



STATISTICS DIRECTORATE

National Accounts and Economic Statistics - International Trade Statistics

STATISTICS AT THE OECD

UPDATE ON THE STATISTICAL WORK PROGRAMME, PRIORITIES AND THE NEW
STRUCTURE OF THE STATISTICS DIRECTORATE

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STATISTICS AT THE OECD

UPDATE ON THE STATISTICAL WORK PROGRAMME, PRIORITIES AND THE NEW STRUCTURE OF THE STATISTICS DIRECTORATE

Introduction

This note is intended to brief and update delegates on developments at OECD which have taken place since the last Trade Expert meeting which was held in December 2001. At that 3rd meeting, the Secretariat presented the new Strategy for OECD statistics¹. It highlighted the decentralised nature of statistical work at the OECD and the need for more coordination and organisational reform in statistics.

It was recognized that

- the accountability of the OECD is largely based on the quality of its statistics and that, as in other activities, the quality of a product depends on the investments made to improve the processes used to satisfy the user's needs;
- the expression "good statistics" implies not only the usual characters of "good quality" statistics (coverage, timeliness, comparability, accuracy, etc.), but also the adoption of a set of new techniques and standards for the data and metadata collection, storage and dissemination;
- the OECD has to develop a statistical "corporate strategy" for statistics;
- statistics is clearly a multidimensional and cross-cutting activity, which must be managed and organised following an approach based on a modern "statistical information system";
- and that the new strategy must be supported by a medium-term investment of resources.

In response to this challenge, four main medium-term objectives of the new OECD statistical strategy were identified, namely to:

- improve the quality of OECD statistics;
- increase the efficiency of OECD statistical activities;
- develop the competencies of OECD statistical staff;
- enhance the role of the OECD in the international statistical network.

As can be seen from what follows, much progress has been achieved since 2001 in responding to the above-mentioned challenges.

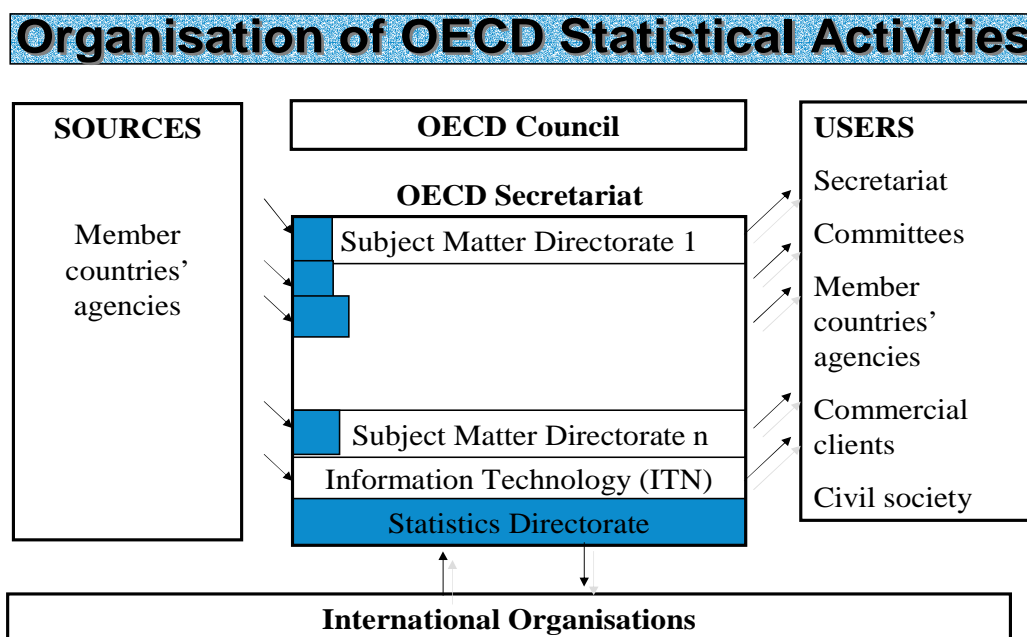
¹ A New Strategy for OECD Statistics, paper STD/NAES/ITS(2001), presented by E. Giovannini, Director of the Statistics Directorate and Chief Statistician of OECD.

I. Key results of the new strategy

1.1 Statistics are now a recognized core activity of OECD

As illustrated in the diagram below, since statistics are decentralised at OECD, the Statistics Directorate has a particularly important mandate of coordination with member countries, within OECD and with respect to the development of international standards and classifications systems , the supply of relevant and timely statistics and related information.

Figure 1: The decentralised organisation of statistics at OECD



The diagram above illustrates the central role of the Statistics Directorate in ensuring

- sound statistical input into the analytical work of the Organisation;
- internationally comparable data;
- co-operation in the development of international statistical standards
- to support the credibility and image of the OECD through high quality statistics.

1.2 An increased “political dimension” of OECD statistics

a) Vis-à-vis outside

A major achievement in 2002 was to improve the co-operation with national and international statistical organisations. To help in the formulation of a sound policy

- a Statistical Advisory Group has been created to help in steering into the right direction;

- A High Level Group on Statistics, meeting once a year, has been created to discuss statistical priorities for OECD;
- Bilateral contacts with NSOs have been reinforced and extended.
- Co-operative agreements with International Agencies and also in particular Eurostat allow a better “burden sharing” of work and allow OECD to concentrate more on Non-European countries.

b) *Vis-à-vis OECD decision makers*

A pro-active policy has been put into place to inform OECD committees about statistical activities by means of presentations;

More frequent contacts with national delegations at OECD than in the past and best use of new communication tools.

c) *Mobilisation of resources for OECD statistics*

Through the launching of several research projects which have aroused interest in member countries, additional resources could be obtained from countries to help advancing the research. Similarly, a program of secondments has been created.

1.3 *More and better communication and dissemination*

Significant progress has been achieved in this area.

A **Statistical Portal** of OECD provides a one-stop access for statistical data and documents organised by themes and not OECDs structure (as in the past). A multitude of tables, databases and methodological papers can be accessed directly. Free access is also now available for basic statistics.

- The Statistical Portal is the most frequently accessed page of the OECD Web site.

Monthly and quarterly **Press Releases** on key indicators. A quarterly Press Release is issued since late 2001.

A **Statistical Newsletter** (about 7-8 issues per year), highlighting in a condensed form new statistical projects, as well as information about OECD statistical products and activities.

- Over 3500 subscribers and also available on the Web. Positive feedback from users.

A **Statistics Brief**, at about quarterly intervals, addressing statistical measurement issues or important statistical results achieved by the OECD.

- Over 5000 copies disseminated and also available on the Web.

1.4 *Improved internal co-ordination*

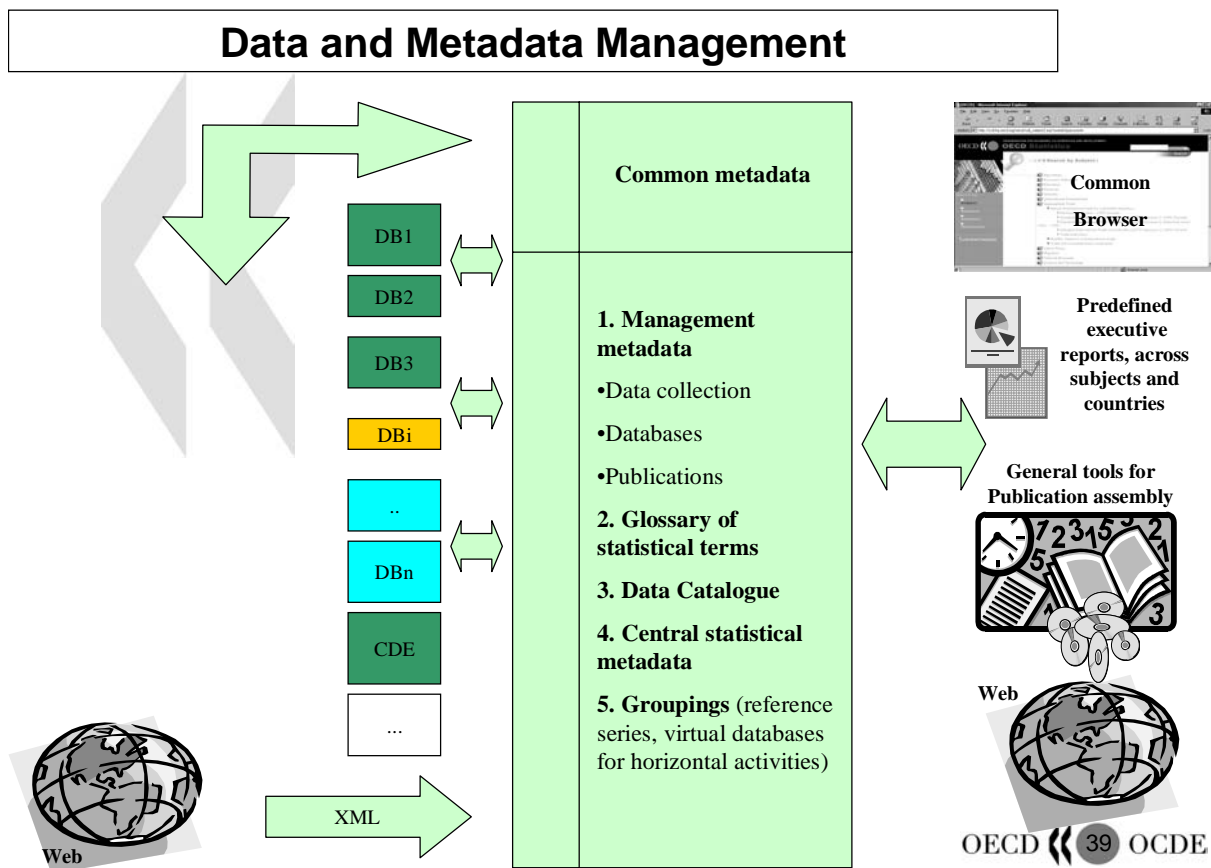
For the first time, a complete and coherently structured “OECD Statistical Work Programme (OSWP)” has been developed which is available online and a streamlined version is also available for external users. This database is part of OECDs statistical information system and comprises about 90 activities. It greatly facilitates access to output of statistical work and helps national statistical offices to have a comprehensive overview of OECD s statistical activities.

Another key achievement is the creation of an OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms , which is accessible through the Intranet and contains over 3500 target definitions of the main variables collected by OECD as well as key terminology and concepts used in OECD publications. It draws extensively on international statistical guidelines prepared by several International Organisations and helps to improve the interpretability and comparability of OECD statistics.

Another milestone in enhancing the efficiency of data collection and management has been the development of a Common Browser to allow easy navigation across databases. Also user guidance is provided through the identification of Reference Series.

A medium –term goal pursued is the development of a new statistical information system, that is a structure composed of sub-systems within one common framework where data is collected, processed, stored, retrieved, analysed and disseminated. In such a system, all data are stored together with their metadata in a data warehouse or networked data warehouses. While “individual” processing remains, inputs and outputs form part of such a corporate data warehouse (se Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: Data and Metadata Management



Another key element of the new strategy is the elaboration of a corporate quality framework which is based upon

A definition of what is understood by “quality” and a description of components

A definition of internal quality guidelines covering all phases of the statistical production process

A procedure for evaluating the quality of statistical processes and outputs

A procedure for assuring the quality of new statistical collections

II. Statistical priority areas

In considering both the views expressed by member countries and internal users with regard to priorities, a number of statistical areas will need particular or increased attention² :

- national accounts measurement issues, with a particular view to “new economy related issues”, which affect mainly the international comparability of growth rates in real GDP, productivity, etc;
- measurement issues in the services sector (production/output, prices, international trade, etc.);
- short-term economic statistics, with a particular attention to the improvement of international comparability/transparency, timeliness and coverage of new areas;
- purchasing power parities, looking for a substantive improvement in the quality of data;
- financial accounts issues, in order to identify better linkages between the real and the financial sectors of the economy;
- improvement of the quality of information in the area of business statistics, integrating better sources available for interpreting the role of specific sectors and of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the countries’ economic performance;
- cooperation with Non-members in emerging areas, both from a technical point of view and from a “statistical policy” point of view. Particular attention has to be paid to helping “global players” in improving the quality of their statistics, which are of concern to all OECD countries;
- integration between economic, social and environmental dimensions of the development, developing integrated frameworks for evaluating sustainability issues;
- development of appropriate guidelines and recommendations for making more effective use of the Internet as a medium for the exchange of data and metadata.

III. The reorganization of the Statistics Directorate

To respond better to new challenges, the structure of the Statistics Directorate was modified. The new structure is given below in a condensed format, including (in bold italics) the responsibility for Expert Groups which meet at regular intervals and with whom statistical research work is carried out.

- **Short-Term Economic Statistics Division (former Main Economic Indicators Division)**, dealing with financial, demand and output indicators, business tendency surveys, composite leading indicators and labour force statistics.
 - ***Short-Term Economic Statistics Expert Group***

² These were published in the February 2003 Issue No 13 of *The Statistics Newsletter* for the extended OECD Statistical Network

National Accounts and Structural Economic Statistics (former National Accounts Division), split in two Sections

- **National Accounts Section**, dealing with quarterly and annual national accounts, financial accounts and other financial statistics.
 - *National Accounts Expert Group*
 - *Financial Statistics Working Party*
- **International Trade and Structural Economic Statistics Section**, dealing with international trade in goods and services, structural business statistics, including statistics on small and medium enterprises, and economic accounts for agriculture. As of 2003, Balance of Payments statistics are part of the Section's work programme.
 - *Expert Group on International Trade in Goods*
 - *Expert Group on Trade in Services*
 - *Statistical Working Party of the Industry Committee*
 - *Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Agriculture*
- **Prices and Co-ordination of Outreach Activities (Former Division for Non-Member Countries)**, dealing with price statistics and purchasing power parities, measurement of the non-observed economy and the coordination of all statistical activities of OECD with non-member countries.
- **Statistical Information Management and Support Division (former Statistical Technology Section)**, dealing with all STD activities requiring particular IT skills, the coordination of the corporate data and metadata warehouse, support the implementation of the OECD Quality Framework, and data dissemination.

IV. Concluding remark

As can be seen from the above, much change has been introduced and significant progress has been achieved since the last Trade Expert meeting in November 2001. OECD Statistics further gain in recognition and also visibility through both the implementation of new processes, organizational change and new co-operative joint ventures with national and International Organisations.

This process is well underway and much of it is of a longer-term nature requiring continuous or increased attention over the forthcoming years. But it can be already said that this reform process is a success from which both national agencies and OECD already benefit through more efficiencies and better communication, more transparency and better use of scarce resources.