

# Reproducing the Stylized Facts that Motivate Models of International Trade with Heterogeneous Firms using the World Bank Enterprise Surveys\*

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## Abstract

This article shows how to use the publicly-available firm-level surveys produced by the World Bank Enterprise Surveys (WBES) to reproduce the stylized facts that characterize firm heterogeneity and its relationship with global engagement, as established by [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#) for manufacturing firms in the U.S. The article describes how to incorporate this exercise in different teaching activities such as small group classes and homework and courseworks assignments. The activities proposed allow students to develop skills handling and analyzing firm-level data and, since WBES surveys are available for more than 150 countries since 2002, they offer an unique opportunity to evaluate the extent to which the stylized facts established from U.S. data are also representative of countries of different size and stage of development. The activities proposed connect the theory of trade with heterogeneous firms to the real-world empirical evidence that motivated the development of these models.

**Keywords:** teaching international trade; heterogeneous firms; exports; imports; economic data; stylized facts.

**JEL classification:** A22; F12.

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# 1 Introduction

In an essay commemorating the centenary of Bertil Ohlin’s birth entitled “What role for empirics in international trade?” [Davies and Weinstein \(2002\)](#) wrote “Our field shows little of the two-way interplay between theory and data that is the very life of many fields of economics, such as macro, labor, and others.” Two decades later, the state of the international trade field could not be more different.

The increasing availability of micro-level surveys at the firm level since the mid-1990s ([Bernard and Jensen, 1995](#); [Roberts and Tybout, 1996](#); [Bernard and Jensen, 1999](#)) spurred a veritable revolution that put firm-level decisions front and centre in the effort to understand the causes and consequences of international trade ([Melitz and Redding, 2014](#)). Nevertheless, and despite its popularity in the research sphere, the so-called “new-new” trade theory has been much slower to permeate the teaching of international trade at the undergraduate level. As [Cook and Pantuosco \(2022\)](#) demonstrate, only two of the most popular undergraduate textbooks in international trade, [Krugman et al. \(2023\)](#) and [McLaren \(2012\)](#), present the [Melitz \(2003\)](#) model—the quintessential workhorse model of trade with heterogeneous firms.<sup>1</sup> Critically, neither of these textbooks offer exercises that use firm-level data to allow students to connect theory and empirical evidence.

This paper seeks to fill the gap between the teaching of theoretical models of international trade with heterogeneous firms and the empirical evidence that motivated the development of these models by leveraging the publicly-available firm-level data made available by the World Bank Enterprise Surveys (WBES). More specifically, I show how to use WBES data, which is available for more than 150 countries since 2002, to reproduce key stylized facts that characterize the extent of global engagement of manufacturing firms, as documented by [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#) for the U.S. Namely, the large differences in terms of size and productivity observed across firms operating in the same industry; the limited extent of

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<sup>1</sup>Neither [Feenstra and Taylor \(2021\)](#), [Gerber \(2018\)](#) nor [Salvatore \(2019\)](#) discuss the Melitz model or heterogeneous firms.

global engagement—i.e. exporting, importing or being foreign-owned— of most manufacturing firms; the substantial heterogeneity in export intensity (the share of total sales accounted for by exports) among exporting firms; and the fact that globally-engaged firms tend to outperform domestic firms across a wide range of performance measures such as employment, sales per worker, and capital and R&D-intensity.

The paper discusses in detail how the reproduction of stylized facts can be embedded into teaching in a variety of ways, including a small-group teaching activity, as well as homework and coursework assignments, and presents different alternatives that instructors can utilize to customize the activity to best fit their needs.

The activities proposed in this paper offer three key contributions to the teaching of international trade. First, they help to bring the teaching of international trade at the undergraduate level closer to the way that research at the cutting edge of the field is conducted—that is, with a strong emphasis on data analysis and empirical work ([Feenstra, 2016](#)). In so doing, they offer a natural complement to other teaching strategies like the interactive classroom simulation developed by [Cook and Pantuosco \(2022\)](#), which highlights the main contribution of incorporating firm heterogeneity into models of international trade—i.e. the fact that changes in trade barriers affect different firms differently—with large and productive firms expanding, and smaller, less-productive firms contracting and exiting the market.

Second, it allows students to familiarize themselves with firm-level data—how to manipulate and present it and draw conclusions from it—a set of skills that is highly valued by employers of economic graduates ([Economics Network, 2019](#)). While firm-level surveys are generally not publicly available because of confidentiality requirements, the raw data from WBES is accessible to individuals for research and pedagogical purposes by simply creating a free account and agreeing to abide with its confidentiality provisions.

Third, it is straightforward to adapt the activities I present in this paper using data from Colombia, to any country for which WBES surveys are available, because WBES uses a standardized questionnaire, which, in turn, means that the name of the variables used

in the analysis are the same across all surveys. This notable feature enables instructors to provide a global perspective to the topics discussed in the exercise and students to evaluate the extent to which the different stylized facts that [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#) identify for U.S. firms also provide an accurate description of the behavior of firms in countries of different size, comparative advantages and stage of development.<sup>2</sup>

The paper is organized as follows: Section [2](#) offers a brief description of WBES and discusses how to gain access to the raw data and survey questionnaires used for the teaching activities proposed in the paper. Section [3](#) uses data from the 2017 survey for Colombia to illustrate how to reproduce the stylized facts established by [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#) for the U.S. and compares the results obtained for this country to the original paper and to international evidence from 72 countries using WBES surveys presented by [Defever and Riaño \(2022\)](#). Section [4](#) discusses how to incorporate the reproduction of firm-level stylized facts into different teaching activities, paying close attention to the time allocation and division of labor in the classroom and the pedagogical choices that instructors can make in terms of the topics to emphasize and the learning outcomes they want students to achieve. Section [5](#) concludes.

## 2 The World Bank Enterprise Surveys data

The World Bank Enterprise Surveys (<https://www.enterprisesurveys.org/>) project conducts establishment-level surveys that intend to be representative of a country's private sector. Since the vast majority of establishments surveyed report to operate only one establishment, I will refer to them as “firms” hereafter. Between 2002 and 2023, the project has interviewed close to 200,000 firms across 155 countries. Most countries covered are developing and transition ones, although surveys for a few European Union countries have become available recently. The surveys cover a broad range of topics including firms' access

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<sup>2</sup>It is important to remark that even in textbooks that emphasize the importance of data analysis, such as [Feenstra and Taylor \(2021\)](#), most of the empirical exercises offered only utilize U.S. data.

to finance, obstacles to conduct business and participation in international trade activities, to name a few.

## 2.1 Gaining access to the raw data

Both instructors and students need to set up a free account to download the raw data (detailed instructions of how to create an account with WBES and download the raw data and questionnaires are provided in subsection A.1 of Appendix A). It is critical that instructors remind students of the need to create an account and download the data by themselves, since by doing so, students agree to abide by the confidentiality agreement regarding the use of the data, which explicitly prohibits users to directly or indirectly, in any way, reveal, report, publish, disclose, transfer or otherwise use any firm-specific information except aggregate data that does not identify specific firms.<sup>3</sup>

After logging in to the ‘Firm-level Datasets for Researchers’ section of WBES, students can search for the specific survey they want to download by country and year. Enterprise surveys are usually conducted once every five years; this means that for most countries there are 2 to 3 survey waves available, while smaller and less-developed ones only have one. The raw data obtained from WBES is available in Stata (.dta) format along with the questionnaire used in the survey (in .pdf format). All variables in the Stata file are labelled and mapped directly to the survey questionnaire, where the name of the variable is written in red in the questionnaire.

The number of firms surveyed varies according to country size. For larger countries such as Argentina, China, India, Türkiye or Vietnam, a survey typically includes between 1,200 to 1,800 firms.<sup>4</sup> I would recommend using relatively larger countries for the teaching activities

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<sup>3</sup>The full Data Access Protocol can be found here: <https://login.enterprisesurveys.org/content/sites/financeandprivatesector/en/terms.html>

<sup>4</sup>Defever and Riaño (2022) use data drawn from WBES across 72 countries for the period 2002-2016. Across this period, the average survey wave includes 442 firms, with substantial heterogeneity in terms of survey size—ranging from 28 firms for Latvia in 2002 to 7,165 firms in India in 2014. These data, which contain several of the variables used in this paper is available here: <https://academic.oup.com/jeea/article/20/3/1347/6521445#supplementary-data>.

in order to have more variability in terms of firms operating across different industries and greater availability of performance measures to analyze. Panel data is sometimes available for larger middle-income countries, but for the purposes of this exercises presented here, only one cross-sectional survey is needed.

### **3 Reproducing the Stylized Facts Characterizing Firm-Heterogeneity and Global Engagement**

This section uses data from the 2017 survey wave for Colombia (the country I have used in the tutorial activity described in Section 4) to illustrate the key statistical regularities that can be computed using the WBES data. This dataset includes 993 firms, 569 of which operate in the manufacturing sector, which constitute the sample that I use to carry out the empirical analysis below. Appendix C provides the Stata do-file used to produce the results presented in this section. As I have noted above, because the standardization of WBES, this Stata code can be readily used with any other survey because the names of the variables remain constant across datasets.

The stylized facts that characterize firms' global engagement that I propose to analyze using the WBES data are:

1. There is substantial heterogeneity across firms in terms of size (employment) within the same industry;
2. In most industries, globally engaged firms (i.e. firms that export, import or are foreign-owned) are a minority;
3. There is large heterogeneity in terms of export intensity—the share of total sales accounted for by exports among exporting firms—across firms in the same country;
4. Globally engaged firms are 'better' than firms that only operate domestically across a

broad range of performance measures such as employment, skill- and capital-intensity, sales per worker and innovation.

### 3.1 How large are differences in firm size within the same industry?

Summarizing total permanent employment reveals the large degree of heterogeneity observed across manufacturing firms. For instance, the median manufacturing firm in the Colombian survey has 32 permanent employees, while approximately one quarter of the surveyed firms employ fewer than 15 workers. At the same time, and consistent with the international evidence, there are a handful of large firms employing more than 1,000 workers (Axtell, 2001; Cabral and Mata, 2003). Figure 1 shows that the same pattern emerges when we examine the size distribution of firms within industries.

Figure 1: Size Distribution of Firms—Selected Industries (Colombia, 2017)

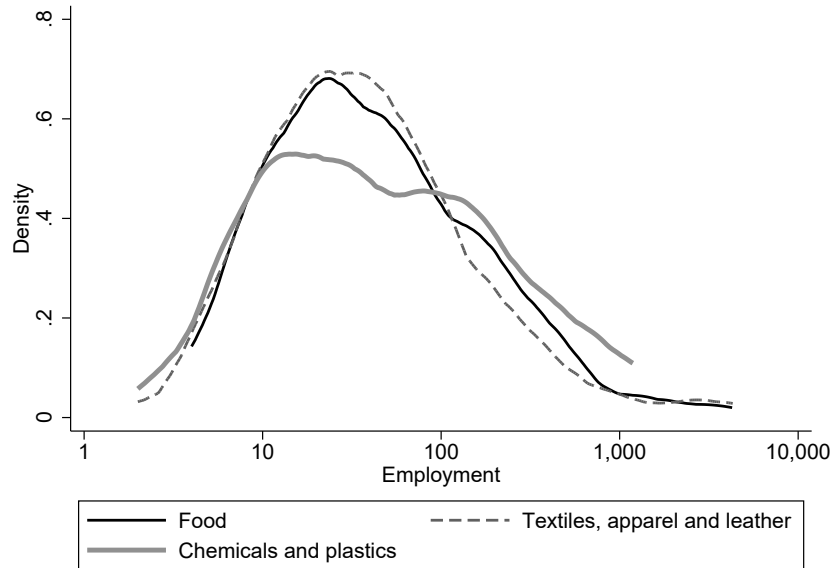


Figure 1 is crucial to convey the key innovation of models of trade with heterogeneous firms—namely, that firms differ quite substantially within industries, in contrast to other workhorse models of international trade such as the Ricardian, Heckscher-Ohlin and even the

monopolistically competitive model of [Krugman \(1980\)](#). The following sections show that the extent to which firms engage with the rest of the world also differs substantially across firms.

### 3.2 How prevalent is global engagement?

The second stylized fact pertains to the extent of firms' global engagement—i.e. whether they export, import, and are foreign-owned. To this end, students must use the information provided in the WBES questionnaire to construct indicator variables for firms' export-, import- and foreign-owned-status (Appendix B shows the precise way in which these indicators are constructed).

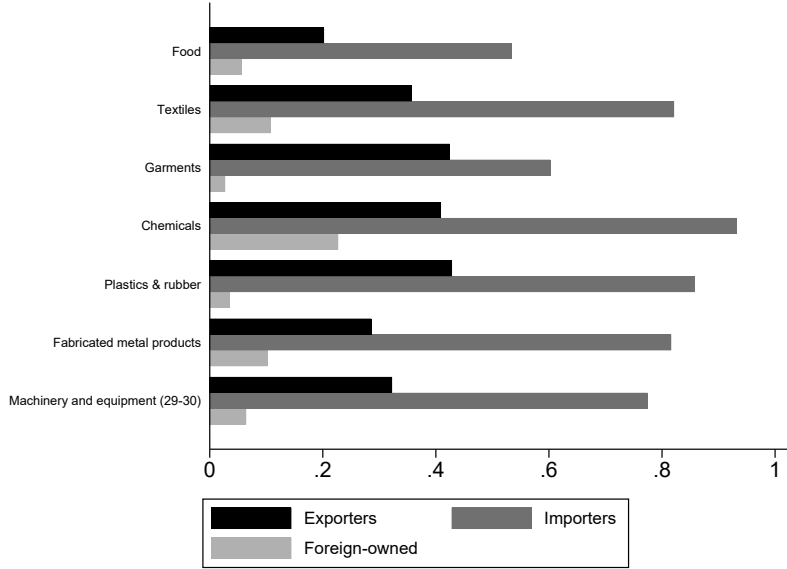
Figure 2 displays the share of firms engaged across each margin of global engagement for each manufacturing industry. The key message provided by this figure is the high level of firm heterogeneity across industries. On average, one third of manufacturing firms in Colombia export some of their output—a similar figure to the one reported by [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#) for U.S. firms and across the 72 countries included in the sample used by [Defever and Riaño \(2022\)](#), in which 40 percent of manufacturing firms export, on average. Importing, in contrast, is much more prevalent among Colombian firms, with two thirds of them importing any materials or inputs, while the corresponding share in the U.S. is only 14%. Foreign ownership is the least common dimension of global engagement, accounting for only 7% of manufacturing firms in Colombia—a figure consistent with the stylized facts reported by [Antràs and Yeaple \(2014\)](#).

### 3.3 How important are export sales for exporting firms?

[Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#) show that in the U.S. the majority of exporting firms sell most of their output domestically—or in other words, most exporters exhibit low export intensity. Figure 3 presents a histogram of export intensity for Colombian exporters, which shows a similar pattern—more than half of manufacturing exporters export 10% or less of their total sales,



Figure 2: Share of Globally Engaged Firms by Industry (Colombia, 2017)



The figure reports the share of globally engaged firms in manufacturing industries with at least 20 firms.

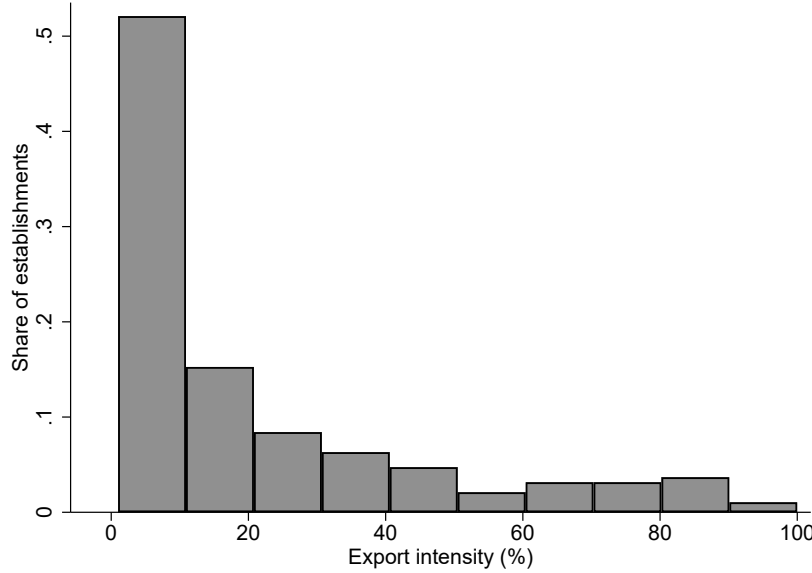
and only a small minority of firms export most of their output. Defever and Riaño (2022), however, show that this stylized fact is not very robust across the world. Export intensity distributions vary tremendously across countries and are often bimodal with large shares of both low- and high-intensity exporters coexisting alongside each other within a country (see Figure 8 in their paper).

### 3.4 Performance premia associated with global engagement

A cornerstone result of models of trade with heterogeneous firms is that globally engaged firms are ‘better’—i.e. are larger, more productive, more capital and skill-intensive and conduct more investment in innovation than firms that only operate domestically. This stylized fact is established by estimating bivariate regressions of the type:

$$\ln Y_i = \alpha + \beta GLOB_i + \varepsilon_i, \quad (1)$$

Figure 3: Export Intensity Distribution (Colombia, 2017)



Export intensity is defined as the share of an exporter's total sales that are exported. Because this measure is calculated conditional on exporting it takes values on the interval  $(0, 100\%]$ .

Where  $\ln Y_i$  denotes the natural logarithm of a given performance outcome for firm  $i$ , and  $GLOB_i$  is a dummy variable taking the value 1 if firm  $i$  is globally engaged (exporting, importing or being foreign owned) and 0 otherwise. Table 1 reports the performance premium in percentage terms, i.e.  $\exp(\hat{\beta}) - 1$ , for each combination of performance outcome and margin of global engagement, with  $\hat{\beta}$  denoting the estimated coefficient associated with the variable  $GLOB$  in regression (1).

The results of estimating the regressions described above reveal that Colombian manufacturing exporters are 203% larger in terms of employment than non-exporters, while importers are 51.3% larger along the same dimension than non-importing firms, and so forth.<sup>5</sup> The results presented in Table 1 reveal that similarly to what Bernard et al. (2007) report for U.S. firms, globally-engaged firms in Colombia are significantly larger (both in terms of employment and sales), more productive and carry out more R&D spending than their

<sup>5</sup>If some students are not familiar with regression analysis, the same analysis can be carried out by simply calculating the difference in the mean of performance measures for globally-engaged and non-globally engaged firms.

non-globally engaged counterparts. These results are consistent with the findings in [Defever and Riaño \(2022\)](#) showing that non-exporting firms in their sample are, on average, 50% smaller in terms of employment, have 50% lower sales and 20% lower sales per worker than exporting firms, in accordance to the predictions of the [Melitz \(2003\)](#) model. In contrast, globally-engaged firms in Colombia are not significantly more capital nor skill-intensive. Another important insight that can be gleaned from Table 1 is that the size and productivity premia of being foreign-owned are substantially larger than those from being an exporter, consistently with the predictions in [Helpman et al. \(2004\)](#).

Table 1: Performance Premia of Different Indicators of Global Engagement (Colombia, 2017)

Performance measure	Premium		
	Exporter	Importer	Foreign-owned
Employment	2.034***	0.513***	3.055***
Sales	4.635***	0.927***	8.777***
Sales per worker	0.881***	0.195***	1.342***
Capital per worker	0.423	0.195	0.710
Skill intensity	-0.067	0.053	0.153
R&D expenditure / Sales	4.104***	1.131***	4.278***

The table reports  $\exp(\hat{\beta}) - 1$ , in which  $\hat{\beta}$  denotes the estimated coefficient in a bivariate regression of the type represented in equation (1) in which the dependent variable is the performance measure in a given row and the independent variable is the respective indicator of global engagement in the column. All regressions have been estimated using robust standard errors. \*\*\* significant at the 1% level; \*\* significant at the 5% level; \* significant at the 10% level.

## 4 Teaching Activities using WBES

In this section I describe in detail how I have implemented the teaching activity in the classroom and discuss the pedagogical choices I have made in the process, primarily in the context of a tutorial session (small group class with 20-30 students), while at the same time considering potential alternatives that have been kindly suggested by the referees. I also discuss how the activities carried out in the tutorial can be further developed into a

homework assignment or coursework (term-project) assessment.

## 4.1 Tutorial (small group class)

I have carried out a teaching activity in which students reproduce the stylized facts presented by [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#) in a 50-minute tutorial, both in an undergraduate course in international trade and in a masters-level class on international business economics that I teach at City, University of London in the UK. These students have previously taken classes in data analysis and introductory econometrics using Stata as the main statistical software.

Appendix [A](#) presents the instructions that I provide students in the week the tutorial takes place, i.e. when I introduce the topic of firm heterogeneity in international trade. I have presented the [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#) paper in the lecture before the tutorial in which students will use the WBES data. An alternative approach that could be implemented in a flipped-classroom framework would instead ask students to use the WBES data to ‘discover’ rather than reproducing the stylized facts presented in Section [3](#).

The benchmark teaching activity consists of three parts: (i) preliminary tasks to be carried out before the tutorial; (ii) tasks to be conducted in the classroom during the tutorial and (iii) debrief and discussion. I now discuss these three stages in more detail.

### 4.1.1 Preliminary tasks to be carried out before the tutorial

The most important thing for students to do prior to the tutorial is to create an account with WBES, which allows them to download the raw data and corresponding survey questionnaire. To create an account, students need to use their university email account and provide a one-paragraph description of what they will use the data for. This summary can be based on the description of the tutorial activity available in Appendix [A](#).

A key decision that the instructor needs to make in preparing for the tutorial is whether to ask students to carry out the statistical analysis using data from a single country or assign a different country to each group. In the context of a 50-minute tutorial, I have asked students

to use data from a single country and then compare their findings with those reported by [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#). While working with a single country involves lower coordination costs for the instructor and permits incorporating a discussion about the country’s trade policy to offer more context to the results, analyzing different countries has the potential to enrich the stage in which each group shares their results with the rest of the class by offering a truly global perspective to the topic ([Lee, 1992](#)).

In the latter case, the instructor needs to choose the countries to analyze with the objective to achieve a diverse sample along a range of characteristics such as country size, stage of development and location, as well as in terms of the statistics that students are going to compute: for instance, including countries with low shares of exporters like Senegal and Zambia with countries in which most firms export such as Tunisia or Slovenia; or countries where the majority of exporters sell most of their output abroad, like Bangladesh or Mauritius, and countries in which the distribution of export intensity is markedly bimodal like China or Uruguay.

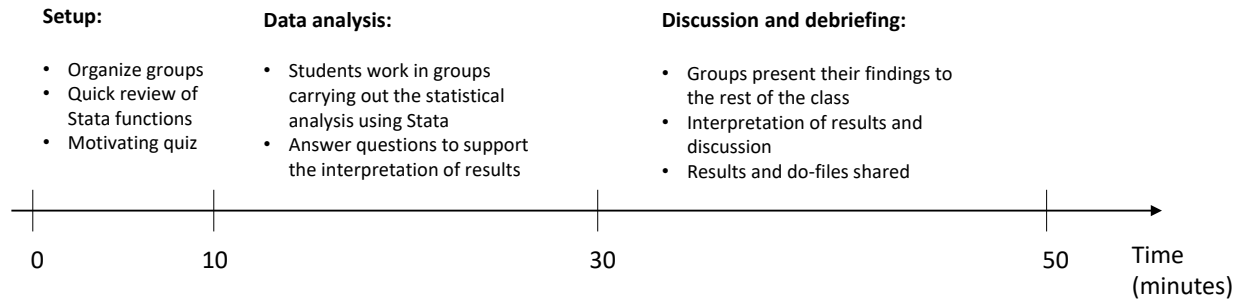
Once students have had their account approved by WBES, they can download the data and questionnaire for the country they will analyze in the tutorial. At this stage, I ask students to open the data in their computers and use the Stata command ‘describe’ to familiarize themselves with the way in which items in the questionnaire are mapped into the dataset; I also ask students to read pages 105-112 of [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#), or review the slides that I presented in the lecture in preparation for the tutorial.

#### **4.1.2 Tasks to be conducted in the classroom during the tutorial**

The tutorial itself is further subdivided in three parts: (i) setup; (ii) data analysis and (iii) discussion and debriefing. [Figure 4](#) summarizes the activities taking place and the approximate amount of time devoted to each stage.

Once students have organized themselves in their respective groups (of 3-4 members), I do two things before students open the data and begin their analysis. Firstly, I run a poll

Figure 4: Timeline of Tutorial Activity



(using polleverywhere or a similar program) in which I ask students what percentage of firms they think are exporters; what are the manufacturing industries which they think have a higher number of firms and exporters; what is the average export intensity among exporters and the average difference in terms of employment between exporting and non-exporting firms. I will use the results of this poll in the discussion stage to contrast these responses with the figures that groups produce in their analysis. Secondly, I open the dataset in Stata and show students how the variables relate to the survey questionnaire and briefly review how to use basic Stata commands such as ‘tabulate’, ‘summarize’, ‘regress’, how to create variables, and use conditional statements. After doing this, I present a ‘cheat-sheet’ slide which I leave on during the Data Analysis stage with these instructions that students can refer to when they work with the data.

In the tutorial I give students 20-30 minutes to carry out the statistical analysis, writing a Stata do-file that they will use to carry out the calculations set out in Appendix A.2. While students work on this in their respective groups, I circulate around the room answering clarifying questions.

It is important to note that in the tutorial I focus on exporting as the only margin of global engagement to analyze (i.e. I do not ask them to calculate the number of firms engaged in importing or that are foreign-owned nor to estimate the performance premia associated with these two modes of global engagement). I do so both because of time considerations, but also because the Melitz (2003) theoretical model, which is the next topic in my course’s syllabus,

emphasizes firms' exporting decision; analyzing the other two modes of global engagement can be naturally incorporated in a homework assignment or in a coursework assignment, as I discuss in more detail below.

One of the key learning outcomes that this activity seeks to develop in students is the ability to use raw data to construct empirical counterparts to the variables in theoretical models. For instance, the surveys do not explicitly ask firms whether they are exporters or not; students need to figure out that they can construct an export indicator using the question in the survey that asks the percentage of a firm's sales that were: (i) national; (ii) indirect exports or (iii) direct exports. Similarly, in order to construct the export intensity variable, students need to notice that they have to use conditional statements to ensure that this variable is only defined for exporters (in other words, they need to make sure that the export intensity variable does not take the value of 0 for firms that only sell domestically).

Another important skill that this activity enables students to cultivate—and which arguably often takes up to 80% of data analysts' time ([Békés and Kézdi, 2021](#))—is the importance of 'cleaning' data. That is, learning what type of variables are included in a dataset, how to identify and address problems with observations and variables, and creating a reproducible workflow to organize the data as well as carrying out any statistical analysis. For instance, students should note that when a firm does not answer a question, this variable is coded in the dataset as taking the value -9, and therefore should become aware that these observations need to be excluded when calculating statistics. Alternatively, the instructor could provide students the do-file (see [Appendix C](#)) and ask them to explain what different commands are doing.<sup>6</sup> A third approach could instead present the figures and tables in [Section 3](#) and focus the discussion on the interpretation of these results.

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<sup>6</sup>I make the do-file presented available to students after the tutorial.

### 4.1.3 Debrief and discussion

After students have finished analyzing the data, the last part of the tutorial entails presenting the results they have obtained, discussing them with the rest of class. To operationalize this, when analyzing data from a single country, I ask that a different group presents the calculations and results associated to each question in the tutorial. In order to facilitate the discussion, I present the responses from the initial poll and contrast those with the actual results as well as with the results presented by [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#).

When revisiting the poll results about the industries with the largest number of firms and exporters, I ask students to justify their answers. For instance, when working with the Colombian data, students often think the country has a comparative advantage in labor-intensive sectors such as food or textiles—on the basis of its relative endowments, as suggested by the Heckscher-Ohlin model, and thus tend to find surprising that the share of exporters is higher in capital-intensive industries like chemicals and machinery and equipment. I then ask them if there are other factors that could explain these data patterns. In the case of Colombia, I use data of exports by industry and destination country publicly available in the Observatory of Economic Complexity website (<https://oec.world/>) to show students that capital-intensive exports are often shipped to neighboring countries such as Ecuador and Venezuela, which are less abundant in capital than Colombia.<sup>7</sup>

If the tutorial studies a country with a high prevalence of high-intensity exporters such as Bangladesh, Ireland or the Philippines, the instructor can ask students about the reasons why the distribution of export intensity of these countries looks so different to that in the U.S. Are these firms producing goods for which there is little to no domestic demand such as wool sweaters in Bangladesh ([Díaz de Astarloa et al., 2013](#))? Or are they producing highly-specialized goods that are exported to the next stage of production within a global value chain ([Antràs, 2020](#))? These results can also be used to introduce the concept of special economic

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<sup>7</sup>Another advantage of focusing the tutorial on one country is that the instructor can more easily embed country-specific knowledge into the discussion, which grounds the conversation, and relates it more to ‘real-world’ issues.



zones—geographically-bounded areas in which customs, tax and investment regulations are more liberal than in the rest of the country. These zones are ubiquitous across the world, are one of the most important tools of industrial policy in developing countries (Rodrik, 2004), and often require firms to export most of their output in order to benefit from the fiscal benefits they provide (Defever and Riaño, 2017; Defever et al., 2019).

After students have presented the results related to the performance premia of exporters, I then turn the discussion to whether we can give these estimates a causal interpretation. On one hand, the workhorse model of firm heterogeneity assumes that exporting is fully explained by firms’ selection into this activity as a consequence of their higher intrinsic productivity; alternatively, exposure to international best practices and access to higher quality inputs allows firms to become more productive once they are globally-engaged—the so-called ‘learning-by-exporting’ hypothesis (Clerides et al., 1998; Van Biesebroeck, 2005).

I like to finish the discussion with a reflection on the implications of the results from the performance premia regressions to economic policy. Should governments subsidize or support firms to become exporters? Or does this mean that governments would end up spending resources helping the firms that are already the best performers? To anchor this discussion I ask students to go and listen to the Trade Talks podcast episode in which the hosts, Chad Bown and Soumaya Keynes, interview Amit Khandelwal about the randomized controlled experiment that he and his coauthors ran with rug producers in Egypt (Atkin et al., 2017) after concluding the tutorial.<sup>8</sup> The podcast, which only lasts 18 minutes, not only illustrates vividly the difficulties in moving from correlation to causation, but also helps to show concrete mechanisms through which exposure to international markets can improve firms’ performance and the policy instruments that governments can use to achieve these goals.

Students who have participated in the tutorial were highly enthusiastic about it noting in student evaluations of teaching that the use of real world data helps to enliven the theoretical

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<sup>8</sup>The podcast episode can be found here: <https://tradetalkspodcast.com/podcast/62-randomized-trade/>

models and facilitate their comprehension of the economic mechanisms at play. The activity is a critical tool to achieve the learning objective of applying theoretical tools of international trade theory to analyse ‘real world’ situations related to the international movement of goods and services.

## 4.2 Alternative ways to use the reproduction of stylized facts in teaching

### 4.2.1 Homework assignment

There are two natural extensions to activities carried out in the tutorial described in Section 4.1. The first one, is to re-do the statistical analysis for importing and foreign ownership as described in Section 3. Comparing the prevalence of importers and exporters within a given industry can be used to motivate a discussion about the importance of inter- and intra-industry trade. Are the industries in which exporters are more prevalent also the ones in which a higher percentage of firms import inputs as would be the case in models with monopolistic competition, or are these two activities negatively correlated with each other as the Ricardian or Heckscher-Ohlin models would predict?

The estimation of performance premia can also be extended in two ways. The first one is to estimate the regressions that [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#) report in columns (2) and (3) of Table 3 of their paper. That is:

$$\ln Y_{ij} = \alpha + \beta GLOB_{ij} + f_j + \varepsilon_{ij}, \quad (2)$$

$$\ln Y_{ij} = \alpha + \beta GLOB_{ij} + f_j + \gamma \ln EMP_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij}, \quad (3)$$

where the subindex  $i$  references firms and  $j$  indicates industries. Thus,  $f_j$  denotes industry-level fixed effects and  $\ln EMP_{ij}$  is the natural logarithm of employment of firm  $i$  operating in industry  $j$ . Regression (2) adds industry fixed effects to regression (1), while regression (3) includes both industry fixed effects and the logarithm of firm’s employment. The key insight

to be obtained from these is that now the performance comparison between globally-engaged firms and domestic ones is carried out within the same industry in the case of regression (2), which in turn means that the difference in say, employment is not due to a majority of globally-engaged firms operating in sectors characterized by high economies of scale, like machinery & equipment, and domestic firms being more concentrated in sectors favoring low-scale operation, like textiles or apparel. The intuition behind regression (3) is similar, but now comparing globally-engaged and domestic firms of similar size in within the same industry.

Beyond the process of constructing the relevant variables, some interesting questions for students to analyze are: (i) Do performance premia remain significant as we conduct the comparison within narrower groups of firms? (ii) If the latter, what other factors explain the performance differences between globally-engaged and domestic firms? (iii) What happens to the magnitude of the performance premia estimates?

The second way in which the performance premia regressions can be extended is to include the three different margins of global engagement in one regression. That is, estimate:

$$\ln Y_i = \alpha + \beta EXP_i + \gamma IMP_i + \theta FOREIGN_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (4)$$

where  $EXP_i$  is an indicator taking the value 1 if firm  $i$  exports and 0 otherwise;  $IMP_i$  is an indicator taking the value 1 if firm  $i$  imports and 0 otherwise and  $FOREIGN_i$  is an indicator taking the value 1 if firm  $i$  is foreign-owned and 0 otherwise.

After estimating regression (4) students can determine whether performance premia are significantly different across the three margins of global engagement—a phenomenon that can be rationalized by having different fixed costs of operating associated with each internationalization activity, as illustrated in [Helpman \(2006\)](#).

Alternatively, instructors could combine the activities described in Sections 4.1 and 4.2.1 into a scaffolded term portfolio project in which each group of students analyzes a differ-

ent country and submits each component of the tutorial and homework assignments in a staggered way.

#### **4.2.2 Coursework assignment**

One of the main objectives of the WBES surveys is to document the obstacles that private businesses face when operating in different countries. I have used this information in a coursework (take-home) assignment in a masters-level course in International Business Economics, in which groups of 3-4 students write a business intelligence report (with a 1,600 word limit) for a country that I assign them from WBES.

The assignment has two parts. In the first one, students provide a brief description of the country's overall trade performance and recent key developments in trade policy (e.g. whether the country has recently lowered import tariffs; measures that the country has taken to integrate local firms in global value chains; signature of free trade agreements, etc). The second part asks students to use WBES data to describe the main obstacles that inhibit firms' growth and to investigate to what extent these barriers differ across exporters and domestic firms. Appendix [D](#) provides the description of this assignment, the criteria used to evaluate the assessment and a group-audit form that provides students the opportunity to assess their contribution towards the group's submission.

Students do not need to use the raw WBES data I have discussed so far in the paper to carry out the analysis in the second part of the assignment. Clicking on the 'Economy Snapshots' in WBES website, students can scroll down and see the survey's questions related to obstacles to growth organized in different tabs, e.g. regulations and taxes, corruption, management practices and so on. Clicking on a given tab reveals the specific questions related to the topic (e.g. percent of firms identifying tax administration as a major constraint; percent of firms expected to give gifts in meetings with tax officials), which can in turn be broken down by different characteristics such as sector, size, location and, crucially for the purposes of the assignment, exporter type, which is subdivided in two groups: firms for

which (i) direct exports are 10% or more of sales and (ii) non-exporters. Any figures are reported for the country in question (e.g. Azerbaijan), the broad geographic group to which the country belongs to (Europe and Central Asia) and all countries. This feature of the WBES website can significantly reduce the barriers to use this resource for teaching when students do not have access or are not familiar with Stata to work with the surveys' raw data.

## 5 Conclusion

In this article I have described how to use the publicly available, firm-level data provided by the World Bank Enterprise Surveys (WBES) to reproduce stylized facts that characterize firm heterogeneity and its relationship with different dimensions of global engagement. To do so, I provide detailed instructions regarding how to access the data and how to calculate the different statistics reported by [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#) in their seminal paper. The paper discusses how this exercise can be embedded into several teaching activities, including a small-group teaching activity, homework and coursework assignments, and presents different alternatives that instructors can customize.

Reproducing the stylized facts that characterize firm heterogeneity and its relationship to exporting and other forms of global engagement helps to make the theoretical models of international trade more stimulating to students by strengthening their connection to the real world. At the same time, working with raw firm-level data helps students to develop data analysis skills and improving their understanding of how to connect the theoretical constructs in economic models to observable data. To conclude, I would like to reemphasize the richness of the data that WBES makes available for researchers, instructors, and students. These data can be effectively used in a similar manner to what this article suggests across a broad range of courses in development economics, industrial organization, labor and public economics.

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# Appendix

## A Tutorial Instructions: Stylized facts characterizing exporting at the firm-level

The objective of this tutorial is for you to reproduce some of the key stylized facts that characterize firms' export behavior, as documented by Bernard et al. (2007) for the United States and as reviewed in the lecture slides for this week. To do so you will use a survey of Colombian manufacturing firms conducted in 2017 by the World Bank Enterprise Surveys (WBES). You need to form groups of 3-4 students to carry out the in-class activities in the Tutorial.

### A.1 Preliminary tasks to be conducted before the tutorial

1. Create an account with the World Bank Enterprise Surveys and download the 2017 Stata dataset and questionnaire for Colombia. To do so, follow the steps below:
  - 1.1 Go to <http://www.enterprisesurveys.org>;
  - 1.2 Click on the 'Data' tab on the top of the page;
  - 1.3 Click on the 'Survey Datasets' tab;
  - 1.4 Click on the 'Firm-level Datasets for researchers' tab;
  - 1.5 Sign up for a new account on the right-hand side of the page.<sup>9</sup>. This last step requires you to use your university email account and provide a one-paragraph summary of the research project, for which you can use the description of the tutorial provided above. It is critical that you create an account and download the data by yourself, and that you abide by the confidentiality agreement regarding the use of the data (see <https://login.enterprisesurveys.org/content/sites/financeandprivatesector/en/terms.html>);
  - 1.6 Once your account has been approved, you can then search for Colombia in the 'Data by Economy' search bar
  - 1.7 Download the files:
    - Colombia-2017-full data.dta,
    - Colombia2017\_Enterprise\_Survey\_Documentation.zip.

The former is the Stata file and the latter zip folder has the survey's questionnaire;

2. Open the Colombia-2017-full data.dta in Stata. Browse the data and use the command 'describe' to see the variables included in the dataset, their definition, and how each variable in the Stata file maps to questions in the questionnaire. Note that the variable names that appear in red in the questionnaire pdf file are the same variable names in the Stata file.

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<sup>9</sup>The direct link to create a new account is <https://login.enterprisesurveys.org/content/sites/financeandprivatesector/en/signup.html>



3. How many observations are included in the dataset? Tabulate the variable ‘a0’ (questionnaire) to determine the number of firms in the survey that operate in the manufacturing sector.
4. Please review this week’s lecture slides on firms’ decision to export and read pages 105-112 of Bernard, A. B., J. B. Jensen, S. J. Redding and P. K. Schott (2007) “Firms in International Trade,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 21: 105–130.

## A.2 Activities to be carried out in class

Use the dataset Colombia-2017-full data.dta to compute the following statistics

5. Using information from Section L of the questionnaire, summarize the number of full-time employees in manufacturing firms. What is the average size of manufacturing firms? What are the 25, 75 and 90th percentiles of the size distribution of firms?
6. The number of firms operating in each manufacturing industry, as in column 1 of Table 2 in [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#).
7. Use information from Section D of the questionnaire to create a dummy variable called ‘export’ which equals 1 if a manufacturing firm exports some of its output and 0 otherwise. Tabulate the number of exporters in each manufacturing industry, as in column 2 of Table 2 in [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#). Which industries have the highest percentage of exporters?
8. Calculate the mean export intensity (i.e. the percentage of exporter firms’ sales accounted for by exports) across all firms and by manufacturing industries, as in column 3 of Table 2 in [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#).
9. Use a histogram to display the distribution of export intensity across all firms.
10. Create the following variables:
  - log employment
  - log skill intensity: log of (number of non-production workers/total employment)
  - log sales per worker
  - log of capital stock per worker: log of (net book value, i.e. value of assets after depreciation for machinery, vehicles, and equipment/total employment)
  - log of expenditure in research and development intensity: log (R&D expenditure/sales)

for each these variables estimate the following regressions by OLS:

$$\ln y_i = \alpha + \beta EXP_i + \varepsilon_i, \quad (\text{A.1})$$

where  $y_i$  denotes the outcome variable of interest (employment, skill intensity, etc.),  $EXP_i$  is the export dummy you constructed above, and  $\varepsilon_i$  is the error term. Interpret the estimated coefficients  $\hat{\alpha}$  and  $\hat{\beta}$ .

### A.3 Debrief and discussion

The following questions intend to help you discuss and analyze your results with your fellow group members. In the last 20 minutes of tutorial, each group will report their results to the rest of the class.

11. In light of the results your group obtained in question 5, do you think that the assumption that all firms in the same industry are identical fits well the data? What factors can explain the differences in firm size that you observe within a given industry?
12. Compare the results that group obtained in points 6-8 with Table 2 in [Bernard et al. \(2007\)](#). Does Colombia have comparative advantage in the same industries as the United States does? If not, what factors could potentially explain these differences? Which models that you have seen in the course (Ricardian, Heckscher-Ohlin, monopolistic competition) be useful to explain the difference in the number of exporters across industries in Colombia?
13. Do most exporters operate at a similar export intensity or are the significant differences in export intensity across Colombian exporters? What factors could explain that some firms do not sell domestically and instead export all their output?
14. Can we use the estimates of regression ([A.1](#)) to argue that exporting improves firms' performance or vice versa?

## B Variables that can be constructed with the raw data

Each survey provides information on a firm's main sector of operation, i.e. manufacturing, retail, and other services (a0), and within manufacturing, 3-digit ISIC Rev. 4 industry (20 industries) (a4b). Below I discuss how to construct variables related to firms' global engagement and performance indicators used in this paper to exemplify the type of empirical analysis that can be carried out with WBES surveys. As noted in Section 2, WBES surveys cover a broad range of topics, and therefore, the following list of variables is not exhaustive.

### B.1 Global engagement variables

- *Export status.* Question d.3 asks the percentage of a firm's sales that were (i) national sales (d3a); (ii) indirect exports (sold domestically to a third party that exports products) (d3b) and direct exports (d3c). The export indicator variable takes the value 1 if the percentage of a firm's sales accounted for either direct or indirect exports is strictly positive or zero otherwise. Students can explore whether the number of exporting firms changes significantly when restricting the definition to only include direct exporters and discuss potential reasons why some firms rely on intermediaries to sell abroad.
- *Export intensity.* Question d.3 is also used to create the export intensity variable for exporters. It is important to remember to create export intensity only for firms that

have strictly positive export sales, or, in other words, for those firms for which the export status indicator defined above is equal to 1.

- *Importer status.* Question d.12 asks the percentage of a firm’s material inputs or supplies that were (i) of domestic origin (d12a) and (ii) of foreign origin (d12b). An importer indicator takes the value 1 if the percentage of material inputs or supplies of foreign origin is strictly positive or zero otherwise.
- *Foreign ownership.* Question b.2 asks the percentage of the firm owned by (i) private domestic individuals, companies or organizations (b2a); (ii) private foreign individuals, companies or organizations (b2b); government or state (b2c); and other (b2d), which can be used to construct an indicator of foreign ownership based on whether the variable b2b is greater than 10% or 50%.

## B.2 Performance variables

- *Sales.* Question d.2. asks the value of the establishment’s total annual sales across all products and services it sold during last fiscal year.
- *Employment.* Question l.1. asks for the number of permanent, full-time individuals employed in the firm in the last fiscal year. Total permanent employment is further decomposed in production (l3a) and non-production, e.g. employees—i.e. those involved in the firm’s management, administration and sales (l3b).
- *Capital stock.* Question n.6a provides information on the net book value (i.e. value of assets after depreciation) for machinery, vehicles, and equipment in local currency units.
- *Expenditure in research & development (R&D).* Question h9 asks how much did an firm spent on R&D, either in-house or externally in local currency units.

## C Stata do-file

This appendix provides the Stata do-file used to carry out the analysis performed in the paper.

```
use Colombia-2017-full-data.dta, replace
* Keeping only manufacturing firms
keep if a0==1

* Determining how many manufacturing firms are there in the data
tab a0

*Firm heterogeneity:  examples
gen log10emp = log10(l1) twoway (kdensity log10emp if a4b==15) (kdensity log10emp
```

```

if a4b==17 | a4b==18 | a4b==19) (kdensity log10emp if a4b==24 | a4b==25)

*Indicators of global engagement:  exporting, importing, being foreign-owned
* Create a dummy variable called 'export' = 1 if an establishment exports some
of its output (directly or indirectly) and 0 otherwise

gen pctexp = d3b + d3c
gen export=.
replace export=0
replace export=1 if pctexp>0

* Create a dummy variable called 'import' = 1 if an establishment imports some
of its inputs and 0 otherwise
gen import=.
replace import=1 if d12b>0 & d12b~=.
replace import=0 if d12b==0 & d12b~=-9

* Create a dummy variable called 'foreign' = 1 if the % of establishment owned
by foreigners is at least 10% and 0 otherwise
gen b2 = b2a + b2b + b2c + b2d
gen foreign=.
replace foreign=1 if b2b>=10
replace foreign=0 if b2b<10 & b2~=.

tab export
tab import
tab foreign

* Calculate observations per industry
egen obsind = count(id), by(a4b)

* plotting incidence of exporting, importing and being foreign-owned in sectors
with more than 20 establishments:
graph hbar (mean) export import foreign if obsind>=20, over(a4b)

* Plotting export intensity distribution:
hist pctexp if pctexp>0, bin(10) frac xtitle(export intensity)

* Constructing performance indicators:
* log employment
gen logemp = log(l1)

* log skill-intensity (share of permanent non-production workers in total permanent
workers)
gen skillint = l3b/(l3a + l3b)

```

```

replace skillint=. if skillint<0 | skillint>1
gen logskillint = log(skillint)

* log sales
gen logsales = log(d2)
* log sales per worker
gen salespw = d2/l1
replace salespw=. if salespw<0
gen logsales_pw = log(d2/l1)

* log capital per worker
gen kpw = n6a/l1
gen logk_pw = log(kpw)

* log R&D expenditure/sales
gen rd = h9
replace rd=. if rd<0
gen logrd = log(rd)

* export regressions
reg logemp export,r
reg logsales export, r
reg logsales_pw export,r
reg logk_pw export,r
reg logskillint export,r
reg logrd export,r

* import regressions
reg logemp import,r
reg logsales import, r
reg logsales_pw import,r
reg logk_pw import,r
reg logskillint import,r
reg logrd import,r

* foreign-owned regressions
reg logemp foreign,r
reg logsales foreign, r
reg logsales_pw foreign,r
reg logk_pw foreign,r
reg logskillint foreign,r
reg logrd foreign,r

```

## D Coursework Assignment

The objective of this coursework (worth 50% of the course's mark) is for you to write a business intelligence report (1,600 words maximum) for a country that I will assign you. This assessment is designed as a group assessment because, in the real world, these types of reports are the outcome of the collaboration of a team of economists, that by sharing ideas, thoughts, views and opinions make the final output richer and more creative than if it was written by a single individual.

My expectation is that you will work together on the report by actively collaborating, sharing the work and consulting each other on a regular basis. Any concern about the group's ability to work together should be communicated as soon as possible to me.

The report should be structured in two sections:

1. **Introduction** (not more than 500 words): brief description of the country's overall trade performance, main exports and trade partners and a succinct summary of key recent developments in the country's trade policy (e.g. whether the country has recently lowered import tariffs; measures that the country has taken to integrate local firms in global value chains; signature of free trade agreements, etc). Which topics are more relevant depends on the country that you are analysing. Keep in mind that the space devoted to this section is limited, so you need to choose carefully what topics merit discussion.
2. **Business environment**: This section should discuss the main obstacles to growth experienced by private firms in the country under analysis using data obtained from the World Bank's Enterprise Surveys ([www.enterprisesurveys.org](http://www.enterprisesurveys.org)). Discuss how these obstacles affect exporting and non-exporting firms in a different way. It is crucial that the figures you report to support your analysis are benchmarked against the same figures for the region to which the country belongs, e.g. if the country you are analysing is Greece, its figures should be compared with those for the Europe & Central Asia region. The Enterprise Surveys website provides this information automatically.

The United States International Trade Administration produces country commercial guides (<https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides>) that, while covering a broader range of topics, provide very similar information to what your report should contain.

The World Bank and the World Trade Organisation provide useful information on a country's trade policy and business environment:

- World Integrated Trade Solutions (<https://wits.worldbank.org/>)
- Trade Policy Review gateway ([https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/tpr\\_e/tpr\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tpr_e/tpr_e.htm))

you should feel free to use information from other sources in writing your report.

### D.1 Assessment criteria

Your report will be assessed against the following criteria:

1. **Analysis and Application [40%]:** Is there evidence that the report provides an insightful analysis of the country's trade policy and business environment? Where appropriate, is there evidence of references to the theories and empirical evidence discussed in the module?
2. **Research effort [40%]:** Does the report show evidence that you have collectively familiarized yourselves with the facts for the country you are analysing, correctly identified salient patterns in the data, and offered thoughtful and plausible explanations for them? Is there evidence of independent research into the sources of information and insight relevant to write the report? Does the report avoid mistakes—e.g. factually untrue statements and logical errors?
3. **Communication and Structure [20%]:** Is the report well presented, clear written and accessible? Is it structured in a logical way which makes it easy to follow its findings? Is there fluency between the different arguments made in the report and consistency in the quality of graphs, tables, writing and style? Does it use proper referencing, diagrams labelled and integrated, correct grammar and spelling, spacing and visual appeal etc.?

## D.2 Instructions

- You need to choose a work group of no more than 3 people.
- You have three weeks to work on this project.
- I will assign you the country that you will analyse for the coursework. I will communicate this via email.
- It is possible for you to work on your own rather than with a group. I have a preference for you to work in a group because sharing ideas, thoughts, views, opinions helps to make your work richer and more creative.
- If you do not have a group and would like to be part of one, please let me know, and I will allocate you to a group.
- Only one member of the group will submit the project and the teamwork audit form filled out. We will discuss how this form works in the lecture. Please list the Full Name and ID number of each member of the group on the first page of your report.
- Write your report using font size 11 and submit your coursework as a word or pdf file.
- Do not write your report using bullet points.
- If you include graphs and tables in your report make sure that you list the source of the data presented and provide a description of the variables used in the table/graph in the table/graph footnote.

- Make sure that, in order to avoid possible late submissions, you start uploading your file well in advance of the deadline and, possibly, no later than one hour before the deadline. Be aware of the size of your file and of the time it can take to upload the file, in particular if your internet connection is not very fast.
- Remember that if you are experiencing any technical problems during the upload of your file you should also email your file to the course officers before the submission deadline.

### D.3 Referencing

Make sure that you include a bibliography at the end of your coursework, listing all books, articles, documents, and websites that you used. The bibliography does not add to your word count. The following are examples of how you should reference your sources of information. Failure to mention or acknowledge your sources of information can lead to the accusation of plagiarism.

### D.4 Figures

- All figures should be clearly labelled, include a title and explicit labels for graphs' axes.
- All figures should include a footnote stating the precise source of the data.
- Any Table or Figure you present must be sufficiently clear, well-labelled, and described by its legend to be understood by your intended audience without reading the results section, i.e. it must be able to stand alone and be interpretable.
- Figures and Tables are numbered independently, in the sequence in which you refer to them in the text, starting with Figure 1 and Table 1.
- Every Figure and Table included in the paper must be referred to from the text.

### D.5 Teamwork Audit Form

Marking teamwork can be difficult. Awarding the same mark to each student is not a problem if everyone contributes equally to a team project; but if for any reason some students contribute more than others it can have the effect of penalizing students who do more work and in extreme situations can reward a student who did nothing at all. This self-assessment method of differential marking is designed to make assessment fairer by awarding you a mark which reflects the standard of the project and the contribution of each student.

How does this work? It's important that you complete the first column allocating tasks between you before you start work so that each member of the team is clear what they are expected to do. At the end of the project you should meet again try to reach an agreement you are all happy with and complete and sign off this form. If for any reason, one or more of you is unhappy with the agreement you should put a mark in the disagreement box next to your name and submit the form before the deadline.



What if we cannot agree on a mark? We will arrange a meeting at which I will mediate an agreement between you. You will be asked to bring evidence of your contribution.

What impact will this form have on my mark? You can calculate the total number of marks awarded between your group by multiplying the mark you are awarded by the number of students in your group. For example, if 3 students worked on a project which was awarded a mark of 65 you would have  $65 \times 3 = 195$  marks to share between you. If the team agrees that they all contributed equally then you all get the same mark:  $195 \div 3 = 65$ .

In this example, however, the students agreed that one student (A) had contributed more than the other two (B and C), so they agreed to allocate 36% of the mark to the student A, and 32% to students B and C. As a result, the student A achieved a distinction mark, while B and C only achieved merit ones.

Table D.1: Example—teamwork mark calculation

Agreed contribution	Student A 36%	Student B 32%	Student C 32%
Mark awarded	$(0.36 \times 195)$ <b>70</b>	$(0.32 \times 195)$ <b>62</b>	$(0.32 \times 195)$ <b>62</b>

**Small differences in the allocation of agreed contributions can have a substantial impact on individual marks. Please keep this in mind!**

What if unforeseen circumstance outside my control impact on my ability to contribute to the team? First and foremost, notify your teammates and the module leader so as to minimize the impact on the group work. You should then put in a claim for extenuating circumstances through the usual channels no later than seven days after the deadline. If your application is successful you may be assessed separately from the rest of the team.