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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

STRENGTHENING THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL MERCHANDISE TRADE STATISTICS (IMTS) AND THE COMPILATION OF E-COMMERCE IN ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

WORKSHOP ON MEASUREMENT OF E-COMMERCE AND EXTERNAL TRADE INDICATORS DUBAI, 30 MARCH – 1 APRIL 2009

Summary

The Workshop on Measurement of e-Commerce and External Trade Indicators was organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in cooperation with Dubai World and Dubai Customs within the framework of the project entitled Strengthening the Development of International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS) and the Compilation of e-Commerce in ESCWA Member Countries. The Workshop aimed to achieve the following: (a) discuss the importance of e-commerce statistics related to international merchandise trade; (b) present and discuss the study prepared in that regard; (c) discuss the preparation and publication of external trade indicators; and (d) discuss and share national experiences between ESCWA member countries in that context. The Workshop brought together experts from central statistical offices, customs departments, central banks, and ministries of trade and industry in the countries of the ESCWA region, as well as representatives from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and an expert in international trade.

The workshop issued a series of recommendations, including promoting the familiarization of definitions and methodologies in the field of e-commerce; establishing a national mechanism aimed at enhancing coordination between national institutions that undertake activities in the field of e-commerce statistics; using surveys to compile such statistics in the field of international e-commerce; and encouraging successful experience-sharing within and beyond the countries of the ESCWA region.

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized, in cooperation with Dubai World and Dubai Customs, the Workshop on Measurement of e-Commerce and External Trade Indicators, which was held in Dubai Customs Building, Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, from 30 March to 1 April 2009.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

2. In the final session, the Workshop concluded with the following recommendations:

(a) Encourage member countries to form a task committee/force aimed at following up issues related to international e-commerce, including the definitions, methodologies and legal issues; developing electronic payment systems; implementing periodic surveys; and compiling statistics from e-commerce transactions. The meeting also recommended that countries with such committees needed to activate their role in order for their membership to include central statistical offices, customs administrations, central banks, ministries of trade, and communication institutions in addition to other national institutions related to this field;

(b) Encourage member countries to perform periodical updates of the trade register with regard to establishments and companies;

(c) Call upon ESCWA and other international organizations to undertake regular visits to ESCWA member countries in order to discuss topics related to capacity-building and improving the quality of statistics, including e-commerce statistics. In that context, ESCWA urged member countries to send an official request to the secretariat;

(d) Encourage member countries to use surveys to collect international e-commerce statistics;

(e) Call upon ESCWA and other international organizations working in this field to define the appropriate methodology in order to specify the quantities and values of digital merchandise trade;

(f) Reaffirm the importance of familiarizing the methodologies and guidelines presented and discussed during the Workshop. Within that context, participants highlighted the need to exchange good expertise within and beyond the countries of the ESCWA region, and to make use of other national experiences;

(g) Encourage countries to develop the information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure and update it continuously, thereby enhancing and increasing international e-commerce;

(h) Call upon ESCWA member countries to prepare and disseminate ICT indicators, in particular fundamental indicators, in order to make use of information and communication in business institutions, as well as with products related to the ICT sector and trade. In that regard, the meeting encouraged making use of the questionnaires prepared by such international organizations as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Statistical Office of the European Union (EUROSTAT), Statistics Canada (CANADA Stat) and the United States Census Bureau;

(i) Urge ESCWA member countries to prepare and disseminate external trade indicators, particularly those related to globalization, and make them available for decision makers and researchers. In that context, the meeting called upon OECD to provide ESCWA member countries with an electronic copy of the printed document prepared in the field of measuring trade indicators, and containing definitions and methodologies related to these indicators.

II. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

3. A total of six working sessions were held and encompassed discussions on e-commerce definitions, benefits and costs, ICT, challenges of measuring e-commerce indicators, external trade indicators and relevant national experiences. The discussions included the following:

(a) *First session on e-commerce concepts and definitions:* The discussions in the first session tackled the concepts and definitions used in international organizations, as well as the importance, benefits and costs of e-commerce. E-commerce was defined as a sale or purchase of a commodity or service via the Internet, whether between business corporations, individuals, Governments or other private or public institutions. While the request for a given merchandise or service could be ordered through the Internet, the actual purchase and delivery could be achieved either via the Internet or by way of more traditional channels. The discussion pointed to the need to unify definitions and concepts in use in order to provide accurate, comprehensive and comparable data;

(b) *Second session on the information and communications technology:* While the presentation during this session included electronic business and international standards, discussions dealt with the ICT indicators used to measure international commerce. Furthermore, the presentation included a summary of the answers to the questionnaire on e-commerce, which was prepared by ESCWA, and reviewed the status of ICT indicators in the region.

Discussions underscored the importance of continuously updating the infrastructure in order to enhance and support e-commerce, including the Web, the Internet and an effective communication system; and of developing a statistical system in order to produce and make use of ICT;

(c) *Third session on the challenges of measuring e-commerce:* The first presentation during this session stressed the importance of ICT and the fundamental indicators that need to be measured. It also covered the challenges of measuring e-commerce, particularly in terms of the lack of data sources and of legal frameworks linked to e-commerce. The third session included two additional presentations, namely, on data sources (customs, international transaction reporting system (ITRS) and enterprise surveys), which tackled the strengths and weaknesses of the respective sources; and on the Dubai project on electronic statistics.

The discussions included the data sources and the difficulty experienced with regard to specifying one effective source. In that context, the discussions covered customs, the international transaction reporting system and surveys and highlighted the challenges related to every source. With regard to customs declaration forms, there was a general perception that information suffered from gaps and a lack of data collection in most of its fields, and that dealers or customs agents were not expected to input the required additional information. The international transaction reporting system was not deemed flexible enough to include details of trade transactions. Consequently, participants concluded that while surveys do not provide details as to the type of merchandise, the country of origin and the date of registration, they formed the best way to collect e-commerce data.

In this session, the first director of Dubai World Statistics Department made a presentation of the Dubai project on electronic statistics. The presentation covered the importance of the project in terms of making use of the technology in developing statistical work in Dubai World Group. The implementation of the project is expected to have a clear impact on the development of customs work in the United Arab Emirates, specifically Dubai Customs, insofar as more than 85 per cent of the commerce for the United Arab Emirates is concluded through Dubai Customs;

(d) *Fourth session on the preparation and dissemination of external trade indicators:* External trade indicators were presented and discussed during this session, including the economic indicators of

globalization. Participants highlighted the importance of producing such indicators given that researchers need them for economic analysis, and in view of their effectiveness in evidence-based trade policymaking.

The fourth session included round-table discussions, during which countries exposed their suggestions on both topics of the Workshop, namely: compiling e-commerce statistics and external trade indicators. Specifically, participants agreed on the importance of coordinating between all institutions with e-commerce-related activities, and on working to improve the means of collecting data through surveys. With regard to external trade indicators, participants agreed on the importance of producing such indicators and disseminating them in periodic publications and electronic pages of member countries. The round-table discussions also included capacity-building issues wherein national capacity-building was underscored as a common responsibility between member countries and international organizations.

(e) *Fifth session:* The fifth session presented experiences of member countries in the field of e-commerce statistics as well as producing and disseminating external trade indicators, namely, the experiences of Bahrain, Jordan, the Sudan and Palestine. It also included a presentation of the Dubai project (Mirsal 2) for electronic customs clearance, highlighting that Mirsal 2 is considered to be one of the most advanced clearance programmes in the world owing to its techniques and high competence, thereby also facilitating the collection and promoting the breadth of merchandise trade statistics;

(f) *Sixth session:* During the sixth session, the main topics discussed over the three-day Workshop were summed up, and the primary report of the Workshop was presented and discussed.

In this session, participants expressed their deep gratitude to both Dubai Customs and Dubai World for the excellent organization of the Workshop and their hospitality. The ESCWA secretariat promised to send letters of thanks to Mr. Ahmed Butti, Executive Director of the Ports, Customs and Free Zone Corporation and Director General of Dubai Customs; and to Mr. Farid Muhammad Ahmad, Secretary General of Dubai World, on behalf of the experts at the meeting and in recognition of the support provided in organizing the Workshop and in view of its successful outcome.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

4. The Workshop was attended by 31 experts from central statistical offices, customs departments and central banks in the countries of the ESCWA region, including representatives of UNCTAD and OECD, and an expert in e-commerce. The list of participants is contained in annex I of this report.

5. In her opening statement, Ms. Fathia Abdel Fadil, team leader in ESCWA Statistics Division, welcomed the participants and thanked Dubai World and Dubai Customs for the cooperation and efforts exerted to host the Workshop in Dubai Customs Building. She mentioned that this training workshop represented the fourth such meeting within the ESCWA project entitled Strengthening the Development of International Merchandise Trade Statistics and the Compilation of e-Commerce in ESCWA Member Countries. In her statement, she highlighted the importance of compiling and disseminating e-commerce statistics and external trade indicators in view of their efficient impact on evidence-based trade policymaking.

6. Mr. Ahmed Butti Ahmed, Executive Director of the Ports, Customs and Free Zone Corporation and the Director General of Dubai Customs, welcomed the national experts and affirmed that e-commerce had become crucially important during recent years in the light of successive developments of the technical revolution in the world and the need to execute trade transactions and receive merchandise and services promptly. He also pointed out that the services and transactions of Dubai Customs were currently fully available electronically.

7. The Workshop was divided into six working sessions, which included presentations on concepts and definitions, the benefits and costs of e-commerce, e-business, international standards, challenges for

measuring e-commerce, the role of ICT in e-commerce, external trade indicators and capacity-building issues. The Dubai project on electronic statistics and the Mirsal 2 programme for customs clearance were also presented, in addition to papers on national experiences in the areas of external trade, e-commerce and cooperation among various national institutions.

8. The agenda of the Workshop was as follows:

1. Opening of the meeting.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Consideration and discussion of issues.
4. Conclusion.

9. The programme of work encompassed the following:

1. Opening of the meeting.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. E-commerce concepts and definitions – overview:
 - (a) Concepts;
 - (b) Working definitions;
 - (c) Benefits and costs of e-commerce.
4. Information and communications technology:
 - (a) E-business and international standards;
 - (b) Summary of the answers of member countries to the questionnaire.
5. Country case studies (2-3 countries).
6. Status of ICT in the ESCWA region.
7. Challenges of measuring international e-commerce.
8. Role of ICT in e-commerce.
9. Data sources: customs data, international transactions reporting system (ITRS) and enterprise surveys.
10. Dubai project on electronic statistics.
11. Country case studies (2-3 countries).
12. External trade indicators.
13. Capacity-building issues.
14. Round-table discussions.
15. Country case studies (2-3 countries).
16. Conclusions and recommendations.

Annex I*

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Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Title
Information Note
Organization of Work
2008 / 15-12 -
Consultant Report: Strengthening Statistical Capacity with Respect to International Merchandize Trade and e-Commerce
- :
:
Workshop on Measuring e-Commerce as part of IMTS (consultant PowerPoint presentation)
- :
:
-
:
Country paper: External merchandise trade statistics and compilation of e-commerce in Egypt – General Department for Trade Programming and Indicators - Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics
OECDs Work on External Trade Indicators
Challenges of Measuring e-Commerce in International Trade - UNCTAD
-
External Trade Indicators: linking trade and business statistics (OECD)
External Trade Indicators: OECDs Economic Globalisation Indicators- the trade chapter
Information and Telecommunication Technology in Saudi Arabia
E-Commerce in Saudi Arabia: adoption and perspectives
Summary of the Methodology for Assessing the Dynamics and Impacts of Electronic Commerce (OECD)
Cross-border Electronic Commerce and International Trade Statistics
E-Commerce Statistics: explanation and sources
Measuring e-Commerce: developments in the United Kingdom
Defining and Measuring Electronic Commerce: towards the development of an OECD methodology
EC-Learnings: how to measure e-commerce
Revisions and Additions to the Core List of ICT Indicators

Title

The Global Information Society: A Statistical View

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development: Manual for the Production of Statistics on the Information Economy - 2009 revised edition

Report of the Partnership on Measuring Information and Communications Technologies for Development: information and communications technology statistics (E/CN.3/2009/19)

:

(E/CN.3/2009/19)

Regional Profile of the Information Society in Western Asia (E/ESCWA/ICTD/2007/15)
