STATISTICS DIRECTORATE

Working Party on International Trade in Goods and Trade in Services Statistics

FUTURE STRATEGY REGARDING ANNUAL AND MONTHLY MERCHANDISE TRADE DATA AT THE OECD STATISTICS DIRECTORATE (STD)

To be held on 22-24 October 2012
OECD Headquarters

This document for item 2 of the agenda provides, for consideration and discussion, a future strategy for OECD merchandise trade statistics data collection.

Contact person: Bettina WISTROM, e-mail: bettina.wistrom@oecd.org
FUTURE STRATEGY REGARDING ANNUAL AND MONTHLY MERCHANDISE TRADE DATA AT THE OECD STATISTICS DIRECTORATE (STD)

1. OECD and UNSD have a long history of cooperation in the collection and processing of annual merchandise trade data, as underlined by the adoption of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in January 2001.

2. This note sets out the changes in the cooperation strategy between UNSD and OECD for the collection of annual and monthly trade statistics given some changes in the strategy at the OECD Statistics Directorate.

The case of annual data

3. Since the early nineties, OECD and UNSD have been cooperating closely on the collection and processing of annual international trade statistics with the aim to reduce response burden and minimise the differences in the trade statistics as disseminated through the respective databases, namely International Trade by Commodity Statistics (ITCS) and UN COMTRADE.

4. OECD now takes a further strategic step to increase efficiency and avoid duplication of work between the two organisations in that OECD will no longer process detailed Trade data by HS 6 and detailed partners. Whereas the original data will be available to both organizations in a joint folder (i.e. an FTP site), the OECD Statistics Directorate will import the processed data directly (i.e. synchronise) from the UNSD database via a SDMX. OECD will then continue to present timely and quality annual trade statistics sourced from the UNSD, and use the resources that were involved in the (duplicated) processing towards the production of other trade related indicators such as UVI, special aggregations etc, as well as quality assuring and providing feedback on the data processed by UNSD. A new MoU will be developed between the organisations to reflect these changes and the roles and responsibilities each organisation will play in ensuring that the package of trade statistics and indicators produced by the two organisations continues to be of high-quality (see also the comments made in the UNSD Report on this issue).

Consequently OECD will no longer send its annual data request (end 2012 for the collection of 2012 annual data).
The case of monthly data

5. Monthly trade have been collected and processed at the OECD from 1960: 3 different sets of data are collected at the monthly level.
   - Monthly trade by SITC sections covers data starting in 1955 for some OECD member countries;
   - Trade flows of OECD countries by partner starting in January 1960 for early members;
   - Volume, price and unit value indices by SITC section or nearest product category. (There are important variations across countries in the type of indices and in the product categories provided).

6. UNSD has now begun to collect, process and disseminate detailed monthly trade data. Monthly data have actually already been collected for two years by UNSD and can be accessed in the UN Monthly Comtrade database (see http://comtrade.un.org/monthly/Public/ReleaseInfo.aspx). In the context of the upgrade of the UN COMTRADE database system, monthly data will be added as well as the new fields as recommended by IMTS 2010.

7. In the light of these recent developments by the UNSD, and following the logic used for the annual processing, the OECD is now considering envisaging to also streamlining its monthly trade data collection with UNSD. One issue this raises is the conversion of memorandum items across classifications, which is currently being discussed across international organisations.

8. It should be noted that the OECD Monthly merchandise trade data shown by SITC section (10 main categories), as they are collected directly from countries, are not affected by the conversion of memo items issue, which is the case for data at the annual level (both in OECD and UN Comtrade database).

9. At OECD, within ITCS, conversion from HS 1988 to ISIC rev 3 is already being performed for annual data (except memorandum/confidential items which need currently to be fixed by OECD internal users) and could possibly also be done at monthly level, as user demand seem to favour this type of information rather than data by SITC.

Outstanding issues

10. Users have signalled that some of the countries for which the data have been synchronised show a loss of recorded entries. OECD is currently investigating the issue and some evidence points to differences in the partner country detail availability which could explain these differences.

11. It's important to note that the decision to have single processing of data by one institution does not mean that the importance that the OECD attaches to these statistics has diminished. This is far from the case. The decision to adopt this ‘single processing’ system is to capitalise on efficiencies and to ensure that our collective resources are better utilised and are better able to provide new and better quality indicators. In this sense the OECD will continue to play an important role in shaping the debate on trade statistics and ensuring coherence and comparability in international trade statistics, for example on assessing the quality and coverage of trade statistics for countries acceding to the OECD.