

# Statistics in the ILO: Roles and responsibilities

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## 1. Introduction

The International Labour Organization (ILO) was founded in 1919 as an autonomous body of the League of Nations and then, in 1946, it became the first specialized agency of the United Nations (UN). Unique in this history amongst UN organizations, the ILO has the same distinction with respect to its tripartite structure of governments, workers= and employers= organizations united in the cause of social justice and better living conditions for all.

The main bodies of the ILO are the:

- \$ International Labour Conference (ILC) - the annual general assembly of member States;
- \$ Governing Body (GB) - the executive council composed of 56 titular members (28 Governments, 14 Workers, 14 Employers);
- \$ International Labour Office (also referred to as ILO) - the Secretariat.

Tripartite participation, such as in the GB, extends to all the bodies of the Organization including the ILC, technical committees, conferences and expert group meetings.

Apart from general discussions of labour and social issues, the ILC adopts international standards in the form of International Labour Conventions and Recommendations. Conventions are legal instruments, which come into force in a country once ratified by its law-making bodies. Such ratification commits the member State to fulfill the obligations specified in the Convention and to report regularly on its application. Recommendations, which supplement or spell out in greater detail the provisions of Conventions, are not ratified but occasional reporting is required.

## 2. General Framework for Statistical Activities

Since its inception in 1919, the ILO has been involved in statistical activities. Article 10.1 of the Constitution of the Organization requires the collection and distribution of

*Information on all subjects relating to the international adjustment of conditions of individual life and labour.*<sup>@</sup>

Starting with the compilation and dissemination of statistics for the international adjustment of labour conditions and related matters, the Office moved into statistical standard setting in the early 1920s, though albeit limited to industrialised countries and a few topics (employment and unemployment, wages

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and hours of work, migration, cost of living, occupational diseases and accidents). With the rapid growth in the number of member States in the 1950s and 1960s, especially from the developing world, the statistical work of the Office took on the additional task of promoting labour statistics through technical cooperation, and data compilation and standard setting were extended to also include topics of particular relevance to these countries.

In 1985, the ILC adopted the Labour Statistics Convention (No. 160) to replace the earlier *Convention on statistics of wages and hours of work (No. 63), 1938*. 45 Member States have ratified the Convention<sup>a</sup> as at 26<sup>th</sup> August 2002. These member States are thus obliged to:

*A... regularly collect, compile and publish basic labour statistics, which shall be progressively expanded in accordance with its resources to cover the following subjects ... A (from Article 1).*

The basic labour statistics specified include the economically active population, employment, unemployment and underemployment, average earnings and hours of work, time rates of wages and normal hours of work, labour cost, consumer price indices, household expenditure and household income, occupational injuries and occupational diseases, and industrial disputes. Ratifying countries are obliged to take into account the latest standards and guidelines established under the auspices of the ILO, to consult with workers=and employers=organizations whenever relevant statistical methodology is being established or revised and to communicate regularly to the ILO published statistics and corresponding methodological information. In ratifying the Convention, member States can initially limit their obligations to only one of the topics. They are to report regularly on their compliance, stating any difficulties encountered in meeting their commitments. The Office for its part may then be called upon to render assistance to help member States fulfill these obligations.

The ILC also adopted the Recommendation concerning labour statistics 1985, (No. 170) as a companion to Convention No. 160. It specifies the basic coverage, frequency of compilation and cross-classification variables for each of the topics and gives details on the statistical infrastructure to be established. The Recommendation also added the topic of statistics of productivity to those already in the Convention.

In recent years, the ILO has identified as its central objective the promotion of **decent work** for all, where decent work is described as

*Aopportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.*<sup>@2</sup>

The implementation of the resulting Decent Work Agenda is making new demands on the statistical activities of the ILO.

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<sup>2</sup> ILO, 1999: *Decent Work: Report of the Director-General, International Labour Conference, 87<sup>th</sup> Session, ILO, Geneva*

### 3. The Bureau of Statistics

The **Bureau of Statistics** is expected *to continue to provide the core of ILO statistical expertise and to maintain the central repository of ILO statistical data.*<sup>3</sup> This should be done with respect to *servicing Office statistical activities, strengthening national capabilities, developing standards, increasing the usability of ILO statistical products, and raising data quality.*<sup>3</sup> A new unit, called the **Statistical Development and Analysis Unit**, (SDA), has been created to *promote and support the development of new data systems and capabilities needed for the medium term programme of the Office, in close collaboration with the Bureau of Statistics ...*<sup>3</sup>

The Bureau of Statistics thus continues as the main unit in the ILO responsible for statistical activities. These include standard setting in labour statistics and delivering technical assistance to member States. The Bureau is also the main unit for gathering and dissemination of official labour statistics produced by national statistical authorities.

#### 3.1 Objectives

The ILO Bureau of Statistics is expected to work with integrity, independence and high professional standards to provide users within and outside the ILO with relevant, timely and reliable labour statistics, to develop international standards for better measurement of labour issues and for enhanced international comparability, and to help member States develop and improve their labour statistics. These statistics include all such that are relevant to the ILO's mandate and objectives within the overarching framework of **decent work**.

#### 3.2 Major Activities

To meet these goals, the activities of the Bureau includes:

- ! collection of statistics and relevant meta-data, principally from official sources, and their dissemination in print, electronic and other forms;
- ! setting of international standards and guidelines for labour statistics;
- ! provision of technical cooperation, technical assistance and training in labour statistics;
- ! servicing the statistical needs of the ILO in labour matters; and

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<sup>3</sup> ILO, 2002: *Policy Integration Department: Organization and responsibilities*, Circular No 230, Series 2, ILO, Geneva

- ! collaborating with the international statistical community in the development of labour statistics within an integrated international statistical system.

These activities are closely inter-related in addressing the above objectives. The gathering of valid and reasonably comparable labour statistics, required for servicing the needs of the ILO and its member States, cannot be achieved without the existence of international standards and of collaboration between international agencies, nor without providing technical assistance and guidance in the application of these standards.

At the same time, as the activities are competing for the scarce resources available to the Bureau, they cannot all be met to the same degree of efficiency and completeness. There is thus inevitably a need for some prioritization in their implementation. In the view of the Bureau, the basis for doing so is best illustrated by a quote:

**A ... the need for better policy decisions is served more immediately and more fully by improving national statistics than by improving access to the data of other countries.<sup>4</sup>**

In reality, over the years the priorities have shifted amongst data gathering, standard setting, servicing the Office, technical cooperation and assistance. The Bureau has not engaged in statistical analysis, but the Statistical Analysis and Development Unit is expected to enhance the capacity of the ILO to undertake such activities..

### 3.3 Collection and dissemination of statistics and methodological information

The Bureau has been collecting and disseminating statistics on labour issues since it was established. These statistics are mainly official statistics which the Bureau

- ! requests from national authorities (ministries responsible for labour, national statistical offices, etc.), largely with paper or electronic questionnaires;
- ! draws from official national publications or Internet websites; or
- ! receives routinely from national statistical services.

Besides checking for consistency with statistics previously submitted for the same countries, to ensure that really outlandish values are verified and that they correspond to the statistics requested for the countries, no adjustments are made to the statistics received before dissemination. The only exceptions are that the Consumer Price Index numbers are re-based to some standard base year, and that food price statistics are converted to standard unit prices. The Bureau also gathers and disseminates the relevant methodological information on the statistics. The statistics and other information collected by the Bureau are stored in a series of electronic databases which are used to produce printed publications, for electronic dissemination, for analysis and for answering users' requests for statistics and methodological information on national practices.

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<sup>4</sup> ILO, 1978: *In-depth review of ILO statistical activities*, Governing Body Paper GB.208/PFA/8/1, 208<sup>th</sup> Session, ILO, Geneva

## **Yearbook of Labour Statistics (YLS)**

The Yearbook is the major ILO printed statistical publication. It contains 10-year statistical time series for 194 countries and territories on the following major areas: 1) total and economically active population, 2) employment, 3) unemployment, 4) hours of work, 5) wages, 6) labour cost, 7) consumer price indices, 8) occupational injuries, and 9) strikes and lockouts. Where relevant the statistics are given for broad industry and occupation groups, by status in employment, by educational level, and by age-groups. Statistics are always given separately for men and women. A variety of sources are used by the national statistical authorities, such as population censuses {for 1)}, labour force and other household surveys {for 1), 2), 3), 4), 5) & 8)}, establishment type surveys {for 2), 4), 5), 6) & 8)}, administrative recording systems {for 2), 3), 4), 5), 8) & 9)}, official estimates {for 2), 3), 6)} and special collection procedures {7) & 9)}. Needless to say this variety of sources between countries for the same subject affects the degree of comparability of the resulting statistics.

Initially national statistics on prices and unemployment were published in the *International Labour Review*, an ILO publication, as from its first issue in 1921. Gradually other subjects were added including employment, wages and hours of work, industrial disputes and collective agreements. The Yearbook made its first appearance in 1935 with time series on these topics as well as on food consumption, social security, occupational injuries, national income, production and wholesale price indices, exchange rates, international migration, the economically active population, household incomes and expenditures, labour productivity and labour cost. Subsequently some topics were transferred to other agencies (e.g. statistics on international migration to the UN Statistics Division), to other ILO units (e.g. cost of social security to the Social Security Department), to separate publications of the Bureau (e.g. household income and expenditure statistics), and some were dropped due to changes in the world of work coupled with limited space and resources.

## **Bulletin of Labour Statistics**

This quarterly publication contains current monthly, quarterly or six-monthly series for the last four years on employment, unemployment, wages, hours of work and consumer price indices (CPI). Monthly or quarterly updates of the Yearbook series were originally published in the *International Labour Review* and its supplement until publication of the Bulletin and its monthly supplements began in 1965. The Bulletin also contains articles on statistical practices and methodologies and reports of special projects carried out by the Bureau.

## **The ILO October Inquiry**

A special annual issue of the Bulletin, this publication contains statistics on wages and hours of work for a set of 159 categories defined by occupations in 49 industry groups, and on prices of 93 selected food items. The reference month is October, hence the name. The ILO has carried out the collection and publication of these statistics since 1924, following a recommendation by the first International Conference of Labour Statisticians (1923) for the ILO to take over a survey conducted earlier by the British Ministry of Labour. The survey originally collected statistics on wages and food

prices in 16 capitals with the aim of comparing the levels of real wages. Revised several times since then, the results of the Inquiry are a rich source of international wages and prices statistics<sup>b</sup>.

### **Estimates and Projections of the Economically Active Population**

Starting in 1971, the ILO has been publishing comparable estimates and projections of population, of the labour force and age-sex specific activity rates for all countries, territories, and major geographical groupings.<sup>c</sup> The projections are based on the population projections of the United Nations Population Division. The most recent edition provides estimates and projections for the period 1950-2010 for all countries and territories with more than 200,000 inhabitants in 1990.

### **Household Income and Expenditure Statistics**

These statistics on the level, composition and size distribution of household income and consumption expenditures broken down by status in employment, household size and geographical areas have been produced in occasional publications since 1967.<sup>d</sup> Another ILO unit has also occasionally produced a complementary publication on poverty and income distribution statistics.<sup>5</sup>

### **Sources and Methods in Labour Statistics**

In order to guide users about the statistics it disseminates, the Bureau also collects and publishes detailed methodological information about the national sources of these statistics. Titled, *Sources and methods: Labour statistics (S&M)*, these series were introduced in 1980 and, in general, give details on coverage, definitions, computation methods and other relevant characteristics of the published statistical series.<sup>e</sup> The series succeeded that of the *Technical Guides*<sup>f</sup> that were launched in 1964 and issued every two years from 1968 to 1980. The S&M series not only provide useful information to users to assess the published statistics, especially with respect to issues of comparability, but also are a rich source of material for developing international standards. They also serve as examples of practices for countries wanting to start or revise their own procedures for production of statistics.

### **ILO-Comparable annual employment and unemployment estimates**

Apart from the work on estimates and projections, this is the only other occasion when the Bureau uses official national statistics that are adjusted to make the series more comparable. The Bureau determines the procedures and rules for making the adjustments while the national statistical offices implement them. The results are published every two years as an article in the second edition of the Bulletin. For the most recent exercise, the results, covering 26 countries that have regular labour force surveys, are available in the 2001-2 edition of the Bulletin.

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<sup>5</sup> Tabatabai, H., 1996: *Statistics on poverty and income distribution: An ILO Compendium of Data*, ILO, Geneva

## **LABORSTA**

This is the main statistical database of the ILO. In reality it is the set of ILO statistical databases covering all subjects for which the ILO is a custodian under the UN system.<sup>6</sup> It contains, in addition to the nine major areas in the Yearbook referred to above, the statistical series presented in the Bulletin, the results of the October Inquiry and the estimates and projections of the economically active population. At present there are in **LABORSTA** about 80,000 Yearbook time series, about 70,000 October Inquiry time series and about 31,000 time series of estimates and projections and 30,000 observations of Bulletin data. In 1999, a Web-based application of **LABORSTA** was launched, baptised **LABORSTA-Web**. It has the welcomed facility of linkages of the published statistics with the accompanying methodological information from **S&M** and the relevant international guidelines. **LABORSTA** allows users to select, view, print and download the selected statistics with the relevant metadata free of charge. This is proving to be a popular ILO product, with about 16,000 visits each month.

The address for the web-site is: <http://laborsta.ilo.org>

## **Other Databases**

The Bureau maintains some databases that are experimental or updated only occasionally depending on demand and resources. One such is the **SEGREGAT** database with statistics on male and female employment by detailed occupational groups. An updated version will be made available to the public in early 2003 with statistics for (years close to) 1970, '80, '90 and 2000 from 87 countries. Another database, last updated in 2001, contains official statistics on employment in the informal sector, broken down by sex and urban-rural areas. Others include an experimental database for public sector employment, **LABCOMP** with the annual average comparable estimates of employment and unemployment, **LABMINW** on legal minimum wages, **HIES** on household income and expenditure and **UNION** on trade union membership. Data from these databases can be extracted and sent electronically on request.

## **KILM**

The then Employment and Training Department and the Bureau have identified and compiled indicators on a set of 20 (originally 18) key areas relating to the labour market.<sup>8</sup> This resulted in a publication called *Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM)*, which has now become a regular publication of the Employment Sector. The statistics are compiled from many international repositories, especially **LABORSTA**. The indicators are available in CD-ROM as well as on a web-site, at a charge.

## **Bureau's Web-site**

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<sup>6</sup> Cornu, P. & S. Lawrence, 2000: *ILO dissemination of international labour statistics on Internet*, Bulletin of Labour Statistics (2000-4), ILO, Geneva.

Information about the Bureau, including its structure, objectives, major activities, publications (priced and free), databases, international standards, meetings and contacts can be found at the Bureau's web-site:

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/>

### 3.4 International Standards and Guidelines for Labour Statistics

The main instrument for formulating policy guidance in labour statistics is the *International Conferences of Labour Statisticians (ICLS)*, which meet roughly every five years. Participants include experts from governments, mostly appointed from ministries responsible for labour and national statistical offices, as well as from employers' and workers' organizations. Observers come from regional and international organizations and other interest groups. So far 16 ICLS have taken place since the first in 1923 in which there were 52 participants from 33 countries and the League of Nations. The latest, held in 1998, had 271 participants and observers from 76 countries, workers' and employers' organizations and international institutions. The next ICLS, the 17<sup>th</sup>, is scheduled to take place from 23 November to 03 December, 2003.

Each ICLS is invited to make recommendations on selected topics of labour statistics in the form of resolutions and guidelines, which are then approved by the Governing Body of the ILO before becoming part of the set of international standards on labour statistics. The recommendations usually relate to concepts, definitions, classifications and other methodological procedures which are agreed as representing 'best practice' in the respective areas, and which, when used by national producers, will increase the likelihood of having internationally comparable labour statistics as well as comparability across time within country. The publication, *Current International Recommendations on Labour Statistics, (2000)*, contains the full set of standards currently in force as well as the labour statistics Convention and Recommendation. The standards can also be found on the Bureau's web-site in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese.

The agenda of an ICLS is decided by the ILO's Governing Body following proposals by the Bureau. The topics to be considered are identified on the basis of the recommendations of earlier ICLS, the work of the Bureau in a particular field, through other ILO programmes or signals received from users, national producers and regional and international organizations. For example for the 17<sup>th</sup> ICLS, the topics consumer price indices and household income and expenditure statistics were identified through discussions at international meetings, labour under-utilization through discussions with some member States; union density and social security from the work of some ILO units; working time from the 16th ICLS and decent work indicators and informal economy from the policy needs of the ILO.

The main items on the agenda of the ICLS, usually no more than three, are those being considered for standard-setting while others are for discussion with a view to having guidance on the future work programme of the Bureau, including future development or updating of standards.

The work of the ICLS is carried out on the basis of reports prepared by the Bureau, one each for the main items and a general report for the others. The report on a subject contains proposals for a



draft resolution, the first version of which in most instances would have been submitted to a **Meeting of Experts** for review and advice. Experts at such a meeting are appointed by the ILO's Governing Body and include officials of governments as well as employers=and workers=representatives. Regional and international agencies and other interest groups can also participate as observers with the approval of the Governing Body. In the preparation of the first draft for the Meeting of Experts, the Bureau carries out extensive research of the concepts, definitions, classifications and methods in current use by countries and consults widely with producers and users of the statistics at all levels. Subsequent to the Meeting, the Bureau continues its research and consultation activities to improve the draft proposals taking into consideration the discussions and recommendations of the Meeting. The report prepared for the ICLS thus reflects detailed methodological research and analysis that are often of help to national statistics offices.

The report is first briefly presented at a plenary session of the ICLS and then discussed in detail and amended, if necessary, by a Committee that meets during the Conference. The resulting proposals from the Committee are then further debated at a plenary session before being adopted as amended (or rejected) by the Conference. The tradition is that decisions at the ICLS are taken on the basis of consensus with only occasional voting on particular points of a resolution.

As much as possible the standards adopted by the ICLS reflect **best practices** but they are not prescriptive, because of the differences that exist in statistical development, resources and infrastructure in the countries in which they are to be implemented.

Changes in the world of work and practices in official statistics, improvements in technology, methodological advances and new insights from experience make it necessary to re-visit the same topics and review their existing standards over several ICLS. The table in Annex 1 reflects a wide range of subjects discussed at various ICLS with some appearing on the agenda several times.

Finally, each ICLS provides a rare opportunity for labour statisticians from the different regions to meet each other and exchange views and experiences. Many participants also take advantage of their presence in Geneva to take up individual matters of concern with staff of the Bureau.

### 3.5 Technical cooperation, technical assistance and training

From early on, the ILO recognised the need to promote the production of labour statistics as essential tools for the preparation, implementation and assessment of economic and social policies and programmes. To achieve this, good statistical standards are required but it is also necessary for member States to know how best to apply these standards. The Bureau has therefore developed technical manuals that supplement and elaborate the various standards.<sup>h</sup> Many articles, papers and other publications have also been produced on specific topics.

In addition, the Bureau provides technical advice on the application of the standards and related matters at the request of member States at all levels of statistical development. This is done on request by correspondence (e-mail, fax, letter, telephone), and by visits of ILO staff to countries or from officials in countries to the ILO. Starting in the late 1930s and early 1940s with a few missions by staff

of the Bureau to some countries in Latin America, the provision of technical advice on aspects of national labour statistics programmes expanded in the 1950s and 1960s through the increased involvement of the United Nations in development activities and the expanding membership of the ILO. Initially, the modalities for delivering such advice were through long-term advisers employed in technical cooperation projects funded by agencies such as UNDP or the World Bank. These projects were directed at building national capacity and lasted for several years. With the increasing availability of national expertise and reduced resources for technical assistance, the pattern has changed to short-term assistance using external consultants, ILO statistics specialists in its field structure or staff of the Bureau. The labour statistics specialists are today members of the ILO's sub-regional multi-disciplinary teams, which develop their work-plans in close consultation with ILO constituents (governments and workers= and employers= organizations). Regrettably, only a few of these teams have such posts.

Training in the application of standards and use of manuals is an essential complement of technical advisory activities. The Bureau has been organising training courses and seminars as part of technical cooperation projects, at national, sub-regional and international levels. The main courses, held sometimes in English and at other times in French, take place at the ILO's Training Centre at Turin, Italy. Staff of the Bureau are responsible for developing their training material, giving the lectures and conducting practical exercises. The Bureau has also participated in training activities organised by other institutions. The Bureau is in the process of producing a comprehensive Training Compendium, the first module of which should come out early 2003.

The technical activities of the Bureau are of enormous benefit to the Bureau itself in that they update and expand its technical capacity for standard setting. They give the Bureau's staff exposure to the practical realities and limitations in the application of standards in different countries, as well as to the needs for developing new standards or revising existing ones. These activities also provide staff members the opportunity to interact with officials from national statistical systems, and this has a beneficial effect on the Bureau's data collection activities.

### 3.6 Inter-Agency Collaboration

Apart from participating at meetings such as the UN Statistical Commission and the former ACC Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities, the Bureau is engaged in both bilateral and multi-lateral relationships with other international and regional agencies in a) coordinating the collection of labour statistics and related information from countries and exchanging the data collected so as to minimize the burden on these countries (e.g. with EUROSTAT, UN Statistics Division, IMF, World Bank, FAO); b) developing international standards, producing manuals and improving on methodological issues (with City Groups, IMF, OECD, World Bank, EUROSTAT, UN Economic Commissions, etc.); and c) ensuring consistency between the different components of the international statistical system through the use of coherent concepts, definitions, classifications etc.(e.g. between SNA and standards in employment statistics). These activities are carried out through direct contacts, networking, formal agreements and coordinating bodies.

## 4. Statistical Development and Analysis Unit (SDA)

The ILO is now engaged in a process to develop a measurement framework for decent work that will enable analysts to not only measure progress with respect to decent work, but also examine the relationships between decent work, poverty and economic performance. This is the first major activity of the SDA, the results of which are described in a paper titled, *Measuring Decent Work with Statistical Indicators*<sup>7</sup>.

As a first step, eleven broad aspects (general characteristics) of decent work have been identified based on what *individuals from around the world would consider important elements of decent work*.<sup>8</sup> These are:

Employment opportunities; Unacceptable work; Adequate earnings and productive work; Decent hours; Stability and security of work; Fair treatment in employment and at work; Safe work environment; Social protection; Combining work and family life; Social dialogue and workplace relations; Economic and social context of decent work.

These general aspects of decent work are considered as representative of the six dimensions of decent work used by the Director-General of the ILO in his description of **decent work**. The dimensions are:

Opportunities for work (for all who need); Freedom of choice of employment (no forced labour); Productive work (acceptable livelihoods, sustainable development & competitiveness of enterprises and countries); Equity in work (no discrimination at or in access to work & balancing work and life); Security at work (health, pensions, livelihoods & loss of work); and Dignity at Work (voice & participation).

Based on these eleven aspects of decent work, a preliminary set of basic indicators has been developed for discussion.

## 5. Other Statistical Activities of the ILO

Several other units in the ILO are engaged in statistical activities related to their main functions resulting in: (i) the collection and dissemination of statistics, which supplement those gathered by the Bureau, and of statistical indicators; (ii) the identification, through experimental exercises, of areas where new or improved statistics and data collection methods would be needed; and (iii) production of publications containing statistical analysis of various areas of the world of work.

One of the largest programmes of statistical activities going on in the ILO outside the Bureau is

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<sup>7</sup> ILO, 2002: Measuring Decent Work with Statistical Indicators, Statistical Development and Analysis Unit, Policy Integration Department, Policy Integration Paper No. 1, ILO, Geneva

the **Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC)** which is based in the *International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)*. Using survey methods originally developed in the Bureau, SIMPOC is conducting child labour surveys in a large number of countries.<sup>i</sup> The Programme is developing a database of child labour statistics as well as a data archive for anonymized micro-data.

The work of the **Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM)** Team of the Employment Strategy Department, in collaboration with the Bureau, has already been mentioned. The Team is establishing an Internet-based world-wide network of Labour Market Indicators Library (LMIL) into or from which countries, ILO units in the field and Headquarters as well as other institutions can put and extract data.

The **In-Focus Programme on Skills** of the Employment Sector is developing instruments and methodology for data collection from establishments with respect to training and life-long training, with particular emphasis on non-OECD countries.

The **In-Focus Programme on Boosting Employment through Small Enterprise Development** has set up a database on small enterprises and conducts surveys of small enterprises in selected countries.

The **Social Security Department** took over from the Bureau the maintenance of the Cost of social security database but has temporarily abandoned it due to resource constraints and conceptual difficulties that are causing a lack of comparability.

The **In-Focus Programme on Socio-economic Security** has sponsored the conduct of ad hoc household surveys on people's security in selected countries in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the transition economies.<sup>j</sup> These are surveys of the perceptions of economic and labour-related security and insecurity among various categories of workers in different communities. The Programme also sponsors the conduct of enterprise labour flexibility surveys in selected countries.<sup>k</sup> These surveys gather information on labour and employment issues primarily for examining labour practices in medium-sized and large firms.

Work has been done by the **Migration Branch** in collaboration with the Bureau to gather and present available statistics on the international migration of workers. Possible strategies for developing and improving such statistics have also been formulated.

The **Sectoral Activities Department** holds regular tripartite meetings for the discussion and exchange of views on current issues in some 22 areas of economic activity. Where the data required on the topic under consideration cannot be drawn from **LABORSTA**, usually because the level of detail required cannot be covered by a regular data collection programme such as operates in the Bureau, the Department collects its own information, generally by means of questionnaires addressed to the relevant national bodies, as well as employers' and workers' organizations.

Where it has the required technical capacities, the ILO field structure, especially the sub-

regional **Multi-disciplinary Advisory Teams**, is also involved in statistical activities related particularly to the provision of technical advisory services in the area of labour statistics and the establishment and maintenance of sub-regional statistical databases. In the Latin America Region, a database of public use files of micro-data from labour force surveys exists for some countries.

## **6. Issues and challenges in the work of the Bureau of Statistics**

There is a proliferation of data collection activities within the ILO that could threaten the Bureau's own data gathering if they are not properly coordinated. Efforts are however being made office-wide to address this issue.

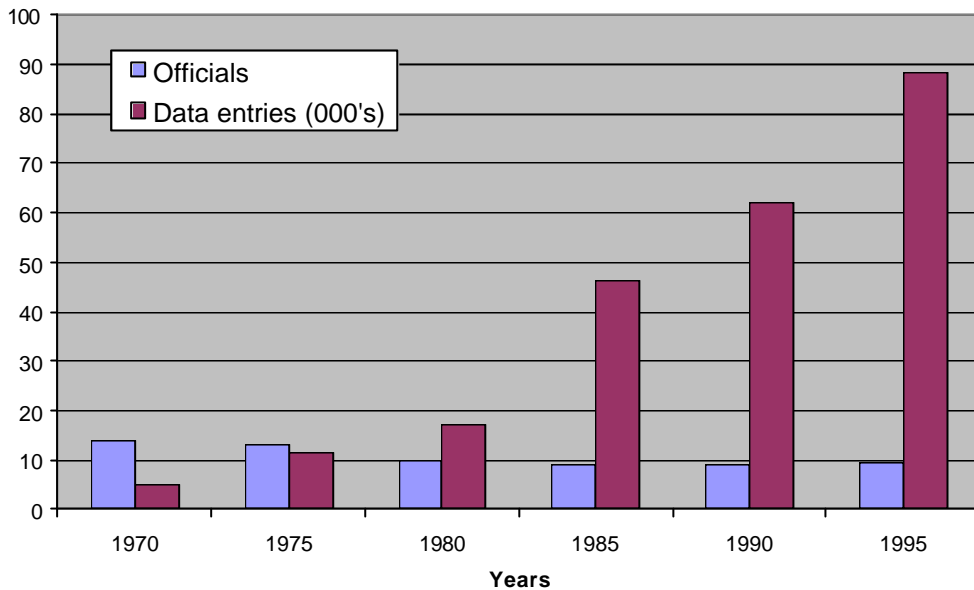
The Bureau has experienced some difficulties in the gathering of statistics from national statistical authorities because of the procedure of sending questionnaires through official contacts. Based on an agreement established before World War II between the ILO and member States, the focal point for receipt of questionnaires from the ILO and transmission of data to the ILO must be the designated official contact in each country. As these are sometimes ministries of foreign affairs or ministries that are not the source of the statistics requested, response rates to the questionnaires could be adversely affected. With the permission of the official contacts, duplicate questionnaires are now being sent to central statistics offices in some instances. There are however still some problem cases, the consequence of which is inadequate coverage in some instances.

The constant increase in the volume of data collected coupled with reduced staff resources is also a challenge for the work of the Bureau. For example, in the period from 1985 to 1995 data entries per official responsible increased at a rate of 4% per annum (See Chart 1). Even taking into consideration improving computing technology, this is a very high rate

In the dissemination of statistics, the Bulletin is not fulfilling expectations that it will provide up-to-date statistics on all the areas covered, due to difficulties in regularly collecting the information. The Yearbook is also becoming unmanageable in size due to the increase in the number of reporting countries for the different topics, and this could prevent the addition of new topics. Consequently, the Bureau is currently reviewing its data gathering and dissemination methods and policies. Some of the other publications also need to be reviewed with respect to their content and format.

In developing standards, the Bureau usually relies on methodological studies and experiments carried out by statistically developed systems. As these systems mainly exist in economically advanced countries, the solutions they proffer do not always suit conditions in developing countries and transition economies. Moreover, participants at the ICLS from these advanced countries are thus better placed to discuss the issues that come up and so could influence the decisions taken to suit their own circumstances, if they so wished. To counter balance this, the Bureau is putting some emphasis in the organization of regional meetings on the topics that are to be discussed at the next ICLS to ensure both that regional concerns are included in the report and that regional participants are familiar with the issues that will come up at the Conference. One such meeting took place in Singapore in 2001 on CPI, organized by the Statistics Office of Singapore with support from OECD, IMF and ILO.

Chart 1: Number of data entries (in 000') and officials responsible



Although, as stated earlier, the ILO's Multi-disciplinary Advisory Teams are involved in statistical activities, in practice there is increasing demand for staff at the Headquarters in Geneva to respond to requests for technical advice in the regions, due to inadequate capacity in the ILO field structures. Some of the labour statistics field posts have been converted to other purposes while others are still unfilled.

## 7. Future Activities

The most important activity for the Bureau in the immediate future is the 17<sup>th</sup> ICLS scheduled for 23 November to 03 December 2003. The main topics for draft resolutions are consumer price indices and household income and expenditure statistics. Other issues likely to be discussed include statistics and indicators of decent work, working time, informal employment, labour under-utilization, gender, occupational health, trade union membership and coverage of collective bargaining agreements as well as the possible need for revision of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-88). Research and consultations with users, producers and the international statistical community are being undertaken in the preparation of the reports.

The SDA is beginning a series of consultations on its proposed set of decent work indicators and is planning to examine the feasibility of collecting statistics to produce these indicators directly through pilot surveys and indirectly through the collection of secondary statistics in a few countries. The Unit is soliciting support from national statistics offices to carry out this experiment in collaboration with the Bureau.

The Bureau will continue its developmental efforts in other areas such as productivity statistics, the direct use of administrative records as a basis for labour statistics, the international classification of

status in employment, and the principles, structure and functions of a labour accounting system. The methodological problems encountered when implementing the new international recommendations concerning the measurement of underemployment, employment-related income and occupational injuries that were adopted by the 16th ICLS in 1998 will be investigated; as well as methods for estimating the total employment and unemployment of the world and of the major regions. The latter will be carried out in collaboration with SDA.

Collaboration between the Bureau, other ILO units and the field structure will continue on projects relating to statistics on child labour, the informal economy, occupational injuries, working time and the international migration of workers, as well as labour market indicators. Special surveys on the first three of these topics are being carried out in selected countries to further test appropriate statistical methodologies.

A revised CPI manual should be available within the next 12 months. It will be the first product of the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Price Statistics consisting of EUROSTAT, ILO, IMF, OECD, UNECE and the World Bank. Work is going on to produce revised volumes in the Sources and Methods series on administrative sources, population censuses and household income and expenditure surveys before the end of 2003. Manuals on the collection of statistics on occupational injuries through surveys and on the informal sector surveys are also expected soon.

For the ILO October Inquiry, the lists of occupations and of the food items and their specifications are being revised in close consultation with the FAO, the current round of the International Comparison Programme and other ILO units. This updating has been prompted by the changes in the world of work and in the consumption and availability of food items since the last revision 20 years ago. It is also envisaged that employment data will be collected along with the wage data for the selected occupations.

The work to improve the programme for the Bureau's gathering of national labour statistics will examine alternatives to the present mail questionnaire system, including the possibility of using e-questionnaires and national focal points. Already a test of e-questionnaires is going on with the collection of the October Inquiry data. As stated earlier, the dissemination strategy for the Bureau will be revised to make statistics more accessible to users by developing a CD-ROM version of **LABORSTA**, restructuring printed publication such as the Yearbook and examining the need to revamp **LABORSTA**.

As always, the Bureau will strive to fulfill its role within the ILO and the international statistical community, meeting these and new challenges with professionalism and efficiency.

## Endnotes

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a. **Countries that have ratified Convention 160**

Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Finland, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, India, Ireland, Italy, Korea (Republic of), Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mauritius, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, San Marino, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States.

**Countries still bound by Convention No. 63**

Algeria, Barbados, Chile, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, France, Kenya, Myanmar, Nicaragua, South Africa, Syrian Arab Republic, Tanzania (United Republic of), Uruguay.

b. **Publications containing the ILO October Inquiry Results:**

- \$ International Labour Review, individual issues until 1933
- \$ Year Book of Labour Statistics, until 1957
- \$ International Labour Review, Statistical Supplement, 1958 to 1964
- \$ Bulletin of Labour Statistics, second quarter edition, 1965-1985, then as a separate edition each year until 1992.
- \$ Statistics on Occupational Wages and Hours of Work and on Food Prices - October Inquiry Results, special supplement to the Bulletin of Labour Statistics, annually since 1993.

c. **Projections:**

- \$ Labour force projections, 1965-1985 (ILO Geneva, 1971).
- \$ Labour force estimates and projections, 1950-2000, (ILO Geneva, 1977)
- \$ Economically active population, estimates and projections 1950-2025 (ILO Geneva, 1986)
- \$ Economically active population, estimates and projections 1950-2010, (ILO Geneva, 1996-97).
- \$ Also available on CD-ROM..

d. **Household Income and Expenditure Statistics, four editions:**

- \$ No. 1, 1950-1964 (ILO Geneva, 1967)
- \$ No. 2, 1960-1972, (ILO Geneva, 1974)
- \$ No. 3, 1968-1976, (ILO Geneva, 1979)
- \$ No. 4, 1979-1991, (ILO Geneva, 1995)



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e. **Sources and Methods: Labour Statistics** (latest editions):

- \$ Volume 1: Consumer Price Indices, 1992
- \$ Volume 2: Employment, wages, hours of work and labour cost (establishment surveys), 1995
- \$ Volume 3: Economically active population, employment, unemployment and hours of work (household surveys), 2003
- \$ Volume 4: Employment, unemployment, wages and hours of work (administrative records and related sources), 2003
- \$ Volume 5: Total and economically active population, employment and unemployment (population censuses), 2003
- \$ Volume 6: Household income and expenditure surveys, 2003
- \$ Volume 7: Strikes and lockouts, 1993
- \$ Volume 8: Occupational injuries, 1999
- \$ Volume 9: Transition countries (special edition), 1999
- \$ Volume 10: Estimates and projections of the economically active population: 1950-2010

f. **Technical Guide (ILO, Geneva, 1964-1980):**

Section I: Consumer prices indices; Section II: Unemployment; Section III: Employment. Section IV: Wages, Section V: Hours of work.

g. **KILM Indicators**

1. Labour force participation rate. 2. Employment-to-population ratio.
3. Status in Employment. 4. Employment by sector. 5. Part-time workers.
6. Hours of work. 7. Informal sector employment. 8. Unemployment.
9. Youth unemployment. 10. Long-term unemployment.
11. Unemployment by educational attainment. 12. Time-related underemployment. 13. Inactivity rate. 14. Educational attainment and illiteracy.
15. Manufacturing wage indices. 16. Occupational wage and earning indices. 17. Hourly compensation costs. 18. Labour productivity and unit labour costs.
19. Labour market flows. 20. Poverty and income distribution.

h. **Manuals**

- \$ An integrated system of wages statistics: a manual on methods, 1979
- \$ Surveys on economically active population, employment, unemployment and underemployment: an ILO manual on concepts and methods, 1990
- \$ Consumer price indices: an ILO manual, 1989 (Undergoing revision)
- \$ Developments in international labour statistics, 1990
- \$ Labour statistics for a market economy: challenges and solutions in the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, 1994
- \$ Statistics for emerging labour markets in transition economies: A technical guide on sources, methods, classifications and policies, 1997

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- \$ Labour statistics based on administrative record: Guidelines on compilation and presentation, 1997.
  - \$ Gender inequality in the labour market: Occupational concentration and segregation. A manual on methodology, 1995
  - \$ Measuring the non-observed economy: A Handbook, 2002 (Published by OECD)
  - \$ Collection of economic characteristics in population censuses. Technical report (with UNSD)

- i. Regional or national child labour surveys, either as a module or as a free standing survey have been completed in 20 countries, some repeated:

Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ghana, Kenya, Indonesia, India, Namibia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Portugal, Senegal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Surveys were underway for the first time or as a second round in 33 countries:

**Africa:** Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, **Asia:** Bangladesh, Cambodia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, West Bank and Gaza. **Latin America and the Caribbean:** Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama. **Europe:** Georgia, Portugal, and Rumania.

Surveys are planned in 8 countries:

Botswana, India, Indonesia, Lesotho, Morocco, Russia, Swaziland, Vietnam.

- j. People's Security Surveys in 14 countries

**Asia:** Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan; **Eastern Europe:** Hungary, Russia, Ukraine; **Latin America and Caribbean:** Argentina, Brazil, Chile; **Africa:** Ethiopia, South Africa, Tanzania

- k. Enterprise Labour Flexibility Surveys in 11 countries:

**Asia:** China, Indonesia, Pakistan, Philippines; **Eastern Europe:** Azerbaijan, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine; **Latin America and the Caribbean:** Brazil, Chile; **Africa:** Tanzania