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Items for discussion and decision: national quality assurance frameworks

Expert Group on National Quality Assurance Frameworks

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2024/312 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Expert Group on National Quality Assurance Frameworks, which is submitted to the Commission for discussion and decision.

* [E/CN.3/2025/1](#).



Report of the Expert Group on National Quality Assurance Frameworks

I. Introduction

1. In its decision 50/106, the Statistical Commission adopted the *United Nations National Quality Assurance Frameworks Manual for Official Statistics*¹ and the recommendations contained therein. It welcomed the *Manual* as an important contribution in guiding countries in the implementation of a national quality assurance framework, including for new data sources, new data providers and for data and statistics for the Sustainable Development Goal indicators. In its decision 54/115, the Statistical Commission welcomed the report of the Expert Group on National Quality Assurance Frameworks (E/CN.3/2023/16) and expressed its appreciation for the work accomplished over the past two years. The Commission took note of the results of the survey on the implementation of a national quality assurance framework and the progress achieved, endorsed the proposed road map for the development and implementation of a national quality assurance framework, recognized the need for capacity-building and training for the implementation of a national quality assurance framework and welcomed the planned initiatives of the expert group to support countries, including the development of additional materials and guidance, such as on the quality assurance when administrative or other data sources are used. The Commission welcomed and endorsed the proposed programme of work of the Expert Group for the next two years and its updated terms of reference.

II. Work of the Expert Group over the past two years

2. The following 22 countries are currently members of the Expert Group: Botswana, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, Niger, Norway, Philippines, Russian Federation, South Africa, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Viet Nam. The following nine international and regional organizations joined the Expert Group: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Eurostat, the World Bank, the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

3. At its meeting in June 2023, the Expert Group established a subgroup on administrative and other data sources and a subgroup on quality culture based on its discussion of priorities for 2023 and 2024. The Expert Group also agreed to launch an online discussion forum on quality assurance. At its subsequent meeting in September 2023, the Expert Group adopted the draft terms of reference and workplan prepared by both subgroups. Members of the Collaborative on Administrative Data were invited to join the subgroup on administrative and other data sources. Canada and Namibia took on the responsibility of Co-Chairs of the subgroup on administrative and other data sources while Colombia agreed to chair the subgroup on quality culture.

4. From 5 to 7 February 2024, the Expert Group convened for an in-person meeting in New York.² At the meeting, the Expert Group discussed the draft module for quality

¹ Available at <https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/data-quality/user-manual>.

² See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/dataquality/meetings/EGM-NQAF-5-7feb2024/>.

assurance when using administrative and other data sources to produce official statistics and the draft maturity model on quality culture in official statistics developed by the two subgroups, the conduct of a global consultation on both draft outputs and a set of other issues that it might wish to address in the future. It also reviewed the workplan of the two subgroups for completing their outputs. From April to June 2024, the Expert Group conducted a global consultation on the draft module and the draft maturity model.³ Sixty countries provided detailed comments on the draft module, and 50 countries provided detailed comments on the maturity model. As part of the global consultation, countries were invited to a webinar at which the draft documents were introduced. Following this global consultation, the subgroups updated both documents in the light of the comments that were received and developed assessment checklists as practical tools for using the two new sets of guidelines. Both assessments checklists were introduced and tested by countries at a workshop in Mongolia in September 2024 and in a series of webinars during October and November 2024.

5. The Expert Group met five times in 2023 and four times in 2024. It conducted a side event during the fifty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission, on the topic “Implementation of quality assurance for official statistics in countries”.⁴ In October 2023, the Expert Group and its subgroup on quality culture hosted a virtual global seminar on quality culture. In November 2023, the Expert Group and its subgroup on administrative and other data sources hosted a virtual global seminar on “Assuring quality when using administrative and other data sources”. During the fifty-fifth session of the Statistical Commission, the Expert Group held a side event on the topic “Quality assurance of administrative and other data sources in the context of data stewardship”.⁵ From June 2023 to November 2024, both subgroups conducted at least 10 regular meetings and several additional sprint meetings to complete their deliverables.

6. The Statistics Division conducted a number of workshops and webinars to support the implementation of national quality assurance frameworks. In November 2023, a regional workshop on the implementation of quality assurance was organized with the Economic Commission for Latin America, in cooperation with the National Administrative Department of Statistics of Colombia (DANE), in Bogotá.⁶ In December 2023, the Statistics Division joined forces with the United Nations Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, the Statistics Department of the International Monetary Fund and the Department of Statistics Malaysia and conducted a training-of-trainers workshop on quality of statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals for the Asia-Pacific Region in Perak, Malaysia. A similar regional training workshop was held in September 2024 in collaboration with the Institute and hosted by the National Statistics Office of Mongolia.⁷ In addition, the Statistics Division introduced the National Quality Assurance Framework and the *Manual* at numerous virtual workshops and events.

7. Six years after its adoption by the Commission, the *United Nations National Quality Assurance Frameworks Manual for Official Statistics* and the National Quality Assurance Framework are now widely used by countries, together with an accompanying self-assessment checklist.⁸ The road map for the development and

³ See https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/dataquality/nqaf_gc_2024/.

⁴ See <https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/events-details/un54sc-14022023-M-Implementation-of-quality-assurance-for-official-statistics-in-countries>.

⁵ See <https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/events-details/un55sc-quality-assurance-of-administrative-and-other-data-sources/>.

⁶ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/dataquality/meetings/nqafws-bogota-2023/>.

⁷ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/dataquality/meetings/nqafws-ulaanbaatar-2024/>.

⁸ See <https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/data-quality/check-list>.

implementation of a national quality assurance framework, which was endorsed by the Commission in 2023, has been an important addition to the guidance available for quality assurance in countries that do not yet have a national quality assurance framework or are working on implementation.⁹

III. Module for quality assurance when using administrative and other data sources to produce official statistics

8. The purpose of the draft module for quality assurance when using administrative and other data sources to produce official statistics¹⁰ is to assist statistical agencies in systematically evaluating and addressing the challenges in the use of administrative and other data sources that may result from, among other things, the use of different concepts and definitions, coverage and possible bias and production processes that lack standardization. These challenges may make data from administrative and other data sources more difficult to use for statistical purposes.¹¹ The module is aimed to be practical and concise. It complements existing generic national quality assurance frameworks and provides more specific and detailed guidance when using administrative and other data sources to produce official statistics. The module is not intended to be used as a quality assurance framework for administrative and other data sources. It should be used in conjunction with an existing national quality assurance framework as, for example, the module does not include key aspects of a national quality assurance framework, for instance as related to the institutional environment. Countries that already have well-established practices for quality assurance when using administrative and other data sources may view the module only as an additional reference point that supports their existing practices. The module is intended to be applicable regardless of the national quality assurance framework or code of practice for quality assurance that is followed by a statistical agency.

9. The module consists of two parts, a conceptual approach and a list of 10 critical requirements. The conceptual approach provides an overarching structure for understanding what should typically be considered to assure quality when using administrative and other data sources. The 10 critical requirements provide specific and detailed guidance for assuring quality when using administrative and other data sources to produce official statistics. The 10 critical requirements are underpinned by a set of suggested practices that have been identified through a thorough review of a large set of country practices and guidance materials. The module also includes several annexes with additional information. Annex 1 provides a sub-module for input data validation. Annex 5 illustrates the link between the Generic Statistical Business Process Model and the module. An accompanying assessment checklist facilitates the evaluation of compliance of the use of a data source with the 10 critical requirements. The checklist is intended as a simple and clearly structured way to use the module and can be used and adapted depending on needs and resources. Another way for countries to use the module is to integrate some of its contents into the existing national quality assurance framework or accompanying guidelines.

10. The module has been developed based on a review of available country practices, guidelines, frameworks and toolkits for assuring the quality of statistics

⁹ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/dataquality/roadmap/>.

¹⁰ The module and the accompanying assessment checklist are available as background documents to the present report.

¹¹ Other data sources include all data sets that are not created primarily for official statistical or administrative purposes but rather for commercial or other private purposes and include for example most “big data” sources.

when using administrative and other data sources¹² and the mapping of their requirements, elements and indicators to the United Nations national quality assurance framework for official statistics. In the module, those country practices, available guidelines, frameworks and toolkits are synthesized into the set of 10 critical requirements and a set of suggested practices for each requirement. Following its development, the module underwent a global consultation and additional testing. The module was developed by the subgroup on administrative and other data sources established by the Expert Group.

11. The use of administrative and other data sources is a very dynamic area of work in official statistics, where practices are evolving rapidly. The module contains references to and reflects many of those practices. However, it also represents an effort to identify an approach to quality assurance when using administrative and other data sources that will remain valid for some time despite the many expected innovations in the use of administrative and other data sources.

IV. Maturity model on quality culture in official statistics

12. The draft maturity model on quality culture in official statistics allows statistical organizations to assess their quality culture and provides a generic road map for improvement.¹³ The maturity model contains a proposal for a definition of quality culture for official statistics which emphasizes the importance of shared values, mindsets, behaviours, practices and knowledge related to quality assurance that shape and characterize the work environment and individual workplace. There is a shared commitment by everyone in a statistical agency or statistical unit to focus on user needs and to deliver statistical products and services that are fit for purpose, while continuously striving for improvement, innovation and adherence to best practices and methods. A common understanding of key concepts related to quality assurance on official statistics is fundamental to developing and sustaining this culture.

13. In the maturity model, six key characteristics are identified that reflect and support the implementation of a quality culture in national statistical agencies: awareness and innovation; communication management and channels; data governance; quality assurance monitoring and error handling; high-level commitment; and staff commitment. Four levels of maturity (basic, intermediate, advanced and established) are proposed for each key characteristic. For each level, two measures (indicators) are proposed. The shared values and beliefs that constitute a quality culture may be difficult or impossible to observe directly and objectively. Their measurement must therefore rely on the observation of certain practices and behaviours or the conduct of surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, self-assessments or behavioural tests.

14. The maturity model is accompanied by an assessment checklist as a practical tool for its application and for assessing the quality culture within a statistical organization or unit. In the checklist, 48 mandatory measures (indicators) are identified, 8 for each of the 6 key characteristics. There are inherent challenges in quantifying and measuring culture. The proposed maturity model and related measures should therefore be viewed as a tool for identifying areas for improvement rather than for scoring and should be used on a voluntary basis. The maturity model is intended to be used in a flexible way and adapted to national circumstances and priorities.

¹² Please see the repository of country practices, available guidelines, frameworks and toolkits on quality assurance when using administrative and other data sources, available at <https://unstats.un.org/wiki/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=224264259>.

¹³ The maturity model and the accompanying assessment checklist are available as background documents to the present report.

15. The maturity model was developed by the subgroup on quality culture established by the Expert Group. It is based on some initial research, responses to a survey among the members of the Expert Group, feedback received from countries during several workshops and an Expert Group meeting and an iterative discussion process within the subgroup on quality culture. One challenge encountered during this work was the absence of well-documented practices and experiences in the area.

V. Focus of work and programme of work of the Expert Group on National Quality Assurance Frameworks for 2025–2026

16. The objective of the Expert Group is to support countries in the development and implementation of their national quality assurance frameworks. The *Manual* is the anchor of its efforts. The Expert Group aims to provide additional materials and conduct additional activities that promote quality assurance and support the implementation of national quality assurance frameworks. A focus of its efforts over the next two years will be the promotion of the *Manual* and associated tools for quality assurance, such as the self-assessment checklist, the road map for the development and implementation of a quality assurance framework, the draft module on quality assurance when using administrative and other data sources and the draft maturity model on quality culture. It welcomes similar efforts by others and the sharing of information and practices.

17. For the period 2025–2026 the Expert Group intends to address the development of the relationship between the Generic Statistical Business Process Model and national quality assurance frameworks. It is expected to involve the development of an overarching quality management process for the Model and the development of guidelines for the use of the Model to support the implementation of quality assurance.¹⁴ In addition, the Expert Group may consider quality aspects related to the use of multiple data sources, the use of machine learning and other issues related to quality assurance in the context of the evolving national data ecosystem. It will cooperate and coordinate with other groups as required to build on existing efforts and avoid duplication.

18. It is suggested that the Expert Group will carry out the following activities over the next two years (2025 and 2026) in support of the development and implementation of national quality assurance frameworks in countries:

- (a) Promote the *Manual*;
- (b) Support countries in the implementation of national quality assurance frameworks throughout the national statistical system by providing additional materials and conduct additional activities that promote quality assurance and support implementation, while considering specific needs such as assuring the quality of new data sources;
- (c) Maintain and further update the website on quality assurance managed by the Statistics Division;
- (d) Conduct a programme of activities and events on quality assurance to further build the community of experts and share best practices;
- (e) Report to the Statistical Commission in March 2027.

¹⁴ This work will be conducted in coordination with the Supporting Standards Modernization Group of the High-Level Group for the Modernization of Official Statistics of the Economic Commission for Europe.

VI. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

19. The Commission is invited:

- (a) To express its views on the work of the Expert Group over the past two years;**
- (b) To endorse the draft module for quality assurance when using administrative and other data sources to produce official statistics and the draft maturity model on quality culture for official statistics;**
- (c) To review and approve the proposed programme of work and updated terms of reference of the Group (see annex).**

Annex

Updated terms of reference of the Expert Group on National Quality Assurance Frameworks

1. The Expert Group on National Quality Assurance Frameworks will:

(a) Promote the *United Nations National Quality Assurance Frameworks Manual for Official Statistics*;

(b) Support countries in the implementation of national quality assurance frameworks throughout national statistical systems by providing additional materials and conduct additional activities that promote quality assurance and support implementation, while considering specific needs such as assuring the quality of new data sources;

(c) Maintain and further update the website on quality assurance of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat;

(d) Conduct a programme of activities and events on quality assurance to further build the community of experts and share best practices;

(e) Report to the Statistical Commission in March 2027.

2. The Expert Group consists of its current members and observers and is open to a limited number of additional countries and organizations that wish to join its work, while ensuring balanced regional representation. Member States will elect two Co-Chairs. The Statistics Division will act as the secretariat of the Expert Group.

3. The Expert Group will conduct its work electronically but will meet face to face should the possibility and need arise. Participation in the Expert Group is self-funded.
