

## FOREWORD

The role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in economic growth and social change has received considerable attention in recent years, particularly in the debate on the “new economy”. The production, diffusion and use of ICT vary considerably between and within countries, although they continue to spread and their economic importance has grown over the 1990s. To focus the policy debate, especially in light of the recent “exuberance” and subsequent crash in the market value of “dot.com” firms, reliable and comprehensive indicators are needed to track developments in new information technologies and understand their impact on our economies and societies.

As ICT has only been recognised as a major source of economic and social change in recent years, official statistics on ICT are still under development. Over the past years, however, much progress has been made in developing internationally comparable ICT statistics. International organisations, such as the OECD and Eurostat, together with statistical offices in OECD member countries, have worked together to develop common definitions, common methods and common surveys of ICT. Over a very short time span, national statistical offices have made great strides towards responding to the challenge and providing high-quality, timely ICT statistics.

*Measuring the Information Economy 2002* ([www.oecd.org/sti/measuring-infoeconomy](http://www.oecd.org/sti/measuring-infoeconomy)) relies on these official sources and builds mainly on the work of the OECD Working Party on Indicators for the Information Society (WPIIS). Chapter 1 describes the resources devoted to new information technologies, in terms of consumption, investment, innovative efforts or human resources. Chapter 2 looks at the size, growth and contribution of the ICT sector, as defined by the OECD, to economic activity. Chapter 3 presents the latest international comparisons, based on official surveys of ICT diffusion in households, among individuals and in businesses recently developed by national statistical offices. Only a few years ago, internationally comparable official statistics measuring the level, growth and composition of electronic commerce transactions were not available. However, Chapter 4 indicates some interesting patterns relating to the volume and nature of e-commerce transactions, based on OECD definitions and guidelines for measurement in this area. By analysing the data currently available, this report highlights the areas in which much progress has been made in recent years. It also shows, however, that ICT statistics are not yet well developed in areas such as ICT use by governments and in schools (Chapter 5).

*Measuring the Information Economy 2002* offers new or improved measures for international comparisons. Methodological boxes discuss issues of measurement and international comparability and the annexes include the OECD definitions and guidelines behind the development of the indicators. Owing to the novelty of some of the databases and indicators, country comparisons should be interpreted with caution when absolute differences are small. In some cases, data provided by member countries have been combined with different data sources to estimate ICT indicators. For this reason, the statistics presented here may differ from figures contained in national reports and in previous OECD publications.

*Measuring the Information Economy 2002* is also available on line and provides easy access to individual sections, an elaborate data and metadata appendix and links to the databases used. The electronic version also gives users “clickable” access to the Excel spreadsheets containing the data used in charts and figures (see [www.oecd.org/sti/measuring-infoeconomy](http://www.oecd.org/sti/measuring-infoeconomy)).

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