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Gender issues in labour statistics

Adriana MATA GREENWOOD*

Labour statistics describe the numbers, structure, characteristics and contributions of the participants in the labour market and how these change over time. Conventionally, they cover many topics concerning the size and structure of the labour force and the characteristics of workers and employers. From an economic perspective, these statistics are necessary for analysing, evaluating and monitoring the way the economy is performing and the effectiveness of current and longer-term economic policies. From a social perspective, they are also necessary for designing policies and programmes for job creation, training and retraining schemes, and for assisting vulnerable groups, including the young, the old, women, etc., in finding and securing employment. To serve users, labour statistics need to reflect reality as closely as possible. This means that they should comprehensively cover all persons who actually participate in the labour market, and should describe their various work situations in equal detail and depth.

However, the production of statistics requires that reality be simplified — codified — into synthetic categories which highlight certain aspects of this reality while ignoring others. Whether these aspects are highlighted or ignored depends mainly on the *available methods of data collection* and on the *priorities and objectives* of the data collection process. The various methods of data collection all have their limitations, and measurement priorities depend to a large extent on the perceptions society has of how the labour market functions — perceptions which are not immutable. As a result, national labour statistics have generally been successful at identifying and characterizing “core” employment and unemployment situations, which reflect the conventional view of what “work” and “joblessness” are all about: i.e. workers in full-time regular employment in formal sector enterprises and persons who are looking for such jobs. They have been less successful at identifying and describing other work situations.

Women are often to be found in these other work situations, which may go unnoticed or be inadequately described in labour statistics (United Nations, 1991). The validity of labour statistics would therefore be enhanced by a better

* ILO Bureau of Statistics, Geneva. This article is adapted from an ILO Bureau of Statistics working paper, *Incorporating gender issues in labour statistics* (forthcoming).

understanding of what women do and how they behave in the labour market. Attempts to reflect as fully as possible women's work as compared with men's would reveal the statistics' strengths and shortcomings and would provide indications of how and where they can be improved. There are other reasons justifying such an endeavour. First, it would provide more complete information to users of the statistics, such as market analysts and policy decision-makers, which is important because men and women often do very different types of work and labour market changes tend to affect them differently. Second, it would enable users to understand and analyse female workers' particular position and constraints as compared with those of male workers, and would provide a more solid basis for promoting equality between the sexes in the labour market. For the systematic under-reporting and misrepresentation of women's contribution to the economy help maintain a distorted perception of the nature of a country's economy and its human resources, and thus perpetuate a vicious circle of inequality between men and women, and inappropriate policies and programmes.

So, it is important to establish the characteristics labour statistics need to acquire before they can fully reflect the similarities and differences in the respective situations of men and women in the labour market. This article seeks to establish the most important of these characteristics.

Gender issues in labour statistics

It is generally accepted that inequality between men and women stems from attitudes, prejudices and assumptions concerning the different roles assigned to men and women in society (Overholt et al., 1984). These roles, which are learned, e.g., those of parent, housekeeper, provider of basic needs, etc., largely determine the type of work men and women do. For example, given their traditional role as homemakers, more female than male workers tend to combine economic activities with household (non-economic) activities, to work intermittently over the year and to work closer to home, often even at home for pay or in a family enterprise for family profit. Furthermore, because of their assigned role as dependent members of the household, women tend to be relatively more active than men in non-market activities and in the informal sector; to be considered by others and even by themselves as economically inactive; to receive less education, and thus to be more confined in occupations requiring lower skills and paying less well; to be considered as secondary workers in their family enterprise even when they have equal responsibility; and, in times of economic downturn or structural adjustment, to be amongst the first dismissed from their paid jobs. In addition, women find it hard to break through the "glass ceiling", which blocks their access to managerial or decision-making positions. Given structural constraints due to family responsibilities, women who are available and willing to work tend actively to seek work much less than men in the same situation, and employers tend to be reluctant to employ women outside typically female occupations.

Another area of gender differentiation is the allocation of resources and benefits among the members of a household. It has been observed, for example, that women who are self-employed have more limited access to production resources than men, which lowers their income (Dixon-Mueller and Anker, 1990). Furthermore, women do not necessarily have control over their use of the resources available to them, nor do they necessarily reap the full benefits accruing from their efforts. Women's and men's gender roles also determine their different needs and constraints. For example, the degree to which women actually participate in and contribute to the production process is highly dependent on their marital status, on whether they have small children, and on whether they have to care for other persons in their households. Men's participation in and contribution to the production process are also affected by these factors, but not in a constraining way.

In order to improve the description of the labour market and to provide a solid basis for promoting equality between women and men, gender differences such as those described above need to be considered when labour statistics are produced. Consequently, when determining which topics to include and how to define, measure and present them, one must consider how to reflect the distinct contributions, constraints and needs of women and of men in the resulting statistics.

Topics to cover

Statistics are needed on the numbers of men and women producing the goods and services in a country (the employed population) and on the numbers of men and women exerting pressure on the labour market for jobs (the unemployed population). Various subgroups of the employed population are especially important for such an analysis:

- persons who, though working, are in jobs with insufficient hours of work (the population in time-related, or visible, underemployment);
- persons whose jobs are ill suited to them for other, labour-market related reasons (the population in inadequate employment situations);
- persons who work in small, unregistered economic units (those employed in the informal sector);
- and children who are in inappropriate work situations (child labour).

These population groups need to be further subdivided into more homogeneous categories, according to other work-related characteristics, for instance:

- occupation, given that men and women generally do very different jobs;
- employment status, in view of the steady decline of regular wage employment and the increase in other employment situations, such as casual and temporary/seasonal employment and self-employment, where men and women are present in different degrees;
- income from employment, given the pervasive difference between men's and women's income levels in all countries even after correcting for hours worked and level of education;

- working time, in order to provide a more accurate measure of their participation in the labour market;¹
- participation in industrial disputes, as women are said to be more passive and less unionized than men, and may tend to be indirectly rather than directly implicated in industrial action and to work in industries less prone to industrial disputes;
- statistics of occupational injuries, given that men and women do very different jobs and thus face very different hazards.

All these topics are conventionally covered in national labour statistical programmes, as established by the ILO's Labour Statistics Convention, 1985 (No. 160), and therefore international guidelines on their measurement exist.²

However, it is clear that the topics likely to increase understanding of men's and women's position and interrelation in the labour market go well beyond those covered by conventional labour statistics. For example, information is needed on:

- the numbers of persons who "work" in the wider sense of the term, i.e. including workers producing goods and services for own consumption, given women's significant participation in these types of activity;
- workers' working-time arrangements, to indicate the degree to which men and women work in what is known as "regular full-time" working schedules or in more irregular schedules, such as intermittent or part-time employment, annualized working hours and other variable time schedules;
- overtime work, to evaluate whether establishments' responses to changing market demand affect men and women in different ways;
- absence from work, to indicate any differences in the types of absence taken by men and women, in particular in view of family responsibilities;
- occupational diseases, given men's tendency to be more exposed to injuries and women's tendency to be more exposed to diseases (Messing, 1998).

More information is also required on home-based work; contingent (or non-permanent) employment; levels of poverty; union participation; the duration of employment, unemployment and underemployment; access to productive resources; and the allocation of benefits among household members, etc. It may also be useful to calculate composite indexes or measures to reflect the respective occupational segregation, wage differentials, annual hours of work, etc., of men and women.

¹ The "number of persons employed" counts persons who work full time equally with those who work only a few hours during the week. Women work on average fewer hours than men (on economic activities) and as a consequence a measure of volume of employment based on the hours worked will reduce their relative participation in the labour market as compared to a measure based on head counts. Still, much of women's work remains unrecognized given that it excludes many unpaid activities carried out for the benefit of their households. If these activities were included in the scope of employment, and the hours spent in them were included in the measure of hours of work, then women's share of working hours would typically be greater than men's.

² Current international guidelines can be consulted at <http://www.ilo.org/stat/public/english/120stat/res/index.htm>.

Defining the topics

The crucial role played by definitions and classifications³ in the production of relevant statistics is often underestimated. Definitions and classifications determine what is to be covered and in how much detail, and are the basis for the whole data production process. Thus, the quality of the resulting figures depends on how well these definitions and classifications mirror the actual situation of the different participants in the labour market. A change in definition can cause a change in the resulting statistics which may not reflect any change in reality. Therefore, when analysing time series or cross-country data, it is important to assess first whether observed changes are actually due to difference in definition.

In order to be useful in making gender distinctions, definitions should recognize that women and men do not necessarily perform the same tasks, that they do not always behave in the same way, and that they are not subject to the same constraints. In this connection, coverage and detail are essential. Definitions need both to cover all qualifying work situations, regardless of whether they are performed by a man or a woman; and to describe the different work situations in sufficient detail to bring out any gender distinctions.

Coverage

The range of activities constituting what is understood as “work” affects the scope of all topics in labour statistics. Employment, unemployment and income statistics are concerned only with persons carrying out or seeking to carry out “work”. Occupational injury statistics include persons experiencing an injury only if it was sustained while performing such activities. And so on.

But, to be useful in making gender distinctions, “work” needs to cover *all* the activities carried out to produce the goods and services in society, regardless of whether they are remunerated, declared to the tax authorities, carried out intermittently, casually, simultaneously or seasonally, etc.; and regardless of whether the goods or services produced are intended for sale, for barter or for own household consumption. At present, however, the definition of “work” is limited to “economic” activities, i.e., those which contribute to the production of goods and services⁴ according to a country’s System of National Accounts (SNA). Such activities include those carried out to produce goods or render services for sale or barter in the market; and activities to produce goods for own consumption if they represent a significant proportion of those goods produced in the country. Domestic or personal services provided by unpaid house-

³ A classification groups together units of a “similar” kind — “similarity” being determined in relation to specific criteria related to a characteristic of the units — often hierarchically, in order to describe the characteristic in a systematic and simplified way. In labour statistics, the three major classifications concern occupations, industries and employment status.

⁴ Activities of this type may include: growing or gathering field crops, cutting firewood, carrying water, weaving baskets and mats, making clay pots and plates, weaving textiles, and other handicrafts.

hold members⁵ are excluded. In practice, few countries include the production of goods for own consumption within the scope of measured employment and none includes services for own consumption. Most work excluded from the scope of "economic" activities is done by women (UNDP, 1995), and this is an important cause of the underestimation of women's participation in production and of their contribution to the well-being of society. Thus, from the outset, labour statistics reflect at best a partial reality.

Child labour is one area in which such restricted coverage of "economic" activities dramatically affects the capacity of labour statistics to reflect reality. Statistics on child labour commonly show that more boys than girls work. This, however, conceals the fact that there are many children engaged in unpaid household activities who are prevented from going to school, just as if they were working for pay. As is to be expected, when these unpaid activities are included under child labour, it then emerges that more girls than boys work (Ashagrie, 1998). In view of the impact of such exclusions on policy decisions, the ILO systematically recommends that all countries include all (or a subset of) unpaid household activities in their national statistics on child labour.

Coverage of workers and work situations may also be affected by the criteria used to define a topic, and these often exclude particular groups of workers. Because the sex composition of these groups is generally uneven, the usefulness of resulting statistics for reflecting gender differences is hampered. Most of the time such exclusions affect more women than men, but not always. For example, some national definitions of employment exclude contributing (unpaid) family workers who work fewer than a fixed number of hours. The effect is probably greater on the number of women identified as employed, since unpaid family work is more prevalent among women than among men. Conversely, many countries exclude the armed forces from employment statistics, which affects more men than women. In many countries (e.g. in Scandinavia), a large proportion of paid workers are entitled to take relatively extended leave without losing their jobs, and national estimates of employment show a larger proportion of workers on extended forms of leave than those of other countries. Because of the likely family-related nature of such leave, e.g. for maternity reasons, most of these workers are women. The high levels of female employment reported in such countries may therefore partly reflect a definitional effect of generous leave entitlement, as in other countries an important proportion of these workers would not be classified as employed.

National definitions of employment in the informal sector may exclude persons whose main job is in the public service or agriculture, for example, but who have a second job in the informal sector; most of them are men. The definitions may also exclude certain activities in which women predominate, regardless of whether these activities otherwise satisfy the criteria for inclusion in the informal sector. Examples include: agricultural activities, activities by

⁵ Activities of this type include: cleaning dwelling and household goods; preparing and serving meals; caring for, training and instructing children; caring for the sick, invalid or old people; transporting household members or their goods, etc.

enterprises exclusively engaged in the production for own final use, activities of paid domestic workers and of outworkers.

Conversely, national definitions of time-related (or visible) underemployment, in line with international guidelines, generally exclude employed persons who work for more hours than a certain fixed threshold, which is considered to represent the level of "full-time employment" in legislation, collective agreements or usual practice in establishments. Those working at or above this threshold are considered to be fully employed even if they are willing and available to work additional hours. Unfortunately, in many countries the chosen threshold does not truly reflect "full" employment, because many workers are in fact compelled to work beyond those hours in order just to make a decent living. Most such workers are men.

National definitions of unemployment generally include ^{non}~~un~~employed persons who are "actively seeking work". But not everyone who wants to work actively seeks it, nor does everyone consider that their attempts to find it constitute "actively seeking work". Consequently, they do not report themselves as doing so. Thus, in countries where "formal" ways of finding work, e.g., through labour exchanges, are limited to the cities, or where more "informal" channels are commonly used, national definitions may exclude persons who are in fact looking for self-employment or for paid employment but who do not consider that their activities amount to "actively seeking work". Furthermore, in line with the standard international definition of unemployment, most national definitions exclude persons who want to work but do not "seek" work at all, either because work opportunities are so limited that they know there are none in practice, or because they have restricted labour mobility, or because they face discrimination or structural, social and cultural barriers in their search for work. Many of these workers, most of whom are women, tend to react positively to an actual chance of employment.

Statistics on income from employment also tend to be partial, for several reasons. They usually exclude wage and non-wage benefits such as social security benefits, profit-related pay and irregular payments, which may be significant in many cases and where differences between men and women may be important. Most important of all, national statistics usually exclude the remuneration of the self-employed where, again, there may be considerable differences between men and women.

Coverage may also be affected by the use of short reference periods. Definitions which aim at complete coverage of work situations should cover seasonal and occasional activities. However, international and national definitions of employment and unemployment generally provide an image of the labour force situation during a particular reference week. Statistics based on these definitions are useful for monitoring changes over time when the dominant form of employment is regular, full-time, non-agricultural, paid employment, but are less useful for monitoring other forms of employment. Since more women than men tend to work in seasonal and casual activities and/or on an intermittent basis throughout the year alternating household non-market activities with economic activities, measures of employment and unemployment based

on a short reference period can only partially reflect this more complex reality. In order to capture this fully, it is necessary to identify persons who experienced employment or unemployment at any time within a longer period, for example, 12 months. Statistics on the experience of employment or unemployment within a 12-month period exist in a number of countries, but they tend to identify the predominant activity over that period, in line with international guidelines. However, this measure conceals seasonal patterns of work and excludes persons who, though working part of the year, are inactive for most of it. Many of these workers are women.

Detail

For definitions to be useful for gender concerns they need to ensure that men's and women's characteristics are described in sufficient detail to allow significant distinctions to emerge. The classification of occupations, for example, needs to be refined at a detailed level (Anker, 1998). If only broad occupational groups are used, the occupational segregation between men and women remains hidden: an analysis of the managerial group as a whole, for example, will not reveal that women managers tend to be concentrated in small enterprises, while managers in larger companies are men.

Similarly, to detect gender differences in workers' employment status, it is not enough merely to distinguish between "employees", "employers" and "own account workers", as most countries do. These are very heterogeneous categories, each comprising a diversity of employment situations. For example, the category "employees" includes not only regular employees but also outworkers (home-based workers), casual employees, work-gang members, etc. Women tend to predominate in the latter situations. In addition to employers and core own-account workers, the category of "self-employed workers" includes subsistence workers, share croppers, members of producer cooperatives, etc., amongst whom women are particularly numerous.

In income statistics, the various components of income must be identified separately, as they may not accrue to women and men to the same degree. For example, in systems where income statistics include social security benefits received by virtue of workers' employment status (as recommended in international guidelines), a worker's income includes all such benefits relating to his or her dependants. Similarly, the income of self-employed workers includes the income generated by the economic activities of the worker's contributing (unpaid) family members, as well as dependants' social security benefits. As men tend to be the primary earners in households, these income components can be expected to be more important for them than for women. Therefore, income statistics that include such components probably show a greater disparity between men and women in employment than statistics which do not include them. Estimates of the value of unpaid work are also important for gender distinctions. If such estimates attribute an economic value to unpaid work (most of it by women), this tends to reduce the differences between the measured contributions of men and women to the economy or their households.

Similarly, to enable valid gender comparisons as regards working time, it is important to separate out its various components (e.g., overtime, absence from work, work at home, travelling time, etc.), as they may affect women and men to different degrees.

Another relevant issue here is the need for female and male workers' characteristics to be described equally in substance and in detail. For example, all occupational groups at each level of a national classification of occupations should be identified separately to the same extent according to specified criteria. Thus, it is important to evaluate whether the distinctions made in occupational groups in which women predominate (e.g., clerical, agricultural and elementary occupations) are as detailed as those made in occupational groups where men predominate (e.g., in crafts and machine operators). Most national classifications tend to bulk in a few occupational groups the jobs in which women predominate, whereas jobs where men are numerous tend to be distinguished in greater detail.

In practice, women's situation may not be described equally as regards employment status. According to international guidelines, women who work in association, and on an equal footing, with their husbands in a family enterprise, are in partnership with them and should therefore be classified in the same employment status category as they are, i.e. as "core own-account workers" or "employers". However, there is a tendency in national statistics to classify women in such situations as contributing (or unpaid) family workers.

Many of the shortcomings found in national statistics regarding coverage and detail are due to measurement limitations. As will be seen below, measurement methodologies often limit the type and range of information that can be produced. However, in other cases, some of the responsibility lies with the international guidelines which serve as models for national definitions. International guidelines seldom explicitly address the implications for gender of using one set of criteria as opposed to another. Though it may not always be possible or practical to revise these guidelines, it may be useful for the ILO to recommend that those groups of workers who tend to be excluded from the various labour topics be identified and described separately.

Measurement methods

The choice of measurement method can also affect the extent to which the resulting statistics reveal possible gender differences. Labour statistics are collected through household-based surveys, establishment-based surveys and administrative records. Each methodology has distinct features regarding the workers and work situations covered, and the control over the type and range of data collected. To understand the strengths and limitations of data gathered by each method and to interpret the resulting statistics correctly, it is important to be aware of these differences.

Administrative records, for example, contain information registered as a result of the administrative functions of an agency, e.g. an employment

exchange office, insurance company, social security institution, tax authority or labour inspectorate. These records can provide information about each unit in the population covered by the agency's operations, so statistics can be produced for small geographical areas and population groups. Establishment-based surveys generally require the respondents to search for the requested information in records kept by employers about individual workers or about groups of workers in the establishments. These records may be able to provide information that is accurate and consistent over time on employment, earnings and hours of work over a specified period of time, depending on the record-keeping needs and practices of the establishment. Household-based surveys obtain information from the workers themselves through replies to a standard questionnaire, and can enumerate the whole population (population censuses) or a sample of it (household sample surveys). They are able to cover a much larger range of subjects than the other types of sources, because the subjects that can be covered are limited only by the capacity of household members to provide the information from their own knowledge; but when they are based on samples, the detail the resulting statistics can provide is limited.

Coverage of topics

Statistics obtained from records kept by establishments and by other agencies are limited by the type and range of information available. Establishment records are designed to monitor payment and attendance, and the records kept by other agencies are designed to support administrative procedures; in neither case is information recorded to provide the basis for statistics. The definitions used by these records do not therefore necessarily correspond to statistical definitions and in many cases little can be done to adjust the resulting data (ILO/EASMAT, 1997). For example, establishments record paid overtime and authorized leave, which are not equivalent to total overtime and actual leave: the implication for gender distinctions depends on whether men and women experience recorded overtime and authorized leave to the same extent as they do total overtime and actual leave. Employers include in their wage records all regular cash payments to employees, but may exclude payments in kind, one-off payments, such as profit-related bonuses, 13th month payments, etc. (ILO, 1998); the implication for gender differences will be important if the excluded components accrue predominantly to one or other sex. Conversely, records kept by insurance companies on occupational injuries typically concern compensated injuries only and records kept by employment offices on unemployment and underemployment relate only to persons who register there to find work. Moreover, the administrative procedure may discriminate against women or men, thus under-reporting their actual numbers: for instance, persons in precarious employment situations may be disqualified from claiming compensation when they are injured — a situation that may affect more women than men (Messing, 1998).

Furthermore, records kept by establishments or administrative agencies may not include information about characteristics which are useful for understanding gender issues properly. For example, they may not register informa-

tion on the age of workers, their level of education or other descriptive characteristics. Sometimes, the records do not even include information whereby it is possible to differentiate between men and women workers!

By contrast with information stemming from registers, household-based surveys permit far more control over the type and range of data collected, the underlying concepts, data item definitions and classifications. This measurement method can be rendered largely independent of respondents' perceptions or understanding of the concepts used for statistics. The classification of a person in a particular category can be determined on the basis of combined replies to a sequence of questions rather than on the reply to a direct question which requires respondents to classify themselves on the basis of their own understanding of their work situation. For example, persons can be classified as unemployed on the basis of whether they actively sought work and were available for work (the defining criteria), rather than on their own understanding of what it means to be unemployed. Similarly, quantitative information, for example on hours of work or on income, can be determined on the basis of replies to the elements that compose the measure, instead of on direct questions of the type: "How many hours did you work last week?" or "How much did you earn last month?". The challenge is to formulate questions that ensure accurate application of the defining criteria. The more independent the measure is of workers' perceptions of their situation, the higher the chance that women will receive equal statistical treatment.

Unfortunately, in practice this approach is not widely used in household-based surveys, given the need to limit the size of questionnaires and the length of interviews. In addition, respondents may not understand or may misinterpret the questions being asked and they may forget certain activities or purposely provide incorrect information, especially on sensitive subjects, such as income. When a household member gives information about other members of the households, she or he may not be fully aware of those persons' activities, in particular if these occur irregularly.

Coverage of workers

Records kept by establishments or administrative agencies rarely cover the whole population, and the excluded groups are generally those in which women predominate, which reduces the usefulness of these sources for making gender distinctions. Establishment-based surveys tend to cover only regular employees who work in medium-sized and large establishments. They may exclude managerial staff as well as peripheral workers, such as outworkers, part-time workers, casual employees and workers contracted from agencies. Similarly, administrative records cover only persons concerned by the work of the agencies which keep them. In many countries, this coverage is very low relative to the total employed population, being limited to regular full-time employees in the formal sector and excluding self-employed workers, casual and seasonal employees, outworkers and sometimes also part-time workers. As women tend to predominate in the excluded groups of workers, administrative

records cannot be expected fully to reflect their characteristics and contribution in the economy. For example, employment statistics based on insurance records obviously include only insured workers. Unemployment insurance records provide information only on persons entitled to benefits when not working or on employed persons entitled to benefits when working fewer hours than their contractual hours. And statistics on industrial disputes largely concern legal strikes involving a large number of workers and lasting several days, tend to record only workers directly involved, and to exclude workers indirectly affected, of whom many are women.

Unlike establishment-based surveys and administrative records, household-based surveys can cover all workers, including the self-employed, casual workers, unpaid family workers, outworkers and paid workers in small production units. Given that these are groups in which women predominate, it is thus the best source for statistics properly reflecting gender-based differences.

Presentation of data

The way statistics are presented is central to the reflection of gender concerns. Tables and figures should portray differences in men's and women's contributions, conditions and constraints. This implies disaggregation by variables which describe the demographic, economic, social and family context of workers. All statistics on the numbers of employed and unemployed persons and their characteristics should make it possible to compare women with men. This means that, as a minimum, establishments' records and other administrative records should include information on persons' sex and that the statistical system should always publish statistics disaggregated by sex.

But statistics on the characteristics of workers should also be disaggregated by other variables which help describe the differences or similarities between men and women. For example, statistics on income should distinguish workers' hours of work and level of education, two factors which affect the level of total income earned. Similarly, for a more comprehensive picture of men's and women's occupational injuries, statistics should be presented for hours of work and seniority, and be shown by occupational groups.

Most important of all, statistics on the structure and characteristics of the labour force should be disaggregated by variables which reflect workers' personal and family situation, in order to provide a more complete picture of women's labour force participation and behaviour compared to men's. Such variables include age, level of education, whether the household includes children needing care, or other adults requiring assistance (e.g., handicapped persons, older family members), etc. All these factors variously constrain the time and energy which women and men can devote to their "economic" work. In many societies, a person's marital status also strongly affects participation in the labour force, and in polygamous societies an important variable is rank within marriage (ACOPAM, 1996). Another relevant descriptive variable is the type of household (e.g., single parent, female headed, etc.).

Though these variables are essential to the description of gender-based differences and similarities in the labour market, few countries actually present their statistics in this way. One reason may be that only household-based surveys are sufficiently flexible to produce such statistics, but the fact that international guidelines have never addressed the importance of linking labour market topics with workers' family context is certainly also important.

Conclusion

This article presents a number of features which labour statistics should display if they are usefully to address gender concerns. First of all, they need to cover topics which are relevant to revealing gender distinctions and similarities in the world of work.

Second, these topics must be defined and measured in such a way as to achieve complete coverage of workers and work situations, and to describe their characteristics in sufficient detail to make these distinctions apparent. At present, the coverage of workers and work situations remains incomplete mainly because the defined scope of labour statistics excludes unpaid services for own household consumption and, consequently, the contribution to the economy of a vast number of workers, most of whom are women. Furthermore, certain groups of workers tend to be excluded from the scope of the various topics because of the criteria used in the definitions, or because of coverage limitations of the data collection method used. Because the sex composition of these groups is not generally even, the usefulness of the resulting statistics for reflecting gender issues is reduced. To improve this situation, it may be useful to develop international guidelines on how to identify and describe better the groups of workers who tend to be excluded from statistics.

Finally, in order adequately to pinpoint the factors that cause differences between men and women at work, a minimum requirement is sex disaggregation of information. But that alone is not sufficient. Data on the persons' work situation must be presented in the context of their personal and family situation, particularly as regards the presence of young children and/or other members requiring care in the household — a practice currently adopted by only a few countries.

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