

■ Explanatory notes and lists

■ Structure and content

The German balance of payments is a comprehensive systematic presentation of economic transactions between residents (natural and legal persons resident in Germany) and non-residents (natural and legal persons resident outside Germany) in a given reporting period (month, quarter, year). It is not a balance sheet in the sense of a point-in-time statement of assets and liabilities, but rather a flow account that also includes cross-border transactions, even if these do not lead to (direct) payment.

The balance of payments statistics provide important information on Germany's multi-faceted external trade links and are used by central banks, ministries, associations and enterprises, as well as by academics. The analyses derived from these form, amongst other things, an indispensable basis for decisions on monetary and economic policy. In addition, the German balance of payments constitutes an important part of the balances of payments of the euro area and the European Union.

The balance of payments is broken down into the following sub-accounts:

1. current account;
2. capital account;
3. financial account.

The current account records the purchases and sales of goods and services, together with primary and secondary income. The capital account comprises unrequited transfers which do not have any direct effect on income or expenditure (e.g. debt forgiveness). The financial account documents the financial transactions between residents and non-residents, and is broken down into direct investment, portfolio investment, financial derivatives and employee stock options, other investment, and reserve assets.

In accounting terms, the three aforementioned sub-accounts are interrelated. If the current account and capital account are taken together, a surplus is associated with an increase in external assets or decrease in external liabilities in the financial account. Conversely, a deficit in the current account and capital account is associated with a decrease in external assets or increase in external liabilities.

In practice, however, there is no such precise correlation due to the fact that, first, transactions cannot always be recorded on an accrual basis and, second, all of the sub-ac-

counts (other than the reserve assets and other assets and liabilities of the Bundesbank) have gaps in their statistical coverage. All discrepancies are reflected in the "Net errors and omissions" item.

■ Sources and legal bases

A modular system is used to collect the data required to compile the balance of payments. External sector reporting is the core component, which as a general rule requires resident banks, enterprises, households and public authorities participating in external transactions to report their transactions with non-residents to the Bundesbank. The legal basis is provided by Section 11(2) of the Foreign Trade and Payments Act (*Außenwirtschaftsgesetz*) together with Sections 67 et seq. of the Foreign Trade and Payments Regulation (*Außenwirtschaftsverordnung*).

Other data sources include:

- foreign trade statistics from the Federal Statistical Office;
- household survey on travel expenses abroad;
- external positions of banks, external positions of non-banks and stock surveys on direct investment;
- the Bundesbank's internal accounting;
- other national and international statistics for reconciliation and as a basis for estimates.

Since the publication of data for the reporting month of May 2014 in July 2014, the methodology and classifications used for the balance of payments have been in line with the revised standard of the International Monetary Fund (IMF): IMF (2009), Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual, Sixth Edition (BPM6). The reporting obligations of the Bundesbank are also laid down in Regulation (EC) No 184/2005 of 12 January 2005 and Guideline of the European Central Bank 2011/23 of 9 December 2011, as last amended.

■ Publication of results

Frequency

The Bundesbank draws up the German balance of payments every month. The results are presented around five to six weeks after the end of the reporting month in a press release, in the time series database, in this Statistical

Series – Balance of payments statistics, in the monthly report and in further tables.

The exact dates can be found in the release calendar.

Revision policy

When publishing the provisional data for a given reporting month, the corresponding data for the previous month are generally revised (prior-month revision). These revisions contain late and correction reports from reporting parties on external transactions, and other information subsequently made available.

Further revisions are incorporated or carried out in the following months:

- March: Annual revisions for the previous reporting year and the three preceding years are made in the March Monthly Report. These annual revisions factor in late and correction reports, as well as more recent information from secondary sources, and preliminary estimates are either revised or replaced. Methodological adjustments, including those for earlier periods, are carried out at this point. More detailed information about the publication dates and revision policy is available to download.
- June: New information from the international investment position, the foreign trade statistics as well as the annual report of the Bundesbank (usually three quarters) is incorporated.
- September: New information from the international investment position, foreign trade statistics, national accounts and travel expenditure (usually twelve quarters) is incorporated.
- December: New information from the international investment position and the foreign trade statistics, including the annual corrections for foreign trade (usually eight quarters), is incorporated.

In addition to the specified revision dates, unscheduled revisions can also occur. In the event of extensive revisions or the discovery of serious errors, an assessment is made on a case-by-case basis as to whether the analysis of the balance of payments is impaired as a result of the errors and, therefore, whether a correction should be made in the next publication or whether a correction at the next regular revision date will suffice.

Extraordinary revisions are announced separately on the homepage and in the newsletter for the balance of payments statistics press release.

■ Methodological notes

Territory

The domestic market comprises the economic territory of the Federal Republic of Germany. All other countries, including those participating in the euro area, are foreign markets.

Transition from foreign trade to goods trade

Conceptual differences between foreign trade in accordance with the official foreign trade statistics and trade in goods pursuant to the balance of payments statistics exist, in the first instance, with respect to the recording approach adopted. While foreign trade statistics record goods physically crossing a national border, the change-of-ownership principle is applied in the balance of payments. This means that, for example, the purchase of goods outside Germany by German traders and their resale to non-residents must be included as an addition to foreign trade, provided the transfer of ownership between the German trader and the non-resident did not result in any national borders being crossed. Deductions must correspondingly be made from foreign trade when goods cross the German border without there being a change of ownership. This includes goods movements in connection with cross-border processing services. Second, in the foreign trade statistics, the goods value recorded is the value at the German border (import c.i.f., export f.o.b.),¹ whereas, in the balance of payments, the value recorded is the value at the border of the exporting country (import f.o.b., export f.o.b.). The transport and insurance costs (c.i.f. costs of imports) included in the import value in the foreign trade statistics must therefore be deducted and, for non-German transporters, assigned to the corresponding services items.

Travel

Estimates of receipts are based on reports for foreign travel payments, the main sources of which are credit institutions and travel companies, which handle a large proportion of travel-related transactions through buying and selling foreign currency as well as via credit and debit card pay-

¹ c.i.f.: cost, insurance, freight (a freight clause that includes transport and insurance costs). f.o.b.: free on board, i.e. no transport or insurance costs.

ments. Together with evaluations of potential changes in payment behaviour, these data are used to determine travel receipts. The value determined is also checked against the figures from the Federal Statistical Office's accommodation statistics and corresponding data from major partner countries. Since 2001, the expenditure figures have been calculated on the basis of a direct household survey of persons travelling abroad. However, owing to the sampling error, the availability of results for individual countries is limited.

Financial intermediation services indirectly measured (FISIM)

Financial intermediaries frequently choose to be remunerated for a service indirectly through the associated interest margin. These indirectly rendered services are now recorded under financial services. As a result, financial intermediation services indirectly measured (FISIM) are no longer included under interest income. Under primary income, non-banks' interest income on deposits held abroad has been expanded to include FISIM, whilst interest expenditure on external loans has been reduced to disregard such services. Conversely, there has been a decrease in domestic banks' interest income and an increase in their interest expenditure. The data on FISIM are calculated by the Federal Statistical Office within the framework of the national accounts using a designated model.

The distinction between loans and currency and deposits

Transactions are assigned to loans or currency and deposits broadly on the basis of the sector of the domestic or foreign debtor: if the debtor belongs to the MFI sector (including monetary authorities), the transactions are assigned to the "Currency and deposits" item; if the debtor belongs to another sector (general government, enterprises and households), the relevant transactions are assigned to the "Loans" item.

Sectoral classification

The revised Balance of Payments Manual (BPM6) has brought sectoral classification into line with that of the System of National Accounts.² However, in order to ensure that balance of payments data would be consistent with the fifth edition of the Balance of Payments Manual (BPM5), the sectoral classification model was adopted in principle while nevertheless consolidating several heavily subdivided sectors. The division of economic agents into institutional sectors, which has been adopted in this statistical series, is very closely based on this manner of clas-

sification. Designations were largely retained in order to maintain consistency with previous sector designations. The sectoral classification is generally that of the domestic sector of the creditor or the debtor.

By contrast, the reporting requirements at European level³ subdivide the sectors to a greater extent than in this statistical series, although, when compared with the national accounts, some of the sectors here are also aggregated into groups.

² 2008 SNA.

³ See Commission Regulation (EU) No 555/12 of 22 June 2012 and Guideline of the European Central Bank 2011/23 of 9 December 2011.