

C.6 Trade in Services Classifications

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The existing Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual, sixth edition, (BPM6) classification of services and the corresponding Extended Balance of Payments Services Classification (EBOPS 2010), when adopted in full, provide detailed and comprehensive information on international trade in services flows. However, in practice, many countries are unable to compile the full BPM6 classification, and some only produce the first-level breakdown, which limits the usefulness of existing international trade in services statistics for analysis and policy-making. This Guidance Note (GN) recommends a moderate restructuring of the BPM6 services classification that provides further detail in the main (first-level) BPM service categories and improves the correspondence between the balance of payments classification of services and the Central Product Classification (CPC). In addition, this GN acknowledges that the growing fragmentation of production processes and the rise of digitalization require additional information that is not available within the current balance of payments framework. In this regard, this GN suggests that in the case where the additional information needs related to globalization and digitalization concern the actors involved in the transaction (“who”) or the way the transaction takes place (“how”), the classification of services, which is and should remain a (mostly) product-based classification, should not be affected. On the other hand, if new services (“what”) are identified during the ongoing CPC revision, then the balance of payments classification should reflect them where relevant. Regarding intermediation services in particular, which are also being debated in the context of the revision of the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC), this GN recommends to wait for the outcomes of the ISIC revision and possibly introduce supplementary items in the new EBOPS revision (not in the balance of payments services classification). The IMF Committee on Balance of Payments Statistics discussed the GN and approved the recommended more detailed breakdown for Telecommunications, computer, and information services, as well as for Other business services. In addition, a separate accounting framework for digital services should be adopted and supplementary items to identify intermediation services should be introduced in the updated Manual of International Trade in Services (MSITS 2010) and the revised EBOPS and not in the balance of payments services classification.

SECTION I: THE ISSUE

BACKGROUND

1. **Notwithstanding the practical difficulties of attribution of certain transactions to the “correct” service category, the classification of services according to the sixth edition of *the Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual (BPM6)*, when adopted in full (including the standard and supplementary items), provides comprehensive information on trade in services flows.** Further details, which improve the analytical value of the information, are available from the corresponding *Extended Balance of Payments Services classification (EBOPS 2010)*.

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2. **The availability of the full *BPM6* (or, better, *EBOPS*) breakdown of services, including also the important presentation of travel by product, ensures broad consistency with the *Central Product Classification (CPC)*.** This consistency is crucial for the comparability and coherence between balance of payments and national accounts aggregates.²

3. **In practice, however, not all compilers provide data with the full details of the *BPM6* classification, and several countries indeed only produce the first-level breakdown, namely the 12 main standard service categories of the *BPM6*.** In fact, the first-level breakdown ultimately drives the compilation efforts, especially for developing economies. For instance, with the changeover from *BPM5* to *BPM6*, many countries have stopped publishing *Telecommunication services* separately from *Computer and information services*, even though the breakdown was compiled and published within the *BPM5* framework. Furthermore, the standard category *Other business services* accounts for a large share of world services trade (around 23 percent in 2019) but it bundles a heterogeneous group of business-related services and is used by many compilers as a “basket” or “residual” category for unspecified services (having “other” in the name of the category may encourage such practices).

4. **The fact that many economies only compile the first-level balance of payments service categories hinders the ability to link balance of payments and national accounts data at national level.** Importantly, this also limits the possibility of conducting cross-country, integrated analyses of the macroeconomic accounts at an adequate level of detail (e.g., the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD’s) Trade in Value Added database).

5. **The *BPM6* services classification is and should remain a (mainly) product-based classification aimed at categorizing international transactions according to analytically sound product groups that are comparable across different domains.** However, trade in services transactions have become increasingly complex. The growing fragmentation of production processes (into regional/global value chains) and the rise of digitalization not only pose significant challenges in the recording of the transactions but also require additional information that is not typically available within the standard balance of payments framework.

6. **Firstly, the demand for more detailed statistical information on global value chains (GVCs) remains high, including not only “what” is traded but also “who” is driving the international fragmentation of production processes.** Given the key role of multinational enterprises (MNEs) in these processes, the IMF Committee on Balance of Payments Statistics (Committee) endorsed the recommendations of the [Final Report of the OECD/IMF Working Group on Balance of Payments Statistics Relevant for GVCs](#) in 2019. These recommendations include the compilation of the full *EBOPS* breakdown as well as a further disaggregation of transactions in goods and services according to the characteristics of the trading firm (in terms of ownership status and size), also brought forward by GN C.2 “Goods, Services, and Investment Income Accounts by Enterprise Characteristics”.

7. **Secondly, the digitalization of economic transactions draws attention to yet another dimension, the “how” or the “nature” of such transactions.** In this context, the *OECD-WTO-IMF Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade* proposes a separate accounting framework, allowing for the

² The (detailed) *BPM6/EBOPS* is broadly consistent with the *CPC* classification, with the exception of the transactor-based service categories. These balance of payments items are addressed in GN C.1.

identification of digitally ordered and/or digitally delivered services transactions. While such framework is orthogonal to the *BPM6* classification (and therefore compatible with any revisions to it), it is important to consider that **digitalization may give rise to “new” services** that, if identified in the revision of the *CPC*, should also be considered in the revision of the balance of payments classification (e.g., intermediation services provided by digital platforms, tele-education, tele-health, cloud computing, etc.).

8. **Finally, other cross-cutting issues such as well-being, sustainability or climate change, while not directly linked to the current balance of payments framework, could have an impact on the international trade in services or require international trade in services statistics.** The *BPM6* revision process should therefore provide a consistent classification of services that also serves these purposes.

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

Main (First Level) Breakdown of Services in Balance of Payments

9. **This GN investigates whether a few, moderate changes in the services classification** could enhance the analytical use of the information and improve the correspondence between the balance of payments service categories and the *CPC* classification, while limiting any additional reporting burden and breaks in time series.

10. **We acknowledge (and support) the proposal of GN C.1 “Recording of Transactor-Based Components of Services” regarding the supplementary breakdown for Travel and Construction,** namely: (i) the separate identification of *Personal, cultural and recreational services* in addition to *Health services* and *Education services* in the presentation of travel by product and (ii) the additional (supplementary) breakdown of *Construction abroad* and *Construction in the reporting economy* to separately identify *Constructions (goods)* and *Construction services* (as defined under *CPC* divisions 53 and 54, respectively). The services classification recommended for the update of the *BPM6* should reflect the decisions taken on GN C.1.

11. **We propose a split of the *BPM6* category *Telecommunication, computer, and information services* into two standard, first-level categories, as shown in Table 1, to allow a “mandatory” separate identification of telecommunication and computer/information services, which are fundamentally different services.** This means in practice a return to the *BPM5* grouping, which in principle should limit compilation burden and breaks in series. “Modern” information services such as databases and search engines are conceptually close to computer services. Nevertheless, the separate identification of information services should be encouraged (information services are estimated to be less than 1 percent of total world trade in services by WTO). The consultation within the Current Accounts Task Team (CATT) revealed good support for the split, although a few members raised the issue of confidentiality and suggested maintaining the *BPM6* framework and making instead the second-level items as standard.

Table 1. Current vs. Proposed Breakdown of Telecommunications, Computer, and Information Services

BPM6	Proposed Changes
1.A.b.9 Telecommunications, computer, and information services	1.A.b.9 Telecommunications services
<i>1.A.b.9.1 Telecommunications services</i>	1.A.b.10 Computer, and information services
<i>1.A.b.9.2 Computer services</i>	<i>1.A.b.10.1 Computer services</i>
<i>1.A.b.9.3 Information services</i>	<i>1.A.b.10.2 Information services</i>

Note: Supplementary items are shown in italics.

12. Finally, we propose to disaggregate the *BPM6* category *Other business services* into five standard, first-level items, as shown in Table 2: (i) *Research and development services*; (ii) *Professional and management consulting services*; (iii) *Trade-related services*; (iv) *Operating leasing services*; and (v) *Technical and other business services*. The coverage of the first two components would be identical to those in the current *BPM6*, while the existing standard group *Technical, trade-related and other business services* would be split into three subgroups. The proposed items 1.A.b.13 and 1.A.b.14 would cover *Trade-related services* and *Operating leasing services*, respectively. The proposed item 1.A.b.15. *Technical and other business services* would cover the current *EBOPS* item SJ31 (*Architectural, engineering, scientific, and other technical services*), *EBOPS* item SJ32 (*Waste treatment and de-pollution, architectural, and mining services*), as well as *EBOPS* item SJ35 (*Other business services n.i.e.*), which are deemed to be closer to technical services and thus grouped in this category. This proposal gives technical services the same prominence as professional services and leaves compilers the option of using this category as a residual when transactions cannot be classified elsewhere. The split of the large *Other business services* category into a few, more specific standard items would foster a more precise classification of transactions and be easier to grasp for data users, for whom the coverage of *Other business services* is often unclear.

Table 2. Current and Proposed Breakdown of *Other Business Services*

BPM6	Proposed Changes
1.A.b.10 Other business services	1.A.b.11 Research and development services
<i>1.A.b.10.1 Research and development services</i>	1.A.b.12 Professional and management consulting services
<i>1.A.b.10.2 Professional and management consulting services</i>	1.A.b.13 Trade-related services
<i>1.A.b.10.3 Technical, trade-related and other business services</i>	1.A.b.14 Operating leasing services
	1.A.b.15 Technical and other business services

13. **This GN acknowledges that increasing the level of detail required in the first-level breakdown, as shown in Tables 1 and 2, may raise confidentiality issues, which in turn may result in the suppression of some relevant data points.** This could mean that, for some smaller economies with few reporting entities, less information would be available following the proposed breakdown. However, based on the feedback received from the majority of the CATT members, it is likely that the amount of information available at global level will increase, greatly enhancing the analytical usefulness of the data.³ It is also worth mentioning that the commonly applied confidentiality rules already affect the data availability at the current (*BPM6*) level of detail. Another possible caveat, also raised during consultations with the CATT, could be related to the necessary adjustments in the IT systems due to these changes.

Information Needs Related to GVCs

14. **This GN endorses the recommendations of GN C.2 (Goods, Services, and Investment Income Accounts by Enterprise Characteristics) regarding the disaggregation of transactions according to the characteristics of the trading firms.** As the information needs in this case relate to the actors in the transactions rather than specific products or services, this Note does not advocate for additional changes in the balance of payments services classification. However, it also acknowledges that some other aspects of the globalization of production processes will be addressed in GN C.4, in particular those related to merchanting and to transactions associated to factoryless producers.

Digitalization of International Transactions

15. **Similarly, this GN supports the adoption of a separate accounting framework (built on top of the balance of payments) to separately identify digital trade** (see [OECD-WTO-IMF Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade](#)). In fact, this GN stresses that the balance of payments services breakdown is and should remain mainly a product-based classification (except for the transactor-based items) aimed at categorizing international transactions by product (“what” is traded) as opposed to “how” the products are traded. However, if new services (as opposed to new way of supplying existing services) are identified in the course of the *CPC* revision, then the balance of payments classification should reflect them where relevant.

16. **In addition, further research is needed for the treatment of intermediation services.** Intermediation services have gained importance in the last years thanks to (but not exclusively) the emergence of digital intermediaries which facilitate transactions in goods and services in exchange for a fee (Digital Intermediation Platforms or DIPs). While most intermediation services (notably in travel and transport) are covered in the balance of payments in the same product they intermediate (with the exception of *trade-related services*), these services are not separately identified.

17. **The issue of intermediation services is also currently being debated in the context of the revision of the *International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC)*** and therefore no definitive changes in the balance of payments services classification can be proposed before the *ISIC* revision is concluded. Moreover, the treatment of digital intermediaries will be clarified in the future revisions of the *OECD-WTO-IMF Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade*. However, in the balance

³ The consultation with the GZTT and DZTT also provided broad support for the proposed changes.

of payments context, a separate identification of the transactions attributable to intermediaries could, for instance, be envisaged on a supplementary basis (in the form of “of which” items, similar to *transactions payable by border, seasonal, and other short-term workers* that do not identify a different product but a different actor in the transaction).

18. **If a separate identification of intermediation services is envisaged, further research will be needed to establish whether those supplementary items should be placed in the sector that is intermediated or, as described in Option I below, whether a breakdown of *Trade-related services* into different sub-categories (i.e., the intermediated products) would be preferable (See Annex I).**

19. **In this regard, two options were identified:**

- a. Option I: introduce a breakdown of *trade-related services* to account for the different types of services and goods intermediated.
- b. Option II: introduce supplementary items in the update of the *Manual of International Trade in Services (MSITS 2010)* and in the revised *EBOPS* (not in the balance of payments services classification).

20. **Option II, which would be implemented at a later stage, would benefit from further guidance coming from the revision of the *System of National Accounts, 2008 (2008 SNA)* and *ISIC* and would also incorporate the outcomes of GN C.4 “Merchandising and Factoryless Producers; Merchandising of Services”, in particular with regard to the related issue covered under the merchandising of services.**

21. **Similarly, the introduction of “digital” services such as tele-health or tele-education, currently not separately identified within the relevant service category, could be envisaged for the update of the *MSITS* and incorporated in the new *EBOPS*.** The explicit identification of these digital services within the relevant category would be particularly useful for analysis and policy-making.⁴

SECTION II: OUTCOMES

22. **Regarding the main breakdown of services in balance of payments, this GN proposes the introduction of moderate changes to the current *BPM6* classification.** Such changes aim at expanding the detail of the information provided by countries as a “default” (i.e., the first-level of balance of payments breakdown) and also at improving the correspondence between balance of payments and *CPC*. The proposed changes are described in paragraphs 11 to 13 and presented in detail in **Annex I** as well as in the accompanying Excel file.

23. For the breakdown of ***Telecommunications, computer, and information services***, CATT members largely agreed with the proposed split. However, some countries expressed concerns over confidentiality, as well as possible breaks in time series.

⁴ Guidance on this particular topic will follow the outcomes of the work undertaken by the Digitalization Task Team and the update of the Handbook on Digital Trade.

24. The proposed breakdown of **Other business services was also supported** by most CATT members. They stressed in particular the importance of separating research and development services and the opportunity to provide more granular information on services for national accountants. However, confidentiality concerns were also raised for this category.

25. On the suggested treatment of **Operating leasing services**, CATT members emphasized the need to align with the final version of GN C.5.

26. **Regarding the information needs related to globalization and digitalization, this GN does not advocate for additional changes in the services classification.** Consultations with the CATT, Globalization Task Team (GZTT), and Digitalization Task Team (DZTT) members emphasized that, if new services arise, they should be reflected in the *CPC* revision first, and then included in the trade in services classification.

27. **In what concerns intermediation services and intermediation fees in particular, the GN identifies two possible options for consideration.** The authors have a preference for Option II, which implies that no changes are introduced in the revised *BPM6* and that supplementary items would be considered in the *EBOPS* revision. The consultation within the CATT, DZTT, and GZTT showed that the overwhelming majority of members also prefer Option II. Members stressed that further analysis and guidance stemming from the revision of both *ISIC* and *CPC*, as well as the outcomes of GN C.4,⁵ will lay the basis for a consistent treatment of intermediation services across different domains.

JUNE 2021 IMF COMMITTEE ON BALANCE OF PAYMENTS STATISTICS MEETING

28. **The discussions held during the June 2021 IMF Committee Meeting were broadly in line with the results of the previous consultation rounds and also with the outcome of the public review. Committee members approved the following proposals:**

- a. Split *Telecommunications, computer and information services* into two standard, first-level items: (i) *Telecommunication services* and (ii) *Computer and information services*.
- b. Split *Other business services* into five standard, first-level items: (i) *Research and development services*; (ii) *Professional and management consulting services*; (iii) *Trade-related services*; (iv) *Operating leasing services*; and (v) *Technical and other business services*.
- c. Adopt a separate accounting framework (built on top of the balance of payments) to separately identify digital trade (see *OECD-WTO-IMF Handbook for Measuring Digital Trade*).
- d. Introduce supplementary items to identify intermediation services in the update of the *Manual of International Trade in Services (MSITS 2010)* and in the new *EBOPS* revision (not in the balance of payments services classification).

⁵ The recommendation of GN C.4 to record intermediation fees net, under *Trade related services* as a supplementary “of which” item was approved during the October 2021 IMF Committee Meeting.

Annex I. Supplementary Information

PROPOSED BALANCE OF PAYMENTS SERVICES BREAKDOWN

LEVEL	Code	SDMX EBOPS 2010	Description	Type_current	Type_proposed
0	0	S	SERVICES	std	std
1	1	SA	Manufacturing services on physical inputs owned by others	std	std
2	1.1	SAy	Goods for processing in reporting economy - Goods returned, Goods received	suppl	suppl
2	1.2	SAz	Goods for processing abroad - Goods sent, Goods returned	suppl	suppl
1	2	SB	Maintenance and repair services n.i.e.	std	std
1	3	SC	Transport	std	std
x			Alternative 1: Mode of transport		
2	3.1	SC1	Sea transport	std	std
3	3.1.1	SC11	Sea transport; Passenger	std	std
4	3.1.1.a	SC11z	Sea transport; Passenger; Of which: Payable by border, seasonal, and other short-term workers	suppl	suppl
3	3.1.2	SC12	Sea transport; Freight	std	std
3	3.1.3	SC13	Sea transport; Other than passenger and freight	std	std
2	3.2	SC2	Air transport	std	std
3	3.2.1	SC21	Air transport; Passenger	std	std
4	3.2.1.a	SC21z	Air transport; Passenger; Of which: Payable by border, seasonal, and other short-term workers	suppl	suppl
3	3.2.2	SC22	Air transport; Freight	std	std
3	3.3.3	SC23	Air transport; Other than passenger and freight	std	std
3	3.3.1	SC31	Other modes of transport; Passenger	std	std
4	3.3.1.a	SC31Z	Other modes of transport; Passenger; Of which: Payable by border, seasonal, and other short-term workers	suppl	suppl
3	3.3.2	SC32	Other modes of transport; Freight	std	std
3	3.3.3	SC33	Other modes of transport; Other than passenger and freight	std	std
2	3.4	SC4	Postal and courier services	std	std
x			Alternative 2: What is carried		
2	3a.1	SCA	All modes of transport; Passenger	std	std
3	3a.1.1	SCAz	All modes of transport; Passenger; Of which: Payable by border, seasonal, and other short-term workers	suppl	suppl
2	3a.2	SCB	All modes of transport; Freight	std	std
2	3a.3	SCC	All modes of transport; Other than passenger and freight	std	std
1	4	SD	Travel	std	std
2	4.1	SDA	Travel; Business	std	std
3	4.1.1	SDA1	Travel; Business; Acquisition of goods and services by border, seasonal, and other short-term workers	suppl	suppl
3	4.1.2	SDA2	Travel; Business; Other than travel, Other than acquisition of goods and services by border, seasonal, and other short-term workers	suppl	suppl
2	4.2	SDB	Travel; Personal	std	std
3	4.2.1	SDB1	Travel; Personal; Health-related	suppl	suppl
3	4.2.2	SDB2	Travel; Personal; Education-related	suppl	suppl
3	4.2.3	SDB3	Travel; Personal; Other than health-related and education-related	suppl	suppl
2	4a.1	SD1	Travel; Goods	suppl	suppl
2	4a.2	SD2	Travel; Local transport services	suppl	suppl
2	4a.3	SD3	Travel; Accommodation services	suppl	suppl
2	4a.4	SD4	Travel; Food-serving services	suppl	suppl
2	4a.5	SD5	Travel; Other services	suppl	suppl
3	4a.5.1	SD5y	Travel; Other services; Of which: Health services	suppl	suppl

LEVEL	Code	SDMX EBOPS 2010	Description	Type_current	Type_proposed
3	4a.5.2	SD5z	Travel; Other services; Of which: Education services	suppl	suppl
3	4a.5.3		Travel; Other services; Of which: Personal, cultural and recreational services		suppl
1	5	SE	Construction	std	std
2	5.1	SE1	Construction abroad	suppl	suppl
3	5.1.1		Construction abroad; of which: constructions (goods)		suppl
3	5.1.2		Construction abroad; of which: construction services		suppl
2	5.2	SE2	Construction in the reporting economy	suppl	suppl
3	5.2.1		Construction in the reporting economy; of which: constructions (goods)		suppl
3	5.2.2		Construction in the reporting economy; of which: construction services		suppl
1	6	SF	Insurance and pension services	std	std
2	6.1	SF1	Direct insurance	suppl	suppl
2	6.2	SF2	Reinsurance	suppl	suppl
2	6.3	SF3	Auxiliary insurance services	suppl	suppl
2	6.4	SF4	Pension and standardized guarantee services	suppl	suppl
1	7	SG	Financial services	std	std
2	7.1	SG1	Financial services explicitly charged and other financial services	suppl	suppl
2	7.2	SG2	Financial intermediation services indirectly measured (FISIM)	suppl	suppl
1	8	SH	Charges for the use of intellectual property n.i.e	std	std
1	9	SI1	Telecommunication services	suppl	std
1	10	SI2+SI3	Computer and information services	suppl*	std
2	10.1	SI2	Computer services	suppl	suppl
2	10.2	SI3	Information services	suppl	suppl
1	11	SJ1	Research and development services	std	std
1	12	SJ2	Professional and management consulting services	std	std
1	13	SJ34	Trade-related services	EBOPS	std
3	13.a		Trade-related services; of which: transport services		suppl-OPTION I
3	13.b		Trade-related services; of which: accommodation services		suppl-OPTION I
3	13.c		Trade-related services; of which: services n.i.e.		suppl-OPTION I
3	13.d		Trade-related services; of which: sale of goods		suppl-OPTION I
1	14	SJ33	Operating leasing services	EBOPS	std
1	15	SJ31+SJ32+SJ35	Technical and other business services	suppl*	std
1	16	SK	Personal, cultural and recreational services	std	std
2	16.1	SK1	Audiovisual and related services	std	std
2	16.2	SK2	Personal, cultural and recreational services other than audiovisual and related services	std	std
1	17	SL	Government goods and services n.i.e.	std	std

Note: std = standard item; suppl = supplementary item; suppl*= derivation from BPM6 standard or supplementary items; EBOPS = *Extended Balance of Payments Services Classification (EBOPS 2010)* standard item.

Annex II. References

REFERENCED DOCUMENTS

International Monetary Fund (2009), *Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual, sixth edition (BMP6)*. Washington, D.C.

International Monetary Fund (2019), Final Report of the Working Group on Balance of Payments Statistics Relevant for the Analysis of Global Value Chains (BOPCOM paper 19/04).

OECD, WTO, IMF (2019), *Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade, Version 1*.

United Nations (2012), *Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2010*.

Annex III. List of Manuals to Update

STATISTICAL MANUALS

IMF (2009) *Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual, sixth edition*

UN (2012) *Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2010*

UN (2016) *Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2010 Compiler's Guide*