

Technical Note

U.S. International Transactions, Fourth Quarter and Year 2021

March 24, 2022

This technical note provides background information about the estimation methods the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) uses to produce the estimates presented in the U.S. International Transactions Accounts news release. The complete set of estimates for the fourth quarter, as well as a brief summary of “highlights,” is available on [BEA's website](#).

COVID-19 impact on fourth-quarter U.S. international transactions

Nearly all major categories of current-account transactions increased in the fourth quarter of 2021, the sixth consecutive quarter of broad-based growth following notable COVID-19-related declines in the second quarter of 2020. Despite eased travel restrictions both in the United States and abroad, travel remained below pre-pandemic levels in the fourth quarter. The full economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be quantified in the statistics because the impacts are generally embedded in source data and cannot be separately identified.

Impact on estimation methods

For international transactions categories based on source data that are lagged, including services categories based on BEA’s quarterly surveys of financial, insurance, and other selected services and intellectual property transactions, BEA generally estimates the current quarter using related indicator series and historical trends. To more accurately measure fourth-quarter transactions, given the impact of COVID-19, BEA incorporated early reporting on the Quarterly Survey of Transactions in Selected Services and Intellectual Property with Foreign Persons (BE–125) and the Quarterly Survey of Financial Services Transactions Between U.S. Financial Services Providers and Foreign Persons (BE–185). Because survey respondents have more time to file for the last quarter of their fiscal year, early response rates are traditionally lower for the fourth quarter of the calendar year compared to other quarters. Reported data for the fourth quarter were available for 41 percent of BE–125 reporters and for 39 percent of BE–185 reporters that had reported for the third quarter of 2021 (revised), compared with an average availability of 72 percent of BE–125 and 79 percent of BE–185 early reporter data during the first three quarters of 2021. BEA used its standard methods to estimate data for companies that had not yet reported.

More complete source data will be incorporated following the schedule described under “Release and update cycle” in the “Additional Information” section of each international transactions news release.