



**Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities**  
**Conference on Data Quality for International Organizations**  
**Rome, Italy, 7 and 8 July 2008**



Prepared by UNSD

## **I. Introduction**

The Conference on Data Quality for International Organizations, organized by Eurostat and UNSD on behalf of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA) and hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, took place from 7 to 8 July 2008 at FAO Headquarters in Rome, Italy.

The conference was attended by 40 participants from 15 international or supra-national organizations. In the concluding Roundtable discussion, the participants were joined by Mr. Peter Hackl, Director General of Statistik Austria.

This conference was the third meeting of the CCSA entirely dedicated to data quality. It preceded the European Conference on Quality in Official Statistics – Q2008, which was held from 9 to 11 July 2008, also in Rome.

The conference was opened by Mr. Pieter Everaers from Eurostat, who welcomed the participants and then introduced Mr. Hafez Ghanem, Assistant Director-General of the Economic and Social Department of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, who gave the welcome address. Mr. Ghanem stressed the usefulness of conferences such as this one in maintaining the focus of quality in statistics, and shared two important lessons the FAO team learned recently from the FAOSTAT2 project: (i) the importance of keeping users both informed about proposed changes to methodology and outputs and involved in the decision-making process in order to ensure that the changes actually represent quality improvements to the main stakeholders, and (ii) the need for capacity building at the country level to help countries improve the quality of their statistics.

Mr. Everaers then reviewed the terms of reference of the conference and noted how the current conference sessions, as presented in the programme, would cover the various themes.

The conference sessions were structured to cover the following five main themes: (i) Quality assessment and the use of checklists and user surveys; collection of quality metadata; dissemination of quality information; training in quality management; (ii) International cooperation on quality management – principles, harmonization of frameworks, peer reviews, support of countries; (iii) Dissemination platforms to make data more accessible and interpretable; (iv) Best practices in imputation and estimation; (v) Roundtable: "The implications for data quality of making data internationally comparable - or respecting national, but not comparable sources". A total of 14 presentations were made.

The main issues and conclusions of the conference are described in the next section, after which the programme and the list of participants are included. More detailed information on the conference, as well

as the papers presented during it, can be found on the conference website:  
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/acsub/CDQIO-2008.htm>.

## **II. Main points and conclusions**

### **1. Quality assessment and the use of checklists and user surveys; collection of quality metadata; dissemination of quality information; training in quality management**

It is evident that the “quality language” has very much evolved since the first two CCSA conferences on data quality for international organizations, and that there is convergence in quality dimensions, concepts, methods and tools among the different international organizations. While the established tools and methods for quality assessment are useful and are working well, nevertheless these instruments are continually being enhanced and adjusted to make them more effective as more experience is gained with their use. Issues discussed in this context were (i) the need for quality commitment at the senior level; (ii) the need to link quality assessments with the regular programme monitoring and management exercises; (iii) the increasing need to focus on quality communication; and (iv) the usefulness of establishing a standard template for member countries to apply when compiling a metadata database, so that such a comparable database can be an effective tool for statistical quality assessment and improvement. With respect to user surveys, it was observed that all agencies experience low response rates and that it would be useful to share experiences regarding “user segmentation” and “successful user outreach tools”. One important conclusion is that quality assessment tools, such as detailed questionnaires, will need to be adapted to the circumstances (e.g. developing/developed statistical systems) and that some coaching with respect to their implementation will be necessary.

### **2. International cooperation on quality management – principles, harmonization of frameworks, peer reviews, support of countries**

The principles governing international statistical activities represent the shared consensus regarding the codification of quality frameworks for official statistics compiled and disseminated by the international agencies. As a consequence of this shared fundamental vision and the continuous process of sharing experiences, the quality frameworks employed by the various international organizations are becoming more harmonized with one another. At the same time, it was emphasized that due to institutional differences, some differences remain well justified. It was observed that the peer reviews conducted so far have had positive results, and have been instrumental in identifying common difficulties, in sharing best practices and in transferring knowledge. They also introduce an essential element of objectivity into the quality assessment process. Whilst so far limited to developed statistical systems, the potential of peer reviews for developing countries was emphasized, also as an advocacy tool to raise the awareness of the importance of investing in good official statistics. Peer reviews also need to be applied among international organizations.

### **3. Dissemination platforms to make data more accessible and interpretable**

Recognizing that users are changing and their expectations are increasing, that communication strategies are continuously evolving and new approaches such as web 2.0 are becoming more popular, it is evident that international organizations must adjust their thinking as well. Making relevant data easily accessible and interpretable, with good visualization tools, is crucial. Also, data accessibility can no longer be considered as a passive concept, but a more interactive approach with users is needed. This is all the more true in a context where there is increasing competition from outside the “official statistics providers”.

Whilst many international agencies are currently experimenting with new dissemination and communication tools, there is considerable scope for cooperation and sharing of ideas to identify effective practices.

#### **4. Best practices in imputation and estimation and making data internationally comparable**

There was consensus that imputations must be made by international organizations in order to satisfy an increasing demand for comparable global data and that it is not possible to wait for countries to improve their systems so that they can produce the data themselves. It was recognized as well that if international organizations didn't make the imputations, someone else would. It was observed that the ECOSOC resolution on strengthening national statistical capacity set the framework for imputations by stipulating (i) transparency of methods, (ii) use of country data and (iii) country consultation. Guidelines from the CCSA group on existing tools and best practices in imputation were considered to be useful, and it was recognized that good practices in imputation should include independent peer review of methods and assumptions. Also in this context, the question about the use of non-official data when official data are missing was raised. WTO offered to prepare a note on this topic for the regular CCSA session. In general, a continued dialogue with countries, for instance through the Statistical Commission, was considered necessary with respect to the issue of imputations. Moreover, it would be useful to develop measures of uncertainty.

#### **5. Role of the meetings and the future**

In general, the usefulness of conferences such as this one was emphasized, especially for the exchange of experience and for the development of common and harmonized tools for assuring and assessing quality in statistics. However, a more formal evaluation of the elements of the conference was considered useful so as to facilitate a review of the format of the conference for the future. It was also suggested that future conferences could broaden the focus of the quality assessments from data production to the fields of standard setting and technical cooperation. It was agreed that the CCSA would discuss and determine the scope and format of possible future conferences.

# Annex 1: Conference Agenda

## Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities Conference on Data Quality for International Organizations Rome, Italy, 7-8 July 2008

### Programme and papers

Monday, 7 July 2008

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#### 14.00 - 14.45 **Welcome, introduction and keynote address**

- Eurostat: Pieter Everaers, Co-chair, Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA)
- FAO: Hafez Ghanem, Assistant Director-General of the Economic and Social Department

#### 14.45 - 16.15 **Session 1: Quality assessment - use of checklist; user surveys; collection of quality metadata; disseminating quality information; training in quality management**

Organizer: Eurostat

- Antonio Baigorri, Martina Hahn and Håkan Linden (Eurostat) "[Implementation of quality assurance activities in Eurostat](#)"
- Le Anh Hua (ILO) "[Assessment of statistical data quality: The example of the Wages part in the ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics \(chapter V\)](#)"
- Som Hiek (FAO) "[Development of metadata framework for national agricultural statistics: Preliminary findings from a recent experience in Asia and Middle East, and plans for expansion to other regions](#)"
- August Gotzfried and Marco Pellegrino (Eurostat) "[The Euro-SDMX metadata structure and quality indicators: a new template for reference metadata](#)"

#### 16.15 - 16.30 **Coffee break**

#### 16.30 - 18.00 **Session 2: International cooperation on quality management - principles; harmonization of frameworks; peer reviews; support of countries**

Organizer: ECB

- Martina Hahn (Eurostat) "[The European statistical system peer reviews: results, experiences and lessons learnt](#)"
- Catherine Ahsbahs and Violetta Damia (ECB) "[The ECB statistical quality framework and quality assurance procedures: an assessment in the light of the attempt to harmonise frameworks of international organizations](#)"
- Lucie Laliberte (IMF) "[Data managed according to the DQAF at the IMF Statistics Department](#)"

Tuesday, 8 July 2008

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#### 9.00 - 10.30 **Session 3: Dissemination platforms to make data more accessible and interpretable**

Organizer: UNECE

- Stefan Schweinfest and Mary Jane Holupka (UNSD) "[UNdata - an innovative way to provide easy access to UN System data](#)"

- Enrico Giovannini (OECD) "[The role of communication in transforming statistics into knowledge](#)"
- Steven Vale (UNECE) "[Accessibility and clarity - the most neglected dimensions of quality?](#)"

10.30 - 11.00 **Coffee break**

11.00 - 12.30 **Session 4: Best practices in imputation and estimation**

Organizer: ILO

- Sylvester Young (ILO) "[Some quality issues in imputation](#)"
- Carla Abou-Zahr (WHO) "[WHO practices in imputation and estimation](#)"
- Steven Vale and Heinrich Brünger (UNECE) "[Imputation in UNECE statistical databases - Principles and practices](#)"
- Thomas Buettner (UNPopDiv) "[Experiences in and challenges of preparing population estimates for all countries of the world](#)"

12:30 - 14:30 **Lunch break**

14:30 - 16:00 **Session 5: Roundtable: "Making data internationally comparable or respect national, but not comparable sources - implications for data quality?"**

Organizer: OECD

Chair: Heinrich Brungger (UNECE)

Panelists: Sylvester Young (ILO), Pieter Everaers (Eurostat), Stefan Schweinfest (UNSD), Lucie Laliberte (IMF), Enrico Giovannini (OECD) and Peter Hackl (Austria)

16:00 - 16:30 **Coffee break**

16:30 - 17:00 **Summary of the conference and conclusions**

Organizer: UNSD

## Annex 2: List of participants

### United Nations entities and programmes

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations Statistics Division	Stefan Schweinfest Mary Jane Holupka	<a href="mailto:schweinfest@un.org">schweinfest@un.org</a> <a href="mailto:holupka@un.org">holupka@un.org</a>
United Nations Population Division	Thomas Buettner	<a href="mailto:buettner@un.org">buettner@un.org</a>
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	Pietro Gennari	<a href="mailto:gennari@un.org">gennari@un.org</a>
Economic Commission for Europe	Heinrich Brünger Steven Vale	<a href="mailto:heinrich.bruengger@unece.org">heinrich.bruengger@unece.org</a> <a href="mailto:steven.vale@unece.org">steven.vale@unece.org</a>
United Nations Environment Programme	Jaap van Woerden	<a href="mailto:woerden@grid.unep.ch">woerden@grid.unep.ch</a>

### Specialized agencies and related organizations

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	Hafez Ghanem David Marshall Hiek Som Robert Mayo Naman Keita Ricardo Sibrian Xiaoning Gong Richard Grainger Gertjan De Graaf Mette Loyche-Wilkie Adam Gerrand Arvydas Lebedys Mauro Paolozzi Felice Padovani	<a href="mailto:hafez.ghanem@fao.org">hafez.ghanem@fao.org</a> <a href="mailto:david.marshall@fao.org">david.marshall@fao.org</a> <a href="mailto:hiek.som@fao.org">hiek.som@fao.org</a> <a href="mailto:robert.mayo@fao.org">robert.mayo@fao.org</a> <a href="mailto:naman.keita@fao.org">naman.keita@fao.org</a> <a href="mailto:Ricardo.sibrian@fao.org">Ricardo.sibrian@fao.org</a> <a href="mailto:Xiaoning.Gong@fao.org">Xiaoning.Gong@fao.org</a> <a href="mailto:Richard.grainger@fao.org">Richard.grainger@fao.org</a> <a href="mailto:Gertjan.DeGraaf@fao.org">Gertjan.DeGraaf@fao.org</a> <a href="mailto:Mette.LoycheWilkie@fao.org">Mette.LoycheWilkie@fao.org</a> <a href="mailto:Adam.Gerrand@fao.org">Adam.Gerrand@fao.org</a> <a href="mailto:Arvydas.Lebedys@fao.org">Arvydas.Lebedys@fao.org</a> <a href="mailto:Mauro.Paolozzi@fao.org">Mauro.Paolozzi@fao.org</a> <a href="mailto:Felice.Padovani@fao.org">Felice.Padovani@fao.org</a>
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### **Other international and non-governmental organizations**

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Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development	Enrico Giovannini	enrico.giovannini@oecd.org
Statistical Office of the European Communities	Pieter Everaers Maria João Santos Martina Hahn Antonio Baigorri Hakan Linden August Gotzfried Nicola Massarelli	pieter.everaers@ec.europa.eu maria-joao.santos@ec.europa.eu martina.hahn@ec.europa.eu antonio.baigorri@ec.europa.eu hakan.linden@ec.europa.eu august.goetzfried@ec.europa.eu nicola.massarelli@ec.europa.eu

### **Countries**

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