International Labour Organisation

THIRTEENTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF LABOUR STATISTICIANS

PAID HOLIDAYS

Geneva
International Labour Office
1982
INTRODUCTION.

Paid vacations and holidays are of great importance. Firstly, from the social point of view they are an important positive element in the working conditions of employees. An increase in their length has certainly been an important component of the rise in the standard of living, even though comprehensive statistics are extremely rare. Secondly, from the economic point of view, including the analysis of productivity, data concerning holidays and vacations are one necessary component in any calculation of total annual hours worked. (Sick leave, strikes, bad weather and absenteeism are other components which are necessary for such a calculation.) Until such calculation can be made, labour input into the productive process can only be measured in terms of numbers employed, so that what is really a flow is measured as a stock. Furthermore, paid holidays and vacations enter into labour costs so that statistics of them add to the usefulness of labour cost statistics.

International comparisons of holidays and paid vacations could be made both in a social and in an economic context. For most purposes, national and international, it would probably suffice to know the average number of days of paid holiday and vacation per person per year for broad sectors of the economy.

Excluding paid sickness, maternity and emergency leave e.g. for funerals etc., two broad groups should be distinguished:

1) Public Holidays are non-working days recognised by the community at large. They can be taken to include days that are normally working days but which are taken in lieu of public holidays that fall on non-working days.

2) Vacations or annual holidays. These are non-working periods whose timing and duration is a matter for employer and employees and are sometimes the subject of legislation regarding minimum duration.

The distinction is not completely clear in some countries. Not only may public holidays differ between regions or religious groups within a country, but certain days may be treated as public holidays by some but not all employers, e.g. the days between Christmas and
the New Year. In other countries it is possible to specify a certain number of days as
constituting public holidays which are very widely observed. Most people either do not work on
these days or receive some extra compensation if they do.

Whether or not public holidays are uniform within a country, they are readily
ascertainable. Hence the main problem relates to statistics of paid vacations and it is
principally with these that this paper deals.

**ENTITLEMENT VERSUS ACTUAL DAYS TAKEN.**

Paid vacation entitlement may differ from the number of days actually taken because
(i) entitlement may be carried over from one period to another, or (ii) people may receive pay
in lieu of entitlement when they leave a job or (iii) some people may even take less than their
entitlement without recompense or carry forward, a phenomenon that does not arise in industries
where establishments close down for a vacation period. The situation may be further complicated
by people who work at a second job during their paid vacation from their main job.

Entitlement is easier to ascertain than the number of days actually taken. This is
because it can be measured at a point of time. Ascertaining the number of days actually taken
requires either recall by a person being questioned or access to employee records relating to a
period of time. The use of such records creates problems where employees have worked for more
than one employer during the period. Note that in many cases entitlement is a function of the
length of service of the employee, so that length of service needs to be taken account of in
recording entitlement.

Entitlement may be of interest both as a rough proxy for the amount of leave actually
taken and for its own sake as one component of working conditions.

**METHODS OF OBTAINING DATA.**

Data on vacations with pay can be obtained from three main sources. The first of these
can provide entitlement but not days actually taken, while the others could provide either or
both!
1) Legislation etc.

The analysis of collective agreements, arbitration awards and legislation. These may enable classification by occupation and/or industry but the number of people covered may not be available.

2) Employers.

a) Questionnaires directed to employers requesting information about a sample of individual employees.

b) Questionnaires directed to employers relating to all employees or to groups of employees.

3) Households

a) Regular Labour Force surveys.

b) Other Household surveys.

Examples of each of these will now be described. Note that many countries have no vacation statistics at all however.

1) Collective Agreements etc.

Analysis of minimum entitlements by industry are provided in U.K., F.R.G., Philippines, Kenya, U.S.A, Canada and Switzerland. The coverage of recorded collective agreements or awards varies widely. In Australia, for example, a large proportion of employees are covered by recorded wage awards and collective agreements. The numbers involved can be estimated from the sample survey of weekly earnings, in which the award or agreement relevant to the employees in the sample is ascertained.

2a) Individual questionnaires.

The U.K. annual New Earnings Survey obtains data from employers about a 1% sample of employees. In 1970, 1974 and 1981 questions were included on the paid holiday entitlement of full-time workers.

2b) Group questionnaires.

In the EEC Labour Cost Surveys, each establishment included is asked for data on the
cost of vacation pay and, in some of the Surveys, for data on days of vacation or hours paid for but not worked due to paid vacation.

In the U.S.A., Area Wage Surveys obtain data for annual paid vacations and paid vacation entitlements ("provisions") by length of service groups for full-time workers. These are weighted and projected to obtain regional and national estimates. Similar data are obtained in Industry Wage Surveys and detailed information is also collected about vacation plans in the Level of Benefits Survey used for considering civil service salary determination.

In France, the Ministère du Travail carries out a six-monthly survey on activity and employment conditions of the labour force in all large and a fraction of small establishments. In 1970, 1976 and 1981 questions were included on paid vacations. In 1976 the number of working days granted as paid annual vacations was asked separately for wage-earners and for other employees.

In Japan, the annual General Survey on Wages and Working Hours Systems, which covers 6000 enterprises, irregularly obtains information on special summer vacations and paid annual vacations.

In Canada, the Annual Survey of Wages and Working Conditions, for office and non-office (and, in a few industries, for other) employees, asks about normal practice regarding the number of public holidays observed by the employees and the number of years service required to qualify for paid vacations by weekly vacation length. The Annual Labour Cost Survey, for full-time employees only, distinguishes salaried employees and wage-earners and asks (i) the number of days of public holiday observed by the majority of the employees and (ii) expenditure for vacations with pay or the total number of hours or days of vacation with pay.

In the F.R.G. 1972 Survey of the Wage and Salary structure data were obtained on paid vacation entitlements of full-time employees.

The socialist countries of Europe have fairly detailed reporting by all enterprises as part of the statistics on working time balances. Thus in Poland there is annual and quarterly reporting on time used by all enterprises in the Material Production sphere excluding agriculture. In Hungary there is similar detailed reporting of paid vacations taken. In view of the stability of the data, collection is to take place only every two years but coverage will
beetended. In 1978 the CMEA adopted new standards for the compilation of these statistics.

An example of the collection of entitlement data is provided by a Puerto Rican survey of vacation and sickness leave regulations in industry undertaken in 1976.

3a) Labour Force Surveys.

Labour Force Surveys, which normally relate to a reference period of one week, often distinguish paid vacation as one reason for absence from work during part or whole of the reference period. The F.R.G. micro-census and the Labour Force Surveys of Israel, Finland, Sweden and Canada offer examples. Such surveys provide little information about the total annual length of vacations, unless they are carried out monthly; even then the one week in four covered may not reflect the experience of the other three, since vacations are non-randomly timed.

3b) Other Household Surveys.

A number of countries, including Spain, Norway, U.S.A., F.R.G., Sweden, Netherlands and Denmark have at one time or another carried out sample household surveys relating to vacations or vacation trips and travel. These have not all provided data of the sort discussed here since that was not their primary purpose, but such data obviously can be obtained as part of a household survey. Thus the 1978 Finnish Living Condition Survey of 3000 people included a question on the length of paid vacations as did a 1978 Austrian micro-census survey. A vacations survey carried out in Spain in 1973 provided some data on length of vacations according to occupational groups.

In Australia, special purpose surveys on leave-taking by wage and salary earners employed at the time of the survey were carried out in 1974 and 1979. Information was asked for on the number of weeks' leave taken within each month of a 12-month period and covered "Long-service" leave as well as annual vacations. The Australian Bureau of Statistics believes that recall has not been a serious problem, since respondents can generally remember the month in which leave was taken (December and January account for over half), and since they were asked about weeks rather than days.
CONCLUSIONS

Some preliminary generalisations emerge from the information used in making this survey of the statistical problem. It is clear that good standardised statistics of paid vacations taken are obtained in socialist countries, and that vacation statistics are extremely rare in developing countries, being confined to the modern sector where they do exist. In most developed countries vacation statistics are also fairly rare. For these countries and for the modern sector of developing countries it appears that:

1) In some countries there are regional or local variations in public holidays.
2) Some employers give extra days of paid holiday before or after public holidays; these extra days are not part of the annual paid vacation entitlement.
3) The analysis of collective agreements, arbitration awards or legislation yields information only about minimum paid vacation entitlements.
4) Household surveys alone can provide data about actual days or weeks of paid vacation taken over a whole year for people who have had more than one job during the year and for the self-employed. However the recall problem would appear to be acute, although the Australian special survey of leave-taking has been successful.
5) Establishment data are easier to obtain if:
   --- they relate to entitlement rather than to actual vacation taken,
   --- they are confined to full-time employees,
   --- they relate either to a specified person or persons or to what is most usual or normal for an easily delimited group of employees.
6) Entitlement is of interest both for its own sake and as approximating leave actually taken. However it is relevant only to employees.
7) Entitlement is frequently a function of length of service, so questionnaires relating to entitlement have either to relate to specified persons or to entitlement by length of service.
8) Since vacation entitlements do not change frequently it is not essential to obtain data annually but it would be very useful to obtain data every few years.

It is for the International Conference of Labour Statisticians to decide whether it wishes to formulate a Resolution on Vacation Statistics.