

Title	Measuring Decent Work with Statistical Indicators
Author	Richard Anker, Igor Chernyshev, Philippe Egger, Farhad Mehran and Joseph Ritter
Source	Policy Integration Department Statistical Development and Analysis Group International Labour Office Geneva
Pub Date	2002
Brief Introduction	<p>Preface⁴</p> <p>In his first report to the International Labour Conference in 1999, ILO Director General Juan Somavia introduced a comprehensive concept of work and the workplace, which he called Decent Work. He described decent work as “opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity”. Decent Work has subsequently become the organising framework for ILO activities. This widely quoted passage, however, provides only a broad description of the basic elements of decent work.⁴</p> <p>There is no agreed set of statistical indicators to measure decent work. Indeed, some believe that decent work is a well meaning, nice sounding phrase that is not definable or measurable. This lacuna as regards decent work indicators greatly hampers ILO’s own work, as well as the ability of its constituents to monitor and evaluate the situation in their countries. It means that it is not possible for constituents to know progress toward the achievement of decent work or the position of their country or with regard to other countries. It means that the ILO’s ability to communicate with and advise constituents is reduced, as is its ability to communicate with the public. Nor is it possible to understand how decent work relates to poverty and other major development concerns, or how different dimensions of decent work interrelate. This need for a core set of statistical indicators to measure decent work was recognised by the Advisory Group on Statistics (AGS) in its recommendations to the Director General in 2001.⁴</p> <p>ILO’s failure to effectively communicate the importance of decent work is evident in the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals. Despite our position that decent work is a pivotal aspect for effective development and poverty reduction, only two out of the 48 indicators developed to monitor these Goals directly relate to work. And both of these indicators measure only the presence or absence of work and not the decency of work itself.⁴</p> <p>It is clear that a major effort will be required if a comprehensive set of decent work indicators is to be identified, developed and measured. This effort will need to be focused and involve the entire ILO, including the regions, and require the cooperation and collaboration of constituents. National statistical services will also need to be involved over the long run. The Office will need to build on and coordinate the major on-going statistical activities already underway such as in STAT, IFP/SES, KILM, and IPEC at headquarters, and in the regions. A collaborative ILO effort must start with an agreed core set of decent work indicators. While countries, regions and technical programmes should be encouraged to augment the core indicators to address special issues, it is nevertheless important for everyone to work together to measure an agreed core set of decent work indicators. Otherwise, efforts will become splintered and uncoordinated. This would end with unsatisfactory results in my opinion—in part because the job ahead is so challenging and available resources are limited, in part because it would limit our ability to look at decent work in a comprehensive way, and in part because it would limit international comparisons, as well as world and regional estimates.⁴</p> <p>This paper has been prepared by the Statistical Development and Analysis Unit of the Policy Integration Department (INTEGRATION/SDA) in light of the clear need for an agreed set of decent work indicators. In doing this, we did not shy away from pointing out conceptual and measurement difficulties, or serious gaps in the coverage of the indicators. We felt it important to be realistic. Our recommendations consider feasibility (especially in terms of data availability for a range of developing, transition and developed countries), clear relevance to one or more aspect of decent work, and the possibility of achieving⁴</p>

acceptable international comparability. It does little good to suggest indicators that cannot be compiled for a range of countries at varying development levels, are not conceptually relevant for decent work, and/or cannot be measured with reasonable accuracy and cross-country comparability. Indeed, we felt that pointing out difficulties and rejecting possible indicators was as important as identifying and suggesting indicators. At the same time, it is important that there is continual development of indicators so that what can be measured at the present time for a substantial number of countries is a first step in a process of measuring decent work.⁶⁴

This paper was prepared in a truly team effort by Richard Anker, Igor Chernyshev, Philippe Egger, Farhad Mehran and Joe Ritter (names are in alphabetical order). Statistical assistance for computing some of the suggested indicators has been provided by David Bescond. At each stage in preparation of this paper, we sat around a table to discuss the issues and preliminary conclusions of one member of the team. Discussions were often pointed and tough, but they were always conducted in a professional and collegial manner, with a satisfactory conclusion the overriding goal of everyone. These internal discussions were preceded by discussions with relevant ILO technical units. We also benefited from the comments and suggestions of colleagues in the Policy Integration Department: Gerry Rodgers, Anne Trebilcock, Sylvester Young, Eivind Hoffmann, Adriana Mata-Greenwood and Rolph van der Hoeven. And from comments of other colleagues such as Jacqueline Ancel-Lenners, Lucio Baccaro, Abbas Bazargan, Roger Böhning, Dharam Ghai, Wouter van Ginneken, Frank Hagemann, Jean-Claude Javillier, David Kucera, Oliver Liang, Amy Ritualo, Ellen Roskam, Frans Roselaers, Bill Salter, Carmen Sottas, Lee Swepston, Hamid Tabatabai and Monique Zarka-Martres among others. This means that considerable discussion, dialogue and thought have already gone into this project. At the same time, we are well aware of this paper's limitations, and so we do not see it as a final document or blueprint for the Office. Rather, we hope it will provide the basis for constructive dialogue and discussion.⁶⁴

The central premise of this paper is that it is important for the ILO to settle on a basic core set of decent work indicators and a plan of action for statistical activities. The Office should also seriously consider developing a complementary set of indicators to measure supporting national and international legal frameworks and conventions for the eleven major aspects of decent work identified in this paper. Inaction or unnecessary procrastination would be a bad outcome for the ILO in our opinion. INTEGRATION/SDA looks forward to reactions and constructive criticisms that move the ILO toward the goal of identifying a core set of ILO decent work indicators and developing the capacity to measure them.⁶⁴

September 2002

Richard Anker⁶⁴
Statistical Development and Analysis Unit⁶⁴
Policy Integration Department⁶⁴