



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
25 March 2020

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Sixty-eighth plenary session

Geneva, 22-24 June 2020

Item 4 (d) of the provisional agenda

Reports, guidelines and recommendations prepared under the umbrella of the Conference:

Intra-household decision-making

Recommendations for measuring intra-household power and decision-making – short version¹

Note by the Task Force on intra-household power and decision-making

Summary

This document is an abridged version of the “Recommendations for Measuring Intra-household Power and Decision-making”. The purpose of the Recommendations is to provide guidance to statistical offices for measuring the gendered dimensions of intra-household power and decision-making, as well as to offer an overview of current practice and existing approaches to tackling conceptual and measurement challenges.

The Recommendations were prepared by the Task Force on measuring intra-household power and decision-making consisting of Canada (chair), Belarus, Colombia, Italy, Lithuania, Mexico, Philippines, Serbia, Turkey, OECD and ILO.

This abridged version of the Recommendations has been prepared for translation purposes. It does not include the review of current practices in national statistical offices and beyond official statistics; the overview of methodological challenges and suggestions for how to address them; the analyses of existing data in selected countries; the report of qualitative testing conducted in Canada; the detailed proposals for possible indicators and related survey questions along with special considerations for how data would need to be collected under each dimension; the bibliography; the survey sent to countries to gather information on current practice; or the annex of existing surveys and survey questions identified across countries.

These sections can all be found in the full version of the Recommendations in English, which has been sent to all members of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) for consultation. Subject to a positive outcome of the consultation, the CES plenary session will be invited to endorse the Recommendations.

¹ This document was scheduled for publication after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control.



I. Introduction

A. Importance and policy relevance

1. All the major international policy frameworks on gender equality, women's empowerment, and indeed on development more broadly, recognize the importance of power and decision-making for enabling women to become equal actors in society, with equal access to resources and equal possibilities to fulfil their potential. These include, among others, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women¹; the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)²; the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action³; and, most recently, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁴. The Beijing Platform for Action, for example, has a section on Women in Power and Decision-making as one of its twelve areas of concern. In the 2030 Agenda, governments committed to "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making" (target 5.5) and to "recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through [...] the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family" (target 5.4).

2. But while each of these frameworks, in some way, refers to 'all levels' of decision-making or to the need for women and men to be 'equal partners in public and private life', it is nevertheless the case that power and decision-making have in fact been principally understood as features of the public sphere of life—at least insofar as they are expanded into specific policy actions, goals and targets, or statistical indicators. The explicit recognition in both the Beijing Platform for Action and the ICPD Plan of Action that "the power relations that prevent women from leading fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public" (emphasis added) has not been seized upon by gender policymakers and has remained comparatively unexplored. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, for example, which now serves as the principal guiding framework for many national and international development efforts, calls in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment all women and girls – yet power in the private sphere is largely absent from the globally-agreed indicator framework, with decision-making being measured by seats in national parliament and local government and by managerial positions (indicators 5.5.1 and 5.5.2).

3. Many national statistical offices (NSOs) already produce statistics on topics variously referred to as 'power and influence', 'women in decision-making', etc., as part of their suite of gender statistics. But, perhaps as a consequence of the positions taken in these international frameworks including the SDGs, they are almost universally limited to power and influence in the public sphere of life – political, civic and economic influence – measuring such things as women's representation in ministerial positions, parliaments, local governments, judiciaries, senior and middle management positions, top positions in universities and research institutions, gender balance among employees in different sectors and industries, etc. Other somewhat less common measures of women's power and decision-making include female voter turnout, political party membership, and women in decision-making positions in sports.

1. Rationale and mandate for action

A. *Public and private gender inequalities are mutually reinforcing*

4. The absence of statistics on power and decision-making in the private sphere of life, within households, is not due to a view that the topic is unimportant. The international policy frameworks cited above, while construing power and decision-making as a public matter, do nevertheless call attention to the fact that gender inequality extends into all areas of human interaction and that inequalities inside and outside the home are mutually reinforcing:

"Inequality in the public arena can often start with discriminatory attitudes and practices and unequal power relations between women and men within the family...The unequal division of labour and responsibilities within households based on unequal power relations also limits women's potential to find the time

and develop the skills required for participation in decision-making in wider public forums” (Beijing Platform for Action, para. 185).

5. Gender inequality in the distribution of power within households leads to women being disadvantaged economically, not only in terms of their immediate access to resources, but also in their ability to pursue opportunities outside the home – due to lack of time, competing demands arising from the demands of unpaid care (which can be associated with limited power in reproductive decision-making), lack of power to decide on whether, when or where to work, and circumscribed choices in education and training. Hence one knock-on effect of unequal decision-making power in a couple may be the social reproduction of gender inequality in the public sphere, as women find themselves less able than men to benefit from what appear on the outside to be ‘equal opportunities’ in access to education and the labour market. For this reason, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for “the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family” (target 5.4, measured in terms of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work), and the European Parliament resolution of 13 September 2016 on creating labour market conditions favourable for work-life balance⁵ stresses the need to “promote equal sharing of responsibilities”: in both cases, shared responsibility need not be understood as limited only to responsibility for performing domestic tasks (which is how it is most often interpreted), but may extend to all the rights and duties in which power is exercised and decisions are made.

6. Relatedly, unequal power within the household may mask monetary poverty, since income is typically measured at the level of the household. If an individual does not have the power to decide how money should be spent or material resources allocated, then the total household income is less relevant to her or his own (and perhaps her or his family’s) well-being than the actual resources at that person’s disposal within the power structure of the household.

B. Gender equality policies are more likely to work if they address causes as well as consequences

7. Policies aiming to decrease gender inequality, in any of its many aspects, are more likely to be successful if they can correctly identify the source(s) of those inequalities, so that they may target the origins of the social reproduction of inequality rather than only the outcomes. For example, a policy aiming to increase women’s employment and income-earning opportunities might stumble if it is made in a vacuum, not taking into account cultural norms that limit women’s freedom to make decisions about taking up employment. A programme to encourage women to enter further education programmes, similarly, might not be effective if women do not have free choice to avail themselves of those educational opportunities.

8. With specific reference to women in positions of power, policies whose ultimate aim is to increase the proportions female in these positions tend to operate through incentives, disincentives, targets and quotas. But this is only one side of the equation. Ultimately it is equality in domestic power structures that will enable women to decide to apply for such positions; to enter careers that might lead to such positions; to pursue education that might lead to such careers; to manage their time, energy and resources so that they are able to devote their efforts to such work. Without addressing this domestic side of the equation, the use of targets and quotas to achieve gender equality in public power and influence may be in vain.

9. It could be, then, that enhancing gender equality might best be fostered by not only focusing on aspects of the labour market, such as making working environments more woman-friendly, creating more incentives for female entrepreneurship, and introducing family-friendly policies to facilitate work-life balance. Focusing on intra-household dynamics could also help to create the conditions under which women both choose to, and are able to take up certain positions within the labour market.

C. Gender equality is an end in itself

10. Arguments for improving levels of gender equality in households are often formulated in instrumentalist terms – for example in terms of the benefits that might accrue to children

if women had more say in making decisions about their health or education, or the society-wide economic benefits that might be seen if more women had the power to decide to sell their labour as they wish, or if there were more women in influential positions in politics and business. There are two problems with this tendency. The first is that, while clearly relevant and important in some developing country settings, this kind of instrumental argument can be rather distant from reality in highly industrialized countries where education is universal and childhood malnutrition is rare. Whomever takes the decisions in a household and however they are reached, it is unlikely (in the UNECE region) that they will result in children not going to school or not having enough to eat. A second problem with this perspective is that it leads to gender equality being viewed as a means to an end. While these kinds of arguments could of course be helpful for those involved in advocacy trying to convince policymakers of the need for change, it must be borne in mind that gender equality is also, and most importantly, an end in itself. Hence, there is a case for producing statistics about gender inequality in power at the household level, irrespective of the many and varied societal impacts such inequalities might have, simply on the grounds that such inequality merits measurement in its own right.

B. Background and work of the Task Force

11. The foregoing section has argued that the measurement of intra-household power and decision-making is valuable, and that it has a mandate emanating from the international policy frameworks on gender equality. The Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Steering Group on Gender Statistics used these arguments in 2016 to develop a business case calling for the establishment of a Task Force on Intra-household Power and Decision-making; this was in response to wishes expressed by participants in several consecutive UNECE Work Sessions on Gender Statistics, as well as to needs identified during earlier work under the Steering Group during the production of the UNECE Indicators of Gender Equality (UNECE 2015).

12. The Task Force was therefore established by the CES Bureau in February 2017, with the objectives of making an inventory of indicators and sources and of providing recommendations to statistical offices on measuring the gendered dimensions of intra-household power and decision-making⁶. This publication is a report of the work undertaken by the Task Force.

1. Impacts and added value

13. The Task Force's planned activities and outputs included, among others, identifying gaps for which there are currently no adequate indicators and making proposals to fill such gaps.

14. Faced with budget and resource constraints, however, NSOs must make decisions about which statistics to produce based on cost/benefit trade-offs. It is therefore necessary to ask: since we already have available objective outcome measures, in most countries, to quantify gender inequality in unpaid household work, expenditure, labour market participation and reproduction, what additional policymaking potential would come from knowing how such outcomes were decided upon? Some potential responses to this question were identified in the UNECE publication 'Developing Gender Statistics: a Practical Tool'⁷ (UNECE 2010, p. 72), which suggested that, among other things, statistically sound data on household decision-making could

- "Create an environment through economic and social policies to enable women and men to fully exercise their human rights"
- Provide equal access for women and their families to health care, nutrition, quality education at all levels, career and employment, community activities
- Change societal attitudes and community practices towards women's and men's role in household decision-making".

15. It is likely that some household decisions are made in a more egalitarian way than others. Statistics would enable identification of these, which could in turn allow

policymakers to consider targeted measures to increase gender equality and promote joint decision-making in those specific areas that are found to be unequal. Conversely, it is conceivable that there may be areas in which statistical analysis of decision-making finds that apparently gender-unequal outcomes are actually arrived at through consensus. This would be the kind of finding that existing final-outcome-based measures could not uncover, and would probably suggest different policy interventions than might be proposed from considering outcomes alone.

16. Hence, one element of the added value of indicators of intra-household power and decision-making is their ability to shed light on the dynamics behind the closed doors of the home which contribute to the observable gender inequalities that are already measured—and in so doing, to help inform approaches to tackling those inequalities from their roots.

17. The added value of the work of the present Task Force also comes from the fact that it attempts to tackle a topic which is considered particularly challenging to measure. The focus until now on measurement of power in the public sphere outlined above is a result not only of a particular understanding of power, but also of the simple fact that it is easier to measure publicly observable, countable things such as seats in parliament or positions in the labour market, than it is to define and measure power within the household. Both conceptual and methodological challenges, discussed in the respective chapters of this publication, make the measurement of intra-household power and decision-making difficult. Attempts have been made, but—as discussed in chapter 4 of this publication—have rarely moved beyond asking survey questions to the production of indicators let alone to analysis of results. The work of this Task Force brings the statistical community a step closer to being able to tackle these challenges. Of course, the gendered dimensions of intra-household power and decision-making comprise a wide range of factors, some more easily quantifiable than others. Social norms, institutions and perceptions are by definition hard to conceptualize and measure. The Task Force limited its work to the more easily-quantifiable aspects, while recognizing that a complete picture of this topic would require more work to untangle the more challenging areas.

C. Overview of the Recommendations

1. Conceptual background

18. This chapter sets out the scope of the topic, setting limits on which households are considered for the purposes of this work and outlining what is understood hereafter by the main terms used in the title, namely decision-making and power. It makes clear that they are not synonyms, and that indeed the fashionable term ‘empowerment’ is worthy of much more careful consideration than it is often afforded.

2. Current practices and experiences in measuring intra-household power and decision-making

19. The first part of this chapter the Task Force presents an overview both of current practices reported by countries represented in the Task Force (as well as others who responded to a broader request for such information), and of existing work identified through literature reviews and consultation among the international gender statistics community. The chapter finds that the topic is extremely widely covered in academic research; rather widespread in some specific applied fields that make use of social surveys (albeit often relying on a limited set of questions and/or on questions whose validity has not been deeply explored); yet rare and relatively undeveloped within official statistics.

20. The second part of the chapter, again drawing on experiences reported by countries in combination with extensive literature review, identifies the key methodological challenges to measuring intra-household power and decision-making, and offers suggestions for tackling them.

3. Indicators of intra-household power and decision-making

21. The Task Force decided to decompose the topic into a set of dimensions and sub-dimensions, which are presented and explained in this chapter along with suggestions for indicators corresponding to each of them, and questions that could be asked in surveys to produce such indicators. Core and supporting indicators and proposed, and consideration is given to the specificities of each dimension such as appropriate survey vehicles, and modes, necessary contextual questions, and areas where cultural factors would make items especially relevant or irrelevant in some countries. Given the relative rareness of this topic to date among NSOs, there is little evidence available to permit the Task Force to state clearly what works and what does not, to argue that some indicators are more valuable than others, or that certain questions are the most appropriate. The content of this chapter is therefore to be viewed as suggestions, rather than firm recommendations.

4. Selected test analyses of existing data

22. In this chapter, existing data from the Generations and Gender Surveys, and national surveys conducted in Belarus, Canada, Serbia and Turkey are analyzed by Task Force members in order to assess the potential of existing data to offer meaningful, policy-relevant insights into intra-household power and decision-making.

5. Qualitative testing of selected survey questions

23. This chapter presents the findings of tests conducted in Canada to trial selected questions from four of the seven dimensions: union formation and sexual and reproductive decision-making; decisions about division of labour; decisions about children's upbringing and education; and financial decision-making. The chapter offers some important conclusions of relevance to all the dimensions and gives rise to some recommendations applicable to all countries.

6. Recommendations and further work

24. In this chapter the various recommendations arising throughout the preceding chapters are summarized. These include both overarching recommendations about the subject, and more specific methodological recommendations. Considerable further work is considered necessary to progress beyond this exploratory stage in an emerging area. Future work should focus on four strands: qualitative testing; validity testing; data reduction to reduce the suggested indicator set (and the framework of dimensions and sub-dimensions) to a more manageable and standardized set; and continuation of international cooperation.

II. Indicators of intra-household power and decision-making

A. Introduction

25. The research conducted by the Task Force indicates that many national surveys, including those conducted by NSOs, do ask respondents questions about decision-making within the household, but there are few attempts to produce indicators.

26. As just one case in point, the Mexican ENDIREH (*Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinámica de las Relaciones en los Hogares*, National Survey of Relationship Dynamics in Households²), includes a set of questions about 'personal liberties', asking female respondents who in the partnership or in the household usually takes decisions about her engagement in a number of activities. Published tabulations of the data include tables of absolute and percentage distributions of the main decision-maker for each activity³. There are no indicators, such as percentage of women who say that they alone or with their partner

² Survey description and tabulations available online at

<http://www.beta.inegi.org.mx/proyectos/enchogares/especiales/endireh/2016/default.html>

³ ibid, see predefined tabled entitled 'XIV. Decisiones y libertad personal' (decisions and personal liberty), table 14.1.

take the decisions for all the activities, or percentage of women reporting on involvement in decision-making, or any kind of composite indicator constructed from the degree of reported decision-making power across several items.

27. Given the dearth of established indicators, it is not clear that survey questions in countries are necessarily designed with a clear goal in mind of the production of particular indicators -hence in some cases there might not be an especially strong rationale for keeping the survey questions unchanged. This can be interpreted as an opportunity since it may present the possibility for countries to align with the proposals made in the present publication, in the absence of strong reasons for maintaining their current practices.

28. The responses received from countries both within and beyond the Task Force indicate that this gap between survey questions and indicator production is a common phenomenon. At most, countries may produce indicators along the lines of ‘proportion of women who are involved (either solely or jointly) in making all the major kinds of decisions’, or conversely, ‘proportion of women who are not involved in any of the major kind of decisions’. For instance, countries which conduct Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) produce an indicator defined as the percentage of currently-married women “who say that they alone or jointly have the final say in all of the three main decisions (own health care, making large purchases, visits to family, relatives, friends”, and another defined as the percentage of currently-married women “who say that they alone or jointly have the final say in none of the three main decisions (own health care, making large purchases, visits to family, relatives, friends)”⁴.

29. The aim of this chapter is to suggest some indicators which could be produced on the basis of already-existing survey data or with relatively little additional work to add the necessary questions into surveys. The chapter considers the small range of existing indicators and then makes proposals based on a set of distinct dimensions that are considered important to the overall phenomenon of intra-household power.

B. Existing indicators of intra-household power and decision-making

30. The data-gathering exercises among countries represented on the Task Force and other countries responding to the online survey revealed a broad diversity of survey questions, leading to the possibility of a similarly broad range of indicators.

C. Proposed indicators

31. It is clear, as discussed in Chapter 1, that the concepts of power and decision-making are broad and encompass a variety of different conceptual areas. The Task Force termed these areas ‘dimensions’. The reviews of both current practices and of literature permitted the Task force to distil seven distinct dimensions.

32. The group does not argue that these seven encompass all possible areas in which intra-household decisions can be made. Discussions in international forums with participants from diverse regions of the world made clear that there are other areas in which decisions may be made—for example, decisions about migration and where a household lives; decisions about agricultural activity; decisions about resource use, etc. However, the seven dimensions identified here were considered to be of relevance to the countries of the UNECE region and beyond, whereas areas such as agriculture may be of limited relevance to many countries in the region.

33. The dimensions are assumed to be conceptually distinct and practically independent, meaning that it would in theory be possible for a person to have the power to take decisions, as the sole, main or joint decision-maker, in any given dimension without it necessarily following that they must also be the sole, main or joint decision-maker in any other dimension. *This assumption has not been tested*, however, as this was not practically possible within the framework of the current Task Force. An important recommendation for future

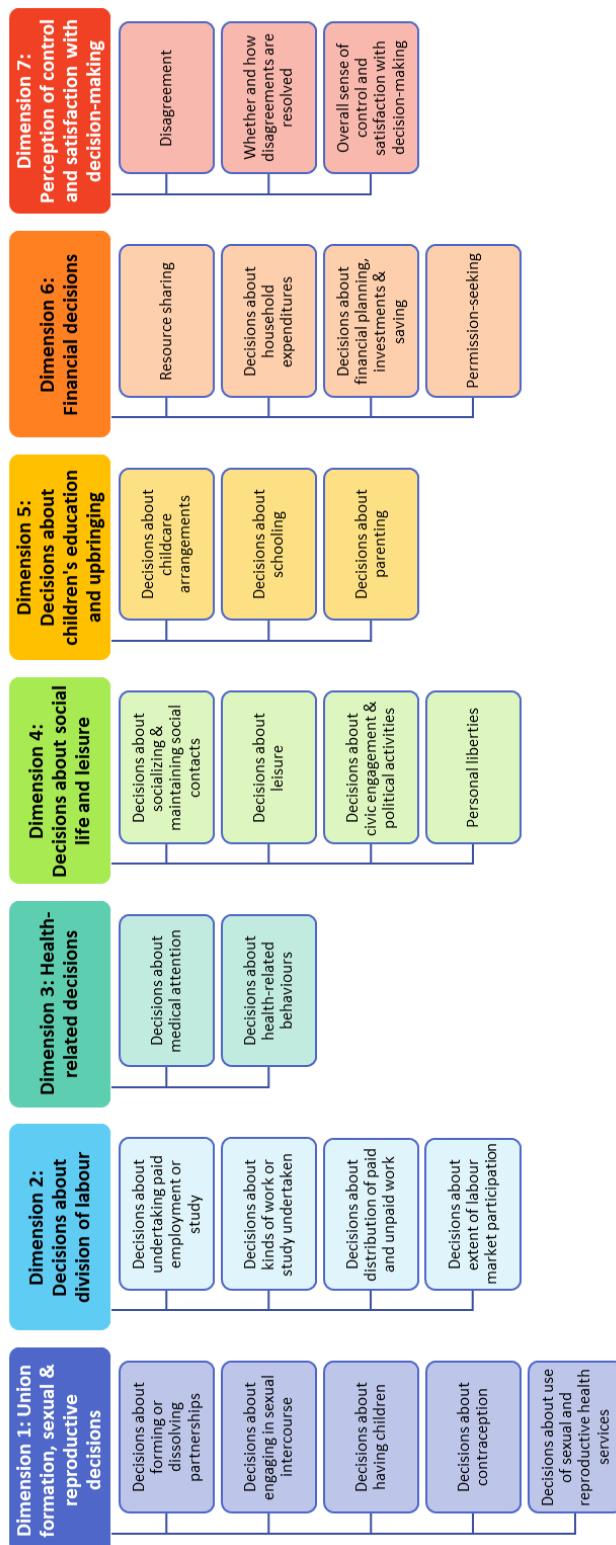
⁴ Indicator details available at <https://www.statcompiler.com/en/>

work is therefore that the conceptual distinctiveness of the dimensions would need to be tested. This would be valuable both on theoretical grounds and on practical grounds, as it would allow surveys to keep to a minimum the number of different items that need to be included to obtain a complete picture of the phenomenon.

34. For each dimension, a proposal is made below for a set of indicators. These are given under two headings: core indicators and supporting indicators. The core indicators are those considered by the Task Force to be the most conceptually central to the dimension under consideration, but also the most feasible in terms of production. That is, the Task Force does not propose core indicators that would be particularly challenging to produce, even if they consider them as conceptually important. Core indicators are also limited to those considered by the Task Force to be concerned with decisions that lie more towards the ‘strategic’ end of the spectrum of all possible intra-household decisions, i.e. decisions which require or reflect more power within the household, while supporting indicators include those that deal with less strategic decisions.

35. The Figure below shows the seven dimensions and the sub-dimensions contained within each:

Figure 1
Dimensions and sub-dimensions of intra-household decision-making



D. Dimension 1 – Union formation, sexual and reproductive decisions

1. Description and relevance of this dimension

36. The ability to make decisions, either alone or with a partner/spouse, about whether and when to have children, and their number and spacing, is one of the most fundamental facets of gender equality. Reproductive decision-making does not just mean deciding whether and when to have children. It extends to decisions about the use of contraception; and decisions around accessing and using sexual and reproductive health services including abortion, family planning clinics, and care during and after pregnancy and childbirth.

37. In essence, for women the outcomes of such decisions amount to decisions about one's own body (and in many ways about the basic course of one's own life). Therefore, the intra-household distribution of these decisions—whether they are taken principally by one or other partner in a couple, or by both together (or indeed by other household members) reveals much about the power of people, and especially of women, to exercise control over their own bodies and their own lives.

38. The policy implications of this dimension of decision-making are wide-ranging. Decisions about having children, for example, will have an important impact on other aspects of people's life, including decisions about involvement in paid and unpaid activities, education, leisure, etc. Some decisions may be restricted along gender lines, for example how much young mothers will participate in the labour force, thus influencing policies to facilitate work-life balance (including paid maternal/parental leaves).

2. Suggested core indicators

- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who report that the decision to have sexual relations is made jointly, the majority of the time, by sex
- Proportion of women in co-residing couples who can say no to sexual relations.
- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who made own or joint decision about having a(nother) child, by sex
- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who are primarily or equally responsible for decisions about the use of contraceptive methods.

E. Dimension 2: Decisions about division of labour

1. Description and relevance of this dimension

39. The ability to take decisions about whether or when to undertake paid employment outside of the home, and the ability to decide about the nature of that work, are widely recognized as key facets of empowerment. If empowerment is understood as the capacity to turn wishes or preferences into actions, then being able to go out to work in the labour market is an important part of such empowerment because it both reflects and, importantly, permits some degree of autonomy. That is, first, only those with a certain amount of autonomy are in a position to decide to work outside the home; and second, by working outside the home, individuals generate income which may allow them some material control over household resources, and which may also, to some extent, afford them power within the household to decide on the use of those resources.

40. This dimension is very closely linked to decision-making about financial resources (see dimension 6 below), since the relative contributions of household members to the income of the household is in part a result of their differential participation in the labour market; and in turn the amount of income that each person earns will impact on their power to decide on its use. The dimension is also connected to time use and the ways in which household responsibilities are distributed, since the amount of time a person spends working outside the home affects how much time they have available for domestic activities. From a policy perspective, the division of labour is important because initiatives aimed at increasing women's labour force participation and labour supply depend on women having both the power and the opportunity, given their share of domestic labour, within the household to do

so. Also, if we know how and why couples make the decisions they do regarding the division of labour, we are in a better position to design policies to enhance work-family balance.

2. Suggested core indicators

- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who are primarily or equally responsible for their own decision to undertake paid employment, by sex.
- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who made decision on own amount of time spent working, by sex OR Proportion of individuals who made own decision regarding part-time or full-time work status, by sex.
- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who made own decision about type of paid work, by sex.
- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who are primarily or equally responsible for their own decision to undertake or continue studies, by sex.
- Proportion of individuals who made decision on own amount of time spent on unpaid activities, by sex.

F. Dimension 3: Health-related decisions

1. Description and relevance of this dimension

41. This dimension is concerned with the ability of household members to make decisions that affect their own health or the health of their dependent children in the home. This does not only mean visiting a doctor or having children vaccinated. The dimension is broader, extending to decision-making about lifestyle behaviours that affect health. For example, if a household member's autonomy is restricted they may not be able to decide for themselves to take regular exercise, especially if there are limitations on their movements outside of the home. While it might initially seem that this dimension is only relevant in developing-country settings, this is not necessarily the case. Decisions about the content of the family's diet, for example, can have a significant impact on health outcomes, whether or not the household is resource-poor. The focus of this dimension on decisions that can affect one's own health or that of dependent children is due to the fact that children may rely on adults to make such decisions on their behalf. Lifestyle decisions can of course affect the health of others in the household, including the partner, but it is assumed that there is some decision-making around this while for children there may be no such opportunity to be involved in making decisions.

42. While reproductive health care is obviously a subset of health care in general, the Task Force considered that decision-making about accessing and using reproductive health care is of sufficient importance and conceptual distinctiveness to be examined separately from other health-related decisions. It is also likely to be more closely linked with other elements of reproductive decision-making, such as partnership formation, family planning and sexual behaviour, than it is with decision-making about other aspects of health. Hence, this dimension excludes reproductive health decision-making which is instead incorporated in dimension 1.

43. The policy implications of this dimension include the fact that women's autonomy in health-related decision-making is known, in the field of development programming, to be closely linked with health outcomes, both for women themselves and for their children. Provision of primary health care services will be effective only if the target beneficiaries are able to avail themselves of the services. Policies to encourage healthy eating and exercise, similarly, will work only if the people targeted by those policies are free to adapt their behaviours accordingly.

2. Suggested core indicators

- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who are primarily or equally responsible for determining the daily meals of the household, by sex.

G. Dimension 4: Decisions about social life and personal liberties

1. Description and relevance of this dimension

44. In comparison with some of the other dimensions discussed in this chapter, decision-making about social life and the use of leisure time may at first glance seem ‘frivolous’, or less important from the point of view of empowerment. However, the freedom to make choices about personal relationships clearly could have a significant impact on a person’s quality of life.

45. Moreover, not all decision-making is necessarily a reflection of power within the household; on the contrary, the obligation to take responsibility for organizing the family’s social life, arranging visits with relatives, sending invitations to events, planning children’s extra-curricular activities, etc., could result from a lack of power to delegate or to share such tasks. Few would regard themselves as powerful if they find themselves taking decisions simply because no-one else will.

46. This dimension is concerned not only with socializing with friends and family, but also with decisions about engaging with the wider community. Hence political activities, volunteering, civic engagement and so on also fall within this dimension. Being able to act upon one’s own political opinions, such as by deciding for oneself whether and for whom to vote, is undoubtedly an important aspect of power.

47. Decision-making about social life also means taking decisions about spending time with people outside the household, such as going out with friends. Such decisions depend upon a certain degree of personal liberty; and the inability to make such decisions may amount to a denial of that liberty by a partner or other household member. In the extreme, this denial of liberty could be a form of violence. Women who are obliged to ask permission from their partner before going out alone, or whose partner has the final say over how they dress or style their hair, are obviously experiencing a curtailment of their power and may under some circumstances be victims of gender-based violence. Indeed, the denial of personal liberties by a partner is a core element of controlling behaviour, and as such there are established methods for measuring it as part of violence against women surveys.

48. This dimension is important, in part, because of the linkage between decisions taken within the household and the social status of those household members in the public sphere. That is, a person who lacks power to take decisions within this dimension at the household level has constraints set on their ability to interact with the community and to form social support networks and may as a consequence be disempowered outside the household as well as inside it.

49. There are various ways in which this dimension is relevant to policymaking. Given the linkage just described between private and public power, policies promoting women’s empowerment outside the home, such as through civic engagement activities, may need to take into account intra-household power in this dimension. Policies aimed at prevention of gender-based violence may benefit from considering the ways in which power over a partner can be manifested as a curtailment of personal liberties.

2. Suggested core indicators

- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who are primarily or equally responsible for making decisions related to organizing the household’s social life, by sex.
- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who are primarily or equally responsible for making decisions about the household’s use of free time, by sex.
- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who report that decisions on whom to vote for are their own or mostly theirs, by sex.
- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who report that decisions about forming friendships are their own or mostly theirs, by sex.

H. Dimension 5: Decisions about children's education and upbringing

1. Description and relevance of this dimension

50. Several of the other dimensions discussed in this chapter include aspects of decision-making related to children—for example, decisions about their leisure activities (dimension 4) or about their health (dimension 3), or indeed, about having children at all (dimension 1). This dimension, however, is distinct from the others in that it relates to decisions of which children are the main subject, and about matters that specifically affect children⁵.

51. As for some aspects of dimension 4 (social life and leisure), the relationship between decision-making and power is not clear-cut and linear for this dimension. Being the main person responsible for decisions about children's upbringing, care and education could indicate power, but it could also be a reflection of disempowerment in that the decision-maker is not able to share the burden of such responsibilities with others.

52. Policies aiming to shape children's educational trajectories—such as whether they continue in school or which subjects they study—will be affected by the way that decisions about their schooling and upbringing are taken at home.

53. Family life has become more diversified in many countries, with both parents and children going through more family events such as union formations and dissolutions. The likelihood that, at some point in their lives, children and adults will live in a “non-traditional family” (such as one-parent family or a step/blended family) has increased significantly over the last few decades. It also means that parents will have to make decisions for non-biological children, and that decision makers will not always be living in the same household as the children for which they are making decisions.

54. In recent decades, with the massive entry of women (including mothers of young children) in the labour force, and thus the significant increase of families with both parents working outside the home, families have to make arrangements for childcare while parents are away working at a job. Decisions about the type of childcare arrangements can have lasting impacts on children. High-quality child care services may better prepare children for school entry and thus reduce the risk of future educational issues. Some research has also suggested a link between with childcare services and secondary school diploma, and the likelihood of living in poverty during young adulthood. Furthermore, the choice of school for boys and girls, and the importance of educational attainment is also likely to have longer-term effects on social and economic development of these children.

2. Suggested core indicators

- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who report that they decide by themselves or with their partner/spouse the type of child care for their youngest child, by sex.
- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who report that they decide by themselves or with their partner/spouse the level of education their children should attain, by sex.

I. Dimension 6: Financial decisions

1. Description and relevance of this dimension

55. The dimension of financial decision-making and associated matters such as allocation of income and household budgeting is perhaps the most well-developed of the dimensions considered by the Task Force. It is fundamental to the concept of power within the household, since having the power to turn intention into action in many other spheres must surely be facilitated by having the power to access and dispose of material, often financial, resources.

⁵ ‘Children’ are understood to be defined according to the needs of the survey or the country, although this section is written with the assumption that co-resident, dependent children are the subject of discussion.

In many cases it might be impossible to act on intentions without such access—for example, to visit a doctor, to purchase food or clothing or to save for the future.

56. The dimension is concerned not directly with who actually makes purchases or takes other financial actions (such as buying or selling property), but with who decides what is to be purchased, or saved, and when. It extends to decision-making about how incomes are pooled, shared or divided. That is, irrespective of the relative amounts earned by partners, the decision to put all income into a joint account or to keep each person's income separate is an indication of how the right to use those incomes is perceived. Furthermore, the dimension covers questions of control and permission-seeking to spend money, since even in cases where incomes are pooled together into one common pot, there may be different rights (either explicit or perceived) to spend, or obligations to ask or inform the partner before spending, especially if spending on items for personal use.

57. While this dimension has received much attention and is the dimension most widely considered in existing research, this is not to say that there is clear agreement on how to conceptualize or to measure these issues. Indeed, as noted previously, Eurostat concluded after analyzing the outcomes of the 2010 EU-SILC module on income pooling and sharing that the concepts were insufficiently understood and decided to discontinue collection of data on the topic (Eurostat 2013).

58. Notwithstanding the conceptual and methodological challenges surrounding this dimension, its centrality to the measurement of intra-household power is evident. Its relevance to policymaking arises from the fact that many policies aim, one way or another, to increase economic well-being, primarily through interventions that affect incomes. Without taking into account how those incomes can be accessed and used, such policies might not have the desired effects. Some very well-known development programmes have succeeded as a result of recognizing that incomes and the power to use them are not independent. For example, in the case of PROGRESA in Mexico, cash transfers were placed directly in the hands of women in situations where they would not otherwise have been able to access them (Fultz & Francis 2013). Conversely, other programmes aimed at increasing incomes have demonstrated unintended, negative, consequences on women's ability to access household resources, such as the granting of group bank credits. Notably, one agricultural development programme aimed at promoting cash crops typically tended and sold by men resulted in women's reduced relative contribution to household income and concomitant reduction in power within the household (Rogers & Schlossman 1990).

59. Clearly, the policy implications of this dimension also concern efforts to alter the balance of power within households. Given the centrality of financial resources to the ability to access other kinds of resources, efforts to enhance equal decision-making surrounding use of incomes could potentially increase equality within households more generally.

60. An issue closely related to this dimension is that of asset ownership and disposal. The power to make decisions around obtaining or disposing of material wealth including land, housing, agricultural products, vehicles, etc is a key aspect of intra-household power in many settings. Asset ownership is challenging to measure because it is underpinned by legal frameworks, including customary law, that vary substantially from nation to nation. The complexity of measuring asset ownership and methodological recommendations for doing so are detailed in a recent report from Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (United Nations 2019). Given the comprehensive nature of this guidance, as well as its greater relevance to other world regions than the UNECE region, no attempt is made here to propose indicators for decision-making on asset ownership and disposal.

2. Suggested core indicators

- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who are primarily or equally responsible financial investment and planning decisions, by sex.
- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who are primarily or equally responsible for decisions on the use of joint savings.

J. Dimension 7: Perception of control and satisfaction with decision-making

1. Description and relevance of this dimension

61. All of the foregoing dimensions give the initial impression of being objective. In reality, of course, they are subjective. Who takes decisions, or how the decision-making is shared, is rarely something that is stated explicitly among household members; it is not necessarily clear to anyone involved in making a given decision how much influence each party had in reaching it; the distribution of influence is unlikely to remain entirely the same every time a decision is made; and partners may therefore not share the same view about who was or is the ‘main’ or ‘final’ decision-maker.

62. There is also a subtle difference between identifying the person who holds the most sway in making a single important decision—the person who ‘has the final say’, to use the wording of some existing survey questions—and identifying the ‘main decision-maker’ for decisions that are taken regularly or repeatedly, such as shopping or planning social interactions. The distribution of power in these two scenarios could theoretically be rather different. In the former case, the person identified as being mostly responsible for the one large decision is the holder of some kind of authority, or in some sense a ‘winner’ if it is envisaged that there is an initial lack of concordance between the intentions of the two partners. For example, if one partner thinks the household should buy a new car and the other does not, then the partner whose desire prevails clearly holds more power with regard to that type of decision. In the latter case, looking at the main decision-maker for repeated decisions, one need not assume any kind of underlying discordance or that any partner holds authority over the other. One partner may be the main decision-maker not because they are ‘winning’ in any sort of disagreement, but because there is a division of labour in decision-making such that the other partner is simply not involved in decisions on that matter. The difference is subtle but important for interpretation, since “who calls the shots when you disagree?” says something different about intra-household power than “whose mental energy is devoted to this issue?”, with the former bringing to the fore the concept of perceived control, or lack of it, and the latter raising issues of perceived fairness.

63. Goldstein et al (2017) showed that across several African countries the responses of both members of a couple to the DHS decision-making question about who was the main decision-maker for major household purchases were in agreement only 53 per cent of the time. The remaining 47 per cent of the time, each partner reported that the other was the main decision-maker, or each reported themselves as the main one. Relatedly, Heffring (1980) discussed Role Taking Accuracy, a measure of congruence “to ascertain the degree to which individuals agree on the roles they are performing. It may be that the incongruity exists because one or both members are inaccurate role takers (i.e., they are not meeting the expectations of others involved in the decision) either because true disagreement exists or due to miscommunication during the decision-making process” (p. 495).

64. The subjective nature of the issues in question need not be an impediment to their measurement, however. After all, the Task Force is concerned not only with decision-making, but more generally with intra-household power. For a person to truly be empowered they must perceive themselves as such. According to Pigg (2002) “the empowerment of individuals is rooted in the psychology of power, the effects of ‘feelings’ and perception of powerlessness” (p. 112). In order to take decisions about important household matters, a person must not only have the freedom to make those decisions, but know, indeed, feel, that they have such freedom. Hence, this final dimension is concerned with subjective perceptions of control over household decision-making.

65. The relationship between the degree of control over household decision-making and the degree of satisfaction is far from straightforward and relates to aspects of personal identity and to the process of internalization of roles (performed or expected) within the family. It cannot be assumed that there is necessarily a positive correlation between the extent of decision-making power, the amount of perceived control over household matters, and the degree of satisfaction experienced by individuals in partnerships. That is, it cannot be assumed without closer examination that the power to make decisions promotes self-

perceived well-being. Research conducted by Gumede (2009) in South Africa does provide some evidence for such a link, suggesting that “decision makers are on average more satisfied with their life than other adults in the household” (p.1).

66. There are several reasons why this dimension is important. First, it is at the heart of what many development policies and programmes are really aiming for. Their proximate goals - income generation, education, nutrition, agricultural development, and so on—are done with the ultimate objective of empowering people as a means of improving their well-being. Enhancing subjective perceptions of such empowerment is therefore a valid policy objective. Second, discrepancies between ‘objective’ measures of the distribution of decision-making power and reported satisfaction with that distribution might give important insights to policymakers. For example, if indicators in the preceding dimensions show a very low degree of involvement in decision-making by women, yet those same women report a high level of satisfaction with this situation, this would provide valuable context for those designing development interventions.

2. Suggested core indicators

- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who report that they make the most important decisions in their relationship, by sex
- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who report that their opinion prevails when there is a disagreement in their relationship, by sex.
- Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who report that they are satisfied with the way that the most important decisions are taken in their household, by sex.

III. Recommendations and further work

67. The following is a summary of recommendations that have been discussed at length throughout the preceding chapters.

A. Overarching recommendations

68. Existing, commonly-used questions on intra-household decision-making may not be sufficiently nuanced or well understood by respondents to be freely re-used in all circumstances. Countries wishing to produce more comprehensive information on the topic therefore must recognize that power and decision-making are complex. There are many kinds of decisions taken within a household, covering many dimensions and carrying different weights in terms of the impacts on the household and its members; and the modalities of reaching each kind of decision cannot be assumed to all be the same. In particular, some kinds of decisions may be taken from a position of power whereas the duty to be the main decision-maker in other arenas could be a reflection of a lack of power. As such, this Task Force recommends that:

- the common survey questions used in multi-topic household surveys in developing country settings should not be applied to other settings without adaptation
- simple indices of decision-making based on combining all decision-making domains in a survey, with equal weight, should be avoided as they mask the unequal weights of different kinds of decisions in real experience, as well as the possible opposing forces of implementation and orchestration power (rights versus duties to make certain kinds of decisions).

69. At the current stage of development of this topic, no specific wording of questions or response categories can be recommended as being the ideal formulation. Such recommendations would need to be supported by considerable qualitative testing. The testing that has been conducted so far, as reported in chapter 6, suggests some general approaches and some terms to avoid in questions (such as the words ‘power’ and ‘authority’), but so far there is no consensus on the ideal phrasing of questions. Furthermore, countries must note that the interpretation and acceptability of different question wording is likely to vary across

countries due to cultural differences. As discussed in chapter 6, qualitative testing is therefore essential for all countries proposing to embark on the measurement of intra-household power and decision-making. Nevertheless, international comparability should be one of the aims of producing indicators on this topic, and as such countries are encouraged to use broadly similar formulations to aid cross-country comparisons. The same applies within countries, across surveys, where the use of similar phrasing would permit the comparison of indicators deriving from a variety of data sources.

70. The likelihood of cross-country differences must also be taken into consideration in deciding which indicators are relevant to a given country. The broad variety of cultural contexts in the UNECE region means that indicators dealing with childcare arrangements, health care provision, division of paid labour, personal liberties, and many more, will have different meaning and relevance in different countries, and in some cases it would be inappropriate to produce them or they would need modification to the context.

71. It is necessary for data producers acknowledge and embrace the subjectivity of this topic, and therefore of the responses that will be obtained in surveys. Hence incongruent responses (whether from two partners in a given couple, or in general across all respondents when asked whether they or their partner take decisions) should not be interpreted as meaning that one or other respondent or respondent group is wrong, or that the question is wrong and eliciting misleading responses. Since power itself is subjectively felt, it is people's *subjective feeling* about whether or not they can take decisions that is important for measuring such power, more than any 'objective' measure of whether they really are able to do so (for example, it matters more for an understanding of power that someone feels free to spend money on something, than whether they are in any objective sense permitted to). It is therefore recommended that these subjective questions be afforded due consideration in surveys, including those usually confined to more traditionally objective approaches (time-use surveys, household expenditure surveys, for example). The potential they have to add depth of understanding to data gathered through such surveys is considerable.

B. Methodological recommendations

72. The ideal scenario is to interview separately both partners in a couple. Where measurement of intra-household power and decision-making is one of the principal objectives of a study, this is recommended as the 'gold standard'. Nevertheless, the limitations that make this unlikely in many cases must be recognized.

73. Data collection should be through a self-administered form, whether paper, electronic or online. If decision-making questions are included in a mixed-mode survey, they should be administered in the mode that most protects the privacy of the respondent.

74. It is recommended that the conditions under which an interview has been conducted be recorded as a crucial part of any survey that covers decision-making, given that the circumstances of the interview can be expected to have a significant impact on responses (not only for sensitive questions about violence and personal liberties, but also for a wide range of others where a respondent may be influenced by the presence of their partner or another household member).

75. The purposes of the investigation will determine the most appropriate survey vehicle into which decision-making questions should be incorporated in any given instance. Unless a full survey is to be conducted specifically devoted to the measurement of intra-household power and decision-making, it is likely that some questions would fit best into certain kinds of surveys and others into other kinds of surveys. When this happens, attention must be paid to the differences between surveys that may limit comparability of indicators produced from different sources.

76. Just as different surveys may be the best fit for different indicators, different approaches to sampling and to the population of interest may be appropriate depending on the nature of any given investigation. Sampled populations could be nationally-representative, but the measurement of intra-household power and decision-making could

also be of particular interest for minority or vulnerable groups, permitting the study of intersectionality and multiple disadvantage.

77. Consideration should be given to incorporating decision-making questions into panel surveys (perhaps on a rotating basis). This would make it possible to capture variations in decision-making within couples over time. This in turn would permit investigation into the extent to which decision-making responsibility shifts between women and men following changes in their socioeconomic characteristics such as employment and parenthood.

78. Recognizing that few if any countries would endeavour to produce all of the proposed indicators, it is suggested that a complete picture of the phenomenon of intra-household power requires indicators from each of the seven dimensions.

79. Furthermore, it is recommended that the core indicators take priority, with supporting indicators being added to these if a fuller analysis is desired.

80. Noting that several countries already include relevant survey questions in surveys but that few produce and publish indicators based on them, it is recommended that countries pay particular attention to dissemination and communication. This could take many forms, ranging from simple publication of indicators on decision-making to compilations of related indicators, analytical work or graphics and visual displays. This could in turn generate user interest and help to guide NSOs in refining their decision-making indicators to better meet user needs.

C. Further work

81. This publication has demonstrated that the measurement of intra-household power and decision-making is in its infancy, and much remains to be done before it can be considered a well-developed area with clear concepts, robust methods and harmonized, comparable indicators. Further work in each of the following areas would help to develop the topic.

1. Qualitative testing

82. The testing of question wording, response options, question order, acceptability, mode effects and interviewer effects, necessary contextual questions and translation into different languages conducted in Canada should be complemented with testing by other countries, and extended to test a variety of survey vehicles

2. Validity testing

83. Multivariate analyses should be conducted to investigate how far the proposed indicators can explain policy-relevant outcomes.

3. Data reduction

84. As in all data collection efforts, one goal should be reducing respondent burden by aiming for the most parsimonious possible set of indicators and therefore of survey questions. Factor analysis could be conducted to examine the extent to which the proposed indicators covary within the dimensions or indeed the extent to which the dimensions covary. An assumption of the foregoing work is that the seven dimensions are qualitatively different from one-another—but if it is found that they are all measuring the same or similar latent variables, it would not be necessary to consider all seven dimensions independently.

4. Continuation of international collaboration

85. Countries interested in implementing the recommendations contained in this publication should continue to exchange experience, such as the results of qualitative testing and data analysis. In particular, countries should convene 2-3 years following the completion of this Task force's mandate to exchange experience and review progress.