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ISCO-08 - Current Status and plans to support implementation

ILO



International Labour Organization
Organisation internationale du Travail
Organización Internacional del Trabajo

**ISCO-08 - Current Status and plans to support
implementation**

**Paper for discussion by the United Nations Expert Group on
International Economic and Social Classifications, New York,
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DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS

Introduction and current status of ISCO-08

1 At its last meeting the Expert Group reviewed the proposed structure of the International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (ISCO-08) and discussed the plans of the International Labour Office (ILO) to support implementation of the classification in national and regional contexts.

2 The final ISCO-08 was adopted in December 2007 by a Meeting of Experts in Labour Statistics as mandated in 2003 by a resolution of the 17th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) and in line with a request of the UN Statistical Commission. The resolution adopting ISCO-08 was endorsed by the ILO Governing Body in March 2008 and the updated classification was subsequently presented to the sessions in 2008 of the UN Statistical Commission and the 18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians.

3 The final classification structure has been available in English, French and Spanish on the ILO Website since early 2008. A final draft in English of the detailed definitions of all ISCO-08 groups was released on the ILO Website in July 2009. Correspondence tables with ISCO-88 are also available. It is anticipated that an updated English index of occupational titles will be released in the near future. This material, together with an updated introduction, will then be released as an ILO publication following formal editing.

4 French and Spanish versions of the above material will be provided as quickly as possible. It is understood that Eurostat is working with national agencies in relevant member states of the European Union to produce versions of the ISCO-08 structure (but not definitions of groups) in European Union languages other than English, French and Spanish.

Implementation of ISCO-08

5 To provide support for the implementation of ISCO-08, and in collaborating with countries or groups of countries that want to adapt ISCO-08 for national or regional use, the highest priority will be given to finalising and releasing the above materials. The need for material in selected other languages that are used in a significant numbers of countries is also recognized.

6 The ILO also proposes to prepare a manual and training material on how to adapt ISCO-08 for use in national and regional settings; to provide training on a regional or sub-regional basis; to provide technical assistance and advice directly to countries; and to assist with and review of correspondence tables between national classifications and ISCO-08. This overall strategy was discussed by the Expert Group in 2007. The relative priority given to each of these activities needs to be given further consideration, however, in view of the imminence of the 2010 round of population censuses.

7 The proposed manual discussing how to use ISCO-08 and adapt it for use in national censuses and surveys would cover the following topics:

- the concept of occupation and why we need to classify statistical and administrative data by occupation;
- introduction to ISCO-08, its underlying principles and structure, and what has changed from ISCO-88;
- understanding specific national requirements for occupational data and the occupational structure of the national labour market;
- how to adapt ISCO-08 to satisfy these needs while retaining comparability with the international standard;
- collecting and processing data on occupation in surveys and censuses;
- development, use and maintenance of a national coding index for occupation;
- development of correspondence tables between old and new classifications and between national classifications and ISCO; and
- international reporting of occupation data.

Provision of training

8 The originally proposed series of regional or sub-regional workshops would present the above material to representatives from both ministries of labour and national statistical offices. This would facilitate understanding and discussion among countries of problem and difficult areas of ISCO with particular reference to local circumstances. The aim would be to support the development of national and regional strategies for development and implementation of occupation classifications based on ISCO-08 and of opportunities for regional collaboration. Funding for such workshops has yet to be obtained, however.

9 Since, in many countries the national Census for the 2010 round will take place in the near future, there is an increasing need for urgent assistance relating to the collection, coding and classification of occupation data in the Census. This need is usually manifested as a need for assistance with question design, data collection, the coding of open-ended questions on occupation and the development of coding indexes. Countries that have not collected data on occupation in a Census or household survey for many years may have very little experience or infrastructure to support coding operations. Similar problems exist for coding of industry (of employment) in household based collections, especially in countries that have large informal sectors and where business registers cover only a small proportion of total employment.

10 An alternative approach, therefore, would be to provide targeted training to statistical offices that are about to undertake a national census, or the first labour force survey in many years. This would ideally be provided via workshops for relatively small groups of countries. The training would focus on the particularities of data collection and coding of both industry and occupation in household-based collections while covering the conceptual and practical elements of occupation and industry classification at a more general level. The workshops would expand on material presented in Chapters X and XI of the Handbook on Measuring the Economically Active Population and Related Characteristics in Population Censuses, authored

jointly by UNSD and ILO.ⁱ

Provision of technical assistance and advice directly to countries

11 Requests for technical assistance with occupation and other classification issues from individual countries and regions are being assessed on a case-by-case basis. The ILO capacity to respond to such requests is limited, however, due to the limited availability of both funds and suitably qualified staff and consultants. It will be important, therefore, to ensure that the provision such support is appropriately prioritized. The ILO will endeavour to establish a network of consultants who may be able to collaborate in the provision of technical assistance.

12 One suggested approach would be to provide support on a relatively intensive basis to a small number of countries. These countries may then be in a position to provide support to neighbouring or similar countries, or play a leadership role in the development of regional adaptations of ISCO-08.

13 During the initial phase of implementation and adaptation, there may be many requests for advice about the most appropriate location in the classification of specific job titles. To facilitate self help and international consistency, it is proposed to create a database of these requests and of the responses to them, and to make these available in anonymous form on the ISCO Website.

Conclusion

14 Since training can be provided at relatively short notice, whereas completion of a manual is likely to take some time, it may be appropriate to give highest priority to provision of training on a sub-regional basis, while responding on a needs basis to requests for direct assistance from individual countries. The sub-regional training would focus either on development of occupation classifications (paragraph 8 above) or on data collection and coding for occupation and industry (paragraph 11 above) depending on local needs and availability of funding. The training material could then be further developed, expanded and refined based on experience as part of the development of the manual.

15 Members of the Expert Group may wish to comment on the relative priorities for the activities discussed in this paper and make any suggestions they consider appropriate regarding the issues raised.

ⁱ To be published as soon as possible but currently available as a final draft on the UNSD Website: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/census3.htm>