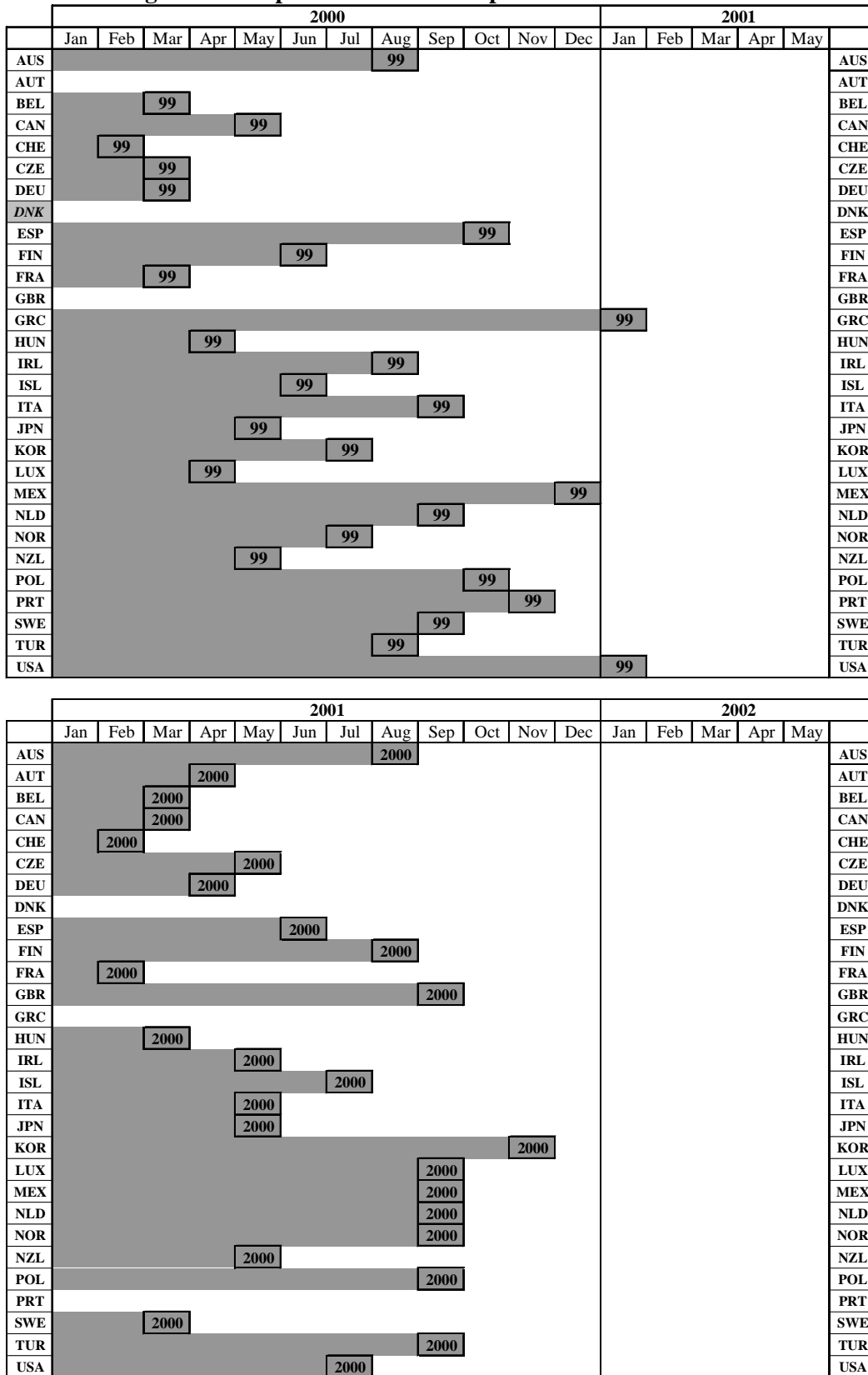
Figure 1: Yearly trade data reception at OECD

6. A more detailed picture by country is given below in Figure 2. Important improvements are shown for example for USA for which the time lag has been reduced to 6 months in comparing 2000 data with 1999 data. More than 50% of data sending were concentrated in four months i.e. between May and September.

b) Supply of provisional data

7. In general, the OECD receives less than 50% of the data in the six-month period following the reference year. This percentage could increase substantially if countries could provide provisional figures. For example, in the 2000 figures, significant improvements on data delivery were due to the reception of provisional figures from Italy and Sweden. The time lag in data reception has been reduced by 6 months for Sweden and by 4 months for Italy thanks to the reception of provisional figures.
8. The Secretariat would like to encourage countries to provide provisional figures if possible which is crucial in a context of co-operation with international organisations. A round table on this subject will be proposed later on the agenda.

Figure 2: Comparison of data receipt between 1999 and 2000



c) *Processing and dissemination of yearly trade data*

9. Thanks to the well-established processing routines, the Secretariat can update quite rapidly a country's data, once received in electronic form and without major inconsistencies or problems. It is also important to maintain the same layout from one year to another or a detailed description of the format of the file. It is also important to have information on the national definition of commodities, a list of country codes and a list of quantity units; all of these help to reduce the time of processing.
10. The data dissemination profile of OECD trade statistics follows an established calendar with OECD's publication service. The objective is to reduce the time lag between data reception and data dissemination to the strictest minimum and to be able to respect the schedule. That is why it is important to receive the data in time, if not significant delays appear for publication. As can be seen from Figure 3 below, both paper publications and CD-ROMs closely follow the date of reception.

Figure 4: Yearly trade data availability on the market

PAPER PUBLICATIONS												
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
2000	5 / 98							1 / 99	2 / 99		3 / 99	
2001				4 / 99	5 / 99			1 / 2000			2 / 2000	3 / 2000
2002		4 / 2000	5 / 2000					1 / 2001		2 / 2001		3 / 2001

CD-ROMs												
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
2000	1 / 98	3 / 98					1 / 99		2 / 99		3 / 99	
	2 / 98	4 / 98										
2001				4 / 99				1 / 2000			2 / 2000	3 / 2000
2002		4 / 2000					1 / 2001			2 / 2001		3 / 2001

Underline : Forecast

11. The products on the market are available six months after the reference year. This regular and optimised time pattern could be maintained only if countries continue to provide data on a regular basis. The volume 4 and 5 of the publications sometimes depend on only one country missing and this omission can significantly impact on the production processing.

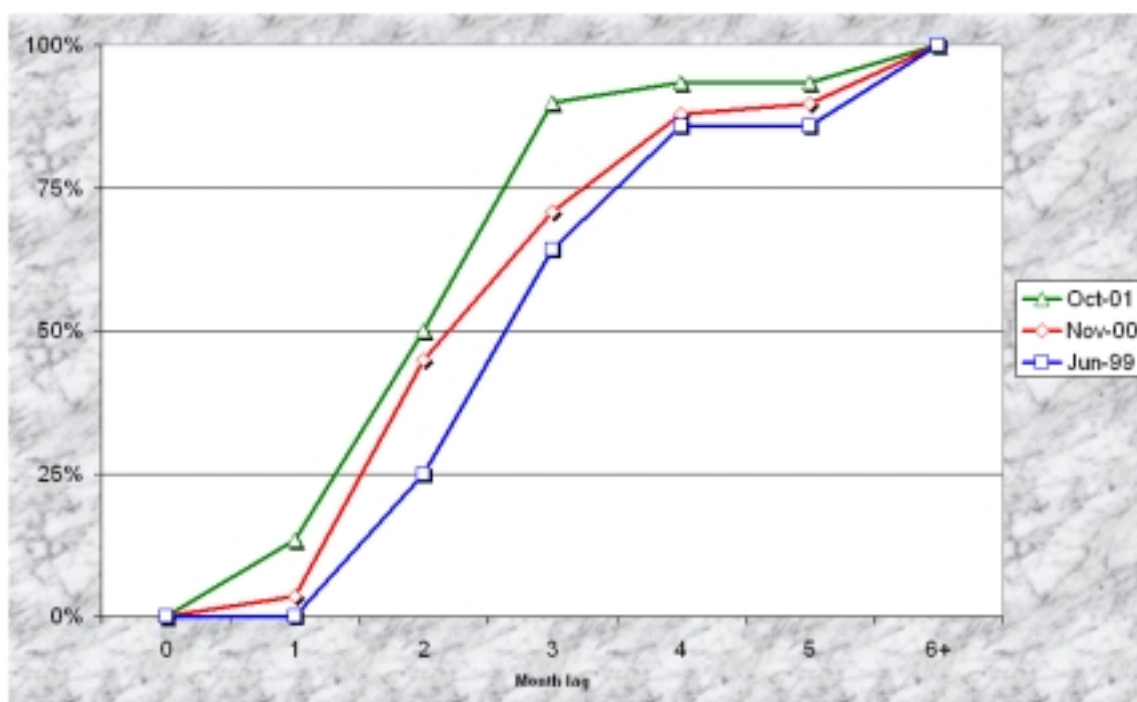
2. Monthly data availability

a) *Current status of data submission*

12. The aim of the database is to provide timely and accurate statistics of monthly international trade of the Member countries both for the internal use of the OECD in its research and reporting functions and for the external use by Member governments and research institutions. Obviously any delays and omissions will have a detrimental effect on the ability of the OECD to fulfil these obligations. The delays in submission are constantly monitored and tracked by the Secretariat and Figure 6 shows the progress in data submission made over the last two years since the First International Trade Statistics Meeting, June 1999.

13. Currently value data is received either directly or indirectly from 29 of the 30 OECD Member Countries; Greece provides no regular data directly to the Secretariat at present. In the case of some countries less detailed data may be available via the Internet prior to the official receipt of detailed data from the Member country.
14. Advances in national data collection and processing combined with faster dissemination and publication via electronic mail and the Internet has resulted in a significant reduction in the time lag for reception of data. An increasing number of countries are now able to provide data before the end of the following month i.e. September figures by the end of October, with 90% normally supplying data by the end of the following quarter. This contrasts with a figure of less than two-thirds two years ago.
15. The considerable variation between countries in the availability and nature of trade indices and much of the data available only on a quarterly basis results in a different time lag profile from the value data. Of the 25 Member Countries currently supplying some trade indices data, over 80% continue to be available within four months.

Figure 6: Further improvement in data availability



16. Although the graph shows only submission of value data, continuing improvements also apply to the provision of indices, particularly through their publication on-line by an increasing number of source agencies.

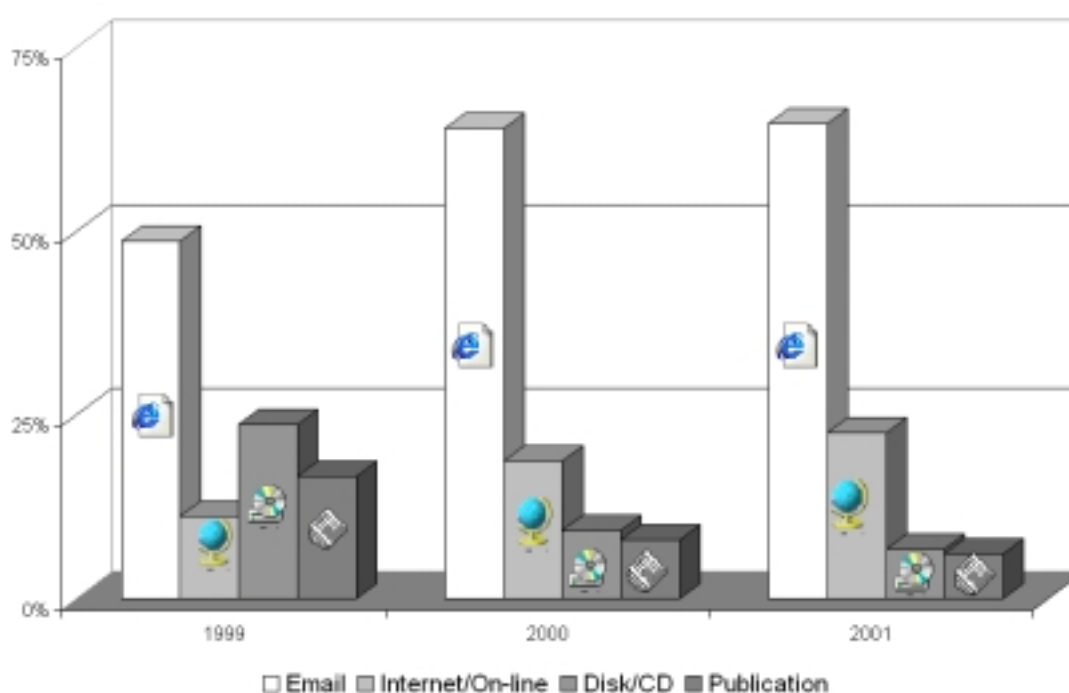
b) Increasing electronic transmission of data

17. The efficiency of processing the data is dependent on the method and quality of the data reception and transmission. Previous Trade Statistics meetings have stressed the need for improvements in the mode of transmission away from paper publications, particularly in the case of partner country data, to

electronic transmission and on-line access. The development of many countries' Internet sites and on-line access continues to facilitate this transition.

18. Figure 7 shows the trend in data delivery methods over the past two years clearly demonstrating the shift towards e-mail and Internet. Around two-thirds of all data submissions are received by email with Internet or on-line access now accounting for more than 20%. The supply of data by CD and diskette continues to fall, as is the case with paper publications, which are generally the source of trade indices for a number of countries. In the latter case the Internet is increasingly becoming an alternative source for information of indices with the added benefit of improving the timeliness of the data, previously dependent on the delivery of the relevant publication.
19. However on-line or Internet access encompasses varying degrees of accessibility. This can range from the publication of simple pdf or 'image' files requiring manual input of the data to active online databases, where data can be downloaded in different formats (Excel, csv, etc) allowing easier processing.

Figure 7: Data reception: Increasing use of electronic media



c) Provision of definitive data

20. In addition to the Monthly Statistics of International Trade database, the Secretariat also publishes monthly trade aggregates from the Main Economic Indicators database. In an attempt to improve the consistency between the two databases an ongoing study was initiated to identify any apparent differences in the data and if possible amend the procedures to reduce or eliminate these inconsistencies.
21. In the case of a number of Member countries some inconsistencies were identified in relation to the use of source agency or series definition, and in most cases the differences have been rectified or annotated.

Further discrepancies can occur due to the difference in the timing of data receipt and updating. Normally these are short-term errors affecting the most recent data and will be rectified over time.

22. A more general error however arises from the provision of definitive or final data. The nature of trade data means that there is often a significant delay between the release dates of provisional and definitive data. In addition different policies exist in the member countries as to the updating of trade series. Also it was noted that in spite of regular and timely transmission of provisional data, there was no such automatic submission of definitive detailed data. In these cases significant discrepancies can become evident between data held in different databases.

3. General Issues for discussion

23. The following issues need to be addressed and discussed with Member country delegates:

➤ Existence of missing series in monthly statistics

24. The Secretariat would like to work with the Member Countries to reduce the number of series omissions in the database. In the case of value data the Secretariat is reluctant to use alternative sources for such data, such as Eurostat and IMF estimates, preferring in all cases to receive data transmitted from the Member Country directly. Currently irregular or no updates are received from Greece, Turkey and Korea.

25. In the case of trade indices the Secretariat urges the Member Countries to communicate the existence of new data or new calculations for the possible inclusion in the database. Member Countries currently not supplying any trade indices include Greece, The Netherlands, and Iceland. In addition many other countries currently provide limited trade indices information.

➤ Efficiency of method of delivery

26. For monthly statistics the efficiency of the processing of data relies heavily on the quality and mode of transport of such data from the Member Countries. The reduction in submission by paper copy and by post is a significant factor in reducing the scope for error and delay and the Secretariat urges a continuation of this trend. Additionally the accessibility of Internet databases is an important step and any developments by Member Countries in the field should be communicated to the Secretariat.

27. The following points were raised last year and they will be discussed later on, in the document referring to the quality questionnaire (agenda item 11.b).

➤ Timeliness and regularity of submission of data

➤ Availability of updates

➤ Inconsistency of data from different sources

➤ Importance of regular contacts

4. Current and future developments

➤ *Press release*

A new press release called “Quarterly trade press release” covering the latest trends in OECD trade is due to be launched in January 2002. A complete description of this new product will be given in the agenda item 4(c).

➤ *New data*

28. Data for the Slovak Republic have been introduced since 1997 as a new Member Country of OECD in both annual and monthly publication.
29. All OECD data related to the Euro zone will be converted to Euro from mid January 2002.
30. The industry based classification ISIC 3 has been introduced since September 2001 in the annual database. An oral presentation on this subject will be given later on the agenda.
31. The OECD now publishes data received directly from the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) under the name EU15 – Extra EU and EUR-12 Extra EU 12 (for Euro area), which excludes Intra-Eu trade. In addition the OECD continues to publish the series EU-15 Total and EUR-12 Total, the aggregate data received directly from OECD Member countries belonging to the European Union. It should be noted that due to the differing definitions of the data supplied to the OECD and EUROSTAT by the EU Member countries, the inclusion or exclusion of Intra-EU trade is not the sole cause of differences between the two series.

➤ *Web Data Server*

32. A presentation will be made about the new statistics portal and the new site of OECD later on the agenda (4.i).