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**INTERNATIONAL LABOUR
ORGANIZATION**

Joint UNECE-Eurostat-ILO Seminar
on Measurement of the Quality of Employment
(Geneva, 27-29 May 2002)

Measuring employee benefits in US establishment and household surveys

Supporting paper submitted by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics¹

Summary

1. Benefits are a crucial component of compensation in the United States, comprising 27 percent of every dollar spent by employers for employee compensation. Employment is the principal source of health insurance and retirement benefits. Thus, the availability and generosity of benefits are important factors in the quality of employment. Information on worker benefits is collected in two major surveys of the US Bureau of Labor Statistics—the establishment-based National Compensation Survey and the household Current Population Survey. The National Compensation Survey (NCS) produces estimates of the percent of workers who either have access to or participate in various benefit plans. The NCS also produces a large number of tabulations showing detailed benefit plan provisions. The NCS data are particularly rich in detail about health insurance and retirement benefits. Further, the NCS provides estimates of cost levels for individual benefits at a point in time and estimates of changes in total benefit costs over time. The Current Population Survey (CPS) is far more limited in scope than the NCS. The CPS asks workers about their access to and participation in health insurance and retirement plans. The advantage of the CPS is that information on health and retirement benefit availability can be correlated with worker demographic characteristics. This paper reviews both data programs, with an emphasis on the NCS.

¹ Paper written by John W. Ruser.