

National Statistics Country Classification (NSCC)

Background and Development

Introduction

Country is a key variable for determining a range of social and economic statistics including country of birth, country of residence, migration, international trade and balance of payments.

The National Statistics Country Classification, including the definition and coding index is designed to be the standard harmonised framework used by National Statistics users and producers involved in the collection and processing of country-related statistical data. Within the classification are output groupings to standardise common outputs, but it is recognised that not every output can be catered for.

The National Statistics Country Classification will not however supersede or replace the country classifications used in international reporting requirements, business areas using international or European country classifications to meet international reporting requirements are not expected to adopt the classification.

National Statistics Country Definition

For the purposes of the NSCC, a country is the name, either short or official, of a current country, dependency or other geographic area of interest. This includes:

- internationally recognised states of the United Nations and/or Her Majesty's Government
- administrative subdivisions, particularly the nations of the United Kingdom: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales
- selected overseas dependencies, territories and administrative sub-regions of such states, with varying degrees of self-government, and which are generally geographically distinct from the country to which they are related and
- other recognised geographic areas of interest

The term "country" covers all the categories included in the country classification, even though some categories refer to entities that are not independent states.

Disclaimer:

The identification of country categories in the National Statistics Country Classification is designed to form the standard harmonised framework for the collection, processing and outputs of country-related data for statistical and analytical purposes only. **It is not intended to be regarded as an authority on the formal recognition, geographic boundary, spelling or nomenclature of any country or geographical area included in the classification.**

The Background

The NSCC was launched in 2006. The associated definition, groupings and coding index form the harmonised framework to be used in the collection, processing, and outputs of statistical data on countries in both social and economic statistical collections. Country was identified as a priority for standardisation as it is a key variable for determining a range of statistics, for example:

- country of birth of a respondent, parents, or members of a couple (Census or Life Events data)
- country of residence, destination or origin (travel, tourism and migration data)
- country of ownership (e.g. for businesses)
- trade and balance of payments data

National Statistics were using a range of definitions, classifications, groupings and coding indexes for country, highlighting the need for harmonisation.

The benefits of adopting the harmonised National Statistics Country Classification for the collection, processing and output of country data included:

- reflecting the needs and requirements of current data users and producers
- increasing international comparability, with both international organisations and other national statistical institutes
- reducing the duplication of work associated with updating and maintaining several different classifications in different business areas, as this work will be centralised and undertaken in the Classifications and Harmonisation Unit of the ONS, as it is with the occupation and industry classifications
- reducing the resource requirements associated with some aspects of survey or collection design, development, support and / or maintenance for collections of country data
- facilitating the comparison of country data over time and from different data sources, thus enabling greater opportunities for the cross-analysis, exchange and re-use of data

The process undertaken to develop the standard country classification will form essential guidance in the future for the development of other standard classifications.

Purpose and coverage

The NS Country Classification should be used in the classification of all statistical data on countries, including both social and business collections, and should be used wherever statistics are classified by country. Thus, although social and business collections have different "country" variables, the underlying conceptual framework for classifying statistical country data will be the same.

As part of the development of the NSCC a standard definition was developed as well as coding guidelines and explanatory notes. This ensures standardisation of data inputs (e.g. coding of country data to the standard classification). The NSCC has also been developed to include a variety of country groupings; however it is not the intention for the groupings to be part of the classification, but to be a supplement for output/analysis purposes.

The National Statistics Country Classification is very similar to other country classifications developed by international organisations, and thus there is a high level of comparability between the country classification and those of international organisations.

The NSCC including the definition, groupings and coding index do not replace or supersede classifications that have to be used to meet international reporting requirements, for example Geonomenclature (GEONOM) for Eurostat trade statistics.

Development process

Development of the NSCC began with research of existing classification practice. This included research of the country classifications used (or recommended for use) by existing NS data collections, national statistical institutes, international organisations, and the Government Data Standards Catalogue's county code and UK internal code. This research was used to form a key proposal that the National Statistics Country Classification be based on the International Standard Organisation ISO 3166 *Codes for the Representation of Names of Countries and their Subdivisions* (known as ISO 3166-1), adapted to meet the requirements of NS data users. ISO 3166-1 forms the basis of most international and national statistical institute country classifications, and there would be a high level of comparability country classifications if this was adopted.

Four rounds of stakeholder consultation followed. Stakeholders from both within and outside the ONS were involved in this consultation; a full list of those organisations consulted in the development of the classification is available in the Annex.

The first round of consultation included a summary of the above research, the proposal outlined above, and a questionnaire designed to generate stakeholder input on their needs and requirements for the country classification. The great majority of stakeholders were supportive of the central proposal outlined above.

The second round of consultation drew on stakeholder feedback from the first round and proposed a draft classification, definition, groupings and coding index. Feedback on this draft was used for the third round of consultation, in which the classification, definition, groupings and coding index were outlined and further feedback from stakeholders invited. Further feedback came at the NS Harmonisation Group (NSHG) meeting. A number of issues were raised, which prompted further revision and modifications to the classification to produce this final revision.

The Statistics Services Branch of the United Nations Statistics Division, ISO 3166 Maintenance Agency, the British Standards Institute (BSi), and the Central Statistics Office (Ireland) (which had also recently undertaken a similar exercise) were contacted for information and/or advice on adapting ISO 3166-1 to meet the requirements of National Statistics data users. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA) were also contacted for information and/or advice on the use of appropriate terminology and relevant UK policy issues to consider, for example using "Ireland" and not the "Republic of Ireland" as "Ireland" reflects the country's own formal title¹. Finally, the National Statistics website was also used to publicise the project via the Classifications and Standards webpage.

¹ However, where data is being compared between Northern Ireland and Ireland, the use of "Republic of Ireland" may be necessary in outputs.

Links to other classifications

The NSCC is based on ISO 3166-1 *Codes for the Representation of Names of Countries and their Subdivisions*, and the United Nations', *Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use*. The 2 and 3 character alpha codes of the country classification are made available by ISO 3166-1. The 3-character numeric code is made available by the United Nations and is also provided in ISO 3166-1.

There are three main areas of difference between the NSCC and the United Nations/ISO 3166-1 classifications.

Area of difference	Rationale for change from the United Nations / ISO 3166-1 classifications
1. Category title differences	To adhere to the UK government policy on the appropriate British terminology used to refer to countries (outlined in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's document <i>Geographical Names and Information</i> and the Permanent Committee on Geographic Names for British Official Use)
2. Additional categories	<p>To cater to particular types of survey responses, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • where not enough detail is provided to enable coding to a country category, but regional information is provided (e.g. "Africa Not Otherwise Specified"); • where a country name is given of a former country in which there is still interest (e.g. "Czechoslovakia"); and • where there is no country to report, but a response has still been provided (e.g. "In the Air", "At Sea")
3. More detailed categories	<p>Existing categories were not sufficiently detailed for United Kingdom statistical data users in four cases. These have been further disaggregated in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United Kingdom - more detailed categories distinguishing the nations of the United Kingdom, i.e. England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as a category for Great Britain and a <u>publication only</u> code for England and Wales (combined) • Spain - distinguishing between Spain and the Canary Islands • Cyprus - distinguishing between the parts of Cyprus included and not included in the European Union; and • The Channel Islands – more detailed categories distinguishing the bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey <p>The codes for the new categories are taken from the series of numbers 900 - 999 and the series of letters QM-QZ, XA to XZ, QMA to QZZ and XAA to XZZ which ISO set aside for users that need additional code elements to represent country names not included in ISO 3166-1. Guidelines for the use of these categories are also available.</p>

Most international and national statistical institute country classifications are based on the United Nations/ISO 3166-1 classifications, and therefore the NSCC has a high level of international comparability.

Eurostat's Nomenclature of Countries and Territories for the External Trade Statistics of the Community and Statistics of Trade between Member States, known as the *geonomenclature* (abbreviated to GEONOM) and *Balance of Payments Vade Mecum Geonomenclature* are very closely linked to ISO 3166-1. Therefore there is a high level of comparability between these and the National Statistics Country Classification.

There are no related harmonised questions for country due to the wide range of variables to which the NS Country Classification can be applied.

Maintenance and support

The ONS' Classifications and Harmonisation Unit (CHU) will be responsible for:

- maintaining the classification, coding index, groupings and correspondences
- publishing the country classification, coding index, groupings and coding guidelines and explanatory notes on the National Statistics' Classifications and Standards web pages and ensuring that these are kept up-to-date.
- disseminating as appropriate any changes or updates to users
- coordinating the implementation of the classification by business areas in the future

Annex

Organisations consulted in the development of the country classification.

- Department for Education and Skills
- e-Government Unit, Cabinet Office
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- Higher Education Statistics Agency
- Home Office
- National Assembly for Wales
- Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
- ONS BOP Investment Income and Co-ordination, Balance Of Payments and Financial Sector Division
- ONS Business Registers Unit, Statistical Framework Division
- ONS Data Editing and Imputation, Quality and Corporate Management Division
- ONS Employment, Travel and Related Group (Labour Force Survey) Social and Vital Statistics Division
- ONS External Migration, Migration Statistics Unit, Population and Demography
- ONS Foreign Direct Investment, Financial and Accounting Surveys Division
- ONS Geography, Statistical Framework Division
- ONS Health and Care, Social Reporting and Analysis Group
- ONS Health and Related Group, Social and Vital Statistics Division
- ONS International Passenger Survey Employment Travel and Related Group, Social and Vital Statistics Division
- ONS Labour Force Assessment, Labour Market Division
- ONS LMD Management, Labour Market Division
- ONS Statistics and Research for Regional Policy, Regional and Local Division
- ONS Survey Methods Division
- ONS System Design, 2011 Census Design
- ONS Vital Events and Morbidity Processing, Social Data Collection and Administrative Sources
- ONS Vital Statistics Outputs, Social and Vital Statistics Division
- The Permanent Committee for Geographical Names for British Official Use