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Executive Summary of the Roundtable on Assessing the Impact of Competition Authorities' Activities

Annex to the Summary Record of the 79th meeting of Working Party 2

16 June 2025

This Executive Summary by the OECD Secretariat contains the key findings from the discussion of the Roundtable on Assessing the Impact of Competition Authorities' Activities held by Working Party 2 on 16 June 2025.

More documents related to this discussion can be found at
https://www.oecd.org/en/events/2025/06/assessing-the-impact-of-competition-authorities-activities.html

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Executive summary of the Roundtable on Assessing the Impact of Competition Authorities' Activities

By the Secretariat[1]

On 16 June 2025, Working Party No. 2 on Competition and Regulation held a roundtable to discuss how competition authorities assess the impact of their interventions. Considering the background note prepared by the OECD Secretariat, the written contributions, as well as the discussion by delegates and expert panellists, the following key points emerged:

1. Quantifying the impact of authorities' interventions has multiple benefits, including strengthening communication with the public and promoting accountability.

Impact assessments aim to provide clear, measurable estimates of the benefits expected from a competition authority's interventions. The use of these assessments has expanded across many jurisdictions in recent years. They typically express these benefits in monetary terms, building on activity measures such as counts of interventions. This approach produces a simple, understandable figure that can be compared against budgets to demonstrate value for money.

Transparency is a key objective for many public agencies, but disclosure alone is not enough—the information must also be accessible and clear. The impact of competition interventions can often be intangible, so it is important to communicate their effects in a way that is easy to understand. Impact assessments help authorities achieve this, strengthening communication with the public and promoting accountability for their actions. In addition, impact assessments can serve as an internal tool for competition agencies, supporting decisions on where resources can be deployed most effectively.

2. Authorities should be mindful of the limitations of impact assessments as an input to priority setting and consider together with other evaluation approaches such as ex post reviews.

When using impact assessments for priority setting, authorities should be mindful of their limitations. These assessments often rely on simplified assumptions and may not capture long-term or qualitative benefits such as innovation or deterrence. Therefore, they should be considered alongside other evaluation tools, including qualitative performance metrics and detailed ex post studies, to provide a more balanced and evidence-based view of effectiveness. Combining these approaches helps avoid over-reliance on headline figures and ensures that strategic decisions reflect the full spectrum of competition policy outcomes.

There is also the potential for working closer with academia to seek improvements in impact assessment methodologies.

3. Assessing deterrence and other non-price effects remains difficult but continued research is worthwhile.

[1] This executive summary does not necessarily represent the consensus view of the Working Party participants. It does however identify key points from the discussion at the Roundtable, including the views of the expert panellists and the participants' oral and written contributions.

Deterrence refers to the preventive effect that enforcement actions by competition authorities have on future anti-competitive behaviour. This indirect effect often exceeds the immediate, measurable price benefits of individual cases. Assessing deterrence is important because it captures the broader societal value of enforcement, beyond the "tip of the iceberg" represented by direct consumer savings. However, measuring deterrence is challenging, as it requires assumptions about behavioural changes and often relies on surveys or econometric models rather than case-specific data.

In addition to deterrence, competition interventions can generate significant non-price benefits, such as improvements in innovation, product quality, and market choice. These dynamic effects are harder to quantify but are increasingly recognised as central to long-term economic welfare.

Current impact assessments tend to focus on static price effects, leaving these broader benefits underrepresented. Updating methodologies to incorporate indicators for innovation, quality, and market structure would be ideal but unlikely to be practical.

More periodic studies of deterrence and other broader factors could be conducted in addition to impact assessments exploring the broader impacts of interventions. For example, the impact of enforcement interventions on macroeconomics can be conducted by modelling how deterrence can lead to approximate long-term improvements in productivity, innovation, and consumer welfare. While challenging to quantify, incorporating deterrence into macro-level assessments helps capture the true systemic value of competition policy.

4. Some competition authorities are exploring the potential to expand impact assessment to market studies and advocacy.

Market studies and advocacy initiatives are increasingly recognised as essential tools for promoting competition, particularly in sectors where enforcement alone cannot address structural issues. These interventions often aim to identify barriers to competition and recommend regulatory or policy changes, such as improving consumer information or removing entry restrictions. While some jurisdictions have begun to measure the impact of these activities—often through qualitative assessments or case-specific indicators—there is no universally accepted methodology. This lack of consistency makes it difficult to compare results across countries or to aggregate findings into a coherent picture of effectiveness.

Current approaches are mostly based on case specific data. Developing a common framework with clear assumptions and indicators would help authorities demonstrate the value of these interventions, however, given the heterogeneity of the advocacy approaches practically this would be difficult.

5. There is a range of different approaches to the assumptions used by authorities when conducting impact assessment.

Competition authorities typically rely on simplified assumptions as part of their ex ante impact assessments, especially in the absence of case-specific data. These assumptions often include estimating affected turnover for all firms in the relevant market, applying standard overcharge rates for cartels (commonly between 10–15%), and assuming a fixed duration of harm (e.g., one to three years). For merger cases, authorities may presume a certain percentage price increase absent intervention, while abuse of dominance assessments often use benchmarks based on prior cases or industry norms.

These approaches enable quick, transparent calculations, but there is still some diversion in assumptions used across jurisdictions. This diversity reflects practical constraints but also underscores the need for consistent, empirically grounded methodologies where possible to improve comparability and credibility of impact assessments.

For mergers and cartels there are several meta-studies which could inform the assumptions used by authorities. Generally, the empirical studies suggest that average or median impacts are often higher than the impacts assumed by authorities but there is a trade-off between seeking accuracy and the conservatism of results to ensure approaches remain credible.

Several authorities have also introduced additional categories of assumptions which apply to other case types beyond mergers, cartels and abuse of dominance cases. Some for example have lower assumptions which they apply to vertical arrangements. Others suggest that in some cases vertical cases may be more similar to cartels. There is the potential for the OECD's guidance in this area to be updated to also include additional case types.

6. The OECD's 2014 impact assessment guidance is well used and valued for its flexible but practical approach but there is the opportunity to refresh the guidance.

The OECD's 2014 guidance on assessing the impact of competition authorities has proven to be a practical and flexible tool and has been widely adopted by agencies. This was highlighted by many contributions as well as the presentation of the ICN survey results. Its adaptability has allowed authorities to tailor methodologies to adjust to their own approaches as required and its simplicity has allowed smaller agencies to utilise without taking up significant resources. However, there is an opportunity to refresh the guidance—potentially updating assumptions to reflect recent empirical literature and including additional detail for topics currently not discussed.