UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

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KEY STATISTICS AND TRENDS in International Trade 2020

TRADE TRENDS UNDER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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CONTENTS

NOTE iv

OVERVIEW v

DATA SOURCES vi

IN FOCUS: TRADE TRENDS UNDER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC 1

1. TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE 5

- Values and growth rates of world trade in goods and services 5
- Volumes of international trade in goods 6
- Values of trade in goods and services by region 7
- Composition of trade flows in goods, by importing and exporting regions 8
- Trade in goods between/within developed and developing countries 9
- Changes in the value of the largerst bilateral trade flows between 2018 and 2019 by product group 10
- Values of world trade in goods by stage of processing and broad category 11
- Values of world trade in goods by region, stage of processing and broad category 12
- Values of world trade in goods by sectors 13
- Market shares of trade in services of developing and developed countries by sector 14

2. TRADE INDICATORS 15

- Import and export propensity 15
- Trade balances 16
- Commodity export dependence 17
- Food and energy net position 18
- Export diversification 19
- Changes in export diversification 20
- Export performance and export competitiveness 21
- Export sophistication and export sophistication gap 22
- Overall export performance 23

NOTE

Key Statistics and Trends in International Trade is a yearly publication. It is a product of the Trade Analysis Branch, Division on International Trade and Commodities (DITC), UNCTAD secretariat. This publication monitors the trends of international trade in goods and services in the medium term.

The series is part of a larger effort by UNCTAD to analyse trade-related issues of particular importance for developing countries, as requested by the mandate of UNCTAD XIV. Alessandro Nicita and Cecilia Heuser contributed to this study. This study benefited from inputs and comments from various DITC staff members and the UNCTAD Statistics team. Desktop publishing was done by Jenifer Tacardon-Mercado.

OVERVIEW

After a recovery in international trade in 2017, economic conditions started deteriorating in the second half of 2018 and further in 2019, due to trade tensions between the United States of America and China, fears of a disorderly Brexit in Europe and a negative global output outlook more generally.

The trade downturn of 2019 has been widespread across all geographic regions. Merchandise trade has shown largest drops while services trade kept increasing in 2019, although at a slower pace. Trade in natural resources showed the strongest drops in 2019 because of lower prices, while manufactured goods trade decline was modest. Agricultural trade kept increasing in 2019.

In addition, available data for 2020 indicate a sharp decline in trade growth (about 8 per cent), largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The sharpest drop in international trade occurred in the second quarter of 2020, with global merchandise trade falling by more than 20 per cent relative to the same quarter of 2019. Trade trends for the second half, although still negative on a year-over-year basis, are better than during the first half. Notably, the relative recovery in the second half of 2020 was largely driven by China.

This report is structured into two parts. The first part presents a short-term overview of the status of international trade using preliminary statistics on merchandise trade up to the third quarter of 2020. The second part provides illustrative statistics on international trade in goods and services covering the medium term. The second part is divided into two sections. Section 1 provides trade statistics at various levels of aggregation illustrating the evolution of trade across economic sectors and geographic regions. Section 2 presents some of the most used trade indicators at the country level, to illustrate trade performance across countries.

DATA SOURCES

The statistics in this publication were produced by the UNCTAD secretariat using data from various sources. This report relies on the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database (COMTRADE) (comtrade.un.org) data for merchandise trade statistics. UNCTADStat (unctadstat.unctad.org) is the source of service statistics. Monthly data for merchandise trade comes from the *International Monetary Fund (IMF)* Directions of Trade Statistics and from national authorities' statistics. The data has been standardized to ensure cross-country comparisons. Data, although comprehensive and comparable across countries, does not perfectly reflect national statistics, and thus some discrepancies with specific national statistics may be present. Unless otherwise specified international trade is defined as trade in goods (merchandise) and services. Countries are categorized by geographic region as defined by the United Nations classification (UNSD M49). Developed countries comprise those commonly categorized as such in United Nations statistics. For the purpose of this report, transition economies, when not treated as a single group, are included in the broad aggregate of developing countries. Product sectors are categorized according to the Broad Economic Categories (BEC) classification and the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) augmented by five broad agricultural sectors based on the Harmonized System (HS) classification. Figures are in current United States of America dollars, except where otherwise specified.

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