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Updating the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO)

Summary of Outstanding Structural Issues for Resolution, April 2007

International Labour Organization



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Organisation internationale du Travail
Organización Internacional del Trabajo

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Introduction

1. This paper summarises the main questions concerning the structure of ISCO-08 that will need to be resolved before the draft classification structure can be finalised for consideration by the Tripartite Meeting of Experts in Labour Statistics, to be convened by the International Labour Office (ILO), from 3 – 6 December 2007.

2. In addition to the issues summarised below, an expected joint submission from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the OECD on ‘cultural’ occupations is likely to have an impact on the classification structure. A larger number of more detailed issues also need to be resolved and will be discussed by the Technical Expert Group for updating ISCO (TEG/ISCO).

Information and communications technology (ICT) occupations

3. The treatment in the draft of occupations in ICT has generally been well accepted by those who have commented on the draft. There are some cases, nevertheless, where further discussion and consultation may be needed.

4. The draft makes a distinction at minor group level between **Web technicians** and **ICT operations and user support technicians**. There is concern, however, that as the World Wide Web becomes closely integrated with almost all aspects of information technology, this distinction may cease to be meaningful. The need for a separate minor group for Web technicians will be reconsidered once definitions of the relevant categories have been developed and circulated for comment.

5. **Hardware engineers and technicians** have been included in the same Sub-major groups as ICT Professionals and Technicians, but the debate as to whether these occupations should be classified with engineering occupations rather than with ICT occupations is not entirely closed.

6. There is agreement that there is a need for a category for **ICT systems testers** but some debate about whether they should be classified in Major group 2, Professionals, or in Major group 3, Technicians and associate professionals. This is because systems testing is seen as an integral part of the work performed by software and applications developers and analysts. A final decision will be made once a definition of the proposed Unit group 3513, Systems testing technicians, has been developed and circulated for comment. It is also important to note that this group excludes telecommunications hardware systems testers.

Managers

7. The overall approach towards the classification of managerial occupations in the draft ISCO-08 has been well received as it overcomes many of the difficulties inherent in the approach used in ISCO-88. There are a few cases, however, where there may be a need to make adjustments, to ensure that the all managerial occupations can be appropriately coded to the new ISCO.

8. The ISCO-88 Unit groups 1221, Production and operations department managers in agriculture forestry and fishing and 1311, General managers in agriculture forestry and fishing have been removed from Major Group 1 in the current draft. In the draft circulated with the second questionnaire a minor group was proposed for **Farm, Forestry and Fisheries Managers**. The distinction between this group and farmers that do not have a significant management function is not feasible, however, in a number of countries where large scale farming is prevalent (Eg Australia, Canada). The occupations included within this category have therefore been moved to Sub-Major Group 61, Market-oriented skilled agricultural, fisheries and forestry workers, and have been merged with the relevant supervisory groups.

9. Before this proposed change can be finalised, however, further consultation is necessary with both the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation and with countries in Africa, Asia and the Americas where both large scale plantation style and small scale traditional agricultural production are common. For example, we need to consider whether it is appropriate to classify occupations such as 'Coffee plantation manager' in the proposed Unit group 6111, Crop farm managers and supervisors.

10. A consequence of the proposed change is that there is now no logical place in the draft structure for managers of forestry and fisheries operations. This issue will need to be addressed if the treatment of farm managers is not changed.

11. In addition there is a need to specify the content of the proposed Minor group 135 , **Other professional services managers**, and to consider whether a unit group 1219, **Business administration managers not elsewhere classified** should be created.

Occupations related to health services

12. A large number of issues with the classification of occupations related to the provision of health services has been resolved. The ILO is currently undertaking discussions with the World Health Organisation (WHO) with respect to a small number of outstanding questions.

13. It has been agreed that **Veterinarians** and **Veterinary technicians and assistants** will be included in the sub-major groups for health professionals and associate professionals respectively, because of the strong similarity in field of knowledge required and tasks performed. WHO has proposed the creation of separate minor groups, within the health sub-major groups, for Veterinarians and for Veterinary technicians and assistants, so that data on human health professionals and technicians is visible in statistics disseminated at the 3-digit level of ISCO. The ILO has some reservations about this, however, as we have been trying to avoid creating minor groups that contain relatively small numbers of jobs, in order to make the 3-digit level of the classification more usable for the dissemination of data from sample surveys.

14. The classification of **paramedical workers** and **medical assistants** needs further consideration. Most of these jobs are classified in ISCO-88 Unit group 3221, Medical assistants (or Feldschers). In Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Africa however many of the

jobs classified here involve working independently of doctors, and tasks performed include diagnosis, prescribing drugs and performing surgery such example appendectomy and Caesarean section. This is an important issue since, in many countries, these occupational groups are central to the provision of health services due to acute shortages of medical doctors and nurses.

15. The TEG-ISCO felt that those who work more or less independently of doctors should be classified in Major group 2, Professionals but separately from medical doctors and from nursing professionals. Those who primarily provide assistance to doctors (for example Physician's assistants in the United States of America) should be classified in Major group 3, Technicians and Associate professionals. A minor group for Paramedical professionals has therefore been created in Sub-major group 22, Health professionals. More information and development work is needed before this approach can be finalised, however. There is a need, in particular, to consider the tasks, duties and knowledge associated with occupation titles such as 'clinical officer', 'medical assistant' and 'surgical assistant' in Africa.

16. A related problem is the treatment of **Emergency paramedics**. These workers perform diagnosis and administer treatment at the scene of accidents and other medical emergencies. A unit group for emergency paramedics has been proposed in the new minor group 'Paramedical practitioners'. It seems, however, that this occupation may exist in only a relatively small number of countries and that there may be concerns about the feasibility of identifying the group separately from Ambulance officers.

Building caretakers

17. **Building caretakers** were missing from the drafts circulated with the Second Questionnaire on updating ISCO and in February 2007. They were moved out of Major Group 9, Elementary workers, where they are classified in ISCO-88, on the basis that the range of tasks performed suggests a higher skill level than that required for Major group 9. Important tasks are technical maintenance of ventilation and heating systems as well as the provision of services to occupants and owners of the building. We need to determine where in the ISCO-08 structure they should be classified. Minor groups 512, 713 and 754 are possibilities. It is currently proposed to include them in Minor Group 512, renamed as Housekeepers, caretakers and cleaning supervisors.

Conclusion

18. The Expert Group may wish to discuss the issues summarised in the paper and make suggestions about the approach the ILO should take towards the resolution of each of the problems identified. Members are invited to identify any further issues and concerns that need to be considered by the ILO in finalising the classification structure.