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Group of Experts on Measuring Quality of Employment

Eleventh session
Online, 9 – 18 November 2021

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 online on 9, 10, 16, 17 and 18 November 2021. 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 Conference of European Statisticians in June 2021 (ECE/CES/2021/15) and the recommendation of the previous meeting of the Group of Experts on Measuring Quality of Employment in November 2019 (ECE/CES/GE.12/2019/2).

I. Introduction

1. The eleventh meeting of the Group of Experts on Measuring Quality of Employment was held online on 9, 10, 16, 17 and 18 November 2021. It was organized by the UNECE Steering Group on Quality of Employment.

2. The meeting was attended by representatives from Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Denmark, Ecuador, Eswatini, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Belarus, Republic of Serbia, Russia, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Ukraine, United States of America and Uzbekistan.

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), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) and W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research (Upjohn Institute).

4. The meeting was chaired by Frank Schüller (Germany) and Vincent Dale (Canada). Françoise Carré (WIEGO), Michael Horrigan (Upjohn Institute), Judith Forster, (Austria) and Hanna Sutela (Finland) acted as session chairs.

5. All background documents and presentations of the meeting are available on the website: Group of Experts on Quality of Employment, online | UNECE.

II. Organization of the Meeting

6. The meeting was divided into 4 online sessions:

(a) Session 1: Quality of employment during the Covid-19 pandemic and after

(b) Session 2: New forms of employment

(c) Session 3: National experiences with the indicators of quality of employment and new approaches

(d) Session 4: Progress of the Steering Group on Quality of Employment

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

A. Session 1: Quality of employment during the Covid-19 pandemic and after

Session chair: Françoise Carré, WIEGO

7. The session addressed the impacts of the pandemic on the labour market and quality of employment and the design of new measures and their implementation. The session was based on presentations by Statistics Canada, National Institute of Statistics of Italy (ISTAT), Eurostat, Upjohn Institute, National Administrative Department of Statistics of Colombia (DANE), Singapore Department of Statistics, Statistics Finland and National Statistical Institute of Spain (INE).

8. The first group of presentations addressed “macro” dimensions of impacts, with a presentation from Statistics Canada on an adjusted unemployment rate and a rate of labour underutilization addressing workers out of the labour force (not job searching) but wanting jobs. ISTAT presented an analysis of the use and income distribution effects of a national job retention scheme based on the integration of several data sources, including business, income and population registers, LFS data and social security administrative registers.

9. The second group of presentations assessed employment or income impacts across socio-demographic groups. Eurostat presented EU-wide results and compared country patterns of impacts. Experience of temporary layoff, job loss, or reduced hours and earnings varied across age groups (e.g. young workers more affected by job loss or temporary layoff than other groups); occupations (e.g. elementary occupations, sales and services more exposed to job loss than professional occupations), and sex (women lost more work hours than men) and across countries. The presentation by the Upjohn Institute focused on impacts on USA workers with less than 4-year post-secondary education degree, with women and minority men more likely to experience unemployment (including long-term employment) and remain out of the labour force (not job searching though wanting to work) in 2020 due to constraints such as limited access to transportation and childcare.

10. The third group of presentations focused on specific measurements of quality of employment impacts. The Department of Statistics of Colombia addressed measurement challenges with the integration of household survey and time use survey data as well as a "Social Pulse" survey. It reported particularly on the pandemic period's effects on dimensions of work overload and housework overload and examining the determinants of paid work and unpaid work across gender. Singapore Department of Statistics also reported on required modifications to the unemployment survey and the design of a new survey to assess impacts on unemployment, employment shifts, wage impacts, and changes in work arrangements (telework).

11. The fourth group of presentations addressed work-life dimensions. Finland presented findings on job loss (women in part-time jobs more affected), and the increased and established use of telework from home, as well as documented impacts on several dimensions of work-life "balance" (e.g. no commuting, support from supervisors but more interruptions at home). The statistical office of Spain increased the periodicity of their survey on "atypical" work arrangements to quarterly and presented results from survey questions related to working time arrangements and off-site work, including measurement of experience of work burden across household income categories. The study reported lower retention of home-based telework practices after the height of the pandemic relative to other countries such as Canada and Finland.

12. In summary, the session addressed the need for changes in methods to measure the impacts of the pandemic and related policies. Supplemental measures detailing dimensions of under-employment were considered useful for policy purposes. These measures also are suited to document patterns in the "recovery" period; some countries reported that with "re-opening" job searchers are still facing constraints because of limited support systems challenged during the pandemic (e.g. childcare). The discussions included interest in part-time unemployment benefits, wage subsidies and other job preservation policies. The challenge of accurately measuring in greater detail underemployment, 'near unemployment" and the changed composition of the "out of the labour force" pool drew interest.

13. Impacts on job loss, hours reduction and earnings losses were driven by industry and, within industry, by occupational group (ability to work remotely vs. site-based work). Changes in work arrangements and sometimes work hours for those able and allowed to work from home show notable variation across occupations, gender and socio-demographic groups. Also, the shift to home-based telework had implications for paid and unpaid work hours, with women found to bear increased household work in particular.

B. Session 2: New forms of employment

Session chair: Michael Horrigan, Upjohn Institute for Employment Research

14. The session included a discussion of ongoing international work on measuring forms of employment and country experiences. There were presentations by Statistics Canada, OECD, Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia and Statistics Poland.

15. Based on an in-depth review of new forms of employment and quality of employment carried out by Statistics Canada the CES Bureau in February 2021 established a task force to develop a conceptual framework for measuring forms of employment.

16. The framework should identify and map the relationship between concepts related to new and established forms of employment. It should help ensure that forms of employment are consistently measured, described and classified, and assist national statistics offices (NSOs) in identifying and measuring emerging forms of employment. The framework should bring existing concepts into a coherent framework and be aligned with the 2018 International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE-18).

17. The main dimensions of the framework are *work relationships in employment* and *work modality* (the way work is performed and compensated). The framework also includes permanence and stability in employment, personal circumstances and social protection aspects. It suggests a matrix that encompasses the dimension of form of employment to guide measurement and research.

18. The task force is currently drafting the chapters of the framework. A draft version will be circulated to all CES member countries in early 2022 for written consultation with the aim to have the final version submitted to the CES plenary session in June 2022 for endorsement. A subgroup of the UNECE Steering Group on Measuring Quality of Employment will be established to regularly map emerging forms of employment onto the framework and ensure ongoing cross-fertilization between the framework and quality of employment indicators.

19. Since 2020 a technical expert group established by OECD has worked to develop a *Handbook on measuring platform employment and work*. The expert group includes OECD, ILO, Eurostat, Eurofound and 14 national statistical offices and observers. The handbook is planned to be completed in first quarter 2022.

20. Survey practices and use of various data sources differ among countries. The handbook aims to support compilation of harmonised and more comparable statistics across countries on platform work. It will provide guidance on measuring digital platform work (DPW) by providing definitions and concepts, operational guidance and recommendations on measurement, data sources, surveys and their advantages/disadvantages.

21. The handbook recognizes there is no optimal approach to capture all aspects of digital platform work. While official surveys are likely to be the best source for estimating the number of platform workers, other available data sources and measurement methods may be used, e.g. business surveys, tax registers and social security registers, depending on research objectives and available data sources.

22. The Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia presented an overview of the development in remote work in Latvia since 2020 broken down on age groups, gender, kind of activity and occupation. The results showed a close correlation between the severity of lockdown measures during the pandemic and the prevalence of remote work.

23. The presentation by Poznan University of Economics and Business Statistics provided an overview of the development of the gig economy in Poland based on data from smartphone apps used by drivers and couriers. The data was purchased from a private data provider. The lockdown had a significant impact on the distribution of working hours which in the study is approximated by the distribution of the use of the apps. The data allowed breaking down on gender, age groups, family situation and location. The presentation also addressed comparisons with survey data or administrative data and measurement problems for socio-demographic variables.

24. In the following discussion, the delineation of platform work was raised. There is a need to clarify which activities fall within the boundaries of employment/work and which does not. For instance, if or to what extent should persons selling products on the web be recorded as doing platform work? It should also be considered if such types of employment/work are important enough to warrant statistical coverage or can be ignored. The development of statistics on new forms of employment should not jeopardize the overall credibility of employment statistics.

25. In summary, new forms of employment, including platform work are likely to grow in importance in most countries, which development has been accelerated by the pandemic. The planned handbook on forms of employment and platform work will therefore be useful to guide countries.

26. The importance of ensuring coherence between the framework on forms of employment and the framework for measuring quality of employment was stressed. While the frameworks have a different focus and go into details in different areas, they should be in line with each other and not give contradictory recommendations. Coherence is crucial for the usefulness and credibility of the statistics.

27. The measurement of (new) forms of employment is a major challenge for statistical offices and researchers. In this context, there is a need for more cognitive analysis of the formulation of questions, which is of crucial importance. The complexity and number of questions need to be balanced against the response burden.

28. Many new forms of employment are linked to digitalisation and globalisation. It would, therefore, be useful to further discuss residency and boundary issues in relation to international workers and include this dimension in the definition of indicators of new forms of employment where this is important.

29. The use of big data such as from providers of apps or platforms has huge potentials for the production of statistics on employment. Getting access to such data, developing methods and tools for utilising the data and ensuring quality and transparency pose major challenges for statistical offices and call for sharing of experiences and best practices.

C. Session 3: National experiences with the indicators of quality of employment and new approaches

Session chair: Judith Forster, Statistics Austria

30. This session included presentations by Statistics Finland, Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel and National Administrative Department of Statistics of Colombia.

31. Statistics Finland presented the outcome of a study of the development in employment quality profiles based on the results of the Finish 2018 work-life survey. The study follows the approach of Eurofound[1] based on factor analysis. Variables from the work-life survey are first aggregated into five quality of work indices (skills and discretion; social environment; flexibility of working time; physical environment; and work intensity). Workers are then grouped into five job quality profiles by clustering jobs that have similar scores (pattern) across the work quality indices. The five job quality profiles are: good jobs; decent manual jobs; jobs spoiled by time pressure; burdensome jobs; and heavy manual jobs.

32. The study showed, among other things, a gender gap in quality of work, strengths in some working conditions can compensate shortcomings in others and that good/decent working conditions are possible in all types of jobs. There was a big interest from different user groups in quality job profiles (including different professional groups such as teachers and cleaning personnel).

33. Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel presented an overview of the influence of the pandemic on the labour market in Israel measured through indicators of persons in the labour force (unemployment, employed persons temporarily absent from work), persons not in the labour force (non-participation in the labour force), working from home, commuting time, evening and night work and job tenure.

34. The Department of Statistics of Columbia presented a new approach on predicting informality rates by using a machine learning algorithm. The algorithm combined information from the household survey and the social security register in Colombia to predict informality rates in March and April 2020. The example demonstrated a data imputation method that could be used during periods of lockdown when the traditional ways of obtaining data are hindered or not possible.

35. It was agreed that the Steering Group should consider further work on job quality profiles and investigate if some of the quality of employment indicators can be used for the purpose. This may involve methodological challenges with the use of different data sources

[1] See https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1634en.pdf

(use of one data source is the easier solution but may not always be an option), and the validity and usefulness of this approach would need to be considered.

D. Session 4: Progress of the Steering Group on Quality of Employment

Session chair: Hanna Sutela, Statistics Finland

36. The session included reports of work by the steering group in six areas:

1) Measuring new forms of employment
2) Indicators for commuting time
3) Indicator for teleworking
4) Guidance note on measuring quality in other forms of work than employment
5) Countries' feedback on the framework
6) Promotion of the framework

37. The first five areas of work presented proposals for changes and amendments to the statistical framework for measuring quality of employment.

Measuring new forms of employment (Singapore Department of Statistics)

38. The following proposals were made:

39. To better capture new forms of employment for employees, the following indicators should be considered for inclusion in the framework:

- Employee-sharing (Percentage of employees that are jointly hired by a group of employers)
- Job-sharing (percentage of employees that are hired along with other workers to jointly fill a specific job)
- Interim Management (Percentage of highly skilled employees that are hired temporarily for a specific project or to solve a specific problem)
- Casual work (percentage of employees that are only called in and provided with work by an employer)
- ICT based mobile work (percentage of employees that can do their job from any place at any time, supported by modern technologies)
- Voucher-based work (percentage of employees that receives payment for their services with a voucher purchased from an authorized organisation)
- Employees with more than one form of employment (percentage of employees who are involved in more than one form of employment)

40. The indicator sheet of the existing indicator *fixed-term contracts* (4a1) should be updated to include a disaggregation into long-term and short-term contracts (e.g. less/more than one year). The duration of the contract is already mentioned as recommended disaggregation in the indicator sheet. The distinction between fixed-term and short-term contracts in ICSE-18 should be taken into consideration.

41. The indicator sheet of the existing indicator *self-employed with one client* (4a4) should be updated to include a disaggregation into economically dependent self-employed; independent self-employed with employees; and independent self-employed without employees.

42. To capture new forms of employment for self-employed, the following indicators should be considered for inclusion:

- Job-sharing (percentage of self-employed that are hired along with other workers to jointly fill a specific job)

- Interim Management (Percentage of highly skilled self-employed that are hired temporarily for a specific project or to solve a specific problem)
- ICT based mobile work (percentage of self-employed that can do their job from any place at any time, supported by modern technologies)
- Voucher-based work (percentage of self-employed that receives payment for their services with a voucher purchased from an authorized organisation)
- Self-employed with more than one form of employment (percentage of self-employed who are involved in more than one form of employment)

43. The terminology (self-employed vs contractors and with/without employees) should be considered; it should be in line with ICSE-18. Platform work should be included by the following new indicator:

- Platform work. Self-employed who use an app or website to match themselves with customers in order to provide a service in return for money

44. The scope of the indicator on platform work should be considered. Should it be restricted to self-employed only or be extended to cover also dependent contractors?

Indicators on commuting time (Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel)

45. The following two proposals were made:

- The existing indicator on commuting time (3c3) which aims to measure the mean duration of commuting time between work and home (one way) should be updated.
- A new indicator on commuting time to measure the share of employed persons with long commuting time between work and home, defined as more than 60 minutes commuting time one way should be introduced.

46. The question was raised if an indicator of the number of days per week working from home would be useful.

Indicator on Teleworking (Swiss Federal Statistical Office)

47. A new indicator on teleworking should be included. The proposed indicator uses the definition of telework from Eurofound (2020). It focuses on employees and is to be compiled as the number of employees working remotely using IT (at least several times a month) divided by the total number of employees.

Guidance note on measuring quality in other forms of work than employment (Federal Statistical Office of Germany)

48. Quality is also relevant for other work forms which play an important role in many countries. The 2019 Expert group meeting recommended to keep the scope of the framework on employment but to review which indicators may apply to other forms of work than employment and develop guidance for these. To this end, a two-step approach was proposed:

- Finalise and publish a guidance note with a general introduction and recommendations for each sub-dimension.
- Prepare and, eventually publish, supplementary indicator sheets for indicators that are relevant to other forms of work than employment. Supplementary indicator sheets may be included in a future update of the handbook.

Feedback from countries (Statistics Austria)

49. Based on the replies from 16 countries on the survey on the Handbook, the presentation listed the following changes and amendments to be considered:

- proposals for changes of names, reference periods and definitions of a number of concrete indicators (for details see the presentation by Statistics Austria)
- New indicators on informality, number of jobs and actual hours worked should be considered

- Update of variables and recommended data sources etc. considering the new EU regulation for Integrated European Social Statistics (IESS).

50. Countries were encouraged to provide comments or suggestions to the framework.

Promotion of the framework (Federal Statistical Office of Germany)

51. The Federal Statistical Office of Germany has developed a website to promote the statistical framework for measuring quality of employment[2]. The primary target group would be NSOs but the website will be open to all. It should be easy to maintain. When ready, the website will be made publicly available from the UNECE website. Comments and suggestions for the website should be forwarded to Katharina Marder-Puch (Katharina.marder-puch@destatis.de).

52. In conclusion of the session, there was general support for the proposals presented. Participants were encouraged to submit written comments or proposals to UNECE (economic.stats@un.org) before the end of December 2021. The steering group will review the proposals and comments received. The proposal will then be finalised and kept in an inventory that should feed into a future update of the framework. The Steering Group can propose an update of the framework to the CES Bureau when the Group thinks an update will be necessary. The CES Bureau will then decide if an update should be initiated.

IV. Proposal for future work

53. The following topics were suggested for further work:

1) Finalisation of proposed changes to the statistical framework:
   - indicators of new forms of employment, telework and commuting time
   - guidance on other forms of work than employment (19th ICLS resolution)
2) Implementation of country survey feedback
3) Forms of employment:
   - map emerging forms of employment to the framework on forms of employment
   - ensure coherence and cross-fertilization between the framework on forms of employment and the framework on quality of employment
4) Job quality profiles
5) Developing new indicators based on administrative and other data sources
6) Promotion of the statistical framework

54. The Steering Group on Quality of Employment should follow-up on the suggested topics for further work. When relevant, residency and boundary issues for international workers should be taken into consideration. The participants recommended an expert group meeting should be organised in 2023.

[2] https://statswiki.unece.org/pages/viewpage.action?spaceKey=SGMQE&title=Measuring+Quality+of+Employment