

Addressing the Services Statistics Dearth in East Africa



Reliable statistics are the foundation of sound policy and regional integration. In the East African Community (EAC), the capacity to measure, analyse, and report on Trade in Services (TiS) has become increasingly vital as Partner States deepen cooperation under the EU–EAC CORE Programme. Despite services accounting for nearly half of the region’s GDP—from tourism and transport to telecommunications and insurance—limited data has long obscured their true economic contribution and movement across borders.

Laying the Groundwork: From Training to Implementation

Between June and August 2025, the EAC Secretariat, with support from the European Union Delegation under the EU-EAC CORE Programme, GIZ, and the World Bank, organised a series of regional and national workshops. These workshops went beyond training—they laid the technical foundation for a region-wide trade in services data collection, analysis, and dissemination framework aligned with international standards.

Experts from central banks, national statistics offices, and relevant ministries refining data methodologies, guided by the Balance of Payments Manual (BPM7), engaged in the regional workshop in Nairobi, which set the tone by defining tools, timelines, and key focus sectors: travel, transport, telecommunications, and insurance.

Each Partner State then advanced its own national approach:

- Kenya expanded its Travel Expenditure Survey (TES) and began aligning insurance statistics with global benchmarks.
- Uganda strengthened collaboration between UBOS and the Bank of Uganda to improve TES coverage.

- Rwanda prioritised border-level data disaggregation and scheduled TiS surveys between October 2025 and February 2026.
- Burundi initiated inter-agency coordination to improve TES and measure reinsurance abroad.
- Tanzania is committed to using corporate tax data to strengthen transport and ICT service measurement.

These initiatives signal a shift from ad-hoc surveys to systematic, comparable, and coordinated data collection.

A Region Moving Toward Harmonisation

The workshops underscored a central truth: successful regional integration depends on harmonised data. For years, varying definitions, collection tools, and coverage scopes have limited the ability to compare service trade performance across countries. The adoption of the EAC Manual for TiS Statistical Reporting, tested during the workshops, provides a shared framework that strengthens both national and regional statistical coherence.

Nonetheless, challenges persist—short survey cycles, limited collaboration across agencies, and underutilised administrative data. Addressing these issues calls for sustained regional coordination, peer learning, and technical support—all of which remain integral to the EU–EAC CORE Programme’s long-term vision.

From Data to Policy: Why It Matters

Trade in Services statistics are not mere figures; they shape economic policy, inform negotiations, and enable evidence-based reform. Reliable TiS data empowers policymakers to identify growth opportunities, monitor competitiveness, and negotiate trade commitments from a position of strength. For the EAC, this translates into stronger participation in continental and global frameworks, including the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

By 2026, Partner States are expected to finalise their national TiS reports and contribute to a consolidated regional report—the most comprehensive on East Africa’s services trade landscape.

The Way Forward

The EU–EAC CORE Programme’s continued investment in TiS data systems represents a milestone for evidence-based policymaking in the region. Building on the 2025 workshops, the next phase will focus on:

- Expanding Travel Expenditure Survey coverage across all Partner States.
- Strengthening analytical and institutional capacity.
- Increasing the use of administrative data sources.
- Institutionalising inter-agency coordination frameworks.

Better data means better decisions—and better integration. Through collaboration, innovation, and shared commitment, the EAC is establishing the statistical backbone needed to power the region’s next chapter of growth.