

Seventeenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS)

80 years of ILO statistical standard setting

About the ICLS

1. More than 80 years have passed since the first ICLS was held in Geneva in 1923. Since that date, ICLSs have been convened periodically, and in accordance with the decision taken by the Governing Body of the ILO at its 283rd Session (March 2002), the Seventeenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) was held at the ILO, Geneva, from 24 November to 3 December 2003. The following items were on the agenda of this Conference:

I General Report: including a number of topics, such as decent work indicators; measurement of working time; measurement of informal employment; child labour statistics; gender mainstreaming in labour statistics; occupational safety and health statistics; statistics of disabled workers; statistics of trade union membership and collective bargaining agreements; the need for revision of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-88), and the past, current and future statistical work of the ILO;

II Household Income and Expenditure Statistics

III Consumer Price Indices

2. The main objectives of the Conference were to revise the existing international recommendations relating to household income and expenditure statistics and consumer price indices. The Conference also discussed the General Report which, for the first time, was an integrated report covering all ILO statistical activities, both current and proposed, and advised the ILO on its future programme of statistical activities, including methodological development, data collection and dissemination.

3. The Conference was attended by delegates from 85 member States, by employers' and workers' representatives nominated by the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization, as well as by observers from a number of international governmental and non-governmental organizations. There were, in all, 287 participants.

Director-General opens ICLS

4. In his opening speech¹, Mr. Juan Somavía, Director-General of the ILO, emphasized that statistics are the key to the lives of people and the lifeblood of the ILO. They help to provide a picture of what is happening in the world of work and lay the foundations for policy-making. Recalling that the first ICLS was held 80 years ago, he drew attention to the role of the ICLS in establishing international guidelines for labour statistics and in promoting the international comparability of labour statistics. He was pleased to note the large number of participants from developing countries, and also that women were well represented at the Conference, as the gender dimension should be fully present in all statistical work. Mr. Somavía outlined the two principal challenges which the ILO faces in statistics: measuring decent work, the overarching framework for all ILO activities, and support for the statistical capacity building that will be necessary for countries to collect relevant and reliable labour statistics.

¹ The Director-General's speech is available at:
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/dgo/speeches/index.htm>

Organization of the Conference

5. The Conference elected Mr. E. Pereira Nunes (President of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) as Chairperson, Mr. J. Archvadze (First Deputy Chairperson, State Department of Statistics, Georgia) as Vice-Chairperson, and Ms. P.C. Kali (Deputy Director, Labour Market Information, Ministry of Labour, Namibia) as Reporter for the Conference.

6. The Conference appointed two Committees to deal with the substantive topics that were the subject of revised international standards for consideration by the Conference. Ms. Sylvie Michaud (Canada) was elected as Chairperson of the Committee on Household income and expenditure statistics. Dr. Paul Cheung (Singapore) was elected as Chairperson of the Committee on Consumer price indices.

7. In the course of its work, the Conference established six Working Groups to deal with specific issues:

- Working Group on the updating of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), chaired by Mr. György Lázár (Hungary);
- Working Group on Informal Employment, chaired by Mr. Jacques Charmes (France);
- Working Group on Decent Work indicators, chaired by Ms Tatiana Gorbacheva (Russian Federation);
- Working Group on Statistics of Trade Unions and Collective Bargaining, chaired by Mr. Garth Bode (Australia);
- Working Group on Gender Mainstreaming in Labour Statistics, chaired by Dr. Linda L. Sabadini (Italy); and
- Working Group on Statistics of Working Time, chaired by Mr. José.A. de Sousa Fialho (Portugal).

Major outputs of the Conference

8. The Conference adopted three resolutions as follows:

Resolution I: Resolution concerning household income and expenditure statistics,

Resolution II: Resolution concerning consumer price indices, and

Resolution III: Resolution concerning further work on the International Standard Classification of Occupations.

In addition, the Conference endorsed two sets of guidelines concerning:

- (a) a statistical definition of informal employment, and
- (b) a checklist of good practices for mainstreaming gender in labour statistics.

It also made recommendations on a number of topics, outlined below, including the measurement of decent work.

Household income and expenditure statistics (HIES)

9. One of the most important outputs of the 17th ICLS is the new resolution concerning HIES, the fourth set of guidelines in this field adopted by an ICLS. These statistics serve to describe and analyse a wide range of social, economic and other issues, and are used for a variety of purposes, in particular for determining the basket of goods and services and the weights to be used for compiling CPIs, and for assessing the economic well-being of households and individuals. HIES statistics also contribute essential information for the study of poverty and social exclusion.

10. The major differences between the current and previous resolutions are that the former: (a) deals with household income and expenditure statistics from all sources, unlike the latter which deals with household income and expenditure surveys only; (b) places more emphasis on a conceptual framework for income statistics and for expenditure statistics; (c) allows the optional inclusion of severance and termination pay and employers' social security contributions as gross income; (d)

explicitly includes imputed income and corresponding expenditures from all household services, including unpaid work, transfer of services from other households as well as flow of services from owner-occupied dwellings and major durable goods owned by households, in the conceptual definition of income and consumption expenditure; and (e) provides guidelines on the treatment of detailed items of income and expenditure.

11. The Conference made recommendations for the ILO's future work in this area, which include: supporting countries in the implementation of the resolution and the production of statistics of household income and expenditure; producing, along with other organizations, a technical guide to assist countries in implementing the HIES recommendations; and participating in a City Group to be set up on household expenditure statistics, to further research into difficult conceptual and measurement areas that still exist.

The Resolution concerning household income and expenditure statistics is presented as Resolution I in the Annex.

Consumer Price Indices (CPI)

12. The new resolution on CPI is another major output of the 17th ICLS and will have an impact on the lives of workers and their families throughout the world. CPIs measure changes over time in the general level of prices of consumer goods and services as well as the effects of price changes on the cost of achieving a constant standard of living. They are used for adjusting wages, social security and other benefits to compensate, partly or completely, for changes in the cost of living or in consumer prices, as an average measure of price inflation, and for many other purposes. This is the fifth resolution on CPI adopted by an ICLS, underlining its significance to the ILO and the world of work, and the need for the international guidelines to be up-to-date and based on current best statistical practices and methodological advances. The resolution was developed in parallel with the preparation of the revised manual on CPI under the auspices of the Inter-secretariat Working Group on Price Statistics² and the two instruments are consistent with each other.

13. With regard to the ILO's future work in this area, the Conference recommended that the ILO support countries in the implementation of the resolution and the production of statistics of consumer price indices (CPI); and build up its research capabilities in prices statistics.

The Resolution of consumer price indices is presented as Resolution II in the Annex.

International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-88)

14. Given the changes in the world of work since ISCO-88 was adopted fifteen years ago, the Conference agreed that this classification should be updated and improved, while retaining the basic principles and main structure. The Conference adopted a resolution proposed by the Working Group, requesting the Governing Body to ensure that the ILO, as the custodian of ISCO-88, would have the capacity to modify and update ISCO-88 by the end of 2007, for the results to be available for use in the 2010 round of population and housing censuses. The resolution also requested that the ILO develop mechanisms for this work to be done in consultation with national agencies and other interested parties; and that the result be presented to a meeting of experts, that would make appropriate recommendations to the ILO Governing Body.

The resolution is presented as Resolution III in the Annex.

² *Consumer price index manual: Theory and practice*, the International Labour Office, International Monetary Fund, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the World Bank (Geneva, 2004).

15. The discussions at the ICLS were based on two reports on national practices and experiences prepared by an external consultant. Printed copies of these reports can be ordered from the ILO Bureau of Statistics (e-mail: stat@ilo.org).

Employment in the informal economy

16. The ICLS was unanimous in its agreement on the usefulness of complementing statistics on employment in the informal sector with statistics on informal employment. It endorsed *guidelines* that provide a statistical definition of informal employment and its components, to supplement the 15th ICLS Resolution concerning statistics of employment in the informal sector (1993). They are based on the conceptual framework for employment in the informal economy, which was developed for discussion by the International Labour Conference (ILC) in 2002, and covers employment in the informal sector as well as informal employment outside the informal sector. The ICLS considered that 'employment in the informal sector' (based on the enterprise as unit of observation) and 'informal employment' (based on jobs as units of observation) were two concepts which refer to different aspects of the 'informalisation' of employment and to different targets for policy-making, and that both concepts needed to be defined and measured in a coherent and consistent manner, so that one can be clearly distinguished from the other. International guidelines were useful in assisting countries in the development of national definitions of informal employment, and in enhancing the international comparability of the resulting statistics to the extent possible. They were needed for the ILO to give follow-up to the request for technical assistance on statistics of the informal economy made by the ILC 2002. The ICLS acknowledged, however, that the relevance and meaning of informal employment varied among countries, and that therefore a decision to develop statistics on it would depend on national circumstances and priorities.

The Guidelines concerning a statistical definition of informal employment are presented in the Annex.

Gender mainstreaming in labour statistics

17. The Conference strongly agreed on the need to gender mainstream all labour statistics in order to improve statistics themselves as well as to address gender concerns and enable a better understanding of the functioning of labour markets. It approved a checklist of good practices that provide guidelines for key issues for mainstreaming gender in the production of labour statistics. This checklist stresses the *need for political will* at all levels, not only in statistical agencies but also in agencies which provide administrative information; the *need for measurement of all those topics* which are useful for gender planning, including employment in the informal economy and unpaid (non-SNA) work; the *need to ensure that all workers and work situations are properly covered* in the statistics, and that *statistics are produced with sufficient detail* to make important distinctions between men and women stand out; and finally *the need for statistics to be published* in such a way that gender issues come to the forefront: statistics need to be disaggregated by sex as a minimum, but also they need to show the effect of workers' personal and family characteristics on their work outcomes, as well as the effect of their work environment and the institutional setting. These recommendations are expected to significantly assist the ILO in enhancing its technical advisory capacity, as well as countries in improving their national labour statistics.

The Checklist of good practices for mainstreaming gender in labour statistics is presented in the Annex.

Decent work indicators

18. One of the tasks of the ILO assigned by its Director-General is the development of statistical indicators for measuring various dimensions of *decent work* covering, in particular, employment opportunities, social protection, social dialogue and rights at work. At the 17th ICLS an initial framework was presented with 29 core indicators, supplemented by a set of socio-economic indicators to help the interpretation of the core indicators. The Conference recognized the importance of this new area of labour statistics and its potential role in bringing more qualitative aspects of labour into statistical measurement. The Conference requested the Office to carry out further work on the

conceptual framework. In particular, it suggested that the measurable dimensions of decent work be clearly identified, and for each dimension to explicitly formulate the associated goal to be achieved, so that appropriate indicators can be developed for correctly measuring a movement toward or away from that stated goal. The Conference stressed the need to use different sources of data, including potentially new ones such as the numerical coding of legislative and regulatory information so as not to overload labour force surveys. The Conference strongly opposed the development of guidelines for the aggregation of indicators into a composite decent work index for the purpose of ranking countries. Finally, the Conference requested the Office to prepare a comprehensive report on decent work indicators based on widespread consultation with countries at different levels of development for submission to the next ICLS and, subject to approval by the ILO Governing Body, to convene a tripartite meeting of experts on this topic. This meeting would also include discussion of statistics of trade union membership and the coverage of collective bargaining agreements (see below).

Statistics of trade unions and collective bargaining

19. Broad support was signalled for the developmental work on guidelines for statistics of trade union membership and collective bargaining coverage. It was stressed, however, that these two aspects alone cannot provide a complete picture of social dialogue in a country. This would need to include statistics of employers' organisations as well. Union membership should encompass groups of workers such as the self-employed and professionals who behave or negotiate like unions but are not unions. It was considered crucial that definitions of both trade unions and employers' organizations include the notion of "independence" anchored in ILO standards, and "active membership", a foremost criterion to measure union membership, to be defined as the payment of dues. To define collective bargaining coverage, "negotiation of pay" is foremost. Other employment conditions, such as working time, may be of particular importance in some countries, but are not sufficient on their own. Different data sources can be used, such as administrative records, establishments and household surveys. The periodicity of data collection could be longer than annual (possibly at five year intervals). For household surveys, sample sizes must be adequate to ensure statistical significance and avoid biased estimates. Other measures were proposed, such as the number of complaints against governments or employers concerning denial of collective bargaining rights or freedom of association. The Conference considered that the ILO's work in this area should be an integral part of the proposed ILO decent work measures.

Working time

20. A strong plea was made by the Conference to revise, at the next ICLS, the current resolution on statistics of hours of work which is the only international guideline on working time statistics. This resolution dates back to 1962 and is applicable only to paid workers. Furthermore, it leaves out work activities which have become important in the recent years, such as work at home, training and on-call work. While confirming that actual hours of work continued to be the key concept, the Conference recommended that revised guidelines should also cover other topics, such as usual hours of work, contractual hours, working-time arrangements, and annual hours worked. They should extend the workers' coverage to include all workers, particularly the self-employed. Revised guidelines should also touch on measurement methodologies and presentation issues. The ILO will be assisted in this work by the Paris City Group, to ensure that the revision is carried out in close consultation with national statisticians. Workers' and Employers' Organizations will also be consulted regularly, and a tripartite meeting of experts should be convened before presentation of a draft resolution to the 18th ICLS.

Child labour

21. There was unanimous support from the Conference for the development of a draft resolution on child labour statistics for discussion by the 18th ICLS, including a precise international statistical definition of child labour and methodological guidelines to ensure comparability across countries and over time. The draft resolution would take into account the experience gained from the large number

of child labour surveys conducted under the ILO's Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC).

Employment situation of persons with disabilities

22. Statistics on this topic are not a regular feature of many national statistical systems, but they are important for assessing the impact of legislation and other measures aimed at promoting the employment opportunities of persons with disabilities. The Conference supported the ILO's work to develop technical guidelines for their compilation, and also recommended the design of a compact set of questions that could be attached to health surveys.

Social security

23. The Conference strongly supported ILO proposals to strengthen efforts to achieve more reliable and comprehensive data on social security, covering four key areas: the scope of social protection, financing and expenditure, beneficiaries and protected persons, and benefit levels. It was recommended that ILO efforts should be strengthened to ensure compatibility with data collected by EUROSTAT and OECD, and a common data collection process was suggested. In addition, a review of the international standards on statistics of social security was proposed, in particular the 1957 ICLS resolution on this topic.

Future ILO statistical work

24. In addition to the topics noted earlier, delegates at the Conference mentioned a wide range of activities for the ILO's future developmental work on labour statistics, including labour demand and the balance between labour demand and supply; labour underutilization; international labour migration; vocational training; wages, employment-related income (including the updating of the *October Inquiry*) and labour accounting systems. It also recommended that gender issues should be considered in all aspects of developmental work, as a core principle of this work. On data collection and dissemination, the Conference stressed the need for the ILO to continue issuing printed publications in parallel with electronic dissemination; this is particularly important for countries where IT systems are not yet widely developed. In addition, the ILO should increase its capacity to provide technical assistance to countries as a way of strengthening their labour statistics systems.

Seminar on capacity building for labour statistics

25. During the 17th ICLS, the ILO and the PARIS21 consortium of international agencies organized a seminar on capacity building for labour statistics. Participants described the problems that they face in building statistical capacity and the (often incomplete) solutions that some had found to do so. The need for international organizations to foster better coordination between all stakeholders at the national level was stressed, as labour statistics are part of national statistical systems, as was the need for improved collaboration between international organizations, so as not to overwhelm the national statistical systems. Countries should develop strategic national plans for the production of statistics, and the use of labour statistics for policy-making and monitoring should be encouraged. In this connection, the demand for statistics could be generated by promoting the in-depth analysis of statistics and encouraging user-producer contacts. Help is also needed to mobilize funds for data collection and analysis in a number of countries. A full report on the Seminar is available on the following websites:

<http://www.paris21.org/htm/workshop/ilo2003/index.htm>, and
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/techmeet/index.htm>.

Report of the Conference

26. The Report of the Conference was submitted to the 289th Session of the Governing Body (March 2004). It is now available on the ILO Bureau of Statistics' website:

<http://www.ilo.org/stat>>.... ICLS.

El texto español de este artículo y sus anexos se publicará en un próximo fascículo del *Boletín de Estadísticas del Trabajo*.