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6 (d): The new UNSD Compilers Manual and Supplements - broadening the scope - UNSD

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This document is made available to the delegates of the joint 8th International Trade Statistics (ITS) and Trade in Services (TIS) Session for information and comment.

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United Nations
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
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SUPPLEMENT TO THE COMPILERS MANUAL

NCDP Questionnaire and important issues of International Merchandise Trade Statistics

Report by UNSD

The 2006 NCDP Questionnaire

1. As part of its publication programme UNSD currently prepares a document which is at the same time a sequel to the existing *International Merchandise Trade Statistic: Concepts and Definitions, Revision 2* (IMTS, Rev2, 1998) and the *IMTS: Compilers Manual* (2004) and a prelude to the upcoming third revision of the recommendations of IMTS. The title of this new publication will be *IMTS: Supplement to the Compilers Manual* (the Supplement). It will be submitted for printing in November 2007. Preparation of this document is done in collaboration with the members of the inter-agency Task Force on IMTS.
2. In 2006, the level of compliance with the 1998 recommendations was measured by UNSD via the National Compilation and Dissemination Practices (NCDP) questionnaire, which follows the structure of IMTS, Rev2, and is linked to the earlier questionnaire which was sent in 1993. In addition to questions regarding the current recommendations, questions about possible new ones were added as well.
3. The 2006 NCDP Questionnaire was sent out in July and August of 2006 to 206 national IMTS compiling agencies. Of these, 30 were sent by OECD with a joint UNSD-OECD letter to OECD countries, including country metadata found at OECD. Questionnaires were pre-filled as much as possible on a country by country basis with information received in the past or retrieved from the country's Internet site. In addition, they were made available in five languages (English, French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic) to facilitate the task for the national compilers. By February 2007, 111 responses were received. A complete overview of answers by question is being prepared in a separate publication and will be made available by UNSD on its website before the end of this year.

4. A summary of responses and main outcomes of the survey will constitute the first part of the Supplement. Answers to the NCDP questionnaire reveal certain areas that are treated very differently among countries and that should be issues of concern for the update of the recommendations of IMTS. These are issues like the system used for reporting trade statistics (General versus Special Trade System), reporting of country of consignment as additional information, or recording of Imports FOB or Freight and Insurance as additional information.

Important issues for International Merchandise Trade Statistics

5. The second part of the Supplement tries to describe and clarify a number of issues which have received in one form or another some interest in recent years. These are issues like the Revised Kyoto Convention, the INTRASTAT system, the borderline issues between IMTS and BOP/SNA, and links between IMTS and business statistics. The intention of the Supplement is not to give solutions or to give explicit compilation guidance on these issues. The intention is to restate the current recommendations – where applicable – and to outline the scope and measurement problems of issues which have received renewed interest. The current table of contents of this part is given in Annex 1. It shows the structure and details of each of the issues. Please note that this is still a draft version and further changes will be applied.

6. UNSD hopes to involve all trade statistics experts in the revision of the current IMTS recommendation via an electronic form on the Internet, namely the Expert Forum on IMTS (see <http://comtrade.un.org/ef>). The reasons why such revision is necessary were outlined in the invitation letter sent out by UNSD during August 2007 to many experts around the globe (see Annex 2). All participants of the 7th OECD ITS Expert meeting were invited to participate in this electronic forum. For those who have not been invited and who are interested to participate, please write to jansen1@un.org.

7. Concerning the overall process of preparation of the third revision of IMTS (IMTS, Rev.3), UNSD has created the following tentative schedule: (1) a proposal to the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) in 2008, (2) world-wide consultation in the period 2007-2009 and (3) completion of the provisional draft of IMTS, Rev.3 by June 2009. The provisional draft is to be endorsed by the UN Expert Group and submitted to UNSC at its 2010 session for adoption. The first meeting of the UNEG on IMTS is planned for 3-6 December 2007.

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ANNEX 2

Invitation to the UNSD Expert Forum on international merchandise trade statistics

I am pleased to inform you that the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) is launching an international forum of experts to collect views of data compilers of national offices and of some data users on the existing international recommendation applicable to international merchandise trade statistics (IMTS) as a part of its work on a new revision of *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions*.

The current second revision was approved by the UN Statistical Commission at its twenty-ninth session in 1997 and published in 1998. It is available on the UNSD website at

http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/SeriesM_52rev2E.pdf

The third revision of the IMTS manual is needed, *inter alia*, in view of:

- Changes in the ways international merchandise trade is conducted (e.g., increasing globalization, outsourcing, expansion of intra-firm trade and transactions with bundled goods and services components, spreading of e-commerce);
- Changes in legal environment in which international trade transactions are conducted and which affect availability and contents of the main source of trade data - customs records (e.g., the revised Kyoto convention on customs procedures; abolition of customs borders or simplification of customs procedures by many countries; new developments regarding rules of origin of traded goods; various experiences in interpretation and application of the WTO valuation agreement);
- Ever increasing user demand for more detailed, consistent and timely data for trade policy, structural and short term analysis and market research;
- Need for a further harmonization with other economic statistics including with the revised SNA93, forthcoming BPM6 and the revised Manual on SITS;
- Need for more extensive use of non-customs data sources to supplement customs records;
- Review of the existing recommendations for internal clarity and completeness;
- Addition of new recommendations regarding metadata, data quality and dissemination.

The expert forum is organized on the Internet and can be visited at

<http://comtrade.un.org/ef/>

To keep an effective discussion, the expert forum needs to be centralized in one place. This implies that the discussion will have to be held in one language, which is English in this case. To accommodate non-native English speakers we allow the experts to pose their comments in French, Russian or Spanish, if they feel more comfortable expressing themselves in one of those languages. As the moderator, UNSD will provide – to the extent possible – a summary of those comments in English.

I would very much appreciate if you send us your comments or suggestions (markhonko@un.org).