

Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics

Special Meeting on the Impact of COVID-19 on Business and Trade Statistics

Virtual Meeting, 16-18 June 2020

Concept Note

The world is facing an unprecedented threat from COVID-19. This has led to a global health crisis unlike any other — one that is spreading human suffering, destabilizing the global economy and up-ending the lives of billions of people around the globe.

The global COVID-19 crisis is also affecting critical operations of national, regional and global statistical systems. The international statistical community has an important responsibility to convene and share guidance, tools, and best practices to facilitate the operational continuity of programmes by National Statistical Offices. At the same time, we need to exploit real time data and data solutions for granular and integrated analysis and policy making and to anticipate our transition to the post COVID-19 environment.

Within this context, the United Nations Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics is organizing a virtual meeting, from 16 to 18 June 2020, to discuss the long term impact of COVID-19 on business and trade statistics programmes.

The Meeting will be organized according to the following four main themes:

Ensuring continuity:

This theme will explore challenges and solutions available to National Statistical Offices to be agile and innovative in adapting data production methods and processes affected by COVID 19, to ensure continuity of major official statistical programmes and to meet new user requirements.

- New mechanisms to communicate with users and policy makers during the COVID19 pandemic. What are these new mechanisms?
- New user demand for granular and for real time statistics on activities, products and societal groups. What are these new user demands?
- Balance the user demands for new crisis-related statistics with that for official statistics
- Collection of administrative and survey data during the lockdown
- Experimental statistics and new compilation methods such as imputations and extrapolation for non-response and missing data
- Resilience of the statistical system - stress testing for different shocks

Data solutions:

There is an unprecedented need for timely and responsive statistics to monitor the evolution and impact of the COVID-19 crisis. National statistical systems therefore need to make full use of all sources of data at their disposal and mobilize partners and experts from all sectors of society to implement new solutions to produce timely and disaggregated statistics.

- Adjusted data and methods to produce statistics to inform policy making during a time of emergency. What new data sources (new surveys, crowdsourcing, web scraping, Big Data sources owned by the private sector data, etc.), new collection methods (CATI, household panel

surveys, etc.) and compilation methods (nowcasting, flash estimates, delayed releases) are introduced?

- Networking with public and private sector partners for access and use of technology, data, methods and learning
- Networking country experiences in response to user requirements (e.g. supply chain analysis). Did countries reach out to other countries to consult on the responses? Is there a need for coordinating these initiatives?
- Role of international and regional organizations in networking and helping National Statistical Offices to access data from digital intermediation platforms. Did countries reach out to international organisations for assistance?
- Availability of secure data exchange capabilities and technologies
- Remote access to sensitive information
- Appetite for risk taking and experimentation for generating real time data. What is fit for purpose and how do we balance timeliness and quality?
- Initiatives and innovative solutions to be scaled to deal with new data requirements to modernize our programs in the post-COVID era?

Pivot Post-COVID:

Post-COVID-19, there will remain a need to continue new working arrangements to make statistical systems more resilient and to address the impact on society and the economy with the pivot to sustain a more integrated and multidimensional statistical measurement of the economy, the wellbeing of citizens and environment

- Requests from policy departments that National Statistical Offices provide an integrated statistical presentation (either support for the creation of models, or the analysis itself) related to the social, economic, and environmental impact of policies and the impact of COVID19
- Most prevalent statistical measurement challenges for NSOs in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Most prevalent new working arrangements to be introduced to make NSOs more resilient in in the wake of COVID pandemic
- Most likely statistics to be demanded and discontinued in the production of statistics
- Data stewardship of National Statistical Offices in management and oversight of national and departmental data assets. How did National Statistical Offices assist in providing support to departments in generating high-quality data that is easily accessible in a consistent manner?

Organization of the meeting:

For each of the themes and sessions, short notes are prepared to cover methodological and operational aspects that are specific to business and trade statistics and to identify key questions for discussion and possible solutions.

The virtual meeting will be consisting of:

- 2.5 hour sessions from 7 am to 9:30 am (NY time) for three days

The virtual platform will be tested twice with registered participants the week prior to the meeting.