



Thirty-Sixth Meeting of the IMF Committee on Balance of Payments Statistics

Washington, D.C.
June 21–24, 2021

BOPCOMVM2—21/16
For information

Progress Report on Work Undertaken by the Communications Task Team

Prepared by the Communications Task Team (CMTT)

INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

Progress Report on Work Undertaken by the Communications Task Team¹

The Joint Task Team on Communication established by the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA), the Advisory Expert Group on national accounts (AEG), the IMF's Committee on Balance of Payments Statistics, and the IMF's Government Finance Statistics Advisory Committee. The objective of the task team is twofold: (i) to develop a communication framework and a set of tools to help producers of economic statistics communicate the statistics that they produce with their users; and (ii) to improve communication among producers of statistics and improve the way producers access the Balance of Payments Manual and the System of National Accounts international statistical standards (ISSs). To this end, the work is organized in five workstreams: (i) compilers hub workstream, which includes the development of a digital platform to facilitate collaboration among macroeconomic statistics compilers and researchers as well as improve the discovery of information; (ii) digital manuals—the serviceability of statistical standards for economic statistics and classifications be enhanced by converting these publications into digitally enabled and interactive tools with cross references; (iii) terminology—simpler alternative terms and clarified definitions/descriptions for more consistent and accurate communication; (iv) taxonomy responsible for developing a set of proposals to communicate the release of economic statistics, statistical products, and product updates, and (v) alignment framework, which focuses on the development of a clear and consistent framework that measures the degree of alignment with the international standards.

BACKGROUND

- 1. The way in which macroeconomic statistics are communicated has a significant impact on users' understanding and use of the statistics.** Therefore, producers of statistics should strive to better communicate with all users to maximize the analytical usefulness, quality, scope, comparability, and policy application of macroeconomic statistics. The update of the System of National Accounts and Balance of Payments Manual presents a unique opportunity to improve the way macroeconomic statistics are communicated to users.
- 2. The Joint Task Team (TT) on Communication (CMTT) was established by the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA), the Advisory Expert Group on national accounts (AEG), the IMF's Committee on Balance of Payments Statistics (the Committee), and the IMF's Government Finance Statistics Advisory Committee (GFSAC).** Its aim is to contribute to the work related to revising the *System of National Accounts 2008 (2008 SNA)*, in coordination with the update of the IMF's *Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual, sixth edition (BPM6)*, and the *Government Finance Statistics Manual 2014 (GFSM 2014)*.²

¹ This report was prepared by Ms. Francien Berry (IMF), Messrs. Eric Metreau (World Bank), Jim Tebrake (IMF), Secretariat and Mr. Sanjiv Mahajan (UK, Office of National Statistics), Chair of the Communication Task Team.

² In November 2018, the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts (AEG) reconfirmed the three priority areas for the System of National Accounts (SNA) research agenda and identified specific issues to be taken forward in the short term within those areas. In October 2019, at the thirteenth meeting of the AEG, members agreed to add a fourth priority area—communication which focuses on potential updates to SNA terminology and presentation. At its fifty-first session, the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) welcomed the establishment of a fourth priority on communication to improve how the data are interpreted and used by governments, researchers, businesses, media, and students. Given the importance in maintaining consistency between macroeconomic accounting

COMMUNICATION TASK TEAM WORKSTREAMS

3. **The objective of the task team is twofold:** (i) to develop a communication framework and a set of tools to help producers of economic statistics communicate the statistics that they produce with their users; and (ii) to improve communication among producers of statistics and improve the way producers access the Balance of Payments Manual and the System of National Accounts international statistical standards (ISSs). To this end, the work is organized in five workstreams: (i) compilers hub, (ii) digital manuals, (iii) terminology, (iv) taxonomy, and (v) alignment framework.

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Compilers Hub

4. **The Compilers Hub workstream includes the development of a digital platform to facilitate collaboration among macroeconomic statistics compilers and researchers as well as improve the discovery of information.** The initial design of the platform includes the following features:

- i. **Digital Library:** The Collaborative Compilers Hub will contain a digital library with links to all supporting manuals, handbooks and guides, research papers, training material, and conference proceedings improving its discoverability by macroeconomic statistics compilers.
- ii. **Research Corner:** The Collaborative Compilers Hub will contain a research corner where international agencies, national statistical offices, and other agencies can upload abstracts and links to current research and invite other members of the community to collaborate to speed up development.
- iii. **Collaboration Section:** The Collaborative Compilers Hub will contain a collaboration section where international organizations, professional researchers, and national agencies can post links to projects and invite others to collaborate in the project.
- iv. **Discussion Forum:** The Collaborative Compilers Hub will include a discussion forum where compilers, researchers, and other stakeholders across the world can interact and discuss accounting related questions and exchange ideas.
- v. **Contact Forum:** The Collaborative Compilers Hub will include a contact area where national accounts compilers can make available their contact information, along with their expertise, and identify current areas of research and interest.

Digital Manuals

5. **The serviceability of statistical standards for economic statistics and classifications such as the SNA, BPM, and GFSM can be enhanced by converting these publications into digitally enabled and interactive tools with cross references.** A suite of digitally integrated statistical standards will greatly facilitate the application of statistical standards by compilers and the navigation from one part of the system of economic statistics to the other. The specific objectives of the digital manuals

frameworks and related statistical frameworks there is a need to coordinate this work across the various statistical domains. For additional details, see the [UNSC report on the fifty-first session](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/documents/Report-2020-Draft-EE.pdf) at: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/documents/Report-2020-Draft-EE.pdf>.

workstream includes the development of digital and interactive cross-referenced statistical standards and a digital platform that can be used to manage the update of the manuals with an aim to improve the overall speed and accuracy of the update process.

COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK

Terminology

6. **The objective of the terminology workstream is to review the terminology used in the current macroeconomic accounting standards and propose simpler alternative terms and clarified definitions/descriptions for more consistent and accurate communication.** The goal of this workstream is to improve the overall communication of macroeconomic statistics, facilitate the interpretation of the statistics to users, and to better convey the meaning and interpretation of the concepts and methods.
7. Considering the different audiences, the review has so far focused on:
 - a) Proposing alternative simpler, easier to understand terms and propose consistent terminology where different terms are used to communicate the same concepts, for example *net errors and omissions versus statistical discrepancies and debit/credit versus resources/uses used to across the domains*.
 - b) Proposing more readily understood labelling of accounts and tables. Based on the current review the proposed complementary names for the allocation of primary income account, secondary distribution accounts, and capital account are *earned income account, transfer income account, and capital formation account*, respectively.
 - c) Developing a “user friendly” glossary of terms and definitions which includes expanded or clarified definitions of existing glossary terms or addition definitions for terms that are not well understood and not well defined in the current standards. As a starting point for the glossary, the CMTT guidance note on terminology proposes a list of these terms and definitions for discussion. This work is expected to proceed in two steps: first, develop for the main terms from the ISSs used in communication with the media/public a short definition in an easy language. Such a short and easy definition could also be used for social media communication as well as for a FAQ-website. Second, the glossary will be supplemented by a more detailed article for the different main terms used, also in a user-friendly language—for the “informed user”. Some examples of these terms (and proposals) include *consumption of fixed capital – depreciation of fixed assets; rent – revenue from ownership of financial, and/or non-produced assets; property income – income earned from financial assets and natural resources; compensation of employees – employee remuneration; etc.*
 - d) Reviewing the overall branding of the statistical standards, including the way the versions of the manuals are labelled and the way the system is referenced. The current inconsistent naming strategies for the manuals including references to release years, version, and editions—the *Government Finance Statistics Manual, 2014; The System of National Accounts, 2008*; the 2016 *Monetary and Financial Statistics Manual*; and the sixth edition of the *Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual*—are not beneficial for users. The CMTT proposes to standardize the naming conventions across ISSs to eliminate the existing inconsistencies using

either the edition or revision approach and consistently branding these set of guidelines as *Standards*. In this case, the next update of the SNA will be branded, as *The National Accounting Standard, xx Revision* or *The xx Edition of the National Accounting Standard*—similar branding is suggested for the BPM and GFS standards. Finally, the CMTT proposes to classify all statistical manuals under the umbrella “*International Economic and Environmental Statistics Standards*” (*IEESS*) which would cover manuals in the macroeconomic and microeconomic statistics domains.

Taxonomy

8. **The taxonomy workstream is responsible for developing a set of proposals to communicate the release of economic statistics, statistical products, and product updates.** Most statistical agencies develop and follow a publication calendar, revision policy, and disseminate metadata that describe vintages of macroeconomic statistics. However, a comparison of the press releases, revision policies, and series published across countries shows that a wide range of language and approaches are used to communicate and describe the vintages of data to users. This issue becomes even more relevant when significant revisions to macroeconomic statistics take place. This impacts their ability to compare, contrast, and understand the quality of data from one vintage to another. The guidance note includes a set of proposed recommendations for communicating statistical products that national authorities could integrate into their current communication practices. The adoption of international guidelines in this area should improve cross-country comparability and provide clarity for users. Currently, these include:

- Communicating Releases (Vintages of Data):
 - Standardizing the description of data vintages to include information about the (i) *substance of the release*; (ii) *timeliness*; (iii) *frequency*; (iv) *the reference period*; and the (v) *update period*. For example, *Regular – 60-day – Quarterly National Accounts release, first quarter 2021 (2021.1Q revised)*.
- Communicating Updates / Revisions:
 - The CMTT proposes a framework to communicate updates comprising the **five key** components of a statistical standard: (i) *concepts*; (ii) *methods*; (iii) *accounting rules*; (iv) *source data*; and (v) *accounts*.
- Communicating Products:
 - Three-tiered standardized labelling of the ‘quality’ of statistical products as *official, provisional, and experimental estimates*.
 - Proposal to adopt the term “**supplementary accounts**” (**satellite accounts**) across all domains when referring to tables outside the main sequence of accounts.

Alignment Framework

9. **The alignment workstream focuses on the development of a clear and consistent framework that measures the degree of alignment with the international standards.** The degree of alignment with international standards provides two important signals to users: first, it assists with

cross-country comparisons; and second, it is an indicator of potential future revisions could be in cases where a country remains distant from the international standards.

10. **The CMTT's proposed alignment framework is structured around the key components of a statistical standard**—the (i) *concepts*, (ii) *accounting rules*, (iii) *methods*, (iv) *classification systems*, and (v) *tables/accounts*. While these five categories can serve as an overarching structure for the alignment framework some granularity is needed. Given that a given ISS has many concepts, accounting rules, methods, classifications, and accounts/tables, it is not possible or pragmatic to list them all within the framework—a sub-set is required. This sub-set should be focused on those components that affect the key aggregates/uses of the specific statistical standard. Using these criteria, an alignment checklist has been developed for the SNA and similar checklists are being developed for the GFS and BPM.

11. **The second proposal focuses on how to communicate the data in the alignment framework to users.** While consideration has been given to the development of a scoring system and/or methodology, the CMTT currently proposes that a *dashboard approach* be taken. Scoring a country's alignment to a statistical framework may create a disincentive to use the framework. In addition, any aggregate score would require some form of weighting mechanism which would introduce a high degree of subjectivity (i.e., is alignment to concepts more important than alignment to accounting rules) into the process. A dashboard that does not attempt to quantify or summarize the information will still provide useful information to users in a simple, straight forward, and flexible manner. Since the framework is intended to measure the *degree of alignment* to an ISS. It is proposed that, for each item on framework, the compiling organization indicate whether they are: *fully aligned*, *partially aligned*, *do not align*, or *not applicable*.

12. **The current proposal calls for the dashboards to be presented in digital format in color coded format**, for instance *Fully Aligned = Green; Partially Aligned = Yellow; Not Aligned = Red; and Not Applicable = Black*. This information could be included as a part of the sources and methods documentation for a given ISS.

TASK TEAM COMPOSITION AND REPORTING

13. Sanjiv Mahajan (Office of National Statistics, United Kingdom) is Chair of the CMTT. The chair is supported by the International Monetary Fund, UNSD, and World Bank, which assume the Secretariat of the joint TT. The Steering Group (Chair, Secretariats, and Workstream leads) is responsible for coordination between the workstreams.

14. **The Steering Group decides on the size and composition of the contributions to the workstreams.** They organize and align the work and establish a detailed work program and timetable that considers the milestones for each work stream. The Steering Group recruits other members of the TTs, normally including other Committee members, experts from international organizations, as well as other experts (e.g., from national statistical agencies, central banks, national or local governments, the research community, the media), according to the necessary expertise (e.g., Balance of Payments, Government Finance Statistics). Progress of work on the five workstreams is reported to the respective participating Committees.

Appendix I. List of Members

Chair

Sanjiv Mahajan United Kingdom

Secretariat

Jim Tebrake IMF
 Francien Berry IMF
 Eric Metreau World Bank

International Organizations

Celestino Giron	ECB
Daniel Suranyi	ECB
Nicola Massarelli	Eurostat
John Verrinder	Eurostat
Orestis Tsigkas	Eurostat
Lanislava Marinova	Eurostat
Edgardo Greising	ILO
Lara Badre	ILO
Kristy Howell	IMF
Achille Pegoue	IMF
Richard Kimuli	IMF
David Bailey	IMF
Kenneth Egesa	IMF
Vanda Guerreiro	IMF
Jorrit Zwijnenburg	OECD
David Barraclough	OECD
Herman Smith	UNSD
Jonathan Gessendorfer	UNSD
Rami Peltola	UNSD
Michael Stanger	UNSD
Ivo Havinga	UNSD
Benson Sim	UNSD
Markie Muryawan	UNSD
Ilaria Di Matteo	UNSD
Amit Joshi	UNSD
Catherine Van Rompay	World Bank

Regional Organizations and Country Representatives

Charles Sessede	AFDB
Tabo Symphorien	AFDB
Ibrahima Sory	AFRISTAT
Luz Garcia Balcarce	Argentina
Michael Smedes	Australia
Rebeca Palis	Brazil
Erith Nghogue	Cameroon
Franklin Assoumou-Ndong	Canada
Stéphane Crête	Canada
Henry Vargas Campos	Costa Rica
Nahashon K. Mutai	East African Community
Carola Fabi	FAO
Caterina Caracciolo	FAO
Franck Cotton	France
Albert Braakmann	Germany
João Carlos Fonseca	IPSASB
S V Ramana Murthy	India
Lis Soelistyowati	Indonesia
Michael Connolly	Ireland
Mauro Scanu	Italy
Kwangwon Lee	Korea
Peter-Hein Van Mulligan	Netherlands
Peter Kruiskamp	Netherlands
Andrew Hancock	New Zealand
Andrey Tatarinov	Russia
Dave Wasshausen	United States
Claire Evans	United Kingdom
Luke Croydon	United Kingdom
Litia Simbangala	Zambia
Wilson Phiri	Zambia