

THE UNCTAD STATISTICS PROGRAMME

MAKING THE NUMBERS ADD UP TO IMPROVED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



GLOBAL CONTEXT

Reliable statistical information – statistics and indicators used in analysis of international trade, investment and development – is indispensable for formulating sound economic policies and recommendations. Policy decisions, once taken, may commit countries for many years as they strive to integrate into the world economy and improve the living standards of their citizens. Having access to high-quality research and evidence-based policy analysis thus enables countries to make informed decisions and design better policies. This, in turn, is essential to fostering social, environmental and economic development.

Good quality, robust statistics are inherent to the work of UNCTAD. As the United Nations focal point for the integrated treatment of trade and development and interrelated issues in the areas of finance, technology, investment and sustainable development, UNCTAD compiles, validates and processes a range of data collected from national and international sources. Most time series data cover extended periods of time, with some dating back to 1948, for almost all economies in the world. The breadth of information makes possible analysis of emerging and timely issues in the context of long-lasting trends and a wide geographical scope. When data are missing or there is a break in a series, UNCTAD applies its expertise and methodology to make estimates. Thus, UNCTAD statistics are grounded in continuity, accuracy and timeliness. Statistical work also conforms to the United Nations principles governing international statistical activities – formulated with significant contributions from UNCTAD.

HOW CAN STATISTICS BECOME THE BASIS FOR POLICY DECISIONS?

Broadly, UNCTAD produces more than 150 indicators and statistical time series essential for the analysis of international trade, economic trends, foreign direct investment (FDI), external financial resources, population and labour force, commodities, information economy and maritime transport. In many cases, UNCTAD statistics are compiled jointly or in close cooperation with other statistical agencies. For example, quarterly and annual trade in services statistics are jointly compiled with the World Trade Organization. This is not only an efficient use of resources but also ensures comparable and consistent results.

On a practical level, being able to use data is key to conducting the research and analysis that are the foundation for policymaking. The UNCTADstat database houses data for every country in the world. Such information can be used to automatically generate “country profiles”. The profiles are individual summaries of selected descriptive statistics that can be of interest to a range of users – from economists and modellers, who typically want all the data they can get, to journalists who need a few pertinent facts. UNCTADstat can also generate detailed tables for specialists. The country profiles are tailored to showcase data unique to UNCTAD:

PROGRAMME FACTS AND FIGURES

Programme scope:
over 150 indicators and time series data

Programme start date: 1967

Number of FDI activities per year: 4 (since 2004)

Programme website:
unctad.org/statistics

UNCTADstat database website:
unctadstat.unctad.org



trade, investment, information and communications technology and maritime transport. Other basic economic data are also included – such as gross domestic product and exchange rates – to provide context. Currently, country profiles include data for 2005, 2010 and 2013. The profiles reflect any updates or revisions to the data and reference years are redefined accordingly, as soon as all variables have been brought up to date.

Reliable FDI data is crucial for the national statistical analysis of investment and for better shaping and evaluating national policies. To make this a reality on the ground, UNCTAD proposes workshops that aim at enhancing the capacity of developing country government agencies to compile, disseminate and report FDI and transnational corporation data.

UNCTAD also assists national statistical agencies in developing countries and transition economies in their data collection and dissemination efforts. In cooperation with United Nations agencies, development banks and other international organizations, such as Eurostat, capacity-building initiatives are carried out in the areas of international trade, FDI, debt, commodities, information and communications technology and creative economy.

RESULTS AND IMPACT AT A GLANCE

- The UNCTADstat database went live in 2010. It is updated and enhanced continuously to provide users with the latest available data. In 2014, the revamped UNCTADstat website recorded close to 400,000 visits from over 200 countries.
- Country profiles, launched in 2015, are specially designed to display on most current web browsers. They draw on UNCTADstat and can be accessed from anywhere in the world using only basic computers. This enables users from developing countries, even with limited bandwidth, to have access to the range of data. Moreover, each country profile can be easily downloaded in PDF format.
- In the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the programme contributed to the formulation of indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals, providing technical advice and data on several proposed indicators.
- UNCTAD produces a number of publications to further facilitate access to data. The *UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics* is produced annually – capturing data at one point in time, as are the relatively new *Key Statistics and Trends in International Trade* and *Key Statistics and Trends in Trade Policy*. In addition, UNCTAD produces the online *Development and Globalization: Facts and Figures*, which offers practical

tools for a better understanding of development trends and their evolution over time.

- The scarcity, unreliability and inconsistency of FDI data pose a serious challenge for policymakers, academics and practitioners. To fill that gap, UNCTAD launched the *Bilateral FDI Statistics 2014*, which presents FDI data systematically. The tool covers inward and outward FDI flows and stocks by region and economy.
- The programme is currently developing a “World Economy Database” – this will be a macro-modellers database designed to support the UNCTAD Global Economic Model, used to simulate/test scenarios for the Group of 20 specifically, but also generally for global computable general equilibrium modelling.

Results in-depth

Applying the numbers – UNCTAD flagships

The annual UNCTAD flagship publications – the *Trade and Development Report*, *The Least Developed Countries Report*, *Economic Development in Africa Report*, *World Investment Report* and *Review of Maritime Transport* – provide rigorous research and policy recommendations on globalization, interdependence and development. The reports draw on the UNCTAD Statistics Programme’s data for their analysis of issues ranging from current economic trends and major policy issues of international concern, to trends in FDI and emerging measures to improve FDI’s contribution to development, and socioeconomic analysis and data on the world’s most impoverished countries. The data and analysis serve as the basis for the policy recommendations presented by UNCTAD in the reports for addressing such issues at the national, regional and multilateral levels.

DONORS/ FUNDING SOURCE

Current: Regular resources, West African Economic and Monetary Union (trade in services statistics database), Multi-donor/Cross-cluster Trust Fund on Capacity-building in Investment for Development (FDI)