

Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Innovative and Effective ways to collect Time-Use Statistics (TUS), in line with ICATUS 2016 and other international standards and in support of SDGs monitoring

New York, USA, 20-22 June 2018

**2 United Nations Plaza, located on 44th Street, between First and Second Avenue,
Room DC2-1684**

Conclusions and Recommendations*

Prepared by

United Nations Statistics Division

* This document is being reproduced without formal editing

**Recommendations of the UN Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Innovative and Effective ways to collect Time-Use Statistics (TUS), in line with ICATUS 2016 and other international standards and in support of SDGs monitoring
UN Statistics Division - New York, USA, 20-22 June 2018**

1. The Expert Group welcomed the organization of the meeting on how to modernize Time Use Surveys (TUS) as part of the process of updating the “UN Guide to producing statistics on time use: measuring paid and unpaid work”, mandated by the Statistical Commission in 2017. The meeting took stock of recent experiences of countries and researchers in producing time-use statistics that take advantage of the latest technologies available and use different (a) survey instruments and (b) collection modes, in order to better understand how to develop a “light/optimal instrument” in line with ICATUS 2016¹. Experts agreed that the meeting was very timely as it addressed issues that will contribute to the monitoring of progress under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicators, including indicator 5.4.1².
2. Experts stressed that the collection of time-use information is challenging for national statistical offices given the complexity of field operations and data processing, the high cost involved, and the high respondents’ burden resulting in low response rates. Use of data, particularly for designing and monitoring policies, should also be strengthened.
3. The group stressed that the objectives of time use surveys will be a main determinant in the choice of the instrument and the collection mode to be used. However, experts also agreed that regardless of instrument/mode used, high-quality data should be the non-negotiable, primary goal in the strive towards reducing respondents’ burden, increasing response rates and decreasing operation costs.
4. Among instruments, the group discussed the relative advantages of full time diaries, light time diaries, stylized/survey questions and a minimum set of questions. As for modes to collect data, the group reviewed current practices in using interviewers face-to-face (PAPI/CAPI) and on the phone (CATI) versus having self-completed/administered surveys through left-behind diaries or via the use of smart and web applications (CAWI). Observational approaches were briefly covered as well. It was noted that different instruments and data collection modes provide different levels of data accuracy and are not necessarily comparable and that some data “adjustments” may be needed.
5. In terms of instruments, the group agreed that although the full time diary is considered “superior” and the best instrument to collect time use data given the accuracy and granularity of data collected, its application is the most challenging due to the high cost, complex data processing, and high respondents’ burden. Additionally, data currently collected with full time diaries are often underutilized and/or cannot be disseminated in some cases due to the small sample size for certain activities. Therefore, further research on the use of light time diaries, combined with

¹ ICATUS 2016 is the International Classification of Activities for Time Use Statistics, adopted in 2017 by the UN Statistical Commission at its 48th session.

² Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location.

additional probing questions and proper background questionnaires, was recommended as an alternative instrument as well as research on the use of the latest technologies for time use data collection.

6. The group also noted that observational approaches should be considered only for data quality checks or in-depth small-scale studies given the high cost they entail. As for a minimum set of questions, they should be considered only for studies focusing on specific domains/topics.
7. The group agreed that in some settings, particularly the ones with low literacy rates, face-to-face interviews will still be needed, whereas in others, self-completed approaches for data collection can be a suitable solution to lower costs. It was also noted that the presence of an interviewer might have an effect on the answers provided by the respondents, compared to those reported in self-completed surveys. For instance, several studies have shown that people tend to overreport activities that are perceived as socially “important” or “acceptable” when asked about their use of time through face-to-face interviews using stylized/survey questions as opposed to self-completed diaries, thus inflating the time spent on those activities.
8. Experts highlighted that modernization of time use surveys may have different meanings in different contexts and countries. For some countries, modernization may result in moving from PAPI to CAPI, as for others, it might consist of developing and using web and mobile solutions. It was agreed that a desirable outcome for countries over time would be to transition from stylized questions to diaries in terms of the instrument, and from face-to-face to self-administered surveys using modern technologies (no paper forms, only digital) in terms of mode of data collection.
9. The group highlighted that the use of mixed modes in the collection of time use data could help address many of the challenges discussed, as different groups of a population would be targeted with a different/suitable mode. As an example, the following population sub-groups and associated instruments and modes to be used were considered for a hypothetical country:

Population sub-group	Instruments	Mode	Contact method
High literate urban high-tech working age population	Full or light time diary	CAWI or Mobile application (concurrent mode)	Mail / e-mail / SMS
High literate urban high-tech working age population, who has lost trust in technology (data protection, confidentiality, etc)	Full or light time diary	CAPI or CATI	
Low literate rural population	Full or light time diary	CAPI	

10. Using open sources for the development of CAPI, CATI and CAWI was emphasized to lower software costs, avoid vendor lock-in and facilitate scaling.
11. The group recognized the importance of improving the response rates of time use surveys. Some strategies that were identified include:
 - a. Better communicate how data will be used;
 - b. Advertise the survey in social media and on TV/cable;
 - c. Share personalized results with respondents to show how they compare with others from the same socio-demographic group;
 - d. Provide incentives (including rewards points, debit cards, mobile data plans).
12. The group welcomed the project on modernizing Time Use Surveys that UNSD is initiating with partners under phase II of the Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE) initiative, and agreed that the following topics should be further researched and tested in pilot countries:
 - a. Collection mode/interviewer effect: to understand how/if collecting data with the assistance of an interviewer affects the quality and coverage of time use data (compared to self-completed data collection modes);
 - b. Comparative study, including in developing countries, of diaries versus stylized questions (instrument effect) using digital data collection: to understand if time use data obtained from these instruments are comparable and how data can be reconciled;
 - c. Combining a time diary with selected summary questions to obtain information about activities that are not frequent or that require further probing;
 - d. Study the need and implications of having a reference day in the survey: can the reference day be replaced with a “similar” day as long as the distinction between weekdays and weekends is ensured?
 - e. Additional research to understand how to better utilize available mobile networks for time use data collection (e.g. using SMS to initiate first contact with the respondent, or to send reminders, or to directly collect data) and take advantage of their high penetration across countries. The use of voice response was also acknowledged as an interesting area with potential; however, it was also noted that NSOs might not be ready to implement it in the near future.
 - f. The use of mobile applications in the context of time use data collection should also be addressed, including by identifying the profiles/characteristics of respondents who may use them along with any mode effect, when used together with other data collection modes.

Decisions related to the guidelines

13. The group took note of the structure, namely the main document and annexes, adopted by Eurostat in the “2020 Harmonized European Time Use Surveys Guidelines” and suggested to refer to it while updating the “UN Guide to Producing Statistics on Time Use: Measuring Paid and Unpaid Work”.

14. Experts agreed to update the UN Guidelines, including by addressing the following points:
- a. The importance of time use data in the context of the SDGs framework and in reviewing and following up the implementation of the 2030 Development Agenda
 - b. The need to involve stakeholders including data users since the planning phase of time use surveys and to provide guidance on how to link policy questions to different survey objectives and related indicators (highlighting how data can be used)
 - c. Expansion of the section on cognitive testing
 - d. Addition of a section on the need to capture geospatial information as part of the household information
 - e. Covering ways of contacting respondents and the use of behavioural science techniques
 - f. Addition of a section on alternative modes of data collection (including mixed modes)
 - g. Addition of a section/part on possible options/scenarios to collect data, based on objectives of data collection, population characteristics, available resources, previous experiences on TUS
 - h. Addition of a section on how to improve response rates (incentives and training of interviewers)
 - i. Covering additional topics that can be included in TUS such as the measurement of subjective well-being and intrahousehold time-use
 - j. Integration of ICATUS 2016: the classification and its operationalization, including contextual variables and related categories
 - k. Addition of a quality assurance framework identifying a set of minimum acceptable standards/requirements including the definition and methods to calculate response rates
 - l. Inclusion of boxes with good country practices, for example, in capturing specific/vulnerable groups (e.g. UNICEF on children's time use)
 - m. "Modernization" of the dissemination chapter
 - n. Addition of a section on the analysis of time use data and indicators linked to policy needs (with reference to point b above)
 - o. Addition of a glossary of terms
15. The group noted that it will be important to provide a full/complete toolkit to countries to conduct time use surveys, which will include the guidelines (covering both conceptual framework and operational advice) and additional material (model background questionnaires at the household and individual levels as well as a model time use diary with related context variables).

Decisions related to the future work of the Expert Group

16. Experts reviewed and agreed with the following tasks to be undertaken in the medium- and long-term:
- a. Developing a draft conceptual framework by the end of 2019 including model/recommended instruments
 - b. Further researching on optimal modes of data collection for TUS

- c. Testing/piloting of conceptual framework, including model instruments, and modes of data collection in interested countries representing different regions, starting in 2020
 - d. Contributing to the analysis and assessment of results from the pilot tests
 - e. Contributing to the update of the methodological guidelines planned to be presented to the UN Statistical Commission in 2022. During 2023, the guidelines will be finalized and edited, and their use will be promoted across countries.
 - f. Contributing to the development of methods to harmonize existing time-use data and improve their comparability across countries.
17. The group took note of the plans to organize one meeting back-to-back with the 50th Session of United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2019 and, if possible, a second one back-to-back with the meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics (IAEG-GS) during the fourth quarter of 2019.
18. Experts agreed to invite additional countries and organizations to become members of the group and to contribute to its work programme described above. A proposed list of additional experts will be shared with the group for comments in due course.