

ACC SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES
Thirty-third session
Madrid, 14-16 September 1999
Item 4 of the provisional agenda

SA/1999/5
21 July 1999

ISSUES RELATED TO THE WORK OF THE TASK FORCES
AND INTERSECRETARIAT WORKING GROUPS

Note by UNSD

As background information to this item, attached is an extract from the report of the Statistical Commission on its thirtieth session (New York, 1-5 March 1999) containing its conclusions on the work of the Task Forces and the Intersecretariat Working Group on Prices.

Chapter II

Economic statistics

A. National accounts

5. The Commission considered item 3 (a) of its agenda at its 490th and 491st meetings, on 1 March 1999. It had before it the following documents:

(a) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Task Force on National Accounts (E/CN.3/1999/2);

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on the milestone assessment of the implementation of the System of National Accounts, 1993, by member States (E/CN.3/1999/3);

(c) Draft classifications of expenditure according to purpose (PROV/ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/84);

(d) Minutes of the last two meetings (April and September 1998) of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA) (background documents).

6. At its 490th meeting, on 1 March, the representative of the World Bank, Convener of ISWGNA, made an introductory statement.

7. At the same meeting, a senior official of the United Nations Statistics Division also made an introductory statement.

8. Also at the same meeting, statements were made by the representatives of the United States of America, the Netherlands, Germany, Australia, Japan, the Russian Federation and Romania.

9. At the same meeting, statements were made by the observers for Canada, Hungary and Austria.

10. Also at the same meeting, statements were also made by the observers for the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat), the Conference of European Statisticians.

11. At the same meeting, statements were also made by the representatives of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

12. Also at the same meeting, the Director of the United Nations Statistics Division made a statement.

13. At its 491st meeting, on 1 March, the representatives of Pakistan, Australia, India and Côte d'Ivoire made statements.

14. At the same meeting, the observer for Canada made a statement.

15. Also at the same meeting, statements were also made by the observers for the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), ESCAP, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

(ESCWA) and ECLAC.

16. At the same meeting, statements were also made by the representatives of the Observatoire économique et statistiques d'Afrique subsaharienne (AFRISTAT) and the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific.

17. Also at the same meeting, the Director of the United Nations Statistics Division made a statement.

Action taken by the Commission

18. The Commission:

(a) Approved the proposal for an updating mechanism for the System of National Accounts, 1993 (1993 SNA), as described in the report of the Task Force on National Accounts, with one change: the period within which the 24 member countries of the Statistical Commission may approve an amendment of the type "interpretation" or "change" should be extended to 60 days. It was emphasized that all the steps of the amendment process, in particular those calling for review by all national statistical offices, should be strictly observed;

(b) Agreed in principle with the proposed amendment referring to the treatment of financial derivatives. It asked the Intersecretariat Working Group to consider specific comments made by member States, and to circulate the redrafted text to all national statistical offices and thereafter to the members of the Commission, in accordance with the agreed procedure as amended in paragraph 18 (a) above;

(c) Approved the publication of the draft classifications of expenditure according to purpose (PROV/ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/84). The Commission noted the offer made by the representative of Eurostat to cooperate in a pilot study on how to test the implementation of the classification of outlays of producers by purpose;

(d) Noted the proposals for further work in the following areas: gross domestic product volume measures, national accounts and employment, measurement of insurance output, financial intermediation services indirectly measured, asset transfer costs, government accounting, exhaustiveness/measurement of the non-observed economy and dissemination standards;

(e) Recalled that the purpose of the milestone assessment had been to create an instrument to detect progress and/or to identify difficulties encountered by countries or groups of countries in their implementation efforts, as well as to focus technical cooperation activities. Accordingly, the Commission asked the Secretariat to strengthen the analytical portion of future assessment papers, highlighting why progress has or has not been made within or between regions. Individual countries would not be identified in such reporting, which should describe the activities undertaken by the United Nations Statistics Division and the regional commissions as a result of the analysis of the data used to determine the milestones, and should be prepared in close cooperation with the regional commissions;

(f) The Commission asked ISWGNA to determine whether there is a match between its work programme and the needs of countries, particularly those at milestone level 0 or 1. In case of a mismatch, ISWGNA was asked to make the necessary adjustments and eliminate any existing gaps. Furthermore, such assessment should become a regular part of the milestone report in the future;

(g) The Commission welcomed the Statistics Netherlands initiative to host a workshop

on gross domestic product (GDP) volume and price measurement, in cooperation with the United Nations Statistics Division.

B. International trade statistics

19. The Commission considered item 3 (b) of its agenda at its 491st meeting, on 1 March 1999. It had before it the following documents:

(a) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Task Force on International Trade Statistics (E/CN.3/1999/4);

(b) Addendum: note by the Secretary-General on the follow-up to discussions and conclusions of the Task Force concerning the Commodity Trade Statistics Database and the Central Product Classification (E/CN.3/1999/4/Add.1).

20. At the 491st meeting, on 1 March, the observer for the World Trade Organization (WTO), Convener of the Task Force on International Trade Statistics, made an introductory statement.

21. At the same meeting, a senior official of the United Nations Statistics Division also made an introductory statement.

22. Also at the same meeting, statements were made by the representatives of Japan and Australia.

23. At the same meeting, statements were made by the observers for Canada and Nigeria.

Action taken by the Commission

24. The Commission:

(a) Agreed that the treatment of electronic commerce in international trade statistics should be clarified, particularly in terms of defining its coverage and methods of data collection; the Commission took note of the plan of the International Statistical Institute and the Singapore Department of Statistics to hold a meeting on the subject in December 1999;

(b) Endorsed the proposed work on the manual for international trade statistics, emphasized the importance of taking advantage of country experiences and requested the United Nations Statistics Division to give special attention in the manual to the measurement of adjustments to customs statistics for balance-of-payments purposes;

(c) Recognized that there would be a continuing need by users for international trade statistics analysed according to the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC);

(d) Considered that it was important to evaluate the usefulness and applicability of trade statistics according to Central Product Classification (CPC) aggregates for economic analysis, and welcomed the intention of the United Nations Statistics Division to produce a data set of merchandise trade statistics according to the Central Product Classification (goods part) on diskette as an input into reviewing and evaluating that Classification and its use;

(e) Reconfirmed its support for the work of the United Nations Statistics Division on producing the planned publication on the statistical territories of the world for use in international merchandise trade statistics;

(f) Agreed that in the short term, the United Nations Statistics Division should maintain the Commodity Trade Statistics Database as it currently exists but should develop, in consultation with users, a strategic plan for its rationalization, taking account of the continuing need for data according to SITC, as set out in paragraph 24 (c) above, and providing adequate lead time for users to adjust to the rationalization plan;

(g) Emphasized that the United Nations Statistics Division should continue its efforts to make its Commodity Trade Statistics Database comprehensive in country coverage, and encouraged countries to provide their detailed commodity-by-partner trade statistics to the Division for inclusion in the Database;

(h) Endorsed the efforts of the United Nations Statistics Division, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Eurostat to rationalize their data-collection, processing and storage systems to reduce reporting burdens on countries, reduce duplicate processing and increase the compatibility of their databases.

C. Service statistics

25. The Commission considered item 3 (c) of its agenda at its 491st meeting, on 1 March 1999. It had before it the note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services (E/CN.3/1999/5).

26. At the 491st meeting, on 1 March, the observer for OECD, Convener of the Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services, made an introductory statement.

Action taken by the Commission

27. The Commission took note of the completed activities and proposed schedule put forward by the Task Force for the completion of the draft manual on statistics of international trade in services.

D. Finance statistics

28. The Commission considered item 3 (d) of its agenda at its 491st meeting, on 1 March 1999. It had before it a note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Task Force on Finance Statistics (E/CN.3/1999/6).

29. At the 491st meeting, on 1 March, the representative of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Convener of the Task Force on Finance Statistics, made an introductory statement.

30. At the same meeting, statements were made by the representatives of the United States of America and Australia.

31. Also at the same meeting, statements were made by the observers for Canada and Nigeria.

Action taken by the Commission

32. The Commission recognized the concerns of countries about the complexities and high resource-intensiveness of measuring external debt, particularly for short-term liabilities of the corporate sector, and the need to compile and publish components of external debt based on creditor as well as debtor sources for improved data quality and accuracy. In this context, it also took note of ongoing efforts to compare alternative methods of measuring external debt and to enable the advantages and disadvantages of the available methods to be determined. The Commission noted the work of IMF in developing the *Manual on Monetary and Financial Statistics* (expected to be available in 1999) and the *Manual on Government Finance Statistics*, which is expected to be available in late 2000.

58. ..., the Commission:

(g) Noted the establishment of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Price Statistics (ISWGPS) with a mandate to prepare price index manuals. While priority is to be given to the updating of the consumer price index manual, the Commission welcomed the offer of IMF to advance the work on a producer price index manual. The need of an overall framework for price statistics was emphasized. The Commission suggested that the manuals focus on a description of best currently implementable practices and — where applicable — of the range of alternatives;

(h) The Commission urged ISWGPS to draw upon the expertise of the Ottawa Group on Price Indexes. In particular, ISWGPS was requested to communicate to the Ottawa Group its needs and to encourage the Group to make specific contributions to the manuals on leading edge thinking on theoretical and practical problems.