COHERENCE
COMPARABILITY
TIMELINESS
ACCESSIBILITY
CLARITY
ACCURACY
RELEVANCE

Quality report on external trade statistics in Southern & Eastern Mediterranean countries

MEDSTAT III

The Medstat III programme in brief

Medstat III is the statistical cooperation programme with the European Union's partner countries of North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean and is financed and managed by EuropeAid. The programme, which was officially launched on 28 April 2010, will run until the end of 2013, and has a budget of seven million Euros. It aims to strengthen the capacity of the statistical authorities of the EU's Mediterranean partners (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, and Tunisia) to collect up to date, timely and relevant statistics, ensuring the reliability and coherence of available information.

Objectives

Medstat III builds on the achievements of the Medstat I (1996-2003) and Medstat II (2006-2009) programmes. It seeks to promote evidence-based policy-making and to foster democratic development through the use of robust statistical data. The programme aims to improve the quality and availability of data in six priority thematic sectors - agriculture, energy, migration, social statistics, transport, and trade and balance of payments - and will promote the increased dissemination and use of this data.

What does it do?

Medstat III is designed to strengthen the national statistics institutes and national statistical systems in the Mediterranean Partner Countries by improving their capacity to collect timely, relevant, and high-quality data necessary for political decision-making and good governance. Furthermore, it promotes the harmonisation of statistical data with European and international standards, and consolidates the exchange of data between partners.

The Medstat III experts work closely with their counterparts in the partner countries to carry out the project's activities and to transfer know-how and best practices. This is done through targeted technical assistance, and a series of workshops, seminars, training courses, and study visits.

Other activities include promoting a more user-friendly dissemination of statistics and a better understanding of the importance of statistics among the final users (politicians, governments, administration, private sector, journalists, universities, civil society, EU bodies, and international institutions).

Data availability

In a complementary activity, Eurostat collects annually a wide range of data from the Mediterranean partners.
These data can be consulted on-line at:
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/european_neighbourhood_policy/enp_south/data_1/database
A synopsis of this data is also available in .pdf version in the Eurostat country profiles that can be consulted on-line at:
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/european_neighbourhood_policy/enp_south/data_1/country_profiles

Quality report on external trade statistics in Southern & Eastern Mediterranean countries

Introduction

A. International trade statistics

International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS) measure the value and quantity of goods traded between countries.

IMTS are an instrument of primary importance for numerous public and private sector decision makers at both the national and international levels. For example, international merchandise trade statistics:

◗ enable national authorities to prepare multilateral and bilateral negotiations within the framework of trade policy;

◗ enable the measurement of national companies' competitiveness in national and foreign markets;

◗ constitute an essential source of information for balance of payments statistics, national accounts and economic studies;

◗ help companies do market research and define their commercial strategy.

This list, while not exhaustive, demonstrates the diversity of users and their needs.

B. What is quality?

Several international organisations (in particular the IMF, UNSD and Eurostat) have defined lists of quality indicators and model Quality Reports.

The present quality report on trade statistics is largely based on the Eurostat Quality Report, which centres on elements agreed on by Eurostat and EU Member States. The Quality Report is based on the following dimensions:

◗ *relevance* is the degree to which statistics meet current and potential users' needs;

◗ *methodological soundness* deals with the application of available international standards, guidelines and good practices in the production of IMTS;

◗ *accuracy* deals with the proximity of the value published to the true unknown population value, including exclusions, thresholds, non-response, adjustments, controls and corrections, confidentiality, etc.;

◗ *timeliness* deals with the publication calendar, reference period, etc.;

◗ *accessibility* deals with availability, ease of access to data, different formats and conditions of data distribution, etc.;

◗ *clarity* deals with ensuring data is adequately documented, assistance in using and interpreting the data, etc.;

◗ *comparability* deals with conceptual differences between sets of trade statistics over space and time;

◗ *coherence* deals with the extent to which statistics originating from other sources (such as balance of payments, national accounts, etc.) are compatible with trade statistics.

Based on these dimensions, a list of quality indicators has been defined in close coordination with representatives of the Mediterranean Partner Countries.

This list of indicators is also compatible to a large extent with the indicators suggested by the United Nations for measuring the quality of international merchandise trade statistics in IMTS 2010 Concepts and Definitions.

C. Quality Reports and indicators

One of the goals endorsed by the MEDSTAT III Task Force on Trade Statistics was to assess the quality of trade statistics in participating countries as a result of:

◗ the implementation of asymmetry studies between Mediterranean countries and the EU (main results are published in a specific document);

◗ the update of the Quality Report published during the second phase of the MEDSTAT Programme (subject of the present publication).

In order to monitor and analyse data quality, a questionnaire was sent in November 2012 to the following Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPCs): Algeria (DZ), Egypt (EG), Israel (IL), Jordan (JO), Lebanon (LB), Morocco (MA), Palestine (PS) and Tunisia (TN). In order to limit the burden put on MPCs, a simplified list of quality indicators (as compared to the list included in the Eurostat Quality Report) was included in the questionnaire.

The present report is based on the answers returned by all concerned countries. The indicators provided in the report are generally for years 2010 and 2011.

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List of acronyms

BOP	Balance of Payments
CIF	Cost, Insurance, Freight
EC	European Commission
EUROSTAT	European Statistical Office – Luxembourg
ENP-South	European Neighbourhood Policy for the southern region encompassing nine non-EU Mediterranean countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia
EU	European Union
FOB	Free on Board
GDDS	General Data Dissemination System (IMF)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMTS	International Merchandise Trade Statistics
MEDSTAT	Statistical cooperation programme with the European Union's partner countries in North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean Region
MPC	Mediterranean partner countries of the ENP-South
NSI	National Statistical Institute
NSS	National Statistical System
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
SDDS	Special Data Dissemination Standard (IMF)
UNSD	United Nations Statistical Division
VAT	Value added tax
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Quality Indicators in the Mediterranean Partner Countries

1.Relevance

One efficient method of measuring data relevance is to carry out regular user satisfaction surveys. Others such tools are periodic meetings with the main users or comments sent by users to national institutions through the national website or via a specific mailbox. **A majority of MPCs use such tools to get feedback from users, but generally not on a regular basis.**

Table 1: Do you carry out user satisfaction surveys specific to trade data?

MPC	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
DZ			X
EG	X		
IL			X
JO		X	
LB			X
MA		X	
PS		X	
TN		X	
Comments			
DZ	No survey carried out but feedback from institutions, companies and experts that use the database when inconsistencies are detected		
EG	General questionnaire on the website; main issues are quantities		
IL	Meetings with main users		
JO	The main issues quoted by users was that they didn't know how to choose a commodity from the list of commodities (through the information centre)		
PS	User-producer dialogue workshops. All stakeholders normally participate.		
TN	Possibility to provide comments on data through an email box of the NSI		

The most frequently quoted gaps between user needs and compiled trade statistics are the following:
- lack of detail: Some users need product information on a more detailed level than what is available in the product classification system;
- the need expressed by some users to get information at the company level cannot be satisfied due to the confidentiality of individual data;
- lack of information on price (or unit value) indices;
- lack of seasonally adjusted data at the aggregated level: With the exceptions of Israel and Morocco, MPCs do not produce seasonally-adjusted data, despite the seasonal pattern of monthly data.

Table 2: What are the main gaps between user needs and compiled trade statistics?

MPCs	
DZ	The eight digit classifications for some products contain a combination of articles ("other products"), which makes the identification of some products difficult. Nevertheless, a 10 digit system is in testing to solve this issue.
EG	Users sometimes need to present data in statistical publications by quantity in addition to value.
IL	Trade data exclude trade with the Palestinian Authority. These data are frequently requested by users. Monthly indices: monthly imports indices were developed and have been published wquarterly since October 2011. Monthly exports indices are currently being developed (monthly publication began in March 2013).
JO	Users wanted more details, such as the names of exporters and importers, which have been classified by the Department of Statistics, as well as the kind of commodities (trademark).
LB	No gap
MA	Isolated monthly data (for the m + 30 days publication) Regional data (already available for exports) Individual data (not disclosed due to confidentiality)
PS	Quantities are not available from official data sources (VAT vouchers). Country of origin for imports from Israel is not mentioned in VAT vouchers, mainly for those commodities imported via Israel; PCBS highlights this issue in its annual reports.
TN	No dynamic database on the website meets users needs (crossed variables) No data available at the company level (problem with basic law) No data according to some international classifications (SITC, CPC, etc.)

2 - Methodological Soundness

Statistics on the trading of goods should follow international recommendations by the United Nations Statistics Division (International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions). This Manual containing general recommendations or encouragements is updated regularly to reflect changes in the environment of international trade. A revised version was edited in 2010 and contains a set of new or updated indicators and recommendations. Furthermore, the classifications for international trade are revised regularly in order to take into account the economic and administrative environment as well as user needs.

Thanks to a questionnaire sent and monitored by UNSD, it is possible to produce a ratio of compliance by comparing countries[1] actions and policies to UN recommendations. The ratio can be estimated by the reporting country or calculated directly from answers to the UNSD questionnaire. Reports on national compilation and reporting practices are available on the UNSD website at the following address: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/tradereport/default.asp

[1] A limitation of this ratio is that all issues raised are treated equally

Table 3: Compliance with UNSD recommendations*

MPCs	Level of compliance declared by the MPC (A)	UNSD measurement of lack of compliance (2006 questionnaire) (B)
DZ	n/a	n/a
EG	70%	n/a
IL	66.4%	20.6%
JO	More than 90%	35.5%
LB	Full compliance	n/a
MA	100%	19.6%
PS	75%	46.7%
TN	n/a	21.5%
Comments		
DZ	Concerning classifications, all recommendations about HS have been introduced in the Customs classification.	
IL	Since the 2006 survey, some concepts and definitions have been updated and changed.	
TN	UN ratio (21.5% + 35% no answer) does not reflect the real situation	

*When the sum of columns (A) and (B) do not equal 100%, it is due to non-answers to some questions or differences between UNSD and national estimates for column (A).

The most frequent divergences from international recommendations are the following:
- the use of the special trade system instead of the recommended general trade system
- the exclusion of the military equipment
- a lack of coverage
- the provision of new indicators (mode of transport, country of consignment, seasonally adjusted data, etc.).

Table 4: Main conceptual divergences from UNSD recommendations

MPCs	
DZ	n/a
EG	Does not include trade data on goods leased, as required by the financial lease contract Does not include trade data from ships and aircraft Trade data does not include data on gifts
IL	Trade statistics are not compiled and published according to the general trade system (GT to be applied in 2014) Military imports as well as trade with the Palestinian Authority are excluded
JO	We didn't use residents and non-residents in our trade statistics We didn't use the general system in foreign trade statistics
LB	No divergence
MA	Statistics by mode of transport (new recommendation) currently under development Statistics by country of consignment (new recommendation) currently available for imports
PS	In terms of coverage, there is an under coverage of Palestinian trade figures
TN	Exclusion of military equipment Inclusion of temporary admission followed by re-export in the same state

3 - Accuracy

The aim of this paragraph is not necessarily to provide figures on the accuracy of international trade statistics, but more realistically to inform users about existing limitations and the problems faced in ensuring accurate information. Where measures of accuracy are known, they are included.

3.1 - Exclusions

There are certain items that are excluded from official international trade statistics, e.g. items of no commercial value. In some cases, trade is excluded for specific domestic reasons. This is the case for military equipment, which is excluded from trade statistics by several MPCs. The inclusion of such goods is nevertheless requested by international recommendations in order to comply with the full coverage principle.

3.2 - Threshold Levels

In addition, in some countries, simplified customs procedures are applied when the value of a transaction is below a certain threshold. Such simplification is applied in three MPCs, albeit with rather low thresholds.

In the concerned MPCs, no adjustment is applied to take into account transactions below the threshold but the resulting undercoverage is negligible.

Table 5: Thresholds applied in 2011

	Do you apply a threshold?		Level of the threshold	
MPCs:	YES	NO	Imports	Exports
DZ	X		1000 dinars ± 10€	1000 dinars ± 10€
EG		X		
IL	X		US$ 50	US$ 100
JO	X		25 $	15$
LB	X		LBP 500 000	LBP 500 000
MA		X		
PS	X		25 $	15$
TN		X		
Comments				
DZ	Sub-threshold trade concerns personal belongings			

Customs declarations are generally the basic source of information for trade statistics. Nevertheless, for some specific goods or specific transactions, full coverage cannot be achieved by the use of customs records alone. In some cases, no customs declaration is provided for specific goods (electricity, ships, aircrafts, etc.). In other cases, a direct declaration from the importing/exporting company provides more accurate data than customs records, e.g., oil products. The following table shows the share of trade measured by other means than customs records.

Table 6: Trade not collected from customs data

MPCs	Imports	Exports	Comments
DZ	0%	0%	
EG	15 to 20%	30 to 35%	Oil companies, Ministry of Petroleum
IL	0.5% (2010) 0% (2011)	0.01% (2010) 0.1% (2011)	
JO	7-10%	about 25%	Ex: Potash and phosphates companies, Ministry of Agriculture
LB	Negligible	Negligible	
MA		1.4%	Goods procured in ports and airports, which are not reported to Customs
PS	Around 70%	Around 88%	VAT vouchers
TN	3% to 4%		Imports of cereals (wheat and corn) updated with data from Office of Cereals

In addition, it is possible that a part of the trade is not recorded in the usual sources of information (customs documents in particular). This lack of declaration can be provisional, as in the late reporting by companies in the case of trade facilitation, for instance, or permanent, as in under-reporting due to informal trade. It is recommended to estimate and include non-observed trade, at least in total trade data. The following table represents non-observed trade as a share of total trade in MPCs. It seems that this non-observed trade is either limited or difficult to estimate.

3.3 - Revisions

Trade figures can be updated several times between the first publication and subsequent revisions and publications at the national level.

The level of trade statistics revisions in the MPCs is generally limited at the aggregated level. When present, revisions always carry a positive sign, meaning that the revised figures are higher than in the first publication.

Table 7: Share of non-observed trade (non-response or informal trade)

MPCs	Imports	Exports	Comments
DZ			
EG	Unknown	Unknown	No estimate before publication
IL	0%	10%	Estimations are made for export data (first publication)
JO			All goods that entered through boards are included
LB	Unknown	Unknown	
MA			
PS	Around 40%	Around 25%	Only administrative records from official data sources are published
TN	0%	0%	

Table 8: Impact of revisions on total external trade for 2010 and 2011
Discrepancy (in %) between the first monthly release and the latest data available (yearly average)

MPCs	Imports (Value)		Exports (Value)	
	2010	2011	2010	2011
DZ	1.1%	0.9%	1.8%	1.4%
EG	10%		5%	
IL	1.0%	0.0%	3.0%	6.0%
JO	10.0%	5.0%	10.0%	10.0%
LB	0%	0%	0%	0%
MA	0.5%	1.0%	5.1%	7.0%
PS	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%
TN	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Comments				
PS	Annual detailed data are published, while totals of imports and exports are published to meet the SDDS requirements.			

- Figures are revised monthly or yearly. Monthly periodicity of revisions allows to get quicker a good updating level.

Final data for the past year are available within six months in the majority of MPCs.

Table 9: Frequency of revisions and delay in the availability of final data

MPCs	Frequency	Last revision on yearly data	Comments
DZ	Monthly	2 months	Monthly results remain provisional until the final version of the yearly data is disclosed.
EG	Monthly	15 months	
IL	Monthly	3 months	Annual data are considered final upon publication in April.
JO	Monthly	4 months	
LB	Monthly	1 month	
MA	Monthly	6 months	
PS		11 months	The periodicity is a special case for Palestine: there are 6 months allowed for traders to send their transactions in addition to the annual data collection for some records
TN	Yearly	5 months	Breakdown by partner for cereals updated at the end of the year

3.4 - Share of electronic declarations

Data quality is greater when customs data are collected by electronic systems. Consequently, the share of electronic declarations can be considered a quality indicator.

Table 10: Electronic declarations

What is the share of electronic declarations in data collected by customs (year 2006):	Country Flow	DZ*	EG	IL	JO	LB	MA	PS	TN
- as a percentage of the total number of declarations	Imports	n/a	90%	100%	100%	100%	100	42%	100%
	Exports	n/a	90%	100%	100%	100%	100	15%	100%
- as a percentage of the total value of trade	Imports	n/a		100%	93%	100%	100	37%	100%
	Exports	n/a		100%	75%	100%	100	11%	100%
Comments:									
DZ	The rate of electronic declaration is 96% for companies with a direct connection to Customs; no registration is possible for Internet declarations. 45% of declaring companies in Algeria benefit from such a connection.								

3.5 - Data validation

Monitoring and correcting errors is resource intensive and MPCs' national administrations in charge of trade statistics need to make judgements about when to make corrections. Countries use different criteria and employ different methodologies, which can create discrepancies when comparing two countries' mirror figures.

Data can be monitored at the input level (in declarations) or at the output level (in publications). Controls can be broadly classified as:

◗ Basic controls check the validity of data and usually involve all recorded variables. A validity error arises when data are incomplete

or incorrectly formatted and therefore cause processing problems. These types of errors cannot be included in statistical analyses and so must be removed or corrected. Examples of this kind of error are incorrect or missing codes, missing values in declarations, character data in numeric field and vice versa, etc. All countries use reference tables with an automatic process to control for these errors.

◗ Complex controls check the accuracy of data and assess all possible errors associated with the data. The data are valid in form but can still be incorrect, i.e., it can be processed, but if included will distort the statistical analysis — for example, declarations inconsistent with what was submitted in previous months. To control

for these errors, countries check one variable against the other within the declaration and/or between declarations.

◗ Trade data may also be checked by comparison with other sources, for instance with the balance of payments, data from business registers, VAT data, statistics produced by a particular professional federation, etc. The purpose of these secondary sources is to provide information to supplement trade data as reported by customs. This secondary information can be used to check the credibility of data or to verify trader declarations.

All MPCs carry out validity and credibility checks on trade statistics before publication. Comparison with external sources, however, is more unusual.

- The result of the validation process differs according to the situation of the country and depends on access to basic customs declarations and on the quality of these data. The quality of basic data depends significantly on the integration of validation rules at the level of data entry systems used by customs administrations.

Table 12: Results of validation processes

What is the average share of erroneous data:		DZ	EG	IL	JO	LB	MA	PS	TN
- as a percentage of the total number of declarations?	2010	n/a	10%	n/a	10%	n/a	n/a	2%	n/a
	2011	n/a	10%	n/a	8%	n/a	n/a	1.5%	n/a
- as a percentage of the total value of trade?	2010	n/a	n/a	n/a	7%	n/a	n/a	3%	0.1%
	2011	n/a	n/a	n/a	5%	n/a	n/a	0%	0.1%
Comments									
MA	The customs clearance system includes validation rules applied to customs declarations. The main process applied to declarations is the transition from customs procedures to statistical procedures								

Table 11: Control procedures

		DZ	EG	IL	LB	JO	MA	PS	TN
Input data	Do you check the exhaustiveness of declarations (i.e., that all compulsory boxes are filled in)?	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
	Do you apply validity checks (e.g., the validity of product or country codes)?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Do you apply credibility checks (e.g., with respect to the credibility of average value)?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Output data	Do you check output data before publication: - on the basis of historical data; - using outlier detection methods; - using external sources (fiscal data, mirror statistics, etc.); - using other methods?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
			X	X		X	X	X	X
		X	X	X		X	X	X	X
				X		X	X	X	
		X							X
Comments (other methods):									
DZ	Coherence and exhaustivity checks								
MA	The COMEXT database is used to check data in some sectors.								
PS	With regards to VAT vouchers, the total should be consistent with the total value collected by the Ministry of Finance as the main source for trade with Israel.								

3.6 - Confidentiality

In general terms, the principle of "passive confidentiality" refers to data made confidential at the request of traders who feel that their interests would be harmed by the dissemination of their data. Passive confidentiality is therefore different from "active confidentiality", in which the national authority in charge of the publication of statistics takes the initiative in situations in which potentially sensitive information might be disclosed, for example by hiding cells in tables where fewer than three traders appear or one is dominant.

Confidentiality affects all flows (both imports and exports) and can affect both value and quantity variables, one or all partner countries, etc. The considerable amount of detail in trade data means that the potential for the creation of confidential data at the detailed level is extremely high. Passive confidentiality

minimises the effect of confidentiality on the quality of detailed data. Aggregating data before publication can safeguard information relating to a particular trader or trading activity. For example, hidden product codes data can be reintroduced at higher-level aggregations when it is no longer possible to identify or deduce data for an individual protected commodity code. This allows complete data to be available to users, but only under broad commodity headings or at grand total level.

MPCs either apply passive confidentiality, or make all data public without limitations (except for some very specific goods, such as military equipment).

Consequently, the effect of confidentiality on quality is limited in MPCs, with the exception of Israel, where passive confidentiality, while applied on a limited number of items, represents a significant share of total trade.

Table 13: Impact of confidentiality, 2010-2011

	MPCs	Imports		Exports	
		2010	2011	2010	2011
Share of confidential items in total trade value: Number of detailed national product codes affected:	DZ	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Share of confidential items in total trade value: Number of detailed national product codes affected:	EG	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Share of confidential items in total trade value: Number of detailed national product codes affected:	IL	19.8% 20	20.3% 20	6.0% 20	7.2% 20
Share of confidential items in total trade value: Number of detailed national product codes affected:	JO	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Share of confidential items in total trade value: Number of detailed national product codes affected:	LB	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0
Share of confidential items in total trade value: Number of detailed national product codes affected:	MA	1.3% 6	0.2% 8	0	0
Share of confidential items in total trade value: Number of detailed national product codes affected:	PS	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0
Share of confidential items in total trade value: Number of detailed national product codes affected:	TN	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0

Table 14: Confidentiality rules

MPC			DZ	EG	IL	JO	LB	MA	PS	TN
	Do you apply passive confidentiality at the national level?		N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y
	If yes, are companies informed of the possibility of requesting confidentiality to prevent disclosure of their individual trade?				Y			Y		N
	Do you apply confidentiality at:	- the product level;			Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y
		- the partner country level;			Y	N	N		N	N
		- both the product and partner country level?		Y	Y	N	N		N	N
Comments										
DZ	Confidentiality is limited to data on trader identification									
JO	Sometimes, we applied confidentiality at the product level, as in the case of military goods.									

4 - Timeliness

The timeliness of external trade statistics can be measured by the delay between the reference month and the first public disclosure of aggregated data (generally disclosed in a press release) and detailed trade statistics.

Table 15: Average lag between the end of the reference month and the release date of the first provisional results, measured in working days

MPCs	Aggregated data		Detailed data	
	2010	2011	2010	2011
DZ	10 days	10 days	20 days	20 days
EG	7 weeks	7 weeks	7 weeks	7 weeks
IL	12 days	12 days	1 month for imports, 2 months for exports	1 month for imports, 2 months for exports
JO	25 days	25 days	35 days	35 days
LB	1 month	1 month	1 month	1 month
MA	10 days	10 days	60 days	60 days
PS	120 days	60 days	360 days	330 days
TN	10 days	10 days	15 days	15 days

A majority of MPCs disclose monthly data within the following month. This delay is shorter than the average delay observed in the EU. This time lag is generally compatible with the delay recommended by the IMF in the SDDS (eight weeks) or IMTS-2010 (45 days for monthly aggregates). Some MPCs have longer delays due to structural problems with access to basic data (e.g., the treatment of VAT data in trade between Israel and Palestine).

Final results (data which are no longer subject to revision) are disclosed within a maximum of six months (with the exception of Palestine, due again to the VAT-based collection system).

Table 16: Average time lag between the end of the reference month and the release date of **the final results**, measured in months

MPC	Aggregated data		Detailed data	
	2010	2011	2010	2011
DZ	2 months	2 months	2 months	2 months
EG	2 months	2 months	3 months	3 months
IL	3 months	3 months	4 months for imports, 5 months for exports	4 months for imports, 5 months for exports
JO	3 months	3 months	4 months	4 months
LB	1 month	1 month	1 month	1 month
MA	6 months	6 months	6 months	6 months
PS	4 months	4 months	12 months	11months
TN	5 months	5 months	5 months	5 months
Comments				
DZ	The two month delay is explained by the facility given to the national oil exporter to report final declarations; otherwise, the delay would be shorter.			
MA	External trade data are published with respect to delays recommended by the IMF SDDS standard, to which Morocco subscribed in November 2005.			
PS	The delay in publishing detailed data is due to the period allowed for traders to declare their official documents to Customs authorities.			
TN	Reallocation of data on cereals for all months of the previous year.			

5 - Accessibility & clarity

5.1 - Accessibility

Statistical data is most valuable when it is easily accessible by all users under equal conditions and is available in the formats that users desire.

The following tables show, for each MPC, the different means (hard copy or electronic) and frequency of publication of international trade statistics and the level of detail of the online database.

All countries publish a monthly press release of aggregated data. In almost all countries, a database is accessible at a more detailed level, divided by product and partner country.

Table 17: Dissemination of international trade statistics

MPCs	Paper/PDF publications				Electronic publications			
	News release	Monthly	Quarterly	Other (yearly, etc.)	Internet Database (aggregated data)	Internet Database (detailed data)	CD DVD	Other (fax, email, etc.)
DZ	X	X	X	9 months and full year	X	X	X	X
EG	X	X	X	X	X	X		
IL	X				X	X		On request
JO	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
LB	X				X	X	X	X
MA	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
PS	X	X		X				X
TN	X	X		X	X	X	X	
Comments								
PS	PCBS is planning to post an interactive database using the PC Axis tool.							

Table 18: Online access to trade data

Level of detail accessible on the website:	DZ	EG	IL	JO	LB	MA	PS	TN
Harmonised System	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
National Product classification	x		x	x	x	x		
Partner Country by Harmonised System	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Partner Country by National Product classification	x		x	x	x	x		
Is it possible for users to define their own extraction parameters?	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Is it possible for users to download their extractions (into Excel, for instance)?	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Comments:								
JO	Detailed data is available to users and can be downloaded free of charge.							
MA	A new version of the external trade database is being finalised, including an interface allowing extractions covering all dimensions of the database (product classifications, countries, periods...)							

5.2 - Clarity

The clarity of publications depends on the assistance provided to users by the producers of the data in using and interpreting statistics as well as comments on and analysis of results available. Statistics should be published along with appropriate metadata so that the user can understand and interpret them correctly.

A majority of MPCs provide such metadata either on paper or in electronic publications.

Table 19: Metadata accessibility
Do you publish up-to date and pertinent metadata (concepts, definitions, classifications, etc.)?

MPCs	Paper publications	Electronic publications	Comments
DZ	x	x	
EG	x	x	
IL		x	Metadata on the website
JO	x	x	Electronic publications on website
LB		x	
MA	x	x	Methodological notes are available. A metadata server is being implemented.
PS		x	Electronic publications are available on the website
TN	x	x	

A new recommendation included in IMTS-2010 is to provide regularly updated quality reports based on a set of quantitative and qualitative indicators for international merchandise trade statistics and on a checklist covering data collection, processing and dissemination. This kind of quality report is not yet produced in MPCs, though quality issues are presented in some reports.

Table 20: Publication of quality reports on trade statistics

MPCs	DZ	EG	IL	JO	LB	MA	PS	TN
Do you publish a national Quality Report?	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Comments								
JO	The annual detailed report includes a paragraph on quality issues.							
PS	The annual detailed report includes a paragraph on quality issues (see the PCBS website).							

6 - Comparability

6.1 - Comparability over space: comparability of international trade statistics between countries

◗ The comparability of international trade statistics may be affected by different definitions and concepts used in data collection by the various countries or their main trading partners.

UNSD periodically assesses compliance with its international definitions and recommendations through a list of detailed questions. The global level of compliance (measured by the percentage of answers are in line with the recommendations) is provided in Table 3.

◗ Differences in the trade system

Differences may exist with regards to methods used in various countries to determine or record trade coverage, partner country, value of transactions, etc. For instance, the trade system used to determine trade statistics depends on the country (the same situation can be observed with respect to EU Member States).

General and special trade differ mainly in the way goods imported to or exported from warehouses are treated. General trade figures are larger than corresponding special trade figures because the latter excludes certain trade flows, such as goods shipped through bonded warehouses. Such methodological differences can give rise to significant statistical discrepancies in data.

Table 21

	Trade System
Algeria	Special trade (strict definition)
Egypt	General trade (as of 01/2008)
Israel	Special trade (relaxed definition)
Jordan	Special trade
Lebanon	Special and general trade
Morocco	Special trade (relaxed definition)
Palestine	Special trade
Tunisia	General trade

Asymmetries with EU data

In theory, trade statistics based on international concepts and definitions should be comparable: Exports from Country A to Country B as reported by A should be equal or very close in value to imports to B from A as reported by B. However, figures often differ and significant discrepancies may occur for many reasons: underreporting, differing valuations of imports (CIF) or exports (FOB), the use of thresholds, product confidentiality, differing partner countries allocations, time lags in the registration of transactions, misclassification of goods and other methodological differences.

Table 22 reports the asymmetries of each MPC with EU data at the total trade level. Asymmetries are expressed as a percentage of the relative flow as measured by the EU.

The table shows significant differences in the levels of asymmetry of MPCs. Specific asymmetry studies have been carried out with several MPCs in the framework of the MEDSTAT Programme and reports with detailed findings are available.

Table 22: Asymmetries between MPC and EU data

	MPC Import[1]		MPC Export[2]	
	2010	2011	2010	2011
MPC:	%	%	%	%
Algeria	-0.4	-3.8	-1.4	2.2
Egypt	-16.3		-14.2	
Israel	3.5		4.1	
Jordan	-28.4	-19.0	-16.3	-17.1
Lebanon*	1.2	-2.6	70.4*	-16.7
Morocco	3.6	0.4	-3.4	-1.7
Palestine	0.9	1.2	0.3	-1.2
Tunisia	7.6		5.0	

*The high level of this asymmetry, due to the inclusion of transactions related to UNIFIL has been corrected by Lebanese Customs since 2011
[1](MPC reported imports - EU reported exports)/EU reported exports
[2](MPC reported exports - EU reported imports)/EU reported imports

6.2 - Comparability over time

Comparability over time is another important aspect of quality. Changes in definitions, coverage or methods, as well as other changes, will have an impact on the continuity of international trade statistics. When such a change occurs, it is important to warn users about the changes and, when possible, to produce backwards extrapolated data that are comparable over a sufficient period of time so as to accurately represent national accounts.

The main changes quoted by MPCs are linked to the selection of customs procedures to be included in trade statistics and the introduction of revised versions of HS product classification.

Table 23: Main changes in national methodologies

MPCs	Main changes	Year(s) of application	Production of backwards extrapolated data
DZ	- Amendments to HS classifications	1992, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012	Yes
EG	- Changeover to the general trade system and the inclusion of all goods that enter the country, regardless of their customs requirements, in national data - Unification of the responsibility for the publication of trade statistics in a sole agency, the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics - Use of HS 2007 tariffs (currently working with Customs to implement HS 2012 tariffs)		
IL	- Export classifications brought in line with international requirement - Import data by country of origin made available	July 2008	No
JO	We included some customs procedures and excluded others from the 2011 list.	2011	Yes
LB	No change		
MA	Integration of trade between the Tangier Free Zone and the rest of the world	2005	Yes
PS	- The use of handheld devices in data collection - Implementation of HS 2007	2012 2008	Yes Yes

7 - Coherence

Coherence is defined as the degree to which statistics can be used together. Apart from international trade statistics, information on trade flows can be found in national accounts, business statistics, and balance of payments statistics, which, in theory, should coincide with one another.

However, the compilation of data and the production of the above mentioned statistics follow the recommendations (vis-à-vis sources and methods) of different international organisations, e.g., Eurostat, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),

the United Nations Statistical Division (UNSD), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), etc.

The differences between International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS) on the one hand and BoP or national accounts on the other can be classified into three categories:

a) Differences in concepts and definitions:

◗ Discrepancies generated by the fact that IMTS are based on the cross-border movement of goods, whereas BoP data are based on the "change of ownership" principle

◗ Other sources of discrepancies, such as the use of different trade systems — for example BoP data are based on the General Trade System, whereas some countries use the Special Trade System for IMTS.

b) Differing treatment of specific transactions:

◗ Some transactions can be included in BoP data and excluded from IMTS, for instance goods procured in ports and airports or goods for repair.

◗ With the application of the forthcoming 6th version of the Balance of Payments Manual and the revised system of national accounts, the list of differing treatments could be extended to new kinds of transactions, in particular goods traded before and after processing and transactions linked to merchanting.

c) Differences in valuation

Imports are often based on the CIF value in IMTS, whereas the value is based on the FOB definition for BoP and national accounts. This generally creates significant discrepancies in the measurement of total imports and the trade balance. Some specific adjustments also need to be introduced (such as those regarding goods procured in ports and airports). With the implementation of the Balance of Payment Manual 6th edition, new items will be introduced (goods for processing, merchanting, etc.). Therefore, it is highly recommended that national administrations in charge of IMTS and BoP statistics provide users with all the metadata necessary and, as much as possible, publish periodic reconciliation tables between IMTS, BoP and national accounts statistics.

The following table summarizes the main adjustments made by BoP compilers in Mediterranean Partner Countries.

Table 24: Transition from trade statistics to BoP "goods"

MPCs	Imports	Exports
DZ	(-) CIF/FOB adjustment	
EG	Use of ITRS system	Use of ITRS system
IL	(-) CIF/FOB adjustment (+) goods procured in ports/airports (+) trade with the Palestinian Authority (+) other adjustments (port services, military equipment, etc.)	(+) trade with the Palestinian Authority (+) net exports of goods under merchanting (+) other adjustments
JO	(-) 11% of the value of merchandise trade imports (CIF/FOB adjustment) (-) imports of non-resident entities	
LB	(-) CIF/FOB adjustment (+) goods procured in ports/airports	(+) goods procured in ports/airports
MA	+) goods procured in ports/airports (-) CIF/FOB adjustment (7.5%)	(+) goods procured in ports/airports
PS	(+) some adjustments made when preparing the BoP bulletin	(+) some adjustments made when preparing the BoP bulletin

Conclusions and the way forward

- As shown in the previous paragraphs, the quality level of external trade statistics is generally satisfactory and compliant with international standards. Nevertheless, some quality indicators differ throughout the MPCs and indicator levels could be improved in some countries.

- Several actions have been taken by MPCs to improve the quality of trade data:

- Changes in the concepts used to measure trade statistics, as in Egypt and Morocco, have improved the international comparability of data. All countries are now using the most current standard international classifications, which has improved data comparability.

- Asymmetry studies have been carried out in the framework of the MEDSTAT II and MEDSTAT III programmes between the EU and MPCs (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia). In addition, internal asymmetries have been analysed between Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Palestine. Some countries have also carried out asymmetry studies with other partners using their own resources (Morocco).

- Since the last Quality Report, published during the second phase of MEDSTAT, several countries have improved the timeliness of data publication at the aggregated or detailed level (Algeria, Israel, Morocco and Palestine).

Way forward

Following the previous observations, it is recommended that MPCs:

◗ maintain or improve, as possible, compliance with international recommendations regarding trade concepts and definitions;

◗ develop links with statistics users (opinion surveys, meetings, etc.);

◗ pay close attention to revisions of international recommendations related to trade, in particular new trade indicators;

◗ be aware of new international recommendations published on related topics (BoP and national accounts) in order to better work with institutions in charge of BoP and national accounts statistics and to communicate to users possible discrepancies between these domains;

◗ regularly perform asymmetry studies with main trading partners, particularly the European Union;

◗ publish at the national level all relevant metadata regarding trade statistics;

◗ improve information transparency by publishing national quality reports, in accordance with UNSD recommendations.

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