

Measuring decent work beyond 2015: Adapting concepts in changing patterns of work

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Job markets have been in the spotlight during the recent Great Recession: economic debates on how to proceed at the macro level in order to overcome the strains suffered by growing number of workers in the affected areas, and how to prevent transmission effects in others, as well as the emerging new scenarios found in markets have triggered statistical challenges on how to better change methods in capturing a moving target. Traditionally, labour statistics, one of the first internationally agreed statistics framework –dating back to 1923 through the International Conference of Labour Statisticians- have focused on the core variables and defined standards in order to guide employment policies and policy decisions. However, back in the 90s, emerging new patterns and seriously affected groups challenged the established notion of key variables in the world of work. The quantitative aspect was combined with the qualitative one and the focus on broader dimensions which would help a better understanding of how labour markets work and how ordinary people is affected by them was widely accepted and incorporated in the policy discussions.

The concept of decent work, launched in the late 90s, was widely accepted at the highest political level and since then, many statistical challenges were carefully studied and taken, both at the international and national levels. The need for a proper metric was immediately undertaken by many actors and the ILO has been leading the effort. The changing patterns of work, the emerging problems and dimensions and the need to rethink many of the core concepts guiding employment, unemployment and other dimensions of decent work (social protection, proper dialogue and respect to labour rights) led to a radical broadening of concepts and many changes in the way of measuring concepts. Last 19th ICLS was clearly an example where labour statisticians from all regions agreed to innovate and align with these new challenges. But also the emerging of different new frameworks (decent work measurement, quality of employment, among others) were signs of winds of change. The paper provides an example on how the post-2015 development agenda has already had an impact on linking key statistical concepts in labour statistics to a broader agenda of poverty alleviation, well-being, inequalities and social dimensions of development. Human rights, economic development, governance and quality of employment have all stepped in the classical framework to be better suited for the challenges of the world beyond 2015.

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