

Note on the project on the use and convergence of international quality assurance frameworks

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1. Introduction

This note provides a summary of the developments in the project on the use and convergence of international quality assurance frameworks since the 8th meeting of the Committee on the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) in Montreal, September 4-5 2006, during which the Committee took note of document SA/2006/9, "Report of the task team on the use and convergence of international quality assurance frameworks" with the proposed Action Plan for the second phase of the project.

The CCSA is asked to

- *take note of this progress report, and*
- *give its opinion on the issue addressed in part B on sharing information on peer reviews.*

PART A. Report of work in the project

2. Developments since the last CCSA meeting

Following the agreement of the CCSA at its September 2006 meeting the focus of the work has been on data quality management. De facto, the data quality management is an important part of the overall quality management (or quality management system) in a statistical organisation (or the department of an organisation) compiling statistics. However, its scope is limited to the statistical products and the processes leading to their production.

2.1 Checklist for Quality Assurance of Statistics

A comprehensive self assessment checklist designed to facilitate the implementation of the Principles Governing International Statistical Activities (in particular Principles 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7) was sent out by Eurostat on 25 October 2006 for comments by the task team. The main objective of the Checklist is to support managers in having a full picture on the output quality and the underlying statistical production processes. It should be seen as a starting point for systematic quality assurance activities since it provides an

encompassing framework to quality evaluation and for the identification of good practices for benchmarking purposes or improvement actions.

A revised version taking into account the constructive comments from the task team members (ECB, IMF, OECD, ILO and FAO) are about to be finalised. This version will emphasise the modular approach which makes it possible to use parts of the Checklist depending on the size and needs of a specific statistical activity.

2.2 Guidelines for quality assurance frameworks

The guidelines for implementing quality assurance frameworks for international organisations are under development. They will cover the scope and uses of quality assurance frameworks; the impact on data quality; costs and benefits; relationships between frameworks; implementation experiences; monitoring and evaluation; and how to work with quality tools in order to facilitate a systematic implementation of quality assessment in international or supranational organisations.

A draft version of the guidelines is expected to be circulated in April to the task-team members.

2.3 Analyses of tools and formats in place for collecting metadata on quality from the countries

This activity has mainly been driven through the Eurostat SODI (SDMX Open Data Interchange) project which focuses on the interoperability of statistics for collecting and disseminating short-term statistics, especially in the domains of the Principal European Economic Indicators (PEEI), with the overall objective of increasing timeliness and accessibility. Eurostat has set up a task force with nine member countries and Norway, where a specific action is launched on the exchange and sharing of reference metadata using SDMX technical standards and content guidelines. The main purpose of this action is to enable users and metadata producers to access, analyse and re-use statistical metadata originated from multiple sources, standardising the set of concepts to be used (which include quality assessment elements) and using standard protocols for transferring the information. The existing situation is being analysed for those countries that have "good practices" on metadata systems and for those who might need a specific support in terms of "open source" tools and training.

2.4 Labelling of information

At the September meeting of the CCSA there was a consensus that issues of quality labelling at this stage would not cover broader areas of statistical activities such as the development of standards. However, it should be noted that several national statistical institutes are working towards "labelling" of statistics or have launched certification processes according to ISO standards. Eurostat will also continue its work towards a process for labelling of its statistical outputs.

2.5 Systems for reviews

Following the observations of the CCSA during its conference on Data Quality in April 2006 that "information from country reviews should be shared among international organisations and that a calendar covering upcoming reviews could be hosted by an international organisation taking into account legal constraints", Eurostat, in January

2007 launched a discussion about a common website for quality assessments which would contain contributions by all international organisations with planned, undertaken and published reviews. The task-team members were asked to reflect upon three options on sharing information about (peer) reviews: (1) central overview of (peer) reviews presented per country; (2) Central overview of (peer) reviews presented per international organisation; and (3) hyperlinks on the websites of international organisations. In brief, the preferred option among the task team members was the first one. They also suggested modifications related to legal constraints, technical implementation aspects, and scope and content of sharing information about reviews. These issues are further described in part B of this note and the CCSA is asked to give its opinion on the utility and scope of sharing information on reviews.

3. Next steps

As next steps implementing the action plan we would propose the following:

- Final version of the checklist for quality assurance of statistics compiled by international or supra-national organisations. Coordinator is Eurostat and the target date set to March 2007 for the final version.
- Draft version of the guidelines for implementing quality assurance frameworks. Coordinator is Eurostat and revised target date set to April 2007 for the draft version to be circulated among the task-team.
- To launch the activity on the analyses of the SDDS like templates used by the international or supranational organisations for informing the users on the quality. Coordinators are Eurostat and ECB.
- To launch the activity on the study of the burden on member countries for reporting on the quality of the data to international organisations. Coordinators are Eurostat and IMF.
- First results from the analyses of the existing situation in countries with respect to metadata systems and formats in place, and the exchange and sharing of reference metadata. Coordinator is Eurostat and the target date is set to June 2007.
- To launch the activity on sharing best practices for international organisations. Coordinator is UNSD.

PART B. Report on the outcome of the consultation on a platform for sharing information about reviews

This action originates from the idea of creating a common website on peer reviews in order to contribute to the reduction of burden put on the statistical authorities which could be seen as a first step towards coordination of the peer reviews among international organisations.

In January 2007 Eurostat launched a discussion about a common website for quality assessments which would contain contributions by all international organisations with planned, undertaken and published reviews. The task team was asked to reflect upon the proposal including three options on sharing information on peer reviews and to comment on their preferences until the 1st of February.

The options were the following:

1. **Central overview of peer reviews presented per country** - information on peer reviews would be presented per country on the website of the Statistics Division of the UN under the section dedicated to the CCSA: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/workpartner_ccsa.htm¹. The Statistics Division of the UN, hosting the site on the peer reviews, would have to receive and update information provided by international organisations on all planned, implemented and published peer reviews.
2. **Central overview of peer reviews presented per international organisation** - the same as Option 1, the only difference is that information on peer reviews would be presented per international organisation.
3. **Hyperlinks on the websites of international organisations** - all international organisations carrying out peer reviews would dedicate sites for their peer reviews, exchange information about these sites and place hyperlinks of the websites of the other organisations on their own websites.

In February responses from six international organisations were received (IMF, OECD, UNECE, ILO, ECB and FAO).

All the organisations which replied prefer the **Option 1** (except for ECB which didn't have comments as it doesn't carry out peer reviews). The organisations also suggested some modifications:

- **Legal constraints.** IMF noted it faces legal restrictions regarding publishing information about planned and undertaken peer reviews and stressed that it can only publish information about the peer reviews which have already been carried out. FAO do often undertake assessments of national agricultural statistical systems (or parts of them) at the invitation of a country when a particular area has been identified by the country where technical assistance is being requested and, generally, these assessments are kept confidential.

¹ Alternatively information can be presented in the section dedicated to Country Profiles of Statistical Systems: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/nsoprofiles/default.aspx>, where the information about the peer reviews could be integrated into the profiles of the countries.

- **Technical implementation/resources.** OECD suggested that possibility to use SDMX or, alternatively, system of remote updating (used for the UNECE Database on International Statistical Activities for implementing the option should be explored. IMF noted it would be able to provide the CCSA with the hyperlinks on its peer reviews, but it wouldn't be in a position to contribute its own resources to develop and maintain the portal.
- **Changing terms.** OECD proposed to change the term "peer reviews" into "quality reviews/assessments" as IMF Data ROSC reviews are not "peer reviews", but should however be presented on a common website of the reviews.
- **Other remarks:** ILO proposed to present information about the peer reviews under section "Country profiles" (and not under CCSA section) of the website of the Statistics Division of the UN. ILO also stressed that regular update of information about the peer reviews carried out by relevant international organisations should be assured. Moreover, UNECE noted that the common site could act as incentive for countries to ask for assessments at regular intervals, so as to see progress documented regularly. UNECE also proposed that some rules about the management of the site, such as concerning country requests to withdraw out-dated assessments from the site should be created. According to UNECE, the assessments shouldn't be withdrawn; they should all be kept on the website indicating clearly the year of assessment. OECD added that the table with information on peer reviews should be complemented with a graph about statistical domains covered by the peer reviews. ILO suggested that contact persons in the respective international organisations should be mentioned for further information.

Option 3 was mentioned by IMF as its second preference. According to IMF, the option also needs some modifications as IMF can not dedicate a site solely to the peer reviews on data quality (data ROSC reports are posted together with assessments of standards of other areas on IMF's website.) IMF noted it could, however, provide hyperlinks to other organisations on its current Data Quality Reference Site.

For the opinion of the CCSA:

CCSA is asked to give its opinion on the following:

- What is the scope of sharing information on peer reviews on a common website? Should the common website cover information only about peer reviews (which are mainly produced by Eurostat and IMF) or reviews of broader spectrum - quality reviews/assessments? If the latter, which organisations carry out such quality reviews/assessments and could be interested to contribute for the common website?
- What kind of information about the peer reviews do international organisations need? Is it useful to have information only about the peer

reviews which have been carried out or also about the ones which are planned and undertaken?

Depending on the answers to the raised questions above the following options could be chosen:

Option 1 "Central overview of the peer reviews presented per country", maintained by the Statistics Division of the UN could be chosen if CCSA decides that a common site should cover quality reviews/assessments carried out by various international organisations. If after the discussion of the CCSA it becomes clear that no other quality reviews/assessments than the ones carried out by Eurostat and IMF could be presented on the common website, the more suitable option is the next option.

Option 3, exchanging information among international organisations on hyperlinks referring to the sites on peer reviews. It wouldn't be reasonable to invest into developing a common website of reviews which would basically cover only information about planned, undertaken and published Eurostat's peer reviews and only those IMF reviews which have already been carried out. I.e., the value added of creating a common website in this case compared to already existing dedicated sites by individual organisations is doubtful.