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GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN LABOUR STATISTICS¹

Submitted by International Labour Organization*

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The ILO, as an organization dedicated to fundamental human rights and social justice, considers gender equality one of its core principles. Governments have also made strong commitments to the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action², which establishes a strategy to promote gender equality in areas that have a direct impact on the well being of men and women in the world, including poverty, human rights, the impact of macro-economic policy and globalisation. To implement, monitor, analyse and evaluate the situation of men and women and their interrelations in all these areas requires up to date and reliable statistics. This was recognised by the Beijing Platform itself, which called for countries and international organizations to collect and analyse statistics that reflect issues of importance to women and men in society³.

¹ Extract from the report to and from the Seventeenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians, Geneva, 24 November-3 December 2003.

* Paper prepared by Valentina Stoevska.

² See www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform, and www.undp.org/fwcw/plat.

³ Regarding labour statistics, the Beijing Platform Strategic Objective H.3 specifically mentioned the need to produce statistics on: (a) employment, including employment in the informal sector, unemployment and underemployment, that do not underestimate the participation of women and men; (b) unremunerated work which is already included in the United Nations System of National Accounts, including agriculture, particularly subsistence agriculture; (c) unremunerated work that is outside the System of National

2. Labour statistics that reflect gender concerns will enable users to understand and analyse the differences and interrelationships between men's and women's work activities and conditions and the extent to which they are rewarded for their work, in the context of their personal and family situation, as well as other factors that may help explain any differences. More is needed than the conventional labour statistics disaggregated by sex.

3. Such statistics need to relate to topics relevant to both women and men, cover and adequately describe all workers, their characteristics and their work situations, provide sufficient detail to reveal whether there are gender differences, and be disaggregated by explanatory variables relating to, at least, the personal and family context of workers, given the importance of these in determining labour market possibilities and behaviour.

4. National labour statistics that satisfy these characteristics will be more complete and of higher quality than those that do not, and this should be of great importance for labour statisticians. Such statistics will be an asset not only to users interested in the analysis of gender issues but to all users of labour statistics, including labour market analysts and policy decision makers.

5. This section presents the need and advantages of producing national labour statistics that address gender concerns, and briefly discusses issues that national statisticians may want to consider. More specifically, it proposes a general checklist on good practices designed to ensure that national labour statistics satisfy gender needs and to improve their overall quality and completeness.

II. JUSTIFICATION

6. The main objective of labour statistics is to provide accurate descriptions of the size, structure and characteristics of the various participants in the labour market, and the changes that take place. To best serve their various applications, labour statistics need to cover, as much as possible, relevant aspects of all actors in the labour market and describe their work situations with relevant detail. To do so perfectly, however, is impossible because the production of statistics requires that reality be "simplified" or codified into synthetic categories that highlight certain aspects of this reality while ignoring others. What is highlighted or ignored depends to a great extent on the priorities and objectives of the descriptions and analysis to be undertaken, and on the methods of data collection that is used. But data collection methods are faced with limitations of many types, and the measurement priorities to a large extent will depend on perceptions about how the labour market functions that are held by those who request or plan the production of statistics.

7. Given these limitations, labour statistics have generally been successful at identifying and characterising "typical" or "core" work situations and less successful at identifying and characterising other work situations. It is easier, for example, to produce statistics on wages and full-time regular employment in formal sector enterprises, on registered unemployment, on

Accounts, such as caring for dependants and preparing food, and their interrelation with remunerated activities carried out simultaneously or interchangeably; (d) poverty among women and men, including their access to resources; (e) violence, including sexual harassment and trafficking; (f) women and men with disabilities, including their access to resources. Countries were requested to produce a regular statistical publication that presented and interpreted topical data on women and men, and to disaggregate all statistics at least by sex and by socio-economic and other characteristics.

registered injuries resulting in compensation for working days lost or on strikes affecting a large number of workers, than on income and employment in the informal sector, on irregular, short time and unpaid employment situations or on occupational injuries that are not compensated.

8. Women more than men tend to be involved in “atypical” work situations that tend to be weakly captured by conventional labour statistics. These often combine economic activities with domestic activities, leading to work intermittently over the year and closer to home, either for profit of a family enterprise or for no pay⁴. It is argued here that the production of labour statistics would therefore benefit from a good understanding of how women and men differ in what they do and how they behave in the labour market, as well as from a recognition that it is indeed important to adequately identify and describe their particular work and personal situations. Endeavouring to identify and describe these situations would complete the coverage of workers and improve the statistical description of all labour market situations.

9. Statistics enhanced in this way would therefore avoid underestimating and misrepresenting the contribution of certain groups of workers, probably women to a larger extent than men, to the national economy. A consequence will then be that policies and programmes that impact labour markets and the economy will not be designed on the basis of statistics that only partially reflect workers’ contributions. With an incomplete statistical basis such policies and programmes can be detrimental to both women and men, but to different degrees. Furthermore, this would also put in the forefront the need to have gender concerns as one of the measurement objectives of labour statistics, thus giving emphasis to the description of the situation of men and women regarding their participation in the labour market and in the context of their family situation.

III. LABOUR STATISTICS THAT REFLECT GENDER CONCERNS: ISSUES TO EVALUATE

10. For labour statistics to be useful in addressing gender concerns, they need to be disaggregated by sex. Statistics on conventional labour subjects, such as employment, unemployment, hours of work, income, strikes and occupational injuries, when disaggregated as a minimum by the sex of those involved will, as a general rule, always be useful to those who want to describe relevant gender issues. There are a number of topics, however, where the statistics are often not disaggregated by sex. One reason for this may be that the workers’ sex is not recorded in the establishment or administrative registers used as the basis for the statistics, for example, for wages or occupational injuries statistics in many countries. Another reason may be that the nature of the statistics does not lend itself to disaggregations by sex, for example, in the case of the consumer price indices or labour cost statistics. However, despite these constraints, statistics on occupational injuries, wages, price indices and labour cost by sex⁵ are invaluable for a good understanding of men’s and women’s situations. To improve the first types of statistics a change in laws or regulations governing the type and range of information included in registers would be required, so that the workers’ sex is systematically recorded. For the second type of statistics, specific estimation procedures, a shift in descriptive or analytical perspective or relevant modifications to data collection procedures, may be required⁶.

⁴ See pg. 9 of Mata Greenwood, A. (1999).

⁵ Price indices classified by sex of consumer.

⁶ An example of an estimation procedure applied to disaggregate labour cost statistics by sex in order to evaluate the cost to employers of maternity protection is presented in ILO (2002b).

11. Disaggregation by sex, while necessary, is, however, not sufficient. In addition, the way in which national labour statistics are produced needs to be sensitive to the differences, similarities and relationships between the various actors in the labour force in general, and between men and women in particular. This implies that:

- The *types of statistics* produced contribute to the understanding of men's and women's position and interrelations in the labour market;
- The *definitions and classifications* used are sufficiently complete and detailed so that they reflect the different work situations of all participants, men and women, in the labour market;
- *Measurement methodologies* are designed so that these particular work situations are clearly and consistently identified and distinguished; and that
- *Dissemination practices* present statistics in such a way that differences, similarities and interrelationships between men and women, as well as the factors causing them, are as much as possible made evident.

12. Statistical institutes responsible for the production of national labour statistics may want to evaluate the degree to which gender is taken into account or "mainstreamed" in the choice of topics, definitions, classifications and design of measurement methodologies, as well as in the dissemination practices, in order to reveal the strengths and shortcomings of the statistics currently available and indicate how and where improvements may be needed and possible.

13. Introducing such practices requires a strong commitment from National Statistical Institutes. It is not simple to modify the existing data collection instruments and publication programmes, in the same way as it is not simple to modify the way one thinks of and perceives particular situations. The commitment to do so must come from the highest levels within the statistical institute and spill down to all levels in the organization: all persons, from the director general down to the interviewer, should understand and be convinced that the above evaluation and modifications will improve statistics in general. Underlying this process is the need for training in gender issues at all levels of the organization.

14. The following paragraphs present very broadly some specific issues to be considered when mainstreaming gender in labour statistics⁷.

IV. COVERAGE OF TOPICS

15. Labour statistics which incorporate gender concerns cover and separately identify the types of statistics that are relevant to enhancing the understanding of men's and women's positions and interrelations in the labour market, where there are important inequalities between women and men, and which can be useful for advancing equality between men and women in the workplace. The following examples provide a list of topics that are essential for understanding gender issues. They do not intend to be exhaustive of all possible gender concerns⁸.

16. The *balancing of work and family life* is known to affect differently women's and men's levels of participation in the labour market, and, as a consequence, their employment related income⁹. To analyse this issue, it is necessary to enhance statistics that describe workers'

⁷ More detail is presented in Mata Greenwood, A. (1999).

⁸ More detail is presented in Mata-Greenwood, A. (2002).

⁹ In Western countries, for example, women who are married or who have dependent children tend to have lower employment rates, work fewer hours and have higher absence rates than other women, while the reverse tends to be true for men.

participation in the labour market with descriptions of workers' personal and family characteristics. Statistics on employment, unemployment, underemployment, hours of work, absence from work, the precariousness of work, working time arrangements and employment related income, should include distinctions according to the sex, age and educational background of workers, their marital status and whether there are preschool or dependent children in the household, or whether there are other (for example, older) persons requiring special care. Most national Labour Force Surveys are able to produce these types of statistics, but such results are not always prepared or presented in regular statistical publications.

17. *The participation of workers in productive activities* is described with statistics on the total working population, including on persons who are not included in the statistics on employment or unemployment but who carry out productive activities outside the SNA production boundary, as well as information on the time spent on such activities¹⁰. This implies accurate measurement of e.g., employment, so that it covers all activities currently within the boundary of SNA activities, including those which are unpaid and carried out for the benefit of the family consumption; but it also implies accurate measurement of “non-economic” activities, which are very important both in terms of the volume of work that is involved and also in terms of the economic value it has for society as a whole. Accounting for this work would improve the description of the economic structure and also the understanding of the changes that are taking place in the market economy. Also, a clearer picture of the employment situation could be made, as women and men engage to different degrees in market and non-market activities¹¹. Special satellite accounts have been developed to make it possible to extend estimates of the total economy as defined by the SNA with estimates of non-market production. In the same way, labour statistics could incorporate non-market work: persons performing activities which are outside the boundary of activities defined as “SNA work” could be linked to employment statistics; injuries which occur when persons are performing such activities, to occupational injury statistics; and children who are prevented from going to school because they are engaged in unpaid household activities, to child labour statistics.

18. The analysis of *labour market segregation* needs statistics that show differences in the type of activities through which men and women contribute to the labour market: the different types of work they carry out, the different types of work contracts that they have, the different places where they work, the different injuries they are subject to, etc. This information needs to be *sufficiently detailed* so that significant distinctions and similarities between men and women are, as much as possible, revealed (Anker, 1998). The statistics collected should also allow individual groups of workers to be targeted for deeper analysis on e.g., the extent to which men and women in these groups behave in a different way, and are subject to different constraints, as well as to analyse trends in their numbers. Such groups of workers can include e.g., entrepreneurs and other persons in decision-making positions (politicians and heads of special interest organizations), workers in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector and workers in the media.

¹⁰ Current labour statistics are circumscribed to “economic” activities defined by the System of National Accounts or SNA (UN 1993), and thus exclude from employment statistics all workers who are engaged in domestic or personal services provided by unpaid household members. They will also exclude time spent on these activities from working time statistics, and all events of injury occurring when performing these activities from occupational injury statistics. Labour statistics as currently measured are consistent with production statistics but they have the same drawback of incompleteness.

¹¹ Women generally spend more time in non-market work than men, while the opposite is true for market work. Overall, women also tend to spend more time than men on productive activities (UN, 1995).

19. *Income inequalities* are the last example, as they are pervasive in all countries and leading to important inequalities in the standard of living of men and women (Dixon-Muller and Anker, 1990). It is not enough to compare average income levels of men and women, because there are significant differences in the hours women and men work, in the size and industries of the firms in which they are employed, as well as in the occupations they are engaged in and other factors that significantly affect levels of income. Statistics on employment related income, including earnings and wage rates, need to be disaggregated at least by sex and detailed occupations as well as by types of income accrued¹².

V. DEFINITIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS

20. Definitions and classifications are the basis for the whole data production process: they determine what is to be covered by a particular topic and in how much detail. The extent to which definitions identify and adequately describe “atypical” work situations – i.e. situations that do not reflect a conventional view of what “working” and “joblessness” are all about¹³ - is the most important test of their gender relevance. The importance for gender is that women and men are found in the excluded groups to different degrees, usually women workers and their work situations being more underestimated than men. Full coverage of workers and work situations as well as sufficient detail in statistics can be better achieved if definitions take into account the fact that women and men do not perform the same activities, nor do they always behave in the same way, nor are they subject to the same constraints, nor have the same opportunities and needs.

21. Definitions will ensure the coverage of all workers and their characteristics when the **criteria used to define national concepts** do not exclude particular groups of workers or their characteristics. Examples of workers or work situations that are often explicitly excluded from the relevant national definitions include: the armed forces and certain unpaid or contributing family workers, from employment statistics; the income accrued to part-time, casual and self-employed persons, from earnings statistics; labour disputes of short duration, from strike statistics. The definition criteria also tend to reflect the behaviour of men rather than that of women. Women and men may relate differently to the criteria for defining unemployment in many countries, because they behave differently when they are out of work given the different structural, social and cultural barriers they face to look for work. Many of those who do not seek work even though they want to work and are available to do so are women (UN, 1995). It would be possible for countries that do not include in the actual data collections certain groups of workers or certain characteristics, to provide estimates of at least the sex composition of such groups.

22. Definitions will cover all workers and work situations when they allow the measurement for **long reference periods**: only if they do so will the statistics account for working patterns of many workers who carry out a multitude of activities and who work intermittently over the year. Women in particular are more frequently in this situation than men¹⁴.

¹² An analysis by detailed occupations may reveal that men can earn lower salaries than women in some occupations and an analysis by income components may reveal that men receive more additional payments, such as bonuses and family allowances.

¹³ i.e., situations other than those of workers in full-time regular employment in the formal sector and persons who are actively looking for such jobs.

¹⁴ A possible approach to the measurements of labour market dynamics was presented to the 16th ICLS in 1998, See ILO (1998).

23. Thirdly, national definitions and classifications will cover all workers and work situations when they identify relevant categories of workers and their characteristics in **sufficient detail**. Broad population groups can be very heterogeneous and comprise a diverse set of employment situations where men and women are present to different extents. For example, analysing the managerial group as a whole will not reveal that women can often be managing small enterprises, while most of those managing larger companies can be men. Lack of detail in the status in employment categories and working time arrangements will also mask distinctions between men and women in the various forms of self-employment and paid employment statuses (e.g., homework, casual work) as well as in the different working time arrangements (e.g., shift work, work at night and weekends, flexitime, annualised schemes, etc.). Details are also needed for occupational injuries as men and women, by the different nature of their jobs, tend to face different hazards at work. Similarly, analysing hours of work as a whole may hide differences in working patterns between men and women and in their propensity to work overtime or be absent from work for different reasons.

24. A related aspect to be evaluated is whether national classifications describe women and men workers' characteristics equally well. In particular, it is important to evaluate whether appropriate distinctions are made in occupational groups where women tend to be numerous, e.g., in clerical, agricultural and elementary occupations, to the same extent as in occupations where men are numerous, e.g., in manufacturing, or whether status in employment classifications classify women who are equally committed to the operation of an establishment as their husband to the same status in employment category as them¹⁵.

VI. MEASUREMENT METHODOLOGIES

25. Measurement methodologies determine the type and range of information that can be produced. Whether using administrative records, establishment-based surveys or household-based surveys as the main source when producing a particular set of statistics, the methodologies need to be evaluated by whether they follow the established statistical definitions, ensure full coverage of workers and their characteristics, and guarantee sufficient and adequate detail in a subject's categories. However, not all data sources are able to satisfy these requirements.

26. The contents of **administrative records** are usually designed to support the administrative functions of the agency making the registrations, with little regard for their use for statistical purposes. The statistics are thus generally limited by the type and range of information received and needed by the agency to perform its mandate effectively and reliably¹⁶. Similarly, statistics produced on the basis of information found in **establishments' records** would also be limited, because these records are generally kept for staff management, e.g. payment and attendance monitoring, not for statistical production. In contrast, **household-based surveys**, including labour force and time use surveys, obtain information from workers themselves through replies to standard questionnaires, a methodology that gives the statistician greater control over the type and range of information collected. The information collected is limited, however, by the capacity and willingness of respondents to provide it, by the questionnaire design as well as by the efficiency of those administering and processing it. Statistics based on administrative and

¹⁵ Both ISCO-88 and ICSE-93 try to provide a basis for doing so in corresponding national classifications. National experiences can help making them better.

¹⁶ Thus, employment exchange offices can provide information on unemployment claimants only, and these are not equivalent to the unemployed; and insurance companies provide information on compensated injuries, which are only a subset of all occupational injuries; etc., See ILO/EASMAT (East Asia Multidisciplinary Advisory Team). 1997.

establishment records can be used for analysing particular groups that are well covered and described by them, e.g., workers in ICT occupations, etc., but household-based surveys are the preferred sources of statistics for overall analysis of gender concerns.

27. In order to mainstream gender into the measurement methodologies, it is important to evaluate, first of all, the **laws, rules or regulations governing administrative and establishments' procedures**, with respect to (a) the type and range of information that is recorded, and the extent to which it is useful for statistical measurement as well as for gender distinctions, e.g. whether sex and age of workers are recorded; (b) the criteria used for inclusion or exclusion of certain groups from the records; and (c) the level of detail at which information is registered, and the extent to which the detail is sufficient to reveal gender distinctions. Changes in the administrative procedures of agencies and establishments may be needed so that the raw data needed to produce gender sensitive data are compiled, e.g. data by sex as a minimum.

28. Secondly, it is also important to evaluate whether the **sample in household-based surveys and establishment-based surveys** is designed to allow adequate precision in the statistics that can be produced for meaningful and detailed categories. Generally, survey results are limited in the amount of possible disaggregations that are consistent with acceptable precision of the estimates.

29. Thirdly, it is important to evaluate whether **household-based surveys apply measurement strategies that are needed to identify and describe all work situations**, especially those on the borderline between economic and non-economic activities. Such strategies will help reduce the response bias related to the social roles of men and women, that cause women to be perceived as housewives, even when they work, and men to be perceived as breadwinners, even if they do not work.

30. One measurement strategy is the **use of activity lists or probes** to improve the identification of persons in employment, which will increase the chance that women who work will be counted as employed, thus reducing their common underestimation in labour statistics¹⁷.

31. A second measurement strategy consists of obtaining quantitative information, e.g., on hours of work or income, on the basis of replies to the elements that make up the measure - whether the respondent is presented with a set of possible hours-of work intervals or income components -, instead of applying direct questions of the type: "How many hours did you work last week?" or "How much did you earn last month?" The former approach will probably reduce measurement errors as it will help respondents to remember unusual events. This should allow gender differences to be measured more reliably, e.g., between similar types of income components.

32. A third strategy concerns the use of **time use approach** to obtain information on the time spent on all activities during a reference period. With this approach, the decision as to whether one activity or the other is considered "work" can be made at the processing stage and can be as

¹⁷ In general, the use of a set of questions designed to obtain the respondents' understanding of relevant aspects of their situation, rather than a direct question which requires the respondents to classify themselves in a particular category (e.g., a particular occupation or a particular activity status) makes the classification of persons more independent of their perceptions and understanding of the concepts used for statistics. It can be expected that the more detached measurement is from workers' perceptions of their situation, the higher the chance that women and men will be classified in the same category when they satisfy the criteria for inclusion.

independent as possible of respondent's opinions, and thus allows the identification of workers for whom the distinctions between periods of work and other periods is unclear or frequently interchanged, such as agriculture workers, other rural workers, homeworkers and the self employed, and who tend to be omitted from the count of employment. The time use approach is recommended by international statistical standards for improving the measurement of employment, unemployment and underemployment¹⁸. It is also suitable to identify the total number of workers, including those who render unpaid services to their households, and as a consequence, the total number of hours worked.

VII. PRESENTATION OF STATISTICS

33. The way labour statistics are presented and disseminated is essential to reveal significant differences and similarities between men and women and the factors that may cause them. As a minimum, labour statistics need to be presented with disaggregations by sex. But this is not enough. In order to mainstream gender adequately, dissemination practices need to be evaluated with respect to whether labour statistics are presented with sufficient detail and whether they are disaggregated by variables which present the demographic, economic, social and family context of workers, including, in addition to the workers' sex, at least their level of education, their marital status and most importantly, the presence in the household of small children and other persons requiring care.

Checklist of good practices for mainstreaming gender in labour statistics Adopted by the 17th ICLS (2003)

To usefully address gender concerns, and to understand more fully the labour market functioning, labour statistics should satisfy the following four requirements:

- (a) They will be based on a political will at all levels, in the various data collection and analysis agencies and in all agencies which can provide administrative information;
- (b) The data collection procedures for labour statistics will ensure that, as far as possible, all relevant topics for describing gender concerns are regularly included. Such topics may include employment in the informal economy, non-SNA work, employment by detailed occupations and status in employment categories, income from paid and self-employment, statistics on the life course, on lifelong learning and on working time;
- (c) The data collection and processing procedures for labour statistics programmes are designed to ensure that definitions and measurement methods cover and adequately describe all workers and work situations in sufficient detail to allow relevant gender comparisons to be made. Household and establishment-based surveys as well as administrative sources are valuable and, in particular, periodical time-use surveys are crucial;
- (d) The resulting statistics are always presented as part of regular publications in a way that will clearly reveal differences and similarities between men and women in the labour market and the factors that may influence their situations. This can be done by (i) presenting relevant topics in sufficient and relevant detail, and by (ii) providing

¹⁸ See paragraph 32 of the Resolution concerning statistics of the economically active population, employment and unemployment, adopted by the 13th ICLS in 1982.

statistics according to relevant descriptive variables, of e.g. personal and family circumstances, work environment and institutional setting.

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