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STATISTICS DIRECTORATE

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STATUS OF OECD'S TRADE DATABASES
- Note by the Secretariat -

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Introduction

1. As for previous International Trade Statistics meetings, this paper presents recent developments for both trade databases International Trade by Commodity Statistics (ITCS) and Monthly Statistics of International Trade (MSIT).

2. Many of these new issues have been announced in the 3rd meeting on international trade statistics. Some of them will be detailed in other papers.

3. Over the past years, improvements have been carried out by the OECD concerning the dissemination of data and metadata. To keep on improving trade databases, more information on data processing is needed as well as updated metadata.

4. A strengthened cooperation is also necessary to ensure that data provided to the secretariat, particularly on the Internet, is comprehensive enough and compatible with automatic transfer procedures.

1. Annual data availability

a. Data collection

5. Thanks to the efforts made by countries, the OECD receives annual trade data quicker each year. Timely delivery to OECD becomes all the more important since delays in delivery also affect UNSD and WTO. The Secretariat would like to thank data providers for steps taken in maintaining or investigating systems for the automatic transfer or update information.

6. In 2002, 50% of annual trade data were available in June 2002 and 100% of data were available in January 2003. The average improvement for data reception is 2 weeks per country:

Figure 1: Comparison of data receipt between 2000 and 2001 data

	Data reception 2001/2000 (months)	2002												2003
		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
AUS	-6		2001											
AUT	+5									2001				
BEL	0			2001										
CAN	+2					2001								
CHE	+4						2001							
CZE	+7												2001	
DEU	+6										2001			
DNK	-2										2001			
ESP	+3									2001				
FIN	-5			2001										
FRA	0		2001											
GBR	-5				2001									
GRC	-5									2001				
HUN	+2					2001								
IRL	+1						2001							
ISL	-1						2001							
ITA	-1				2001									
JPN	0					2001								
KOR	-8			2001										
LUX	0									2001				
MEX	-2							2001						
NLD	-1								2001					
NOR	-8	2001												
NZL	+7												2001	
POL	-2							2001						
PRT	+2													2001
SVK	-3										2001			
SWE	-3								2001					
TUR	-1								2001					
USA	-4			2001										
CHN	+3								2001					
HKG	0			2001										
TWN								2001						
average gain	-0.47													

7. This improved situation allows a more timely publication schedule established with OECD's publication service and consequently reduces the time lag between data reception and data dissemination.

8. The first issue of the annual publication cycle is in July, i.e. six months after the reference year.

b. Content and publication of annual trade statistics

9. The size of the ITCS database is about 50 MB and contains trade statistics:

- for values and quantities;

- since 1961 when available, up to 2001;
- for 30 OECD member countries plus China, Hong-Kong and Chinese Taipei;
- provided in 4 commodity classifications (SITC Rev 2, SITC Rev 3, HS 88 and HS 96) and 2 industrial classifications (ISIC Rev 2 and ISIC Rev 3).

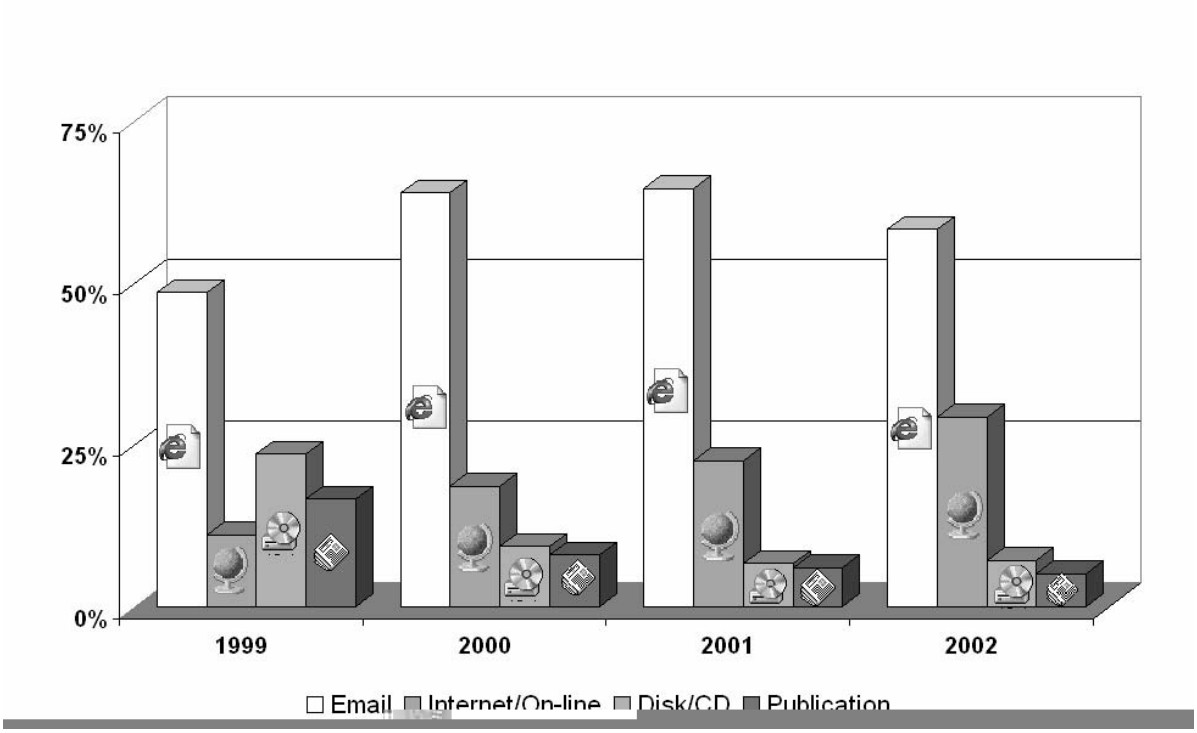
10. A paper version of ITCS is released every two or three months, starting in August. Electronic versions are now available as updates progress since data files are included immediately on SourceOCDE/OLIS when ready. All OECD member countries are also published on 4 CD ROMs containing each one 7 or 8 countries. CD ROMs are released every two months, starting in August.

2. Monthly data availability

a. Data collection: the case of MSIT

11. The main trend in data transmission already observed previously is confirmed in 2002 as shown in figure 2 where the various options are aggregated in four groups measured in number of files transmitted. An increasing amount of data is made available through electronic means, Email and the Internet, which is in general beneficial for the timeliness and the accuracy of data. When the shares of these electronic means are analyzed separately, the Internet is characterized by the quickest progression from 11% in 1999 to 29% in 2002 and apparently is gaining ground on Email in 2002. The third technological option, diskettes and CD-ROMs, is marked by a sharp drop from 24% to 6% over the first three years. Obviously, the decrease in diskette usage has not been compensated by an increase in CD-ROM usage, even if the later is responsible for a slight increase in 2002, probably linked to the spread of CD-ROM burners. After a strong decline from 17 % to 5 % over the whole period, the use of paper publications is fortunately rather limited but it has remained almost stable in the past two years.

Figure 2 : Data transmission, an increasing use of the Internet



consist in embedding in public institutional sites detailed and comprehensive files, possibly password protected or stored in dedicated addresses, with stable structures and agreed data formats, preferably XML (Extensible Markup Language), corresponding to the specific needs of international organisations collecting statistical data. The addition of publication schedules, rarely given until now, would also facilitate a timely management of these statistics.

18. In cases where the above recommendations cannot be applied, email transmission of custom-made files should be kept in use as the most efficient solution to provide trade data to the organisation.

b. Content and publication of monthly trade statistics

19. The MSIT database currently covers trade flows of OECD member countries analyzed from four different perspectives. The first one is a set of synthetic tables giving the most meaningful trade indicators and allowing direct cross-country analysis. The second perspective is made of a selection of volume and unit value indices by member country. The third one is a summary by commodity where data are provided in accordance to the sections of the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC). Then trade by partner country and country groups gives the most detailed perspective available in the database.

20. The MSIT database was initially developed for the needs of OECD economists and remains crucial for internal use at the organisation, for instance as an input to economic forecast models. The same data are used for the quarterly press release which highlights the latest trends in international trade of member countries. This press release is sent directly to a large number of journalists specialized in economics and is published on the OECD web site at the same time, during the fourth month following the quarter analyzed.

21. Being the most up-to-date source of data on international trade, the MSIT is increasingly used also by external users. Besides the traditional monthly paper publication giving the latest updates which is still quite popular, a monthly CD-ROM is issued in parallel to provide external users with as much data as the mother database does, including for instance every single partner country.

3. On-line access to trade data

22. Three different types of Internet access have been developed to meet the various needs of three groups of users. The first one is available on the statistics portal in the OECD site where the general public can get for free a limited selection of tables showing total trade flows for each member country and figures by SITC sections.

23. Also free, the second access through OLIS is dedicated to officials from Governments, delegations, International Organisations and offers them two options. The first one, Statistics Online, is a service providing interactive access to the latest statistics including International Trade data. Selected data can be extracted, displayed and downloaded in three formats (Beyond 20/20, Excel, Comma delimited ASCII). The second option gives access to all files issued in the latest copy of the MSIT CD-ROM, most of them in Beyond 20/20 format, which can be downloaded on the spot.

24. SourceOECD, the third access, is the OECD's online library of books, periodicals and statistics designed for institutions such as universities, consultancies, non-governmental and governmental organisations. This service, available on annual subscription, gives access to OECD databases the same way OLIS does with the same capability of doing specific data selections. From SourceOECD, it is also possible to download Postscript versions (PDF) of printed publications including all foreign trade ones.

4. General issues for discussion

25. Improvement in the quality of OECD statistics is one of the main objectives of the Statistics Strategy. The quality of OECD statistics depends on its internal processes but also on quality of statistics and methodological information received.

26. As mentioned in the OECD Statistical Programme of Work 2003, good statistics imply not only characteristics of good quality statistics but also the adoption of a set of modern methods and standards for metadata collection, storage and dissemination. Many improvements have already been done concerning international trade metadata dissemination on Internet and on electronic products (see point 4.c. of the agenda about this issue). To continue these improvements a commitment from data providers is necessary in order to disseminate relevant methodological information useful for a proper use of statistics.

27. On the other hand, additional efficiency gains could be made if more information about trade statistics were sent automatically to the OECD which still has to get back to too many countries with questions concerning unknown commodity codes, unknown country codes, etc.

28. For both reasons, the OECD encourages data providers to send all information available concerning methodology and data processing or to indicate web sites where this information may be found.

29. The increasing availability of electronic data reduces the scope for error and delay. Altogether, 88% of raw files used as an input to the MSIT in 2002 were transmitted electronically which compares to just 60% four years earlier. This impressive change is by itself a real success and shows the way for future improvements which depend largely on strengthening cooperation between statistical institutions and the OECD Statistics Directorate on the followings issues:

- Availability and comprehensiveness of relevant data (detailed series, historical data …);
- Advance schedules of data sets availability, essential to ensure timeliness (e.g. quarterly press release);
- Coordination for the implementation of agreed and stable Internet technical solutions to allow an increased development of automatic transfer procedures.

30. The Secretariat would be interested to have views expressed by delegates on these issues.

5. Current and future developments

a. Developments announced in 2001.

31. All announced developments presented at the last Trade Statistics Meeting in 2001 have been achieved:

- the quarterly trade press release covering the latest trends in OECD trade is now published on a regular basis since January 2002;
- trade data for Slovak Republic have been introduced in the annual database;
- all OECD data related to the euro area have been converted to euro;
- annual trade data are available in ISIC Rev 2 and ISIC Rev 3;
- for publishing considerations EU-15 EXTRA will not be published anymore in the paper version of ITCS. However, these data, as well as all trade data relating to zones published in the volume 5 of the paper version will be disseminated on electronic products. This project is ongoing;

- an improved version of the Web Data Server will be presented later on the agenda (see point 4.d. of the agenda about this issue).

b. Harmonised System 2002

32. In 2003, the Harmonised System 2002 will be implemented in ITCS. This ongoing project requires addition of all specific codes used by the OECD for Eurostat data, oil products as well as confidential codes. It is also necessary to convert HS 2002 data into the 6 others classifications already used in the ITCS database.

33. Some annual trade statistics have already been sent in the HS 2002 classification. The OECD will be able to process them next summer when HS 2002 will be completely implemented.

c. Co-operation with other international organisations and IT developments

34. The OECD participates to the Common Data Set (C.D.S.) project which provides the total merchandise exports and imports data. This project handled by W.T.O. will be presented in the point 5.d. of the agenda.

35. The Memorandum Of Understanding between UNSD and OECD has been extended to all OECD member countries except Mexico for which UNSD obtains data from UN ECLAC. More generally, the co-operation between both organisations is furthered through the project of a single trade database (see point 5.c. of the agenda about this issue).

36. At the same time, Oracle will no longer support Express software version 5.0.3 used in OECD trade databases as of July 2004. All Oracle Express applications are reviewed to assess future options.

37. In that context, the OECD is actually working on producing a functional specification based on the current database. This “reverse engineer” work will describe in detail the validation rules of the input phase, data conversion, harmonisation and aggregation of the application. It will provide the basis for a joint set of specifications to be allocated as part of a shared development approach with UNSD.