

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

Report II

## **Measurement of working time**

**18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians**

Geneva, 24 November–5 December 2008

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# 1. Introduction

## Historical background and need for revision

1. The International Labour Organization has long been concerned with the regulation of working time as an aspect having a direct and measurable impact on the health and well-being of working persons and on their levels of fatigue and stress (and on those of the people close to them). It has also considered its important impact on productivity levels and on labour costs for establishments, and on the general quality of life in all countries. Measuring the levels and trends of the hours worked in an economy, for different groups of working persons, is therefore important when monitoring working and living conditions, as well as when analysing economic developments. The importance of working time is reflected in the Preamble to the ILO Constitution:

Whereas universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice; And whereas conditions of labour exist involving such injustice, hardship and privation to large numbers of people as to produce unrest so great that the peace and harmony of the world are imperilled; and an improvement of those conditions is urgently required; as, for example, by the regulation of the hours of work including the establishment of a maximum working day and week ...

2. It is also demonstrated by the over 30 Conventions adopted by the International Labour Conference that have dealt with working-time issues such as the regulation and reduction of maximum daily and weekly working time, the regulation of night work, weekly rest, annual leave, maternity leave and part-time work, as well as the production of statistics. The first of these, the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 1) introduced the standard of an eight-hour day and a 48-hour week.
3. The International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) has dealt with the measurement of working time, adopting two resolutions on the subject: one concerning statistics of wages and hours of labour (1923) and one concerning an integrated system of wages statistics (1973) that recommends the measurement of working time as part of a system of wages statistics. The first ICLS recognized the importance of working-time statistics when constructing wage indices to measure changes in the standard of living of the working class. The ICLS has only adopted one resolution, however, defining working time for measurement purposes. The current international standards date back to 1962, when the Tenth ICLS defined the concepts of “normal hours of work” and of “hours actually worked”. The resolution mentioned the concept of “hours paid for” but did not adopt an international definition because of important variations in establishment practices in different countries.
4. The description and analysis of patterns and trends in the time people work around the world, however, increasingly requires more comprehensive working-time statistics. In view of the changes that have taken place in recent decades, these statistics need to reflect the new realities and serve policies in both the economic and social spheres. To meet this growing need, in 1993 the 15th ICLS already requested that the measurement of absence from work be the subject of international guidelines, to be integrated within a framework for measuring working time as a whole. The 16th ICLS (1998) recommended to further develop its measurement, particularly in three areas: (a) the time worked by the self-employed, useful for analysis of income from employment statistics; (b) the volume of employment, expressed as total hours actually worked, useful as a basis for statistics on labour productivity; and (c) working-time arrangements as a complement to working-time statistics. The 17th ICLS (2003) considered as a priority activity the development of

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statistics of working time and working-time arrangements. In discussing the need for revised guidelines on the subject, its Working Group on Statistics of Working Time provided guidance on the direction and issues to be considered. The revision of the international standards will enable countries to improve or develop a comprehensive system of statistics of working time that can account for all productive activities, in order to provide an adequate statistical base for their users of working-time statistics. In turn this base will facilitate the presentation and international reporting of these statistics for the purpose of comparisons between countries.

5. Several international organizations have been instrumental in developing and implementing guidelines for the measurement of working time on behalf of their constituents: the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT); the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); and the United Nations (Statistics Division). Under the United Nations' auspices, the Paris Group on Labour and Compensation (a city group for the purpose of informal consultation) was created in 1997 involving all of these organizations as well as national labour statisticians. This group has made substantial contributions to the work of revising the prevailing international standards on hours of work.
6. At the national level, many statistical offices, in particular in countries with well-developed national statistical systems, have collected statistics of hours of work for years. There is consequently a wealth of national practice, which has aided the revision process. These practices to produce statistics of working time have gone beyond the scope of the Tenth ICLS resolution and vary considerably. The heterogeneity in quantity and quality of national statistics on working time seriously hampers international comparisons. This is reflected in the ILO publication the *Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, which publishes national series on average weekly "hours actually worked" by sex, major industry groups and division in manufacturing industries. However, some countries provide annual averages taking into account paid leave, public holidays and other types of irregular absence from work. Others provide simple averages of weekly observations, while still others provide statistics only for a particular reference week. For some countries the statistics refer to "hours paid for" and sometimes even to "normal hours of work". Monthly or quarterly statistics on average weekly hours actually worked published in the *Bulletin of Labour Statistics* have the same limitations. The *ILO October Inquiry* publishes statistics on "normal hours of work" per week and on "hours actually worked" (as well as statistics on wage rates and earnings) for selected detailed occupational groups in selected industry groups. In both cases the statistics actually provided can be for national concepts and/or reference periods that all differ. These differences in scope and coverage exist partially because of the complex nature of the topic but also because of a lack of international guidance or consensus on how they are to be defined and measured or estimated. In order for the international revision of the measurement of working time to succeed, it must take place within the spirit and principles of tripartism. For this reason, the social partners have

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