



### SPECIAL FEATURE:

## TOWARDS IMTS, REV.3 - RESULTS FROM THE WORLDWIDE CONSULTATION WITH COMPILERS OF INTERNATIONAL MERCHANDISE TRADE STATISTICS

As mentioned in the June edition of this newsletter the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) conducted a worldwide consultation with national trade statistics compilers on 17 issues critical for the revision of the current recommendations on International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS). Between May and July 2008 a total of 115 countries replied to the consultation paper, 34 developed and 81 developing and transition countries. Over 1,000 (!) individual and often very detailed comments were received. The replies and comments of countries provide an excellent basis for the further discussions and for the drafting of the revised recommendations.

The consultation paper requested feedback from countries concerning issues of coverage, mode of transport, valuation, partner country, data sources, institutional arrangements, data quality, metadata and various supplementary topics. Some of the results are presented below.

**Coverage:** An overwhelming majority of countries (more than 75%) agreed that the existing definition of IMTS should be further elaborated by the clarification of the meaning of the terms used in it. Comments from 64 countries were received on this question and many countries offered specific proposals, such as, identifying the criteria which differentiate certain types of transactions. Countries also agreed that the use of the criteria of change of ownership between residents and non-residents for the inclusion of certain categories of goods should be reviewed. Several comments suggest that change of ownership should only be used in a very limited set of special

cases (such as ships and aircrafts) and that providing a list of cases and examples would be useful. Other issues concerning the coverage of IMTS were goods for processing, transactions between parent and affiliated branches, asymmetric inclusions and exclusions, packaged software and downloadable or otherwise electronically delivered computer software and audiovisual products.

**Mode of transport:** There had been a recommendation on the compilation of mode of transport in an earlier version of the recommendations on IMTS. Now countries agreed (92%) that an updated recommendation on the compilation and dissemination of trade statistics by mode of transport should be added to IMTS, Rev.3. Yet, the details of such a recommendation have to be worked out carefully, as there is much less agreement on how mode of transport should be recorded.

**Valuation:** A majority of countries (60%) agreed that in addition to the existing recommendation on the valuation of imports (the statistical value of imported goods be a CIF-type value), a new recommendation should be added to compile the statistical value of imports also on a FOB-type basis (as supplementary information). Yet, there is significant opposition to this proposal and some countries argue that it is not the responsibility of IMTS but BOP compilers to obtain this information.

**Partner Country:** There is a strong support (75% of countries) for the proposal that the existing recommendation to collect the country of consignment for imports as additional information

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(IMTS, Rev.2, para 150) should be strengthened by recommending to collect the country of consignment as the second partner attribution for imports alongside with the country of origin. In their comments many countries explicitly support this proposal as important for analytical purposes and trade reconciliation. There is much less support (below 50%) for the suggestion to collect country of consignment as second recommended or encouraged optional partner attribution for exports alongside with country of last known destination.

Regarding the other issues raised in the

consultation paper such as providing more guidance on the use of non-customs data sources and data compilation strategies, maintaining institutional arrangements, data quality, the compilation and dissemination of metadata, the compilation of external trade indices and the compilation of seasonally adjusted data there has been overall strong support from countries.

The full report on the results of the worldwide consultation is posted on the website of the Expert Group on IMTS (EG-IMTS) at:

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/trade/EG-IMTS/EG-IMTS%20web%20announcement.htm>

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### DATABASES AND PUBLICATIONS: NATIONAL COMPILATION AND DISSEMINATION PRACTICES (NCDP) - 2006 SURVEY RESULTS NOW AVAILABLE -

In 2006 the Trade Statistics Branch of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) conducted a survey on national compilation and dissemination practices (NCDP) in International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS). 132 countries replied to the questionnaire which contained 173 questions covering various conceptual aspects of IMTS such as coverage, trade system, commodity classification, valuation, quantity measurement, partner country and reporting and dissemination as reflected in *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions, Rev.2* (United Nations publications, Sales number:

98.XVII.16). In addition, the NCDP survey also contained detailed questions regarding institutional arrangements, data sources and data quality control.

The detailed results of the 2006 survey are now available on the UNSD website at [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/tradereport/introduction\\_MM.asp](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/tradereport/introduction_MM.asp) together with the results of a previous survey conducted between 1992 and 1995. In addition to the detailed replies by countries an overview of the results and various summary tables are provided.

### DATABASES AND PUBLICATIONS: UPDATE OF THE WEB PAGES ON IMTS

At the beginning of September 2008, the International Merchandise Trade Statistics Section (IMTSS) started to restructure its web pages and to add additional materials. Now all information is presented according to the four main areas of work of the IMTSS which are: 1. Methodology IMTS, 2. UN Comtrade database, 3. Analytical tables (publications) and 4. International cooperation and workshops. Please go to [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/trade/imts/imts\\_default.htm](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/trade/imts/imts_default.htm).

For the coming months it is planned to add a lot of additional information and materials, most importantly, (i) correlation and conversion tables for the classifications used in UN Comtrade, (ii) historical data for the years 1900-1960 and (iii) the most recent IMTS tables published in the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics. In addition, the information regarding the ongoing revision process of the international recommendations on IMTS will be constantly updated (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/trade/EG-IMTS/EG-IMTS%20web%20announcement.htm>).

The detailed results of the 2006 survey are available on the UNSD website at [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/tradereport/introduction\\_MM.asp](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/tradereport/introduction_MM.asp)

Please feel free to provide any feedback concerning our web pages and its contents at [comtrade@un.org](mailto:comtrade@un.org)

## COOPERATION WITH COUNTRIES AND AGENCIES: UNSD/UN-ESCAP WORKSHOP FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ON THE REVISION OF THE INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMTS, 9-12 SEPTEMBER, 2008, BANGKOK, THAILAND

UNSD in cooperation with the Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific (UN/ESCAP) conducted a workshop for Developing Countries on the Revision of the Recommendations for International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS). The aim of this workshop was to inform and receive feedback from developing countries on the revision process of the current recommendations on international merchandise trade statistics contained in *International Merchandise Trade Statistics, Revision 2* (IMTS, Rev.2).

In total IMTS compilers from 14 countries of different regions participated in this workshop (Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Ethiopia, India, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Malay-

sia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates and Vietnam). The current recommendations on IMTS were discussed on the basis of the results of the questionnaire on national practices in 2006, the results from the first round of worldwide consultation on the central issues for the IMTS revision and invited country presentations/statements. Overall, the workshop provided very important feedback from developing countries on the various issues currently under review. A detailed meeting report and all documents of the workshop are available at: [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/trade/workshops\\_imts.htm](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/trade/workshops_imts.htm)

## COOPERATION WITH COUNTRIES AND AGENCIES: 1ST MEETING OF THE OECD WORKING PARTY ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN GOODS AND TRADE IN SERVICES STATISTICS (22-24 SEPTEMBER) MEETING OF THE INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCE ON STATISTICS OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN SERVICES (25 SEPTEMBER) PARIS, FRANCE

The Working Party on International Trade in Goods and Trade in Services Statistics (WPTGS) was established by the OECD in 2007. The purpose of this working party is to provide a forum for various trade expert groups to ensure fuller coordination between goods and services trade issues and to facilitate the analysis of cross-cutting and statistical globalization issues.

This was the first meeting of the WPTGS. Important from the perspective of the UNSD Trade Statistics Branch were the discussion of inter-agency co-operation and coordination. Also interesting were the discussions of substantial issues such as the recording of goods for processing in merchandise trade statistics on gross ba-

sis, the recording of imports FOB and the developments in the EU customs regulations and their effects on the statistical data compilation.

The meeting of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services (TF SITS) was held on September 25. Main items on the agenda were the revision of the Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services (MSITS), the promotion of trade in services statistics and the MSITS, and the preparation of reports to the IMF Balance of Payments Committee and the UN Statistical Commission.

**UN ServiceTrade** 

The meeting report of the workshop in Bangkok can be downloaded here:  
[http://unstats.un.org/unsd/trade/WS%20Bangkok08/WS%20Bangkok08\\_workshop\\_imts\\_trade.htm](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/trade/WS%20Bangkok08/WS%20Bangkok08_workshop_imts_trade.htm)

Website of the Task Force on SITS:  
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/tradeserv/TFSITS/default.htm>

Visit UN Comtrade at:



## YOU HAVE ASKED US: COMTRADE: HOW DO I GET A WORLD AGGREGATE?

Before we explain how to arrive to an estimate for world trade using UN Comtrade two warnings need to be provided: 1) Countries (or areas) do not necessarily report their trade statistics for each and every year. This means that aggregation of data into a group of countries such as world (all countries) may involve countries with no reported data for a specific year. As UN Comtrade does not contain estimates for missing data, trade of a country group could be understated. 2) Not all countries provide their trade data in the latest classification. Yet, UN Comtrade converts data provided in later classification such as the Harmonized System 2007 edition (HS07) into some of the earlier classification. Hence, when retrieving data for a group of countries and years the classification with the best data availability needs to

be selected. At this time it would be best to select SITC, Rev.3 as the most suitable classification for retrieving trade totals for all countries.

In order to arrive to an estimate of the world trade total users can simple extract the trade totals of all countries (enter 'All' under reporter or leave blank) and add those data up using for example EXCEL. Another option would be to use country group code 12398 in the data query which would provide the world aggregate. Subscribers to UN Comtrade have the option to create such country groups themselves. World aggregate as a partner is available by typing 'World' or by using code '0'; since, as explained, not all countries report their data the term 'World' is not defined as reporter.

### UPCOMING EVENTS:

## VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE EXPERT GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL MERCHANDISE TRADE STATISTICS (EG-IMTS) 5-26 NOVEMBER 2008

The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) is organizing a virtual meeting of the Expert Group on International Merchandise Trade Statistics (EG-IMTS) to discuss further the revision of the international recommendations on IMTS. This meeting will be conducted electronically through an 'expert forum' between 5-26 November 2008. The objectives of the meeting are (i) to discuss the results of the first round of worldwide consultation on the 17 issues most relevant for setting the scope of the future recommendations as identified by

the EG-IMTS and (ii) to agree on how to incorporate them into the future revised recommendations. To facilitate the discussion UNSD will provide its initial proposals for IMTS, Rev.3 on all 17 issues which were submitted for consultation. These proposals are based on the results of the first round of worldwide consultation.

For further information please go to the website of the EG-IMTS at: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/trade/EG-IMTS/EG-IMTS%20web%20announcement.htm>.

Towards IMTS, Rev 3. Go to the website of the Expert Group on IMTS at: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/trade/EG-IMTS/EG-IMTS%20web%20announcement.htm>

### EDITORIAL NOTE

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