

International Trade statistics for the Euro area countries

The November 2005 Main Economic Indicators (MEI) publication sees a change in the source of international trade data for the twelve European Monetary Union (EMU) countries. Previously, this data was sourced directly from each country's official statistical agency. However, from now on, all international trade data for EMU countries will be obtained from the Statistical Office of the European Commission (Eurostat).

As daily demand for statistical data increases from users such as academics, journalists, students, government agencies, other researchers and even ordinary citizens, all users wish to obtain the most up-to-date data of the highest quality that is internationally comparable. The OECD in facing this strong demand is always looking at ways to increase the efficiency of its processes and the quality of the data it provides, closer co-operation with other international organisations is a way to meet these demands.

Over the last few years, the OECD has been very active in a number of initiatives aimed at improving the functioning of the international statistical system and the co-ordination of the statistical work of international organisations. Especially important has been co-operation with Eurostat due to its increasing role in the European Union and its close relationships with all EU national statistical offices. The aim of the international trade statistics initiative is to improve efficiency, present more harmonised international trade data, improve statistical transparency through the presentation of better metadata and most importantly avoid duplication of work and minimise the reporting burden on Member countries.

As a result of this initiative, from the November 2005 issue of the monthly MEI, the OECD will obtain raw and seasonally adjusted international trade statistics for all Euro area countries from Eurostat in lieu of their direct collection from national sources. It should be noted that for the last few months Eurostat has already been the source of international trade data for France, Belgium, and Greece. For France and Greece international trade data are no longer available from the national source, therefore Eurostat is the only available source.

In some cases international trade data published by Eurostat differ from the data published by Member states – which previously appeared in MEI. The main reasons for these differences are:

- » different territorial coverage for certain countries;
- » different treatment of goods in transit;
- » certain Member countries using a general trade system for their national series, but providing data on a specific trade basis to Eurostat; and,
- » certain Member countries providing export data to Eurostat on a country of consignment basis while they use a country of origin basis as the criterion for their national statistics.

An initial quantitative analysis of the differences between what Member states previously forwarded to the OECD and what will now be sourced from Eurostat shows that the differences outlined above are most evident when comparing the level of both imports and exports. The difference in level is quite noticeable for some countries (e.g. around 10%), but for other countries the data are the same or the differences very small. However, even where differences in level are noticeable, the difference in growth rates for the time series from the two sources are small and thus should not affect analytical uses of this data. Further information on this analysis can be obtained from the OECD (email: [Milovan Stojanovic – \[Milovan.stojanovic@oecd.org\]\(mailto:Milovan.stojanovic@oecd.org\)](mailto:Milovan.stojanovic@oecd.org)).

The seasonally adjusted series are calculated by Eurostat using TRAMOSEATS software. A two-step process is used whereby raw data are first adjusted by the number of working days on the basis of each country national calendar, and then seasonally adjusted using a common methodology.

The next edition of the OECD Statistics Newsletter will include a more detailed report on the extent of the changes that have been made. For further information about this subject please contact: Milovan Stojanovic.