

ISSUES RELATED TO THE WORK OF THE TASK FORCES AND
INTER-SECRETARIAT WORKING GROUPS

Activities of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Finance Statistics
Prepared by the Statistics Department, International Monetary Fund

1. The Inter-Agency Task Force on Finance Statistics (TFFS), which was set up in 1992, was reconvened in 1998 to co-ordinate work to improve the methodological soundness, transparency, timeliness, and availability of data on external debt and international reserves.¹
2. The need for comprehensive, comparable, and reliable information on external debt to inform policy makers, financial markets, and other users of statistics has long been recognized. This need was again reinforced by the international financial crises in the 1990s.
3. In 1998, the TFFS launched two important initiatives to improve access to and understanding of data on external debt. First, beginning in March 1999 a new series of quarterly releases of statistics on external debt for 176 developing and transition countries were jointly disseminated by the BIS, the IMF, the OECD, and the World Bank. These statistics—Joint BIS-IMF-OECD-World Bank Statistics on External Debt—brought together for the first time the best and most timely internationally comparative data available on components of external debt from creditor and market sources.² Supplementary data are shown on international reserves.
4. Second, to aid the task of improving national-source data, the TFFS began work on *External Debt Statistics: Guide for Compilers and Users (Guide)*. The *Guide*, which updates a 1988 inter-agency publication,³ provides guidance on the concepts, definitions, and classifications of external debt data, the sources and techniques for compiling these data, and the analytical uses of these data. The *Guide* informs readers on the work of international agencies in this field. It also aids countries in their preparations to meet the data dissemination requirements of the IMF's data standards initiatives—Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) and the General Data Dissemination System. The *Guide* is intended to be of use to both compilers and users of external debt statistics.

¹ The Task Force is chaired by the IMF and its recent work has involved representatives from the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), Commonwealth Secretariat, European Central Bank, Eurostat, IMF, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Paris Club Secretariat, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and the World Bank.

² It should be noted that these data do not provide a completely comprehensive and consistent measure of a country's total external debt.

³ *External Debt: Definition, Statistical Coverage and Methodology* (Paris, 1988).

5. The conceptual framework used in the *Guide* is derived from the *System of National Accounts 1993 (1993 SNA)* and the fifth edition of the IMF's *Balance of Payments Manual (BPM5)*, also issued in 1993. The gross external debt position is presented in two types of tables: one focuses on all resident institutional sectors, as presented in the international investment position (IIP) in *BPM5*; the other focuses on the role of the public sector. The *Guide* goes beyond *1993 SNA* and *BPM5* frameworks in specifying the concepts for the measurement, and in providing tables for the presentation, of analytical external debt data series, including series on a remaining maturity basis, by currency of denomination, and in the form of a debt-service payment schedule.

6. The appendices in the *Guide* provide glossaries of terms and of financial instruments, and cover the relationship between the IIP, the balance of payments transactions, and the national accounts, among others.

7. In November 2001, the TFFS completed its work on the *Guide* and in December, a final draft in English was posted on the IMF's external website at: <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sta/ed/guide.htm>. The IMF is editing the *Guide* and expects to publish it towards the end of 2002. Concurrently, it is being translated into Arabic, French, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese.

8. In conjunction with the work on the *Guide*, and with funding from the government of Japan (under the Administered Account for Selected Fund Activities) and the assistance of the other agencies represented on the TFFS, the IMF organized a series of regional seminars to raise awareness of the data dissemination requirements for external debt data under the IMF's data standards initiatives and to discuss various initiatives for improving the quality of national external debt data. In February 2002, the last of seven regional seminars to introduce the new *Guide* was completed (see Table 1).

Table 1. Regional Seminars on External Debt Statistics

Venue	Dates	No. of participants
Singapore (IMF-Singapore Regional Training Institute)	March 21–24, 2000	29
Austria (Joint Vienna Institute)	August 28–September 1, 2000	27
Mexico (Center for Latin American Monetary Studies)	March 5–9, 2001	42
South Africa (South African Reserve Bank)	May 7–11, 2001	39
USA (International Monetary Fund)	May 24, 2001	12
Germany (European Central Bank)	May 31–June 1, 2001	31
Bahrain (Bahrain Monetary Agency)	February 10–14, 2002	27

9. The target audience for the introductory seminars has been the managers and senior external debt compilers in the countries subscribing to the SDDS. There were more than 200 participants at these seminars, and those that participated in the early seminars provided comments on the early drafts of the *Guide*. The participants were predominantly from central banks and finance ministries/departments, but also from national statistical offices and national debt offices.

10. In May 2002, the first of a new series of IMF regional training seminars in external debt statistics was offered at the Joint Vienna Institute. In total, 30 external debt compilers from 21 countries in Eastern Europe and Asia attended the seminar. The two-week seminar—directed at mid-level compilers—covers more comprehensively the methodology set out in the *Guide* for compiling external debt statistics. A second seminar, to be conducted in French, is planned for October 2002 at the Joint Africa Institute. Next year, the seminars will be conducted at the Joint Regional Training Center for Latin America (in Brazil) and at the IMF-Singapore Regional Training Institute.

11. The Commonwealth Secretariat has conducted regional workshops to provide training in debt recording and management systems in which other TFFS members have participated. UNCTAD organized the Third Inter-regional Debt Management Conference in December 2001, in which TFFS members also participated. TFFS members regularly share training calendars so that training opportunities can be leveraged in a way that the agencies can reinforce the efforts of the others to improve external debt statistics.

12. In May 2002, there was a meeting of the TFFS in Washington, D.C., which addressed, inter alia, the issue of whether there was a need to continue the TFFS now that work on the *Debt Guide* had been completed. The following are among the main action points arising from the meeting of the TFFS:

- the TFFS will continue to serve as a forum for addressing issues pertaining to external debt statistics;
- one of the TFFS participating agencies will develop a centralized database on external debt statistics based on data compiled by countries, which will complement the Joint BIS-IMF-OECD-World Bank Statistics on External Debt;
- the TFFS will assist the IMF in developing, at the country level, improved data for vulnerability assessment. This initiative will identify, inter alia, repositories of information that could be used to make an assessment of data gaps across a broad range of countries;
- the TFFS will continue to develop the Joint BIS-IMF-OECD-World Bank Statistics on External Debt, with particular attention to data on short-term debt; and
- the TFFS will assist the IMF in the development of a Data Quality Assessment Framework for external debt statistics.

September 3, 2002

sa-02-11add1 September 5, 2002 (3:42 PM)