The annual meeting of the Inter-agency Task Force on International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS) was this year hosted by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in Bangkok from 15-17 March 2005. The Task Force is made up of representatives of international agencies that deal with trade statistics, namely the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Trade Center (ITC), the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and the United Nations Secretariat — represented by the UN Statistics Division (UNSD).

Bangkok Task Force meeting focuses on combining efforts (UNSD) — and the UN Regional Commissions. At the meeting attention was first of all given to the creation of a website for the Task Force. WTO — the convener and chair of the Task Force — will host and develop the site which will contain meeting documents and reference materials on international merchandise trade statistics. In addition, the Common Data Set will be located here. This dataset contains annual merchandise trade totals for which responsibility is shared among participating Task Force members. UNSD and OECD jointly reported on further progress which has been made over the last year in their shared development of a data processing system with common standards. UNSD and OECD already merged the collection of OECD member states trade data which is fully channeled via OECD. Now, in addition, the organizations share the technology and further development of the dissemination of international trade data via the Internet (besides sharing data collection efforts with OECD, UNSD also works together with FAO, ITC, ESCWA and ECLAC in combining efforts to improve the collection of basic trade data).

Convergence on metadata structure and data quality assurance

UNSD also works together with FAO, ITC, ESCWA and ECLAC in combining efforts to improve the collection of basic trade data). Convergence of approaches was noticeable in the area of data quality assurance.

(Continued on page 2)
and reporting of meta-data. IMF presented its Data Quality Assessment Framework (DQAF) which includes concepts used in the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) project (see http://www.sdmx.org/), whereas OECD reported progress on its MetaStore project which proposes a common structure and vocabulary for storing and presenting meta-data. MetaStore also builds on SDMX concepts. UNSD, which participates in the SDMX project and cooperates closely with OECD regarding meta-data for IMTS, announced that it will conduct its review of the National Compiling and Reporting practices within the framework of DQAF.

On other issues, progress was reported by IMF on the development of the manual for imports and exports price indices, by OECD on its handbook on globalization indicators and by Eurostat on globalization studies regarding the structure of exporting industries and the differences among

Progress reports on other issues

EU member states in making BOP adjustments to merchandise trade data. In its annual status report on UN Comtrade, UNSD devoted this year a larger section on new developments regarding the data transfer possibilities from the Comtrade server to international agencies using XML file structures and MS Web Services tools.

DATABASES AND PUBLICATIONS:

OECD Factbook 2005: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics

A key reference tool for everyone working on economic and policy issues, covering a wide range of areas such as: economy, agriculture, education, energy, environment, foreign aid, health and quality of life, industry, information and communications, population/labour force, trade and investment, taxation, public expenditure and R&D (for more details see http://www.oecd.org/document/62/0,2340,en_21571361_34374092_34420734_1_1_1_1,00.html).

Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2003

The Yearbook provides a comprehensive compilation of statistical tables relating to the ESCAP region. It provides each country's data in a single section: population, manpower, national accounts, agriculture, forestry and fishing, industry, energy, transport and communications, etc. For more information and paper copies please go to http://unp.un.org/ (Sales No. 04.II.F.1).

COOPERATION WITH COUNTRIES AND AGENCIES

35th Session of the Harmonized System Committee

The Harmonized System (HS) Committee, 35th Session met 14-24 March 2005 in Brussels. Over 30 contracting parties and observer countries and several international organizations attended the session. There were several outcomes of particular interest: The HS Committee examined the draft of the Correlation Tables between the 2002 and 2007 versions of the HS and approved it with few exceptions. The Correlation Tables will be published on the internet after their approval by the HS Committee. The Secretariat released the publication schedule for the unilingual (in September 2005) and bilingual version (in August 2006) of the 2007 HS Nomenclature. Also a new brochure concerning the “Amendments to the HS Nomenclature”...
The World Customs Organization (WCO) was established in 1952, as the Customs Co-operation Council. WCO is an independent intergovernmental body. WCO mission: enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations.

With 159 Member Governments, it is the only intergovernmental worldwide organization competent in Customs matters.

UNECLAC is headquartered in Santiago, Chile. UNECLAC is one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations. It was founded for the purposes of contributing to the economic development of Latin America, coordinating actions directed towards this end, and reinforcing economic relationships among the countries and with the other nations of the world.

The Series de Comercio Internacional (http://www.eclac.cl/Comercio/serieCP/eclactrade/comercio.htm) of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) show graphs of international merchandise trade statistics on its website in Santiago de Chile. In itself these graphs are well-designed and contain useful information. What makes them different from most other graphs, however, is the fact that the data used in the application come directly from the UN Comtrade database in New York. It is an interactive and eye-catching interface feeding real time data from UN Comtrade via MS Web Services to the...
application in Santiago. The result is the best from two worlds: Data presentation for local analytical purposes from UNECLAC and the latest available data from UN Comtrade. The great advantage for UNECLAC is that it does not need to store the basic trade data in its own database. UNECLAC and UNSD have been co-operating in the development of these analytical applications, but they can be built independently by the user organization. Changes in the application do not affect UN Comtrade and vice-versa. As a result, UN Comtrade becomes a virtual internet database permitting organizations to make their own applications for data analysis without worrying how to duplicate and synchronize data. Any newly added or revised data will immediately be available and visible in the local application.

YOU HAVE ASKED US

DO YOU HAVE TOTAL WORLD EXPORTS/IMPORTS OF SPECIFIC ITEMS?

Q: I would like to find out the total world exports/imports of a specific item?

A: UN Comtrade does not store - at this moment - the World as a Reporter (whereas there is World as a Partner), because not all countries or areas in the world report to us. Creating such an entity called World Reporter involves adding estimated trade data at detailed commodity level to the database, which we were not ready to do so far. Yet, UN Comtrade allows users to create a Country Group (under My Favorites) that contains all available reporting countries and areas. Such group could serve as a proxy to get World exports or imports of a specific item.

UPCOMING EVENTS

WORKSHOPS ON INTERNATIONAL MERCHANDISE TRADE AND ON TRADE IN SERVICES

Joint UNSD/UNECLAC workshop on Statistics of International Trade in Services, September 2005. Participants from Central Banks and National Statistical Offices will be invited to this workshop in the ECLAC/CARICOM region to share their experiences in the compilation of international trade in services and in the implementation of the Manual on Statistics of international trade in services (MSITS). Countries will be asked to present case studies to specific compilation issues and resource persons will be available to support the learning experience.

Joint UNSD/UNCTAD workshop on International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS), August/September 2005. The workshop on the compilation of IMTS for francophone countries in Africa will be held at the ECOWAS conference centre in Abuja. Customs officers and statisticians of the National Statistical Offices will be brought together to solve local problems in producing trade data.

EDITORIAL NOTE

The Trade Statistics Newsletter is a quarterly publication prepared by the International Trade Statistics Section of the United Nations Statistics Division — Department of Economic and Social Affairs. This Newsletter is not an official document of the United Nations nor does it express the official position of the United Nations. Editorial team: Vladimir Markhonko, Ronald Jansen, Markie Muryawan and Matthias Reister (Executive Editor).