



TRADE STATISTICS

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1 PURPOSE

- a) The purpose of this policy is to inform Customs clients of the legislative framework and processes governing the compilation, publication, and disclosure of South Africa's official trade statistics in terms of section 117 of the Customs and Excise Act.
- b) The policy explains how trade data (derived from Goods Declarations (GD) for imports and exports warehousing as well as movement of goods) is verified, analysed, and published by SARS to ensure the accuracy as well as reliability of trade statistics.
- c) It further sets out SARS's authority to request additional information where necessary. Then outlines the process through which trade statistics may be disclosed, on request, to persons, institutions, and organs.

2 SCOPE

- a) This policy applies to the compilation, publication, and disclosure of official trade statistics by SARS in terms of section 117 of the Customs and Excise Act.
- b) It covers the extraction of trade data from Goods Declarations (GDs) submitted for importation and exportation. It also includes the internal verification and analysis of such data to identify and correct anomalies prior to the publication of final trade statistics on the SARS website.
- c) The scope further includes the Commissioner's authority to request additional information where required for the accurate compilation of trade statistics.
- d) In addition, the policy applies to the delegated function of the Trade Statistics Division to disclose trade statistics to persons, institutions, and organs for the purposes set out in section 4(3), and affirms SARS's commitment to providing trade statistics, upon request, in a timely and accurate manner within the ambit of customs legislation and in line with international best practice.

3 POLICY STATEMENT

3.1 Fundamental principles

3.1.1 United Nations principles

- a) Principle 1: Official statistics must be compiled and made available on an impartial basis to honour the right to access to information.
- b) Principle 2: Statistical agencies must decide according to strictly professional considerations, including scientific principles and professional ethics, on the methods and procedures for the collection, processing, storage and presentation of statistical data to retain trust in official statistics.
- c) Principle 3: Statistical agencies must present information according to scientific standards on the sources, methods and procedures of the statistics to facilitate a correct interpretation of the data.
- d) Principle 4: Statistical agencies are entitled to comment on erroneous interpretation and misuse of statistics. In this regard, South Africa has converted to the inclusion of trade with Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho and Namibia (BELN) in International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS) presentation and calculation with effect from November 2013.
- e) Principle 5: Data for statistical purposes may be drawn from all types of sources, be they statistical surveys or administrative records. Statistical agencies must choose the source with regard to quality, timeliness, costs and the burden on respondents
- f) Principle 6: Individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether they

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refer to natural or legal persons, must be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes.

- g) Principle 7: The laws, regulations and measures under which the statistical systems operate must be made public.
- h) Principle 8: Coordination among statistical agencies within countries is essential to achieve consistency and efficiency in the statistical system.
- i) Principle 9: The use by statistical agencies in each country of international concepts, classifications and methods promotes the consistency and efficiency of statistical systems at all official levels (IMTS 2010 guidelines are applied).
- j) Principle 10: Bilateral and multilateral cooperation in statistics contributes to the improvement of systems of official statistics in all countries (refer to 'Trade Agreements' on the SARS Website>Customs and Excise>Trade Statistics home page).

3.1.2 Trade reporting system

- a) The UNSD compiles the United Nations IMTS (UN IMTS) guidelines according to which trade statistics should be compiled to reflect a most comprehensive trade balance. The recommended trade reporting systems are:
 - i) The General system according to which all imports and exports throughout the economic territory (including free zones) must be recorded based on the Customs Procedure Code (CPC) of the transaction.
 - ii) The Special system according to which the statistical territory comprises only a particular part of the economic territory excluding certain flows of goods from trade statistics. A strict or relaxed approach may be applied:
 - A) The strict definition of the special system is in use when the statistical territory comprises only the free circulation area, i.e.:
 - I) Goods imported for inward processing and goods that enter or leave an industrial or commercial free zone or Customs warehouse are not included in trade statistics, as they would not have been cleared through Customs for home use; and
 - II) Compensating products after inward processing are also not included in export statistics.
 - B) The relaxed definition of the special system is in use when trade statistics include goods that enter a country for, or leave it after inward processing, as well as goods that enter or leave an industrial or free zone.
- b) South Africa currently:
 - i) Makes use of the Special Strict system according to which:
 - A) Warehoused goods destined for local consumption are included in trade statistics;
 - B) Warehoused goods for export are excluded from trade statistics; and
 - C) Goods imported and exported for processing are excluded from trade statistics.
 - ii) Follows the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreement on rules of origin for purposes of special trade and duty pricing agreements between countries.
 - iii) Reports:
 - A) Both exports and imports as Free-on-Board (FOB).
 - B) Exports per Country of Destination (COD).
 - C) Imports per Country of Origin (COO).
 - D) Gold, in exception to B) and C) above, as country code 'ZN' (Origin of goods is unknown). When refined trade data is extracted, it is thus not possible to determine where the exports are going to, or the imports are coming from.
 - E) Re-imports (imports of domestic goods which were previously recorded as exports) as code ZA (imports from South Africa).
 - iv) Does not make use of Country of Consignment.
- c) SC-CF-04-A19 – Export Coding – External Annex prescribes additional attribute information to be

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recorded on export clearance declarations only in SAD Box 44 (CD1: Financial Data > To be Coded), which denotes whether or not the content of the clearance declaration is to be incorporated in Trade Statistics, as follows:

- i) Code 1: Include in trade statistics; versus
- ii) Code 2: Exclude from trade statistics.

3.1.3 Data sources

- a) The main source of the Trade Statistics data is the **Goods Declaration form** completed by traders. The date embedded in the Movement Reference Number (MRN) is the date used for reporting of Trade Statistics.
- b) Trade statistics are programmatically derived from data source tables for the day (delta loads) from Declaration Processing (DPR) into the Customs Data Store (Customs DS) database with all versions and historical data.
- c) The Southern African Customs Union (SACU) Import and Export statistics: Extra SACU and these statistics refer to import and export transactions of BELN with countries other than South Africa, i.e. BELN exports to other countries like the United States of America (U.S.A.) or Mozambique
- d) SACU import and export statistics: Intra SACU:
 - i) These statistics refer to the import and export transactions with all countries within the BELN, e.g. merchandise exported from South Africa to one (1) of the BELN countries.
 - ii) The purpose of these statistics is for statistical records for the Intra SACU pool.
- e) Import and Export statistics: International Trade **refers to merchandise imported and exported between South Africa as well as other countries** that was obtained from declarations captured on the DPR.
- f) The South African Reserve Bank (SARB) currently provides the gold export figures for inclusion in trade statistics to SARS.

3.2 Verification of data

3.2.1 Verification purpose and process

- a) The purpose of verification of data is to ensure correctness and accuracy of trade statistics including the SACU revenue pool.
- b) Raw trade data (before application of Trade Statistics rules) is programmatically made available to Data Verification Officers (DVOs) for verification purposes and from these printouts unit values are verified by comparing quantities and values against the description of the goods in order to determine whether incorrect values or quantities were declared. This verification must be done daily to eliminate any obvious errors in the data.

3.2.2 Verification queries

- a) Suspected inaccuracies is queried with clients in order to confirm that the correct data is on the database:
 - i) If there is an existing Case number on the item the DVO accesses the Case to view the supporting documents. Only if additional supporting documents relevant to the query is required, is specified on the query.
 - ii) A query number is programmatically allocated to the query.
 - iii) A system generated email with predefined text is sent from the DVO's email address to the declarant. The subject of the email reflects as follows: 'Query Number 12345 – 'Status' _ 'Relevant client name'.
 - iv) One (1) of the following query status options is indicated on the query:
 - A) 'Open' – a query is defaulted to 'Open' once a new query is being created. The status

- remains on 'Open' unless it is changed by the DVO;
- B) 'Cancelled by Admin' – a query that has been sent to the wrong declarant or where a declaration has been cancelled;
 - C) 'Pending' - a query that is in follow-up or that has initially been replied to and that is being clarified by the DVO, e.g. further documentation is requested from the declarant, or the query is referred internally for expert opinion;
 - D) 'Escalated' – a query that has been handed-over to a different division in SARS for further action in the following circumstances:
 - I) Where documentation has been requested, the query has been followed up for three (3) days, and no co-operation is received from the declarant;
 - II) Where the declarant submits an amended declaration in reply to the query; or
 - III) Where analysis of the submitted documentation in response to a query renders it evident that the declaration requires amendment or further investigation.
 - E) 'Closed' - where the declarant submitted the required documentation or counter evidence and it transpired that the declaration is in order.
- b) The declarant must respond on the original verification query reflecting the query number and subject.
 - c) Where the submitted documents in response to a query are insufficient to clarify the query, additional documents is requested by the DVO. The DVO replies to the declarant on the email received, indicating the required information and a new time-period within which the documents must be submitted.
 - d) Where additional documents are submitted by the declarant in response to a query the DVO verifies the submitted documentation according to the guidelines for specific documentary checks as listed in SC-CF-55-Clearance Declaration – External Standard:
 - i) If the declarant's mitigation is in order, the DVO updates the Query Feedback field, change the query status to Closed; and
 - ii) A system generated email with predefined text is sent from the DVO's email address to the declarant. The subject of the email reflects as follows: 'Query Number 12345 – 'Closed'_ 'Relevant Client name'.

3.3 Analysis of data

3.3.1 Analysis purpose and process

- a) Analysis is conducted on commodities contained in the Tariff Book to determine month-on-month variances and trends to reveal significant increases or decreases.
- b) A Trader in commodities where variances were identified is requested to clarify the variances.
- c) The Trade Statistics division also conducts specific analysis projects and entertains ad hoc analysis requests

3.3.2 Queries on analysis inconsistencies

- a) The Trade Statistics **Analyst** may query selected commodity movements with the specific trader via email.
- b) The subject of the email must reflect the trade type and the trader's name, e.g.: 'SARS: Imports Confirmation – Trader Name'.
- c) The trader must reply on the original email from the **Data Analyst**. The **Data Analyst** monitors analysis queries as replies are received in his / her mailbox.
- d) A summary of traders' responses is included in the Trade Balance Summary to serve as explanation for fluctuations in trade.

3.3.3 Analysis ad hoc requests

- a) Ad hoc analysis requests must be submitted to the dedicated Trade Statistics mailbox: tradestatistics@sars.gov.za. No telephonic or SARS personal email address requests may be entertained. Where a request for an analysis report is submitted at Branch front-end, the request must be forwarded to the dedicated Trade Statistics mailbox.
- b) **The Data Analyst** must evaluate the specifications of the analysis request in order to establish:
 - i) Data content;
 - ii) Relevant database from where data must be extracted;
 - iii) Complexity of analysis; and
 - iv) Content of report.
- c) **The Data Analyst must:**
 - i) Conduct the analysis on the downloaded data according to the request specifications;
 - ii) Compile a detailed analysis report containing e.g. comparative data tables, graphical illustrations and findings and / or recommendations; and
 - iii) Disseminate the completed analysis report to the requestor according to indicated preference) and depending on the size of the analysis report.
- d) Analysis reports are completed in a time reasonable to the complexity of each analysis.

3.4 Publication of Trade Statistics

- a) Trade statistics is prepared with a month lag, e.g. trade statistics for **January 2025** will be subject to preliminary processing during **February 2025**.
- b) **Flash Reports which serve as forecast of expected trade figures for month-end publication, must be compiled on the 1st, 10th and 20th of the publishing month for information of the Trade Statistics team.**
- c) **The publication signoff pack including the Trade Balance Summary must only be compiled after the gold figure released by the SARB has been captured.**
- d) **The monthly published trade statistics contained in the Sign-off Pack are subject to internal quality assurance and sign-off process.**
- e) **The trade statistics is only available for public viewing and disclosure on the SARS website after official publication at 14:00 on the last business day of the month.**
- f) **The release schedule dates for publication are available on the website under Customs and Excise>Trade Statistics>Release Schedule.**

3.5 Disclosure of trade data

3.5.1 Requests for disclosure of trade data

- a) Ad hoc requests for trade data disclosure may be submitted:
 - i) By email to the dedicated Trade Statistics mailbox: tradestatistics@sars.gov.za; or
 - ii) Through the provided Trade Statistics Download wizard on the SARS Website.
- b) Ad hoc requests for Customs data must be submitted by email to the dedicated Trade Statistics mailbox: tradestatistics@sars.gov.za.
- c) Requests submitted through the SARS website wizard results in an immediate data download to the requestor.

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- d) Requests to be subscribed as a regular receiver of data through the tradestatistics@sars.gov.za mailbox must be accompanied by the reason for the request. Registration as subscriber is required once only.
- e) Confidential or client specific information is not generally made available as it is proprietary or can advantage a requestor unfairly. Examples of such data include client name and address. This information can only be supplied to the client in question or a duly authorised representative, in which case the request must be accompanied by a Power of Attorney (POA) / Letter of Authority (LOA) which serves as consent.
- f) The following must be clearly stated in the request:
 - i) Trade type (exports / imports);
 - ii) Period for which data is requested;
 - iii) **Commodities** HS Codes;
 - iv) Country of origin / destination; and
 - v) Purpose for which the data is required.

3.5.2 Analysis of requests for disclosure of trade data

- a) All data requests are analysed in order to establish the type of data requested (refer to definitions for Customs data and trade data).
- b) The **Trade statistics team member** evaluates the content of the request to establish clear detail of the requested data. If not clear, the **Trade statistics Team Member requests clarity from the client**.

3.5.3 POA/LOA for Confidential Customs data requestors

It is recommended that the annexure SC-GP-15-A01 – POA for Trade Statistics Disclosure – External Annexure be used.

- a) **Confidential data must not be disclosed without a valid POA / LOA and with all fields on the POA/LOA fully completed and signed.**
- b) Any presented POA / LOA may only be accepted for a period of two (2) years. The POA / LOA must be kept on record for five (5) years from the termination of its validity period.
- c) Where there is any doubt regarding the confidentiality of the Customs data request, the **Trade stats team member** must progress the request via email to the OOC for consideration who informs the requestor via a formal letter of the outcome of the request.

3.5.4 Subscribers' registration and disclosure options

- a) Subscribers may opt to receive data in one (1) of the following formats:
 - i) Access to the SARS Secured File Transfer Protocol (SFTP) site for which registration as a SFTP site user is required
 - ii) Via email:
 - A) **Trade Statistics Team Member** is responsible for manual emails to ad hoc requestors;
 - B) Small files must be zipped and emailed to the email address provided by the requestor; and
 - C) Where the data report exceeds the data limit of the email system, the Trade stats team member provides the data either through:
 - D) Standard and tailored subscribers must receive automated emails from the tradestatistics@sars.gov.za mailbox;
 - I) SFTP access with **a temporary password; and**
 - II) **By e-mail with Mimecast.**
- b) To be registered on the SARS Trade Stats SFTP Service:

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- i) The requestor must complete the form INF001 – External Application for Access to SARS Electronic Interface available on the SARS Website, **an Oath-01-F01 – SARS Oath of Secrecy Form** and submit it to the Team Member: Trade Statistics;
- ii) The Trade Statistics **Team Member** confirms the SARS Information for External Client with the requestor and the steps to follow to test access to the SFTP site; and
- iii) The requestor must follow the connection procedure and confirm successful access to the SFTP site where downloads must be accessed for the agreed period.

3.5.5 Trade Stats Data Reports

- a) Ad hoc data requests **must** be completed (logged, data extracted and report disclosed) within a time- frame reasonable to the request complexity, but preferably within 24 business hours.
- b) Subscribers' reports **must** be made available for access / disclosed only after official publication of the monthly trade statistics on the SARS website **at** 14:00 on the last business day of the month.
- c) Arrangement of the statistics vary according to client requirements and **are** in most cases disseminated in electronic format either in MS Excel or 'txt' format, depending on the size of the data files or client preference.

4 REFERENCES

4.1 Legislation

TYPE OF REFERENCE	REFERENCE
Legislation and Rules administered by SARS	Customs and Excise Act No. 91 of 1964: Sections 4(3); 4(4); 4(12A);101A and 117(2)(a)
	Customs and Excise Rules: None Tax Administration Act No. 28 of 2011: Sections 215 to 220 and 224
International Instruments	Kyoto Convention: General Annex Chapter 7 – Application of Information Technology – Standard 7.1; Chapter 9B - Information of a Specific Nature, Standards 9.4; 9.5; 9.6 and 9.7 The Southern African Customs Union (SACU) Agreement: Part 7, Article 36 WCO Framework of Standards, June 2012: Pillar 1, Standard 6.9 – Data Privacy and Data Protection UN IMTS Compilers Manual (IMTS 2010-CM, Rev. 1): All

4.2 Cross References

DOCUMENT #	DOCUMENT TITLE
SC-CF-04-A19	Export Coding – External Annex

4.3 Quality Records

DOCUMENT #	DOCUMENT TITLE
SAD 500	Customs Declaration Form
SAD 504	SAD: Voucher of Correction: (Direct)
SC-GP-15-A01	Trade Statistics POA – External Annex

5 DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

Ad hoc request	Irregular or once-off requests for data. Ad hoc requestors are managed in the Trade Statistics Mailbox Request Tool. Where repetitive requests are identified, the requestor is contacted to enquire if he / she can be added to the Subscribers Register.
BELN	The Republic of Botswana ; The Kingdom of Eswatini The Kingdom of Lesotho ; and The Republic of Namibia .

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Case	SARS Service Manager generated Case to query a declaration. All GDs submitted, on which the supporting documents were requested, in order for further inspection purposes will be managed through the SARS system which refer to CCDs routed in this manner as a case.
COD	Country of Destination
COO	Country of Origin
CPC	Customs Procedure Code
Customs data	a) Raw data of all import and export transactions as it is captured on the Declaration Processing System (DPR); b) Contains client specific (confidential) information; and c) Is NOT availed for generic disclosure
CustomsDS	Customs Data Store (Customs DS Database in PTABREBE11 server)
Data	A representation of information, knowledge, facts, concepts or instructions which are being or have been prepared in a formalised manner and is intended to be processed, is being or has been processed in a computer system or network and may be in any form (including computer printouts, magnetic optical storage media, punched cards and punched tapes) or stored internally in the memory of the computer
Declaration	For Customs is the act whereby a person indicates (on a single administrative document or SAD form) the wish to place goods under a given Customs procedure such as importation, exportation, removing in bond/transit or moving across the borders between the SACU countries.
Delta	The difference between trade figures for two (2) periods, e.g. month-on-month
DPR	Declaration Processing System
DVO	Data Verification Officer
Escalation	The hand-over of verification queries different Divisions in SARS for further action
Export Coding	Rules that apply to the declaration of goods originating within the Southern African Customs Union in terms of which goods on export declarations are coded for inclusion or exclusion in the compilation of trade statistics
FOB	Free on Board
IMTS	International Merchandise Trade Statistics
LOA	Letter of Authority
MRN	Movement Reference Number
POA	Power of Attorney
Query	A query generated by officers of the Trade Statistics division as part of the verification or analysis of data for trade statistical purposes
SACU	The Southern African Customs Union, consisting of: The Republic of South Africa; Eswatini; The Republic of Botswana; The Kingdom of Lesotho and The Republic of Namibia.
SARB	South African Reserve Bank
Standard subscriber	A requestor to whom repetitive generic data reports of trade data is disclosed monthly until confirmation to deregister as subscriber is received via email
Subscriber	A registered receiver of monthly trade statistics
Tailored subscriber	A requestor to whom repetitive generic trade data reports adapted to subscriber's specifications are disclosed monthly until confirmation to deregister as subscriber is received via email
Tariff	All import and export commercial transactions require declarations according to an appropriate tariff heading. The tariff classification code is directly linked to the rate of duty payable on that commodity. Classification operates as part of the international Harmonised Commodity and Coding System, under the WCO Harmonised System Convention. The Tariff is the Guide in which the commodity classifications according to specific headings are compiled.

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Trade Data	a) Customs data on import and export transactions to which compilation rules in terms of the IMTS standards have been applied in order to filter the Customs data to that which must be included for a most accurate reflection of a country's trade for a particular period; b) Has been further refined to exclude client specific information; and c) Is availed for generic disclosure.
Trade Statistics	Verified and analysed trade data reflected in the publication pack on the SARS website
UN	United Nations
UN IMTS	United Nations International Merchandise Trade Statistics
UNSC	The United Nations Statistical Commission as the apex entity of the global statistical system in compilation and dissemination of global statistical information: a) Develops standards and norms for statistical activities; and b) Supports countries' efforts to strengthen their national statistical systems.
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
WCO	The World Customs Organisation is the intergovernmental organisation focused on Customs matters, specifically concerning global standards and the simplification and harmonisation of Customs procedures on the facilitation of international trade
WTO	World Trade Organisation