Measuring Illicit Financial Flows
The Economic Elements

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Categories of activities that may generate IFFs

Source: UNCTAD and UNODC
Illicit tax and commercial IFFs to conceal revenues and reduce tax burden:

- **Illegal tax and commercial IFFs**
  - Examples: Tariff, duty and revenue offences, tax evasion, competition offences and market manipulation
  - Often part of the non-observed, hidden or shadow economy.

- **IFFs related to aggressive tax avoidance**
  - Examples: Hiding profits or assets via the manipulation of transfer pricing, strategic location of debt and intellectual property, tax treaty shopping and the use of hybrid instruments and entities.
  - Can be part of legal business transactions. Only the illicit part of the cross-border flows belongs within the scope of IFFs.
Illegal v illicit

- While tax avoidance is legal, aggressive tax avoidance can be detrimental to sustainable development and is, therefore, included in the SDG indicator as an IFF.

- Statistics cannot be based on legality as national tax laws differ and audits are carried out retrospectively. Thus, the indicator is based on activities that may generate IFFs.

- As the boundary between legal, illicit, and illegal tax practices may be unclear, a continuum of activities from legal tax planning to illegal tax evasion can be used.

**Boundaries of aggressive tax planning**

- Using tax provisions in the spirit of the law
- Rearrange international flow to avoid repatriation taxes
- Reallocate the tax base to a lower-tax country
- Reduce the base via a double deduction or double non-taxation
- Illegal measures, e.g. non-disclosure of income

Statistical Framework for Measuring IFFs

Key features:

- **Country-Level:** Allows to measure IFFs at the level of countries (in line with SDG indicator framework)

- **Comprehensive:** Encompasses all types of illicit activities that cause IFFs

- **Compatible:** Aligned to established concepts and standards from economics and accounting. Liaising with new ‘Joint Informal Economy Task Force’ hosted by IMF to ensure consistency.
Main Activities

- UNCTAD/UNODC Task Force on the statistical measurement of illicit financial flows is developing methodological guidance for countries.

- Involvement of national statistical offices is critical as coordinators of the national statistical systems - data needed to measure IFFs are scattered across many organisations.

- Latin America IFF project led by UNODC in cooperation with UNODC-INEGI Centre of Excellence for Statistical Information;

- Africa IFF project led by UNECA & UNCTAD

- Asia IFF project led by UNESCAP with UNCTAD/UNODC
Next Steps

• Publication of UNCTAD-UNODC Conceptual Framework


• Development of methodological guidelines on IFFs from illicit markets

• Sharing of results from pilot studies in Latin America

• Development of methodological guidelines on IFFs relating to tax and commercial practices

• Sharing of results from pilot studies in Africa and Asia
Thank you