UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

Expert Group on International Merchandise Trade Statistics
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Implementation of IMTS 2010 and
the EG-IMTS work programme for 2010-2012

UNSD Report

New York, October 2009

I. Introduction: finalization of the draft IMTS2010 and related activities

1. UNSD will finalize the draft IMTS2010 based on the conclusions of the 2nd meeting of the EG-IMTS and submit it to the Commission by the end of December 2009. The final text of IMTS2010 will be prepared taking into account decisions of the Commission and will be made available on the UNSD website immediately after its preparation (March 2010).

2. UNSD will inform countries about the Commission's actions and will encourage them to begin planning the IMTS2010 implementation as soon as possible. Countries will be encouraged to develop their implementation plans based on their national circumstances and priorities. UNSD will review the status of the implementation several years later and report its findings to the Commission.

3. International and regional organizations are asked to support countries in their implementation activities by providing necessary technical materials, training and advocacy.

4. The 39th Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission endorsed the report of the Secretary-General[1] containing an outline of the multi-year strategy for updating the Commission's recommendations for international merchandise trade statistics and for their implementation. Based on the Commission's decisions UNSD is developing an action plan for the implementation of IMTS2010 and counts on the continued support of the EG-IMTS in its future activities. An outline of the action plan is presented in section II of the report. The draft work programme of the EG-IMTS is provided in section III.

II. Draft action plan for the implementation of IMTS2010

5. The draft action plan includes the following activities:

1. Preparation of an updated version of *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Compilers Manual*

6. The cornerstone of UNSD's action plan for the implementation of IMTS2010 is the update of the *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Compilers Manual* (Compilers Manual). It is expected that the Compilers Manual will contain further and more detailed explanation of certain recommendations and provide practical guidance for compilers by describing good/best practices applicable under different circumstances.

7. A detailed outline of the scope and structure of the Manual and a work plan for its update will be developed after the Commission's adoption of IMTS2010 and will be based on the country comments collected during the worldwide consultation and the conclusions of the current EG-IMTS meeting. UNSD will ask the EG-IMTS to review the detailed outline for an updated Compilers Manual in the second quarter of 2010.

8. One option for structuring the Compilers Manual is to follow the sequence of the recommendations and encouragements contained in IMTS2010 and provide any relevant

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[1] E/CN.3/2008/10.

additional explanations and compilation advice. This might show better the complementary character of IMTS2010 and the Compilers Manual and will make them easier to use together.

9. Based on the available country comments and previous suggestions by the members of the EG-IMTS the following topics and ideas need to be taken into account in the revised Manual:

(i)   additional explanation regarding the general and specific guidelines on coverage focusing on data sources and data compilation strategies applicable for the recording of particular categories of goods (for instance, further explanations needed for time of recording under different trade systems and how to move more effectively from the special trade system to the general trade system);

(ii)   information on analytical classifications and correlations should be updated and amended as required;

(iii)   examples of the calculation of the statistical value using invoice prices and information about additional cost items incurred by traders under the agreed terms of delivery and the valuation of specific categories of goods should be provided;

(iv)   good practices in the compilation or estimation of imports FOB should be well elaborated, including the description of data sources and compilation procedures;

(v)   approaches to the improvement of the quality of quantity data and quantity data estimation need to be discussed;

(vi)   the application of partner attribution in a number of special cases should be discussed and illustrated with examples; the issue of the application of a standard country nomenclature could be further discussed;

(vii)   there is a need for a separate chapter on good practices in the compilation of data by mode of transport which should also address data quality concerns;

(viii) examples of the efficient use of non-customs data sources and merging non-customs data with the customs records should be provided, highlighting advantages and limitations of these sources; further, data compilation for IMTS as part of an integrated approach to economic statistics as well as the issue of data collection for free zones will be discussed;

(ix)   good practices in quality assessment and quality assurance should be described;

(x)   issues of compilation and dissemination of metadata should be discussed;

(xi)   information and guidance on the calculation of external trade indices should be provided;

(xii)   good practices concerning the seasonal adjustment of trade data should be provided.

2.   Improving collection and dissemination of the IMTS metadata including descriptions of countries statistical territories

10. As part of the implementation of IMTS2010 UNSD plans to collect and disseminate metadata in a more regular and comprehensive way as part of its data collection activity. As of now the country metadata are available in the form of replies to the UNSD questionnaire on county practices, UN Comtrade explanatory notes and the UNSD publication *Statistical*

territories of the World for Use in IMTS. This publication presents the results of a survey of countries in 1999 regarding their statistical territory, including questions on the membership in a customs union.

11. The information on the countries' statistical territory is important for compilers and users of IMTS and should be updated on a regular basis. Yet, the statistical territory of a country is only one element of a country metadata on IMTS. UNSD plans to review its practices in collection and dissemination of country's metadata so that all information is provided together with the data itself and not parts of it in a separate, difficult to access, and fast ageing publication.

3. Technical assistance to developing and transitional countries

12. UNSD plans to conduct a series of regional workshops for developing and transitional countries which will focus on the contents of the new recommendation and the practical issues of their implementation. For 2010 and 2011 activities (predominately workshops) for the following regions are tentatively planned:
    - South-East Asia (5 countries)
    - Sub-Saharan Africa
    - CIS and Central Asia
    - Asia and the Pacific
    - North Africa and Middle East

    In previous years UNSD conducted workshops to support the implementation (but also the update) of the current recommendations at a rate of about two per year. For details on past technical assistance activities see: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/trade/workshops_imts.htm

4. Further enhancements in the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database (UN Comtrade)

13. As part of its regular data collection UNSD will request and advocate the delivery of data according to the new recommendations and will put increased emphasis on obtaining comprehensive metadata. As for UN Comtrade, it is planned that the database will be able to accommodate and disseminate data according to the new recommendations starting with data of the reporting year 2010 received in 2011. The following data items/ fields will have to be added:
    - Mode of transport
    - Second value for imports FOB
    - Second partner country (Country of consignment)

5. **Continued methodological work and related research agenda**

14. There are several issues which will require significant further work and/ or which do not fit into the scope of the Compilers Manual. These include, for example,

    - Addressing global imbalances / reconciliation studies;

    - Linking trade and business statistics/ integrated approach to economic statistics;

    - Relationship BOP and Merchandise Trade Statistics;

    - Interpretation of trade data/ value added chain;

    - Automated data transfer;

    - Good practices in compilation of the external trade indices and various analytical indicators.

III.   EG-IMTS work programme for 2010-2012

15. Based on the above mentioned considerations an outline of the proposed EG-IMTS work programme for 2010-2012 contains the following main elements:

Work Programme item	Timetable
2010	
Review and endorsement of IMTS-CM outline	Q2 2010
Review and endorsement of a questionnaire on country practices on IMTS index numbers	Q4 2010
1st virtual meeting on IMTS-CM	Q4 2010
2011	
2nd virtual meeting on IMTS-CM	Q2 2011
Virtual meeting on UN Comtrade (data and metadata)	Q3 2011
EG-IMTS meeting to review and endorse the provisional draft of the revised IMTS-CM	Q4 2011
2012	
EG-IMTS meeting on good practices in the compilation of IMTS index numbers	Q2 2012

16. The EG-IMTS is invited to provide comments on both, the draft action plan for the implementation of IMTS2010 and the proposed EG-IMTS work programme.