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**Meeting of the Expert Group on
International Economic and
Social Classifications
New York, 18-20 May 2011**

**Update of the Mandate for the Expert Group on International Economic and Social
Classifications**

Draft version prepared by a working group of the Expert Group

Update of the Mandate for the Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications

The Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications was established in 1994 to develop a strategy for the convergence of international classifications. The group has met at least every two years and reports to the United Nations Statistical Commission following each meeting.

Initially the Expert Group's focus was on resolving the conceptual differences between the international economic reference classifications which caused difficulty in integrating data into the national accounting framework. The initial work program was focused on better alignment of the industry and product classifications. In 1995, the Commission agreed that the Expert Group's work should be expanded to include social classifications. (1)

At its 30th session on 1-5 March 1999 the United Nations Statistical Commission recommended that the Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications be the central coordinating body for implementing the work programme on economic classifications endorsed at that session of the commission. (2)

The Expert Group discussed its mandate in September 2009 in light of the changing requirements of the group, such as the demand for high quality international environmental classifications. Following this discussion the Expert Group agreed to establish a technical subgroup to review the Expert Group's governance and mandate.

This paper provides a revised mandate for the Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications. The new Terms of Reference:

- align with earlier the terms of reference specified by the Statistical Commission;
- clarify the role of the Expert Group in relation to the International Family of Economic and Social Classifications;
- clarify the role of the Expert Group for emerging areas of statistics; and
- continue to recognise the role of the Expert Group in supporting UNSD and other international agencies in the development, maintenance, review and implementation of international economic and social classifications,

This paper recommends that the United Nations Statistical Commission continue to entrust the Expert Group with the functions identified at the 30th session of the Statistical Commission including the review of selected new classifications for inclusion into the International Family of Economic and Social Classifications.

The new Terms of Reference for the Expert Group also establish a Bureau which is charged with maintaining the forward momentum of the group between meetings, proposing work programme and drafting agendas for future meetings of the group.

(1) <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/95report.pdf>

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc99/report-e.pdf>

(2). (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc99/report-e.pdf>)

Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications

The Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications was charged by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its 30th session on 1-5 March 1999 (1) with improving cooperation on international classifications and ensuring harmonization and convergence among classifications in the International Family of Economic and Social Classifications.

The International Family of Economic and Social Classifications is comprised of those classifications that have been registered into the UN Inventory of classifications, reviewed and approved as guidelines by the United Nations Statistical Commission or other competent intergovernmental body on such matters as economics, demographics, labour, health, education, social welfare, geography, environment and tourism.

The Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications will continue to be the central coordinating body for the current and future work on classifications that belong to the International Family of Economic and Social Classifications and, for the coordination and review of others that are proposed for adoption by the Statistical Commission or other competent international authorities.

The Expert Group will continue to work towards ensuring harmonization and convergence in the development of the Classifications within the International Family of Economic and Social Classifications. To ensure the coordinated revision, the Expert Group will continue to develop and progress strategies for orchestration and timing of revisions for the International Family of Economic and Social Classifications. Where a reference classification has changed, the Expert Group will encourage and assist custodians of other classifications to adopt the changes that reflect those made in the reference classification.

The Expert Group will continue to discuss requirements imposed on classifications arising from statistical and non-statistical applications of the classifications to establish long-term strategies for their further development. These applications include censuses surveys and administrative activities in areas applicable to these classifications, analytical work requiring linkages between classifications, as well as requirements for policy decisions.

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference of the Expert Group are to assist and advise the Statistical Commission in:

- (a) promoting the adoption of best practice in the development of international classifications;
- (b) coordinating work on those reference classifications that are members of the International Family of Economic and Social Classifications, including examining changes to classifications and clarifying their relationship to reference classifications;
- (c) promoting the adoption of the reference classifications of the International Family of Economic and Social Classifications within regional and national statistical systems to improve the international comparability of data;
- (d) assessing the appropriateness of requests for inclusion of classifications into the International Family of Economic and Social Classifications as reference classifications;

(e) ensuring that the various classifications are suitable for use in the range of statistical activities in which they are to be applied and that they promote conceptual and methodological coherence in the statistical system, as well as reflecting practical considerations in data collection and compilation;

(f) developing a strategic approach towards the future development of the system of international statistical classifications.

The tasks of the Expert Group include revising classifications, reviewing the underlying principles of existing and emerging international and multinational classifications, and practical proposals to bring about the convergence of existing and emerging international and multinational classifications. The Expert Group will also provide guidance to the United Nations Statistical Division and other custodians of international economic and social classifications on their work programme priorities with respect to international classifications used for statistical purposes.

The Expert Group has special responsibility to manage the development of classifications to be endorsed by the Statistical Commission, where no other group has been established with a clear responsibility to develop or review a classification in a particular field, or where multiple groups are developing classifications in a related field.

The Expert Group will decide whether certain technical, analytical or exploratory tasks should be carried out by a suitable subgroup of the Expert Group. If the creation of a subgroup is warranted, the Expert Group will specify the goals and, if applicable, life-span of these subgroups. The subgroups should report back to the Expert Group for evaluation of their tasks and approval of their findings or decisions.

Items considered

The Expert Group considers issues of concern in developments in international classifications, best practice in developing classifications, implications of reviews on time-series, context and requirements imposed on classifications arising from statistical applications and strategies for implementing international classifications. In addition, the Expert Group may also choose to consider the requirements of classifications imposed from non-statistical applications. The Expert Group should also consider associated elements of classifications such as correspondences, companion guides and coding tools.

The Expert Group should confine its discussions on new classifications, where possible, to the application of best practice in their development. The Expert Group should not consider decisions made on the subject matter by other expert groups unless it is related to ensuring harmonization and convergence of classifications.

Within the terms of the above resolutions, there is flexibility for the Expert Group to adjust, where necessary, its priorities and methods to meet new requirements and maintain a balance between matters of current concern and the longer-term development aspects of the official statistical system.

Convener

The United Nations Statistics Division will continue to be the convener of the Expert Group and will, to the extent possible, provide funds for the participation of developing countries.

Membership

The United Nations Statistics Division will continue to invite representatives from International Organizations, developed and developing countries, custodians, major users of international economic and social classifications and invited experts in the development and application of international classifications to become members of the Expert Group. The Expert Group should have regional representation to ensure a balanced view is presented in discussion of all classification matters.

The members of the expert group should be experts in the development and application of classifications, as well representing national and regional experiences in the application of the International Family of Economic and Social Classifications.

The Expert Group and its subgroups can invite guest experts to discuss topics that require a more specialized or broader knowledge in certain areas, without making these guests members of the Expert Group.

Term of office

Members of the Expert Group will be invited by the UN Statistics Division to participate in Expert Group discussions for a period of 2 years.

Frequency of meetings

The Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications should meet biennially for four days each session or more frequently if required by the work programme.

Reporting

The work program, decisions and recommendations of the Expert Group will be presented to the United Nations Statistical Commission through the report of the Secretary General on Economic and Social Classifications, prepared by the Classifications Section of the United Nations Statistics Division.

Officers of the Expert Group

The Officers of the Expert Group will constitute the Bureau which will distribute tasks, carry out day-to-day management and act as a bridge between Expert Group meetings. The Bureau will not have any decision-making authority beyond those necessary to undertake its administrative roles.

The officers are the Chairperson, Vice-chairperson and the Rapporteur; they are also referred to as the Bureau. In between sessions of the Expert Group, members of the Expert Group, the Bureau and the Secretariat consult on the election of the Bureau for the upcoming session. A Bureau is elected for a two year period or until the next Expert Group meeting. Nominations are made by member(s) of the Expert Group. Elections are held at the beginning of a session.

Secretariat support and other participants

The sessions of the Expert Group are substantively serviced by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and may be attended by the regional commissions, other United Nations organizations, specialized agencies and related organizations, non-United Nations international organizations active in international statistical work, and non-governmental organizations.

¹ See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1999, Supplement No.4 (E/1999/24), Chapter VII.
(Document can be accessed at www.un.org/esa/coordination/ecosoc/doc99-24.htm)