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## Statistical Commission

### Fifty-second session

1–3 and 5 March 2021

Item 3 (e) of the provisional agenda\*

**Items for discussion and decision: business and trade statistics**

## Report of the Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics

### Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2020/211 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics. In the report, the Committee describes its progress in advancing the work streams of globalization and digitalization; well-being and sustainability; business dynamics, demography and entrepreneurship; exhaustive business registers; and capacity-building (leaving no one behind) on statistical business registers, as well as its work on communication. It also provides a description of its activities on the development of global databases and on training and capacity-building for statistical business registers and the future work programme of the Committee and its task teams for the period 2021–2022. The report concludes with action to be taken by the Statistical Commission.

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\* E/CN.3/2021/1.



## I. Introduction

1. In its decision 51/107, adopted at its fifty-first session, in March 2020, the Statistical Commission, *inter alia*:

(a) Welcomed the joint report of the Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics and the Inter-Agency Task Force on International Trade Statistics, and expressed its appreciation for the activities undertaken by the Committee and the Inter-Agency Task Force;

(b) Welcomed the proposed strategic view on business statistics, and encouraged the Committee to further elaborate and promote it;

(c) Commended the Committee for its efforts to coordinate the activities with relevant statistical groups, and encouraged the Committee to continue seeking cooperation with other groups on areas of common interest;

(d) Recognized the progress made by the Committee in advancing the work in its thematic areas, and requested the Committee to complete relevant guidelines for the implementation of its recommendations;

(e) Recognized the importance of statistical business registers as an essential statistical infrastructure to support the coherence and consistency of statistics and to derive detailed data on businesses and their relation to global value chains, globalization, digitalization, the environment and well-being, and noted that an exhaustive statistical business register should include small and medium-sized enterprises and, to the extent possible, the informal sector;

(f) Welcomed the proposed capacity-building programme on statistical business registers and requested the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat to report its progress to the Commission at its fifty-second session;

(g) Welcomed the creation of a task team on communication for business and trade statistics;

(h) Took note of the progress of work for the development of a global group register and encouraged the Statistics Division to advance the project in collaboration with national and international institutes, acknowledged the difficulties of building such a register from public records, and suggested that a model, such as the European Groups Register, be considered for building the global group register from country data;

(i) Agreed to the establishment of a central data repository for business and trade statistics to make them more accessible to users and to allow for a virtual connection and dialogue with users.

2. Section II.A of the present report contains a summary of the progress made by the Committee and its task teams in 2020. Section II.B contains information on the development of global databases. An update on the training and capacity-building programme for statistical business registers is presented in section II.C. The proposed work programme of the Committee for the period 2021–2022 is presented in section III. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission is presented in section IV.

## II. Progress of work of the Committee in 2020

3. The Committee held a virtual special meeting on the impact of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on business and trade statistics from 16 to 18 June 2020, during which members shared their experiences in ensuring continuity in the production and

dissemination of standard business and trade statistics, as well as in the design and implementation of innovative data solutions to respond to new user needs posed by the COVID-19 crisis. The Committee also reflected on which changes in the programmes on business and trade statistics of national statistical offices were likely to be implemented on a permanent basis post-COVID-19.

4. During its third meeting, held virtually from 29 September to 1 October 2020, the Committee reviewed the work progress in the five work streams of the Committee, namely, globalization and digitalization; well-being and sustainability; business dynamics, demography and entrepreneurship; exhaustive business registers; and capacity-building (leaving no one behind) on statistical business registers. At the meeting, the Committee recognized the significant progress the task teams had made towards identifying a core set of business and trade indicators to be recommended at the international level for compilation by all countries and preparing methodological notes and guidance for each indicator. The terms, definitions, coverage and breakdowns are aligned across all of the indicators, to the extent possible. The global core set of principal business and trade indicators, along with methodological sheets, will be subject to a global consultation, which the Committee plans to conduct in 2021, following experimentation and testing of the global core set in a limited number of countries in 2020. Careful consideration is given to the consistency of that global core set of principal business and trade indicators and similar indicators recommended by Eurostat, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Partnership on Measuring Information and Communication Technology for Development and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

5. On the basis of the outcome of the global consultation, the Committee will prepare a manual on the global core set of principal business and trade indicators for the work streams of business demography, dynamics and entrepreneurship; globalization and digitalization; and well-being and sustainability. The manual will contain guidance for the programmes of business and trade statistics to be agile and responsive to new and emerging user needs, integrating the strategic view on business statistics.<sup>1</sup>

6. The Committee has also made significant progress on the creation of a maturity model and assessment tool for statistical business registers for capacity-building purposes that builds on lessons learned from the civil registration system. The Committee will develop a manual on the maturity model, complemented by an interactive web page that links the maturity model to available guidance and country practices. On the basis of the maturity model, the Statistics Division will carry out, together with international and regional partners, a regular global assessment of statistical business registers in countries to monitor the implementation of international recommendations on statistical business registers in countries and to identify priority areas for technical assistance.

7. The Committee has also approved terms of reference for the newly established task team on communication. In addition, the Committee has identified its work programme for the next two years, how to contribute to forthcoming revisions to the economic statistical frameworks, and how to bring forward the lessons learned from COVID-19.

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<sup>1</sup> Stefano Menghinello and others, “A strategic and data production frameworks for the development of business statistics”, *Statistical Journal of the International Association for Official Statistics*, vol. 36, No. 3 (August 2020), pp. 701–713; and [E/CN.3/2020/9](#).

## **A. Activities of the task teams**

8. Summaries of the activities of each task team are presented below.

### **Task team on globalization and digitalization**

9. The task team has elaborated a detailed policy framework document to contextualize its work on globalization and digitalization business statistics, building on existing initiatives, such as those by Eurostat, OECD, the Group of 20, ITU, the Partnership on Measuring Information and Communication Technology for Development and UNCTAD. The task team has also made significant progress on identifying a global core set of principal business and trade indicators on the digitalization of businesses (both the enablers and the impacts) and has, to the extent possible, aligned the terms, definitions, classifications, frequency, coverage and breakdowns with the metadata for the indicators being proposed by the other task teams.

### **Task team on well-being and sustainability**

10. The task team has made progress on the identification and harmonization of indicators on the contributions of businesses to well-being and sustainability. In particular, the task team is building on the work by UNCTAD on the guidance for global core indicators for businesses reporting on their contributions towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

### **Task team on business dynamics, demography and entrepreneurship**

11. The task team identified a core list of indicators on business dynamics, demography and entrepreneurship and completed methodological sheets for each indicator, based on existing international guidance from Eurostat and OECD. The task team has led the initiative to conduct a global consultation on the proposed indicators and the experimentation and testing of the global core set of principal business and trade indicators in pilot countries in December 2020 and January 2021.

### **Task teams on exhaustive business registers and capacity-building (leaving no one behind) on statistical business registers**

12. The task teams have worked together to build a system approach to statistical business registers that takes into consideration a business registration system, a unique identifier, the statistical business register and the statistics derived therefrom and a common quality framework, which takes lessons learned from the approach to civil registration and vital statistics. The task teams have also jointly created an assessment tool for the maturity level of statistical business registers, which will be useful for national statistical offices and for regional and international organizations to assess the status of implementation of recommendations on the statistical business register at the global level and identify priority areas for technical assistance.

### **Task team on communication**

13. The Committee has approved the terms of reference for the newly established task team on communication, which will foster effective communication across the various task teams of the Committee and externally to the user community, including policymakers, business statisticians, business analysts, the broader economic statistics community and the general public. The Committee has indicated that membership of the task team will include task team leaders and reflect a balanced geographical representation. The objectives of the communication strategy are to increase collaboration and coherence across the different work streams of the

Committee; to facilitate the identification and implementation of recommendations made by the Committee; to promote the visibility of state-of-the-art concepts and methodologies in business and trade statistics; to raise awareness of the work of the Committee and demonstrate the relevance of its recommendations; and to mainstream those recommendations in the business and trade statistics community and in policymaking.

## **B. Development of global databases**

14. In decision 46/107, adopted by the Statistical Commission at its forty-sixth session, in March 2015, the Commission agreed with the creation of a global enterprise group register, building on and taking into account lessons learned from the ongoing EuroGroups Register project. At its second meeting, in June 2019, the Committee encouraged the Statistics Division to work with the task team on exhaustive business registers to make a business case for the development of the United Nations global group register, building on existing initiatives such as the OECD Analytical Database on Individual Multinationals and Affiliates, and exploring future possibilities of collaboration.

15. The Statistics Division has developed a methodology for profiling large multinational enterprise groups from free, publicly available information and has thus far collected information on the legal structures of the 100 largest multinational enterprise groups in the world. A beta version of the database was made publicly available on the Statistics Division's website at the end of 2020. Given the similarities between the global group register and the Analytical Database on Individual Multinationals and Affiliates, the Statistics Division and OECD have agreed to work towards the development of a joint product for the register of the largest multinational enterprises combining the experience and methods of the global group register and the Analytical Database.

## **C. Training and capacity-building programme for statistical business registers**

16. In its strategic view the Committee emphasized that the statistical business register is the backbone of the statistical infrastructure in any country. The existence of a well-developed business register facilitates data linking and integration to produce statistics. The capacity-building programme addresses the development, maintenance and updating of business registers in a holistic manner. This multifaceted approach covers topics such as the legal framework for access to administrative data from the registration of enterprises; the promotion of a unique global identifier; interoperable information technology solutions; and raising awareness of good business registers.

17. The maturity model for statistical business registers is at the core of the programme. It allows for a systematic assessment of the stages of maturity of statistical business registers in countries and the identification of the steps for their improvement. The Committee has made significant progress in the development of a maturity model that builds on lessons learned from the civil registration system, as well as an assessment tool on the level of maturity of the statistical business register, which provides links to relevant materials, and will facilitate the assessment of the status of implementation of recommendations on the statistical business register at the global level and identify priority areas for capacity-building. As indicated in paragraph 6 above, the Statistics Division plans to establish a regular assessment of

the status of implementation of statistical business registers in countries on the basis of a survey with a cycle of three to five years.

18. The Statistics Division is working in collaboration with the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific to develop an e-learning programme on statistical business registers, to be delivered in mid-2021. The e-learning programme will be developed with the guidance of the task teams on exhaustive business registers and capacity-building (leaving no one behind) on statistical business registers.

### III. Future work programme of the Committee

19. The Committee recognizes the importance of coordination of programmes in business and trade statistics at the global, regional and national levels. In that regard, the Committee will develop and strengthen mechanisms for sharing information on current and planned activities among all relevant agencies, including the United Nations regional commissions, and seek collaborations on areas of common interest. The Committee will further contribute to the revision process of the System of National Accounts (SNA), the *Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual* and related manuals, by taking up selected issues that are related to business and trade statistics and contributing to joint task teams that are being created as part of the revision process. Examples of joint task teams in which members of the Committee can participate are the proposed joint task team on statistical units (with System of National Accounts and classification experts) and the joint task team on the informal economy.

20. At the special meeting on the impact of COVID-19 on business and trade statistics, held from 16 to 18 June 2020, the Committee recognized that data production frameworks rooted in integrated systems and extended statistical business registers had proven to be more agile and responsive during this time of crisis and would continue to be so moving forward. The Committee discussed how national and international cooperation on improving statistical business registers, microdata linking and providing capacity-building would prove to be of fundamental importance and an essential work stream for the work programme of the Committee. The Committee also highlighted the need to keep the dialogue open with data providers, partners and data users about their needs from, and their possible contributions to, the work of the national statistical offices, and above all communicate the lesson learned through this crisis that business and trade statistics are important in their own right and for informing policies.

21. The Committee further recognized that it should continue its efforts in the integration of business and trade statistics rooted in the statistical business register and their links with the environment and well-being. In addition, the Committee could provide the venue in which examples of alternative data sources used for business and trade statistics are collected and shared among countries. The Committee will also seek collaboration and coordination with the Friends of the Chair group on economic statistics and coordinate, for example, a user-producer dialogue on business and trade statistics as part of the United Nations global forum on economic statistics.

22. Summaries of the proposed work programme for 2021–2022 of each Committee task team are presented below.

#### **Task team on globalization and digitalization**

23. The task team will finalize the list of business and trade indicators on digitalization and conduct a global consultation jointly with the other task teams. It will further expand the core list with indicators for globalization. The task team will

also share experiences on innovation in statistical production in response to the challenges posed by COVID-19 on globalization and digitalization, in particular on the understanding of the supply chain of relevant products (such as personal protective equipment) and develop related guidelines for countries. The task team will continue to network with other committees of experts and city groups of the system of economic statistics to enhance collaboration and user consultation, and importantly will contribute to relevant issues on the research agenda of the SNA, the *Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual* and other statistical manuals, as well as the testing of the new guidance that is being developed as part of these revision processes. The task team will also coordinate with ITU and the Partnership on Measuring Information and Communication Technology for Development for their work on information and communications technology indicators.

#### **Task team on well-being and sustainability**

24. The task team will finalize its list of core business and trade indicators on well-being and sustainability with a focus on the contributions of enterprises to the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, it will consider how it can contribute to the issues relating to well-being and sustainability of the SNA research agenda, particularly those related to the compilation of labour, education and health accounts. The task team will also consider methods to measure the value of social and free services being provided by social enterprises (which are especially relevant in analysing responses to the COVID-19 pandemic) and bringing this non-market value into extensions of the national accounts framework, beyond gross domestic product, and share experiences on innovation in statistical production through regional and global webinars in response to the challenges posed by COVID-19 on well-being and sustainability. In addition, the task team can work towards a definition of social enterprises and be a driving force towards a common framework and terminology surrounding social enterprises, building on the guidance provided on the third or social economy in the recent United Nations handbook entitled *Satellite Account on Non-profit and Related Institutions and Volunteer Work*.<sup>2</sup> The task team will also explore collaboration with the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting, given its work on linking business accounting with environmental and economic accounts and ecosystem accounts. The task team will continue to network with other committees of experts and city groups of the system of economic statistics to enhance collaboration and user consultation.

#### **Task team on business dynamics, demography and entrepreneurship**

25. The task team will conduct a global consultation on its proposed list of core business and trade indicators on business dynamics, demography and entrepreneurship, jointly with the core lists of business and trade indicators prepared by other task teams. The task team will further discuss the concept of entrepreneurship and how to link the progress of the task team with other initiatives such as those of UNCTAD and the International Labour Organization. The task team will also share experiences on innovation in statistical production through regional and global webinars in response to the challenges posed by COVID-19 on business dynamics, demography and entrepreneurship and develop guidance for countries to produce related business and trade statistics. It will also contribute to the research agenda of the SNA, the *Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual* and other statistical manuals on issues related to business dynamics, demography and entrepreneurship and continue to network with other committees of experts and city

<sup>2</sup> Available at [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/docs/UN\\_TSE\\_HB\\_FNL\\_web.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/docs/UN_TSE_HB_FNL_web.pdf).

groups of the system of economic statistics to enhance collaboration and user consultation.

#### **Task teams on exhaustive business registers and capacity-building (leaving no one behind) on statistical business registers**

26. The two task teams will finalize the draft guide on the maturity model for statistical business registers and conduct a global consultation on the draft guide. They will further contribute to the development of a United Nations global assessment on the implementation of statistical business registers in countries in order to identify gaps and priority areas of technical assistance. The task teams will also develop an interactive website, hosted by the Statistics Division, on the maturity model that links that model to existing guidance on its various aspects. In addition, the task teams propose to collect country examples and best practices on using administrative data, the economic census, big data, web scraping and artificial intelligence to update and maintain the statistical business register and for early warning systems, and on innovations in statistical production of statistical business registers in response to the challenges posed by COVID-19 on exhaustive statistical business registers. Moreover, the task teams will develop guidance for countries for the production of related business and trade statistics from statistical business registers. The task team on exhaustive business registers will contribute to the research agenda of the SNA, the *Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual* and other statistical manuals on issues related to the statistical business registers (such as issues related to statistical units, the informal economy and sectorization of multinational enterprises) and continue to network with other committees of experts and city groups of the system of economic statistics to enhance collaboration and user consultation. Finally, the task team will provide guidance for the development of the global group register.

#### **Task team on communication**

27. The terms of reference of the task team on communication have identified strategies for improving internal communication and coordination across the task teams of the Committee to promote opportunities for collaboration and synergy, ensure consistency and coherence and avoid duplication of work. In particular, the task team will develop a communication strategy with external users (such as academia, policymakers and decision makers in the public and private sector) to promote the work of the Committee and establish a dialogue with users in order to keep abreast of new and emerging user needs. Possible deliverables of the task team will include strengthening the Committee website; creating a brochure; publishing a regular newsletter; sharing the latest tools for data visualizations and infographics on business and trade statistics; organizing a forum for dialogue between data producers and data users; creating a logo for the Committee; and utilizing social media to share and broadcast advances in this area.

#### **Task team on the joint research agenda of business and trade statistics**

28. At its third meeting, the Committee considered the methodological developments in the area of international trade statistics and the revisions of the manuals *System of National Accounts 2008* and the *Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual, sixth edition* to ensure synergies and coherence between the work streams of the Committee and the work undertaken by other Committees. The Committee decided that the upcoming updates of the manual *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions 2010* and the *Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2010* should be initiated and led by an international coordinating mechanism under the Committee.



29. The Committee agreed to create a task team to advance the joint research agenda for business and international trade statistics. Acknowledging that international trade statistics are an integral part of enterprise and business statistics, the Committee called for an inclusive task team with representation of trade and business statisticians. The new task team will coordinate the joint research agenda between business and international trade statistics, and the related processes and mechanisms of the revision of the trade-related standards, in consultation with other statistical groups related to national accounts, balance of payments and international classifications.

30. For the overall coordination of the research agenda and the revision process of trade-related manuals, the Committee agreed to actively coordinate the integration of the work programmes with the Inter-Agency Task Force on International Trade Statistics as recommended by the Friends of the Chair group on economic statistics, while recognizing the inter-agency mechanisms in international trade and the specific role of the participating agencies, namely, Eurostat, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, OECD, the Statistics Division, and the World Trade Organization.

#### **IV. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission**

31. **The Commission is invited to express its views on:**

- (a) **The progress of work of the task teams of the Committee;**
- (b) **The future work programme of the Committee for 2021–2022, which includes the preparation of a manual on the global core set of principal business and trade indicators and a manual on the maturity model for statistical business registers;**
- (c) **The launch of the revision of the manual *International Merchandise Trade Statistics: Concepts and Definitions 2010* and the *Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2010*;**
- (d) **The creation of a new task team to coordinate the joint research agenda between business and international trade statistics, and the related processes and mechanisms of the revision of the trade-related standards;**
- (e) **The role of the Committee to actively coordinate the integration of the work programmes with the Inter-Agency Task Force on International Trade Statistics as recommended by the Friends of the Chair group on economic statistics to advance a common research agenda and the revision of the manuals.**