

Foreword

The need to inform policy making and society's deliberations with indicators that go beyond traditional measures of economic growth is so widely recognised today that we may fail to appreciate how much distance the statistical community has travelled since 2009, when the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission gave heightened visibility to long-standing concerns about the limits of GDP as a welfare measure. Since then, the statistical community has been engaged in a dual process of both making the best use of statistics that already exist to provide a parsimonious but comprehensive view of the conditions of individuals, regions and countries, and laying the basis for the statistics needed for tomorrow. These Guidelines, developed in the context of the OECD Better Life Initiative launched in 2011, represent a milestone in this journey.

The case for looking at the quality of the working environment as a critical aspect of people's conditions is straightforward. Indeed, work is of fundamental importance for the well-being of workers. Policy demand for this type of data is already high and set to increase further in the near future. One of the goals of the 2030 Agenda agreed by the UN General Assembly in September 2015 is to "Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all" (Goal 8), with more specific targets to "achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all", "protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers", and "eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour". While a first set of indicators for the global monitoring of this goal has already been identified by the statistical community, this set will need to evolve in the future to better match today's labour-market realities. The OECD is also currently revisiting its "Job Strategy" – the blueprint that has underpinned the labour-market reforms implemented by many of its member countries since the 1980s and 1990s. This is giving an important role to the concept of Job Quality, which includes the quality of the working environment as one of its three dimensions, along with earnings quality and labour market security. Hence, labour market conditions are not only assessed in terms of quantity of jobs but also in terms of the quality of jobs that can provide the basis for a dignified existence.

As compared to other aspects of the "Beyond GDP" agenda, a substantial body of evidence and statistical practice already exists in the field of the working environment, largely reflecting long-established regulations to address health and safety concerns in the workplace. But much of the available evidence is based on non-comparable country surveys, with comparative evidence largely limited to European countries. Also, the nature of the working environment has evolved over time, reaching beyond the physical risk-factors that were the focus of traditional health and safety regulations. Comparable evidence on the much broader range of socio-environmental aspects that shape working conditions remains limited, despite evidence of their importance for both workers' well-being and firms' productivity. The consequences of a poor working environment manifest themselves in burnout, disengagement, absences from work and mental health problems among workers. Better data are needed to establish which developments in the work environment lead to an increase in psychological ill health and how employers can mitigate the sources of stress by improving

the design of work. Failure to do this would lead to escalating costs for the budgets of welfare and public health systems.

Developing good comparative data on the working environment is central to human progress, to anchor the notion of job quality in policy discussion, and to provide answers to workers' demands in this field. The implementation of the OECD Guidelines by national statistical offices holds the promise of providing the evidence base needed to assess the future of work and to respond to workers' demand for better quality jobs.



Martine Durand
OECD Chief Statistician
Director of the OECD Statistics Directorate

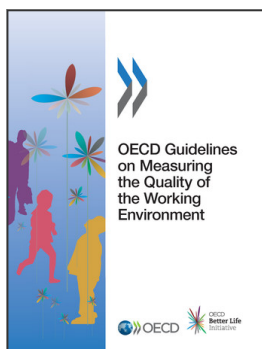
Acknowledgments

This report is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and the arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Organisation or of the governments of its member countries.

These *Guidelines* were produced as part of the overall OECD work programme on Job Quality. The report was prepared by Hande Inanc and Sandrine Cazes, and finalised by Marco Mira d'Ercole and Fabrice Murtin (all from the OECD Statistics Directorate). Chapter 3 was prepared by Professor Duncan Gallie, University of Oxford.

An expert group gathering statisticians and experts in the field of working environment provided valuable comments and advice on the drafting of the report. Members of this expert group included Thomas Coutrot (DARES, France); Hanna Strzelecka (Central Statistical Office, Poland); Irena Svetin (Statistical Office, Republic of Slovenia); Maury Gittleman (Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States); Sophie George and Eleanor Jones (Office National Statistics, United Kingdom); Rodrigo Negrete Prieto (INEGI, Mexico); Lisa Guenther (DESTATIS, Germany); Mark Feldman (Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel); Christian Wingerter (Eurostat, Luxembourg); Agnès Parent-Thirion (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Ireland); Robert Karasek (Øresund Synergy and JCQ Center); Johannes Siegrist (University of Düsseldorf); and Duncan Gallie (University of Oxford).

The report has benefitted from comments from Martine Durand and Carrie Exton (OECD Statistics Directorate), as well as from delegates of the OECD Committee on Statistics and Statistical Policy. Patrick Hamm, Anne-Lise Faron and Virginie Elgrably ensured the final editing of the document.



From:
OECD Guidelines on Measuring the Quality of the Working Environment

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264278240-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2017), "Foreword", in *OECD Guidelines on Measuring the Quality of the Working Environment*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264278240-1-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.