

Distr.: General  
27 May 2016

English

---

## **Economic Commission for Europe**

### Conference of European Statisticians

#### **Work Session on Gender Statistics**

Vilnius, Lithuania

1-3 June 2016

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

**(Work-life balance, time-use and decision-making within the household)**

## **Measuring power and decision-making within the household**

**Note by The UNECE Steering Group on Gender Statistics\***

### *Abstract*

Power and decision-making in the household is an important aspect of gender equality. Despite the strong and growing interest in the issue, there are to date no robust indicators for measuring power and decision-making within the household.

This paper, based on a concept noted developed by the UNECE Gender Steering Group and a systematic literature review on power and decision-making within the household, suggests two steps for further action: preparation of an inventory of the availability of existing indicators, and a preliminary analysis of the situation of each UNECE member State by the identified indicators.

## **I. Background**

1. The Steering Group on Gender Statistics is mandated by the Conference of European Statisticians (CES), among others, to identify new areas where methodological work could be undertaken. Among its planned activities, the Steering Group will “develop a plan for taking forward methodological work on measuring the gendered power and decision-making relationships within the household”. The output of this activity is a “proposal on methodological work on measuring the gendered power and decision-making relationships within the household, presented to the CES Bureau for approval”.

\*Prepared by Ms. Fiona Willis-Núñez

2. Although not specifically addressed in the Beijing Platform of Action (United Nations, 1995a), power and decision-making in the household is an important aspect of gender equality. There is ample evidence of the impact of household decision-making on development, health, education, poverty and the division of paid work and household work. Gender inequalities in the household reinforce, and are reinforced by, gender inequalities in society. Various United Nations policy documents have therefore called for the development of programmes to address unequal decision-making power within families, and to support women's and men's joint control of household assets and joint household decision-making to guarantee adequate livelihoods for themselves and their families (United Nations, 2010, 2011).
3. A crucial aspect of household decision-making pertains to reproduction, including voluntary choice in marriage, family formation and determination of the number, timing and spacing of one's children and the right to have access to the information and means needed to exercise such voluntary choice. These issues are addressed by the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (United Nations, 1995b) and its follow-up.
4. Gender equality within the household is a topic of strong academic and policy interest for various institutions. This theme has been debated recently in UNECE (2015, chapters A.5 and A.7), EIGE (2011), European Commission (2014, chapters 3 and 4) and OECD (2014), among others. The European Institute for Gender Equality highlights the importance that the European Commission gives to within-household task division: "The European Commission has recognised the importance of the issue of gender inequalities in the division of tasks by declaring the importance of promoting long-lasting changes in parental roles, family structures, institutional practices and the organisation of work and time, and emphasising that these do not merely affect women but also men and the whole of society. It concludes that there is a need to adapt the organisation of society to a fairer distribution of women's and men's roles" (EIGE, 2013, p. 25).
5. Despite the strong and growing interest in the issue, there are to date no robust indicators for measuring power and decision-making within the household. New efforts are therefore needed in order to enhance the understanding of intra-household power relations. As a starting point, a clearer conceptual understanding of "gendered power and decision-making relationships within the household" is needed. This would help to understand the role of indicators related to the various bargaining situations and to the gendered division of work and responsibilities. After considering the indicators, data availability for their production needs to be examined and related data gaps and/or inadequacies identified.

## II. Available sources of indicators

6. The reports mentioned above suggest a number of possible indicators for measuring intra-household decision-making. These indicators can be divided roughly into three areas: income, financial resources and labour market outcomes; time-use; and subjective measures. These areas are broadly characterized as follows:
  - (a) **Income, financial resources and labour market outcomes:** The European Commission (2014) proposes the use of objective measures to describe the dynamics between couples. This would include, for example, the percentage of men and women who have reduced their working hours to take care of children, and the household earnings structure. An advantage of using these objective measures is their periodicity and availability; earnings structure, for instance, can be captured by EU-SILC. There is also the possibility of introducing ad-hoc modules in existing surveys, such as the intra-household sharing of

resources module in EU-SILC 2010 . However, these indicators might only reflect labour market characteristics and not how intra-household bargaining works.

- (b) **Time-use:** EC (2014), OECD (2014) and UNECE (2015) suggest indicators of how time is used within households as a reflection of the outcomes of decision-making. These indicators include the time-use structure of employed persons, the female to male ratio of time devoted to household activities and the female to male ratio of total workload (both paid and unpaid). Time-use surveys can be a powerful tool as the “preferred source of information for the production of estimates of the value of own-account household production of services and volunteer services” (UNECE, 2013, p.7) and those estimates might be useful to reflect bargaining power. However, limitations in periodicity and coverage remain important.
  - (c) **Subjective measures:** UNECE (2015) suggests that the decision-making process within households can be investigated through specific survey questions present in surveys such as the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), the Generations and Gender Surveys (GGS) and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). These surveys have the advantage of asking very specific questions on decision-making, such as who controls household finances and participation in household decision-making. The drawbacks are country coverage and periodicity.
7. The annex includes a sample of relevant existing indicators and their respective sources.
  8. There is currently a strong interest in improving the subjective measures since they could be tailored to elucidate the power and decision-making dynamics within the household. They may also shed light on bargaining processes, whereas the first two categories are only able to reflect the outcomes of such bargaining. The summary above represents only a generalized attempt to categorize the possible areas of concentration. The appropriate approach or indicators are still to be identified. Data permitting, technical approaches such as factor analysis could be developed in order to reach summary measures of household decision-making.

### III. Steps undertaken and proposals for further action

9. In order to deepen our knowledge of the existing indicators and enhance the likelihood of conceiving robust indicators for this topic, the Steering Group on Gender Statistics suggested undertaking three main activities for initial work. The first, to conduct a systematic literature review on power and decision-making within the household, was undertaken in early 2016. The review focused both on operationalising concepts and on measurement, and included both qualitative (quality and relevance of indicators) and quantitative (availability) aspects.
10. The review helped to clarify the most fruitful areas on which statistical work in this area could focus, especially with regard to the question of whether we should be more focused on processes of decision-making, outcomes, or both. The literature review identified a mid-point between the direct study of *bargaining and negotiating processes* (the realm of psychology and behavioural economics, and hence out of scope for our purposes), and the *final outcomes of decisions* (expenditure patterns, labour market choices, etc.; areas for which both clear concepts and good statistics generally already exist). The mid-point is the area that is investigated by such questions as ‘who usually makes decision X in your household?’, by studies of family budgeting and distributional regimes, and by levels of spousal agreement or disagreement about family planning and reproductive decision-making, for example.
11. The literature review also examined existing survey questions and data availability, and revealed gaps, problems with existing survey questions, and related issues.

12. The remaining two suggested activities are as follows:
  - (a) Conduct an inventory of the availability of existing indicators in different countries. As a point of departure, this exercise could begin by preparing an inventory of the availability of the indicators in the countries represented by members of the Gender Steering Group.
  - (b) Present a preliminary analysis of the situation of each UNECE member State by the identified indicators, as an exercise in exploring the extent to which the identified indicators do (or do not) paint a useful and accurate picture of the gendered power and decision-making relationships in households.
13. Based on the literature review, inventory and preliminary analysis of indicators, as well as on input from the participants at the present Work Session on Gender Statistics, the Steering Group may consider recommending the CES Bureau the establishment of a task force to pursue concrete objectives in this area.

#### IV. References

- European Commission (2013) Income pooling and equal sharing within the household — What can we learn from the 2010 EU-SILC module? Retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3888793/5857781/KS-RA-13-013-EN.PDF/8a5f212c-fe7f-4d3e-98e7-d36d8d46f993?version=1.0>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2014). Gender equality in the workforce: Reconciling work, private and family life in Europe. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/documents/140502\\_gender\\_equality\\_workforce\\_ssr\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/documents/140502_gender_equality_workforce_ssr_en.pdf)
- European Institute for Gender Equality. (2011). Reconciliation of Work and Family Life as a Condition of Equal Participation in the Labour Market. Retrieved from <http://eige.europa.eu/content/document/report-review-of-the-implementation-of-the-bpfa-in-the-area-f-women-economy-reconciliation>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2013). Gender Equality Index: Report. Retrieved from <http://eige.europa.eu/content/document/gender-equality-index-report>
- OECD. (2014). Time use as a transformative indicator for gender in the post-2015 agenda. OECD Development Centre, March 2014. Retrieved from [https://oecd.org/dev/poverty/Time%20use%20\\_final\\_2014.pdf](https://oecd.org/dev/poverty/Time%20use%20_final_2014.pdf)
- United Nations. (1995a). Beijing Platform for Action. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1995b). United Nations Population Fund. Programme of Action. Adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994. United Nations. Retrieved from <http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/publications/pid/1973>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2010). United Nations General Assembly. Follow-up to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond. Report of the Secretary-General. 29 November. A/66/62-E/2011/4. United Nations. Retrieved from <http://www.10yearsiyf.org/20yearsiyf.pdf>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2011). United Nations General Assembly. Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014. Report of the Secretary-General. 11 November. A/67/61-E/2012/3. United Nations.

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. (2013). Guidelines for Harmonizing Time-Use Surveys. Geneva: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. Retrieved from [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/publications/2013/TimeUseSurvey\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/publications/2013/TimeUseSurvey_Guidelines.pdf)

\_\_\_\_\_. (2015). Indicators of Gender Equality. Geneva: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. Retrieved from [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/publications/2015/Indicators\\_of\\_Gender\\_Equality.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/publications/2015/Indicators_of_Gender_Equality.pdf)

## V. Annex: Selected indicators of intra-household decision-making

### 1. Objective income, financial resources and labour market outcomes

Indicator	Survey	Reference
Percentage of men and women (gap?) who have reduced their working hours to take care of the youngest child in the household (up to 8 years old), individuals 20-49	LFS - AHM 2010	EC (2014)
Household earnings structure (solo providers, percentage in which the female contribute equally, <40%, >60%)	EU-SILC 2010	EC (2014)

### 2. Time use

Indicator	Survey	Reference
Self-reported time spent on domestic work by household earnings structure	EU-SILC 2010	EC (2014)
Work-life balance measures (i.e. family-related work schedule flexibility)	EU-SILC 2010 AHM, EWCS	EC (2014)
Time use structure of employment persons by activity and sex	TUS, LFS	UNECE (2015)
Time spent in domestic activities	TUS, LFS, EWCS	UNECE (2015)
Free time spent by activity and sex (including specific activities: sport, charitable work...)	TUS, LFS, EWCS	UNECE (2015)
Number of hours spent in paid and unpaid work per week, by sex	TUS, LFS	UNECE (2015)
Number of hours per week spent on childcare and dependent adults	TUS, LFS, EWCS	UNECE (2015)
Female to male ratio of average time devoted to household activities	TUS	OECD (2014)
Female to male ratio of total workload (both unpaid and paid work)	TUS	OECD (2014)

### 3. Intra-household subjective measures

Indicator	Survey	Reference	
Topics	Family planning	DHS, GGS, MICS	UNECE (2015)
	Organization of hh finances (how income is organized, differentiating decision-making for large purchases vs routine or daily purchases)	DHS, GGS, MICS, SILC	UNECE (2015)
	Decision to work	DHS, GGS, MICS	UNECE (2015)

Indicator		Survey	Reference
	Participation in other household decision-making	DHS, MICS	UNECE (2015)
	Satisfaction, perception of control and attitudes	DHS, GGS	UNECE (2015)
Proposed indicators	Per cent of women in a co-residential partnership who state that their partner or spouse manages all the money and gives them their share	GGS	UNECE (2015)
	[who] (...) usually makes decision on the following issues: large hh purchases, routine hh purchases, time she spends in paid work, way of child raising, social activities	GGS	UNECE (2015)

### Legend

AHM=ad-hoc module

DHS= Demographic and Health Surveys

EU-SILC=EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions

EWCS=European Working Conditions Survey

GGS= Generations and Gender Surveys

LFS= Labour Force Surveys

MICS= Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey

TUS= Time-use surveys