

## ▶ Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic

October 2020

# Gender relevance of the 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS statistical standards

### Key points

- ▶ In October 2013 updated statistical standards were adopted at the 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS. The standards create a wider framework of statistics on work and labour, establishing the base for more gender relevant analysis. The need for this has never been higher given the unequal effect of the COVID-19 crisis on women's and men's working lives.
- ▶ Data collected during an extensive round of pilot studies highlights the analytical power created to understand differences in women's and men's work and how this impacts labour market engagement. As one example this shows that women are more likely to engage in multiple forms of work, do more unpaid work, and have a higher total work burden when paid and unpaid work are counted.
- ▶ Achieving the analytical potential requires the implementation of the 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards and the mainstreaming of measurement of different forms of work.

## ▶ Introduction

Just one of the many messages that we can take from the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing crisis is that good data is essential to observe and address inequalities. COVID-19 has been shown to have exacerbated inequalities in the world of work, [notably those between women and men](#). However, the data to show this, and monitor any progress to close those gaps are scarce. In addition, as observed by [Data2x](#), available statistics are insufficiently engendered to create proper understanding of gender gaps.

Action is needed to address this if we are to have any hope to assess the effects of policies implemented to [build back fairer](#) from the pandemic. An important step in the right direction was taken through the adoption of [new statistical standards at the 19<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Labour Statisticians \(ICLS\)](#) in 2013. These standards, substantially reshaped the framework of labour related statistics. One of the key motivators for the new standards was a desire to better explain differences in the working

contributions and experiences of women and men.

One part of this was to refine [existing definitions of employment and unemployment](#) adopted more than 30 years earlier at the 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS. However, the new standards go further by proposing additional indicators of labour underutilization and defining a broader concept of work (including both paid and unpaid work), which consists of multiple forms of work, now separately defined for measurement. This creates a dual and overlapping framework for statistics on labour market engagement and working activities, which is analytically very powerful.

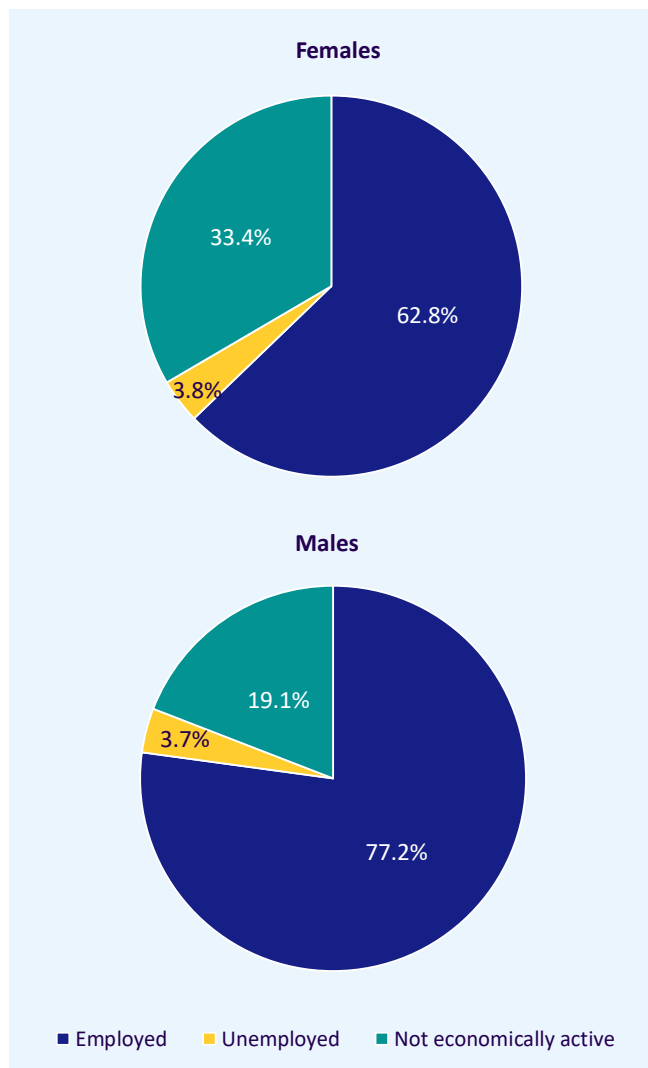
The remainder of this note illustrates the key gender relevant differences between the two sets of standards using experimental data collected through an extensive set of pilot studies organized by the ILO between 2015 and 2017. In doing so it hopes to highlight the benefits of implementation of the standards and thereby promote wide application.

## ► 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS – key indicators and range of analysis

The 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS has performed a very important function for over 3 decades, as the reference point for statistics on economic activity and labour force status. However, over time acknowledgement of weaknesses grew, including the relatively narrow range of key indicators it proposed. Further, the definition of employment was wide by design, covering, in theory a wide range of paid and unpaid productivity activities in order to achieve alignment with the System of National Accounts.

The 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS classified the working age population by economic activity into 3 main groups, namely employed, unemployed and not economically active (see **Figure 1**).

► **Figure 1. Economic activity classification of working age population by sex, in line with 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards**

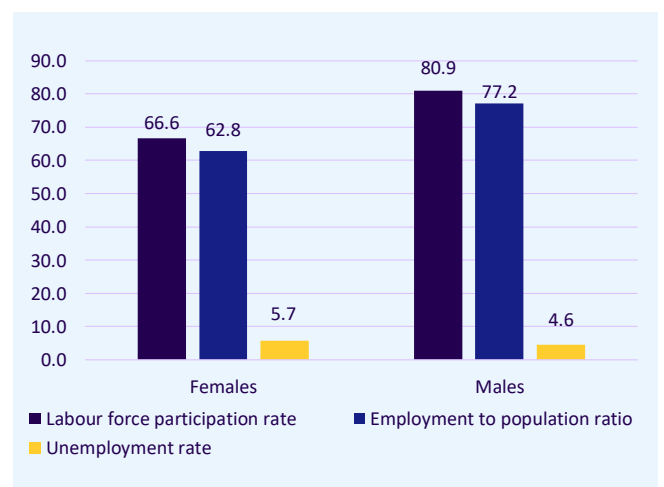


Under that framework, estimates of the level of employment and unemployment became the central focus of labour market statistics, along with indicators built from them, such as the labour force participation rate, employment-to-population ratio and unemployment rate (see **Figure 2**).

Using the data from the ILO pilot studies, this would have generated comparisons such as:

- A much higher labour force participation among male respondents (80.9% for men compared with 66.6% for female respondents), see **Figure 2**. By extension, this meant a much higher proportion of women were identified as not economically active (33.4% vs. 19.1%), see **Figure 1**.
- The employment to population ratio among male respondents (77.2%) was higher than female respondents (62.8%), see **Figure 2**.
- A similar proportion of working age respondents in unemployment (3.7% for males and 3.8% for females), see **Figure 1**, although this still translated to a higher unemployment rate among women (5.7% compared with 4.6% for men) given lower labour force participation among females and the fact that the unemployment rate uses the labour force as the denominator, see **Figure 2**.

► **Figure 2. Key labour market indicators in line with 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards, by sex**



## Working time

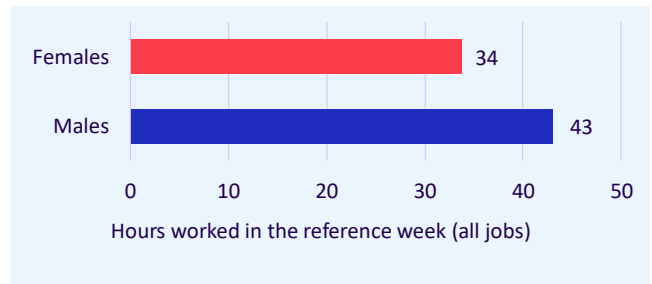
Working time measures were usually highlighted, such as those presented in **Figure 3**, generally showing that men had longer working time on average than women.

For example, in the case of the pilot studies covered by this note, males worked higher average hours in employment than females (43 hours versus 34 hours in the reference week) applying the 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS definition of employment.

Further to the estimates of economic activity and working time highlighted above, various disaggregations can be generated (age, urban/rural, economic sector, occupation, informality, status in employment) to supplement the

analysis of headline indicators. However, the data shown in figures 1 to 3 were the typical core of analysis of data generated when applying the 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS.

► **Figure 3. Average working time in employment in line with 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards, by sex**



## ► 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS – key indicators and range of analysis

Essentially the 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards completely transform and expand the range of analysis possible. While employment and unemployment remain key concepts, they now sit within a **dual framework of labour force status and labour underutilization**, and **forms of work**. Both elements of the new dual framework are particularly relevant to our understanding of the impacts of COVID-19 on the world of work.

Improving the gender relevance of statistics on work was a key motivator of many of the changes introduced. Among other things, the new standards seek to address the unintentional gender bias created by the wide employment definition established by the 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards. The lack of differentiation between paid and unpaid working activities, designed to achieve alignment with the System of National Accounts, masked the true scale of gender differences given the higher prevalence among females of unpaid working activities classified as employment. The 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards address this by refining existing definitions and defining multiple forms of paid and unpaid work for separate measurement.

## Labour force status and labour underutilization

Starting with labour force status and labour underutilization the main developments are:

- Refined definitions of employment and unemployment - most notably a narrower definition of employment now referring to work for pay or

profit. In principle, the new definitions can lead to lower employment estimates and higher unemployment estimates as compared with those based on the 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS (depending on country context and measurement practices).

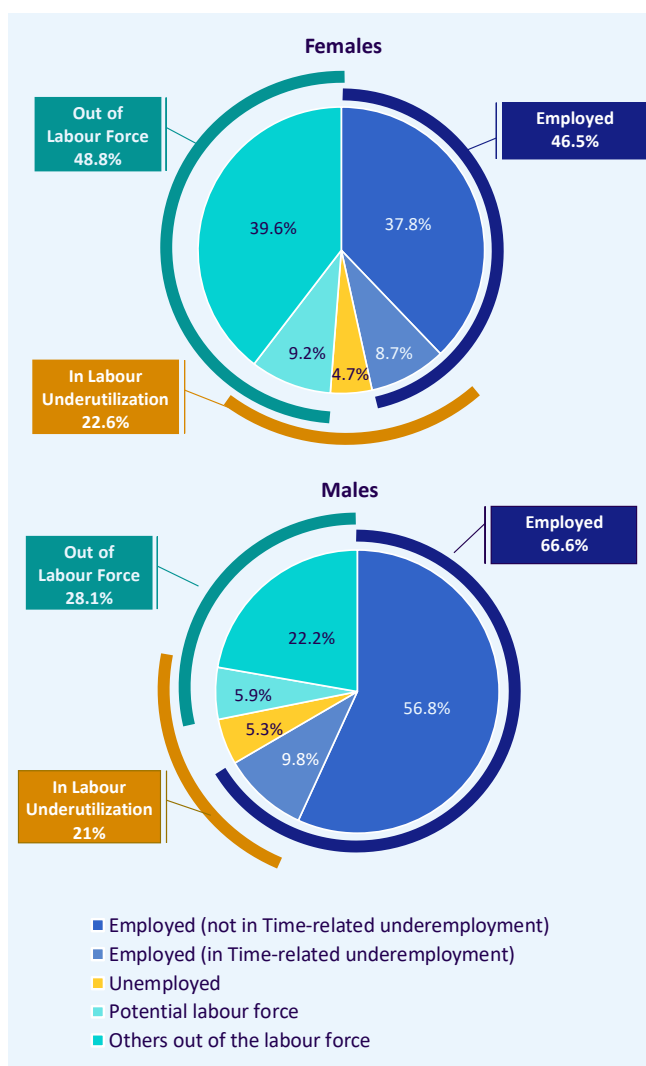
- A wider range of labour underutilization indicators incorporating people in *time-related underemployment* and the *potential labour force*. Both these groups report an insufficient volume of paid work with respect to their preferred situation. While the unemployment rate will remain a key indicator, these groups can be used to produce valuable supplementary analysis of labour underutilization. *Unemployment, time-related underemployment and the potential labour force* can be combined into 4 indicators as proposed within the standards, namely LU1 to LU4, which in combination present a more comprehensive view of people with inadequate volume of work than the unemployment rate alone.

**Figure 4** below illustrates how the working age population can be classified between different groups and sub-groups, when applying the new standards.

Comparing **Figure 4** with **Figure 1** it is easy to see how much richer the information provided by the new standards is.

The main labour underutilization indicators proposed by the 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards are illustrated in **Figure 5** below, but many others can be produced, depending on the scope of the analysis.

**Figure 4. Classification of labour force status and labour underutilization of working age population by sex, in line with 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards**



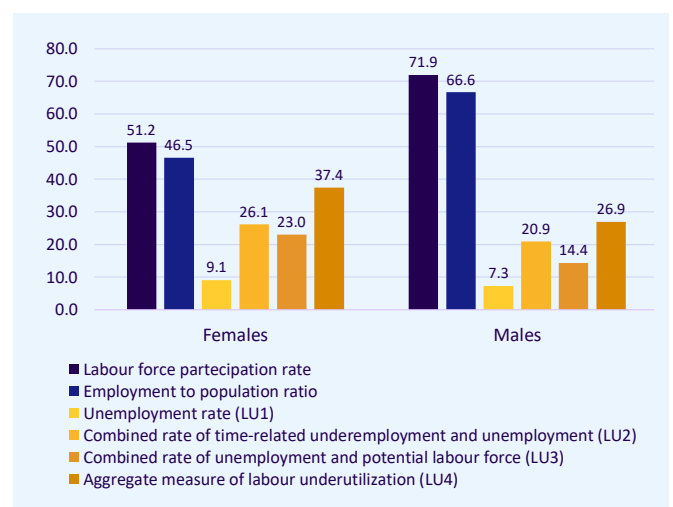
Comparing the figures obtained using the old and the new standards, some of the conclusions of gender relevance we can draw from this include:

- The employment to population ratio of both male and female respondents falls (as expected) versus the standards from the 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS, from 62.8% to 46.5% for females and from 77.2% to 66.6% for males. As expected, the decrease is much higher for women, who are more typically engaged in unpaid work for the production of food for family consumption (which is excluded from employment under the new standards but proposed for separate measurement and reporting).

- The proportion of male and female respondents of working age who were unemployed increased. Along with a reduction in the size of the labour force (the denominator for the unemployment rate - the LU1 indicator) increased when applying the new standards - from 4.6% to 7.3% for males, and from 5.7% to 9.1% for females.
- The additional labour underutilization components (time-related underemployment and potential labour force) covered 17.9% of female respondents of working age and 15.7% of male respondents (see **Figure 4**), groups not visible under the 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards. Males were relatively more likely to be in time related underemployment (9.8% compared with 8.7% of females) while females were relatively more likely to be in the potential labour force (9.2% as compared with 5.9% of males).

The extent of gender gaps vary by component of labour underutilization. Only taking the unemployment rate - as this was the only indicator proposed under the 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS framework - would show a higher prevalence among females but a relatively low gender gap (1.8 percentage points higher than males). However, the new labour underutilization indicators, proposed in the 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards (see LU2, LU3 and LU4 in **Figure 5**) highlight much larger groups of respondents and more substantial gender gaps. In fact, when considering all the components of labour underutilization, the aggregate measure LU4 reached a level of 37.4% of the extended labour force<sup>1</sup> for females, and the 26.9% for males, a gender gap of 10.5 percentage points.

**Figure 5. Key labour market indicators in line with 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards, by sex**



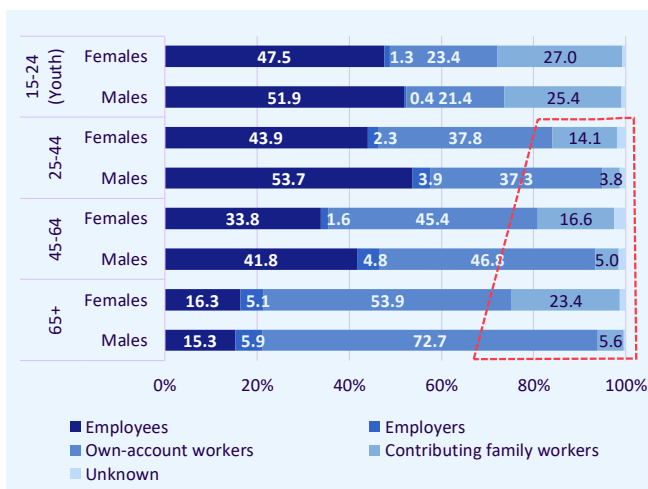
<sup>1</sup> The extended labour force includes the Employed, Unemployed, and Potential labour force. As indicated in the 19<sup>th</sup> Resolution, it is used as denominator for the LU3 and LU4 indicators.

While these precise patterns and gender gaps would be different across settings, the key message remains that the new indicators enable a substantially expanded view of labour underutilization, identify large groups of people with an unfulfilled demand for paid work, and will reveal patterns that are highly gender relevant.

As mentioned with respect to the 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards headline indicators of employment and labour underutilization will be supplemented with many disaggregations, some of which were already being generated under the 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards, but which become even more meaningful when the 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards are applied due to the updated definitions.

Taking just one example, an analysis of employment **by status in employment** (in the main job) and age-group helps to highlight important gender differences.

► **Figure 6. Employed males and females by status in employment of the main job and age group**



We can draw many messages about difference in status in employment from **Figure 6**, for example that males were more likely to be employers than females, while females were more likely to be contributing family workers (CFW). However, more nuanced patterns also become visible when we add breakdowns by age group. For example, while it was relatively common for both men and women aged 15-24 to be CFWs, it was very infrequently reported for males in older age groups. However, it continued to be reported among reasonable proportions of female respondents across all age groups. In summary, this suggests that while CFW was a transitory status for young males, it was ultimately a more persistent status among females within the samples covered by the studies. This can reflect differences in perceived or actual roles within family businesses (even where both remain engaged with the family business), or a more general greater ability of

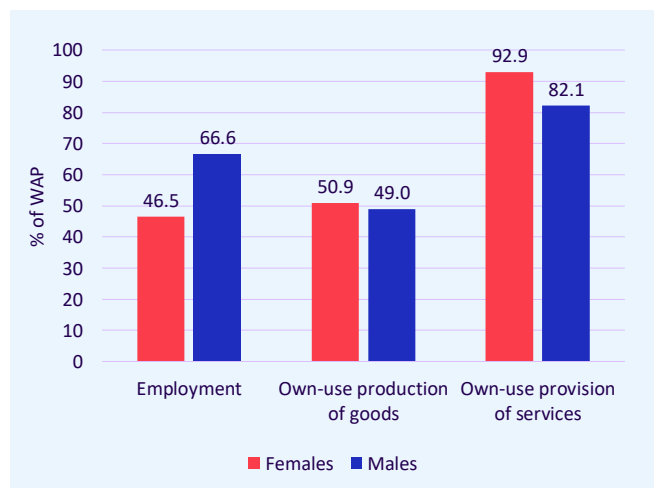
males to separate themselves from a status as unpaid helper in a family business.

## Forms of work framework

Turning to the forms of work framework, the framework enables us to provide measures of participation in different forms of paid and unpaid work. The pilot study covered **employment** and **own-use production work** (both to produce goods for the family or household, such as subsistence farming, or to provide services such as unpaid care work or other household services). We can use the data generated to highlight the level of participation in each of those activities among different sub-groups of the working age population, as well as looking at participation in multiple paid and unpaid working activities (**double burden**) and working time across forms of work and different work activities.

Starting with participation rates in each form of work, **Figure 7** shows that while participation in employment was higher among males (consistent with the 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS, see **Figure 2**), we can now see that female participation in the unpaid working activities was higher, most notably in the case of own-use provision of services (92.9% versus 82.1% for males).

► **Figure 7. Rates of participation in paid and unpaid work (19<sup>th</sup> ICLS), by sex and type of activity**

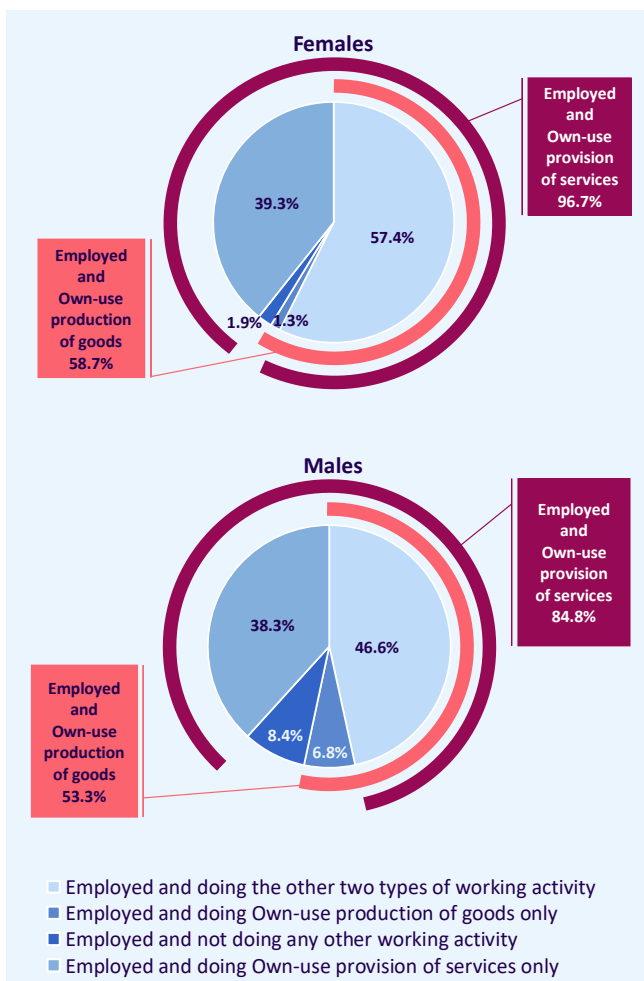


**Figure 8** and **Figure 9** add another dimension to this analysis by showing how performance in unpaid work differs for those in employment versus those not in employment.

**Figure 8** shows that focusing on respondents in employment, we can see that a higher proportion of female than male respondents:

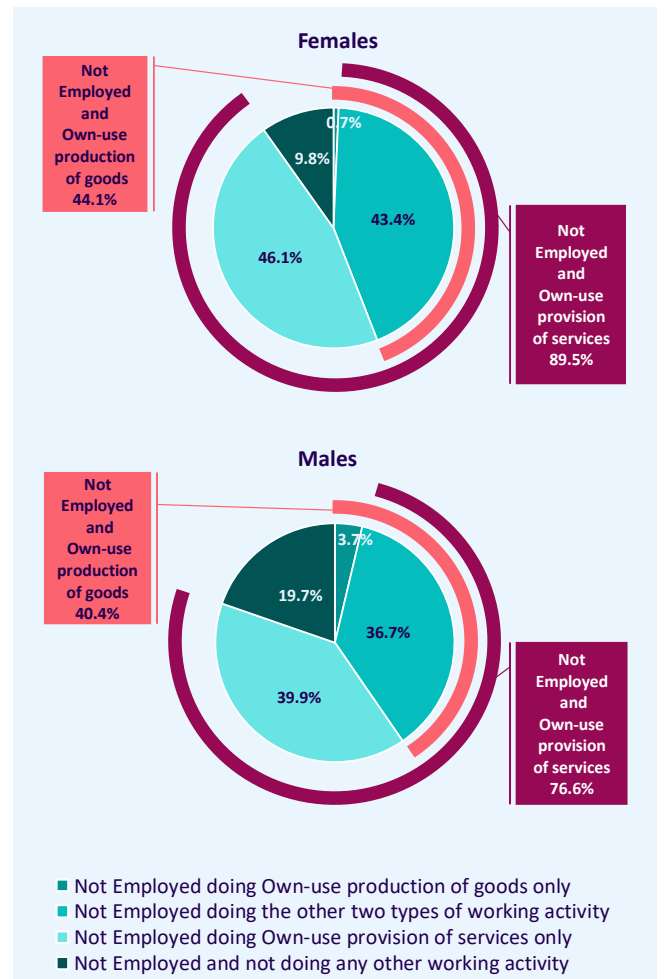
- were engaged in all three types of working activity during the reference week (57.4% vs. 46.6%);
- were engaged in employment and own-use production of goods (whether or not in own-use provision of services also) (58.7% vs. 53.3%); and
- were engaged in both employment and own-use provision of services (whether or not in own-use production of goods) (96.7% vs. 84.4%).
- Moreover, it was very rare for women in employment to not engage in either of the other types of working activity (1.9%), while this was more common for men (8.4%).

► **Figure 8. Participation of Employed in unpaid working activities (19<sup>th</sup> ICLS), by sex and type of activity**



**Figure 9** shows the same type of analysis as **Figure 8**, for those not in employment.

► **Figure 9. Participation of Not Employed in unpaid working activities (19<sup>th</sup> ICLS), by sex and type of activity**



For those not employed we can see that a higher proportion of females than males:

- were engaged in the two types of own use production work during the reference week (43.4% vs. 36.7%);
- were engaged in own-use production of goods (44.1% vs. 40.4%) (whether or not also engaged in own-use provision of services also); and
- were engaged in own-use provision of services (89.5% vs. 76.6%) (whether or not also engaged in own-use production of goods).
- While about one in ten women not in employment (9.8%) did not engage in either of the other two types of unpaid working activity, this was approximately half the proportion observed for men (19.7%).

## Total working time under the 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards

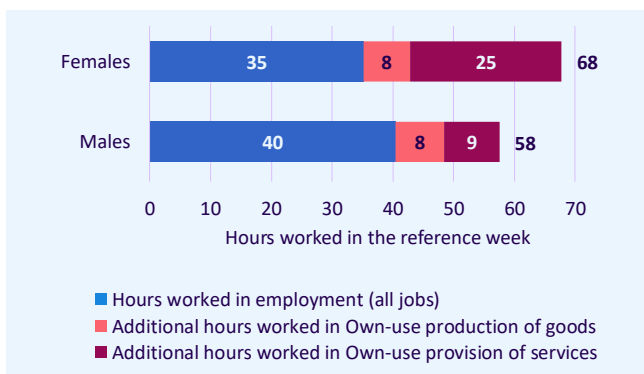
A common theme of comparisons between the 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS and 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards is that **the range and depth of analytical possibilities created is immensely expanded.**

**Figure 3** showed us the one-dimensional view of working time supported by the 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS, with a focus on working time in employment (as defined under the 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards). While useful for various purposes, including productivity analysis, it falls far short of being a measure of total work burden, as becomes feasible when the 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards are applied.

**Figure 10** shows us the additional unpaid working burden (in the additional two unpaid types of work covered by the pilot studies) of those respondents who were identified as employed. As can be seen, it highlights a very clear gender disparity, with employed females having markedly more additional unpaid working hours than employed males.

- For employed females, average working time in employment was 35 hours, but a further 33 hours on average were worked in the other types of working activity. By contrast, employed males worked 40 hours in employment, but only an additional 17 hours in the other activities.
- The difference was concentrated in a substantial gap in time spent in own-use provision of services, 25 hours among employed females compared with 9 hours among employed males.

► **Figure 10. Hours worked in all jobs by employed males and females and additional hours worked in other types of activity (19<sup>th</sup> ICLS)**



- In summary, across the three forms of work employed female respondents reported on average 68 hours of work per week, compared with 58 hours for males. This reverses the direction of the gender gap when only working time in employment is

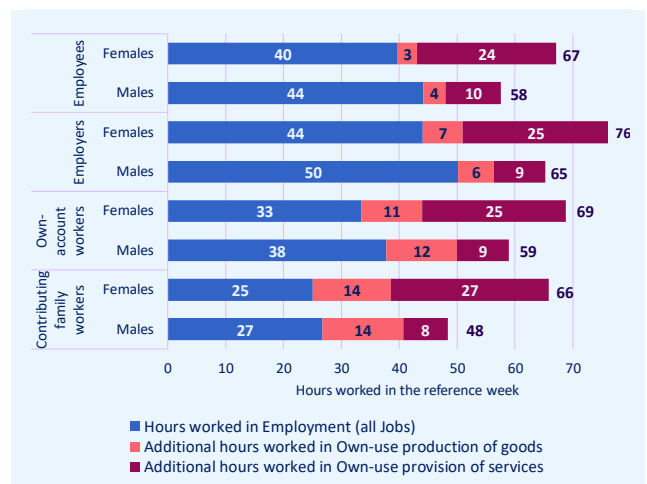
considered, as was the case when the 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards were applied as shown in **Figure 3.**

- Another way of putting this gender difference is to say that for males in employment their working time was dominated by employment (70% of all time worked), while for females in employment it accounted for about half their total working time (52%), highlighting very clearly the issue of **double working burden.**

The analysis by status in employment offers additional insights related to the gender differences (see **Figure 11** below):

- Employers reported the highest hours worked in employment, and CFWs the lowest. For all the statuses males reported more hours than females.
- Time spent in own-use production of goods is very similar for males and females for each employment status, but differs across statuses with relatively higher hours worked for those with lower hours in employment (e.g. own-account workers or CFWs).
- There is a substantial gender gap in time spent in own-use provision of services for each status in employment with females working more hours than males. However the amount of time spent in own-use provision of services did not vary substantially by employment status.
- The highest gender gap in total working time was observed for respondents who were employed as CFWs, with female CFWs working 17 hours on average more per week than male CFWs in total across the three types of working activity.

► **Figure 11. Hours worked in all jobs by employed males and females, and additional hours worked in other types of activity, by status in employment**



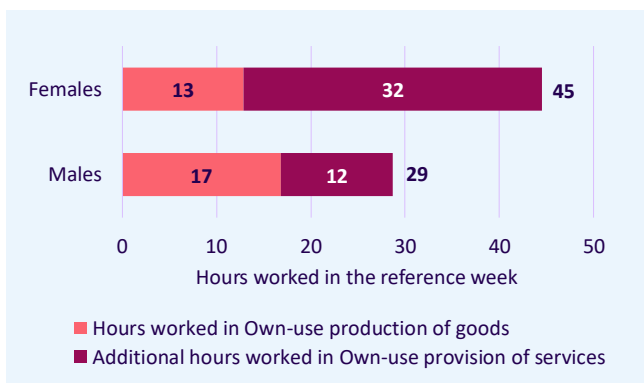
Gender and the international statistical standards on labour. Findings from ILO LFS pilot studies (Phase 1)

A further benefit of the new standards is that it enables a perspective to be gained on the working time of those not in employment (again with no comparator under the 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS as all working time was captured under employment as defined at that time).

This benefit is shown in the two figures below and clearly shows substantial gender gaps. For example:

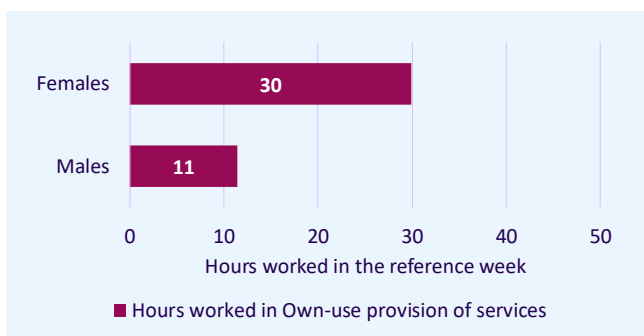
- Females, who were not employed but doing the two other types of working activity, worked 16 hours more per week than their male counterparts, i.e. 45 hours versus 29 hours (see **Figure 12**).

► **Figure 12. Hours worked in own-use production by persons engaged in both types of working activity (19<sup>th</sup> ICLS), by sex and type of activity**



- For those only engaged in own-use provision of services the gender gap becomes even greater with females continuing to work on average 30 hours compared with 11 hours among males (see **Figure 13**).

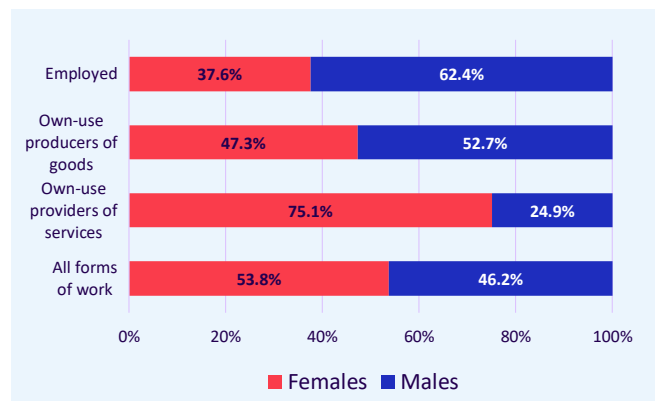
► **Figure 13. Hours worked in own-use provision of services by persons engaged only in that type of working activity (19<sup>th</sup> ICLS), by sex**



An additional way of analysing time spent is to look at contribution of males and females to total working time, i.e. taking into account both the level of participation and average working hours, either overall or by form of work. For example, **Figure 14** shows that:

- Male respondents accounted for about two thirds of all time spent in employment (62.4%), as result of higher participation rates and higher average hours worked of males.
- For own-use production of goods, the split was close to half each between men and women, as result of very similar participation rates and average hours worked.
- In the case of own-use provision of services, despite the high participation of both females and males (92.9% versus 82.1%), females contributed three quarters of all the working hours in this form of work. This is due to the fact that females worked substantially longer hours on average (24.5 hours versus 9.2 hours for males). This illustrates the important lesson that participation levels alone do not show the full extent of gender disparities.
- Across all three forms of work, female respondents accounted for a little over half of total hours worked (53.8% versus 46.2% for male respondents).

► **Figure 14. Breakdown of the total hours worked by men and women in the different types of working activity (19<sup>th</sup> ICLS)**





## ► Summary

- The change from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards can be described as an evolution from a single framework centred on economic activity (in a National Accounting sense) to a dual framework built on a coherent set of definitions covering labour market engagement and participation in different forms of work. While the concepts of employment and unemployment provide a very important overlap between the two sets of standards, they nonetheless have substantially different scope and emphasis. Among the objectives of the updates is to create a more engendered framework for statistics on work.
- The data presented above illustrates the analytical potential created by this change, just at the summary level. While the pilot studies referenced were relatively small scale surveys, the analysis generated nonetheless illustrates the potential power of the standards when applied.
- This has never been more relevant given the unequal gender impact of COVID-19 on paid work, unpaid work and labour market engagement.
- Taking a very schematic view of the key changes and their gender relevance we can observe:
  - The 13<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards included a variety of unpaid activities within employment, these are now separately defined for measurement under the 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards, creating greater separation and visibility of people's different working activities. As females are generally more likely to be engaged in unpaid work this is of major gender relevance.
  - Simultaneous performance of multiple working activities can now be highlighted, again something more common for females.
  - A more complete picture of working time, paid and unpaid, can be created, highlighting substantial gender gaps and the multiple working burdens of women in particular.
- The findings highlighted in this note are supplemented in a more [detailed report](#), evaluating in further depth the range of gender relevant analysis that can be generated when the 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards are applied. In addition some key lessons on measurement will be highlighted.
- The precise gender patterns shown in the data of the pilot studies may not be repeated in other settings, or in fully representative datasets for the countries covered, nonetheless the range of analysis can be replicated where the different forms of work have been covered. Many of the patterns have been shown to be broadly similar in other settings.
- Perhaps the key takeaway message lies in the additional gender relevant data highlighted, which was either conceptually not feasible (for example the separation of employment and own-use production of goods) or very rare in practice (for example measurement of time spent in own-use provision of services sometimes covered by time-use surveys which are relatively rare due to complexity and cost).
- Achieving the analytical potential requires the implementation of the 19<sup>th</sup> ICLS standards and the mainstreaming of the measurement of the different forms of work. This is one of the key objectives of the ILO's ongoing strategy, being advanced through a mix of guidance development, capacity building, technical assistance and advocacy for implementation. The pilot studies highlighted in this note are part of that strategy, providing a source of evidence on good measurement practices through a labour force survey, the key source of statistics on work and the labour force.
- Building on the experiences of the studies, the ILO is continuing questionnaire development and testing activities to extend [existing guidance and tools](#). This work will cover many key topics for which measurement challenges are known to remain substantial, some of which were highlighted by the studies referenced in this note. One example of this is the measurement of time spent in own-use provision of services. This has been shown to be particularly sensitive to measurement approaches. The ILO has launched a project to improve measurement of time spent in these activities through labour force surveys, taking into account good time-use measurement practices. Further guidance on this and other key topics will follow.

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