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National Accounts and Economic Statistics - International Trade Statistics

Item 3b): Methodological issues

**7th OECD INTERNATIONAL TRADE STATISTICS EXPERTS MEETING ITS
and OECD-EUROSTAT MEETING OF EXPERTS IN TRADE-IN-SERVICES STATISTICS (TIS)**

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TRADE DATA ISSUES – AN UPDATE ON OECD MONTHLY AND ANNUAL TRADE DATABASES.

Introduction

This paper presents an overview of recent developments during the past year with respect to OECD merchandise trade statistics.

2006 is a transitional year for trade statistics at the OECD. The International Trade by Commodity Statistics (ITCS) and the Monthly Statistics of International Trade (MSIT) databases were previously managed in a common Oracle Express environment. Both databases have been migrated to an SQL-based data processing application. The ITCS database is now managed within the UNSD-OECD Joint Data Collection and Processing System and data for OECD countries is copied into the new OECD hosting environment OECD.Stat, while MSIT has been migrated to the OECD common hosting environment StatWorks and OECD.Stat.

Data quality enhancement was the main concern in these migration processes. Both databases benefited from a thorough quality review and additional capabilities of the two new processing systems. The improvement of quantity conversions methods in ITCS and the enhancement of the seasonal adjustment in MSIT are two examples of this. Despite these migrations and associated intensive efforts, timeliness remains a crucial issue for trade statistics. This is because of the truly tremendous demand from users for trade data as shown in document STD/NAES/TASS/ITS(2006)3. This measured demand is an obligation for us and for data providers to do their best in providing accurate and timely data.

1. Annual data

a) Timeliness

The increasing demand for up-to-date statistics pushes OECD to request data earlier every year. The target reception date of June was reached by 22 OECD countries for the reference year 2005.

Timeliness is therefore very similar with 2004 data collection when 21 countries had provided their date in June or before. The OECD would like to remind countries that provisional data should be provided as soon as they become available. Indeed, a first dataset of provisional data can easily be revised by the OECD when final data become available later in the year. The last datasets for the reference year 2005 are expected for September 2006. Hence, it can be said that detailed merchandise trade statistics for OECD countries are available at the latest around $t + 9$ months after the reference year. This is certainly an excellent result and the Secretariat wishes to thank countries for their sustained efforts and good will.

The detailed data collection dates since 2000 are provided below.

Table 1: ITCS data reception dates 2000-2005

Country Name	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Australia	30-Jul-2001	12-Feb-2002	21-Mar-2003	25-Mar-2004	1-Feb-2005	13-Apr-2006
Austria	23-Apr-2001	23-Aug-2002	12-Jun-2003	18-Jun-2004	26-Apr-2005	28-Feb-2006
Belgium	28-Mar-2001	23-Mar-2002	17-Feb-2003 Fin 17-Feb-2004	21-May-2004	24-Jun-2005	31-Mar-2006
Canada	21-May-2001	30-May-2002	8-Jul-2003	18-May-2004	16-Feb-2005	17-May-2006
Czech Rep	16-May-2001	28-May-2002	21-Nov-2003 Fin 19-Mar-2004	26-May-2004	17-Jun-2005	22-Jun-2006
Denmark	21-Mar-2001	4-Apr-2002	6-Mar-2003	Pre. 27-Jul-2004 Fin 22-Sep-2004	11-Aug-2005	14-Mar-2006
Finland	14-Aug-2001	1-Mar-2002	21-Mar-2003	Pre. 19-Mar-2004 Fin 28-May-2004	07-Mar-2005	06-Mar-2006
France	29-Mar-2001	20-Feb-2002	18-Jun-2003	22-Apr-2004	04-Mar-2005	27-Feb-2006
Germany	11-Apr-2001	29-Jul-2002	21-Mar-2003	HS 02-Mar-2004 SITC 19-Mar-2004	04-Mar-2005	14-Mar-2006
Greece	16-Feb-2002	3-Sep-2002	10-Feb-2004	22-Sept-2004	09-Jun-2005	14-Jun-2006
Hungary	27-Mar-2001	13-May-2002	25-Aug-2003	8-Jun-2004	22-Sep-2005	Exp. July
Iceland	9-Jul-2001	4-Apr-2002	3-Jun-2003	31-Mar-2004	04-Mar-2005	31-Mar-2006
Ireland	8-May-2001	13-Jun-2002	6-Aug-2003	15-Sept-2004	07-Jun-2005	13-June-2006
Italy	10-May-2001	25-Apr-2002	9-May-2003 Fin 7-Jan-2004	7-May-2004	01-Jun-2005	10-Apr-2006
Japan	9-May-2001	4-Apr-2002	8-Jul-2003	9-Jul-2004	11-Aug-2005	29-Jun-2006
Korea	30-Aug-2001	27-Mar-2002	24-Jan-2004	1-Oct-2004	21-Jun-2005	14-Apr-2006
Luxembourg	17-Aug-2001	3-Sep-2002	12-Sep-2003	12-Oct-2004	21-Jun-2005	30-Jun-2006
Mexico	26-Sep-2001	28-Jun-2002	29-Sep-2003	23-Sept-2004	15-Sep-2005	10-May-2006
Netherlands	18-Sep-2001	26-Aug-2002	16-Sep-2003	27-Sept-2004	28-Jul-2005	Reminder sent
New Zealand	7-Feb-2001	18-Jun-2002	25-Aug-2003	17-May-2004	12-May-2005	9-Mar-2006
Norway	26-Sep-2001	18-Jan-2002	25-Jun-2003	18-Jun-2004	17-Jan-2005	Technical problem
Poland	21-Sep-2001	15-Jul-2002	25-Apr-2003	22-Apr-2004	17-Jun-2005	03-Aug-2006
Portugal	20-Nov-2001	4-Feb-2003	6-Oct-2003	27-Oct-2004	12-Jul-2005	Reminder sent
Slovakia	N/A	N/A	8-Oct-2003	22-Apr-2004	22-Jul-2005	04-Aug-2006
Spain	13-Jul-2001	14-Oct-2002	3-Oct-2003	9-Nov-2004	17-Oct-2005	Reminder sent
Sweden	16-Mar-2001	22-Aug-2002	3-Apr-2003 Fin 6-Apr-2004	6-Apr-2004	01-Jul-2005	22-Jun-2006
Switzerland	21-Feb-2001	6-Jun-2002	21-Mar-2003	9-Feb-2004	04-Mar-2005	21-Apr-2006
Turkey	14-Jun-2001	10-Sep-2002	12-Jun-2003 Fin 31-Mar-2004	Pre. 30-Mar-2004 Fin 23-Jun-2004	17-Jun-2005	Reminder sent
United Kingdom	8-Feb-2001	22-Apr-2002	6-Mar-2003	Pre. 3-Aug-2004 Fin 8-Nov-2004	12-May-2005	31-Mar-2006
USA	19-Jul-2001	5-Mar-2002	6-Mar-2003	26-May-2004	07-Apr-2005	13-Mar-2006

In about a third of countries, further improvements in timeliness could be made while in others the situation remained broadly similar to last year or deteriorated. This can be seen as a sign that further improvements are in general unlikely to occur at a substantive scale. The system seems, therefore, to be fairly optimized.

b) Data reconciliation, data quality and metadata

The implementation of the new OECD-UNSD Joint Trade Data Collection and Processing System was the opportunity to improve data quality. It is for example now possible to process re-imports and re-exports and to process two quantity fields for quantities: net weight and supplementary quantity units. Details are provided in the paper “The new and operational UNSD-OECD Joint Trade Data Collection and Processing System – methodological issues” (STD/NAES/TASS/ITS(2006)5).

With the implementation of the UNSD-OECD joint system, harmonization of historical data slowed down in 2006. However, as announced at the last OECD trade expert meeting, historical series for United Kingdom have been revised back to 2000. Concerning New Zealand, the OECD is studying the possibility of using UNSD historical data in order to include re-exports before 2003.

As announced last year, trade metadata are now managed in the OECD general toolkit MetaStore.

2. Monthly data

a) Migration of the Monthly Statistics of International Trade (MSIT) database

As yearly data, MSIT data were previously processed and disseminated using the common Oracle Express Trade environment.

The MSIT database is not included in the UNSD/OECD joint system which only manages annual trade statistics. It, therefore, remains an “independent” OECD activity which follows the corporate logic. In order to reduce the number of tools used in statistical activities, and correspondingly reduce training and support requirements, it has been decided as a general rule to migrate production databases hosted in non-standard environments to the OECD common environment StatWorks.

StatWorks has been developed to provide a common hosting environment for production databases, based on the OECD standard database hosting platform, MS-SQL Server.

Functional requirements based on the previous processing rules have been implemented in StatWorks to compile monthly trade statistics: harmonization, index rebase calculation, aggregation, calculation of quarterly and yearly averages, conversion of national currencies into US dollars, seasonal adjustment, calculation of trade indices and so forth. In order to handle the different input data files formats, specific Excel macros have been developed to complete the StatWorks data capture system. Correspondence tables are necessary to manage non standard codes like partner country codes. Seasonal adjustment options have been reviewed to improve the data quality of adjusted series calculated using the X-12 ARIMA method.

b) Timeliness

Even more than for annual trade statistics, timeliness is a crucial issue for monthly data. In particular, data analysts from the OECD Economics Department need monthly data as early as possible. Similarly, many external subscribers, including news agencies and private data providers subscribe to the monthly releases of MSIT. The Quarterly Trade Press Release is another reason for up-to-date monthly data.

Monthly trade data are either provided to OECD by countries directly (data files attached to emails) or downloaded from databases accessible on Internet sites or copied from electronic and paper publications. In the framework of the OECD database migration to a new software environment, it is planned to develop-when-ever practical and feasible- a more standardized and automated data collection process in co-operation with NSOs in order to improve timeliness, accuracy and reliability. It is also planned to improve the coverage of volume indices which in some instances are not provided by some member countries.

Table 2: MSIT data availability 2006 and timeliness by MSIT parts

	Monthly data			
	Source	Monthly data by partner country	Trade data by SITC Sections	Indices
Australia	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
Austria	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes (delay)
Belgium	CB	Yes	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	Yes	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	NSO	No	No	No data
Hungary	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ireland	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes (delay)
Iceland	NSO	Yes	Yes	No data
Italy	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
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	Yes	Yes (delay)
Sweden	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
Turkey	NSO	Yes	Yes	Yes
United States	Census	Yes	Yes (delay)	Yes

Note: **Yes** = satisfactory, **Yes (delay)** = satisfactory on substance but delay in transmission, **No** = not satisfactory, **DA** = Direct Access through Internet or FTP site

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

c) Metadata

As for annual trade data, methodological information of the MSIT database has been transferred into MetaStore which is now the only application for metadata management and dissemination of trade statistics.

3. Conclusion

During the migrations in 2006 of trade statistics, the objective was to improve data and metadata quality.

In this respect, the data processing have been fully reviewed and enhanced whenever possible. A major achievement was the complete review of the OECD trade nomenclature now implemented in both annual and monthly trade databases. Metadata are a key issue of the OECD data quality program. As planned, all methodological information related to trade statistics has been integrated into the OECD common repository MetaStore.

As repeatedly stressed every year at trade experts meetings, data providers play a key role in data quality enhancement. Their continued co-operation is needed to sustain this successful effort.

Timeliness is a crucial issue. Even though it has been continuously improved in the past years, improvements could still be carried out for countries which cannot provide annual provisional data six month after the reference year.

- *Delegates of these countries are asked to indicate if they can provide provisional figures in 2007*

On its side, thanks to new data processing systems, the OECD should be able to further reduce the time lag between data collection and data dissemination.

Availability of detailed and up-to-date technical and methodological information could also be improved, especially for monthly trade statistics. In case of data file submission, it would be very helpful to be informed of any change in data file layouts. In case of direct download from Internet sites, any change of address should be provided.

- *Delegates are invited to indicate if in 2007 they could transmit data together with standard Metadata. OECD could assist in this respect with proposing standard file formats (e.g. SDMX)*