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International Economic and
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An updated template for assessing the implementation of national classifications

UNSD

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Background

The work of the Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications is focused on the development and coordination of international standard classifications. While these classifications serve as a common tool for harmonizing statistical data across countries, it is recognized that countries have additional, often specific, needs that require different classifications to satisfy user requirements.

In order to maintain a high degree of data comparability, countries are encouraged to develop or revise their national classifications to maintain or improve the links to the international standard classifications.

It is therefore of great interest to know to what degree countries are aligning their national classifications with the international standard and to get a general overview of current classification practices around the world.

The registry of national classifications, maintained by UNSD since 2001, has provided some basic information to that extent, allowing users to obtain information about national classifications used around the world in a compact form through a single access point.[1]

The original version of the registry has primarily been used to solicit information about national versions of activity and product classifications (i.e. those linked to ISIC, CPC or HS). In subsequent rounds of data collection, information has also been requested about classifications of expenditure according to purpose and classifications of occupation. However, responses to the latter two categories have been limited.

In total, the registry now includes information on 422 classifications from 118 countries.

While not specifically designed to measure "compliance" with the international standard classifications, the information in the registry provides a good estimate of the implementation of the international standard in national variations.

The present document proposes an updated template for the questionnaire associated with the registry of national classifications, i.e. the set of information to be collected about national classifications.

Information to be collected

The information collected through the questionnaire and presented to users is intended to provide a concise description of each national classification used, enabling users to

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[1] See http://unstats.un.org/unsd/cr/ctryreg

understand the purpose and application of each classification, obtain basic administrative and technical information, understand its relationship to the international standard and find references for more detailed information.

To maintain comparability with the previous version of the questionnaire / registry, most questions included in the new template are similar to those in the previously used version.

For ease of use, the template has been subdivided into broader sections. As such, the template covers the following groups of information:

1. General information
2. Classification structure
3. Relationship to international standards
4. Classification uses
5. Implementation / revision status
6. Supporting documents
7. Capacity building
8. Contact information
9. Other comments

Some of the questions are designed for internal use by the custodian, e.g. those on capacity building and problems encountered, and the respective responses will not be made available to the public.

Since the relationship of the national classification to the reference classification is usually of high interest, the Expert Group may wish to discuss if a more targeted set of questions would be desirable. Currently, it is left to the respondent to decide how detailed the response to this question should be (see questions 3(b) and 3 (c)). While guidance on more detail may be desirable, it should also be kept in mind that the questionnaire is used to provide summary information, not detailed accounts, such as those in a detailed correspondence table.

For the latter, there is no intention to define a scale of compliance criteria, i.e. no explicit "ranking" of the compliance with the international reference classification is planned. This is in compliance with discussions at previous meetings of the Expert Group.

The complete questionnaire is shown in Annex 1 of this document.

Classifications to be covered

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classifications of expenditure according to purpose and classifications of occupation. However, responses to the latter two categories have been limited.

While UNSD will continue to collect information related to classifications for which it is custodian (i.e. ISIC, CPC, classifications of expenditure according to purpose, SITC, BEC), the questionnaire template should be suitable to address classifications of other custodians as well. These other custodians could either collect similar data themselves or coordinate the data collection with others, such as UNSD.

The questionnaire template therefore has not been designed to specifically target one classification or a limited group of classifications, but solicits general information that should be available about any classification and that should also be sufficient to provide users with enough information about content, structure and uses of the classification.

Distribution and use of the questionnaire

Since this template is intended for collecting information about national classifications, the number of recipients is relatively large, covering at least all national statistical offices, but also other agencies that develop or maintain relevant classifications, such as central banks, ministries and so on.

While it may not be possible to start with a complete list of entities developing or maintaining national classifications, the list of national statistical offices would serve as a starting point. When the questionnaire is sent to an NSO, information could be solicited on other national entities that may be able provide information on other relevant national classifications.

In the past, the questionnaire ahs been distributed mainly in connection with classifications workshops organized by UNSD. Since there are currently no workshops planned that would provide sufficient coverage, other mechanisms should be explored.

Since more direct contact with recipients seems essential for a high response rate, a more targeted distribution of the questionnaire may be helpful. This could for instance be done through existing coordination mechanisms that exist in some regions (e.g. Eurostat's work on classifications for EU member countries) or through technical assistance activities that may exist in some regions (e.g. ECLAC's proposed Technical Expert Group on classifications).

The Expert Group may wish to explore if other options exist or if a central data collection carried out by UNSD (for the classifications listed above) would be more appropriate.

Questions

1. Does the Expert Group agree to the overall layout and content of the questionnaire template?
    a. Is the current set of questions suitable to address different types of classifications?
2. Should any additional information be included?
    a. Are more detailed questions necessary to describe differences from the international reference classification?
3. Can the Expert Group suggest suitable forms of distribution and follow up for this type of questionnaire?
    a. Can other institutions be involved?
    b. Should there be a fixed schedule for collecting this type of information?

Annex 1 – Proposed template for the questionnaire on national classifications

No.	Question
	General information
1 (a)	Name of the current national classification (full name in both national tongue and in English with acronyms in brackets, should be given)
1 (b)	In which languages is the classification available?
1 (c)	Can the classification (or information about it) be accessed on the Internet? If yes, please provide the URL.
	Classification structure
2 (a)	Please describe the structure of the classification: How many levels does the classification have? (Please provide labels, such as "Division", "Class") How many categories exist at each level?
2 (b)	Please provide examples of the coding system used at each level.
	Relationship to international standards
3 (a)	Is this classification based on (or linked to) an international standard classification? If yes, please describe.
3 (b)	Is the classification structure identical to the international standard or, if not, how does it differ? (e.g. have additional levels been added to the international standard or have changes been made within the level of the international structure, such as aggregations or additional breakdowns)
3 (c)	Please describe deviations from the international standard (in terms of structure, methodology or application rules). Please use examples, if a general statement is not possible.
3 (d)	If no links to international classifications exist or no international standard is used, please state if there are plans to use international norms in the future.
	Classification uses
4 (a)	Please state for which **statistical purposes** (surveys etc.) this classification is used and if there are users outside of the Statistical Office. Please indicate at which level the classification is used for data **collection** and for data **publishing**.
4 (b)	Please give the names of institutions that use the classification for **non-statistical purposes** (as opposed to statistical purposes in question 2(a)). Also indicate the kind of use (e.g. tax offices, social security, customs, enterprise register etc.)
4 (c)	Please indicate if **alternative classifications** are used by other institutions of the economy. Are these classifications available and useful for the Statistical Office?
	Implementation / revision status
5 (a)	Please state the date of the official adoption of the classification. If not yet adopted, please indicate the current state (e.g. in development, sent for approval, in printing, ready to be distributed etc.)
5 (b)	Please state the date of use of the classification for individual statistical programmes.
5 (c)	Are there existing plans for revision or update of the current classification?
5 (d)	Name of former (previous) national classification (full name in both national tongue and in English with acronyms in brackets, should be given)
5 (e)	Please describe the link of the former classification to international classifications

No.	Question
5 (f)	Please describe the structure of the former classification and indicate the number of items at each level of the classification. (similar to question 2(a))
5 (g)	Do conversion tables exist between the former and current classification?
5 (h)	When was the former classification implemented?
5 (i)	Are statistical data still collected or published according to the former classification? Please indicate if this statistical data is collected or published by the Statistical Office or elsewhere.
	Supporting documents
6 (a)	Is the classification available in electronic form? If yes, in which formats is it available (e.g. PDF, TXT, Excel, XML)
6 (b)	Do the correspondence tables exist in electronic form?
6 (c)	Have national explanatory notes and recommendations been elaborated?
6 (d)	Do conversion tables exist between the national and the international classifications (if applicable)?
6 (e)	Are conversion tables between alternative and current classification available (if applicable)?
	Capacity building
7 (a)	Did problems occur in the use of the current classification? Please describe the kind of problems that have occurred (interpretation, methodology, etc.)
7 (b)	Please indicate if assistance from international organizations could be useful and the kind of assistance needed.
7 (c)	The international classifications undergo a review process and are periodically revised. Do you have any suggestions for the relevant international classifications in this case (e.g. ISIC or CPC)? What changes would you like to see? Do you know of specific problems that should be addressed?
	Contact information
8 (a)	Name of institution / office responsible for the development and maintenance of the classification
8 (b)	Contact address, phone number, e-mail or website for **public information** and inquiry (this info may be posted on UNSD's website)
8 (c)	Name and contact information (telephone, e-mail) of the person responsible for the daily management (**for UN use only**)
	Other comments
9 (a)	Please provide any other comments on this classification that you consider relevant for users