

Latest international standards on work, employment and labour underutilization:

Main features, gender relevance and experiences to date

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Abstract:

In October 2013, the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) adopted a new Resolution concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization. This Resolution updates the previous international standards dating from 1982 and used by countries as basis to produce their official statistics on the labour force, employment and unemployment.

Major changes introduced in the new standards include a conceptual framework that recognizes all paid and unpaid work as productive activity and promotes their comprehensive but separate measurement; a more refined measure of employment as “work for pay or profit” and wider measures of labour underutilization that complement the unemployment rate to support better monitoring of labour markets; as well as separate concepts, definitions and indicators of participation in different forms of unpaid work, particularly in own-use production work (including in subsistence farming and fishing and in the provision of unpaid household services), unpaid trainee work and volunteer work to render visible their contribution to households, communities and national economies.

These refinements to the international statistical standards respond to demands for more targeted measures to inform the formulation and monitoring of a wide range of economic, labour market and social policies and programmes. There is a particularly strong gender relevance as statistics produced by the new standards are expected to give visibility to unpaid work which is predominantly done by women.

Activities to revise and update national data collection practices to be in line with the new standards are already underway in a number of countries and regions around the world. To support these efforts, the 19th ICLS called on the ILO to conduct further “conceptual and methodological work, including testing” and to promote the “sharing of goods practice among countries” through a “collaborative mechanism between countries, international, regional and sub-regional organizations, and workers’ and employers’ representatives.” To meet this demand the ILO launched a pilot study process with 10 countries in 2015. The studies will be completed in 2016 and guidance will be published by the ILO to support countries who wish to apply the standards.

This presentation will provide an overview of the main changes introduced in the new international standards on statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization. A particular focus will be placed on the gender relevance of these changes and the expected improvements in our understanding of women’s and men’s work which will result from their application. The experiences from the pilot studies will be discussed with a particular focus on what the studies can tell us about questionnaire design to ensure different working activities are adequately captured.

Keywords: work statistics framework; paid and unpaid work; employment; unemployment; labour underutilization; ICLS;