



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

**Expert Group on International Merchandise Trade Statistics
First Meeting
New York, 3-6 December 2007**

Report of the First Meeting

United Nations, New York

2007

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I. Purpose and organization

1. The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) established the Expert Group on International Merchandise Trade Statistics (EG-IMTS) to assist in the revision of the existing United Nations recommendations on international merchandise trade statistics, published in the *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions, Revision 2* (Statistical Papers, Series M, No. 52, Rev. 2, United Nations, New York, 1998).
2. In particular, the task of the Expert Group is to review the underlying concepts and definitions, data items, data sources, data compilation strategies, data dissemination policies and other relevant areas.
3. The Expert Group is expected to conduct two meetings – the first from 3 to 6 December 2007 and the second in the third quarter of 2009. The purpose of the first meeting was to provide an assessment of the existing recommendations in view of new developments, to advise on the areas where updating of the existing and/or developing of new recommendations is needed and to propose a list of issues for a worldwide consultation.
4. The agenda of the first meeting included a review of all substantive items starting with the need for a new revision and covering all chapters of the current IMTS, Rev.2 as well as some chapters of *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Compilers Manual*. The agenda included such items as: (a) coverage and time of recording; (b) trade system; (c) commodity classifications and mode of transport; (d) valuation; (e) quantity measurement; (f) partner country and (g) metadata and data quality. The meeting concluded with a round-table discussion and formulation of the preliminary conclusions.
5. Participants prepared notes on country practices in international merchandise trade statistics and made presentations on selected topics.

II. Summary of the opening statement of the Director of UNSD

6. A written statement from Mr. Paul Cheung, Director, UNSD, was read to the participants. Mr. Cheung stated that international merchandise trade is an important economic activity and that data on such trade is always in high demand. The globalization of national economies has created a need for higher quality and internationally comparable data on international merchandise trade.
7. Mr. Cheung noted that in some countries these statistics are not sufficiently developed and do not satisfy fully the needs of the policy makers, business community and general public. In a number of countries, even with well established trade statistics, there are concerns regarding the quality and international comparability of data necessitating bilateral and multilateral reconciliation exercises. These concerns, combined with new developments such as changes in commercial practices and legal environment (e.g., abolishing of customs controls in trade between some countries) as well as the adoption

of revised methodological guidelines for balance of payments statistics and national accounts, warrant revisiting and updating current recommendations for international merchandise trade statistics.

8. The Director also emphasized the importance to achieve the best possible harmonization of trade statistics with economic statistics as a whole. The benefits of such an integrated approach will include improving a country's capability to produce data in the most cost effective way and, at the same time, ensure their coherence with other economic statistics and enhance policy relevance. Following its policy of strengthening basic economic statistics, UNSD has decided to make a special effort to modernize the methodological and operational foundations of international merchandise trade statistics. This is one of its priority activities in coming years.
9. In conclusion, the Director expressed his confidence in the professionalism of the Expert Group and wished them a productive and successful meeting.

III. Evaluation

10. In general, the participants concluded that the Expert Group meeting was well organized and that it provided fruitful discussion for the revision process of the manual on international merchandise trade statistics: 89 percent of the participants thought that the overall organization of the meeting was excellent or good; 81 percent were satisfied with the travel arrangements and accommodation; only 48 percent approved of the conference facilities, whereas 33 percent thought that it was adequate and 19 percent believed that the conference room was not up to standard. All participants rated the value of the meeting as either good or excellent and 93 percent believed that the balance among topics was very well chosen.

IV. Conclusions

11. At its first meeting from 3 to 6 December 2007 in New York, the Expert Group on International Merchandise Trade Statistics:

A. Need for Revision

12. Agreed that the existing recommendations have to be reviewed, clarified and updated in view of:
 - (i) changes in the way international merchandise trade is conducted; for instance, increasing globalization of the production and distribution processes, expansion of intra-firm trade, transactions with bundled goods and services components;
 - (ii) changes in the legal environment such as the adoption by the WCO Council of the International Convention on the simplification and harmonization of Customs procedures (Revised Kyoto Convention) and new legal/administrative measures for increased security or further simplification of customs formalities;

- (iii) changes in related statistical frameworks, like the 1993 System of National Accounts and the Balance of Payments Manual;
 - (iv) changes in user needs, including an increased demand for more detailed and timely data for market access negotiations, trade policy purposes, market research by business community and economic analysis (e.g., linking industry and trade statistics to analyze trade and production or employment);
 - (v) and the need for further clarification of some existing concepts and improvement of overall readability.
13. Agreed that new recommendations may be needed in areas not sufficiently covered in IMTS, Revision 2.

B. Guiding principles for drafting the revised recommendations

14. Agreed that drafting of the revised recommendations should be guided by the following principles:
- (a) user needs should be identified for better focus of the revision process;
 - (b) recommendations have to focus on detailed trade statistics (by commodity and partner country) suitable for multiple uses;
 - (c) recommendations should (i) be internally consistent; (ii) be operational; (iii) be cost effective; (iv) not increase the overall respondents burden; (v) be in line, where applicable and to the extent possible, with the recommendations for the related areas of statistics including BOP, SNA, and structural business statistics;
 - (d) the scope of IMTS, Rev.3 should include the different stages of the statistical process such as concepts and definitions, data sources, data compilation strategies, institutional arrangements, data quality, metadata, dissemination and analysis;
 - (e) the boundary between recommendations contained in IMTS, Rev.3 and additional guidance to be provided in the updated compilers manual should be clarified;
 - (f) priorities need to be established as required during the revision process.

C. Preparation of a paper for the worldwide consultation

15. Agreed that the list of issues for worldwide consultation should be rather shorter than longer, that it should focus on key issues and recommendations, that other issues should be dealt with by EG-IMTS and that the list for worldwide consultation should be available in as many UN languages as possible;

16. Agreed that each issue be introduced by a brief note which describes its background and, if necessary, different options for its treatment;
17. Agreed that UNSD will draft an initial list of issues and send it to EG-IMTS by mid-December 2007, that comments and additional proposals will be accepted until mid-January 2008 and that the draft consultation paper be ready by the end of February 2008, to be reviewed by TF-IMTS and EG-IMTS by the end of March 2008;
18. Agreed that the world wide consultation paper will be sent by UNSD to countries in early April with a 12-weeks consultation period and a deadline of 1 July 2008;
19. Agreed that UNSD will prepare the report on the results by mid September 2008.

D. Coverage and time of recording

20. While recognizing the need for further discussion on and explanation of the term 'trade', confirmed the existing recommendation (IMTS, Rev.2, para 14, page 4) that international merchandise trade statistics record all goods which add to or subtract from the stock of material resources of a country by entering or leaving its economic territory except for goods simply being transported through a country (goods in transit) or temporarily admitted or withdrawn; and requested to further elaborate and clarify the boundaries between "temporary admission", "simple transformation" and "adding to or subtracting from the stock of material resources".
21. Requested to further elaborate the nature of transactions covered by international trade statistics (e.g. sales and purchases, goods transfer, non-competitive or intra-firm trade), to clarify the role of certain activities adding value to the goods (of which the origin may or may not change), such as distributive trade, storage or transportation, and to clarify whether these transactions should be included in international merchandise trade statistics or should be classified as simple transportation (and excluded).
22. Agreed that conditions should be provided under which change of ownership is to be used in the decisions of inclusion or exclusion of certain categories of goods.
23. Agreed that the list of inclusions and exclusions should be reviewed for updating or refocusing and that for certain categories of goods it should be specified that they should be included in the total, but need not be fully described in commodity and partner detail.
24. Agreed for the following special cases :
 - (a) that the recommendation for inclusion of goods, which cross the border as part of intra-firm trade, be strengthened and that this trade be separately identified;
 - (b) that humanitarian aid, including emergency aid, and other donations be included, even if details of these transactions may only become available at a later stage;

- (c) that the recommendation for inclusion of standard packaged digital products should be clarified;
- (d) that a recommendation for exclusion of electronic transmission of any downloadable product be added;
- (e) that the recommendation for inclusion of goods for processing be confirmed; it is further proposed to recommend that goods for processing with physical inputs owned by others be separately recorded for the purposes of balance of payments statistics; separate identification would require customs as well as non-customs data sources;
- (f) that the existing recommendation on exclusion of merchanting (paragraph 50, IMTS, Rev.2) be confirmed; and that in this respect the trade in aircraft and vessels (which is included) be further elaborated;
- (g) that as a general guideline, recommendations on inclusions and exclusions should be symmetrical (that is if a certain category of goods is recommended for inclusion in imports statistics it should be recommended for inclusion in exports statistics as well and vice versa) and that all asymmetric inclusions and exclusions (such as bunkers supplied to foreign vessels or aircraft which are recommended for inclusion in exports statistics [IMTS, Rev.2, para 39, page 6], but recommended for exclusion from imports statistics [IMTS, Rev.2, para 59, page 8]) be reviewed, and either reconfirmed, modified or canceled.

E. Trade System

25. Agreed that the current recommendation to use the General Trade System be reconfirmed (IMTS, Rev.2, para 89, page 13) and be elaborated and clarified with respect to (i) the inclusion of certain territorial elements and (ii) the boundaries with the relaxed definition of the Special Trade System; the text should further make separate mention of the possibility of a different trade system for imports and exports within one country.

F. Commodity classifications

26. Confirmed the existing recommendations for use of HS in data collection, database maintenance and dissemination (IMTS, Rev.2, para 100, page 15).
27. Confirmed the use of SITC for economic analysis.
28. Agreed that BEC be further studied by the Expert Group on international economic and social classifications.
29. Confirmed the usefulness of ISIC (if correctly applied) to analyze trade by economic sectors.

G. Mode of Transport

30. Agreed that a recommendation to record and publish Mode of Transport be added in IMTS, Rev.3.
31. Agreed that self-propelled or own-propelled (transported by its own means, like ships and aircraft) might be a separate category of Mode of Transport.
32. Proposed to elaborate further on the issue of nationality of a carrier.

H. Valuation

33. Reconfirmed the recommendation to record Imports value on a CIF-type basis (IMTS, Rev.2, para 116, point (a), page 17), while elaborating and clarifying the conceptual reasons and practicalities of it.
34. Agreed that in addition to the existing recommendation (IMTS, Rev.2, para 116, point (a), page 17) that the statistical value of imported goods be CIF-type value, a new recommendation to compile (as supplementary information) the statistical value of such goods on a FOB-type basis, should be added and that the compilation of such data should be at least at total level and compilation at the detailed level should be encouraged.
35. Requested to elaborate and clarify the need for compilation of value components (including invoice values) and the use of prorating and other methods of estimation; requested also to address the issue of valuation and time of recording in the case of non-customs sources.
36. Requested to elaborate and clarify the valuation of special cases like (a) electricity, water and gas, (b) returned goods, (c) used goods, (d) goods on consignment (including sales at auctions on foreign markets), (e) rebates and discounts, (f) goods bundled with services, (g) goods with very large mark-up margins and (h) counterfeit goods.

I. Quantity measurement

37. Reconfirmed the existing recommendations on quantity measurement (IMTS, Rev.2, para 133, page 20).
38. Recommended the use of quantity estimates and the publication of the methods of quantity estimation, including the estimation of net weight (e.g., from gross shipping weight), if not directly recorded.
39. Requested to collect good practices in quantity estimation and put them in the updated compilers manual.

J. Partner country

40. Proposed to strengthen the existing recommendation to collect both, the country of origin and the country of consignment for imports (IMTS, Rev.2, para. 150, page 23).
41. Agreed to update the existing recommendation that the statistical territory of each country, as defined by the country itself, constitute the basis upon which the trading partners of each country compile their statistics (IMTS, Rev.2, para 151, page 23), so that it correctly includes also free zones and other territorial elements which may not be part of the statistical territory.
42. Confirmed the recommendation of country of last known destination for exports (IMTS, Rev.2, para. 150, page 23) and agreed that the additional recommendation on use of country of consignment be presented in two options in the worldwide consultation, namely (i) the recommendation that country of consignment be an encouraged optional attribution for exports or (ii) the recommendation that country of consignment be recommended as additional partner attribution for exports.
43. Requested to further discuss the usefulness of compiling country of sale/ purchase.
44. Requested to further discuss which partner attributions could be used in calculation of the trade balances by country.
45. Requested to elaborate and clarify issues concerning Rules of Origin, namely:
 - (a) the possible use of ISIC (and CPC) in origin attribution for cases where national and Kyoto convention rules of origin are non-conclusive;
 - (b) the recommendation regarding origin of used goods;
 - (c) the conceptual and practical boundaries in determining rules of origin to distinguish between exports, re-exports and simple transportation;
 - (d) The country of origin in case of financial leasing.

K. Data sources and institutional arrangements

46. Proposed to include a recommendation on use of non-customs sources and data compilation strategies (e.g., on use of enterprise surveys, statistical business register etc.) in the context of promotion of an integrated approach to meet the needs for analysis of globalization.
47. Proposed to include a recommendation on establishing and maintaining necessary institutional arrangements.

48. Agreed to update the existing recommendation to periodically conduct bilateral and multilateral reconciliation studies or implement data exchanges (IMTS, Rev.2, para 158, page 24) and to recommend bilateral or multilateral data exchange with the purpose of improving the quality of data and under the condition that necessary reconciliation studies were conducted.

L. Data quality and metadata

49. Recommended that IMTS, Revision 3, will provide guidance on quality of international merchandise trade statistics, including on the assessment and reporting of data quality and on the use of some data quality indicators.
50. Recommended that IMTS, Revision 3, will provide guidance on the compilation and dissemination of metadata as a necessary part of the regular work programme of trade statistics compilers.
51. Requested to elaborate and clarify the main elements of metadata.

M. Dissemination

52. Confirmed the importance of timely data dissemination to international agencies for inclusion of data in international reporting.
53. Requested to elaborate and clarify the possible use of new technologies for dissemination such as the internet and SDMX.

N. Supplementary topics

54. Agreed to explicitly recommend the compilation of external trade indices (based on price surveys and/or unit values) and to elaborate on their use in the deflation of the trade flows.
55. Requested to delineate more clearly the differences between international merchandise trade statistics and national accounts or balance of payments statistics and provide clear guidelines on how to derive the latter.
56. Requested that linkages to and possible integration with other statistical domains be explored.
57. Proposed to include a recommendation to compile seasonally adjusted data.

ANNEX I
AGENDA

Monday, 3 December 2007

Morning session: 9:00 – 12:30

9:00 – 9:30

Registration

9:30 – 10:00

1. Opening statement by Paul Cheung, Director, UNSD

2. Objectives and organization of the meeting

3. Administrative matters

Chair: *Vladimir Markhonko, UNSD*

10:00 – 10:30

4. Adoption of agenda

5. *Why International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions* need a new revision?

UNSD presentation Towards revised recommendations

(a) Canada

10:30 – 10:50

Coffee break

10:50 – 12:30

5. – cont.

(b) Eurostat

(c) IMF

General discussion

UNSD presentation on country practices in IMTS and compliance with IMTS, Rev.2

General discussion

12:30 – 14:00

Lunch

Monday, 3 December 2007

Afternoon session: 14:00 – 17:00

Chair: *Andreas Maurer, WTO*

14:00 – 15:30 6. Coverage and time of recording

- i. Definition of coverage and time of recording; use of physical movement and change of ownership criteria; lists of inclusions and exclusions

UNSD introduction

General discussion

- ii. Special case - Goods for processing

UNSD introduction

(a) France

(b) Canada

15:30 – 15:50 *Coffee break*

15:50 – 17:00 6. cont.

(c) China

(d) Czech Republic

(e) Mexico

General discussion

Tuesday, 4 December 2007

Morning session: 9:00 – 12:30

Chair: *Craig Kuntz, Canada*

09:00 – 10:40 7. Trade system

- i. Statistical territory and definitions of trade systems
- ii. Treatment of free zones
- iii. Trade flows – general/special systems

UNSD introduction

(a) United Kingdom

(b) United States

(c) Chile

(d) Viet Nam

General discussion

10:40 – 11:00 *Coffee break*

11:00 – 12:30 8. Commodity classifications and Mode of Transport

- i. Harmonized System and SITC
- ii. Trade statistics by CPC, BEC and ISIC
- iii. Trade by Mode of Transport

UNSD introduction
(a) Malaysia
(b) United Kingdom
(c) Chile
General discussion

12:30 – 14:00 *Lunch*

Tuesday, 4 December 2007

Afternoon session: 14:00 – 17:00

Chair: *Ronald Jansen, UNSD*

14:00 – 15:30 9. Valuation

- i. The WTO Valuation Agreement and statistical value of imported and exported goods: country experience with implementation

UNSD introduction
(a) Germany
(b) WTO
General discussion

15:30 – 15:50 *Coffee break*

15:50 – 17:00 9. cont..

- ii. Compilation of data on CIF components; feasibility of imports FOB

(a) Brazil
(b) United States
(c) Czech Republic
(d) Nigeria

General discussion

Wednesday, 5 December 2007

Morning session: 9:00 – 12:30

Chair: *Paolo Pavao, Brazil*

09:00 – 10:30 10. Quantity measurement

UNSD introduction
General discussion

10:30 – 10:50 *Coffee break*

10:50 – 12:30 11. Partner country

- i. Imports/Export – country of origin, country of consignment and other partner attributions: concepts and issues of implementation

UNSD introduction
(a) Norway
(b) Ukraine
(c) Eurostat
General discussion

12:30 – 14:00 *Lunch*

Wednesday, 5 December 2007

Afternoon session: 14:00 – 17:00

Chair: *David Dickerson, United States*

14:00 – 15:30 11. cont.. Partner country

- ii. Re-exports – Multiple partner country attribution (country of origin, country of consignment on imports side; country of last known destination, country of consignment on exports side); concepts and issues of implementation; rules of origin/ substantial transformation; distinction re-exports from transit and transshipment.

UNSD introduction
(a) Belgium
(b) Senegal
(c) Jordan
General discussion

15:30 – 15:50 *Coffee break*

15:50 – 17:00 12/13. Institutional arrangements and interagency cooperation and an

overview of data sources and data compilation strategies

- i. Customs records
- ii. Other sources (including enterprise surveys)

UNSD introduction

(a) Germany

(b) Malaysia

(c) OECD

General discussion

Thursday, 6 December 2007

Morning session: 9:00 – 12:30

Chair: *Klaus Geyer-Schaefer, Germany*

09:00 – 10:30 14. Metadata and data quality
UNSD introduction
(a) Italy
(b) France
General discussion

15. Dissemination
UNSD introduction
General discussion

10:30 – 10:50 *Coffee break*

10:50 – 12:30 16. Round table discussion on issues for a world-wide consultation and other EG conclusions

12:30 – 14:00 *Lunch*

Afternoon session: 14:00 – 17:00

Chair: *Vladimir Markhonko, UNSD*

14:00 – 17:00 17. Evaluation of the meeting

18. Conclusion of the meeting

ANNEX II
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