International Labour Organization

► **Room document***: 22

Measurement of forced labour: stocktaking and way forward

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* This document was not formally edited

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1.   Introduction

The 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians in 2018 endorsed, for the first time, Guidelines concerning the measurement of forced labour. The *Guidelines* provide statistical definitions for key concepts, specifically, forced labour, forced labour of children, and the duration of time spent in forced labour. The guidelines also distinguish between different types of forced labour, such as state-imposed versus privately imposed, as well as particular forms of forced labour like bonded labour, trafficking for forced labour, and forced commercial sexual exploitation. The *Guidelines* discuss a range of measurement issues including classifications and items of data collection, data sources and data collection strategy, survey design and ethical considerations, and data analysis and reporting. The *Guidelines* recognize the role of global, regional and national estimation of forced labour in the achievement of Target 8.7 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking. Finally, the *Guidelines* call for the ILO (a) to prepare technical manuals on practical methods for data collection, data processing, data analysis and data transmission on forced labour; and (b) to provide technical assistance through training and capacity building.

The purpose of the present document is to describe the main activities conducted by the ILO on this topic during the last five years and to point to some issues that need further development:

- Section 2 describes the national, regional and sectoral forced labour surveys undertaken with ILO's support between 2018-2023, after the adoption of the Guidelines. It also discusses the challenges encountered and methodological improvements;
- Section 3 describes the fourth global estimates of forced labour, launched in 2022;
- Section 4 describes research tools and training materials developed by the ILO;
- Section 5 describes methodological issues that need further development;
- Section 6 calls for a global programme on forced labour and human trafficking data collection; and
- Section 7 proposes discussion points

2.   Implementation of surveys on forced labour

Since 2018, mostly through its technical cooperation projects, the ILO has supported the implementation of 15 surveys covering forced labour components in 17 different countries, in addition to the global estimates[1]. These surveys had different coverages, from national to sector-specific, and were mostly implemented by national statistical offices[2].

These surveys were implemented either as modular surveys (five cases) or stand-alone surveys (ten cases). In the cases of modular surveys, the relationship with the base survey is at the level of questionnaire design, where a separate forced labour module is incorporated to the base survey, and with limited room to influence the sample design. Stand-alone surveys are exclusively or primarily concerned with forced labour topics and have their own operation.

Study design

Questionnaires

The expansion of forced labour surveys supported by the ILO and partners in recent years had a great diversity of scenarios, including stand-alone and modular surveys to cover privately-imposed and state-imposed forced labour at sectoral, sub-national or national levels. While this diversity poses a challenge to standardized approaches, several improvements in the questionnaire were gradually incorporated, as compared to before the ICLS *Guidelines*. Mostly, they aimed at reducing subjectivity in the questions and respondents' fatigue.

Pre-testing the draft questionnaire is a standard procedure in any survey design and implementation process. While survey testing has focused traditionally on expert reviews and operational and field-related matters, forced labour questionnaires have undergone Cognitive Interviewing (CI) tests on several occasions, used to evaluate the wording of questions. Drawing from theoretical psychology frameworks, CI identifies sources of potential response errors by analysing the cognitive processes survey respondents use to comprehend and respond to questions. This step is critical when addressing sensitive and context-specific phenomena such as forced labour. The ILO has also promoted these cognitive testing methodologies as part of in its labour force survey methodological report series[3].

The ILO has supported the implementation of cognitive testing for forced labour surveys in Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia, Mongolia and Peru, both in modular and stand-alone surveys. These tests resulted in the simplification and re-wording of certain questions to enhance clarity, minimize "false positives" and "false negatives", and improve respondent recall. They have also contributed to the improvement of screening questions – if used – to assess the eligibility of respondents to go through the full forced labour module.

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[1] Notably, most surveys were funded by projects of the United States Department of Labor (USDOL)

[2] A full list of implemented surveys will be available in the second edition of "Hard to see, harder to count" (see item 4)

[3] ILO LFS pilot studies – Cognitive Interviewing tests: Methodology, process and outcomes. International Labour Office, Department of Statistics. Geneva, ILO, 2018. Accessed at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/publication/wcms_627874.pdf

> ▶ **Box 1. Need for further methodological development on measurement of forced labour of children**
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> The measurement framework of forced labour of children has been outlined in the ICLS guidelines. Given different ethical and practical constraints on data collection among children, most surveys implemented so far only covered partially the assessment of forced labour of children. Further work on questionnaire design and pilot implementation should improve the measurement of this phenomenon.

Sampling

More complex sampling methods recommended by the ICLS *Guidelines* were adopted in 4 out of the 15 survey. For instance, Argentina's survey on the garment sector, implemented by a private partner, used a time-location sampling (TLS) design to recruit a moderate number of seeds to commence an innovative variant of a respondent-driven sampling (RDS) design. The TLS design screened and collected data about the general population with a focused interest on identifying and interviewing members of the base population, and further recruitment was then based on the tree-branching peer-referral scheme commonly seen in RDS.

In the palm oil sectoral survey in Malaysia, a stratified multi-stage design with adaptive cluster sampling (ACS) was used. Moreover, the sample included both non-institutional and institutional households. First, the plantations were selected using a probability proportionate to size (PPS) method from the national sample frame of oil palm plantations. Second, the chosen plantations were overlaid onto the Enumeration Blocks (EBs) map. Third, the selected EBs were either linked to the plantations (Linked EBs) or paired to one of the Linked EBs (Paired EBs). Finally, living quarters were selected in the chosen EBs using ACS, and the respective household members were screened and interviewed.

The survey conducted in the Cusco region in Peru had a two-stage sampling. In stage 1, poverty-vulnerable conglomerates were oversampled; households in each selected conglomerated were listed and screening questions were used to assess the higher likelihood of forced labour prevalence. In stage 2, those households with higher likelihood of forced labour were oversampled.

The ILO has recently tested the methodology of the Decent Work Supply Chain Survey (DW-SCS) with a pilot in the Electronics Supply Chain of Viet Nam.[4] The survey aims to measure indicators of well-being from the employers' and employees' perspectives, including on child labour and forced labour. The sample design involves three stages of sampling. In Stage 1, a sample of economic units from Tier 2 (producers of final electronics and electrical products) and Tier 3 (suppliers of electronics and electrical components) is created. The tiers are defined in terms of branches of economic activities (ISIC code) and are chosen as entry point because can be uniquely identified as belonging to the electronics supply chain. In Stage 2, all economic units linked to those sampled in Stage 1 are identified. These include suppliers of goods and services, sub-contractors, clients of goods and services and clients of manufacturing services within the territory of Viet Nam. Multiple waves of indirect sampling of linked economic units (i.e., economic units linked to economic units already identified as linked economic units

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[4] The results of the pilot will be presented at the 21st ICLS on October 16th, 2023 in the ILO R2 South Auditorium

in a previous wave) are possible. In Stage 3, a sample of workers is drawn within each economic unit of the sample or from a sub-sample of the economic units.

In upcoming work, the ILO is implementing several surveys on the measurement of forced labour in marine fishing[5]. Given the complexity of reaching fishers for interviews, the sample design will be built on multiple frames, targeting not only their place of work (vessels) but also their living quarters (households, employer-provided dormitories or other housing structures at the port or its vicinity). Multi-frame sampling is particularly relevant where no single sample frame provides an exhaustive representation of the target population, like in this context. This has been discussed in the context of child labour surveys in the ILO manual on sampling elusive populations.[6] In the fishing surveys, multi-frame sampling is formulated in terms of indirect sampling according to which the sampling populations are represented by two or more list frames, all linked to a common target population.[7]The list frames may be the list of vessels and the list of geographical areas of living quarters. The common target population is the workers in marine fishing.

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[5] These surveys are funded through the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and through the Blue Justice Iniciative by the Norwegian Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries

[6] Verma, Vijay, *Sampling elusive populations: Applications to studies of child labour*, FPRW/International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour and Department of Statistics, ILO. Geneva, 2013 (Ch. 8). https://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/WCMS_314425/lang--en/index.htm

[7] Lavallée, Pierre, *Le Sondage Indirect, ou la Mèthode généralisée du partage des poids*, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, Brussels, 2002.

▶ **Box 2. Sampling: Areas for further testing**

- Probability sampling

As forced labour is a rare phenomenon, the development of cost-efficient sample designs for the measurement of its prevalence in a general population is often challenging. The challenge is even more important in sectoral surveys where the base population itself is rare or unevenly distributed, such as in a forced labour survey among cotton pickers or domestic workers. When the forced labour module is to be attached to an existing survey, room for manoeuvring is further restricted as the options for the forced labour part is highly conditioned by that of the existing survey. Certain options explored by the ILO include incorporation of screening questions to target households of interest and oversampling of areas of concentration where data indicate high prevalence or vulnerability to forced labour.

Another option being considered is the use of linked surveys, where the sample design of the forced labour survey can be, to some degree, detached, yet linked to, that of the base survey. The basis for proposing linked surveys is described in more detail on the room document on child labour presented to the Conference (item 4.2). It involves, in short, different forms of linkage between the forced labour survey and the base survey at different stages of sampling.

- Non-probability sampling

Non-probability sampling generally do not allow for statistical inference, that is, the non-random choice of respondents by convenient procedures such as quotas do not allow us to obtain statistically representative indicators of the population of interest, given the absence of sample frames or bias in the sample itself.

Experienced gained by the ILO in conducting forced labour surveys in countries in different regions of the world indicates that survey interviews should be conducted in a secure place away from the place of work where the presence of the employer or the representative could hamper the respondent to provide genuine information and, in some cases, the participation in the survey itself could be a threat to the worker. This important consideration has implication on sample design. In the case of surveys where obtaining workers' lists as sample frame is needed, employers may not provide those or may provide incomplete lists; or, if it is allowed that they select workers themselves for the survey, the resulting sample would not necessarily be representative. In such cases, limitations to the approach have to be made clear, for example, the inability of making statistical inference or to make explicit that the use of the data only allows to qualitatively describe characteristics of workers in forced labour or related risk factors. Innovative procedures could be explored to assess the possibility, in case employers themselves select respondents, to turn the non-probability sample selected by the employer to a probability sample representative of the range of workers in the establishment, or to adapt the estimation procedure to make correct inference from the non-probability sample.

Likewise, novel methods using mathematical theories to assign weights to network-based sampling (e.g. respondent-driven sampling), or combinations between time-location and network sampling (e.g. "starfish" sampling) require further work to assess their validity and feasibility of implementation by national partners.

3. Global estimates

In 2022, the ILO, Walk Free and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) published "Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage". This was the fourth effort by the ILO to produce global and regional estimates of forced labour (2005, 2012, 2017) and the first global estimates published after the adoption of the ICLS *Guidelines*. It is estimated that 27.6 million people were in forced labour at any point of the year in 2021, corresponding to 3.5 in each 1000 individuals; that being the highest prevalence ever captured in global estimates.

The core datasets for global estimation were derived from the national surveys conducted in 68 countries during the period from 2017 to 2020. In one country (Cambodia), the survey was conducted more than once, in 2017 and again in 2019. All surveys were implemented by Gallup, Inc. in conjunction with the annual World Poll Survey. The national surveys were household-based surveys with survey interviewing of a sample of individuals at their places of residence, collecting data on forced labour and forced marriage regarding themselves and their immediate family members. Surveys conducted in 2017 and 2019 used face-to-face interviewing, but those conducted in 2020, after the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic, were carried out by telephone interviewing.

Although the collected data was sufficient for the generation of global and regional estimates, deriving country-level estimates directly from the dataset is still a challenge given the low frequency of observations and the rare statistical prevalence; this highlights the importance of countries collecting national data, also taking into account possible reporting on Target 8.7 in their Voluntary National Reviews to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

4.   Research tools and training materials

Strengthening the capacity for sustainable data collection and analysis on forced labour is essential to ensure that the ICLS *Guidelines* are used effectively to inform policies aimed at preventing and eliminating forced labour. Over the past years, the ILO has developed several tools designed for use by national statistical offices, social partners and other relevant institutions or individuals.

4.1.   Forced Labour Model Questionnaires[8]:

- Modular national forced labour surveys: This model questionnaire in English, French, and Spanish, is designed for easy integration into broader labour force surveys or household-based surveys. It facilitates efficient data collection on forced labour and ensures alignment with 20th ICLS *Guidelines* on the measurement of forced labour.
- Stand-alone national forced labour surveys: These comprehensive resources include questionnaires, enumerators' manuals, and national adaptation guidelines, in English, French, and Spanish, tailored for stand-alone national forced labour surveys. The materials are aimed at capturing detailed information on forced labour at the national level.

4.2.   Reporting Templates[9]:

The reporting templates provide user-friendly formats for presenting forced labour survey results and policy implications at varying levels of detail. These highly visual tools are designed to communicate findings accessibly to a wide audience in a harmonised way that facilitates statistical comparisons across countries and time.

4.3.   Sampling Resources:

Sampling tools for forced labour surveys at national and sectoral levels: this set of tools allow to conduct oversampling of areas of concentration at the first stage of sampling and targeted sampling of households and workers at the second stage sampling of national and sectorial surveys on child labour and forced labour. Oversampling tools include methods for cases where full information on concentration is available and for cases where partial or no information on concentration is available. Target sampling tools include listing and screening of households and workers of interest within sample PSUs; adaptive cluster sampling based on the geographical proximity of the households of interest within PSUs; and respondent driven sampling based on the social relationship among the households of interest within PSUs.

4.4.   Training Curriculum[10]:

The ILO has introduced an online training curriculum on child labour and forced labour research to bolster our training efforts and respond to the demand for improved data and research on these issues. This curriculum aims to: i) enhance the capacity of national statistical offices and researchers to conduct

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[8] Forthcoming in Q1 2024

[9] Forthcoming in Q4 2023

[10] Forthcoming on the ITC-ILO e-campus platform (https://ecampus.itcilo.org/)

rigorous research on child and forced labour, ii) elevate the standard of child and forced labour studies by fostering awareness among researchers at various levels and improving the quality of published research, and iii) equip statistical offices and researchers with the skills to effectively design, communicate, and promote their research findings, encouraging the application of this knowledge in policy-making and stakeholder engagement.

4.5. Second edition of "Hard to see, harder to count"

In 2012, the ILO published "Harder to see, harder to count", which were the first practical guidelines on how to measure forced labour. The ILO is currently preparing a second edition of the publication in light of the 20th ICLS *Guidelines*, and also incorporating the lessons learnt in the last decade from the implementation of surveys on the topic. This second edition includes a full discussion on research on state-imposed forced labour.

4.6. Other Research Resources:

The ILO Research to Action project has compiled an evidence gap map on forced labour research. Other upcoming resources include a toolkit on mixed methods for child labour and forced labour research, guidance on measurement and monitoring of child labour in low-prevalence contexts, and ethical guidelines for research.

5.   Areas for further methodological development

Proxy response

Given the rarity of the forced labour phenomenon and the usual implementation of household surveys, proxy responses are often common in forced labour surveys. Proxy responses are responses made by a person, typically the household head or the most knowledgeable person in the household, on behalf of the sampled person. However, for such a sensitive topic as forced labour, it is often the case that the respondent is not fully aware of the work situations of other family members. In fact, the surveys conducted by the ILO so far often show a strikingly higher prevalence of forced labour among the respondents compared to when the respondent is asked to report about other family members Adjustments to the quality and reliability of proxy response have been used, for example, in the global estimates of forced labour, but further methodological development is needed to correct for biases in case proxy responses are systematically used to estimate prevalence of forced labour. For instance, the ILO is exploring the opportunity of using proxy response in specific circumstances, like in the surveys on forced labour in marine finishing when the interviewed person is the left-behind partner or a close relative who is informed of a situation of forced labour.

Statistical definition of trafficking for forced labour

The Standard Tools for Analysis of Trafficking in Persons (STATIP) project started in 2022, funded by the United States Department of State Trafficking in Persons Office. This project is a collaboration involving at, the UN level, the ILO, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and, as academic partner, the University of Georgia (UGA). STATIP aims to clarify overlaps and differences between legal frameworks derived from ILO Convention 29 and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol), and translate those into operational statistical definitions for the compilation of primary data on trafficking in persons, including for labour purposes. It is expected that the project will pilot the definitions and submit measurement guidelines to the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2026, accompanied by tools that will allow primary data collection of different overlapping concepts (trafficking in persons, trafficking in persons for labour purposes, and forced labour) within the same survey instrument.

6.   Towards a global programme on data collection

Leveraging cutting-edge tools and initial experience in forced labour data collection, and aligning with the broader ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch research strategy, we propose the establishment of a global forced labour and human trafficking statistical programme to support a wide range of stakeholders, including Governments and National Statistical Offices (NSOs) in designing and implementing sustainable programmes for forced labour data collection. This initiative will result in a large increase in the number of countries regularly collecting representative national data on forced labour and human trafficking and the characteristics of the populations affected. This data will be critical to inform policy responses and for tracking progress at the national, regional and global levels. Following the experience of child labour statistics, the ILO aims to integrate forced labour statistics into national statistical country systems and in the long-medium term produce forced labour global estimates using country-level data.

The ILO possesses significant expertise in creating global data collection programmes, as exemplified by the Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour (SIMPOC), launched in 1998. With substantial funding from various donors, particularly from the United States Department of Labor (USDOL), the ILO effectively facilitated the integration of child labour statistics into national statistical systems across numerous countries and regions worldwide. This collaboration has enabled the production of six global estimates using primary data since 2002. The datasets used in the latest Global Estimate of Child Labour consistently covers over 70% of the target population of children aged 5-17. A similarly ambitious approach is necessary for forced labour and human trafficking issues.

7. Discussion points

Participants in the Conference are invited to review the room document on Forced Labour Statistics and provide feedback on: (a) areas for further methodological development, and (b) offer advice on the creation of a global programme for data collection on forced labour and human trafficking; (c) express interest in integrating existing survey with forced labour modules or implementing national or sectoral stand-alone forced labour survey.