
INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

Final Report¹

**Of the Regional Preparatory Meeting of Labour Statisticians in
support of the 19th ICLS**

Middle East and North Africa

18-20 June 2012 –Beirut, Lebanon

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Background

1. The Regional Preparatory Meeting of Labour Statisticians in Support of the 19th ICLS was held from 18 to 20 June 2012 in Beirut, Lebanon. It was organized by the ILO Department of Statistics, in collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN ESCWA).
2. The meeting was one of several being organized by the ILO Department of Statistics in all major regions of the world to promote the participation of countries in the review and update of the international standards of statistics of the economically active population, employment, unemployment and underemployment. A revised draft international standard for labour force and work statistics will be presented for discussion and adoption at the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in 2013.
3. Specifically, the main objectives of the meeting were to: (a) inform participants about the review process in preparation for the 19th ICLS; (b) present the current proposals to update the international standards of statistics of the economically active population, employment, unemployment and underemployment; and (c) promote discussion and gather feedback to further refine the proposed revisions.
4. The proposals presented during the meeting were developed by the ILO Department of Statistics, with the advice of the *Working Group for the Advancement of Employment and Unemployment Statistics*.
5. The meeting was attended by 10 officials from National Statistical Offices (see Annex I).

Opening and structure of the meeting

6. The meeting was opened by representatives of the ILO, ESCWA and of the Ministry of Labour of Lebanon. Mr. Zafaris Tzannatos, Regional Advisor on Employment Policy and Microeconomics, ILO-Beirut, welcomed participants to the meeting and thanked the UN ESCWA for their support in the organization and conduct of the meeting. He highlighted

the importance of linking statistics to policy and of contextualizing the available evidence to ensure their proper interpretation. Mr. Mustafa Hakki Ozel, Head of the Standards and Surveys Section, ILO Department of Statistics, stressed the importance of having the perspective of countries in the MENA region in the review of the international standards on employment and unemployment statistics, which had been in place since 1982. Mr. Juraj Riecan, Director of the Department of Statistics, UN ESCWA, reminded participants that, in the Arab world, labour market statistics had an important impact on all other areas of life, including demography, migration, health and education. To ensure that statistics reflected the everyday reality of people, their development should be from the bottom up. That is, there is a need to identify the key policy issues and translate those issues into data needs. Mr. Ziad El Sayegh, National Policy Advisor of the Ministry of Labour of Lebanon, recalled that statistical concepts should be based on strategic views for the future. The indicators should contribute to inform the development of labour policies that focus on priority issues in the region such as youth, innovation, and job creation. All speakers exhorted participants to engage in the deliberations to ensure that the revised standards were adequate to reflect the main features of the labour markets of countries in the MENA region.

7. As detailed in the Agenda, the meeting comprised ten sessions (see Annex II), each one revolving around the most important issues in the current standards that needed review and update, including the national practices in the implementation of the standards, and the draft proposals to update the standards.
8. For each topic, selected participants were invited to act as discussants, to reflect on the relevance, feasibility and applicability to national realities of the proposals for update presented by the ILO, in order to promote subsequent discussion in plenary sessions.

Summary of outcomes

9. The main outcomes arrived at during the deliberations are summarized in the paragraphs that follow.

Conceptual and measurement frameworks

10. Participants expressed broad interest in the conceptual framework for work statistics and the revised concept of employment presented by the ILO. In particular, they found it useful to separately identify persons in different forms of work, as at present it was not possible to provide statistics on groups such as volunteer workers, interns, persons producing goods for own final use or persons providing unpaid services for their own household, but expressed a need for guidance on questionnaire design, to apply all the changes being proposed.
11. Regarding the measurement framework, they agreed with the use of a short reference period to measure the labour force but expressed concern with how to capture seasonal activities, especially in agriculture. Some countries indicated that to adequately capture seasonal activities, there was a need to move towards frequent measurement that would enable comparisons of changes between trimesters. It was noted that the usual activity framework did not adequately serve the need for information on employment in a long reference period. Assessments carried out in the region showed big differences between employment measured at frequent intervals using a panel approach, and the usual activity framework based on retrospective recall.
12. Participants further requested clarification about the relationship between the concepts being proposed and the System of National Accounts. In general, they agreed with the new terminology being proposed.

Employment

13. Participants generally agreed with the proposed operational definition of employment, including the use of a short period of measurement of seven days or a calendar week, the “one hour” criterion, and the restriction to persons who worked to generate income (i.e. excluding workers producing goods for own final use, volunteer workers and unpaid trainees), “at work” or “not at work” during the reference period of measurement.
14. Regarding the treatment of absences from employment, participants agreed that some reasons, such as sickness, bad weather or vacation, could be used as clear evidence of formal job attachment among employed persons absent from work. However, if the

person was a casual worker, this assumption did not necessarily hold. They also agreed that the “continued existence of the enterprise” was not a good criterion to determine whether a self employed worker “not at work” was employed, due to the widespread existence of informal activities. Many self employed did not have visible premises, and in these cases it was difficult to determine whether the activity continued to exist, even when the person continued to have the tools and equipment needed to carry out the activity.

15. The criterion of duration of the absence was considered important for all self employed persons as well as for employees “not at work” in the case of certain reasons for absence. This was especially true for the off-season in agriculture, which could last for several months. Regarding the specific duration of absence for inclusion in employment, the group considered that it should be allowed to vary between countries, depending on their national realities. In determining an appropriate duration, countries should carry out studies to examine patterns of absence from employment.

16. Regarding the “one hour” criterion, the group mentioned that users were not necessarily satisfied with including in employment persons who worked a few hours a week, but acknowledged that persons working only a few hours were not many and did not have an impact on the levels of employment or unemployment.

Other forms of work

17. The group considered that more detailed descriptions and guidelines were needed on the various forms of work other than employment, in particular volunteer work, as for example it was not clear whether military conscripts, persons who worked for the government for free, and persons involved in associations and political parties, were volunteers or not². In addition, they requested further guidance on the measurement of volunteer work, production of goods mainly for own final use and on unpaid household service work.

² Conscripts are not volunteers but employed, and specifically, paid employees. Persons engaged in associations and political parties, who receive no pay, are volunteers. Persons who voluntarily work for free for others, including the government, are volunteers.

18. The treatment of unpaid trainees, interns and apprentices was long discussed but no agreement was reached as to whether or not to include them in employment. A number of countries could not distinguish trainees from other workers, because they did not ask question to separately identify them. In a number of countries, interns, apprentices and trainees were considered employed and were classified in a separate status in employment category, whether they received income or not. In other countries trainees who carried out work as part of the requirements to receive a certification or to graduate were not treated as employed. Also trainees working in the government were viewed as providing a public service and thus excluded from employment. Traineeships in enterprises were very varied, including formal and informal arrangements, paid and unpaid, and would thus be difficult to propose different treatments based on selected characteristics of the traineeship. It was considered that perhaps all interns, trainees and apprentices should be separately identified from employment as a group, regardless of whether they were paid or not, given that the objective of all interns, trainees and apprentices was the same, namely, to gain experience or learn skills.

Unemployment

19. There was general support for the proposals to update the operational guidelines for the measurement of unemployment. Specifically, the group agreed with the proposed definition, the order of the criteria to measure unemployment and the reference periods. Regarding reference periods, some countries indicated using longer durations, but it was acknowledged that the proposal of using “four weeks or one month” would focus the statistics to a clearer measure that could be used for policy programmes. Regarding the seeking work criterion, they welcomed the inclusion of job search methods in another country, as this was common in the region. These would need to be expanded for their region, to include, for example, specific methods such as contacting embassies or contractors that provided jobs abroad. In addition, it would be important to ask questions to identify the country in which persons were looking for work. Also, the inclusion of specific methods of job search using the internet was considered very relevant.

Time-related underemployment

20. The meeting considered that this concept was relevant as it could behave differently than unemployment in times of crisis. However, there were important measurement difficulties. In particular, the group was concerned with the choice of threshold to be used, even within countries, as it could differ by occupation, industry, status in employment, etc., and a national benchmark could be seen as arbitrary and not pertinent for all workers. Also, the group considered that the job coverage may be different (main job only or to all jobs together) depending on the measurement objectives and policy needs.
21. Similarly, the group considered that guidelines needed to include measures of inadequate employment situations, which were very relevant to understand the functioning of the labour market.

Persons not in the labour force

22. There was broad support for the proposed definition, terminology and classifications. In general, the group considered that the classification by degree of labour market attachment and by reasons indicating social barriers was very relevant in the region, especially for women. In a number of countries, women were forbidden to work and obtaining information about this situation was very relevant in the region. The precise questions would need to be determined nationally according to the circumstances in each country. In all cases, however, it was essential to collect information on the reasons for entering the labour market and the type of work desired, for example, part-time or full-time work, public or private sector employment. In addition, the criterion relating to “desire” to work for pay was considered an important additional criterion to be incorporated into the classification.

Measures to supplement the unemployment rate

23. The meeting considered that the proposed measures were very relevant in the region. In addition, they also recommended additional measures to supplement the unemployment rate, to cover persons who were not employed, were not available and

did not seek employment, but who wanted employment. This sub-group was essential to capture women who had an interest in employment.

Age thresholds

24. The group agreed that minimum age thresholds for collecting data should be decided according to national circumstances and could vary between countries. There was a difference between the age threshold for collecting data and for reporting statistics on the labour force. Countries may decide to measure child labour with the same instrument as the labour force and this should not affect the age threshold for reporting labour force statistics. There was agreement that the age threshold for reporting statistics on the labour force should always be above 15 years of age. Because participants agreed that international comparability was important they considered that the international standards should recommend reporting of data using 5 year age groups covering persons 15 years and above.

Reference populations

25. The meeting welcomed the proposed recommendations on the relevant reference population(s) for labour force statistics to meet different objectives and stressed the importance that the reference population for labour force statistics be clearly specified. The group was concerned about how to properly identify two groups of persons who were common in the region, namely persons not living in private households (i.e., living in collective households, such as work camps) and migrant workers who were not usual residents of the country. They also considered important that guidelines be clear that different sources could be used to measure some of these groups, as the labour force survey was not necessarily suited to cover these population groups. Finally, the guidelines needed to provide guidance on how to tabulate and disseminate information for different reference populations.
26. A participant expressed concern with the concept of “usual residence” to define the resident population, and that a “de facto” concept was less problematic in the region. The new guidelines needed to consider all possible relevant population groups used in the various countries.

Data collection programmes

27. Participants considered that their most urgent need in this area concerned guidance on sample design particularly to implement rotation schemes and in establishing the precision of the estimates for different population sub-groups. It was noted that there were no international guidelines on these issues as suitable schemes depended on many factors, such as data collection frequency, sampling frame characteristics, and the needs for information.
28. Data quality was another area discussed, and it was generally agreed that information on sampling errors, item non-response, non-sampling errors and other measures of quality needed to be disseminated. National statistics needed to be collected and disseminated in a coherent way, based on sound statistical legislation. Such legislation was instrumental in setting the framework for the coordination of data collection plans and in enforcing the use of common standard definitions, classifications and methods across different surveys and other data sources, thereby ensuring the comparability of the data. It was noted that one way to achieve this was with the use of master samples and a coordinated system of household surveys.

Communication and dissemination guidelines

29. Developing suitable strategies to communicate official statistics to the public was considered important. Some of the strategies mentioned by the group included workshops for the media, in order to ensure that the statistics are properly interpreted by them, and disseminating a calendar of release of data.
30. It was important to highlight certain topics, for example, labour force statistics by hours worked and income, labour migration, supplementary measures to the unemployment rate, gender, informality and dynamic measures of the labour force.
31. It was suggested that the Working Group for the advancement of employment and unemployment could provide guidance on a set of core questions for basic labour market indicators. In the region, areas of particular concern for which indicators were needed included labour underutilization, labour migration, informal employment,

including informal sector employment, precarious employment conditions and transition from school to employment.

Round table

32. The round table discussions focused on challenges faced in the region with limited availability of statistics to inform policymaking. Mr. Ismail Lubbad of UN ESCWA emphasized the need to improve the quality, frequency and accessibility of labour statistics. He proposed a set of activities to promote good practices, including: (a) establishing a working group on labour force statistics to serve as a platform for sharing experiences; (b) conducting training and advocacy at the political level to raise-awareness and understanding about the importance and uses of labour force statistics; (c) supporting study tours to countries with statistically advanced programmes in labour force statistics; and (d) establishing technical assistance activities by international organizations in data collection and analysis.
33. Mr. Frank Hagemann of ILO Beirut stressed the need for data to address pressing policy issues, particularly youth employment and labour migration. ILO promoted evidence-based policymaking in the region through: (a) technical assistance and, in some cases funding, to countries in the conduct of labour force surveys, child labour surveys and school-to-work transition surveys; (b) capacity-building activities, particularly training workshops; and (c) analysis of data on specific policy-relevant topics. Stronger collaboration among countries and international organizations was essential to improve the availability and quality of labour force statistics and to strengthen their use in policymaking.
34. Participants recognized the need to improve access to the available information. Some countries had strong dissemination programmes and were making available detailed statistics through online databases. Others indicated that limited resources impacted their capacity to disseminate the information collected. The group also expressed concern with the high number of data requests, often on similar topics, received from international and regional organizations and called for greater coordination among the concerned agencies. Some countries also indicated that the ILO annual questionnaire

was too long and in some cases requested information that was already publicly available through websites. It was also unclear who should complete the request, the Ministry of Labour or the National Statistical Office. They requested that international requests for data be rationalized to reduce the response burden on countries.

35. Regarding strategies to improve the quality of data, the group proposed that revision of the statistical production should cover all stages, from survey design to analysis and dissemination. Solid knowledge and experience existed in the region, in areas such as sampling, data collection including the use of PDA technology, data processing and tabulation using new technological advances, and timely data dissemination. There was wide agreement with the usefulness of study tours and workshops, but some participants noted that there was no sufficient demand by countries in the region. Establishing national coordinators for labour statistics from the national statistical office could serve to start and facilitate the process.

Annex I: List of Participants

Country	Participant	Institution
Egypt	Ms. Fatma Mohamed El Ashry Mohamed	Central Agency for Public Mobilization & Statistics (CAPMAS)
Iraq	Mr. Mahmood Shakir Mahmood Al- Obaidi	Central Statistical Office
Lebanon	Ms. Lara Badre	Central Administration de Statistique (CAS)
Mauritania	Ms. Oum Elkhairatt Mint Dahmed	National Statistical Office
Morocco	Mr. Jamal Guennouni	High Commissioner to the Plan
Kwait	Ms. Awatef AlSaleem	Central Department of Statistics Department of Census and population statistics
Syrian Arab Republic	Mr. Talal Boufah	Central Bureau of Statistics
Tunisia	Mr. Yamen Helel	National Institute of Statistics
West Bank and Gaza Strip	Ms. Suha Waleed Kana'an	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
Yemen	Mr. Khaled Taha Mahmood Al- Madani	Central Statistical Organization

Organizers	
Mr. Ismail Lubbad	UN ESCWA
Mr. Marwan Khawaja	UN ESCWA
Mr. Mustafa Hakki Ozel	ILO, Geneva
Ms. Elisa Benes	ILO, Geneva
Ms. Adriana Mata-Greenwood	ILO, Geneva

Annex II: Agenda

Day 1	
8:30 –9:30 am	Arrival and participant registration
9:30 –10:15 am	Opening Ceremony <i>-Mr. Zafiris Tzannatos, Reg. Advisor, Employment Policy & Microeconomics, ILO –Beirut</i> <i>-Mr. Juraj Riecan, Director, Department of Statistics, UN ESCWA</i> <i>-Mr. Ziad Sayegh, National Policy Advisor, Ministry of Labour, Lebanon</i>
10:15-10:45 am	<i>Coffee break (30 min)</i>
10:45–11:15 am	CONTEXTUAL SESSION Objectives of the meeting and expectations from participants 19th ICLS process and scope of review <i>-Mr. Mustafa Hakki Ozel, ILO –Geneva</i>
11:15–11:45 am	Setting the Stage: Labour Force Statistics in Western Asia and North Africa Today <i>-Mr. Ismail Lubbad, UN ESCWA</i> <i>-Mr. Zafiris Tzannatos, ILO-Beirut</i>
11:45–12:15 pm	Required infrastructure, objectives and scope of labour force statistics <i>-Ms. Adriana Mata-Greenwood, ILO –Geneva</i>
12:15–12:30 pm	Q&A session
12:30-1:30 pm	<i>Lunch break (1 hour)</i>
1:30 – 2:15 pm	SESSION 1 Conceptual framework for labour force and work statistics • Persons, jobs and activities • Classification of persons by labour force status <i>-Ms. Elisa Benes, ILO –Geneva</i>
2:15 – 2:30 pm	<i>Invited discussant: Ms. Suha Waleed Kana'an, PCBS –West Bank and Gaza Strip</i>
2:30 – 3:00 pm	<i>(Report para. 53-72)</i> Plenary Discussion
3:00 – 3:30 pm	<i>Coffee break (30 min)</i>
3:30 – 4:00 pm	SESSION 2 Labour force measurement framework (part I) • Current and usual measurement <i>-Mr. Mustafa Hakki Ozel, ILO –Geneva</i>
4:00 – 4:15 pm	<i>Invited discussant: Mr. Ali Rustom, CBS –Syrian Arab Republic</i>
4:15 – 5:00 pm	<i>(Report para. 86-96)</i> Plenary Discussion

Day 2	
9:00 – 9:30 am	SESSION 3 Employment - Operational definition, absences from employment - Treatment of specific groups <i>-Mr. Mustafa Hakki Ozel, ILO –Geneva</i>
9:30 – 9:45 pm	<i>Invited discussant: Ms. Fatma Mohamed El Ashry Mohamed, CAPMAS –Egypt (Report para.111-143)</i>
9:45 – 10:15 pm	Plenary Discussion
10:15 – 10:45 am	<i>Coffee break (30 min)</i>
10:45-11:15 am	SESSION 4 Other forms of work Scope and Operational definitions <i>-Ms. Adriana Mata-Greenwood, ILO –Geneva</i>
11:15-11:45 am	Plenary Discussion
11:45-12:15 pm	SESSION 5 Unemployment - Operational definition, criteria and reference periods - Treatment of specific groups <i>-Ms. Elisa Benes, ILO –Geneva</i>
12:15-12:30 pm	<i>Invited discussant: Mr. Yamen Helel, NIS –Tunisia (Report para.144-168)</i>
12:30-1:30 pm	<i>Lunch break (1 hour)</i>
1:30 –2:00 pm	SESSION 5 continued... Plenary Discussion
2:00 –2:30 pm	SESSION 6 Time-related underemployment Operational definition, criteria and relevant subgroups <i>-Ms. Adriana Mata-Greenwood, ILO –Geneva</i>
2:30 – 2:45 pm	<i>Invited discussant: Ms. Lara Badre, CAS –Lebanon (Report para.195-199)</i>
2:45 – 3:15 pm	Plenary Discussion
3:15 – 3:45 pm	<i>Coffee break (30 min)</i>
3:45 – 4:15 pm	SESSION 7 Persons not in the labour force - Operational definition and classifications - Treatment of specific groups <i>-Ms. Elisa Benes, ILO –Geneva</i>
4:15 – 4:30 pm	<i>Invited discussant: Mr. Mahmood Shakir Mahmood Al-Obaidi, CSO –Iraq (Report para.169-183)</i>
4:30 – 5:00 pm	Plenary Discussion

Day 3	
9:00–9:30 am	SESSION 8 Measures to supplement the unemployment rate - Objectives, scope and relation with other indicator sets - Components, type of measure(s), units and denominators <i>-Ms. Elisa Benes, ILO –Geneva</i>
9:30–9:45 pm	<i>Invited discussant: Mr. Jamal Guennouni, HCP –Morocco</i>
9:45–10:15 am	<i>(Report para.184-206)</i>
10:15–10:45 am	Plenary Discussion
10:15–10:45 am	<i>Coffee break (30 min)</i>
10:45–11:00 am	SESSION 9 Labour force measurement framework (part II) Age thresholds <i>-Ms. Adriana Mata-Greenwood, ILO –Geneva</i>
11:00–11:15 am	<i>Invited discussant: Mr. Khaled Taha Mahmood Al-Madani, CSO –Yemen</i>
11:15–11:45 am	<i>(Report para.97-105)</i>
11:45–12:00 am	Plenary Discussion
12:00–12:30 pm	Reference populations <i>-Ms. Elisa Benes, ILO –Geneva</i>
12:30–1:30 pm	Plenary Discussion
12:30–1:30 pm	<i>Lunch break (1 hour)</i>
1:30 – 1:50 pm	SESSION 10 Data collection programmes - Current labour force and work statistics programme - Non-current labour force and work statistics programme <i>-Mr. Mustafa Hakki Ozel, ILO –Geneva</i>
1:50 – 2:20 pm	Plenary Discussion
2:20 – 2:35 pm	Communication and dissemination guidelines <i>-Mr. Mustafa Hakki Ozel, ILO –Geneva</i>
2:35 – 2:50 pm	<i>Invited discussant: Ms. Oum Elhkairatt Mint Dahmed, NSO –Mauritania</i>
2:50 – 3:15 pm	Plenary Discussion
3:15 – 3:45 pm	<i>Coffee break (30 min)</i>
3:45 – 4:15 pm	Round Table: The Future of Work and Labour Force Statistics The ICLS revision and its relevance for statistical systems in Western Asia and North Africa <i>-Mr. Ismail Lubbad, UN ESCWA</i> <i>-Mr. Frank Hagemann, ILO-Beirut</i>
4:15 – 4:45 pm	Plenary Discussion
4:45 – 5:00 pm	Key outcomes and way forward <i>-Ms. Elisa Benes, ILO –Geneva</i> Closing