



## Report on 2<sup>nd</sup> usergroup: STILE 26-04-2002

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### Agenda

1. Status quo of the project
2. Discussion on the relevance and operationalisation of indicators
3. Preparation of further activities ao. European usergroup

### 1. Status quo of the project

#### 1.1 Status quo

At the beginning of the meeting we have reported on the status quo of the project. Special attention was given to:

- Different frameworks that have emerged during the discussion on indicators.
- The expectations of Eurostat to STILE: a manual of recommendations on existing rather than on new indicators.
- Opportunities of the Irish and the Hungarian partner to attach some questions to the LFS.
- EMERGENCE results: Tele-homework is a work form which is often limited to an experimental stage and which is mostly the privilege of highly skilled male professionals. The results of this project have illustrated that the implementation of ICT has given shape to a wide range of 'work-at-distance' forms.
- The academic world is currently interested in the relationship between ICT and WORK (at organisational and individual level).

#### 1.2 Up to a synthesis

Based on these facts, we have come to the proposal to develop 2 modules:

### *1.2.1 A limited module:*

Which can be attached to the LFS in the short or middle long term. This module should focus on indicators which allow to count *eWorkers* and which can be a good basis to support current policy tendencies that are focused on family friendly labour markets and mobility.

### *1.2.2 A broader module:*

Which builds further on the limited one, including indicators that can bring into focus the wide variety of work forms. But this module should also include some indicators on the impact of *eWork* on the quality of work from the perspective of the worker.

This module should be useful for the academic world, searching for basic indicators on *eWork*. Based on this module researchers should be able to choose some important indicators, but the list of indicators should also be a source of inspiration for new research questions, as it brings into focus new aspects.

The members of the usergroup can agree with this twofold objective.

## **2. Discussion on indicators: relevance and operationalisation**

The discussion on the list of indicators was structured by two major questions:

- Which indicators are expedient within the limited module, and which are only expedient within the broader module?
- How can some indicators be made operational?

The most important conclusions are set out below.

In general we have divided the list of indicators into 6 major clusters:

- Filter
- Specification of filter variables
- Job characteristics
- Reasons and structural conditions for *eWork*
- Impact
- Potential on *eWorkers*

### **2.1 Filter**

The use of ICT is the most important indicator to distinguish *eWorkers* from non-*eWorkers*. Taking this as a filter would select nearly all working people, as almost all work makes use of ICT in one way or another. Therefore, this indicator has to be combined with other variables:

The work has to be carried out at a distance AND the respondent has to work at least a certain amount of his time at a distance, with the help of ICT.

Summarised: *eWorkers* are situated within the sectional plane between:

- Use of ICT
- Work carried out at a distance from the employer and/or the customer.
- Intensity of work at a distance

REMARK: The order in which the questions are asked, is partly dependent on the operationalisation of some other indicators (see further discussion).

The usergroup mentioned that measuring 'ICT' is as complex as measuring 'eWork or telework', as there are many definitions of ICT.

## 2.2 Further specification of the filter variables

More concrete information on:

- The place where the respondent works
- The amount of time spent on working at a distance
- The intensity of ICT-use

This information is important, but not as a filter. More specific information on the kind of ICT-link (hardware, technologies, applications) is too technical and not expedient within the context of research on work related aspects of eWork. More important is to know the specific role of the ICT-link in the work which is carried out at a distance.

## 2.3 Job characteristics

With respect to job characteristics the following questions are important:

- What is the occupation, the function the respondent carries out?
- What is the sector the organisation belongs to?
- Which activities are carried out at a distance?
- For which of these activities is the ICT-link used?
- To which extent has the respondent control over the way the work is carried out and how is it controlled?

As the last three indicators are an extension on the use of ICT, these indicators are important within the broader module. With respect to these indicators, the focus within the usergroup was on the operationalisation.

### 2.3.1 *Occupation, function, sector*

The members of the usergroup agree with the difficulties to measure these aspects (inaccuracy of existing classifications and difficulties of open questions). But it is questionable to which extent we can/should have an influence on the way these aspects are measured within the LFS.

### 2.3.2 *Kind of activities that are carried out at a distance*

The usergroup prefers a list of activities that can be distinguished within the value chain. (preparation-administration-organisation-executing).

### 2.3.3 *Functionality of the link*

There is a proposal to put the question on the kind of activity that is carried out at a distance and the question on the activity for which the lct-link is used, in one common question.

To do this, for instance a matrix could be made up:

List of activities	Which activities are core tasks	Which are rather preparing-supporting (ie. Administration, making appointments etc.)	For which activities is the lct-link used?

#### *2.3.4 Autonomy and control*

The group thinks the following indicators:

- **Number of contacts with colleagues and supervisor:** this is not a reliable measure (assumption of a relationship between the number of contacts and the amount of control is not feasible)
- **Who assesses the work and how?** (if it is in an open question, this is difficult)

The group prefers the following indicators

- Basis for assessment
- The way the postponed norms are controled (direct supervision, output, control on-line, automatic registration)
- The amount of autonomy in the work
- The extent to which the respondent has control over the planning of the work (is it determined by the supervisor, is there an automatic distribution of tasks, has the worker make his own planning; is this than fully free or determined by customers' questions/other factors?)

### **2.4 Reasons for eWork and structural conditions**

#### *2.4.1 Reasons for e-Work*

Three questions are central here:

- Who has taken the initiative?
- Which was the motivation?
- Can the respondent come back on the decision to eWork (reversibility)

The group thinks it is important to split up the motivations for eWork that have been the driving force for the employer and for the working respondent.

#### *2.4.2 Structural conditions*

Important conditions are:

- Who takes responsibility for the costs (ICT hardware; usage: submission, connection; infrastructure; energy costs)
- Training before adaption of eWork? Who paid? Issues dealt with: time management, ICT-usage, communication skills, e-learning, management skills etc.
- Distance between home and telecentre, specifications of places etc are not that important.

## 2.5 Impact

### 2.5.1 Limited module

Aspects that are expedient within the limited module:

- Better usage of competences? (subjective assessment)
- Work pressure experienced higher? (subjective assessment)

Impact on ...is also important (subjective assessment)

- Productivity
- Combination family-work
- Travelling between work and home

Remark: asking for a subjective assessment requires a category (don't know, have no other experience)

### 2.5.2 Broader module

The broader module wants to give more attention to the impact of eWork on quality of work at the level of the individual employee/self-employed. Within the framework of eWork different aspects are important to take into account. During our first usergroup we delineated:

- Flexibility
- Autonomy
- Competences and development of competences
- Teamwork
- Social contact opportunities

The European survey on working conditions, but also the LFS take up some of these aspects. It is the challenge to assess (and ameliorate where necessary) these questions. We have done a first exercise to assess the questions of the European survey on working conditions. The perspective from which we have done this is the perspective of the impact of ICT on these aspects.

REMARK: Within the framework of this research it is only possible to ask for subjective assessments.

## 2.6 Potential of eWorkers

There are two ways to measure the potential of eWorkers in a population survey:

- Subjective assessment of the preparedness, the advantages and the disadvantages of eWork
- Analysing jobs, functions on some characteristics (for instance: can be done individually, is not assessed on a time basis etc.)

The usergroup thinks these measures can only be valuable if they are associated with measures of the preparedness of the management, as research has shown that the readiness of management is a prerequisite for the introduction of eWork. Moreover, for some forms of eWork the employee has no other choice (ie. Call center work). Therefore, taking up a question on the eWork-potential in a population (employee) survey is opportune. However, the prospecting value of the results is very low.

REMARK: It is stated within the usergroup that it is important to take into account barriers as well as stimulating factors.

### **3. Planning of further work**

The members are invited to participate at the European usergroup in Ghent on 29th of May.