

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

For discussion and
recommendations

First meeting of the 2009/2010 Bureau
Washington, D.C., 15-16 October 2009

Item 8 of the Provisional
Agenda

**UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
COMMON METADATA FRAMEWORK**

Note prepared by the UNECE secretariat

I. BACKGROUND

1. In 2004, the Bureau approved the creation of a “Common Metadata Framework” under the supervision of the Steering Group on Statistical Metadata. This note sets out the current status of that initiative, and the planned next steps. The Bureau is invited to comment on what has been achieved and to give a view on future priorities.
2. The Common Metadata Framework comprises four parts, which are outlined below. It is intended as a living resource for those working with metadata in national and international statistical organizations, and is being developed, enhanced and disseminated via the “Metis-wiki”¹. The content is regularly reviewed by specialists, and is subject to change as new standards and practices emerge.
3. The main aims of the Common Metadata Framework are to provide examples of good practice, and interpretation of the many existing standards, rather than to propose new ones. For this reason, and in line with the rules of procedure for the CES and the Bureau, this update on the Common Metadata Framework is presented mainly for information, though comments on the general approach (rather than the detail of the texts) are very welcome.

II. PART A – STATISTICAL METADATA IN THE CORPORATE CONTEXT

4. The main aim of Part A is metadata advocacy, explaining the importance of a good metadata management system for the efficient production of statistics. It is targeted at senior managers and subject-matter statisticians, as well as those responsible for making business cases to create or enhance statistical metadata systems. Its key message is that metadata is not just an information technology issue, but one that affects all aspects of statistical production, requiring a clear vision and strategy.
5. Part A was first published on the Internet in 2006, but has recently been updated and enhanced by the Steering Group on Statistical Metadata to reflect feedback from various users, including several who are not metadata specialists. Feedback on the latest version has been positive, including the following comments from directors at the Australian Bureau of Statistics:

¹ www.unece.org/stats/cmef

(a) “It should be compulsory reading for everyone working on metadata projects. It should be especially compulsory for our senior staff in key business programs”;

(b) “It certainly seems to be addressing the important issues - a good read!”

The current version of Part A (see Addendum 1) will be printed and distributed to statistical organizations by the end of 2009.

6. The Bureau is invited to comment on the usefulness of the current version of Part A, and suggest any enhancements to the structure or topics covered for future versions.

III. PART B – METADATA CONCEPTS, STANDARDS, MODELS AND REGISTRIES

7. There are many international standards relating to different aspects of statistical metadata, which can be confusing for those new to the subject. Part B explains the key features of these standards, their applicability and inter-relations. A simple template is used to present this information in a logical and consistent way, and to provide the reader with links to original source material for further information.

8. An informal sub-group of the Steering Group on Statistical Metadata has been set up to take this work forwards. This sub-group will present the draft results of its work at the March 2010 Work Session on Statistical Metadata for feedback from that group. Progress can be followed on the METIS wiki.

IV. PART C – METADATA AND THE STATISTICAL BUSINESS PROCESS

9. Part C explores the role of metadata throughout the statistical production process, and how good metadata management can contribute to the efficiency of this process. There has been considerable work on this part over the last two years, including two expert workshops, which have attracted a large and varied audience. The main output so far is a generic model of the statistical business process, building on experience in several organizations that have produced their own internal models.

10. The generic model (see Addendum 2) provides a framework against which existing organization-specific models can be mapped, and a starting point for organizations wanting to create their own models. Interest in the generic model is spreading rapidly beyond the domain of statistical metadata. It is now seen as a potential basis for harmonising information systems architectures, a framework for measuring process quality, and even as a basis for defining organisational structures.

11. Part C will be further developed to focus on the role of metadata within the model, including experiences from implementations in national and international statistical organizations, and information on the associated business benefits. Version 4.0 of the model was adopted by the Steering Group on Statistical Metadata in April 2009, following extensive rounds of consultations, both at the workshops mentioned above, and by a written procedure.

12. The Bureau is invited to comment on the usefulness of this model, and to suggest enhancements for future versions.

V. PART D – IMPLEMENTATION

13. Part D comprises a set of case studies from national and international statistical organizations, describing their experiences in developing and implementing statistical metadata systems. These case studies follow a standard template and focus on lessons learned. They give honest accounts of successes and failures, and are regularly updated by their authors, thus providing a valuable resource to help users to benefit from the experiences of others.

14. Case studies have been provided so far by Australia, Austria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO). Countries offering new case studies for the 2010 Work Session already include Finland, Latvia and the Netherlands.

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