

Friends of the Chair Group on Economic Statistics

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Project team on digital platforms

Background

The Friends of the Chair Group on Economic Statistics has recognised the need for the statistical groups to work more collaboratively by applying a network approach that brings together multidisciplinary project teams to address specific methodological and institutional challenges. These challenges should mobilize the power of networking among the statistical groups functioning under UN and non-UN organisations and across the economic, social and environmental sphere. It is expected that a network approach will lead to new working methods and innovative methodological and institutional solutions through shared communication, priorities, membership and user consultation. This approach should also lead to more effective coordination and alignment between statistical groups without adding any additional governance groups or hierarchies.

The FOC Group referred to challenges in the area of better use of technology for communicating; the need for more iterative approach to producing outputs; the importance of opening membership to a wider array of institutions; incorporating a capacity building perspective into the work of statistical groups; and finding new ways of balancing challenges of continuity with innovation. The network would also serve as a medium for sharing best practices and results from experimentation between groups.

Ultimately, the project teams should demonstrate new working methods that make the system of economic statistics responsive to fast-changing user demand, enhance synergies between the groups, and avoid duplication of work.

Purpose

The platform-based economy is not only growing fast, but with the digital transformation of the economy, digital platforms are becoming central actors in the economy.

The Project Team on Digital Platforms focuses on advancing the measurement of digital intermediation and related digital services across the emerging range of digital platforms, providing services in transport, accommodation, travel, and trade in financial services, etc.

The project on Digital Platforms represents an excellent opportunity to leverage the excellent work already done by the multiple stakeholders involved in the various groups looking at the multidimensional aspects of the digital economy and continue to advance the development and share of common definitions and methods internationally.

In 2019, the Inter-Agency Task Force on International Trade – Expert Group on Measuring Digital Trade published the *OECD-WTO Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade*. As well in 2019, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) published the *Digital Economy Report 2019* with a focus on the implications of the emerging digital economy for developing countries.

Each report uses a **different typology** to characterize the type of digital platforms. Both reports raised various **challenges related to statistical definitions and classification** related to digital platforms (eg. Industry, workers, mode of supply). The **identification of the Digital platforms in the economy and their characterization in the business register is difficult** in the absence of a dedicated industry classification. Both reports also discuss the **measurement challenges of transactions on digital platforms given the transnational nature of the platforms**. In some cases, the platforms are not resident in the economic territory, and are therefore outside the reach of statistical agencies and administrative government databases.

Beyond solving measurement problems, the FOC Group expects to learn from these collaboration projects and from the outcomes of the new working methods to improve the responsiveness of the overall economic statistics systems to new emerging socio-economic issues and policy needs.

Approach

This work will be initiated through the creation of a network of Chairs on economic statistics from existing statistical groups covering macroeconomic accounts, business and trade statistics, classifications and price statistics. Joining the network would be voluntary, and membership would be broad (inclusive of groups from the environmental and socio-demographic domains and groups operating outside the UN system). Activities of the network would jointly focus around a selected measurement problem, with designated outputs and outcomes, with specified time frames.

Deliverables / Time Schedule

The project will be responsible for developing **formal guidance notes** on the following elements:

1. Development of a common typology and classifications
2. Identification of the platforms on the business registers
3. Development of accounting principles and concepts
4. Measurement – transactions, intermediate fees, data sources
- 5.

The notes would outline the issues being addressed, summarize existing research/ country practices, consider various options, develop a consensus recommendation and a road map for addressing the research issues of globalisation for the future update of the system of economic statistics.

In addition, the team members will be asked to report on the successes and challenges of the network approach and on the innovative working methods and agile solutions used inside the network.

- A status update report will be submitted for the fourth meeting of the Friends of the Chair group on economic statistics in the **fall of 2020**.
- The final guidance notes should be ready for the final report of the Friends of the Chair group on economic statistics to be submitted for the Fifty-Second Session of the Statistical Commission in **March 2021**.

- A report providing an assessment of the network approach and of the working arrangements used for the team project will be prepared for the final report of the Friends of the Chair group on economic statistics to be submitted for the Fifty-Second Session of the Statistical Commission in **March 2021**.

Communications and reporting

The Project team on digital platforms will report directly to the Chair of the FOC Group on Economic Statistics.

Membership

NSOs/CBs/International organisation

Name	Title	Organisation

External (from the private sector, platform companies)

Name	Title		Company	Location
				UK

Chair, secretariat and meetings

The Chair of the project team is yet **TBD** and the secretariat will be provided by UNSD. The Group is expected to meet weekly online, with other ad-hoc meetings to be arranged as required.