

COMPARABILITY AND ADJUSTMENT OF THE INDIAN WORKING FORCE DATA, CENSUSES 1911-61

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THIS paper probes into the comparability of the working force data from the 1911, 1921, 1931, 1951 and 1961 censuses, and analyses the possibility of making use of them for preparing comparable estimates of the trends in the size and the industrial distribution of the Indian working force during 1911-61.

I. CONCEPTUAL COMPARABILITY IN THE ENUMERATION OF THE WORKING FORCE

There are two main sources of conceptual non-comparability between the working force data of the 1961 census and those of the earlier censuses. The first one arises from the fact that while the 1961 census adopted the "work" criterion, the earlier censuses adopted the "income" criterion as the eligibility test for reporting an individual as worker. However, the working force data of the earlier censuses can be made comparable with those of the 1961 census by excluding from the former those persons who received income without working and those in unproductive occupations.

The second source of non-comparability arises from the differences in the reference period. The 1961 census adopted a reference period of 15 days in regard to regular employment in any trade, profession, service, business or commerce; and working season for seasonal activities such as cultivation, livestock, dairying, household industry, etc. This in effect is the adoption of "labour force" approach for the urban sector, and an approach similar to that of "gainful worker" for the rural sector. Earlier censuses have not adopted any reference period, and if rentiers, pensioners, and persons engaged in unproductive occupations are excluded from the working force, the data resulting would be those of "gainful workers". Therefore, in regard to the rural sector, the approaches adopted in the earlier censuses and in the 1961 census are for practical purposes similar.