



UNITED NATIONS  
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

STATISTICS DIVISION  
TRADE STATISTICS BRANCH

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**THE UNITED NATIONS STATISTICAL COMMISSION  
SIDE EVENT OF 40<sup>TH</sup> SESSION:  
INTER-AGENCY CONSULTATION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE STATISTICS**

United Nations Headquarters, New York  
Thursday 26 February 2009, 8:45 – 10:00 am, Conference Room C

## **Report of the meeting**

### **I. Purpose and organization**

The inter-agency consultation on international trade statistics was organized by UNSD as one of the side events of the 40<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Statistical Commission. The main purpose of the consultation was to exchange views on several issues relevant to the future of international trade statistics in connection with the preparations for the 41<sup>st</sup> session of the Commission (February 2010) where international trade statistics will be one of the major items for discussion. The agenda of the consultation meeting included the following items:

1. Status of preparation of the revised recommendations for international merchandise and services trade statistics
2. Towards an integrated approach to international trade statistics: challenges and the ways to deal with them effectively
3. Trade data dissemination by the international organizations in cooperation with third parties

International, supranational and regional organizations as well as the United Nations Regional Commissions were invited to attend this meeting. As this was an open meeting country representatives attending the 40<sup>th</sup> session of the Statistical Commission were welcome as well. The following organizations participated in the consultation: UNSD, UNCTAD, UNIDO, UNESCAP, UNWTO, FAO, WTO, WB, WCO, OECD and

EUROSTAT. The consultation was attended by a number of country delegates to the Commission as well. FAO, WCO, WTO and the World Bank submitted contributions to the consultation and those are available on the event website at:

**[http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/statcom\\_09/seminars/trade/trade\\_2009.html](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/statcom_09/seminars/trade/trade_2009.html)**

By way of introduction UNSD indicated significant achievements in the methodological development of both international merchandise trade statistics and statistics on international trade in services and outlined a number of challenges ahead for these statistics. The need for further steps in harmonization between the two areas of trade statistics was highlighted in order to more effectively meet the requirements of the user community and to ensure better integration into the system of economics statistics. UNSD presented also the status of preparation of the revised recommendations for International Merchandise Trade Statistics and the revised Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services focusing on the revision timeline, core issues and future work, in particular the development of compilation guidance and the further research agenda. The participants were informed as well about the timeline of the publication of the International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008 (IRTS 2008) and Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework 2008 (TSA: RMF 2008). The issue of trade data dissemination by the international organizations in cooperation with third parties was addressed as well. The UNSD introduction was followed by a general discussion on a number of issues. The conclusions of the meeting are summarized below.

## **II. Conclusions**

The meeting:

- (a) Agreed that the preparation of the revised recommendations for both international merchandise trade statistics and statistics on international trade in services in accordance with the existing schedules should be considered as a matter of high priority and supported extensive consultations with countries and relevant international and regional fora;
- (b) Welcomed the UNSD plans to prepare and submit to the 41<sup>st</sup> session of the Commission an implementation plan for the revised recommendations for international merchandise trade statistics which includes the preparation of the revised International Merchandise Trade Statistics Compilers Manual;
- (c) Agreed that an implementation plan for the revised Manual on International Trade in Services should be developed by the Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services and presented to the Commission; suggested that the Compiler Manuals (and the revised recommendations) in both areas need to address the relationship (growing dissonance) between trade statistics and the new 2008 SNA and BPM6 in order to bridge

the gap between these statistics; also the boundary between goods and services should be addressed.

(d) Concluded that many of the important issues of the IMTS revision are directly linked to the international agreements on customs related matters and the ongoing work at the WCO on such issues as transfer pricing and rules of origin and welcomed, in this context, the offer by the World Customs Organization to actively support the revision process;

(e) Concluded that a number of issues require special attention during the revision process and indicated for example, that (i) the development and implementation of trade data quality assurance programmes in countries should be promoted, (ii) the asymmetries in partner data should be more fully and systematically examined and explained including in metadata (it was acknowledged that such asymmetries are to a certain degree inherent due to the existing recommendations for the compilation of partner data), (iii) guidance on data compilation with respect to customs free zones (export processing zones) should be more detailed as information is not always properly compiled and disseminated although custom records about trade flows in/out these zones are often available and (iv) the use and limitations of non-customs sources and private sources should be further examined;

(f) Agreed that the current work on linking business statistics and trade statistics is a good example of the integration of economics statistics compilations and analysis and took note that this issue is also of interest for customs when they are exploring ways to identify illegitimate trade;

(g) Raised the issue of data quality at the international level which should be systematically recorded, flagged and further addressed, i.e. by providing well documented corrections or estimations or by such efforts as the common dataset (CDS) for merchandise trade statistics;

(h) Pointed out that the analytical needs cannot wait until fully integrated systems for economic statistics are developed and implemented and that the use of estimates/modeling should be explored and possibly recommended; in this context agencies were invited to cooperate more closely in the harmonization of the estimation procedures to minimize discrepancies in the disseminated data;

(i) Discussed briefly the dissemination of international trade statistics and indicators by international organizations in cooperation with third parties, agreed that this is an important issue and that further work on the identification of good practices in this area will be useful; in general, there is some gap between the user needs and availability of the trade related information such as tariffs etc.; also the role of and relationship to the private sector as data provider was briefly discussed;

(j) Welcomed the opportunity to hold regular consultations on international trade statistics at the time of the Commission's sessions and suggested that the reports of such meetings be posted on the UNSD website.