

Comments and Recommendations of the Hungarian User Group

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Introduction

In accordance with the views and proposals set forth at the user group meeting and subsequently submitted in writing, first we attempted to define the concept of telework, accepting the fundamental criteria of (1) physical distance from the workplace and (2) the use of computer/telephone (ICT).

Under Hungarian conditions the question of time is of outstanding importance because “clear” cases of teleworking are few. It must also be determined whether telework investigation should focus on full-time or on some other form of employment. The latter may be considered as typical in the case of certain lines of work (e.g. the research work of university instructors). HIVA’s “Telework Module – Proposal for Indicators” as well as the background paper by Csaba Makó and Dániel Mester, “Difficult Take-off: Telework in Hungary,” were discussed at the Hungarian user group meeting.

Telework as a work form is less widespread in Hungary than in the European Community, from which it follows that those who take part in population surveys have various ideas of what the term covers. A standard, easily understood definition is indispensable when any of the aspects of telework are investigated.

Comments on the List of Indicators

a) Filter

Since the spread of ICT diminishes the importance of distance from the employer, emphasis should be put on where the work is carried out. Thus, a teleworker is someone who

- works at home, or
- works at a telecottage, or

- works at various locations and keeps in touch with the workplace through ICT means.

The term teleworker should be used in a broad sense, including both employees and freelance workers. In view of the fact that – mainly in case of certain intellectual activities – employers sometimes urge their former employees to formally become independent contractors, whereby employers pay less rates and taxes and might also save on the additional costs of the various benefits (sickness, disability, severance pay) provided for employees, the definition should not be based exclusively on formal criteria. An accountant who works for only one company should be treated in the same way as an employee even if he carries on this activity as an independent contractor.

Since the questions concerning the content characteristics of telework are relevant for both main and secondary activities (though it may be necessary to narrow it down for reasons of survey technique), we agree with the Belgian suggestion that the question about working time and its inclusion among the indicators seems justified. We deem the ICT link as a filter condition important because that is what distinguishes teleworking from traditional working from home.

b) ICT link

The general indicators include criteria of different importance. The first denoting the kind of link is of fundamental importance, but the intensity of use can only be interpreted in terms of the specific link in question, which makes the phrasing of the question rather complicated. “Functionality of link” partly overlaps with the “Kind of function” variable of Job characteristics, therefore one question would be enough.

Further investigation and standardisation are necessary regarding the technologies used (kind of link).

Job characteristics

The proposed list of indicators is acceptable. For practical reasons the aim should be to adapt as many of the indicators of the standard LFS (Labour Force Survey) questionnaire as possible.

Place and time of work

In the case of the question on job patterns, indeed in the case of the whole related group of questions, it would be worth reconsidering whether it is really necessary to include the question of autonomy in the rather long list of indicators.

Quality of work

The list of indicators comprehends the characteristics of telework, but the time frame of the interview necessitates that only selected items be included in the survey. According to the Hungarian user group, the following considerations are also important:

- Is the work carried out typically individual work (e.g. development of special software) or group work (e.g. the processing of identical types of data at home)?
- Who provides (pays for) the communication means of teleworking and bears the additional costs (e.g. who owns the computer, who pays the phone bill, etc.)?
- Who evaluates the work performed and in what way?
- The question of changing activity. What kind of work did the person do before he became a teleworker? Was it the same or different?
- The question of flexibility. Can he change customers or employers easily? If so, can he switch to a different hardware/software should it become necessary? (Both questions are related to the nature of the activity, whether it is predominantly a conventional type of work or a remote type of work.)
- The question of obtaining information. How did the person learn about his present work?

Other Remarks, Recommendations

a) Users have called attention to the fact that the spread of telework is hindered not by the supply side, but by the demand side (employers are not open enough on this issue). Nevertheless, they also noted that the part surveying general receptiveness by the public is missing from the list of indicators. After studying the LFS questionnaire, they recommended the addition of questions such as:

- Do you know what telework is?

- Would you agree to work in this form?
- What sacrifices are you ready (or would you be willing) to make in order to do this kind of work (e.g. purchase your own technological equipment such as a computer)?

In our opinion, it would be worthwhile to consider the inclusion of a series of questions that deal with the investigation of receptiveness on the part of the population.

b) Statisticians, who work with LFS data, added a number of remarks concerning survey organisation.

There are two ways in which the telework questionnaire may become a part of the LFS as an ad hoc module:

1) It would be made a part of the ongoing LFS. In this case a target group would be selected with the help of one of the (filter) questions in the standard questionnaire. In the case of the Hungarian LFS, the target group may be composed of those who give affirmative answer to the question 'Have you ever done telework?' ('Yes, regularly'; 'Yes, occasionally'; 'No'). However, the question on telework is not a standard question of the CLFS, therefore, not every country participating in the STILE project will be able to use it as a filter.

2) With the help of companies which employ teleworkers 200 persons could be selected for interviewing regarding both the standard and the auxiliary LFS modules. But since in this case finding a suitably co-operating firm/individual could be a problem, the first alternative was chosen by the members of the Hungarian user group.

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HIVA's list of indicators offers a good basis to start out from. But it is absolutely necessary to finalise the list by the end of May at the latest, in order to be able to make the telework ad hoc module a part of the Labour Force Survey to be carried out in the third quarter of the year. It is important to keep the list as short as possible. In most countries the same households are polled a number of times, therefore, their later co-operation must not be risked by lengthy questioning.