

WTO's priorities for trade and market access statistics

Designing an integrated information system to meet users' needs: Filling information gaps and bridging the breach between trade statistics and trade policy data.

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The priorities of WTO's statistical programme for the next years closely reflect the institution's core objectives and their recent evolution. WTO is known as a forum for governments to negotiate trade agreements, at its heart are the WTO agreements, which provide the legal ground-rules for international commerce. Through the schedules of concession which reflect the countries' tariff and other commitments (e.g., non-tariff measures), WTO is the custodian of trade policy information. It also assists its members, especially developing countries, in preparing and maintaining them.

WTO-Statistics is responsible for maintaining the trade and tariff data. To do so, it cooperates with national and international statistical organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations, to provide trade policy analysts with relevant data on trade and market access for goods and services. In recent years, the number of developing countries represented at WTO has increased significantly, presenting increased needs for technical assistance in statistical matters. This has been reflected for example in the Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration, where Annex C refers to WTO providing targeted technical assistance, *inter alia*, on compiling and analyzing statistical data on trade in services, [and] assessing interests in and gains from services trade, ..."

The change towards a more pro-active role of the Statistics Group in collecting and disseminating trade policy data was also reflected recently by the WTO Committee on Market Access. In line with its decision, the institutional priority for 2010 and 2011 is to develop new procedures for compiling, validating and disseminating trade and market access data. The coverage of the data collected will also be increased, to include not only WTO agreements, but also the numerous regional and preferential trade agreements. In order to cope with this larger scope, WTO-Statistics will strengthen and extend its data-sharing arrangements with multilateral and regional organizations, and further promote joint technical assistance activities.

The strengthening of the cooperation and collaboration between international organizations in the field of merchandise and services trade statistics has been and will remain a priority for WTO-Statistics. The ultimate objectives are ensuring that users' requirements with respect to trade policy analysis and negotiation are taken into consideration when the concepts and standards underpinning the international statistical system are defined, and making these data available to the users in an analytically meaningful way. Thus, besides cooperating in the revision of concepts and definitions of international standards for merchandise and trade in services statistics, WTO's interest lies obviously in promoting statistical capacity building at national and international levels, as well as strengthening the dissemination and analytical use of these data.

After the submission of IMTS 2010 and MSITS 2010 to the 41st Statistical Commission this year, our priority will switch to supporting the elaboration of the respective compilation guides, to help national statisticians to implement the new recommendations according to

best practices. Ideally, the preparation of these compiling manuals should be coordinated with the respective exercises contemplated for BPM6 and SNA2008, to highlight complementarities, and more importantly, cover potential information gaps in some of these revisions that may affect the implementation of the other ones.

Besides promoting complementarities among various economic statistics collected and processed by national statistical authorities, it is hoped that a coordinated approach between balance of payments, national accountants and trade statisticians at international level would help to promote integrated economic statistics. To this end, WTO convenes the Inter-Agency Task Force on International Merchandise Trade Statistics and actively participates in the Inter-Agency Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services, and is an active observer to the Working Group on the Impact of Globalisation on National Accounts.

In line with filling existing data gaps, the recent global crisis revealed also deficiencies affecting the compilation and timely dissemination of high-frequency trade statistics. While the availability of short-term merchandise trade indicators has been improving corresponding series for trade in commercial services are still limited and the level of disaggregation is often inappropriate for analytical purposes. Equally, statistics on the size and availability of trade finance are almost inexistent as their release has been discontinued by official statistics in recent years.

Finally, WTO-Statistics is engaging in research-and-development activities in order to adapt its statistical production to the changes in the global economy and the emergence of new analytical demands. As many recent studies on globalization indicate, the most dynamic sector of trade in merchandise is the international trade in intermediate goods resulting from the fragmentation of the supply chains. This phenomenon is especially relevant for large industrial and emerging countries, above all the largest world traders (US, Germany and China). Monitoring appropriately this particular form of trade and linking it to key global socio-economic issues, such as labour and environment, is therefore crucial to understand the new global economy.

For this reason, WTO has embarked on an ambitious project of measuring the value-added content (VA) of bilateral trade flows. As the various tasks and processes leading to final goods take place in different countries, traditional merchandise trade statistics (based on physical flows that are recorded gross at customs) do not reflect the economic content of these transactions. To compute the value-added content of bilateral trade flows, one needs to relate gross merchandise trade flows with national input-output (IO) matrices, in order to differentiate the domestic from the imported contents in the respective national outputs. In order to do so, WTO-Statistics is cooperating with a series of national and multilateral programmes elaborating harmonized input-output tables (IDE-Jetro, OECD, WIDO). The pilot phase of the project is expected to culminate in 2011. In the same analytical perspective of measuring the value added content across the productive chain, WTO is analysing, together with FAO and UNIDO, the feasibility of developing a joint data base on the production, transformation and trade of agricultural products.
