



STATISTICS DIRECTORATE

National Accounts and Economic Statistics - International Trade Statistics

**THE TASK FORCE ON INTERNATIONAL MERCHANDISE TRADE STATISTICS AND THE
COMMON DATA SET**

**6th OECD INTERNATIONAL TRADE STATISTICS EXPERT MEETING (ITS) & OECD-EUROSTAT
MEETING OF EXPERTS IN TRADE-IN-SERVICES STATISTICS (TIS)
Tour Europe, Salle des Nations, 12-15 September 2005**

This document has been prepared by Mr. Andreas Maurer, WTO, for information and discussion under point d. of item 5 of the draft agenda : Inter - Agency Co-operation and coordination

For further information, please contact :
andreas.maurer@wto.org
andreas.lindner@oecd.org

JT00188792

THE TASK FORCE ON INTERNATIONAL MERCHANDISE TRADE STATISTICS AND THE COMMON DATA SET

Why an inter-agency Common Data Set?

International agencies compile and publish merchandise trade statistics often with different timeframes or from different national sources with varying revision schedules or estimation and adjustment methods. They also may apply different exchange rates to convert national currencies to dollar values. All these elements often result in users facing different figures for the same time-series of individual countries and ensuing aggregates.

To address this problem and also contribute to the ongoing process of harmonization of data between different international agencies, the Task Force on International Merchandise Trade Statistics endorsed the idea of producing, maintaining and disseminating a common data set on total merchandise exports and imports by country.

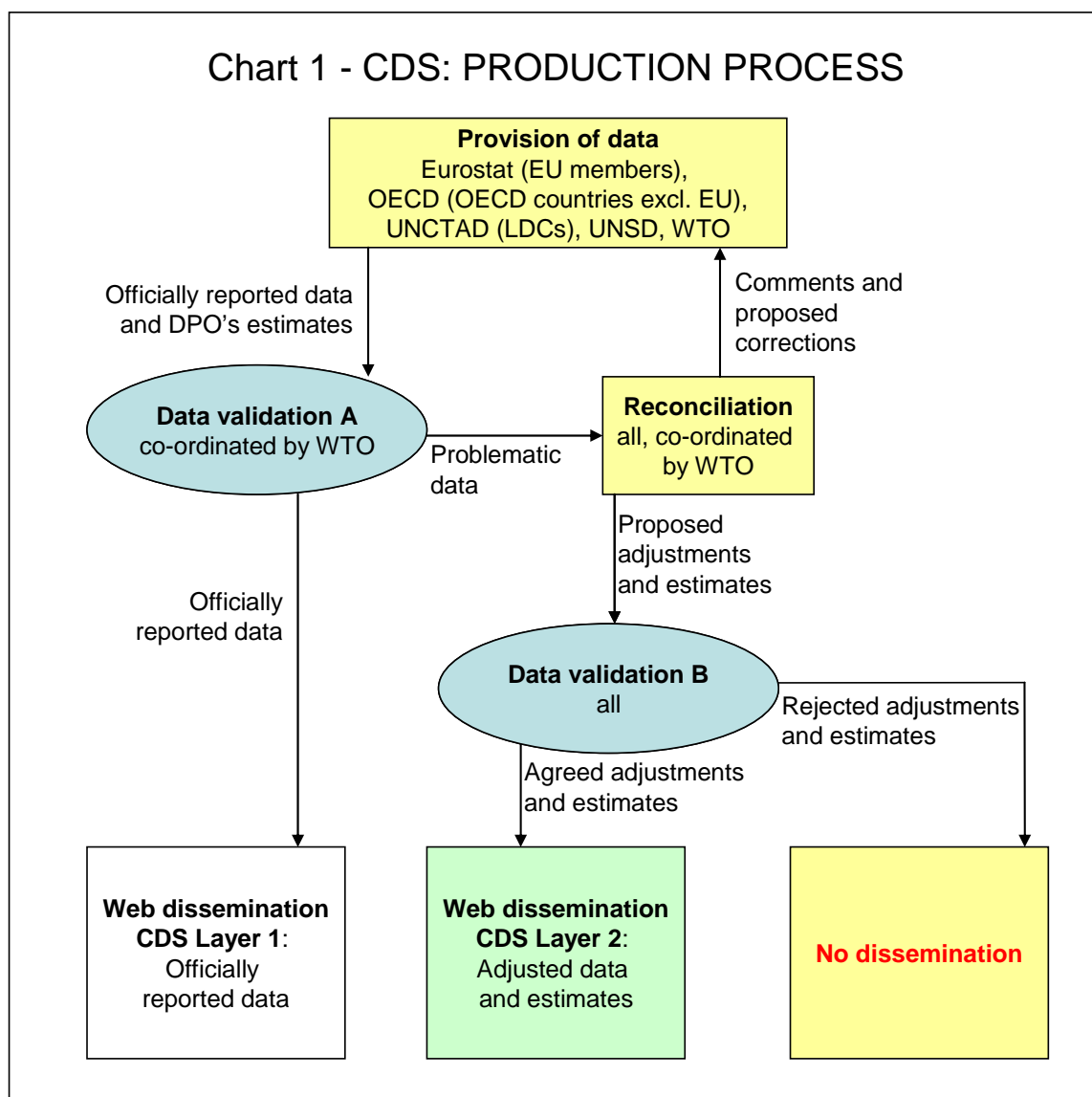
The principal objectives

- Significant improvement in the coverage, consistency, quality and timeliness of aggregate merchandise trade statistics.
- National statistical offices have easy access to their own and other countries' data and metadata in a standardized, easily comparable format; and to estimates made by international organizations when countries do not report, or report with a long delay.
- Analysts, policy makers and other users are able to easily access analytically valuable data.
- Participating international agencies maximize the use of scarce human resources through work sharing while developing an extremely useful collaboration and co-operation at the working level.

How does it work?

The participating agencies, that is, Eurostat, OECD, UNSD, UNCTAD and WTO beforehand agreed on the scope of the data set and on the responsibility for data provision for individual countries. The countries were distributed among the various data providers according to their memberships and specialization. For example, Eurostat provides data for its 25 members, the OECD for its member countries that are not part of the European Union, UNCTAD supplies data for the LDCs and the remainder of the countries has been split between UNSD and WTO with the WTO estimating data of countries for which no official source is available.

After defining data ownership, the international agencies engaged in a time-consuming reconciliation exercise which resulted in the current Common data Set. The different steps of the exercise are described in chart 1 below:



Where do we stand?

While the reconciliation exercise will be a continued effort, the Task Force decided that the data set could now be provided online through its forthcoming website. An important feature of the Common Data Set is that original country data should concord with international concepts and definitions. For that purpose, the Task Force agreed to present the data set according to three different layers, for example, officially reported data, adjusted data or estimated data. The users can then choose the data level according to their requirements.

This presentation is currently being prepared. It is planned to finalise the online presentation and the newly forthcoming Task Force website towards the end of 2005 in time for the Statistical Commission 2006.