

CURRENT ISSUES IN TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION -
STATISTICAL TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Report prepared by the International Labour Office

Since its inception, the ILO has been engaged in the establishment of international standards and guide-lines concerning the concepts, definitions, classifications and development of statistical methods to be used in collecting and compiling various types of labour statistics. These statistical standards are implicit in the terms of the 1985 ILO Labour Statistics Convention (No. 160) and Recommendation (No. 170), which provide for a basic set of labour statistics at the national level.

The ILO's action is aimed at translating these international standards into operational programmes through (i) technical assistance, (ii) manuals and (iii) training. Unfortunately, its action has been weak as regards training. The most recent training courses conducted by the ILO date back to the 1960's. Since then, financial constraints within the regular budget have made it impossible to organise any training courses without disrupting other priority activities. Efforts made in the past to obtain extra-budgetary resources have been unsuccessful.

The only regular and formal international system of training in the field of labour statistics appears to be that of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics International Training Programs in Labour Statistics. Other courses, for example those in statistical training institutes such as the Munich Centre for Advanced Training and the International Centre for Vocational Training in Turin, are of a more ad hoc nature. The ILO Bureau of Statistics has often been called on to contribute resource persons to these ad hoc courses, as well as seminars and workshops organised by other organisations. This has unfortunately been the extent of its training activities in the recent past.

Recourse has, however, been made to on-the-job training in the statistical units of ministries of labour or related ministries and/or central statistical organisations. This is particularly the case for technical co-operation projects which generally include a training component; this component also often covers resources for studies abroad, frequently within the framework of the BLS International Training Programs in Labor Statistics.

The difficulties involved in organising training courses in labour statistics include (i) financing; (ii) the need to provide instruction and documentation in at least three languages; (iii) the selection of topics - labour statistics cover a wide range of subjects which are not necessarily inter-related, and which interest different specialists; (iv) the selection of objectives - the courses should aim not only at producers of statistics but also at users, such as economists, trade unionists, managers, etc.; and (v) the selection of participants, who should have the necessary levels of qualification and experience in handling numerical data.

The ILO Bureau of Statistics has recently turned its attention once again to the need for training courses. Serious consideration is now being given to the possibility of organising a regular, though not frequent, labour statistics training course with the assistance of the International Institute for Labour Studies in Geneva, and the International Centre for Vocational Training in Turin.