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Item 3 (k) of the provisional agenda*

Items for discussion and decision: business and trade statistics

Business and Trade Statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2024/312 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics, which is submitted to the Commission for discussion and decision.

* [E/CN.3/2025/1.](#)



Report of the Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics

I. Introduction

1. In its decision 55/116, the Statistical Commission:

(a) Endorsed the amended mandate and governance of the Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics to facilitate stronger integration between business and trade statistics and stronger coordination across other statistical domains and with the macroeconomic frameworks;

(b) Endorsed the second edition of the *Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade*;

(c) Welcomed the progress of work on the revision of the trade statistics manuals;

(d) Expressed its appreciation for and took note of the progress of work on the handbook on integrating business and trade statistics and volume 2 of the *Manual on Principal Indicators for Business and Trade Statistics*;

(e) Approved the note on mainstreaming a gender perspective into trade and business statistics, and encouraged the Committee to strengthen ongoing collaboration with the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics and other relevant groups to advance the integration of gender and social perspectives into business and trade statistics;

(f) Expressed its appreciation for the progress on integrating geospatial aspects into business and trade statistics, and supported continued collaboration between the Committee and the Expert Group on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information to develop guidelines to assist countries in integrating geospatial information into statistical business registers;

(g) Commended the work on the global initiative on unique identifiers for businesses, and expressed its support for the continuation of activities undertaken by the Committee and other key partners to strengthen the legal registration of businesses and the management of unique identifiers for the improvement of the statistical business register and other users of register data while considering the cost implications;

(h) Welcomed the finalization of the manual on the maturity model for statistical business registers, and expressed its support for the ongoing work on the development of a toolkit for the maturity model and the development of a global assessment on the status of implementation of statistical business registers in countries;

(i) Underscored the importance of capacity development to strengthen the capabilities of the national statistical system for the compilation of business and trade statistics.

2. The present report describes the work programme of the Committee and its task teams in the fields of business and trade statistics over the past year. It presents the current efforts by the Committee to improve the integration of business, trade and other statistical domains and to address new priority areas. The report further presents the progress by the Committee on the finalization of the handbook on integrating business and trade statistics, the drafting of the second volume of the *Manual on Principal Indicators for Business and Trade Statistics*, the revision of the trade statistics manuals and the possible development of the manual on business statistics, as well as progress in strengthening coordination with inter-agency working groups,

aligning the Committee's activities with the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and using new data sources. The Commission is invited to (a) endorse the handbook on integrating of business and trade statistics; (b) take note of the progress in drafting the second volume of the *Manual on Principal Indicators for Business and Trade Statistics* and in the revision of trade statistics manuals; (c) express its views on the development of the manual on business statistics; (d) express its views on the strategic road map for the global initiative on unique identifiers for businesses and (e) provide guidance on the elements of the work programme of the Committee. Points for discussion are presented in section VI.

II. Outcome of the seventh meeting of the Committee

3. The Committee held its seventh meeting from 24 to 26 September 2024 in Geneva. The meeting reviewed the progress of work of its task teams, addressed follow-up actions to the decisions of the Statistical Commission and reviewed new developments and initiatives in business and trade statistics. In addition, the meeting provided strategic direction on the organization and work programme of the Committee to ensure that it reflects the current efforts by the Committee to better integrate business and trade statistics and to strengthen the horizontal and vertical integration of business and trade statistics with other statistical domains. The main outcome and actions of the Committee meeting are summarized as follows. The Committee:

(a) Emphasized the need to have stronger coordination between the Committee and inter-agency working groups and intergovernmental organizations of other statistical domains, with suggestions to: (i) define specific areas of cooperation; (ii) organize joint events to discuss the production of integrated statistics based on new data sources and statistical business registers; (iii) promote knowledge-sharing and best practices in relevant common topics and (iv) develop pilot projects and training programmes;

(b) Tasked the Bureau with identifying priority areas for the Committee to work on in the short to medium term and aligning the task team activities with those priorities;

(c) Welcomed the progress on the drafting of the handbook on integrating business and trade statistics, and recommended that it be submitted as a white cover version to the Statistical Commission in March 2025 for endorsement following review and endorsement by the Bureau after the global consultation process in the fourth quarter of 2024;

(d) Welcomed the progress on the revision of *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions 2010* and the *Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2010*;

(e) Acknowledged the business cases and usefulness of developing a United Nations handbook of business statistics; noted the need for concerted efforts, dedicated resource and prioritization; tasked the Bureau with developing a way forward and a timeline, including consideration of a global consultation exercise and elaboration of guidance or technical notes to assess priority needs in advancing the development work;

(f) Recommended the development of a centralized global public repository to share country practices and library documents for all domains of business and trade statistics and to provide information on the use of the maturity model of the statistical business register;

(g) Reiterated the importance and central role of statistical business registers for the compilation of business statistics and their integration with other statistical domains. The Committee set out the priority work programme for the task team on statistical business registers, which includes the preparation of content for the global public repository regarding the use of the statistical business register maturity model; finalization of the discussion note on the integration of geospatial information into statistical business registers; global assessment of the implementation of statistical business registers; and providing a platform to exchange information on the implementation of the revised industry classification. Statistical interoperability of statistical business registers with other registers was highlighted as another issue to be further explored by the task team;

(h) Expressed support and approval for the strategic road map for the global initiative on unique identifiers for businesses and took note of the importance of the establishment of unique identifiers for enterprises for efficient microdata linkage and the linkage between national and global unique identifiers as a way to address confidentiality issues;

(i) Commended the work by the task team on international trade statistics on the development of methodological guidelines, which includes: the revision of trade statistics manuals (*International Merchandise Trade Statistics 2010* and the *Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2010*); the drafting of the handbook on integrating business and trade statistics and the development of an online public repository for the dissemination of related country practices, as well as the drafting of the second volume of the *Manual on Principal Indicators for Business and Trade Statistics*. The Committee highlighted the importance of the development by the task team of a way forward in advancing the globalization work programme in collaboration with other task teams of the Committee;

(j) Took note of the key activities of the task team on business dynamics, demography and entrepreneurship in 2024, which included the identification of relevant gender indicators, the development of a repository for gender-related statistics and the creation of a template for the recording of national practices. The Committee set out the work programme for 2024–2025, which covers the finalization of the template for mainstreaming gender in business and trade statistics; the development of the public repository for gender statistics; further research on entrepreneurship, in particular in small and medium enterprises; and strengthening collaboration with international bodies and other task teams;

(k) Confirmed the renaming of the task team on digitalization (formerly known as the task team on globalization and digitalization) to reflect the task team's focus on the digitalization workstream and the reassignment of the workstream on globalization to the task team on international trade statistics. The Committee took note of the current focus in the task team's work on measuring the adoption of automation technologies and collaboration with the task group on measuring e-commerce value of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to develop indicators that are more reflective of e-commerce value;

(l) Recommended the elaboration of a concept note on the topic of sustainability and well-being, including the following issues: aligning the Committee's activities with the Goals, creating a list of proposed indicators, developing a description of the production framework (encompassing the business register, direct reporting and new data sources) and exploring the use of new data sources;

(m) Reiterated the importance of the Committee's work programme to capacity development to strengthen the capabilities of national statistical systems with respect to the compilation of business and trade statistics. The Committee expressed an

intention to develop training materials and capacity-building programmes in collaboration with other partners following the adoption of methodological standards on business and trade statistics.

4. The Committee expressed gratitude to the outgoing Chair, Stefano Menghinello, of the National Statistical Institute of Italy (ISTAT), for his leadership and contributions in leading the Committee since its inception and guiding its work programme to the current level. At the same meeting, the Committee elected Gerardo Durand, of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico (INEGI), as its interim Chair for the period from 27 September 2024 to 31 March 2025.

III. Progress on the work programme of the task teams

5. The work of the Committee is organized according to five broad areas, with members of the Bureau leading the related parts of the programme of work. The areas of work are as follows: business dynamics, business demography and entrepreneurship, led by INEGI; digitalization, led by Statistics Canada; international trade statistics, jointly led by Statistics Portugal and the Office des Changes of Morocco; statistical business registers, led by Statistics Netherlands; and well-being and sustainability, led by ISTAT. The Committee also has a work programme on the global initiative on unique identifiers for businesses.

A. Task team on business dynamics, demography and entrepreneurship, led by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico

6. The work programme of the task team on business dynamics, demography and entrepreneurship for 2024 is focused on two workstreams: mainstreaming gender into business and trade statistics, and businesses entrepreneurship. Among the activities of the task team in 2024 was the development of a working document that identifies relevant indicators related to integrating a gender perspective into business and trade statistics on the basis of country experiences and the work conducted by the national statistical offices and international agencies. This working document, which builds on volume 1 of the *Manual on Principal Indicators for Business and Trade Statistics* and the conceptual framework from the guidance note on mainstreaming gender into business and trade statistics, is aimed at identifying relevant indicators of gender in business and trade and emphasizing the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into business and trade statistics. Following the completion of the document in 2025, the task team will explore the feasibility of carrying out pilot testing of such indicators for consideration in the design and evaluation of policies that contribute to reducing inequalities between women and men in business and trade. Efforts are also currently under way to develop a public repository of practices in the integration of gender in business and trade statistics. Moreover, the task team continues to coordinate with international organizations, in particular the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and UNCTAD, for the purpose of sharing ideas and collaborating on the issue of mainstreaming a gender perspective in business and trade statistics.

7. With respect to business entrepreneurship, the task team explored new insights on entrepreneurship through microdata linkage of the statistical business registers and population and housing registers, stressing the importance of unique identifiers for microdata linked across various data sources and registers for measuring business entrepreneurship. The task team will continue the discussion of the measurement of

entrepreneurship, in particular in micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the update of the draft note on measuring entrepreneurship in 2025.

B. Task team on digitalization

8. As part of the decision of the Committee, this task team (formerly known as the task team on globalization and digitalization) was renamed to reflect the task team's focus on the digitalization workstream and the fact that the workstream on globalization has been moved to the task team on international trade statistics. The work of the task team complements and builds on current work to record best practices from national statistical offices in terms of data sources and data collection methods and approaches for measuring e-commerce. The task team will provide recommendations on best practices and future areas of study with respect to new data sources and methods for measuring e-commerce to serve as an input and complement to the task group on measuring e-commerce value.

9. Among the activities of the task team in 2024 was the development of a summary document on the measurement of the adoption of and investment in automation technology. The document is aimed at providing a summary of current practices to measure the automation processes of firms and potential best practices that have been employed, as well as to develop new business statistics indicators to better measure artificial intelligence, automation and its utilization and robotics and their contributions to firm performance.

C. Task team on international trade statistics

10. The task team on international trade statistics has focused on revising trade statistics manuals (*International Merchandise Trade Statistics 2010* and the *Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2010*), which are expected to be completed in late 2025 and submitted to the Statistical Commission for its consideration in 2026. Furthermore, the task team has worked on the handbook on integrating business and trade statistics and volume 2 of the *Manual on Principal Indicators for Business and Trade Statistics*. More details are given in section III.

11. With the transformation of the task team on globalization and digitalization to focus on digitalization only, the task team on international trade statistics is also taking up the role of coordinating the work programme on globalization within the Committee. The task team is developing a way forward in advancing the (re-)globalization workstream. Many of the topics relating to globalization are already part of the work programme and responsibilities of the task team on international trade statistics. In addition to working with other task teams in the Committee, the task team is to collaborate with other groups, including the new OECD group on measuring economic globalization.

D. Task team on statistical business registers

12. The work programme of the task team on statistical business registers in 2024 was focused on the implementation of the statistical business register maturity model and the development of statistical business register infrastructure. Knowledge exchange is also an important component of the work of the task team.

13. The statistical business register maturity model describes the levels of maturity recognized for a statistical business register with respect to seven dimensions. After the completion of the *Manual on the Maturity Model for Statistical Business Registers*

in 2023, attention has been focused on the implementation of the maturity model to support development of statistical business registers in countries. The task team is finalizing the global consultation questionnaire on statistical business registers, which combines the country progress report of the Wiesbaden Group on Business Registers and the statistical business register maturity model's self-assessment questionnaire. The global consultation will be conducted in 2025 and will provide input for capacity-building. Work is also under way to set up the toolkit for the statistical business register maturity model. An important part of this is the development of a statistical business register global repository, which will consist of a library where information can be found on numerous topics related to statistical business registers and where concrete help can be found on steps to be taken towards the next level of maturity. A toolkit working group is now being established to deliver a first version of such a repository in the first half of 2025.

14. The task team has been working on geospatial information and on updating statistical business registers with the revised industry classifications. Best practices are now being collected from different countries on integrating geospatial information into the register, with a final version of the report to be prepared in 2025. The task team considered that updating the statistical business register with the revised industry classification is an important activity for many countries, and attention will be paid to this topic in the 2025 work programme.

E. Work programme on well-being and sustainability

15. The task team on well-being and sustainability has not been active, and its work programme will now be overseen by the Bureau, with ISTAT taking the lead. The recent Committee meeting highlighted the importance of linking business and trade statistics with the 2030 Agenda and environmental, social and governance reporting. It is envisaged that the 2025 activity in this area will include the elaboration of a concept note on sustainability and well-being that covers the link between the Goals framework and the enterprise-centred perspective of the business and trade statistics framework; a list of proposed indicators; and a description of the production framework based on a statistical business register and the use of new data sources from company reports.

F. Global initiative to improve the availability of unique identifiers for businesses

16. The global initiative on unique identifiers for businesses, mandated by the Statistical Commission in 2023, is aimed at improving the availability and use of national and global unique business identifiers in business registers, which will enhance access to and the sharing and interoperability of administrative business information and enhance the use of unique business identifiers in the creation and maintenance of statistical business registers, thereby promoting transparency in domestic and cross-border business activities.

17. A strategic road map for the global initiative on unique identifiers for businesses was developed in 2024 to provide a comprehensive guide for countries and international stakeholders in adopting and implementing unique business identifiers. The initiative begins with a thorough assessment of current systems, identifying countries in need of enhanced legislation and technical support. It then moves to outreach, engaging with international and regional organizations and establishing partnerships to build a broad coalition of stakeholders. The road map then contains details on the technical cooperation and capacity-building phase, providing critical

guidance on legislation, policy reform and best practices for implementing unique business identifiers. The third phase is focused on the practical application of these identifiers through pilot programmes and the integration of national identifiers into global systems such as legal entity identifiers. Finally, the road map contains an emphasis on continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the initiative remains dynamic and responsive to evolving challenges and opportunities. By adhering to these strategic actions, the initiative is aimed at fostering a global environment in which businesses are transparently and uniquely identified, facilitating smoother trade, enhanced regulatory compliance and overall economic growth.

18. A global assessment survey regarding the current implementation and use of unique identifiers in administrative and statistical business registers is planned for December 2024. The next steps involve mobilizing international collaboration, securing active participation from countries and moving forward with the outlined phases. The planned activities of the initiative in 2025 include outreach and engagement with international and regional organizations to establish partnerships to build a broad coalition of stakeholders. An advisory group will be progressively established to guide and support the initiative. The initiative is expected to unfold over several years, with each phase building on the achievements of the previous one, ultimately leading to a harmonized system of unique business identifiers that strengthens business registration systems and supports global economic growth.

IV. Progress on the development of methodological standards

19. The Committee made significant progress towards the development of various methodological standards on business and trade statistics, including the publication of the *Guidelines on Statistical Business Registers*, the finalization of the handbook on the integration of business and trade statistics, the drafting of the second volume of the *Manual on Principal Indicators for Business and Trade Statistics* and the updating of *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions 2010* and the *Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2010*.

20. With respect to the revision of trade statistics manuals (*International Merchandise Trade Statistics 2010* and the *Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2010*), a second round of global consultations on outstanding topics was successfully held in early 2024. It addressed concepts and definitions and some compilation issues, focusing on the scope of international merchandise trade (the inclusion of goods crossing borders illegally); the amended scope of informal cross-border trade; global production arrangements, including factoryless goods producers and nature of transaction and customs procedure codes; trade systems; Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) for trade statistics; an assessment of integrating business and trade statistics; and an assessment of the valuation of long-term contracts. For informational purposes, developments in other compilation issues were also shared, such as bilateral trade asymmetries; the measurement of modes of supply; the impact of trade on the environment and sustainability; the impact of revisions of the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities and the Central Product Classification; the use of alternative data sources; price and volume measurement; the Classification by Broad Economic Categories Rev.5 and the “Manual on the classification of business functions”; and the treatment of legal tender coins made from precious metals. The task team on international trade statistics collaborated with several regional organizations, including the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC-Stat) and the African Union Institute for Statistics (STATAFRIC), including on webinars and the translation of a questionnaire for the global consultations.

21. Since mid-2024, the task team on international trade statistics is focusing on drafting chapters of the manuals. The Australian Bureau of Statistics is the Chief Editor leading the drafting of *International Merchandise Trade Statistics 2010* while OECD and the World Trade Organization (WTO) are the Chief Editors leading the drafting of the *Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2010*. Completion of the manuals is scheduled for the end of 2025. A background document gives more information on the expected updates.

22. The drafting of the handbook on integrating business and trade statistics has been completed. The handbook is aimed at providing a conceptual and methodological framework related to the integration of business and trade statistics, including on gender, the digital economy and subnational statistics. INEGI and Statistics Portugal are the Chief Editors, and the handbook is herewith submitted to the Commission as a background document for its endorsement.

23. The drafting of the second volume of the *Manual on Principal Indicators for Business and Trade Statistics* has been completed, subject to final editing after the global consultation to be held in early 2025. It proposes new indicators to meet policy needs and to provide an easier and better reading of foreign trade data based on mainstreaming business and trade statistics. The Office des Changes of Morocco, UNCTAD and WTO are the Chief Editors, and the manual will be submitted to the Commission as a background document for the fifty-seventh session, in 2026.

24. The Committee, in the outcome of its sixth meeting, in 2023, called for a proposal to explore the need to develop a handbook of business statistics to address emerging needs. A concept note reviewing the business case for developing such a manual was prepared in 2024 and brought forward to the Committee for discussion and recommendations. At its seventh meeting, in 2024, the Committee acknowledged the business case for and the usefulness of developing a handbook of business statistics, noting the need for concerted efforts and dedicated resources as well as the need for careful consideration and prioritization to advance the work. The Bureau will develop a way forward and timeline in advancing the work, including the consideration of a global consultation exercise and elaboration of guidance or technical notes as a basis for the development of the handbook.

V. Capacity development

25. Under the guidance of the Committee, several capacity-building activities relating to business and trade statistics were undertaken in 2024. The Statistics Division, collaborating with regional and national partners, delivered a series of capacity development projects of various types, including webinars and workshops.

26. An international workshop on cross-border digital trade and a high-level international seminar on cross-border digital trade were jointly held by Bank Indonesia, the Statistics Division and UNCTAD in Bali, Indonesia, from 15 to 18 October 2024. The seminar provided an opportunity for policymakers, statisticians, academics and others to understand the increasing trend of cross-border digital trade, while the workshop provided an opportunity for the participants to learn about the conceptual framework for statistics on cross-border digital trade.

27. Annual TrainForTrade e-learning courses on international merchandise trade statistics and on statistics of international trade in services were held jointly by the Statistics Division and UNCTAD in cooperation with WTO. The objective of these annual courses is to enhance the capacity of trade statisticians to apply internationally agreed recommendations, define the best possible data sources, strengthen statistical production processes and share best practices.

28. Eurostat and the Statistics Division are working on developing a new generation of trade data tools, that is, United Nations trade data tools comprising a set of tools for processing and analysing trade data (or any data). The trade data tools are being developed as an upgrade for Eurotrace, which is widely used in many countries for trade data processing. Apart from the other Eurotrace functionalities, trade data tools improve the user experience by adding capabilities such as single sign-on, multi-user support, a highly scalable and technology-agnostic platform, and plug-and-play ability. It also comes with an in-built database, a data lake and analytical capabilities. A prototype has been tested in Eswatini. In addition to testing those tools, the Eswatini country mission has also aimed to train statisticians to disseminate data in SDMX output.

29. Two regional workshops were held in 2024 to strengthen capacity among participating developing countries on the development and maintenance of statistical business registers for the production of quality official statistics and to provide guidance on the implementation of the statistical business register maturity model. The first workshop was held jointly by the Statistics Division and the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) in March 2024, with participation from 19 countries from the Asia-Pacific region. The second workshop was held jointly by the Statistics Division, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS) in June 2024, with participation from 16 countries from the Arab region. The workshops reiterated the usefulness of the statistical business register maturity model to assess the stages of statistical business register development in countries and called for further development of guidance on related topics such as the informal sector, administrative and new data sources for business register development, classifications, and the global information technology solutions for statistical business register upgrade.

VI. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

30. **The Statistical Commission is invited:**

- (a) **To endorse the handbook on integrating business and trade statistics;**
 - (b) **To welcome the progress in the revision of trade statistics manuals and the drafting of the second volume of the *Manual on Principal Indicators for Business and Trade Statistics*;**
 - (c) **To express its views on the development of the handbook of business statistics;**
 - (d) **To express its views on the strategic road map for the global initiative on unique identifiers for businesses;**
 - (e) **To welcome the progress made by the Committee and its task teams on advancing business and trade statistics; to express its views on the progress of work; and to provide guidance on the elements of the work programme of the Committee.**
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