

Criteria to become a Member of the International Family of Classifications

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Introduction

The International Family of Classifications primarily contains those classifications that have been reviewed and approved as international classifications by the United Nations Statistical Commission or other competent intergovernmental bodies, covering broad statistical areas such as economics, demographics, labour, health, education, social welfare, geography, environment, and tourism, among others.

The Family contains also some classifications that have not (yet) been formally approved by the United Nations Statistical Commission or a similar competent intergovernmental body, but have either gained international acceptance or are the only existing classifications in a given field.

The List of classifications in the Family is maintained by the United Nations Committee of Expert on International Statistical Classifications.

This note describes the criteria used to include a classification in the International Family of Classifications. These criteria are regularly reviewed and updated by the United Nations Committee of Experts on International Statistical Classifications.

Criteria for Inclusion

In order for an international classification to be considered for membership of the International Family of Classifications the classification must meet all the requirements as specified below.

All the criteria listed in this document are mandatory requirements for international statistical classifications. For those classifications which are members of the International Family and that are primarily used from analytical purposes the criteria may be considered discretionary. However, every attempt should be sought to apply the requirements as mandatory for analytical classifications.

1. Custodian of the classification

There must be a custodian for the classification.

The custodian of an international statistical classification can be:

- the international agency or organisation that is responsible for the classification in a subject matter capacity, for example ILO for the classifications of occupations and status in employment, WHO for health classifications or UNESCO for education classifications;
- the international agency or organisation that is responsible for coordinating the development, review or implementation of the classification, for example UN Statistics Division;
- a regional organisation if there is no other international agency;
- or any combination of the above.

The classification custodian should work with other custodians of international statistical classifications to improve the relationship and links between the agencies, organisations, and the classifications themselves. It is important that the custodians recognise any commonalities across classifications to ensure consistency in the definition and treatment of related categories.

The custodian is responsible for the maintenance and update of the classification.

2. Primary use of the classification

The primary use of the classification is expected to be within the statistical environment for the collection, production and dissemination of official statistics and data, and this is often detailed as part of the rationale for developing the classification.

In a non-statistical environment, the use of the classification is often to facilitate integration with statistical data in a standard and consistent way, or for analytical purposes. A statistical classification may be used in a way for which it was not considered when it was first developed. For example, an occupation classification developed solely for the production of official statistics may be used by a job-seeker to ascertain information about specific occupations to assist them in obtaining a job, or for classifying skills within the labour force.

The use of the classification in a statistical or non-statistical environment should be documented nor should it prevent a classification being part of the international family.

3. Underlying concepts used in the classification

The major concepts that are used for developing the classification must be defined so that users are clear about what the classification is measuring.

It should be detailed how the different levels of the classification are developed or defined i.e., what concepts are used to define each level. For example, an industry classification might be built on a broad concept of production orientation or supply-based demand. The detailed industries that are assigned to each broad grouping might be differentiated by considering the inputs, as well as the process and technology of production, the characteristics of the outputs and the primary activity of the enterprise.

4. Scope of the classification

The scope of the classification is determined by the characteristics used to determine the categories in the classification, for example jobs in the labour market, activities in the economy, the resident population or a particular set of events, diseases or deaths etc, or a predetermined subset of those.

The scope must also identify consistencies with accepted international standards or practices. This is to facilitate international comparability and to enable use of international concepts and principles where applicable to the national context.

5. Statistical Unit and classification unit

Statistical units are the units of observation or measurement for which data are collected or derived. The statistical units for the primary application of the classification have to be clearly identified.

The statistical unit must be suitable for data compilation and aggregation and enable consistency across entities and be internationally comparable. Statistical units can be defined following many criteria and consist of an individual, household, activity, enterprise or product etc.

The statistical unit may or may not be the same as the classification unit as the classification could be applied to different units, even though it was designed for a specific purpose.

The classification unit is the basic unit to be classified in the classification, for example an establishment or enterprise in an industry classification or a job in an occupation classification.

6. Classification Levels

A classification structure is composed of one or several levels. In a hierarchical classification the items of each level but the highest (most aggregated) level are aggregated to the nearest higher level. A flat classification has only one level

Each level in the classification should only define the number of categories which are sufficiently detailed to distinguish the units being classified. For hierarchic classifications the different levels need to correspond to the different needs of the users to make consistent detailed or more aggregate distinctions for the variable being measured. The structure should provide categories that reflect exhaustive coverage of all units within the scope of the classification.

When defining the categories to be included in a classification, or preparing statistics on the basis of the categories defined by a classification, compromises may need to be made for reasons of statistical feasibility (i.e., the distinctions made possible by the data collection and coding process), statistical balance, compatibility with other statistical concepts and classifications, or comparability with international standards.

7. Classification category labels

The labels (or titles) chosen for the categories must be precise, unique and accurate, and reflect relevance and facilitate user understanding. The labels (or titles) should clearly articulate, if possible, the scope of the category.

The categories must be mutually exclusive for international statistical classifications

8. Format of Classification Codes

The code structure for the classification must be easy to understand, and consistent. For hierarchical classifications it must present a logical and sequential pattern which reflects the number of levels required.

The simplest code structures are based on numeric sequences. However, it is important to define whether the classification structure requires any special code conventions such as ending a code with a '9' to indicate a residual (not elsewhere classified) category, and the notes to the classification should detail the rationale for the code structure i.e. if it is alphanumeric, numeric or alpha and the reasons for choosing this pattern.

The need for supplementary codes for operational purposes or residual categories may need to be detailed. For example, a classification code structure may need to incorporate residual categories to enable coding of vague or general survey responses.

9. Consultation process

Full consultation with regional and national users of a statistical classification as well as with statistical offices, and relevant subject matter and classification experts must be undertaken to ensure that the classification meets the needs of the regional, national and international community.

10. Testing of the classification

The classification has to have been widely discussed and tested (by different national statistical offices and users) to ensure suitability for use in developed and developing countries.

11. Correspondences

In order for an international classification to be accepted as a member of the International Family of Classifications, a list of relevant correspondences should be provided.

The mapping of categories between old and new versions of the same classification and the mitigation of time-series issues for users of statistics are important when introducing a new or revised classification.

The listing of appropriate correspondences should be considered and endorsed by the UN Committee of Experts on International Statistical Classifications (CEISC)..

12. Implementation Plans

The custodian of a new or revised classification must present a clear and timetabled implementation plan or strategy. This preparation of this strategy should be initiated at the start of the development process for the new or revised classification. The implementation plan should ensure that:

- Stakeholders will participate in a manner that will give them confidence that the classification may provide the relevant distinctions and can be used effectively and reliably.
- The users of statistics and data based on the classification for description and analysis should trust that the statistics and data produced by the classification will be relevant and reliable;
- Transition to a new classification is well coordinated and communicated;
- The classification is implemented in a coordinated way without impacting on data quality;
- There is material that supports the use of the classification freely available to all users.

The implementation plan for an international statistical classification should also detail how the classification is to be:

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- Implemented in a timely and quality manner using robust methods;
- Implemented by synchronising work with other custodians of international statistical classifications and by leveraging off other international strategic initiatives;
- Implemented using common approaches;
- Implemented with agreement by a range of countries (as appropriate), with their plans for adapting the international classification for national use.

The process of decision should be well documented in order to be transparent.

13. Maintenance Schedules

There should be a clearly articulated maintenance schedule established for the classification outlining the procedures for updating and a timeframe for reviews and/or the scope of such

reviews . The maintenance schedule for an international statistical classification should be created by the custodian in consultation with national, regional and international users and statistical offices, the Committee of Experts on International Statistical Classifications, UN Statistics Division and subject to direction from the UN Statistical Commission or governing bodies of the relevant international agencies, based on the intended scope of the review. However, this is not a prerequisite for inclusion in the international family.

Timings for reviews of international statistical classifications will depend on many circumstances, for example reviews are often timed to coincide, or work in with the international round of population censuses (ten yearly cycles).

The timetable for maintenance and/or review of international statistical classifications should be communicated well in advance to international users to enable forward planning by them and by national custodians for the corresponding national classifications to ensure that all appropriate changes are accounted for. This would include plans for modifications to affected IT systems, updating or backcasting of business registers; updating coding tools and/or dual coding options, introduction or updating of web services or apis for system to system interchange, survey weighting changes, sample frame size changes and time-series management.

The maintenance schedule for an international classification must be endorsed by the UN Committee of Experts on International Statistical Classifications and approved by the UN Statistical Commission.

14. Dissemination

The classification and supporting guides, coding tools etc should be freely available either from a centralised website or from the custodian's own website, if appropriate. Formats for dissemination should be discussed with relevant parties at the beginning of the development cycle for the classification.

Appendix 1: Criteria to become a member of the International Family of Statistical Classifications Checklist

The following table is the checklist presented to the Committee of Experts on International Statistical Classifications (CEISC) by the reviewer of the classification and which provides comments on whether the criteria for inclusion have been met, and if there are any issues relating to those criteria if they are documented.

Criteria	Y/N	Comments
Custodian of the classification		
Primary use of the classification		
Conceptual basis		
Statistical Unit		
Scope of the classification		
Structure of the classification		
Classification levels		
Classification categories		
Format of Classification codes		
Consultation process		
Testing of the classification		
Concordances		
Implementation Plan		
Maintenance Schedule		
Dissemination		