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Indicators of gender equality

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Note by the Task Force on Indicators of Gender Equality

Summary

In 2010, the Conference of European Statisticians established the Task Force on Indicators of Gender Equality (ECE/CES/2011/13) to improve the monitoring of gender equality in the UNECE region. In this document, the Task Force is presenting the conceptual framework and the approach that it had taken in its work.

I. Background and objective

1. The need to monitor progress towards internationally agreed gender-related policy goals has led to the proliferation of indicators. The 2010 UNECE work session on gender statistics recognized that it is important to review the indicators developed for monitoring internationally agreed policy agendas with a strong gender dimension and to identify the key indicators that UNECE countries would be able to produce. Such a review would assess the indicators' suitability for describing major gender inequalities, for monitoring gender-relevant policies, their regular availability and comparability across countries.

2. The UNECE Task Force on Indicators of Gender Equality was set up to tackle these issues. It aims to improve the monitoring of gender equality in the UNECE region (a) by consolidating and systematizing the existing proliferation of gender relevant statistical indicators, including developing a framework for grouping indicators by domain and a hierarchy of indicators (headline and supporting indicators in each domain), (b) by proposing ways for sustainable data collection on selected indicators and (c) by proposing measurement approaches where internationally consistent measures are lacking.

II. Framework

3. In recent years, the demand for statistical information by the media, policymakers and the scientific world has grown considerably together with the rapid and substantial changes that have characterized the lifestyles of men and women in the society. For this reason, the national statistical offices are facing a growing demand for ever more timely and detailed statistics.

4. Statistics and indicators that reflect the realities of the lives of women and men are needed to describe their role in the society, economy and family, formulate and monitor policies and plans, monitor changes, and inform the public. Gender indicators have the function of pointing out gender-related changes in society over time, and therefore to measure whether or to what extent gender equality is being achieved. The compilation of gender equality indicators for the UNECE region relies on international monitoring initiatives and takes into account the existing demand for statistical information in this field at national and international levels.

5. The United Nations Advisory Group on Gender Statistics Database and Indicators is working towards establishing a minimum set of gender indicators for international compilation worldwide, to provide a basis for monitoring gender issues on the global level. The minimum set contains the minimum common denominator for statistics on gender equality and women's empowerment. It is expected to be the basis for regional and national exercises of indicator development. The UNECE Task Force is considering this indicator set in defining the indicators for the UNECE region.

III. Selection criteria

6. The criteria to be used in selecting each indicator for inclusion in the set of each domain are the following:

- (a) The indicator clearly addresses a relevant policy issue related to gender equality and/or women's empowerment;
- (b) The indicator is relevant to the UNECE region;

- (c) The indicator is conceptually clear, easy to interpret, and has an agreed international definition;
 - (d) The indicator is sensitive to changes; changes in the value of the indicator have a clear and unambiguous meaning;
 - (e) The indicator is feasible, robust and reliable;
 - (f) The indicator is comparable over time and enables international comparison.
7. The indicators aim at covering all key dimensions of gender equality. For ease of communication, the set should be limited to a fairly small number of indicators, be clear and well balanced between the different dimensions. The indicators can be based on both objective and subjective measures.
8. An essential feature of this set of indicators is the hierarchy of headline or supporting indicators. The headline indicators cover the most essential aspects and can be considered as the key indicators. Their purpose is to provide simple and clear information to decision-makers and the general public about progress towards internationally agreed gender-related policy objectives. The supporting indicators provide further information on more specific aspects of gender equality. They are valuable to achieve a deeper comprehension of the phenomenon.
9. Gender indicators, whether headline or supporting, are not merely statistics on men and women. They highlight the contributions of men and women to the society, their different needs and problems. A set of indicators that covers all relevant aspects is necessary, because in isolation, the interpretation of some indicators may be misleading. For example, the traditional focus on labour statistics has mainly been on employment and unemployment, but there is now a growing awareness that looking only at gender disparities in the work environment is insufficient. Gender inequality at the labour market can be underestimated if only employment and unemployment rates are included in the analysis. As a matter of fact, the employment rate can increase and unemployment rate can decrease at the cost of the growth of female inactivity, because these rates do not take into account the discouragement of women who give up looking for a job.

IV. Domains

10. The Beijing Platform of Action is taken as a starting point for identifying the domains of gender equality, because it provides an internationally agreed framework for establishing a relationship between the indicators and the policy concerns. The following domains of the Platform of Action are identified as those where a lot of methodological work has already been done and where the Task Force can make significant progress in the short term:
- (a) Woman and poverty;
 - (b) Education and training of women;
 - (c) Women and health;
 - (d) Violence against women;
 - (f) Women and the economy (including the labour market and work-and-family issues);
 - (g) Women in power and decision making (in society; in the household).

11. The Task Force will also pay attention on the domains for which less info is available, focusing on the needs to fill the data gaps. Those domains of the Beijing Platform for Action are the following:

- (a) Institutional mechanism for the advancement of women (area H of the Beijing Platform for Action);
- (b) Human rights of women (I);
- (c) Women and the media (J);
- (d) Women and the environment (K);
- (e) The girl child (L).

12. Area E of the Beijing Platform for Action, “Women and armed conflict” is less relevant for the UNECE region and will not be considered in this framework.

13. The Task Force is also considering that a section with indicators describing demographic situation and other country background information would be useful. This section could also include indicators that are not gender specific but provided useful background information for the different areas.
