



## ► Room document\*: 6

Updates to the resolution concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization



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## 1. Introduction and background

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1. Since its adoption in 2013 Resolution I of the 19th ICLS (*Resolution concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization*) has been increasingly widely applied. Inevitably as application widens some aspects of the resolution that could be considered ambiguous, or requiring further clarification or development arise.
2. The purpose of this document is to highlight a small number of issues where known ambiguities, or possible updates have been highlighted and where a clear improvement is felt to be identified. These relate to specific parts of the definitions referring to volunteer work and own-use provision of services.
3. In addition, one wider topic of potential future work is identified – namely subsistence foodstuff production. In this case the issue is not necessarily that the 19th ICLS resolution would need to be updated, although this is an option. Rather the issue is that there is potentially a lack of clarity on the range of statistics needed to describe the phenomenon of subsistence activity and lack of wider reference concepts for subsistence. Among other things this has highlighted a difficulty in providing clear measurement guidance to apply the 19th ICLS definition.
4. The nature of the issues identified, proposed amendments (where relevant) and possible next steps related to subsistence activity are discussed further below.

## 2. Volunteer work

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5. Volunteer work is defined in paragraphs 37 to 39 of 19th ICLS Resolution I as “unpaid, non-compulsory activity to produce goods or provide services for others”, where others refers to people other than household or family members. Paragraph 38 covers exclusions from volunteer work and sub-paragraph 38 (c) states the following exclusion:

*“work for others performed during the working time associated with employment, or during paid time off from an employee job granted by the employer.”*

6. The spirit of this exclusion was to exclude from volunteer work only the unpaid work done by an employee for others, during paid time off granted by the employer specifically for this reason (a practice known as “corporate or company volunteering”).
7. In its current formulation, paragraph 38(c) can be interpreted as excluding from volunteer work all unpaid work for others (excluding household or family members) during paid time off granted by the employer. Paid time off, however, includes all time for which employees receive a payment without performing their job duties — including paid annual leave, sick-leave, and public holidays. A strict interpretation of the exclusion would therefore not recognize any unpaid work done by people to benefit others during paid annual leave as volunteer work.
8. **Proposed Revision (I):** It is now proposed to refine the wording of paragraph 38 (c) as below in order to more accurately reflect the spirit of the exclusion intended at the time 19th ICLS resolution I was adopted. Under the new formulation the exclusion would be:

*(c) work for others performed during the working time associated with employment, or during paid time off from an employee job granted by the employer specifically to do that work.*

### 3. Own-use provision of services

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9. As regards own-use provision of services two aspects of the definitions from 19th ICLS Resolution I can be considered ambiguous or worthy of immediate refinement. These are:
- i. The one-hour criterion for own use provision of service work and its operationalisation
  - ii. The comparability of Activity Cluster categories with the UN International Classification of Activities for Time Use Statistics (ICATUS-16), approved by the UN Statistical Commission in 2017, and broadly aligned to the 19th ICLS

#### 3.1. Operationalisation of the one-hour criterion for own use provision of service work

10. Resolution I of the 19th ICLS specifies the reference periods appropriate to each form of work, “based on the intensity of participation and working time arrangements” (paragraph 19).
11. For the purposes of assigning appropriate reference periods, the two sub-categories of work constituting own-use production work are treated separately. For own use provision of services, the specified reference period is “one or more 24-hour days within a seven-day or one-week period” (paragraph 19c). For own use production of goods, the specified reference period is “four weeks or one calendar month” (paragraph 19b).
12. Paragraph 21 further specifies a one-hour criterion for classification of individuals to each form of work (“the form of work must be engaged in for a cumulative total of at least one hour during the relevant, short reference period”).
13. In the case of own use provision of services, the imposition of this constraint, and the resulting exclusion of all respondents who report less than one hour of qualifying activities during the 24-hour reference period from the calculation of indicators will impact on the utility of the resulting data if applied. This is especially apparent in the calculation of sex disaggregated data for participation rates and volume indicators. As, for example, required by SDG indicator 5.4.1 on the “proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location”. In several world regions, the mean time spent by men on own use provision of services work (unpaid domestic and care work) falls below the 60-minute constraint (ILO 2018).
14. The referent for the one-hour criterion is subject to some ambiguity. Paragraph 22a of 19th ICLS, Resolution I states: “any activity” refers to work performed in the various activities under paragraph 22(b) [“production of goods”] and (c) [“provision of services”] for a cumulative total of at least one hour”. The ambiguity rests on whether the cumulative total of at least one hour refers to the combined total for 22(b) [“production of goods”] and (c) [“provision of services”] or to each category individually.
15. While there is some ambiguity regarding the referent for the one-hour criterion, the most reasonable inference is that it applies separately to own use production of goods and own use provision of services, rather than to the cumulative total of each, i.e., combined total for own use production. This is based in particular on the different reference periods applied, which make aggregation complicated.
16. Furthermore, typical practices for the measurement of own-use provision of services, for example through time-use surveys, do not apply any such lower limit for exclusion, putting the standards at odds with the methods typically used for measurement.

17. Proposed revision (II): To address the above concerns it is proposed to omit reference to a one-hour criterion for the production of indicators on own use provision of service work.

### 3.2. Comparability of Activity Cluster categories with ICATUS-16 classification scheme

18. Four separate activity clusters are listed under own use provision of services (19th ICLS Resolution I, paragraph 22c).
- i. household accounting and management, purchasing and/or transporting goods
  - ii. preparing and/or serving meals, household waste disposal and recycling
  - iii. cleaning, decorating, and maintaining one's own dwelling or premises, durables and other goods, and gardening
  - iv. childcare and instruction, transporting and caring for elderly, dependent or other household members and domestic animals or pets, etc.
19. This categorisation maps onto a well-established conceptual approach in which "direct care" activities (corresponding here to activity cluster iv) are distinguished from indirect care activities (corresponding here to activity clusters i – iii).
20. At the broad conceptual level, this approach is consistent with the wider UN framework for the production of time use statistics and the measurement of unpaid domestic and care work (as operationalised for SDG indicator 5.4.1, and the International Classification of Activities for Time Use Statistics (ICATUS-16) scheme.
21. At the operational level, there is generally a high level of consistency between the ICLS activity clusters and the UN Statistics Division (UNSD) Guidelines on the production of time use statistics and the measurement of unpaid domestic and care work (UDCW).
22. ICATUS-16 major divisions (i.e., one digit) map directly onto the relevant activity clusters in most cases. The exception relates to activity cluster (iv) from the 19th ICLS resolution, which combines in a single cluster, activities ("childcare and instruction, transporting and caring for elderly, dependent or other household members..."). Within ICATUS these activities are spread across two different major divisions, namely major division four ("unpaid caregiving services for household and family members"), and major division three ("unpaid domestic services for household and family members") which covers the activities ("[transporting and caring for...] domestic animals or pets, etc").
23. In short, ICATUS-16 classifies pet care as unpaid domestic services, whereas the 19th ICLS classifies pet care as unpaid caregiving services.
24. One further divergence is observed at the two-digit division level. The 19th ICLS classifies "household waste disposal and recycling" with "preparing and/or serving meals" under activity cluster ii. ICATUS-16 classifies "recycling and disposal of garbage" under division 32 "Cleaning and maintaining of own dwelling and surroundings ". (ICATUS-16 classifies "Food and meals management and preparation" under division 31). With the exception of "household waste disposal and recycling", activities classified under ICATUS-16 division 32 are classified under activity cluster iii ("cleaning, decorating, and maintaining one's own dwelling or premises, durables and other goods, and gardening"). This results in a minor misalignment at the ICATUS-16 two-digit level, with activities classified under ICATUS-16 division 32 split across activity clusters ii. and iii.

25. **Proposed revision (III):** In order to promote comparability of indicators produced by activity cluster with statistics aligned to ICATUS and harmonise the production of national statistics on the topic, it is recommended that own use provision of service work related to “domestic animals or pets” is transferred from the activity cluster “unpaid caregiving services for household and family members”, to the activity cluster “unpaid domestic services for household and family members”.
26. **Proposed revision (IV):** Further to proposed revision III, it is recommended that own use provision of service work related to “household waste disposal and recycling” is transferred from the activity cluster “preparing and/or serving meals, household waste disposal and recycling”, to the activity cluster “cleaning, decorating, and maintaining one’s own dwelling or premises, durables and other goods, and gardening”.

## 4. Subsistence foodstuff production

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27. In paragraph 24 19th ICLS Resolution I provides a definition of subsistence foodstuff producers. This definition states that they “constitute an important subgroup of persons in own use production work” and goes on to define them as:
28. (a) all those who performed any of the activities specified in paragraph 22(b)(i) in order to produce foodstuff from agriculture, fishing, hunting or gathering that contribute to the livelihood of the household or family;
29. (b) excluded are persons who engaged in such production as recreational or leisure activities.
30. The critical elements of this definition are that it specifies that subsistence foodstuff producers are a subset of persons in own-use production. The key criteria offered to create the boundary between subsistence and non-subsistence foodstuff producers is that the production must ‘contribute to the livelihood of the household or family’, while it is also stated that it excludes cases where the activity is done for recreation or leisure. The criterion regarding the contribution to livelihood is broadly consistent with an earlier definition from ICSE-93 – however, the criterion excluding recreation or leisure is a new feature of the 19th ICLS definition.
31. ILO model questionnaires published from 2018 onwards included questions to identify own-use production of foodstuff – but did not include questions to operationalise a boundary between subsistence and non-subsistence activity. As a consequence, countries following ILO guidance, or indeed their own national practices could often default into publishing statistics on subsistence foodstuff producers that identify all own-use producers of foodstuff as subsistence foodstuff producers.

### 4.1. Sri Lanka pilot study - overview

32. To address this issue the ILO tested different operational approaches to the identification of subsistence foodstuff production through the series of pilot studies completed in Sri Lanka between 2017 and 2019.
33. The work was completed in multiple stages, starting with cognitive testing, followed up by quantitative testing in two districts of Sri Lanka with high levels of foodstuff production activity. In the first round of work in September 2018 cognitive interviews were completed with a particular focus on questions related to agricultural or fishing work. This was followed by two rounds of quantitative testing in April and August 2019 respectively.
34. For the cognitive tests two additional questions were asked of all persons identified as doing farming or fishing work. These were included to try to operationalise the boundary between subsistence and non-subsistence foodstuff production. They were developed following a review of existing (limited) country practices. The questions are shown in table 1.



► **Table 1 – Questions tested during cognitive tests – Sri Lanka, September 2018**

Question	
1.	<i>Thinking about the foodstuff your household produces could you afford to purchase the food if you were not producing it?</i>
a.	YES -> NOT SUBSISTENCE
b.	NO -> ASK Q2
2.	<i>And is that foodstuff...</i>
a.	A major part of the food that your household eats -> SUBSISTENCE
b.	or used to complement the food your household buys -> NOT SUBSISTENCE

35. The idea underlying this set of questions was that if the household could afford to purchase replacement food this could be taken as an indication that the household was not reliant on the production. This would be further confirmed by the second question, only asked of those who could not afford to purchase replacement food – now focussing on whether the foods was a major part of the household consumption or not. The ultimate identification of subsistence foodstuff producers in this case would focus on those who could not afford to purchase replacement food and where the consumption was a major part of the food the household eats.
36. Cognitive probing indicated several comprehension and reporting difficulties with the tested approach. The general idea of affording to buy the foodstuff produced appeared to be reasonably understood – respondents referring to whether or not they had sufficient income to buy the food lost. However, the question on the importance of the foodstuff for consumption was found to be subject to comprehension difficulties. For example, some respondents were unclear whether the question referred to the importance for consumption of that specific product, or overall – and difficulties with response were observed.
37. Based on the initial testing the questions were updated in preparation for the quantitative tests. The versions used during both rounds of the quantitative testing are shown in table 2.

► **Table 2 – Questions tested during cognitive tests – Sri Lanka, September 2018**

Question	
1.	<i>You told me that your family produces food from farming or fishing for your own consumption. If you were not producing this would your family have enough food to eat?</i>
a.	YES -> NOT SUBSISTENCE
b.	NO -> ASK Q2
2.	<i>And could you afford to buy the food your family needs?</i>
a.	YES -> NOT SUBSISTENCE
b.	NO -> SUBSISTENCE

38. The new questions essentially sought to initially establish if the family would have enough food if the own-use produced foodstuff was not available (e.g. if a crop failed). For those who said no, the question of affordability of required food was then used to confirm whether the activity was truly relied upon or not, thereby also excluding that it would be a leisure activity as excluded by the 19th ICLS definition.
39. These questions were supplemented by questions to identify own-use producers and a question on sources of household livelihood within which one of the response categories was 'Foodstuff produced from family farming or fishing'. The intention was to analyse the outputs using these different overlapping measures to gain insight on the meaning of the results.

## 4.2. Outcomes from the Sri Lanka study

40. While initial feedback from operation in the field was relatively positive, detailed analysis of the results created doubts about the usability of the data to clearly establish if members of households were engaged in subsistence activity in line with the definition, and the ability to generate guidance for this purpose. Some of these questions are considered below.
41. **Should the importance of the contribution be measured at household or individual level?** Whether a person undertakes own-use production of foodstuff is measured at individual level – however, the definition refers to the contribution to the livelihood of the household. It is plausible that each individual member of the household could answer questions of this type but this may lead to inconsistency in reporting across individuals, either because of different interpretations or because different individuals work on different products with differing degrees of interpretation. Through the Sri Lanka studies it was decided to ask the questions on contribution to livelihood of one household reference person – both as a way to reduce repetition but also on the assumption that the household reference person may be in the best position to judge whether the production contributes to household livelihood. This approach thereby identifies the household as a “subsistence household” as a first step towards identifying subsistence foodstuff producers. The assumption underlying this is that once the household reference person states that the contribution is important then all people engaged in the production would be subsistence foodstuff producers. This, however, rules out that an individual could see their own activity as a leisure activity, or could only be working on products which are not contributing to livelihood. The absence of clarity on this point makes interpretation of results difficult. Also as practically shown in the Sri Lanka studies it does not remove the need to measure activity at the individual level to assign labour force status and collect other essential information.
42. **Does the identification of subsistence activity relate to other information collected such as employment?** The 19th ICLS definition refers to subsistence farming as a subset of own-use production of foodstuff. This must therefore be assessed based on the activities of an individual. However, no reference is made in the definition of whether the other activities of that individual, or the household are relevant. For example, if a person has other employment, or lives in a household where all others are employed is the activity still subsistence foodstuff production? The default treatment would be to identify a person as engaged in subsistence activity regardless of any other activities but it would be reasonable to further discuss if this should be the case, particularly where the other criteria in the definition are not generally applied. Another way of considering this is to ask the question “are there reasonable proxy measures which could be identified to exclude that the activity would be for subsistence”? Currently this is not envisaged.
43. **What components of the definition should we directly attempt to operationalise?** As noted the definition makes reference to the contribution to livelihood to identify subsistence but also excludes recreational activity. Attempts were made through the studies to directly operationalise the contribution to livelihood, but not the recreational nature of the activity. To be comprehensive it could be argued that both should be covered, unless it can be safely assumed that an activity is not recreational if the foodstuff generated contributes to the livelihood of the household.
44. **What reference periods should be used?** The default approach would be that the same reference period would apply as the reference period for own-use production of goods (namely a short reference period). However, is this the same reference period as should be applied for the contribution to livelihood? Alternatively, should the reference period be unstated? This was the approach in the pilot studies – making the question easier to design but it makes the interpretation potentially unclear – are we referring to a current season, a more general situation, just the short reference period used for own-use production?

45. The data collected in Sri Lanka showed that the issues pointed to by the above questions can make a substantial difference to the result generated. They additionally indicate that the results generated were highly questionable. For a start as shown in table 3 within the 968 households interviewed in the first wave of interviewing 404 own-use producers of foodstuff were identified through the individual questionnaire. Notably, this means that in the absence of applying any further criteria this would be the group identified as subsistence foodstuff producers (404 people).

► **Table 3 – Identification of subsistence foodstuff producers, wave 1, Sri Lanka 2019**

	Number of households	Number of Own-use producers of foodstuff
Total interviewed	968	<b>404</b>
Asked the two questions on subsistence	417	224
Would have enough food to eat without own-use produced foodstuff	179	107
Would not have enough food to eat without own-use produced foodstuff	238	<b>117</b>
Could afford to buy other food if the food the produce would not be available	209	107
Could not afford to buy other food	29	10

\* Note – this is the unweighted number of respondents to the study

46. The subsistence related questions were only asked in households who reported having agricultural production where any of the products were kept for own-consumption. Consequently, these questions were asked of 417 households covering 224 own-use producers. This shows an initial quality concern – the level of consistency of reporting of agricultural activity between household and individual level was far from perfect meaning that at the individual level 180 respondents were identified as own-use producers of foodstuff but did not live in households that were identified as eligible for the questions on subsistence activity because those questions relied on household level information. For example, of the 404 people identified as own-use producers of foodstuff through the individual questionnaires, only 285 of them lived in households that reported foodstuff from farming and fishing (either for sale or own-use) as a source of livelihood.
47. Of the 417 households asked the subsistence questions, more than half (238) stated that they would not have enough food to eat if they were not producing that foodstuff themselves – covering 117 own-use producers of foodstuff. This highlights a second quality concern – not even half of the households identified as relying on own-use produced foodstuff (based on household level questions) had own-use producers based on individual questionnaires. Notably almost all of those households had members identified as employed in farming or fishing.
48. Taking the information on affordability we see that 209 of the 238 households who would not have enough food to eat without the own-use produced foodstuff, stated that they would be able to afford to purchase the food they needed, covering 107 own-use producers.
49. The combined effect of these questions is that if we apply no additional criteria then 404 own-use producers would have been identified as subsistence foodstuff producers. Applying the additional criterion of having enough food to eat without the own-use produced foodstuff cuts this to 117, while applying the affordability criterion cuts it further to only 10.

50. One message which can be taken from this is that the application of the additional criteria makes an enormous difference to the result. The scale of this may be specific to the situation in Sri Lanka but would likely be repeated in other contexts to different degrees. Indeed, in settings where subsistence farming is very prevalent the additional criteria may make relatively little difference, but in the absence of questions to apply those criteria it is difficult to be sure. Even in those cases, the practice of identifying all own-use producers of foodstuff as subsistence foodstuff producers creates an evident risk of overidentifying the group.
51. A second message that can be taken is that the choice of capturing information at household or individual level also makes a substantial difference. It should generally be assumed that household and individual level information for the same household should be broadly consistent, for example if own-use production of foodstuff was reported at the household level by a knowledgeable household member, then some of the individuals in the household should report being engaged in own-use production of foodstuff. However, for various reasons the data in Sri Lanka showed this not to be the case meaning careful consideration is needed to design operational approaches that achieve internally consistent results that can be clearly interpreted. The most straightforward approach to apply the definition from 19th ICLS Resolution I would be to ask the subsistence questions at the individual level, thereby ensuring that only own-use producers of foodstuff are asked about the contribution to household livelihood (or other operational approach chosen). However, this does risk inconsistent reporting of household contribution across household members if there are multiple own-use producers of foodstuff.
52. A third message is that various data quality concerns arose, calling into question whether the operational approaches tested in Sri Lanka generate good quality information. For example, it was ultimately shown that the majority of households that reported that they would not have enough food to eat if they were not producing the foodstuff consumed were households that had people employed in farming or fishing. One conclusion drawn is that this may indicate that the respondents were thinking about the loss of all agricultural production, not just the part they consumed. Clearly this was not the intended interpretation, but the results suggest it was perceived in that way by many respondents. This calls into question among other things the construct validity underlying the chosen approach and suggests great care is needed in designing the question seeking to establish a boundary between subsistence and non-subsistence production.
53. Furthermore, it could be considered that there is a lack of a wider frame of conceptual reference for the concept of subsistence. It is generally understood and referred to as the idea of reliance on the production of foodstuff by the household – however there are no precise definitions of a more general concept of subsistence. In addition, there is no proposed set of indicators related to the topic of subsistence. Theoretically this could include some combination of household and individual level information, for example the number of subsistence households, the number of people living in subsistence households and the number of subsistence foodstuff producers among others. In the absence of such a framework the only proposed indicator identified is the number of subsistence foodstuff producers and the associated rate as defined by in 19th ICLS Resolution I.

### 4.3. Sub-working group discussions and follow up activities

54. When these issues were discussed by the sub-working group in April 2021, it was generally agreed that this is a topic where further work on the topic beneficial. In particular, it was noted to be problematic that a default approach in the absence of good measurement approaches would be to identify all own-use producers of foodstuff as subsistence foodstuff producers. A revision of the definition of the 19th ICLS could be an outcome of further development work but cannot be presumed to be necessary without wider discussions, developing a wider context of statistics on

subsistence. A more straightforward starting point could be to undertake further work on questions to apply the current definition within the individual LFS questionnaire. It was also noted by the sub-working group participants that the evidence collected suggested the topic is quite complex from a measurement perspective and that future work should focus on developing approaches that are practical to implement within a LFS, while generating data of clear interpretation.

55. As a follow up to the sub-working group discussion the ILO, FAO and World Bank have held early informal discussions on possible joint work to further advance this topic, incorporating wide consultations if further conceptual work does take place. Due to resource constraints the work has not developed further at the time of writing.
56. As acknowledged by the sub-working group, an alternative to a wider conceptual development process would be further work to operationalise the current ICLS definition. The results from Sri Lanka show that the operational approach used there is not suitable for wider application at this point. Work could be undertaken with interested countries to further refine this approach to develop and test alternatives that perform better in practice. This could be done regardless of or in parallel with further conceptual work.
57. Participants at the ICLS are invited to provide their opinions on potential future work on the topic of subsistence foodstuff production. In particular, participants are asked to provide their views on the importance of further conceptual development, which would necessarily extend beyond the domain of work statistics and require collaboration with other agencies, or whether work to refine measurement approaches is considered sufficient.

## 5. Conclusions and points for reflection

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- 58. This paper presents developments in related to three areas of potential update to the 19th ICLS Resolution I definitions.
- 59. On the first two points relating to volunteer work and own-use provision of services the ICLS is invited to provide its views on the amendments proposed as shown in annex 1.
- 60. Regarding the topic of subsistence foodstuff production the ICLS is invited to provide views on the importance of further measurement and/or conceptual work on this topic, recognising that in the absence of further guidance a default practice can be to identify all own-use producers of foodstuff as subsistence foodstuff producers. Expressions of interest to collaborate with any further work on the topic are welcome.

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## ► Annex 1 – Drafts of amended resolution

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Below are links to the draft amended resolutions in English, French and Spanish.

Proposed amendments are highlighted in track changes.

- [English](#)
- [Français](#)
- [Español](#)