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# Labour statistics which are useful for gender concerns

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## Introduction

Labour statistics describe the size, structure, characteristics, results and contributions of the participants in the labour market and how these change over time. Conventionally, they cover many topics dealing with the *size and structure of the labour force* and the *characteristics of workers and employers*. From an economic perspective, these statistics are useful to analyse, evaluate and monitor the way the economy is performing and the effectiveness of current and longer term economic policies. From a social perspective, they are also useful to design policies and programmes for job creation, training and retraining schemes, and assistance for vulnerable groups, including the young, the aged, women, etc., in finding and securing employment. To serve the users, labour statistics need to reflect reality as closely as possible. This means that they should cover all persons who participate in the labour market, without distinctions, and describe their different types of work situations with equal detail and knowledge.

However, the production of statistics requires that reality be “simplified” or codified into synthetic categories which highlight certain aspects of this reality while ignoring others. The aspects which are highlighted or ignored depend mainly on the *methods of data collection* which can be used and on the *priorities and objectives* of the data collection process. The different methods of data collection face various limitations, and measurement priorities depend to a large extent on the

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perception of a society about how the labour market functions, which can never be complete. As a result, national labour statistics have generally been successful in identifying and characterising “core” employment and unemployment situations, which reflect the conventional view of what “work” and “joblessness” are all about: workers in full-time regular employment in formal sector enterprises and persons who are looking for such jobs. They have been less successful to identify and describe other work situations.

Women are often found in these “other” work situations which may go unnoticed or be inadequately described in labour statistics. The production of valid labour statistics would therefore be enhanced by a better understanding of what women do and how they behave in the labour market. Endeavouring to reflect as fully as possible the work of women as compared to that of men would reveal the statistics’ strengths and shortcomings and provide indications of how and where they can be improved. Reflecting the differences between men and women in the labour market is important also for other reasons. First, it would provide more complete information to users of the statistics, such as market analysts and policy decision takers. This is important because men and women often do very different types of jobs and labour market changes tend to affect them differently. Second, it would enable users to understand and analyse the particular position and constraints of women workers as compared to men workers, and provide a more solid basis for promoting equality between women and men in the labour market. Systematic under-reporting and misrepresentation of women’s contribution to the economy contributes to maintaining a distorted perception of the nature of a country’s economy and its human resources, and thus perpetuating a vicious circle of inequality between men and women strengthened by inappropriate policies and programmes.

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It is important therefore to know the characteristics that labour statistics need to have to be useful to reflect differences and similarities in the situation of men and women comprehensively<sup>2</sup>. This article deals briefly with some of these characteristics. This article is not the characteristics of good “women’s” statistics, but about those of good statistics of women and men as they interrelate in the world of work.

### **Gender concerns in labour statistics**

It is generally accepted that inequality between men and women stems from attitudes, prejudices and assumptions about the different roles assigned to men and women in a society. These learned roles, e.g., as parents, housekeepers, providers of basic needs, etc. largely determine the type of work men and women do in a society. For example, given their traditional role of housekeepers, women workers tend, more than men, to combine economic activities with household (non-economic) activities, to work intermittently over the year and to work closer to home, often in the house for pay or for family profit in a family enterprise. Furthermore, because of their assigned role as dependent members of the household, women tend to be relatively more active than men in non-market activities and the informal sector; to be considered by others and even by themselves as economically inactive; to be provided less education, thus to be more limited to occupations which require lower skills and are less rewarded; to be considered as secondary workers in their family enterprise even when they have equal responsibility; to find it hard to break through the “glass ceiling”, i.e., to move to managerial or decision-making positions, and, in times

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<sup>2</sup> While this article is limited to gender differences, the same principles and tools can be applied to incorporate differences and similarities in the contributions and concerns of other population groups, including workers who are children, disabled or migrants.

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of economic downturns or structural adjustments, to be dismissed from their paid employment jobs first. Given the structural constraints related to family responsibilities, women who want to work and are available to do so tend to seek work much less frequently than men in the same situation, and employers tend to be reluctant to employ women outside typically female occupations. Finally, because women's roles are generally valued less than men's roles in the society, work typically done by women tends to be less remunerated and to have less status than work typically done by men.

Another area where gender roles affect men and women differently relates to the allocation of resources and benefits among the members of a household. It has been observed, for example, that women who are in self-employment tend to have more limited access to production resources than men, and this lowers their income. Furthermore, they do not necessarily have the power to control how they will use those resources available to them nor do they necessarily reap the benefits accruing from their efforts. Women's and men's roles also determine their different needs and constraints. For example, women's actual participation in and contribution to the production process is highly dependent on their marital status and on whether they have small children or there are other persons requiring care in their households. While men's participation in and contribution to the production process is also affected by these factors, the effect on them tends to be opposite to that of women.

In order to improve the description of the labour market and provide a solid basis for promoting equality between women and men, gender differences of the types described above need to be considered when producing labour statistics. This means that when determining the type of topics included and the way these topics are defined, measured and presented, it is necessary to consider how well the different contributions, constraints and needs of women as compared to men can be reflected in the resulting statistics.

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## The topics to be considered ...

In order to understand the situation of women relative to men in the labour market, statistics are needed on, for example, the number of men and women who produce the goods and services in a country (i.e., *employed* population) and the number of men and women who exert a pressure on the labour market for jobs (i.e., the *unemployed* population). Various subgroups of the employed population are of analytical importance: those persons who although working are in jobs with insufficient hours of work (the population in *time-related, or visible, underemployment*), those whose jobs are ill suited for them for other labour-market related reasons (population in *inadequate employment situations*), those who work in small unregistered economic units (the *employed in the informal sector*) and children who are in inappropriate work situations (*child labour*). These population groups need to be further subdivided into more homogeneous categories, according to other work-related characteristics, which may include, for example: the workers' *occupations*, given that men and women generally do very different jobs; their *status in employment*, in view of the steady decline of regular wage employment and the increase in other forms of employment situations, such as casual and temporary/seasonal employment and self-employment, where men and women are present in different degrees; their *income from employment*, given the pervasive difference between men's and women's level of income in every country even after correcting for their hours worked and level of education; their *working time*, in order to provide a more accurate measure of their participation in the labour market<sup>3</sup>; their participation in *industrial disputes*, as women are said to be more passive

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<sup>3</sup> The number of persons employed gives equal weight to persons who work full time and those who work only a few hours during the week. Women work on average fewer hours than men (on economic activities) and as a consequence a measure of volume of employment based on the hours worked will reduce their relative participation in the labour market as compared to a measure based on head counts, thus providing a more valid reflection of reality. Still, much of women's work remains unrecognized given that it excludes many unpaid activities carried out for the benefit of their household. If these activities were included in the scope of employment, and the hours spent in them included in the measure of hours of work, then women's share of working hours would be greater than men's.

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and less unionised than men, to be indirectly rather than directly implicated in industrial action and to be in industries which are less prone to industrial disputes; and their *occupational injuries*, given the tendency of men to be in occupations where accidents are more visible and obvious and of women to be in jobs which are more stressful, less autonomous and with more repetitive tasks than men. The above topics are conventionally covered in national labour statistical programmes, as established by ILO Convention 160, and international guidelines on their measurement exist<sup>4</sup>.

However, it is clear that topics which are relevant to increasing the understanding of men's and women's position and interrelation in the labour market need to go beyond those covered by conventional labour statistics. For example, information is needed on the number of *persons who "work" in an enlarged sense*, which include workers who produce goods and services for own consumption, because of women's significant participation in these types of activities; on workers' *working time arrangements*, to indicate the degree to which men and women work in what is known as "regular full-time" working schedules or in more irregular schedules, such as part-year, part-time employment, annualised working hours and other variable time schedules; on workers' *overtime work*, to evaluate whether establishments' responses to market's demands affect men and women differently, and on their *absence from work*, to indicate any differences in the types of absences experienced by men and women, in particular in view of the family context; on *occupational diseases*, given men's tendency to be more exposed to injuries and women's tendency to be more exposed to diseases; and on home-based work, on contingent (or non-permanent) employment, on poverty, on union participation, on the duration of employment, unemployment and underemployment, on access to productive resources and on the allocation of benefits among household members, etc..

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<sup>4</sup> Current guidelines can be consulted at <http://www.ilo.org/stat/public/english/120stat/res/index.htm>.

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It may also be useful to calculate composite indexes or measures, to reflect, e.g., the occupational segregation, wage differentials, annual hours of work, etc., of men and women.

### **... how these topics are defined ...**

The crucial role of definitions and classifications<sup>5</sup> for the production of relevant statistics is often underestimated. The definitions and classifications determine what is to be covered and with how much detail a topic will be described. The whole data production process is based on definitions and classifications, and therefore the quality of the resulting figures depends on how well these definitions and classifications reflect the actual situation of the different participants in the labour market. A change in definition will bring forth a change in the resulting statistics which may be unrelated to any change in reality. Therefore, when analysing time series or cross-country data, it is important to assess foremost whether observed changes are due to differences in definitions.

To be useful for gender distinctions, definitions should recognise that women and men do not necessarily perform the same activities, nor do they always behave in the same way, nor are they subject to the same constraints. Two characteristics are essential: *coverage* and *detail*. Definitions need to cover all qualifying work situations, regardless of whether they are performed by a man or a woman, and need to describe the different work situations in sufficient detail to bring out gender distinctions.

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<sup>5</sup> A classification groups together units of a “similar” kind - “similarity” being determined in relation to specific criteria related to a characteristic of the units - often hierarchically, in order to describe the characteristic in a systematic and simplified way. In labour statistics, the three major classifications relates to occupations, industries and status in employment.

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## Coverage

*The range of activities which constitute what is understood as “economic” affects the scope of all topics in labour statistics.* Employment statistics, for example, will include only those persons performing activities which are considered to be “economic”. Unemployment statistics will only include persons seeking to carry out such activities. Income statistics will include only those receipts accrued to persons carrying out “economic” activities. Occupational injuries statistics will include persons experiencing an injury only if performing such activities. And so on.

To be useful for gender distinctions, “work” needs to cover all activities carried out to produce the goods and services in a society, regardless of whether or not these activities are remunerated, declared to the tax authorities, done intermittently, casually, simultaneously or seasonally, etc.; and regardless of whether the good or service produced is intended for sale or barter or for own household consumption. Presently, however, “work” is circumscribed to “economic” activities, i.e., those which contribute to the production of goods and services according to the System of National Accounts (SNA). “Economic” activities defined this way include activities carried out to produce goods or render services for sale or barter in the market, and activities to produce goods for own consumption if they represent a significant proportion of the production of those goods in the country.<sup>6</sup> But domestic or personal services provided by unpaid household members<sup>7</sup> are excluded. In practice, few countries include the production of

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<sup>6</sup> Activities of this type may include: growing or gathering field crops, fruits and vegetables, producing eggs, milk and food, hunting animals and birds, catching fish, crabs and shellfish, cutting firewood and building poles, collecting thatching and weaving materials, burning charcoal, carrying water, threshing and milling grain, making butter and cheese, slaughtering livestock, curing hides and skins, preserving meat and fish, making beer, wine and spirits, crushing oil seeds, weaving baskets and mats, making clay pots and plates, weaving textiles, making furniture, dressmaking and tailoring, other handicrafts, constructing dwellings and farm buildings, building boats and canoes, clearing land for cultivation, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Activities of this type include: cleaning, decorating and maintaining dwelling, including small repair, cleaning, repairing household durables, vehicles or other goods; preparing and serving meals; caring for, training and instructing (continued...)

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goods for own consumption within the scope of measured employment and none includes services for own consumption. Most work excluded from the scope of “economic” activities are carried out by women, and this constitutes an important source of underestimation of women’s participation in the productive sphere and of their contributions to the welfare of their society. Thus, from the onset, labour statistics are at best only reflecting a partial reality.

An area where such restricted coverage of “economic” activities dramatically affects the capacity of labour statistics to reflect reality relates to child labour. Statistics on child labour commonly show that more boys than girls work. This fact, however, conceals the fact that there are many children engaged in unpaid household activities who are hindered from going to school, just as if they were working for pay. As expected, when these unpaid activities are included in the scope of child labour, then the number of girl workers exceeds that of boys. Given the impact of such exclusions on policy decisions, the ILO systematically recommends to countries to include (all or a subset of) unpaid household activities in their national statistics of child labour.

*Coverage of workers and work situations may also be affected by the criteria used to define a topic.* Often, these criteria are such that they tend to exclude particular groups of workers. Because the sex composition of these groups is generally not even, the usefulness of the resulting statistics for reflecting gender differences will be reduced. Most of the time such exclusions affect women more than men, but not always. For example, some national definitions of employment exclude contributing (unpaid) family workers who worked less than a certain number of hours. The effect will probably be stronger on the number of women identified as employed, as unpaid family work is more prevalent among women than among men. On the other side, many countries exclude the

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<sup>7</sup> (...continued)  
children; caring for the sick, invalid or old people; transporting household members or their goods, etc.

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armed forces from employment statistics, which affects men more than women. In many countries where national laws on leave entitlement cover a wide share of paid workers and allow them to take relatively extended leave without losing their jobs, e.g. in Scandinavian countries, national estimates of employment will include a higher share of people who are on extended forms of leave than in other countries. Most of these workers tend to be women, e.g. on extended maternity leave. The reported high employment levels of women in such countries may therefore be partly reflecting a definitional effect of generous leave entitlement, as an important share of these workers would not be classified as “employed” in other countries.

National definitions of employment in the informal sector may exclude persons whose main job is in, e.g. the government or in agriculture, but who have a second job in the informal sector. Most of them tend to be men. The definitions may also exclude particular activities where women are important, an aspect which is recommended in international guidelines, regardless of whether these activities otherwise satisfy the criteria for inclusion in the informal sector. Examples are: agricultural activities, activities by enterprises exclusively engaged in the production for own final use, which produce goods for the consumption of their own households, activities of paid domestic workers and of out-workers.

On the other side, national definitions of time-related (or visible) underemployment, again in line with international guidelines, generally exclude employed persons who worked more hours than a certain threshold, which is considered to represent a level of “full-time employment” in legislation, collective agreements or usual practices in establishments. Those working at or more than the threshold are considered to be fully employed even if they are willing and available to work additional hours. Unfortunately, in many countries the chosen threshold does not truly reflect

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“full” employment, because many workers are in fact compelled to work beyond those hours in order to earn a livelihood. Most of these workers tend to be men.

National definitions of unemployment generally include persons not in employment who took specified steps to find work, i.e., who were “actively seeking work”. But not all persons who want to work seek work actively, nor do all persons consider that their activities to find work are “active seeking work” activities. Thus, in countries where “formal” ways of find work, e.g., labour exchanges, are limited to the cities, or persons who use more “informal” channels, national definitions may tend to exclude some of the persons who are in fact looking for self-employment or for paid-employment but who may not necessarily consider that their activities are “seeking work” activities. Furthermore, most national definitions, in line with the standard international definition of unemployment, will exclude workers who want to work but do not “seek” work at all, either because work opportunities are so limited that they know there are no work opportunities, because they have restricted labour mobility, face discrimination or face structural, social and cultural barriers to look for work. Many of these workers tend, however, to react positively to a concrete possibility for employment. Most of them are women.

Statistics on income from employment tend also to be partial for several reasons. They tend to exclude certain wage and non-wage benefits such as social security benefits, profit-related pay and irregular payments, which may be significant for many workers and where differences between men and women may be important. Most important of all, national statistics also usually exclude the remuneration of the self-employed, where, again, differences between men and women may exist and be considerable.

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National statistics of industrial disputes may cover only legal or official actions, and impose a minimum duration or a minimum number of workers involved for inclusion in the statistics. Some may cover only workers “directly” involved, and exclude workers who do not take part in the action but who work in the establishments concerned and are prevented from working because of the dispute. This last group of workers may include, for example, out-workers and casual employees, who would normally not take part in a strike but whose work would be affected by such action in the establishment where they work. It can be expected that most of these workers are women.

*Coverage may also be affected by the use of short reference periods.* Definitions which aim at complete coverage of work situations should cover seasonal and occasional activities. However, international and national definitions of employment and unemployment generally provide an image of the labour force situation during a reference week. Statistics based on these definitions are useful to monitor current changes over time when the dominant form of employment is regular, full-time, non-agricultural, paid employment, but are less useful in other cases. Since women tend, more than men, to work in seasonal and casual activities and/or on an intermittent basis throughout the year, alternating household non-market activities with economic activities, employment and unemployment measured with reference to a short reference period will only partially describe their reality. In order to capture them fully, it is necessary to identify persons who experienced employment or unemployment any time during a longer period, such as one year. National statistics on the experience of employment or unemployment over a year exist for a number of countries, but tend to identify the *predominant* activity over that period, as this is the recommendation made in international guidelines. This measure conceals seasonal patterns of

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work and excludes persons who, while working part of the year, are inactive most of the year. Many of these workers are women.

### **Detail**

*For definitions to be useful for gender concerns they need to make sure that men's and women's characteristics are described at sufficiently detailed levels to allow significant distinctions to emerge.* To detect gender differences and similarities in occupations, for example, a national classification of occupations needs to be used at a detailed level. To use only broad occupational groups will hide occupational segregation between men and women: analysing the managerial group as a whole, for example, will not reveal the fact that women tend to be concentrated in managing small enterprises, while most of those managing larger companies are men.

Similarly, to detect gender differences in workers' status in employment, it is not enough to distinguish between "employees", "employers" and "own account workers", as most countries do. These are very heterogeneous categories, each comprising diverse employment situations. For example, the category "employees" includes not only regular employees but also out-workers (also known as home-based workers), casual employees, work-gang members, etc. Women tend to be very important in the latter situations. Similarly, "self-employed workers" include, in addition to employers and core own account workers, subsistence workers, share croppers, members of producers cooperatives, etc., where women in particular can be numerous.

To detect gender differences in income statistics, it is necessary to separately identify the various components of income because women and men may not accrue them to the same extent. For example, when income statistics include social security benefits (e.g. family allowances and compensation for medical expenditures) received by virtue of workers' employment status, as

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recommended in international guidelines, a worker's income will include all such benefits relating to his or her dependents. Similarly, when income statistics include the income of self-employed workers, the workers' income will include the income generated by the economic activities of his or her contributing (unpaid) family members. The importance for gender is that men tend to be the primary earners of their households, so it can be expected that these income components will be more important for men than for women. Therefore, income statistics that include such components will probably show a greater disparity between men and women in employment than statistics which do not. Important for gender distinctions are also estimates of the value of unpaid work, as recommended in international guidelines. Such estimates recognise that unpaid work, most of which is carried out by women, has an economic value, and will tend to reduce the differences in the measured contributions of men and women to the economy or their households.

Similarly, to make possible valid gender comparisons in working time statistics, it is important to separately identify the various working time components (e.g., overtime, absence from work, work at home, travelling time, etc.), as they may be experienced by women and men to different degrees.

*Another aspect relating to the level of detail in the statistics relates to the need for women workers' characteristics to be described equally well and with the same level of detail as the characteristics of men workers.* For example, occupational groups at each level of a national classification of occupations should be identified separately to the same extent according to the criteria specified. It is therefore important to evaluate whether the distinctions made in occupational groups where women tend to be numerous, e.g., in clerical, agricultural and elementary occupations, are detailed to the same degree as in occupational groups where men are numerous, e.g., in crafts and machine operators. Most national classifications tend to bulk in a few occupational groups the type of jobs dominated by

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women, while jobs where men are numerous tend to be distinguished at detailed levels in the classifications.

Another example where the situation of women in practice may not be described equally well as that of men relates to their status in employment. According to international guidelines, women who work in association, and on an equal footing, with their husbands in a family enterprise, are *partners* of their husbands and should therefore be classified in the same status in employment category as them, i.e. as “core own account workers” or “employers”. There is a tendency, however, for women in these situations to be classified as contributing (or unpaid) family workers in national statistics.

Many of the shortcomings found in national statistics regarding coverage and detail are due to measurement limitations: as will be seen in the following section, measurement methodologies often limit the type and range of information that can be produced. However, in other cases, the responsibility partly lies with the international guidelines which serve as models for national definitions. Seldom have international guidelines explicitly addressed the implications for gender of using a certain set of criteria as opposed to another. While revising these guidelines may not always be possible or practical, it is necessary for the ILO to recommend to identify and describe separately those groups of workers that will tend to be excluded from the different labour topics when the international standards are used.

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### ... how they are measured ...

The method used to measure the various labour topics will also affect the ability of the resulting statistics to reveal possible gender differences. Labour statistics are collected through household-based surveys, establishment-based surveys or administrative records. Each methodology has distinct features regarding coverage of workers, work situations and the control they have over the type and range of data which can be collected. To understand the strengths and limitations of each source and to interpret the resulting statistics correctly, it is important to be aware of these differences.

Administrative records, for example, provide information registered as part of the administrative functions of an agency, such as employment exchange offices, insurance companies, social security institutions, tax authorities or labour inspectorates. They have the great advantage of being relatively cheap to the producers of statistics as very little data collection is needed, and being able to provide information about each unit in the population covered by the agency's operations. Statistics can therefore be produced for small geographical areas and population groups. Establishment-based surveys generally require the respondents to search for the requested information in records kept by employers about individual workers or about groups of workers in the establishments. These records may be able to provide information which can be accurate and consistent over time on employment, earnings and hours of work over a specified period of time, depending on the needs and practices for record keeping of the establishment. Household-based surveys obtain information from the workers themselves through replies to a standard questionnaire, and can enumerate the whole population (population censuses) or a sample of it (household sample surveys). They are able to cover a much larger ranges of subjects than the other

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types of sources, because the subjects that can be covered are limited only by the capacity of household members to provide the information from their own knowledge, but when they are based on samples, the detail the resulting statistics can provide is limited.

### **Coverage of topics**

*Statistics obtained from records kept by establishments and by other agencies are limited by the type and range of information that can be obtained.* Establishment records are designed to monitor payment and attendance, and the records kept by other agencies are designed to support administrative procedures. In neither case is information recorded to provide the basis for statistics. Therefore, definitions used by these records do not necessarily correspond to the statistical definitions, and in many cases there is little that can be done to adjust the resulting data. For example, establishments will record occupied posts, which are not necessarily equivalent to the number of persons employed. They will record paid overtime and authorised leave, which is not equivalent to total overtime and actual leave: the impact for gender distinctions depends on whether men and women experience recorded overtime and leave to a different extent than total overtime and actual leave. Employers will include in their wage records all regular cash payments to employees, but may exclude payments in kind, one-time payments, such as profit-related bonuses, 13th month payments, etc.: the impact for describing gender differences will be important if excluded components are accrued predominantly by men or by women. Records kept by insurance companies on occupational injuries, on the other side, will typically relate to compensated injuries only and records kept by employment offices on unemployment and underemployment will relate only to persons who register in these offices to find work. It may be, furthermore, that the administrative procedure discriminates against women or men, thus under reporting their actual

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numbers: the fact that e.g., persons in precarious employment situations may be disqualified from claiming compensation when they are injured, and this may affect women more than men.

Additionally, records kept by establishments or administrative agencies may not keep information about those characteristics which are useful to understand gender issues adequately. For example, they may not register information on the age of these workers, their level of education or other descriptive characteristics. Sometimes, the records do not include information which makes it possible to differentiate between men and women workers!

*In contrast with information stemming from registers, household-based surveys allow much more control over the type and range of data collected, the underlying concepts, data item definitions and classifications.* The measurement can to a large extent be made as independent as possible from the respondents' own perception or understanding of the concepts used for the statistics. The classification of a person in a particular category (e.g., a particular occupation or a particular activity status) can be determined on the basis of the combined replies to a sequence of questions rather than on a direct question which requires the respondents to classify themselves on the basis of their own understanding of their work situation. For example, persons can be classified in unemployment on the basis of whether they did something to find work and were available to work (the defining criteria) rather than on their own understanding of what it means to be unemployed. Similarly, quantitative information, e.g. on hours of work or income, can be determined on the basis of replies to the elements that compose the measure, instead of on direct questions of the type: "How many hours did you work last week?" or "How much did you earn last month?". The challenge therefore, is to formulate those questions that ensure accurate application of the definition criteria. It can be expected that the more independent the measurement is of workers' perceptions of their situation, the higher the chance that women will receive equal statistical treatment, i.e., that they will have the

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same chance than men of being classified in a particular category when they satisfy the criteria for inclusion.

Unfortunately, in practice this approach is not sufficiently used in household-based surveys, given the need to limit the size of the questionnaire and the length of the interview. In addition, respondents may not understand or misinterpret the questions being raised, they may forget certain activities or purposely provide incorrect information, especially on subjects, such as income, which have proved to be sensitive. When a household member gives information about other members of the households, she or he may not be fully aware of their activities, in particular if these activities happen on an irregular basis.

### **Coverage of workers**

*Rarely do records kept by establishments or administrative agencies cover the whole population, and the groups excluded are generally those where women, more than men, are numerous, thus reducing the usefulness of these sources to reflect gender distinctions.* Establishment-based surveys tend to cover only regular employees who work in medium sized and large establishments. They may leave out managerial staff as well as peripheral workers, such as out workers, part-time worker, casual employees and workers contracted from agencies. Similarly, administrative records will only cover persons concerned by the work of the agencies which keep them. In many countries, this coverage is very low relative to the total employed population, limited to regular full-time employees in the formal sector and excluding self-employed workers, casual and seasonal employees, outworkers and sometimes also part-time workers. Given that women tend to be very important in the groups of workers excluded, administrative records cannot fully reflect their characteristics and contribution in the economy. For example, statistics on employment based on insurance records will include only

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those workers who are insured. Records about the beneficiaries of unemployment insurance will provide information for persons who have the right to claim benefits when not working or for employed persons who have the right to claim benefits when working less hours than their contractual hours. Statistics on industrial disputes tend to be restricted to legal strikes which involve a large number of workers and which last several days, and tend to cover only workers directly involved, excluding workers indirectly affected, where women are important.

*Unlike establishment-based surveys and administrative records, household-based surveys can cover all workers, including the self-employed, casual workers, unpaid family workers, out workers and paid workers in small production units. Given that these are groups where women are prominent, it is the best source for statistics when needing to reflect gender concerns.*

### **... and how they are presented**

The way statistics are presented is central to reflect gender concerns. Tables and figures should portray differences in men's and women's contributions, conditions and constraints. This implies relevant disaggregation by variables which describe the demographic, economic, social and family context of workers. All statistics on the number of persons employed, unemployed and their characteristics (e.g., income, hours of work, occupations, etc.) should make it possible to compare men with women. This means that establishments' registrations and other administrative records should as a minimum include information on the sex of persons and that the statistical system should always publish statistics disaggregated by sex.

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But classification by sex is not enough. Statistics on the characteristics of workers should be disaggregated by those variables which, in addition to sex, help describe the differences or similarities between men and women. For example, statistics on income should be presented by workers' hours of work and education level, two factors which affect the level of total income earned. Similarly, in order to show a more complete picture of men's and women's occupational injuries, statistics should be presented for hours of work and seniority, and be shown by occupational groups.

Most important of all, statistics on the structure and characteristics of the labour force should be disaggregated by variables which reflect the workers' personal and family situation, to explain the labour force participation and behaviour of women as compared to men in a more holistic way. Variables related to men's and women's personal and family circumstances include their age, their level of education, whether there are children in the household who need care, whether there are adults requiring assistance in the household (e.g., handicapped persons, older members of the family), etc.. All these factors constrain in different ways the time and energy which women and men can dedicate to "economic" work. In many societies, a person's marital status will also strongly influence their participation in the labour force, and in societies practising polygamy, a variable which deserves attention is the rank within the marriage. The type of household (e.g. single parent, female headed, etc.) to which the person belongs can also be used as a descriptive variable.

While these variables are essential when describing gender differences and similarities in the labour market, few countries present their statistics in this way. One reason may be that only household-based surveys provide sufficient flexibility to produce such statistics. But international guidelines have a role to play. They have never addressed the importance of linking labour market

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topics with workers' family context. Surely, this is an issue that needs to be addressed soon, if gender is to be a central area of work in the ILO.

## Conclusions

This article presents a number of features of labour statistics which are needed for them to usefully address gender concerns. First of all, they need to cover topics which are relevant when describing gender distinctions and similarities in the world of work. These go beyond those labour statistics covered by ILO Convention 160. If gender is to be a key area in the work of the ILO, international guidelines on the measurement of labour statistics therefore need to be extended beyond the topics covered by this Convention.

Second, the way these topics are defined and measured should aim at complete coverage of workers and work situations, and at describing their characteristics at sufficient detailed levels to make these distinctions apparent. Presently, the coverage of workers and work situations remains incomplete, mainly because the defined scope of labour statistics excludes unpaid services for own household consumption and, by so doing, the contribution of a vast amount of workers to the economy, most of whom are women. Additionally, by virtue of the criteria used in the definitions, or the coverage limitations of the data collection method used, certain groups of workers tend to be excluded from the scope of the various topics. Because the sex composition of these groups generally is not even, the usefulness of the resulting statistics for reflecting gender issues is reduced. To improve this situation, international guidelines may be necessary on how to better identify and describe those groups of workers that tend to be excluded from statistics.

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Finally, in order to adequately portray the factors that cause differences between men and women at work, it is important to disaggregate the information, as a minimum, by sex. But it is not enough. Data on the work situation of persons need to be presented in the context of their personal and family situation, particularly as regards presence of young children and other members requiring care in the household. At present, few countries do so. Also in this area, international guidelines may need to be developed.

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