United Nations

ECE/CES/GE.12/2019/2

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
15 January 2020

English only

Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Group of Experts on Measuring Quality of Employment

Tenth session
Geneva, 6 – 8 November 2019

Report

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The document presents the key outcomes of the meeting of the Group of Experts on Quality of Employment, which was held on 6 – 8 November 2019. This report is provided to inform the Conference of European Statisticians of the organization and outcomes of the meeting.

The meeting was organized following a decision of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians in October 2018 (ECE/CES/BUR/2018/OCT/13) and the recommendation of the previous meeting of the Group of Experts on Measuring Quality of Employment in October 2017 (ECE/CES/2018/14/Add.12).

I.   Introduction

1.   The tenth meeting of the Group of Experts on Measuring Quality of Employment was held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 6 - 8 November 2019. It was organized in cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO).

2.   The meeting was attended by representatives from Austria, Azerbaijan, Canada, Costa Rica, Eswatini, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, New Zealand, Poland, Russian Federation, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America.

3.   The meeting was also attended by representatives from the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), Eurostat, International Labour Organization (ILO), Joint Research Center of the European Commission (JRC), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), University of Oxford, and the private sector.

4.   The meeting was co-chaired by Jason Gilmore (Canada) and Frank Schüller (Germany). Shun Wu Fang (Singapore), Agnès Parent-Thirion (Eurofound), Monica Castillo (ILO) and Françoise Carré (WIEGO) acted as session chairs.

5.   All background documents and presentations of the meeting are available on https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=51484 .

II.   Organization of the Meeting

6.   The meeting was divided into the following sessions:

(a)   Session 1: Progress of the Steering Group on Measuring Quality of Employment

(b)   Session 2: Impact of the 19th and 20th ICLS and related topics

(c)   Session 3: New forms of employment

(d)   Session 4: Panel discussion on internet-mediated platform work

(e)   Session 5a: Country experiences

(f)   Keynote speech: How to quantify what is not seen? Two proposals for measuring platform work

(g)   Session 5b: Country experiences

(h)   Session 6: Experimental indicators

III.   Summary of the main discussions and conclusions reached at the meeting

A.   Session 1: Progress of the Steering Group on Measuring Quality of Employment

1.   In this session the progress of the Steering Group on Measuring Quality of Employment was presented, as were the outcome of a survey on the use of the *Handbook on Measuring Quality of Employment, A Statistical Framework* (UNECE, 2015), and a study on how the *Handbook* and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are linked.

2.   The former Co-chair of the Steering Group on Measuring Quality of Employment, Switzerland, presented the main outputs and work of the Steering Group between 2016-2019. The Steering Group has focused on the implementation of the recommendations of the *Handbook*, worked on the previously identified priority issues of the research agenda and on

the organization of two expert group meetings. The currently planned next steps of the Steering Group were explained.

3.   An ongoing objective of the Steering Group is to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations of the *Handbook*. To this end a questionnaire on the implementation and usefulness of the *Handbook* was circulated together with the invitation to the expert group meeting. Austria presented the results of the survey. The replies from eleven UNECE member countries and three countries outside the region provided general feedback on the *Handbook*, including suggestions for improvement, and useful information about the dimensions of the framework and the individual indicators in terms of comprehension, feasibility, data source and relevance. The Steering Group will continue collecting feedback from countries on the implementation and usefulness of the *Handbook*.

4.   In a third presentation, the overlap between the Measuring Quality of Employment (MQE) framework and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) was assessed and presented by UNECE. Especially SDG 8 "Decent work and economic growth" shows considerable overlap with MQE indicators meaning that there are several indicators identical in definition and scope, some indicators with just slight differences and some indicators with similar definition but different scope. In the following discussion, the importance of harmonization, by at the same time maintaining the unique features of the framework, were highlighted.

B.   Session 2: Impact of the 19th and 20th ICLS and related topics

Session chair: Frank Schüller, Germany

5.   The first part of the session was dedicated to the outcomes of the 19th and 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) related to the definition of employment, the new International Classification on Status in Employment (ICSE-18) and the ILO guidelines measuring qualification and skills mismatches.

6.   ILO reported on the main outlines of the 19th ICLS resolution on work activities and employment. The boundaries of employment and their relationship to the System of National Accounts production boundary were highlighted. The definition of work activities covers volunteer and other non-remunerated work activities. These new definitions may have an effect on some of the MQE-indicators. Alternative ways to handle the impact of these new definitions within the MQE-Framework have already been discussed but not implemented yet. The participants recommended the Steering Group to review which indicators may apply to work activities and provide guidance on selected indicators as part of the future agenda.

7.   ILO also presented the outcome of the 20th ICLS on statistics on work relationships. The new ICSE-18 and in addition the recommended cross cutting variables might have an effect on MQE indicators. The ICSE-18 defines new categories like independent workers without employees or dependent contractors. These changes are likely to affect the conceptual scope of different categories of the MQE indicators. At least all indicators with a recommendation for employment status disaggregation and all indicators dedicated specifically to self-employed are affected. Therefore, a review of the indicator sheets reflecting the new ICSE-18 will be included on the Steering Group's future work agenda.

8.   ILO then reported on the 20th ICLS guidelines concerning measuring qualifications and skills mismatches. This measurement is recommended as inadequate labour absorption signifies poor utilization of human capital. This inadequate employment complements the 19th ICLS concept of labour underutilization. The guidelines were recognized as useful by the Expert Group and should be taken into account when further developing the set of MQE indicators.

9.   The second part of the session included presentations on international labour migration, labour mobility and rural-urban labour statistics.

10.   ILO presented the current international standards on measuring international labour migration under the guidelines adopted by the 20th ICLS. International labour migration was

identified consisting of the different groups: International migrant workers, for-work international migrants, return international migrant workers and in addition citizens or native-born persons working abroad. ILO is now working on a strategy for the development of methodologies for the collection of data on international labour migration to be presented at the 21st ICLS.

11.   UNECE presented the publication on Measuring international labour mobility (UNECE, 2019) developed by the respective UNECE Task Force. The Task Force defined different groups of labour mobility. In addition, the publication includes case studies from countries, describing the national reporting on labour mobility of selected countries and the used data sources. The report recommends data collection on the main defined groups and also variables which are similar to some MQE indicators like hours usually/actually worked per week, hourly earnings, fatal/non-fatal occupational injuries or the existence of a formal contract.

12.   Participants agreed that the work done on labour migration and labour mobility should be taken into account as the defined groups and variables might be of great interest for the MQE framework.

13.   Lastly, ILO reported on the need for harmonized rural-urban labour statistics. The importance of monitoring decent work in rural and urban areas was also highlighted by the 20th ICLS. An analysis showed that neither international statistical standards on defining urban or rural areas nor on rural-urban labour statistics exist. Different approaches were discussed and a proposal was made during the 20th ICLS to develop a harmonized rural-urban classification. The expert group agreed that rural-urban comparisons are of big interest. As the MQE-Framework recommends disaggregations for a number of indicators, the work by ILO on harmonizing rural-urban statistics needs to be taken into account.

C.   Session 3: New forms of employment

Session chair: Françoise Carré, WIEGO

14.   This session included four presentations addressing one of the new forms of work, platform-mediated work, also called "gig work", including tasks but also sales of goods or providing rental services. The policy interest in this type of work is great, partly because of its direct impact on workers currently involved but also because it may pre-figure changes in employment relationships more broadly. There are also questions about the implications of participating in this kind of work over the longer term in terms of experience, earnings and social security issues like unemployment benefits and retirement income. The presentations were held by participants from Singapore, Switzerland, the University of Oxford and the RIWI corporation.

15.   The presentations and the group discussions raised the following issues:

- There are varied ways to define the scope of what is included in platform-mediated employment. Some include web-based digital labour platforms (e.g. crowd work) as well as online freelancing (service provision for example); others restrict the scope of investigation to the latter component.

- There is ongoing debate about how to define the relationship entailed in platform-mediated employment. In discussion is whether the relationship should be described as "triangular" (worker/service provider – platform – client/end user) or as including others such as intermediaries or "sub-contract" workers involved in a task.

- Most platform-mediated work is organized on the legal basis of a "self-employed" working arrangement. The workers are responsible for organizing and financing their own social protection (benefits). Nevertheless, there are cross-national differences in institutional and economic contexts within which this form of work occurs and implications vary for workers as a result.

- While these forms of work have arisen first in high-income countries, they have spread to middle- and low-income countries. They also may involve a single "bidder" further contracting the task to other workers.

- The varied types of platform-mediated work entail a contradictory set of characteristics: An apparent flexibility in when to schedule work and what to work on is paired with experiences of unpredictability of earnings and future work, a high workload combined with time pressure, insecurity due to lack of social protection as well as social isolation.

- Where algorithmic control is involved at the end of the process (task or "gig"), the process is experienced as opaque by workers.

- The functioning of the platform itself (immediacy of information on the number and price of bids, ability to aggregate patterns) appears to amplify the effects of "crowd-competition" experienced by workers accessing work through the platform.

- Research on the dimensions and characteristics of the phenomenon is enriched by insights from worker experience (working conditions, work intensity, job satisfaction, health impacts, etc.)

16. Methodology issues raised include:

- Because platform-mediated work encompasses relatively new forms of work arrangements, specific survey questions/modules or other forms of data collection are needed. Presenters provided examples of survey questions for Labour Force Survey (LFS) modules and one discussed an experiment with recruiting potential respondents through online prompts.

- Survey questions that are understandable for workers and effective in identifying workers engaged in platform-mediated work - as distinct from workers using a platform to perform one's work tasks - are challenging to design and are still being developed.

- The challenges in defining the scope of platform-mediated work and designing appropriate survey questions impact the measurement of the phenomenon. Potential respondents may not understand the questions (possible undercounting) or confuse this type of work with all forms of platform use involved in performing their work (possible overcounting). Experimentation with changing the reference period for questions impacts results and helps determine the appropriate period.

D. Session 4: Panel discussion on internet-mediated platform work

Moderator: Monica Castillo, ILO

Panellists: Hanna Sutela, Finland; Julie Hatch, United States of America, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS); Enrique Fernández-Macías, JRC; Agnès Parent-Thirion, Eurofound; Alex Wood, University of Oxford

17. Monica Castillo, ILO, provided an overview of the key issues and findings relevant for measuring platform work from an ILO perspective:

- Platform work presents opportunities and risks to platform workers.

- Platform work is dynamic and ever changing, driven also by technological development. There is increasing pressure from policy makers to measure the phenomenon.

- Platform work is an important topic within the ILO's future of work agenda to ensure decent work for all.

- Following the recommendations of the 20th ICLS Resolution concerning statistics on work relationships adopted in 2018, the ILO is undertaking further conceptual and methodological development on platform work, including the 2019 Global Desk

Review on statistical measurement and national practices in measuring platform work. The work has revealed that less than 20 countries have attempted to measure platform work in the past five years and the main approaches used by national statistical offices to measure it are income based and job (task) based approaches.

- International initiatives in this field are important, such as the OECD-ILO-EU Technical Expert Group on Measuring platform work and the Eurostat Task Force on measuring digital platform employment.

18.   In the discussion, the panellists provided insights on issues pertaining to policy challenges and lessons learned with respect to measuring platform work. The main messages from the panel discussion are:

- There is increasing public debate about platform work, even though currently the phenomenon appears to be small. The policy discussions surround a need for legislation and regulations clarifying whether the workers are employees or not.

- Classification of platform workers by status has implications for social protection. Portability of benefits among such workers is a policy concern.

- A main policy challenge is the enforcement of labour rights.

- Platforms have an opaque nature, allowing them to circumvent legislation and this raises concerns about worker protection, but also about fair competition, tax revenues etc.

- On the other hand, a main value added of platforms is their efficiency and generation of big data. As a consequence, "platformisation" of regular work is being observed.

- Policymakers need to understand the core business of the platforms. For example, in the case of Uber, are they only matching drivers with clients, providing temporary help services or delivery services?

- It is not clear what the impact of platform work is on national accounts. How can for example productivity be measured when output is generated by external workers?

- Platform work creates a situation where there can be a migration of work, without the migration of workers.

- There is no perfect data collection mode. It is challenging to obtain responses via a household survey; administrative data is not designed to be used as statistical information.

- There are difficulties in defining what platform work is. Measurement depends on how wide or narrow the definition is, and what sort of policy questions should be answered. Different measurement approaches and instruments have yielded a wide range of estimates. Hence, a common definition and operationalization are needed.

- In terms of survey measurement of platform work, testing experiences suggest respondents are having problems understanding what a platform is. Survey questions may unintentionally capture workers that do online gambling, self-employed own webpage, car selling online, etc. Furthermore, it is extremely difficult to measure platform work especially as it is continuously evolving.

- Qualitative research is useful for survey research. Use of strategically targeted non-probability samples using platforms is useful and can complement the work of official statistics.

- Policy makers could enact legislation to give access to data collected by platform companies to researchers and official statistics. It was noted that some national governments have agreements with specific platforms already to share information (e.g. France with Airbnb).

- The linkages between platform work and the informal economy need to be better understood by applying ICLS standards.

- Eurofound will share their studies conducted on the platform economy that include dimensions of platform work with the expert group.

E. Session 5a: Country experiences

Session Chair: Shun Wu Fang, Singapore

19.   The presentations touched on country experiences in measuring quality of employment. The presenters shared experiences and frameworks used to measure quality of employment.

20.   OECD uses a framework developed by G20, which looks at earnings, labour market security and quality of working environment. A Job Strain Index was developed based on a theoretical model balancing the demand of jobs and the resources available to the worker. The modules of the model have expanded over time to cover the variety of the workforce, also taking into consideration both the physical and psychological strain experienced at work.

21.   Eurofound measures quality of employment in terms of work hours, work intensity, skills and discretion. In the first presentation, Eurofound shared that the study has an extensive coverage that includes data from the European Union, and countries from the Americas and Asia. Because of the extensive coverage, one of the challenges faced is to harmonize the comparability of questionnaires across countries. The accuracy is improved with the help from participating countries through their inputs, revisions and alignment of languages.

22.   Eurofound followed up with a second presentation on the 7th European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS). The EWCS is conducted with the mandate to modernize the Job Quality Index to address fragmentation of workplaces and the changes in work conditions because of digitization. The 7th EWCS will pilot the use of cognitive interviews which applies a conversational style interviews to identify issues.

23.   The Russian Federation touched in their presentation on a comprehensive list of indicators they have monitored in their LFS. Serious interest and attention on the indicators from the policy makers are drivers that enabled the national statistical office to establish the comprehensive list of indicators. An employment relationship dimension will be included in the future.

24.   In the last presentation, Eswatini presented the measuring of quality of employment in the country. The presentation was on various indicators touching on job security, wages, safety, health, and skills improvement. The presentation also covered aspects on policies, legislation and programmes to improve the quality of employment in Eswatini.

25.   Main comments from Switzerland, Finland, US, Italy, ILO, Eurofound, WIEGO:

- Workers can face either mental or physical challenges. While there were improvements in physical challenges, mental challenges could have worsened.

- It is recommended to consider trade-offs and other factors when interpreting results on quality of employment. E.g. work-life balance.

- Measurements should account for the sample profile. E.g. the proportion of self-employed and employees.

- It was clarified that child labour refers to children who are working illegally or who are involved in dangerous work

F. Keynote speech: How to quantify what is not seen? Two proposals for measuring platform work

Speaker: Enrique Fernández-Macías, JRC

26.   The presentation started with a definition of platform work. Information coordination by algorithms and a triangular form of work organization were identified as most common properties. This form of economic coordination is very efficient and combines properties of a market with those of a firm. Currently, platforms own the data generated by them and the size of their network increases their power. The ever-changing nature of the platforms and the blurred boundaries make them difficult to measure.

27.   Two proposals were made for measuring this type of work:

- Proposal 1 was to measure them as a form of employment. This would allow for a LFS type of survey on provided labour and then classifying its type based on questions on regularity, working hours, and income generated. Further probing questions would be necessary.

- Proposal 2 was to collect the data directly from the platform and to measure their labour input. The biggest challenges are seen in the reluctance of the platforms to share their data and also in the data itself regarding, homogeneity, completeness etc.

28.   Main questions remain how important the phenomenon really is, how it could develop and whether the focus should be broadened.

29.   The discussion revealed issues with the definition of the platforms, of their workers (do they count as multiple job holders if they offer their service on several platforms?), and also issues related to the indicators on MQE. Would for example the time spent to search for a job or "gig" count as working hours? It was seen as important to keep a broad perspective to allow for some flexibility in the future, while it is yet not clear what exactly the demands on the data are.

G.   Session 5b: Country experiences

Session chair: Agnès Parent-Thirion, Eurofound

30.   In this session Canada, Germany, Israel, Italy and Singapore presented their experiences with MQE indicators and their approaches of presenting them.

31.   Firstly, Italy presented their approach to measure income and job trajectories through the micro integration of LFS and statistical registers. By combining information of the business register, the labour register and the income register with the LFS, longitudinal information became available and the compilation of new indicators became possible. The main conclusions from this work were that combining survey results with the register information enables more in-depth analyses, as well as a dynamic approach to analyse the quality of employment. Remarkably, survey responses seem to be good predictors of the future working conditions of the individual.

32.   Secondly, Israel presented their results on recent analyses of the impact of commuting time of the work-life balance. Due to the absence of a time use survey, potential leisure time was estimated based on survey results on working hours and commuting time. The analyses revealed higher differences of commuting time between different sectors than between ethnicities. The main influence on potential leisure time was identified to stem from the extent of work rather than from the commuting time. One issue mentioned in the following discussion was the discrepancy between the ILO definition for commuting time and the one used in the SNA.

33.   Next, Canada presented their analyses of long commutes by car based on the Census 2016 results. The results show that a majority of "long commuters" (more than 60 min one-way) use the car. Long commutes are associated with poorer physical and mental health, especially when the car is used instead of public transport. There are significantly higher likelihoods for being a long commuter for men, older workers, single parents and higher income workers.

34.   Then, Singapore presented their work on measuring skills mismatches. Skill is one of the four dimensions of underemployment identified, the other three being: time, income, and occupation. Challenges were to distinguish between skills and qualification and the

identification of skills for jobs, which might be overlapping. Another challenge was to explain the skills in the survey. More awareness on what skills are relevant for which job is wished for. For this purpose, a framework mapping skills to occupations is aimed for.

35. Lastly, Germany presented their experiences, current solutions and ideas for future publishing of MQE indicators. This includes the way from a printed booklet in 2010 to a new website presenting the indicators that went on-line in 2019 and substituted the printed publications. Future goals are the inclusion of regional comparisons and also international comparisons, which are already possible for some indicators based on the Eurostat-Database. The discussion revealed that other countries are following a similar track from paper to purely web-based publication and work on similar solutions to present the MQE framework.

36. To summarize, it can be stated that in the combination of register data with survey results lies a great opportunity to increase the value of the data, also in the context of MQE. Further it can be said that commuting time and skills-mismatches are important indicators of the framework, which still hold some challenges in their measuring and interpretation of the data. Lastly, the general trend seems to move away from paper publications towards more dynamic web presentations, which give opportunities to increase the comparability within and between countries.

H.   Session 6: Experimental indicators

Session chair: Jason Gilmore, Canada

37. This session consisted of three presentations from Finland, Poland and ILO with WIEGO.

38. In the first presentation, Poland described their use of the EU-LFS for monitoring of labour underutilization, unregistered employment and volunteer work. Additionally, they use ad hoc modules in their own LFS to capture data on people working in the hidden economy, workers covered under different kinds of contracts, as well as unregistered work and volunteer work. One main output from this presentation and the discussion is that more national surveys on volunteering and the hidden economy are important for both unpaid contributions to the economy as well as addressing vulnerable populations.

39. In the next presentation, Finland described their methods to try and capture informal work. This is defined as not having job-dependent social protection, limited or no access to paid sick leave and annual leave, or employment in the informal sector. The method includes looking at workers with 0-hours contracts, self-employed without employees, freelancers and platform workers, as well as groups such as berry pickers, hobby workers and those in the barter economy. Results reveal a group of particularly vulnerable workers who are not covered by labour legislation (freelancers, own account in informal economy, unpaid family workers). The need for further refining informal work in the context of the country was identified.

40. In the third presentation of the session, prepared by ILO and WIEGO, the importance of informal employment not only as an experimental indicator in the MQE framework, but also indicator 8.3.1 of the SDG was highlighted. The definition and operationalization of this was identified as the big challenge. It was clarified that informal economy is not meant to capture illicit activities, but to capture work relationships where employees are not subject to labour laws, taxes, or social protection. Self-employment is seen as informal if the enterprise is part of the informal sector. Following the definition, own-account workers and unpaid family workers represent a notable portion of informal employment. Overall, agriculture represents the largest share of informal employment, even in developed countries.

41. To summarize, it can be stated that informal work, which is an experimental indicator of the MQE framework is complex to measure (combined with challenges to source data). Nevertheless, it is worth measuring informal work within the context of the framework. The expert group suggested to either further evaluate the indicator or to eventually elevate it to a permanent indicator in the framework.

IV. Proposal for future work

42.   The meeting participants agreed that:

a) Work on the following topics should continue to have priority:

- Teleworking
- Commuting time

b) The review of indicators for (in particular) dimension 4 should await the adoption of the revision of the ICSE.

c) In addition, priority should be given to work on: new forms of employment and their measurement, including precarious new forms of employment, the digitized labour market, or platform work.

d) Indicators marked as experimental need further development. Work on these indicators should continue in terms of collecting experiences on their compilation and suitability.

e) It would be useful to collect more feedback and experiences from countries on producing QE indicators according to the statistical framework.

f) Guidance on how to take the definitions of the 19th ICLS resolution on Work Statistics and the definitions of the 20th ICLS resolution concerning statistics on work relationships into account in the statistical framework should be developed.

g) Ways in which to further promote the statistical framework for MQE, including having more indicators published under the headline of QE should be discussed and a website created for collecting examples on this.

h) The need for harmonizing the framework or individual indicators with other existing frameworks, like the Sustainable Development Goals, the ILO decent work framework, or the OECD quality of work environment framework should be analysed and discussed.

43.   Meeting participants suggested that a future expert group meeting on MQE be organized to follow-up on the issues and priorities raised at this meeting.