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## Outline of a project to promote the use and the convergence of international quality assurance frameworks

Prepared by Eurostat

### 1. Introduction

At its 5<sup>th</sup> meeting in New York on 28 February 2005, the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities discussed the idea of moving towards the development of a *quality assurance framework for international and supra-national organisations*<sup>1</sup> and asked Eurostat to coordinate the preparation of a paper on this issue. This document is the response to that request. It describes the scope and objectives of a project which should promote the use and convergence of international quality frameworks. The paper starts from an analysis of the issues at stake and suggests an approach. A brief analysis of the cost and benefits of what is considered is outlined and some potential risks are listed.

### 2. Purpose

The general objective of the project is primarily to promote the use of “*Quality Assurance Frameworks*” within international organisations and second, the coherence of quality frameworks used by different international organisations. More specifically, it should contribute to:

- foster the use of quality approaches by international organisations;
- improve transparency and clarity on the links between the different existing quality approaches, their respective main emphasises and possible inconsistencies;
- streamline quality reporting requirements between producers of statistics;
- harmonise the formats used for informing users on the quality of statistics;
- define a common set of minimum quality requirements for official statistics;
- share information on good practices, guidelines and quality related information.

### 3. Problem statement

The project should be seen as a response to the following concerns.

- *Lack of use of quality assurance frameworks in most international organisations.* The experience of several statistical offices demonstrates the usefulness of formalised quality framework. So far, only few international organisations have developed and used these

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth indicated as « international organisations »

frameworks to improve the quality of their internal production processes for collecting, processing and disseminating statistical data.

- *Existence of different quality frameworks and benchmarking activities at the international level.* International organisations have developed different (albeit overlapping) frameworks such as the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, the European Code of Practice, FAO ABCDQ and the IMF DQAF. This may lead to different kinds of evaluation. There are needs for further harmonisation efforts in order to minimise reporting burden of national institutions, facilitate exchange of information between international organisations and make efficient use of existing tools for collecting information.
- *Existence of different formats to inform the users on the quality of statistics.* Different organisations have proposed different definitions of quality and different means and templates for informing users on the quality of the statistics. This could create confusion for the users and makes more difficult the sharing of metadata on quality.
- *Desirability to agree, as far as possible, on a common set of minimum quality requirements to authorise some common labelling of official statistics and help the users to identify statistics elaborated according to the agreed quality framework.* At European level, Eurostat is launching an initiative which could lead to a kind of label for official statistics produced in the European Statistical System; this cannot be done in isolation and other institutions should be associated (for example, ECB has expressed strong interest in this topic). Some methodological work has already been done on the same theme at the UNECE. Similarly within the context of its new FAOSTAT system, FAO will also be launching a new quality framework and reporting scheme as part of its statistical database in 2006.
- *Sharing of information on good practices.* Several international organisations are working on the collection and dissemination of current best methods, minimum standards, and best practices. Rationalisation of the efforts, economy of scale seems to be possible by a better coordination of the activities.

#### **4. Scope of the project**

This project covers primarily the frameworks for collection, compilation and dissemination of statistics by international organisations. However, most of the time, these compilations are based on primary data collected by national statistical institutes, and therefore, the needs of these institutions should also be taken into account.

Issues related to the promotion and implementation of quality assurance frameworks should be covered as well.

#### **5. Approach**

To meet the concerns expressed above, it is proposed to launch the following actions.

### *5.1 Quality frameworks*

Mapping of existing quality frameworks looking at their structure, principles and quality dimensions - institutional settings; statistical processes; statistical outputs – and their different uses (basis for defining protocols; framework for collecting indicators). This work should build on the previous carried out harmonisation efforts between IMF and Eurostat frameworks; take into account the recent developments in the international statistical systems; and link up with the work, which is underway in another context within CCSA, on how principles of statistics should apply to international organisations.

The outcome should lead to a common framework or a set of articulated frameworks.

Recommendations for the implementation and use of assurance frameworks within international organisations should also be prepared.

### *5.2 Systems for reviews*

Inventory of the different mechanisms in place for the evaluation of statistical systems, like peer-reviews, self-assessments, and reviews by external parties. This should lead to common review processes where possible, consistent and shared assessments of institutions, and reusability of exiting information by different organisations. The costs for all parties involved in review processes should be assessed against the expected outcomes in terms of quality improvements and the importance of the statistics area.

### *5.3 Quality reporting*

Inventory of the different tools and practices for collecting quality metadata from the data providers (e.g. statistical institutes) – quality aspects covered, frequency, terminology used etc. This should lead to a common structure for quality reporting and should minimise reporting burden.

Informing users on the quality of statistics in a more uniform way through common templates, structures, improving availability, accessibility of quality information for comparisons across countries. This should lead to more harmonised and hopefully better documentation of quality for users.

### *5.4 Labelling of statistical information*

Discussion on different approaches with regard to minimum quality requirements/ standards feeding a labelling process for official statistics. This should lead to agreed principles for the process towards a kind of label for official statistics.

### *5.5 Sharing of guidelines, best practices etc.*

Inventory and share of information on good practices: collecting best practices, listing existing documents, linking websites. This should improve the access to documents related to quality and create economy of scale.

## 5.6 Q2006

Discussion of the content of the project with all stakeholders. The next Q- conference on quality in statistics is planned for 24-26 April in Cardiff, Wales. Following the example of the meeting held in Wiesbaden in 2004, a satellite meeting on quality in statistics for international organisations will be foreseen. This will give maximum visibility to the project and to enrich the discussion of the work in the project. Back to back to the conference, a meeting with the project team could be arranged.

## 6. Action Required

A project team has been set up in July 2005 with the main stakeholders and this outline of the project will be presented and discussed at the next CCSA meeting in Rome, September 12-14, 2005.

The CCSA will be asked to agree on the approach outlined and as well on the proposed timetable.

## 7. Deliverables and Key Milestones

<b>Id</b>	<b>Task description</b>	<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Deadline</b>	<b>Responsible</b>
D1	Preparation of a first ex-ante evaluation of the project	Document	June 2005	Eurostat
T1	Creation of a project team with other international organisations	Project team	July 2005	Eurostat
D2	Finalisation of document outlining the project	Document	21 August 2005	Project team
T2	Presentation of the project proposal to the CCSA	CCSA meeting	12-14 September 2005	Eurostat
D3	First progress report	Document	31 January 2006	Project team
T3	Presentation of the 1 <sup>st</sup> progress report to the CCSA	CCSA meeting	6 March 2006	Eurostat
D4	Second progress report	Document	April 2006	Project team
T4	Organisation of a satellite meeting to the Q2006 conference on quality frameworks for international organisations	Meeting	27-28 April 2006. (Q2006 is 24-26 April)	UNSD, Eurostat
T5	Meeting of the project team at Q2006	Meeting	24-26 April 2006	Eurostat
D5	Third progress report and presentation to the CCSA	Document	September 2006	Project team

D6	Draft final report	Document	April 2007	Project team
T6	Consultation procedure on the draft final report	Stakeholder consultation	June 2007	Eurostat
D7	Final report	Document	September 2007	Project team

The tasks and deliverables will have to be specified in more detail once the project is underway, but the project should aim at providing the following outputs.

- Proposal for a common Quality framework (or a set of articulated frameworks).
- Recommendation for the implementation of quality assurance frameworks for international statistics.
- Common definition of quality.
- Common structure for quality reporting for end users.
- Bilateral exchanges on specific topics (review process for instance, or “Official Statistics” labelling).
- The set-up of a system for sharing information (best practices etc.).
- Promotion and implementation strategy.

## 8. Project progress indicators

- First outline of the project presented to the CCSA, 12-14 September 2005.
- Satellite meeting organised to the Q2006 conference.
- Three progress reports
- Stakeholder consultation
- Final report of the project

## 9. Resources and Lead Times

The project basically involves all international organisations collecting and/or compiling statistics. When defining the project in more details the responsibility and resources needed for each task should be specified as well. A rough estimate is that each member of the task-team is expected to allocate two weeks full time employee during the project. The Eurostat resources needed is estimated to two months full time employee.

## 10. Impact Assessment – stakeholder analysis

- **Project team** both with regard to contributing to the project and at the same time being one of its major users. This interdependence should guide all project phases.
- **International Organisations** as designers, implementers or users of quality frameworks; for improving the assessment of the output quality; for the dissemination of information on the

quality of the statistics. They will have to cooperate in order to exploit synergies and avoid duplication of existing work undertaken.

- **National Statistical Institutes** and National Central Banks as primary data providers; implementing quality frameworks; reporting on quality; involved in review processes; and also sometimes having leadership on quality issues (for benchmarking purposes).
- **Users of Statistics** to be informed about the process and the results through the CCSA website, Q2006 and to perceive the results through the harmonisation of quality metadata.

## 11. Project Environment

Given its overarching nature, the project is linked to many activities going on in international organisations and at country level, like the implementation of the European Code of Practice, the recommendations of the EU Leadership Group (LEG) on Quality, development of Protocols, SDMX and SODI projects, the IMF country reviews, the OECD quality reviews etc. To explore and try to map all these activities and relations should form part of the project deliverables.

## 12. Cost-Benefit Analysis

The investment needed for trying to promote the converge of existing quality frameworks, to harmonise quality reporting, to coordinate reviewing of statistical activities, and to share best practices for production of statistics, can be considered fairly low. Benefits would include:

- Synergies within the “world wide” statistical systems.
- Positive perception of international organisations playing a leading role in this area.
- Input for prioritisation of statistical activities.

The alternative would be to continue the existing “decentralised” approaches, but then the costs in terms of double reporting burden for the statistical institutes and the use of different templates and terminology for informing users on the quality of statistics have to be estimated.

## 13. Risk Analysis

The main risks of the project include:

- **Underestimation of resources needed** for carrying out the project tasks and for implementing the project results.
- **Lack of cooperation by data providers.** This could lead to results which will not be optimal for reducing reporting burden and improving quality of statistics by sharing best practices.
- **Low sense of ownership** when building overarching frameworks.

## 14. Project Organisation

#### *14.1 Project sponsor*

The project sponsor is the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA).

#### *14.2 Project Manager*

The project manager is Håkan Linden, Eurostat.

#### *14.3 Reporting Structure*

- First reporting to the CCSA meeting 12-14 September 2005 in Rome.
- Second report to the CCSA meeting 6 March 2006 in New York.
- Third progress report, September 2006.
- Consultation procedure of the draft final report to the main stakeholders, June 2007.

#### *14.4 Project Team*

It is proposed to have a working-team consisting of Eurostat, ECB, IMF, OECD, UNECE, ILO and FAO, and a wider network group covering all the organisations participating at the CCSA meetings giving feed-back on the progress of the work.

#### *14.5 Project Documentation*

The project documentation will be available through the UNSD CCSA website.