



United Nations
Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Statistics Division
Trade Statistics Branch
International Trade Statistics Section

INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW
UNSD ANNUAL TOTALS TABLE (ATT) FOR IMPORTS AND EXPORTS
(as of 24 August 2007)

1. Purpose

The UNSD Annual Totals Table (ATT) of the International Trade Statistics Section (ITSS) of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) provides “UNSD annual totals” of imports and exports for all countries, for the years 2000 to 2006, for which such data are available for publication.

The ATT addresses the issue that data users are often confronted with different totals provided by different sources. In general, it is not feasible for users to confirm the data with the responsible national organizations, and thus it is very difficult to decide which data to use.

One reason for the existence of multiple and different values for imports and exports is that different figures and datasets are produced on the national level for different purposes, often with different revision schedules. Also, the exchange rates used in the conversion of data from national currency to a common currency (like the US dollar) might cause differences.

Another purpose of the ATT is to eliminate, to the extent possible, differences in ITSS databases and publications and to show those differences otherwise.

The ATT is planned to be produced biannually. It is a snapshot at a certain point in time

2. Structure of the table

The ATT contains the following fields: Country(Area)_Name, Country_Code; Trade_Flow; Year; UNSD_Annual_Total(in_US_dollar); Source (“CT”=UN Comtrade; “TT”=UN TotalTrade); Additional_Explanation; UN_Comtrade_Total(CT)(in_US_dollar); UN_Totaltrade_Total(TT)(in_US_dollar); UN_Totaltrade_Status (“A”=Actual data; “E”=Estimated data).

3. Methodology

3.1 Data sources used

To decide which annual trade values should be given preference, UNSD/ITSS compares (1) the annual merchandise trade data, detailed by partner and commodity, that are available in its UN Comtrade database (<http://comtrade.un.org/db/>)¹, and which are obtained either directly from countries or via partner organizations like OECD and FAO, and (2) the data available in its UN TotalTrade database, containing monthly, quarterly and annual totals for imports and exports, which are mostly sourced on a monthly basis from the IMF’s International Financial Statistics (IFS, <http://www.imfstatistics.org/>), but also supplemented with data received directly from

¹ For this version of the ATT the internal version of the UN Comtrade database was used which also contains data which has not been published yet. There are a very few cases where these two databases currently show different values.

countries or taken from national publications. In addition, as part of the data collection process for the UN Comtrade database, countries have been requested to provide their official totals for the period 2000 to 2006.

3.2 General considerations

When comparing the data for one country we consider (1) the completeness and internal consistency and plausibility of the complete time series of imports and exports, (2) the date when the data was received, (3) differences in trade system and valuation and (4) any other information that might support our decision. We also review the currency conversion factors applied in UN Comtrade and UN Totaltrade.

Since the UN Comtrade totals are supported by detailed data, in general we consider the annual totals obtained from UN Comtrade as being of higher quality than data from other sources. Also data uploaded to UN Comtrade is systematically checked and verified in a very comprehensive and detailed way. Yet, usually we would give priority to the source reporting the highest value (see 3.3 Decision rules), since lower values may be due to under-coverage .

Whenever we consider it necessary we will provide additional information under “Additional_Explanation” but otherwise our decisions on the totals are based on the application of the above considerations and the decision rules below.

3.3 Decision rules

To guide in the selection of the appropriate “UNSD annual totals,” the following set of automated decision rules were implemented, which are applied unless there are other factors to be considered (see paragraph 3.2):

Case 1: When we compare totals from UN Comtrade with the actual data from UN Totaltrade, we in general adopt the higher value. Differences of up to 2 percent with respect to UN Comtrade are considered minor, and in such cases the value from UN Comtrade still is given preference. Differences above 2 percent require a special review.

Case 2: When we compare Totals from UN Comtrade with estimates from UN Totaltrade, we would adopt the value from UN Comtrade. Very high differences (above 10 percent) are reviewed.

Case 3: When there are data only from UN Totaltrade, we usually publish them if they are actual data, but would only publish estimates after reviewing them.

3.4 The ATT is a snapshot

The current ATT has been produced with information available as of **26 July 2007**. Although the different data sources that provide input for the production of the ATT are updated on a continuous basis, a new version of the ATT is produced only twice a year to incorporate all data revisions and updates that have been received during the interim period of time.

4. Disclaimer

The purpose of this table is not to identify the correct or final value for imports and exports of countries. Only the countries themselves can provide such information. This table only intends to provide users of international merchandise trade statistics with the “best” value for annual imports and exports based on the information available to UNSD at the particular point in time of the production of this table.