

COORDINATION OF DATA SETS DISSEMINATED BY DIFFERENT
ORGANIZATIONS COVERING THE SAME SUBJECT MATTER

Note by the United Nations Statistics Division

This document presents two examples where UNSD has made formal arrangements with partner agencies in order to avoid discrepancies in data dissemination in the fields of trade and energy statistics. These examples are presented to the Committee for information. The members of the Committee may want to discuss the extent to which similar arrangements are in place or would be useful and/or feasible in other statistical areas.

I. Trade statistics

Aggregate international merchandise trade statistics

1. *Arrangement between UNSD and the IMF.* In order to minimize discrepancies in disseminated aggregate trade statistics (total exports/imports), UNSD and the IMF agreed that the IMF collects aggregate trade data (expressed in national currency) in accordance with the UN Statistical Commission recommendations adopted for merchandise trade statistics and converts that data into US dollars using trade weighted exchange rates following the UNSD practice. Accordingly, UNSD stopped collection of aggregate trade data for the countries published by the IMF and focuses on collection of such data for the limited number of developing countries and areas not published by the IMF. Those data are made available to the IMF. Staff of both organizations maintain regular contacts to ensure implementation of the agreement and quality of the data. The arrangement resulted in dissemination of virtually identical aggregate merchandise trade data series by two organizations.

2. *Internet site with aggregate trade data.* The Task Force on International Merchandise Trade Statistics is developing a Common Data Set (CDS), which, eventually, will be put on Internet and will contain series of aggregate trade data (reported and estimates) supplied by the participating organizations. By now, input from data providers has resulted in a preliminary core data set. Reconciliation of the data to conform, to the extent possible, with the agreed concepts and definitions is progressing on an incremental basis. The Task Force members strive to improve data comparability, which could result in adjustments to country data, and to the inclusion of estimates in the CDS. The importance of accurate and transparent metadata is recognized. The Task Force agreed to update the data set twice a year (April and October). It is expected that construction of a prototype site will be completed by the end of 2003.

Detailed international merchandise trade statistics

3. *Arrangement between OECD and UNSD.* In accordance with the existing Memorandum of Understanding OECD and UNSD agreed on division/coordination of efforts in collection and dissemination of detailed (by commodity/partner) trade data to lessen the burden on countries and to ensure dissemination of the identical data. The arrangement is implemented for 22 countries. By the end of 2003 all OECD member countries will be covered by it. The current work is concentrated on extending the cooperation to data processing with creation of a common database in 2004 as the ultimate goal.

II. Energy statistics

The Joint Monthly Oil Data Initiative (JODI)

4. Six key international organisations engaged in oil statistics (APEC, EUROSTAT, IEA/OECD, OLADE, OPEC, and UNSD) held a meeting October 2000 to investigate the quality of oil data. The meeting discussed differences between definitions, units and methodologies used by the international organisations. Solutions were sought for better harmonisation of statistical systems, reporting and dissemination of oil statistics. The debate created a momentum for a joint effort to improve the availability and the reliability of oil data, as both producer and consumer countries recognised the need for more, and better, transparency in the oil market.

5. Each international organisation invited 3 to 4 of its Member Countries to a follow-up workshop on oil data transparency. The six organisations and twenty countries agreed to launch and participate in a six-month data reporting exercise with the objective to quantify and qualify the availability, and timeliness, of basic monthly oil data. A standard questionnaire was developed for the purposes of the joint data collection initiative where each international organisation took responsibility for the data collection from its member countries.

6. The results of the exercise were reviewed in November 2001. Various aspects of the implementation were discussed including issues of methodologies and units used, availability of data, confidentiality, and communication-related problems. Although the quality of the data largely varied from country to country, as of the end of October 2001, fifty-five countries provided data for the Joint Oil Data Initiative. The countries represented around 70 per cent of total world oil production and some 83 per cent of total world consumption. Moreover, for a number of countries, the exercise constituted an opportunity to strengthen their statistical system, in terms of coverage, completeness and timeliness. Likewise, the organizations profited from the momentum to strengthen statistical co-operation with their member countries and among themselves.

7. One of the most important decisions taken was the agreement to extend the exercise by 10 months and to report to the 8th International Energy Forum (September

2002) on the progress made since the call for more transparency at the 7th International Energy Forum in November 2000.

8. The initiative was introduced at the 8th International Energy Forum where a decision was made to turn the exercise into a regular data collection activity with the ultimate objective of the development of a World Database for the harmonized dissemination of monthly oil statistics with timely, harmonized key oil data on supply and demand for as many countries as possible. For that purpose the six organizations have developed a joint website on the Internet where they will make the data collected from their member countries available for each other as well as for the general public.

9. The initiative is a good example of the coordinated and harmonized development of the entire process of data collection, analysis and dissemination. The workload is shared among the six international organizations responsible for data collection and follow-up with their respective member countries. Data are collected through a standardised questionnaire. Validation and quality analysis is done according to agreed criteria. And finally, the validated data will be pooled into a world database and data will be made available according to agreed formats, at a joint web portal.