

**Task Force on International Merchandise Trade Statistics, Santiago de Chile,
3-5 April 2006
Summary of the Meeting**

Major outcomes

- The meeting welcomed the new Task Force's joint website as an entry portal to merchandise trade statistics and will use it as a vehicle to organize the forthcoming revision of IMTS, Rev.2.
- The Task Force congratulated UNSD and OECD for their effective co-operation in implementing the first joint database that aligns data collection, processing and dissemination of trade data.
- The Task Force also welcomed the publishing of the common data set on the countries' total exports and imports on the Task Force's website.
- On concepts and methodologies, the Task Force decided to start the revision process for IMTS, Rev.2 with the aim of concluding it by 2010, to publish the Supplement to the Compilers Guide in 2007, to send out the questionnaire on national compilation practices, and discussed the organizations' geo-nomenclatures.

The meeting was hosted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Ms. Marta Maurás, Secretary of the Commission, opened the meeting by highlighting the strategic priority of international trade for economic development. Mr. Hubert Escaith, Director, Division of Statistics and Economic Projections, underlined the importance of statistics as an example for good co-operation between international organizations.

The Agenda is shown in Annex 1, the list of participants in Annex 2, and Annex 3 lists available documents. Annex 4 summarises the decisions and Annex 5 includes the Provisional Agenda for the next meeting.

1. Adoption of the provisional agenda

The provisional agenda was adopted with the following amendments: Item 4(c)'s title was changed to Trade Index Numbers, and two new items were introduced: 4(d) on the revision of the concepts and definitions of International Merchandise Trade statistics (IMTS, Rev.2) and 6(f) on the Task Force website and the Electronic Discussion Group (EDG).

2. Minutes of the meeting held in Bangkok, 15-17 March 2005

The Summary report was accepted without any amendments.

3. Review of decisions of other international meetings with regard to merchandise trade

3(a) Report of the 37th UN Statistical Commission

The Statistical Commission welcomed the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities and asked the Inter-agency Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) to develop an implementation plan. Progress will be reviewed in 2008. The International Standard Industry Classification Rev.4 (ISIC, Rev.4) and the Central Product Classification Rev.2 (CPC Rev.2) were both adopted by the Statistical Commission.

3(b) Report of the Inter-agency Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA, New York, September 2004 and March 2005)

Following the endorsement of the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities by Chief Statisticians of International Organizations, it was decided that these organizations start documenting their statistical practices and policies related to these principles. This documentation should be included in the respective websites of these organizations. The CCSA also adopted the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) technical standard for the exchange and dissemination of statistical data and metadata. Of this standard, the SDMX – Cross-sectional data set is of particular importance for structuring trade statistics data sets. Further work of the CCSA includes a project on converging international available quality assurance frameworks, the development of an action plan for training statisticians in international organizations, and the discussion of divergences and inconsistencies in the use of country groupings by international organizations. It was also highlighted that the Statistical Commission may have at its disposal more funds for statistical capacity building and that the Task Force may wish to suggest activities for using these funds.

3(c) The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Declaration

Following criticism on the imputations or adjustments that international organizations carried out on national data in the compilation of MDG indicators, the inter-agency Expert Group on MDG indicators decided to devote more attention to the quality of data and metadata. WTO, ITC and UNCTAD, closely collaborating on the market access indicators 38 and 39 under goal 8, have designed a website and a tool that allows to make computations on these indicators in a user-friendly way.

3(d) Report of the 6th OECD Trade Statisticians meeting

The objective of the meeting was to take stock of progress made in the OECD region on merchandise trade and trade in services statistics and to advise on future developments. The advantage of the meeting is the cross-fertilisation between statisticians and analysts with a view to develop or adapt conceptual issues. The meeting was informed on the implementation of the new UNSD/OECD trade data processing system in early 2006 and monitored progress made in the reconciliation analysis of Balance of Payments and merchandise trade data as well as in linking up trade and structural business statistics.

4. Concepts, Definitions and Methodology

4(a/d) Supplement to the Compilers' Manual for International Merchandise Trade Statistics and Revision of the concepts and definitions of International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS, Rev.2)

The Task Force discussed a draft contents table of the Supplement. It was informed that the first part will be sourced from the Questionnaire on "National Compilation and Dissemination Practices in International Merchandise Trade Statistics", sent out jointly by UNSD and WTO as convenor of the Task Force, while the second part will be devoted to specific issues. These chapters, a total of nine, would deal with specific data compilation and reporting issues such as Kyoto 2000 and its implementation or measurement of intra-trade in regional integration agreements. As an intermediate step to a revision of the concepts and definitions (IMTS, Rev.2), it would also deal with conceptual issues such as the boundary between goods and services or the refining of data compilation on goods for processing. New issues will also be described, for example the link of business and trade registers to derive new types of disaggregated statistics. It was decided to regroup chapters that deal with globalization issues. A first assignment of agencies by chapter was discussed. The questionnaire will be sent out in the first half of 2006 and a first draft of the Supplement is expected in 2007.

In view of the ongoing revisions of the System of National Accounts and the Balance of Payments, UNSD suggested to start also the revision process for IMTS, Rev.2. The intention is to submit it to the UN Statistical Commission in 2010 and the next Task Force will discuss in detail how to organize this revision process. Eurostat was asked to make a presentation on its Extrastat legislation (to be implemented in 2009) at the next Task Force meeting.

4(b) Interaction between BOP, SNA and external trade

Eurostat informed the Task Force that an internal task force (EUBOPCOM) had proposed a reconciliation table detailing the individual adjustments to derive from Community Foreign Trade Statistics datasets used in the EU balance of payments 'goods account'. This would enormously enhance transparency and it was suggested to add this table in the above Supplement to provide users additional insight into the differences between Balance of Payments and Foreign Trade figures of EU members.

Furthermore, the OECD reported that it had written a letter to the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts to highlight implications and difficulties that a changed treatment of goods for processing would have on data compilation.

4(c) Handbook on Foreign Trade Indices

The Task Force regretted that the IMF as a lead agency for this topic could not attend the meeting. It took note that all chapters of the forthcoming Handbook were now available on the Internet for comments. Also, UNSD had provided a list of trade indices experts to the IMF.

Discussions centred on the survey approach in contrast to the unit value calculation. The question was raised to which extent the survey approach would be useable for trade index calculations in merchandise. The different organizations reported their current practices as to the use of unit values in different applications and it was decided to change the current title of this agenda item to Trade Index Numbers with a special focus on unit value calculations. All organizations were invited to prepare short documents on their practices for the next meeting.

5. Country and Product Classifications

5(a) Geo-nomenclatures and country groupings for use in international merchandise trade statistics

The CCSA had agreed to look at its next meeting into the issue of enhancing transparency and harmonization of geo-nomenclatures between international organizations. It did charge the Task Force to draft a report on experiences in the merchandise area that could be considered together with a paper prepared by the inter-agency Group on MDG indicators. The Task Force decided to prepare such a report using the experiences drawn from the UN/OECD harmonization for Comtrade joint processing as a starting point. The paper should serve as a framework for discussion raising issues such as the development of a tool for enhancing transparency, correspondences between countries' codes, legislations for country names, specifics of merchandise such as the use of territories or the need to define both reporter and partner countries, particular groupings such as developing or developed or G77, and how to take into account users needs.

5(b) and (c) Revision of HS and SITC and correspondences between classifications (HS, SITC, ISIC)

The Task Force congratulated UNSD for the work done to establish a fourth revision of SITC. After a final editing, SITC, Rev.4 will be submitted for publication in the course of the year. Correspondence tables between SITC, Rev.4 and HS02 will be developed while the correspondence to HS07 is already available. Interest was also expressed in updating the correspondence table of BEC/SITC, Rev.4.

The Task force was informed that UNSD was invited to participate in the WCO High Level Policy Committee on HS matters.

6. Databases on international trade

6(a) COMTRADE: status, technical issues, EDP strategies and joint arrangements

UNSD and OECD reported that their joint operating system for Comtrade was operational as of 1 January 2006, that is, UNSD and OECD data sets are now fully harmonised. The countries' total trade figures in Comtrade are aligned with numbers published in UN's Monthly Bulletin of Statistics. In addition to trade flow data, tariff line data for all countries are available, although only for international organizations. Data and metadata are standardized with UN codes and corrections indicated.

Commodity codes are not changed. While UNSD appreciated the support received from other organizations in collecting trade data, it continues to have contacts with all countries directly to be able to follow up on data problems individually.

The FAO mentioned that in 2005 it had entered into a formal agreement with UNSD on exchanging trade data to formalise a traditionally good co-operation. It was highlighted that the respective organization's data collection activities are mutually beneficial and that data collection follow-up is done jointly.

6(b) Database developments in other organizations

UNSD highlighted that trade data checking is done in all organizations and that it would be useful to have a central repository displaying these findings to reduce overlapping work and enhance data quality. It was also discussed that countries were concerned with estimations carried out by international organizations, especially in the context of MDGs and that eventual adjustment or estimation methodologies need to be well documented and explained. Another issue of common concern in discussing the organizations databases was the use of different classifications and the question to which extent product classifications, for example, high, medium, and low technology products are standard groups or, if not, could be standardized. It was discussed to include such classifications eventually on the Task Force's website.

The FAO highlighted that the contribution of trade statistics in compiling national supply and utilization accounts of food and agriculture products is essential for estimating food availability and food deprivation. In fact, FAOSTAT's trade domain is one of the most important components of FAO's food and agriculture information system.

The cooperation between the FAO Statistics Division and the national authorities has continued, during 2005, to focus on increasing capacities of national statistical offices to disseminate improved food and agriculture statistics and on harmonizing concepts, definitions and classifications with applied international standards. About 36% (51 country files) of the total trade data files uploaded to FAOSTAT have been independently collected by the FAO-Statistics Division and all files have been shared with UNSD or/and other international organizations

6(c) Common Data Set

The availability of the first common data set on the Task Force's website was welcomed by participants. Several questions were raised and discussed: Would it be fit for use? How to advertise it? Many organizations indicated that they are ready to either use it directly or as a reference board to converge to it in the long-term. However, before using it as the authoritative source and to make it known to a wider public, it should be further refined. Its user-friendliness should be improved through developing a database presentation. It was also suggested to improve the presentation through adding graphics or leading traders. Data quality could be enhanced as a result of its use by organizations and verification by national authorities. The question of a live database updated on a quarterly basis was also discussed but considered a second priority after the implementation of SDMX.

6(d) Trade Indicators

The OECD reported about its trade indicators project that has been developed and tested. It is in its final stages before release. The approach chosen was to develop first a data warehouse, i.e., provide homogeneous data sources that can easily be extracted, combined and exported through a tool such as XL Report Builder. It was highlighted that the interactive presentation the OECD has developed is exactly what users expect and it was highlighted as an example for others to follow. The FAO presented the second volume of its Statistical Yearbook which includes important trade indicators at country level. Eurostat, based on the Lisbon Agenda, also develops structural indicators in relation to trade and WTO reported that it had issued its first Trade Profile publication which has become quickly a reference source for WTO Members and the Secretariat alike.

6(e) Dissemination tools and policies of international organizations

Eurostat informed the Task Force on its new Easy Comext version and its functionalities. The FAO also showed its online database. As for Comtrade, the UNSD reported that it has included extra trade of the EU25 as of 2004. It was also highlighted by Eurostat that the asymmetry of EU intra-trade has decreased at aggregate level over time, yet there may be considerable discrepancies at detailed level. UNSD also reported that a Swedish-funded project would look into improving its dissemination policy and that Google had expressed some interest in providing tools for disseminating Comtrade data. FAO has highlighted that it has extended its Internet dissemination over the last years while significantly reducing printed publications.

6(f) Task Force website and EDG

The Task Force welcomed the presentation of the new website as a supplement to the EDG and to organize the outreach of the Task Force's activities. It should be considered as an entry portal to merchandise trade statistics and in that context it would be good to develop some guidelines for the contents of this website. It was highlighted that training material could be an important heading to be added to the basic structure and the organizations agreed to provide their existing material (Eurostat, UNSD, FAO). For the Common Data Set, a web database should be developed and the organization's trade indicators could also be included into the website. As the maintenance of the website which is carried out by WTO is linked with costs, it needs to be well guided and WTO was asked to prepare a policy paper on how to monitor the website and on the content that needs to be added.

7. Data Quality

7(a) Statistical metadata in merchandise trade

OECD's MetaStore system as an integrated management system of metadata based on "cubes" was shortly presented. UNSD indicated that it will use this system to reorganise meta information in Comtrade.

7(b) Data Quality Assessment Frameworks

The IMF has meanwhile applied its data quality assessment framework to the posting of the countries' merchandise metadata on the Fund's Data Standards Bulletin Board (DSBB). Examples can be checked online at the IMF's website. Eurostat reported that it has produced a user guide and a quality report, and issued guidelines for the implementation of the intra-Community legislation for merchandise trade statistics. OECD agreed to present a quality report at the next Task Force meeting and it was decided to rename this agenda item to Reports on Data Quality by International Organizations. FAO mentioned that improving data quality is one of the main important tasks of the FAO trade data processing system. For example, the new trade data processing system incorporates various data quality modules to validate data trends and unit values or cross-check reporter and partner declarations (TP module) and imports/export data versus domestic supply or/and domestic utilization (SUA module).

8. Globalization and merchandise trade statistics

8(a) Multinational enterprises

With the revision of the Business Register Regulation and a follow-up project (Eurolinks), Eurostat will take a more active role in business registers to develop statistics according to multinational enterprises and local subsidiaries. In addition, the new FATS regulation, which will be published in summer 2006, proposes pilot studies and surveys on trade variables starting in 2007. The importance of disaggregated figures to analyse the impact on globalizations was underpinned. UNCTAD will investigate to which extent it will collect data on FATS. ESCWA reported that it did a review in its member countries and an assessment study will be produced during June 2006.

8(b) Links between business and trade statistics

The discussion of this agenda item was in fact a continuation of the previous and it was therefore recommended to merge both items for the next meeting. Eurostat presented the results of 2005 project to compile trade statistics according to enterprise characteristics by linking trade and business registers. Additional aspects highlighted here included the confidentiality with publishing detailed data when dealing with information derived from business and trade registers as the requirements of both registers may differ. The OECD reported that it would extend Eurostat's project to non-OECD members. Canada will play a leading role in carrying out a feasibility study for selected countries. UNIDO reported that surveys done in developing countries on linking structural business statistics with trade issues in questionnaires were very discouraging. On the other hand, linking up data classified by SITC with ISIC data, even so very much crude, is a very popular approach.

9. Technical Assistance

The Task Force was informed on ESCWA's success in receiving funds from the UN's Development Account for a project to improve merchandise trade statistics in its region. The detailed project plan was under preparation with the assistance of UNSD. Once funds are freed, probably in summer 2006, the project needs to be carried out within three years. The project plan covers data recording, compilation, dissemination and trade indicators as well as a module on e-commerce. The concluding workshop is planned for 2009 back-to-back with the Task Force. Annual progress reports will be discussed at the Task Force meetings.

The various organizations reported then their different TA activities and it was questioned how to use or reuse existing material. The organizations were asked to provide available information, material or links to WTO for inclusion in the Task Force's website in a separate topic on training. Candidate for inclusion into this category would be the Eurostat's standardized training module on merchandise trade statistics.

10. Other business

10(a) Time and place of next meeting

The Task Force thanked UN/ECLAC for hosting this meeting and the good organization. It agreed to follow an invitation of FAO to reconvene in Rome from 17 to 19 April 2007. UNSD offered to host the 2008 meeting while ESCWA offered to hold the 2009 meeting that will be linked up with the concluding workshop of its Technical Assistance project.

The meeting was concluded by discussing future directions for the Task Force. While the meeting participants considered the Task Force an effective forum for coordination and integration of merchandise trade statistics issues, it was highlighted that changing economic processes would require to look into related issues such as business statistics or trade in services. The question was raised whether this necessitates an update of the Task Force's mandate. It was decided to launch an e-discussion amongst participants during the course of the year. The proposal of including national experts, at least of the country in which the Task Force is organised, was also raised. However, it was highlighted that there are different structures in place that allow for an intensive discussion of national experiences, e.g. the OECD Trade Statisticians meetings.

Annex 1:**TASK FORCE ON INTERNATIONAL MERCHANDISE TRADE STATISTICS**

Santiago de Chile , 4-6 April 2006

Provisional Agenda

- 1. Adoption of the provisional agenda**
- 2. Minutes of the meeting held in Bangkok, 15-17 March 2004**
- 3. Review of decisions of other international meetings with regard to merchandise trade**
 - (a) Report of the 37th UN Statistical Commission
 - (b) Report of the Inter-agency Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities (Rome, September 2005)
 - (c) The Millennium Development Goal Declaration
 - (d) Report of relevant trade statistics meetings (OECD Trade Statisticians, Task Forces, etc.)
- 4. Concepts, definitions and methodology**
 - (a) Supplement to the Compilers' Manual for International Merchandise Trade Statistics (*update by UNSD*)
 - (b) Interaction between BOP, SNA and external trade (*update by Eurostat*)
 - (c) Handbook on Foreign Trade Indices (*update by IMF*)
- 5. Country and Product Classifications**
 - (a) Geo-nomenclatures and country groupings for use in international merchandise trade statistics (*update by UNSD*)
 - (b) Revision of HS and SITC (*update by UNSD*)
 - (c) Correspondences between classifications (HS/SITC/ISIC)
- 6. Databases on international trade**
 - (a) COMTRADE: status, technical issues, EDP strategies and joint arrangements (*joint report of UNSD/OECD*)
 - (b) Database developments in other organizations (FAO, WTO, others)
 - (c) Common Data Set (*update by WTO*)
 - (d) Trade Indicators (*update by OECD and WTO*)
 - (e) Dissemination tools and policies of international organizations (*exchange of information*)
- 7. Data quality**
 - (a) Statistical metadata in merchandise trade (*report by OECD*)
 - (b) Data Quality Assessment Frameworks (*update by the IMF*)
- 8. Globalization and merchandise trade statistics**
 - (a) Multi-national enterprises
 - (b) Links between business and trade statistics
- 9. Technical assistance** (*updates by various international organizations*)
- 10. Other business**
 - (a) time and place of next meeting

Annex 2: List of participants

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Annex 3: List of Available Documents		
Item 1	Provisional Agenda	WTO
	Information Note for Task Force Members	ECLAC
	Annex 4: Summary of actions decided	WTO
Item 3(d)	Summary Report of the 6 th ITS/TIS Expert meeting – Sept. 2005	OECD
Item 4(a)	IMTS: Supplement to Compilers Manual	UNSD
	Movements of Goods undergoing Repair	Eurostat
	Outline-Proposal for IMTS Supplement: Intrastat – European Trade Statistics within a single Market	Eurostat
	Questionnaire on Compilation and Dissemination Practices	UNSD
Item 4(b)	Reconciliation between Balance of Payments and Foreign Trade Statistics	Eurostat
	Information on Goods for Processing and Merchanting (WTO)	WTO
Item 4(c)	Export and Import Price Index Manual (XMPI Manual)	IMF
Item 4(d)	Revision of the IMTS Recommendations	UNSD
Item 5(a)	Geo-nomenclatures and country groupings	WTO
	Geo-nomenclature	OECD
	Statistical Territories and use of country codes in UN-OECD Joint system	UNSD
Item 5(b)	Standard International Trade Classification, Rev.4	UNSD
Item 6(a)	UNSD Data Collection overview 2004-2006	UNSD
	Individual area codes	UNSD
	Report UNSD/OECD – Merchandise Trade Statistics	UNSD
Item 6(b)	FAO Activity on IMTS – FAOSTAT Trade Database	FAO
	Overall Architecture of the new SIS	UNCTAD

	Database Developments at OECD (see also 6(e))	OECD
Item 6(d)	International Indicators of Trade and Economic Linkages	OECD
Item 6(e)	EU in international trade statistics	Eurostat
	Database Developments at OECD (see also 6(b))	OECD
Item 7(a)	Data quality – Statistical Metadata in Merchandise Trade Statistics	OECD
Item 7(b)	Data Quality Assessment Framework (DQAF)	IMF
Item 8(a)	Multinational enterprises – Eurostat's developments on Business Registers and FATS	Eurostat
	Report of the Expert meeting on Capacity Building in the area of FDI: Data compilation and policy formulation in developing countries	UNCTAD
Item 8(b)	Link between business and trade statistics	Eurostat
	Linking SBS and Trade Statistics: a new OECD project launched in 2005	OECD
Room papers		
item 9	Strengthening the Development of International Merchandise Trade Statistics and the Compilation of e-commerce in Member Countries of ESCWA	ESCWA
item 5(b)	Update on HS 2007/amendments/legal text/2012 review cycle	WCO
item 6(b)	Overview of international merchandise trade data in ESCWA during 2005	ESCWA
item 6(b)	FAOSTAT trade database and activities on International Merchandise Trade Statistics	FAO

Annex 4: Summary of actions decided

Action	Who
item 4(a): Send out questionnaire on National Compilation Practices	UNSD
item 4(a): Determine final list of topics for Supplement and division of labour for drafting	UNSD/WTO
item 4(c): Practices for calculating unit values	FAO/WTO
item 4(d): Start the organization of the revision of IMTS, Rev.2	UNSD
item 4 (d): Presentation of Extrastat legislation	Eurostat
item 5(a): Draft paper on framework for discussing geo-nomenclature issues	WTO
item 5(b): Publication of SITC, Rev.4	UNSD
item 5(b): Correspondence tables SITC, Rev.4/HS 2002 and BEC	UNSD
item 6(b): Include classifications in the Taskforce's website (e.g. technology products)	WTO
item 6(c): Develop a database structure for CDS based on SDMX	WTO
item 6(f): Maintenance of the Task Force website/Guidelines for Design and Content	WTO

Annex 5:**TASK FORCE ON INTERNATIONAL MERCHANDISE TRADE STATISTICS***Rome, 17-19 April 2007***Provisional Agenda**

- 1. Adoption of the provisional agenda**
- 2. Minutes of the meeting held in Santiago de Chile, 3-5 April 2006**
- 3. Review of decisions of other international meetings with regard to merchandise trade**
 - (a) Report of the 38th UN Statistical Commission
 - (b) Report of the Inter-agency Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities
 - (c) The Millennium Development Goal Declaration
 - (d) Report of relevant trade statistics meetings (OECD Trade Statisticians, etc.)
- 4. Concepts, definitions and methodology**
 - (a) Supplement to the Compilers' Manual for International Merchandise Trade Statistics (*update by UNSD*)
 - (b) Revision of IMTS, Revision 2 recommendations
 - (c) Interaction between BOP, SNA and external trade (*update by Eurostat*)
 - (d) Trade Index Numbers and the Unit Value Approach (*all organizations*)
- 5. Country and Product Classifications**
 - (a) Geo-nomenclatures and country groupings for use in international merchandise trade statistics (*update by UNSD*)
 - (b) Revision of HS and SITC (*update by UNSD*)
 - (c) Correspondences between classifications (HS/SITC/ISIC)
- 6. Databases on international trade**
 - (a) COMTRADE: status, technical issues, EDP strategies and joint arrangements (*joint report of UNSD/OECD*)
 - (b) Database developments in other organizations (FAO, WTO, others)
 - (c) Common Data Set (*update by WTO*)
 - (d) Trade Indicators (*update by OECD and WTO*)
 - (e) Dissemination tools and policies of international organizations (*exchange of information*)
 - (f) Task Force website and EDG
- 7. Data quality**
 - (a) Statistical metadata in merchandise trade (*report by OECD*)
 - (b) Reports on Data Quality by International Organizations (*exchange of information*)
- 8. Globalization and merchandise trade statistics**
 - (a) Multi-national enterprises, structural business and trade statistics
- 9. Technical assistance** (*updates by various international organizations*)
- 10. Other business**
 - (a) time and place of next meeting