



REPORT OF THE WEBINAR

on the Primer on data for trade in
services and development
policies:

Latin America

17 June 2026

The Director of the Division on International Trade and Commodities from UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Ms. Luz María de la Mora, opened the webinar by framing the discussion within the implementation of the Geneva Consensus. This Consensus had recognised the central role of services and services trade in promoting structural transformation and economic diversification. The Geneva Consensus had mandated UNCTAD to strengthen countries' access to and use of services trade data in support of evidence-based policymaking and to help developing countries derive greater benefits from services trade. UNCTAD had established the [Informal Working Group on Data for Services Trade Policies for Development](#) to foster collaboration among policymakers, statisticians, international organisations and experts. The [Primer on Data for Services Trade Policies for Development](#), whose Spanish version was launched through this webinar, was one of the concrete outcomes of that collaborative process. Services were around two-thirds of global output in 2024 and 63 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in Latin America. Between 2014 and 2024, global services exports had expanded at more than twice the rate of goods exports, while Latin America's services exports had grown by approximately 4 per cent annually. Exports of intellectual property-related services and information and communications technology (ICT) services had grown by more than 9 per cent annually during the previous decade. Fully exploiting these opportunities required reliable services trade data to identify export potential, assess competitiveness, understand firms' participation in international markets, analyse the links between services and other economic sectors, and design more inclusive policies supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), women entrepreneurs and other underrepresented groups. The Primer was a practical tool for transforming available information into evidence for policymaking. Improving services trade data was not merely a statistical exercise but a prerequisite for designing better development policies.

The Officer in Charge of the International Trade and Integration Division of ECLAC, Mr. Keiji Inoue, welcomed the launch of the Spanish version of the Primer as a further example of the longstanding cooperation between ECLAC and UNCTAD. Mr. Inoue agreed that services had become increasingly important for economic diversification, the servicification of manufacturing, regional integration and the development of regional value chains, while modern ICT-enabled services represented an important opportunity for the region. ECLAC recent technical assistance to Pacific Alliance countries had identified common challenges, including the underestimation of digitally delivered services and the heterogeneous use of administrative records. Mr. Inoue also highlighted ECLAC support for national strategies to promote modern services exports, including in the Dominican Republic and Panama. Both cases demonstrated that high-quality statistics were essential for establishing baselines, identifying priority sectors, monitoring implementation and evaluating policy outcomes. The Primer was a timely and practical guide that mapped available data sources, explained their strengths and limitations, and illustrated how they could be combined with policy indicators to support evidence-based policymaking. Mr. Inoue reaffirmed ECLAC commitment to continue working with UNCTAD and member States to strengthen statistical capacities and improve the use of evidence in policymaking.

Mr. Bruno Antunes, Economic Affairs Officer of Trade in Services and Development at the Division on International Trade and Commodities of UNCTAD, confirmed that the [Primer on Data for Services Trade Policies for Development](#) had been conceived primarily as a guide for improving public policies. It had been developed on the premise that effective services trade policies depended upon reliable evidence and that policymakers needed to understand both the opportunities and limitations presented by the existing services data ecosystem. The Primer first

introduced the conceptual foundations of services trade, including the different modes of supply, the increasing importance of digitally delivered services and the role of services as inputs into manufacturing and other productive sectors. It then mapped the principal sources of services trade information, including balance of payments statistics, foreign affiliates statistics, databases on digitally delivered services, estimates by mode of supply, balanced bilateral trade databases, value-added trade databases, policy databases and, where available, firm-level information. Rather than promoting any individual source, the Primer explained the distinct purposes, strengths and limitations of each dataset and demonstrated how they could be combined to provide a more comprehensive evidence base for policymaking. The Primer should be regarded as the starting point of an evolving process, reflecting both the rapid transformation of services through digital technologies and artificial intelligence and the continuing evolution of international statistical standards. Addressing services data challenges required not only technical improvements but also stronger institutional cooperation between policymakers, statisticians and trade analysts.

The discussion consistently underscored the growing importance of services and services trade for development at the global, regional and national levels. Participants noted that services had become the largest component of economic activity in most economies while also representing the most dynamic component of international trade. Beyond their direct contribution to output and exports, services increasingly underpinned productivity, innovation and competitiveness by supporting manufacturing, agriculture and participation in regional and global value chains. Modern knowledge-intensive and digitally deliverable services were repeatedly identified as particularly important drivers of future growth. Mr. Javier Pérez Ibáñez, Economic Affairs Officer of the International Trade and Integration Division of ECLAC, presented evidence showing that countries with a higher share of modern services exports also tended to achieve higher levels of GDP per capita. This relationship appeared particularly strong in Latin America and the Caribbean. At the same time, although the region had broadly followed global growth trends in modern services exports, its share of the global market had remained at around 2 per cent over the previous two decades, illustrating the considerable scope for further expansion. Several speakers also noted that comparative advantages varied considerably across countries, with different economies specialising in business services, transport, tourism or modern service activities, thereby highlighting the need for country-specific policy approaches.

Participants also agreed that stronger services trade policies depended upon better data, while recognising that significant information gaps remained. Ms. Luz María de la Mora observed that policymakers frequently had to take decisions using incomplete, outdated or fragmented information, while Mr. Keiji Inoue emphasised that these shortcomings limited countries' ability to design, implement and evaluate effective strategies. Ms. Romina Gayá, Consultant of the Inter-American Development Bank, [demonstrated](#) that statistical coverage varied substantially across Latin America and the Caribbean. Only Argentina currently published an almost complete sectoral breakdown of knowledge-based services across 56 categories and subcategories, whereas most countries continued to produce considerably more aggregated information. Consultations undertaken with governments, academia and the private sector had further revealed strong demand for more detailed statistics covering emerging sectors such as fintech, video games and different software activities. There was also demand for better information on partner countries, subnational activity, SMEs, firm-level performance and services supplied through different modes of supply. At the same time, many users had requested information that already existed but remained insufficiently known, suggesting that improving the dissemination



and communication of available statistical resources was as important as expanding statistical production. The discussion therefore highlighted that improving services trade statistics required not only greater data availability but also greater awareness of existing sources and a better understanding of how they could support policymaking.

The discussion also demonstrated that addressing these information gaps required making better use of complementary data sources and analytical tools rather than relying on a single statistical dataset. Mr. Bruno Antunes emphasised that each source had been developed for a specific purpose and therefore presented different strengths and limitations, making it essential to understand how they could be used together. Mr. Javier Pérez Ibáñez illustrated this point by combining balance of payments statistics, balanced bilateral databases, value-added trade databases and policy indicators to analyse different policy questions. Balanced bilateral databases could provide useful estimates where official bilateral statistics were unavailable, but Mr. Pérez Ibáñez also cautioned that national statistics constituted the preferred basis for policymaking whenever sufficiently detailed information existed. Value-added trade databases could be used to analyse the servicification of exports. They showed, for example, that the incorporation of modern services into Chile's mining exports had declined over the previous decade. Complementing this perspective, Mr. Enrique Gilles, Professor at CESA, Colombia, highlighted the growing relevance of multi-regional input-output databases for analysing servicification and productive linkages, and also the broader economic, social and environmental impacts of services trade. These methodologies could provide valuable evidence on employment, gender and sustainability outcomes, but further efforts were needed to familiarise policymakers with their practical applications.

National experiences illustrated that stronger services trade policies depended on sustained institutional coordination and close cooperation between data producers and users. Mr. Rodrigo Céspedes, Project Manager of the Global Services Export Programme at the Ministry of Finance of Chile, explained that, although Chile's services exports had expanded steadily, the national policy debate had continued to focus predominantly on goods exports, making services less visible despite their increasing economic importance. The Global Services Export Programme was an example of an integrated institutional approach that had brought together public and private stakeholders, strengthened cooperation between producers and users of statistics and improved administrative data collection through the digitalisation of export procedures. The programme had coordinated six public and private institutions, facilitated the attraction of more than 190 global services investment projects since 2017, representing almost US\$6 billion in investment, and supported more than 50 thousand digital skills scholarships since 2018.

Similar lessons emerged from Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic. Mr. Rigoberto Torres Mora, Director at the Central Bank of Costa Rica, explained that services exports had increased from 26 per cent of Costa Rica's total exports in 2000 to 46 per cent in 2024, corresponding to average annual growth of around 9 per cent, exceeding both regional and global averages. From the perspective of a compiler of official statistics, the Primer provided practical guidance by organising concepts, classifications and statistical sources while encouraging countries to strengthen the measurement of bilateral trade, Mode 3 supply, tourism-related activities, value-added trade and the links between macroeconomic and firm-level information. Modern statistical governance should be based on long-term cooperation between public institutions, the private sector and international organizations to ensure that improvements held as new international statistical standards were introduced.



The Director for Trade Policy of the Ministry of Industry, Trade and MSMEs of the Dominican Republic, Ms. Ilena Rosario Rodríguez, described how the Dominican Republic's National Strategy for Modern Services Exports, launched in 2021 with ECLAC support, had broadened the country's export diversification agenda beyond traditional sectors. Around 70 per cent of the strategy's planned actions had already been implemented through five public-private-academic working groups, including one dedicated specifically to statistics. These efforts had strengthened institutional coordination, expanded statistical coverage, introduced new survey modules, improved the identification of exporters in emerging sectors such as fintech and contributed to more targeted policies for digital and knowledge-based services. Ms. Alina González, of the Central Bank in the Dominican Republic, complemented this experience by explaining that closer cooperation between the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and MSMEs and the Central Bank had already translated into measurable improvements in the quality and coverage of official services statistics in the Dominican Republic.

Participants also discussed statistical challenges facing the region and possible ways to address them. Mr. Herlon Brandão, Director of the Department of Statistics and Foreign Trade Studies of the Ministry of Development, Industry, Trade and Services of Brazil, explained that Brazil's current reporting system continued to rely predominantly on foreign exchange records, which limited sectoral detail, coverage and information on different modes of supply. Greater use of fiscal and other administrative records, together with stronger institutional capacities, would significantly improve services statistics. Ms. Andrea Jiménez, of the Ministry of Foreign Trade of Costa Rica, emphasised that a clear understanding of available databases and of their appropriate use was essential for designing public policies and for supporting trade negotiations. Mr. Mario Salas, of the Central American Academy in Costa Rica, similarly highlighted the importance of timely and up-to-date statistics for academic research and policy analysis, observing that delays in the publication of services data reduced their usefulness for informing policy decisions. Responding to this point, Mr. Rigoberto Torres Mora noted that more recent statistics were already available for Costa Rica and suggested that stronger communication between statistical producers and users would help ensure that existing information was more widely known and utilised.

Against this background, participants consistently described the [*Primer on Data for Services Trade Policies for Development*](#) as an important contribution to addressing both statistical and policy challenges. Rather than introducing new statistical methodologies, the Primer was a practical reference that helped policymakers, statisticians and analysts navigate the increasingly complex ecosystem of services trade data, understand the strengths and limitations of different sources and combine complementary datasets appropriately for policy analysis. Several speakers observed that it filled an important gap by bringing together knowledge that had previously been dispersed across multiple databases, manuals and institutional practices. It was also considered an important complement to existing international statistical standards because it focused on translating available evidence into more effective services trade and development policies. Throughout the discussion, participants emphasised that strengthening services statistics ultimately required not only better data but also stronger dialogue between policymakers, statistical agencies, researchers and the private sector.

The webinar concluded by emphasising that the launch of the Primer was part of a continuing process of collaboration. Ms. Luz María de la Mora recalled that the recent [*Multi-year Expert Meeting on Trade, Services and Development*](#) had requested UNCTAD to expand its capacity-



building activities on services trade data and establish mechanisms for exchanging knowledge and good practices. The webinar discussions would inform the work of the [Informal Working Group on Data for Services Trade Policies for Development](#) and contribute to the preparation of a second edition of the Primer. This could address, among other topics, the measurement of servicification and the impacts of services trade and services policies. Throughout the webinar, participants emphasised that continued cooperation among governments, national statistical offices, central banks, trade ministries, academia, the private sector and international organisations would be essential for strengthening statistical systems and translating better evidence into better development policies. The [Multi-year Expert Meeting on Trade, Services and Development](#) and the [Global Services Forum](#) were key opportunities for sustaining this collaboration and exchanging experiences. The webinar concluded with UNCTAD reaffirming its commitment to continue supporting member States, in collaboration with ECLAC and other partners, through continued dialogue, technical assistance and capacity-building activities.

