LATEST TRENDS IN CONSUMER PRICES

Consumer prices in the OECD area rose by 0.4 per cent in March, compared with 0.3 per cent in February (1). In Japan, prices rose by 0.5 per cent following three consecutive months of decline, while in the United States seasonal factors appear to have contributed to the slight acceleration in prices from 0.4 per cent in February to 0.5 in March. Within the EC the rate of consumer-price inflation averaged 0.4 per cent, unchanged from the two preceding months. Taken over twelve months, the rate of inflation for the OECD area as a whole rose from 3.3 per cent in February to 3.5 per cent in March; it remained clearly higher in the EC (4.8 per cent) than in North America and Japan (3.1 and 2.0 per cent respectively).

Consumer prices excluding food and energy, an indicator of "underlying" inflation, edged up to 0.5 per cent in March from 0.4 per cent in February (2). In Japan, this indicator rose by 0.6 per cent after having remained stable in February, while in both North America and the EC the rate of increase was unchanged at 0.5 per cent. Measured over twelve months, underlying OECD inflation edged up from 3.8 per cent in February to 3.9 per cent in March. It still remains, however, almost 1 percentage point lower than its rate in March 1991.

(1) Excluding Turkey, a high-inflation country. Including Turkey, the increase amounted to 0.4 per cent during March and to 4.6 per cent taken over twelve months.

(2) Excluding Greece, Iceland, Portugal, Sweden and Turkey, for which data are not available.