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STATISTICS DIVISION
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item 4(a) of the provisional agenda
(Database developments in organizations)

COMTRADE: status and technical issues

Report by UNSD

Status of the joint UNSD-OECD Comtrade processing system

1. A new UNSD-OECD Comtrade data processing system (CoprA) was implemented simultaneously at UNSD and OECD at the beginning of 2006. Overall the new processing system had a successful start and UNSD published all newly received data before the end of 2006. During 2007 the quality, efficiency and timeliness of data processing was further improved also due to various improvements and additions to the processing system (please see below for details).

2. UNSD cooperates with OECD in data collection with OECD collecting and forwarding to UNSD the national trade statistics of the 30 OECD countries. The implementation of the joint processing system is a huge step forward to further harmonize data published by UNSD and OECD, but continued actions in sharing and systematic comparison of the processing information are required. A visit of an OECD staff member to UNSD in January of 2008 was important to further align processing practices. Based on the experience since the start of the new processing system UNSD will continue to process and publish data for OECD countries independently.

3. Starting the first of January 2007, the 2007 edition of the Harmonized System came into effect and consequently many countries are now submitting their detailed data according to this new HS version. The UN Comtrade processing system has been updated to accommodate validation of HS-2007 codes and the processing of so far received HS 2007 data has been without any problems. Also data conversions to HS 2002 and SITC, Rev. 4 have been developed and implemented. The development and implementation of

HS 2007 to SITC, Rev. 3 data conversion is an important priority and should be completed shortly. Other data conversions are of lesser priority and will be added throughout the year.

4. New standard unit values for quantity checking and estimation for the reporting year 2007 have been generated and implemented for all HS versions (including HS 2007).

UN Comtrade data collection, publication and data availability

5. During 2007 UNSD further improved its efforts in data collection. A comprehensive follow-up system was implemented and countries were immediately contacted whenever required. Data quality and data availability increased significantly as result of these efforts. For 133 countries or areas detailed data for the reporting year 2006 was published by the end of 2007 compared with 120 countries or areas for the previous year (please see table below). The number of country years published for the first time reached 202 in 2007 compared with 159 for the year before. Overall, data availability in UN Comtrade in terms of number of available countries for the different reporting years has never been higher.

UN Comtrade publication statistics*

reporting year	Data availability			Newly (first time) published		Total published	
	by end of 2007	by end of 2006	by end of 2005	in 2007	in 2006	in 2007	in 2006
2000	169	164	163	5	1	22	12
2001	168	162	161	6	1	27	14
2002	166	160	154	6	6	31	18
2003	163	157	148	6	9	37	26
2004	160	144	122	16	22	50	42
2005	150	120		30	120	60	120
2006	133			133		133	
Sum	1109	907	748	202	159	360	232

*In terms of number of countries or areas.

6. The processing and publication of revised data are another important part of keeping the data on UN Comtrade up-to-date. Also, as indicated in last year's report to the task force UNSD engaged in a program of reprocessing data previously processed in the old mainframe application for the years 2000-2004 in order to improve the data quality and to generate the additional outputs of the new processing system such as quantity estimates and tariff line data. In 2007 UNSD published over 150 revised or reprocessed country periods in addition to the 202 country periods which were published for the first time.

Additions to the joint UNSD-OECD data processing system:

7. Based on the experience gained during the first year, UNSD updated and further improved the new processing system. It recently introduced CoprA 2.0. The most important changes concern the integration of existing work flows at UNSD into the processing system (such as a data collection tracking system, the verification of totals and the provision of specific processing and publication notes) and improvements to the existing processing reports, including better reports archiving. The functioning of the processing system and its results were not affected by these changes. Various additional internal reports have been implemented. These reports are important to monitor processing progress and to assist data processors.

Recent developments to UN Comtrade (dissemination) and future plans

8. Automatic data feed to UNdata (http://data.un.org/) has been implemented (HS 1992 and SITC Rev.3), as soon as data is released. Comtrade supplies Total, 3-digit SITC Rev.3, and 6 digit HS 1992 for partner World and all years to UNdata. As of 14 March 2008, there are 39,770,414 Comtrade records on UN Data.

9. Recently released data are made clearly visible on every page of UN Comtrade (http://comtrade.un.org/db/default.aspx). On the middle right side, "Released data" statistics are shown and users can have an overview about the latest additions.

10. So called publication notes have been implemented (please see http://comtrade.un.org/db/mr/daPubNoteDetail.aspx). These notes which are released together with the data indicate whether the data for this country year is published for the first time, whether we are publishing newly received updated data or whether data has been re-processed (and is getting published again) for a particular reason. In addition, it is indicated when and from/ through whom we received the data. For further information, please go to http://comtrade.un.org/kb/article. aspx?id=10234.

11. In addition to footnotes, the estimation flag on net-weight and/or supplementary quantity has been made available on record level. These flags are visible on the result page and can be downloaded.

12. Asynchronous Web Service (AWS) has been implemented. If web service request is equal with direct download, then asynchronous web service is equal to batch submission. It handles complex queries that are submitted to web service by executing it asynchronously. To generate its analytical tables, ECLAC consumes AWS regularly. For further information, please go to
http://comtrade.un.org/kb/article.aspx?id=10240.

13. The access via web services has been expanded and now covers also the explanatory notes, publication notes and data availability. For further information, please go to http://comtrade.un.org/kb/article.aspx?id=10051.

14. Under "Metadata and Reference" the HS 2007 and SITC Rev.4 have been added (please see http://comtrade.un.org/db/mr/rfCommoditiesList.aspx). The detailed description of HS2007 and SITC Rev.4 are also available for download at http://comtrade.un.org/kb/article.aspx?id=10102.

15. To improve user support, online chatting support (Live Help) has been added to UN Comtrade. User can have immediate support during business hours.

16. The International Trade Statistics Yearbook 2006 has been made available online on UN Comtrade at http://comtrade.un.org/pb/. The yearbook consists of country pages, commodity pages and special tables.

17. At the recent Statistical Commission session, SDMX was endorsed as the preferred standard for data transmission. The plan of UNSD in promoting SDMX for use in transmission of trade statistics is as follows:

a. It is planned to upgrade the current SDMX to version 2.0 for both, data and metadata. This requires cooperation among TFIMTS members to have a common metadata vocabulary;
b. As consequence UN Comtrade Web Service and ComtradeTools need to be upgraded as well;
c. In addition, we are looking at various possibilities to promote use of SDMX by national statistical offices for data transmission to UNSD; one possibility is the creation of a SDMX module for Eurotrace.

18. Finally, we are checking the possibility to create a UN Comtrade light edition which would focus on quick data extraction and data download and which could be available in multiple languages.