

Proposal on updating the Handbook on Measuring Quality of Employment

I Background

The Statistical Framework presented in the UNECE Handbook on Measuring Quality of Employment, published in 2015, offers a coherent structure for measuring quality of employment and provides practical guidance for compiling and interpreting a number of proposed indicators. The UNECE Steering Group on Measuring Quality of Employment, as part of its mandate, reviews the Handbook and identifies areas where updates should be considered to ensure the relevance and practical usability of the Handbook.

In fact, many developments can be observed in the area in the last decade since drafting the Handbook. In a first round in 2016-2018 the work carried out focused on updating the list of indicators. After discussing and confirming the recommendations by the Group of Experts on Quality of Employment the results were fixed in an Addendum to the Handbook available for download. After a second round of work in 2019-2023 dealing with several conceptual issues as the impact of the 19th ICLS and in addition the development of new indicators (e.g. telework, commuting), the Steering Group considered that the time has come to launch an update of the Handbook on Quality of Employment to incorporate the developments since 2015 to maintain the relevance and practical usability of the Handbook.

This paper provides a brief summary of issues that should be included in an update of the Handbook. The Steering Group will present the proposal to update the Handbook to the Group of Experts for discussion and feedback.

II Possible content for an update

a. Impact of the 19th ICLS

The Handbook on Measuring Quality of Employment applies the definition of employment as one of five forms of work set out by Resolution on statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization adopted by the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians in 2013. The Handbook, therefore, does not provide guidance on the quality of other forms of work than employment. This brings an disadvantage as with the 19th ICLS resolution employment has a narrower scope and some kind of work that was before covered as employment now falls out of that scope. It is obvious that measuring quality of employment should continue to focus on employment as this is at the core of the framework. But it was recognized that while maintaining the scope of the Handbook it may be helpful to consider also the other forms of work in some cases. Therefore, the relevance of the indicators of the Handbook should be assessed for other forms of work with the aim to include specific recommendations in this regard where it is appropriate for single indicators in an update of the Handbook.

b. Impact of the 20th ICLS (ICSE-18)

The classification of status in employment as defined in ICSE-93, is integrated within the Quality of Employment framework. In some instances, the employment status category contributes to the definition of specific indicators (e.g. own account workers, self-employed with one client), while in others, it is used for certain breakdowns when disseminating the results. With the introduction of the new Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE-18) as defined in the Resolution concerning statistics on work relationships adopted at the 20th ICLS, there will be notable implications at various levels. Substantial work has been carried out by the Steering Group in analysing the impact on the existing indicators across each of the seven dimensions of the quality of employment framework. Based on this work the changes by ICSE-18 should be widely included in the Quality of Employment framework.

c. Impact of the 21st ICLS

During the 21st ICLS, a resolution was adopted concerning statistics on the informal economy. The Handbook on Measuring Quality of Employment includes an experimental indicator on informal employment and it can be assumed that there are other areas of relevance for measuring quality of employment. In addition to updating the existing indicator, an assessment should provide more information on which other changes should be included in the Quality of Employment framework.

d. Forms of employment

In recent years, many countries have witnessed the emergence and growth of new forms of employment, driven by economic changes, the adoption of new business models, technological advancement, and continuing digitalization. These new forms of employment and the growing number of workers involved in them sparked discussions among policymakers on their potential impact on social protection and working conditions. After an in-depth review on new forms of employment the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians established a Task Force on Forms of Employment to develop a conceptual framework for measuring forms of employment.

The UNECE Handbook on Forms of Employment published in 2022 is the result of its efforts. It presents a broad framework to classify and understand forms of employment. Following the publication of the Handbook, a subgroup on forms of employment was formed under the Steering Group of Quality of Employment to advance efforts in the area. While the subgroup is actively working on addressing the remaining conceptual issues which were not or not fully addressed in the Handbook, the conceptual advances introduced by the Handbook on forms of employment could be implemented as part of an update of the Handbook on Measuring Quality of employment. As a consequence, there is a need to analyse the impact of the work on forms of employment on measuring quality of employment and to include the relevant common aspects, at least on the indicators, in the Handbook on Measuring Quality of Employment.

e. Updating existing indicators and suggesting new indicators

Due to the constant change of labour markets there is a need to check regularly whether the list of indicators needs to be updated to remain relevant (Handbook on Measuring Quality of Employment, Chapter V.). In light of such changes the task is twofold: to update existing indicators and to develop new indicators concerning critical changes in the labour market. Work already done and ongoing work should be taken into account when updating the list of indicators in the Annex of the Handbook on Measuring Quality of Employment. Examples are indicators of commuting time, telework, discrimination at work or job satisfaction.

f. Update of the SNA 2025

To ensure consistency with the update of the SNA 2025, which will include updated guidance on employment and labour accounts, the handbook's update will reference the updated SNA and incorporate any necessary adjustments accordingly.

III Way forward

Based on the expert group's deliberations, the Steering Group will draft a proposal to update the Handbook on Measuring Quality of Employment for review by the CES Bureau in October 2024. If approved by the Bureau, a task force may then be formed to update the Handbook.