

UN ONLINE NETWORK ON PUBLIC  
ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE



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UNPAN/SG/104

## **Guidelines on Classification and Validation of UNPAN Information**

17 May 2000

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# **Guidelines on Classification and Validation of UNPAN Information**

## **Proposal for discussion to the UNPAN Task Force on Classification**

**Prepared by UNPAN-NY**

### **1. Justification and Overview**

Information is the essence of UNPAN. Therefore the quality of the information provided is a crucial, and quality control is a necessary continuous process in the management of the UNPAN network. The headquarters and regional centers of UNPAN need to collect, analyze, select and ultimately process large amounts of data for dissemination and uploading into the web. The present guidelines aim at ensuring network effectiveness by providing specifications and directions for effective information quality control.

The need for classification and validation of UNPAN information was stressed by participants in the 1<sup>st</sup> Interregional Consultative Meeting of UNPAN held in Thessaloniki on 15-17 November 1999. More specifically the participants pointed out that:

1. Classification of UNPAN information/data is crucial and needs to be well developed by type, field, location and function, etc, for all regional centers' information and other sources of information;
2. The UNPAN outputs under the information clearing house to be produced requires to be further defined, and be categorized either by type or theme;
3. The issue of authentication, validation and reliability of the information that UNPAN will provide at regional level needs very careful consideration as it is essential to the effectiveness of UNPAN.

In Thessaloniki, a task force of five institutions (CLAD, EIPA, Magalhaes Foundation, Greek Institute for Public Administration and DPEPA and DPEPA) was formed to immediately address the above issues. The present draft guidelines are therefore an initial proposal on the basic criteria for classification, authentication and validation of the UNPAN information, to be discussed among the members of the task force.

### **2. Classification of UNPAN Information**

The information subjects in the UNPAN network focus into five core thematic areas, as indicated in the UNPAN plan of action:

1. Public economic policies
2. Governance systems & institutions
3. Public administration and civil service
4. Management innovation and development
5. Public finance

As recommended by the participants in the 1<sup>st</sup> Consultative Meeting on UNPAN of November 1999, within the five broad areas above special attention is given to non-conventional, emerging and critical issues, such as role and functions of the state, public enterprise reform, civil service reform, corruption and promotion of good governance. The breakdown by subject given in Appendix I is a proposal for discussion by the taskforce, with a view to arriving at an agreed classification for UNPAN information.

In order to guarantee the quality of the information provided by UNPAN and facilitate the work of the participating institutions in selecting, uploading and removing information, the UNPAN needs its own classification of subjects, and needs to establish subjects above need to be broken down and classified. A proposed breakdown of each subject into three levels of details is to be found in Appendix I.

Classification is a means of bringing order to a multiplicity of concepts or items of information by arranging them into classes - that is, group of things that have something in common. A class may be divided into smaller classes, still with the properties of collective identity and distinctiveness.

The UNPAN information is classified according to five core thematic subdivided into (initially) up to three levels of smaller classes, as per Appendix I. This classification is unique to the UNPAN network. However, it is necessary to establish a connection between UNPAN special classification on the five subject areas and a universal classification system of information, in order to establish a common language and criteria among the different participating institutions responsible for selecting and posting information in the network.

To this end, UNPAN-NY examined several thesauri as well as the Universal Decimal Classification Tables. It was pointed out that the thesaurus, which is a controlled vocabulary containing terms for describing concepts within a particular subject area, is used for indexing and retrieving information. While a number of organizations use the thesaurus as a tool for classification, the terms in the thesaurus were found to be too broad and did not offer the specificity required for the classification of UNPAN materials.

The Universal Decimal Classification scheme, however, is designed to arrange and index literary materials in any form. The Tables offer flexibility as they can be used to classify materials in any language, including Cyrillic languages. In addition, the decimal notation system easily accommodates new subjects while still using the simple Arabic numerals. It offers a classification of subjects independent of point of view and geography, two areas that UNPAN will use. Most importantly, it allows one to classify materials as narrowly as possible and several levels removed from the main subject. It can also be easily adjusted to meet the needs of a special classification such as the one for UNPAN materials, which, as mentioned above, gives attention to non-conventional, emerging and critical topics.

A sample classification of UNPAN material according to the Universal Decimal Classification is given in Appendix II for consideration of the UNPAN taskforce on classification. The need and utility of using a universal classification is an issue to be discussed within the task force.

### **3. Criteria for Validation of Information**

In order to be of any use to the interested public, the UNPAN information needs to meet high quality standards. Quality has several dimensions, including relevance of the contents, credibility of the source, originality, timeliness and neutrality. Therefore the information uploaded in UNPAN should meet the following criteria:

1. Relevance/Accuracy:
  - 1.1. Theoretical conceptual and practical value
  - 1.2. Demonstration of specific solutions (case studies)
  - 1.3. Identification of best/bad practices
  - 1.4. Country cases and comparative studies
2. Credibility of the source
  - 2.1. Academic institutions, (schools, institutes, journals)
  - 2.2. Government documentation
  - 2.3. Inter-governmental documentation
  - 2.4. NGO documentation
  - 2.5. Individual experts recognized within the field
3. Authenticity

Materials for inclusion in the UNPAN Network should have an official identifier (document symbol, sales no. etc.). Where an identifier is lacking, a statement should be made on the document that it has been cleared by .....(head

of Division/regional/national centers) for inclusion in the Network. Newsletters should have the number in the series.

Each regional/national center will be responsible for the authenticity of the information they posted themselves in UNPAN

#### 4. Originality

Documents and other materials uploaded into the UNPAN website are of two kinds: original, i.e. not published elsewhere (neither in paper nor electronic form); or already published elsewhere, in which case the source of the original publication should be quoted. Publication is defined as any material that is officially published for external or internal perusal, and has some form of identification/symbol.

#### 5. Neutrality

The information provided in UNPAN will follow to the extent possible criteria of neutrality, objectivity, non-exclusion/comprehensiveness and balance (geographic, ethnic, gender related, political, et al.). politically sensitive issues should be considered in light of the above criteria

#### 6. Time sensitivity /obsolescence

A timeframe for posting, updating and removal of information is to be established according to different services and products, as follows:

Service/product	Timeframe for		
	Posting	Updating	Removal
Legislation			
Reports (analytical, technical), case studies			
Country profiles			
Major developments in Public Administration			
Statistical databases			
Public administration directories and calendar of events			

### 4. Legal Aspects

#### 1. Proprietary rights

Article 4 of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOA) to be signed between DESA and the regional and national centers of UNPAN establishes that "DESA shall be entitled to all intellectual property and other proprietary rights including but not limited to patents, copyrights, and trademarks, with regard to products, or documents and other materials which bear a direct relation to or are produced or prepared or collected in consequence of or in the course of the execution of this Memorandum".

Article 4.2 of the same MOA establishes that "with respect to pre-existing copyrighted material, [...] shall be responsible for securing permission of the copyright holder in each case, before inclusion in UNPAN".

## 2. Disclaimer

Every UN publication with a sales number has a disclaimer. Each author institution is responsible to put a disclaimer in its own material.

## **5. Information Management and Technical Maintenance and Its Process**

### **Information management**

Once the classification and validation criteria for the UNPAN information are established, the "information life cycle" will be integrated by a number of steps, which include the following:

Targeted search and collection (according to established areas of focus and classification criteria)

Analysis (according to authentication and validation criteria)

Selection

Approval for posting

Uploading onto the web (time sensitive)

Maintenance/update (time sensitive)

Removal from web (time sensitive)

Initially, the UN server at HQ will be the primary information host. The server can be accessed by the UNPAN online regional centres for managing the information of their respective regions whereas UNPAN-NY will design the host system and manage its own part of the information.