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## Statistical Commission

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**Items for information: service statistics**

## Report of the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics

### Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2021/224 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics, which is presented to the Commission for information. In its report, the Group describes its progress since its previous report, in 2019, including a new five-year strategic plan, the updating of sector papers for specific industries and discussion of cross-cutting topics such as economic ownership and multinational enterprises and international trade in services by mode. The Group has actively collaborated between 2019 and 2021, resulting in an examination of the alignment of methodology and scope between services producer price indices and consumer price indices and the development of a framework for using the latter in the calculation of the former, and alternative data survey results. The Group has revisited some industries since 2019, meaning that a revisited sector paper will be produced in relation to renting and leasing of other machinery, equipment and tangible goods, for presentation at its meeting in 2022. In 2017, the Group developed a new content development framework, which continues to be used when industry-specific papers concerning the measurement of output or prices are produced within the more than 113 service industries defined in the *International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, Revision 4*. The Group's work product and tangible outputs are available from its website (<https://voorburggroup.org/>). The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

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\* E/CN.3/2022/1.



## Report of the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics

### I. Introduction

1. In the late 1980s, the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics was established in response to a request from the Statistical Commission for assistance in developing service statistics. The first meeting, hosted by the Netherlands Statistical Office, was held in January 1987 in Voorburg, the Netherlands, from which the Group derives its name.

2. The Voorburg Group was not created to be simply another forum for the exchange of information. Instead, it was to be a group of countries interested in and capable of carrying out developmental work between and during meetings, following well-established rules and a clear timetable. In fact, the purpose of the Group was to address issues related to the production of service statistics, including service product outputs and inputs, the estimation of the real product of service activities and price indices of service products and industries, as well as their implications for product and industry classification (Central Product Classification and International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC)).

3. Over the years, the Voorburg Group was successful in developing product and industrial classification and model surveys, and discussing a wide range of topics, such as the information society, short-term indicators and international trade in services, to name only a few. In 2005, in response to concerns about the Group's broad agenda and wide participation, the Voorburg Bureau reviewed the focus and modalities of the Group and prepared a strategic vision paper describing the mandate, role and workplan for the future of the Group. The vision paper was presented at the thirty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission, held in March 2005, at which the mandate of the Group was renewed, with an emphasis on the development of services producer price indices.

4. During the thirty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission, the Voorburg Group presented an updated strategic vision to guide future work that focused on the proper identification and definition of service industries, products and measures of turnover, combined with a coordinated effort to develop producer price indices for use as deflators to improve the measurement of service components of the gross domestic product at constant prices. Consequently, the Group focused its work on classification issues, output measures and price indices.

5. In 2006, the Voorburg Group adopted a content development framework to ensure that its work was focused on the strategic vision and would be presented by a set of tangible outputs that would provide information to the larger official statistics community.

6. In 2021, the Voorburg Group developed an updated strategic plan that reflects the changing needs of its members. The plan will guide the Group's efforts for at least the next five years. Owing to the current realities and challenges related to digitalization and globalization, the Group has also necessarily broadened its scope within its current mandate to include the establishment of an internationally comparable methodology and best practices for the development of measures, not only for output and producer price indices for the service industries, but also for international trade price indices of services and their goods-related industries. The Group continues to focus on the importance of expanding its knowledge base in line with the rapid change in these industry and product areas.

7. The present report provides an update on the progress of the Voorburg Group in addressing best practices in service industry output statistics, service industry price

statistics and service industry and product classifications. It also presents the changes in the Group's operations for the future, as articulated in its strategic plan for 2022–2026.

## II. Progress since 2019

8. Two meetings have been held since 2019, one in 2020 and one in 2021. Owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Voorburg Group had to rearrange the physical one-week meeting planned to be held in Helsinki in September 2020. It became a virtual meeting hosted by Statistics Finland over two half-days. As a physical meeting could not be held in 2021, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics hosted a virtual meeting over four half-days at the end of September.

9. The Voorburg Group has followed its content development framework established in 2017. This ensured that the work of the Group was focused and would result in a set of tangible outputs that would provide information to the larger official statistics community.

10. Increasingly, the Voorburg Group has been tackling cross-cutting issues, such as measurement issues with online intermediary platforms, machine learning techniques used for quality adjustment, and the use of alternative data sources that pose significant challenges in the measurement of the volume of services produced in an economy. Where practical solutions can be found, these are documented in guidance papers, or at least summarized in issue papers, to ensure that the collective knowledge of the Group on an issue is not lost over time. The Group works with other international groups and organizations to avoid duplication of effort while ensuring that concepts, frameworks and requirements are considered in sector and guidance papers. The Co-Chairs also now serve on the Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics.

11. In addressing industries or topics, the Voorburg Group has adopted a series of mini-presentations of national experiences that are summarized into a sector presentation (industries) or guidance paper (cross-cutting issues) that details best practices. Cross-cutting topics are also covered through poster sessions (breakout/smaller group sessions) and task forces (subgroups to address specific issues), which are followed by a summary report. In addition, the Group has continued to review areas of interest and need. A summary of activities by year since the previous progress report is set out below:

(a) **2020, virtual meeting hosted by Statistics Finland:**

(i) The meeting included the presentation and approval of revisited sector papers on advertising (ISIC 73.10) and publishing (ISIC 58.12 and 58.13) and the approval of the architectural and engineering activities and related technical consultancy revisited sector paper (ISIC 71.1). An issue paper for short-term accommodation (ISIC 55.1) was presented and discussed. There were mini-presentations on renting and leasing of motor vehicles (ISIC 77.10) and warehousing and storage (ISIC 52.10);

(ii) The meeting also included cross-cutting topic discussions on issues and best practices concerning measurement challenges related to economic ownership and multinational enterprises and sampling methods and sources. The results of the work of a task force summarizing all alternative data sources presented at Voorburg Group meetings since 2015 were presented. The task force also created a survey on alternative data to be completed by participating countries before the meeting in 2021;

(iii) A paper containing an overview of national accounts in Costa Rica was submitted for review and comment by the Voorburg Group;

(b) **2021, virtual meeting hosted by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics:**

(i) The meeting included the presentation and approval of revisited sector papers for renting and leasing of motor vehicles (ISIC 77.10) and warehousing and storage (ISIC 52.10). There were new mini-presentations on renting and leasing of other machinery, equipment and tangible goods (ISIC 77.30);

(ii) The meeting also included cross-cutting topic discussions on lessons learned in dealing with economic shocks, international trade in services by mode, innovative methods for capturing quality change, and new techniques in the measurement of intangibles. New developments with regard to Costa Rica and the deflator gateway system used in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland were presented in a cross-cutting session relating to the use of services producer price indices in the compilation of national accounts. The Voorburg Group held a successful virtual poster session utilizing breakout rooms in which three national statistical offices presented posters related to best practices to evaluate the fitness for use of alternative data;

(iii) The preliminary results of two task forces were also presented and discussed. One task force pertained to an International Monetary Fund (IMF) collaboration on comparison of unit value and transaction pricing in accommodation services and the other to the alignment of methodology and scope between services producer price indices and consumer price indices and the development of a framework for using the latter in the calculation of the former;

(iv) A draft of a new strategic plan was presented and feedback gathered.

12. The Voorburg Group has developed a considerable library of national-level experience in the development of turnover and price statistics for service industries since the institution of the content development framework. Overall, the Group has addressed 113 service industries as defined in *the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, Revision 4*. A full list of industries is included in the annex to the present report.

13. The Voorburg Group maintains a website on which all its sector papers and related materials are stored for reference by interested parties ([www.voorburggroup.org](http://www.voorburggroup.org)). The website is hosted by Statistics Canada and incremental enhancements are made every year.

14. As the Voorburg Group is dealing with more cross-cutting issues, there is a need to coordinate the work with frameworks and concepts developed by other international groups while avoiding duplication. This means ensuring that internationally comparable methods to measure the services sector reflect changes in concepts and activities related to broader issues, including globalization and the impact of digitalization. One of the objectives of the Group is to strengthen its connections with other international groups. In tackling broader issues, the Bureau has collaborated with international organizations, including the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, IMF, the World Trade Organization, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and Eurostat. The 2021 meeting included topics related to international trade in services and pricing in accommodation services, to which IMF and the World Trade Organization contributed.

### **III. Future agenda**

15. The tentative agenda for the thirty-seventh meeting of the Voorburg Group, which is currently planned as a virtual meeting, includes an industry paper on renting and leasing of other machinery, equipment and tangible goods (ISIC 77.30) covering measurement issues for output and prices. Mini-presentations are planned for the education sector. Cross-cutting topics to be discussed include e-commerce measurement experiences, collaboration on measurement of financial services, alternative data use in measurement of air passenger transportation, data gaps and measurement issues with the online intermediary platforms, innovative price products that incorporate combined domestic and import prices in published data, and continued discussion on measurement of economic shocks. A poster session on experiences of modernizing production systems is planned.

16. A task force has been established to build on the results of the poster session in 2021 on criteria for fitness for use of alternative data to establish a global guidelines document for alternative data use. Additional task forces to enhance outreach and collaboration efforts are planned. The remaining task force continues its work from the meeting in 2021 and will complete the development of a framework for using consumer price indices in the calculation of services producer price indices. Summaries are to be developed before the meeting in 2022.

17. The Voorburg Group is a unique resource for advice on the content and structure of standard classifications because of its members' hands-on experience. A classification topic on wholesale trade is planned for the 2022 meeting. The Group will revisit and update past work to incorporate market changes and developments.

### **IV. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission**

18. The Commission is invited to take note of the report of the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics.

## Annex

### Industries covered by the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics, 2006–2021

<i>ISIC code</i>	<i>Industry title</i>
3312	Repair of machinery
3313	Repair of electronic and optical equipment
3314	Repair of electrical equipment
3315	Repair of transport equipment (except motor vehicles)
3319	Repair of other equipment
3600	Water collection, treatment, and supply
3700	Sewerage
3811	Collection of non-hazardous waste
3812	Collection of hazardous waste
3821	Treatment and disposal of non-hazardous waste
3822	Treatment and disposal of hazardous waste
3830	Materials recovery
3900	Remediation activities and other waste management services
4520	Maintenance and repair of motor vehicles
462–469	Wholesale trade
4911	Passenger rail transport, interurban
4912	Freight rail transport
4923	Freight transport by road
5011	Sea and coastal passenger water transport
5012	Sea and coastal freight water transport
5021	Inland passenger water transport
5022	Inland freight water transport
5110	Passenger air transport
5120	Freight air transport
5210	Warehousing and storage
5221	Service activities incidental to land transportation
5222	Service activities incidental to water transportation
5223	Service activities incidental to air transportation

<i>ISIC code</i>	<i>Industry title</i>
5224	Cargo handling
5229	Other transportation support activities
5310	Postal activities
5320	Courier activities
5510	Short term accommodation activities
5520	Camping grounds, recreational vehicle parks and trailer parks
5590	Other accommodation
5610	Restaurants and mobile food service activities
5621	Event catering
5629	Other food service activities
5630	Beverage serving activities
5811	Book publishing
5812	Publishing of directories and mailing lists
5813	Publishing of newspapers, journals and periodicals
5819	Other publishing activities
5820	Software publishing
5910	Motion picture, video and television programme activities
5920	Sound recording and music publishing activities
6010	Radio broadcasting
6020	Television programming and broadcasting activities
6110	Wired telecommunications activities
6120	Wireless telecommunication activities
6130	Satellite telecommunications activities
6190	Other telecommunications activities
6201	Computer programming activities
6202	Computer consultancy and computer facilities management services
6209	Other information technology and computer service activities
6311	Data processing, hosting and related activities
6312	Web portals
6411	Central banking
6419	Other monetary intermediation

<i>ISIC code</i>	<i>Industry title</i>
6492	Other credit granting
6499	Other financial service activities, except insurance and pension funding activities, n.e.c
6512	Non-life insurance
6520	Reinsurance
6610	Activities auxiliary to financial services, except insurance and pension funding
6810	Real estate activities with own or leased property
6820	Real estate activities on a fee or contract basis
6910	Legal activities
6920	Accounting, bookkeeping and auditing activities; tax consultancy
7020	Management consultancy activities
7110	Architecture and engineering activities and related technical consultancy
7120	Technical testing and analysis
7210	Research and experimental development on natural sciences and engineering
7220	Research and experimental development on social sciences and humanities
7310	Advertising
7320	Market research and public opinion polling
7410	Specialized design services
7500	Veterinary activities
7710	Renting and leasing of motor vehicles
7721	Renting and leasing of recreational and sports goods
7722	Renting of video tapes and disks
7729	Renting and leasing of other personal and household goods
7730	Renting and leasing of other machinery, equipment and tangible goods
7740	Leasing of intellectual property and similar products, except copyrighted works
7810	Activities of employment placement agencies
7820	Temporary employment agency activities
7830	Other human resources provision
7911	Travel agency activities



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<i>ISIC code</i>	<i>Industry title</i>
7999	Other reservation service and related activities
8010	Private security activities
8020	Security systems service activities
8030	Investigation activities
8110	Combined facilities support activities
8121	General cleaning of buildings
8129	Other building and industrial cleaning activities
8130	Landscape care and maintenance service activities
8210	Office administrative and support activities
8220	Activities of call centres
8230	Organization of convention and trade shows
8610	Hospital activities
8620	Medical and dental practice activities
8690	Other human health activities
9000	Creative, arts and entertainment activities
9101	Library and archives activities
9102	Museums activities and operation of historical sites and buildings
9103	Botanical and zoological gardens and nature reserves activities
9311	Operation of sports facilities
9312	Activities of sports clubs
9319	Other sports activities
9521	Repair of consumer electronics
9522	Repair of household appliances and home and garden equipment
9523	Repair of footwear and leather goods
9524	Repair of furniture and home furnishings
9529	Repair of other personal and household goods

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