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**Development of International Guidelines and Frameworks for
Micro Statistics on Household Income, Consumption and Wealth**

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Development of international guidelines and frameworks for micro statistics on household income, consumption and wealth

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Abstract

An International Expert Group, sponsored by the OECD and chaired by the ABS, is developing new international guidelines for the compilation of micro statistics on household wealth, and a comprehensive and integrated framework for micro statistics on household income, consumption and wealth. The new guidelines and framework will be aligned with the existing international micro statistics standards, and wherever possible with the standards for macro statistics in the SNA.

The micro group is one of two Expert Groups formed by the OECD Committee on Statistics, in response to some of the recommendations of the 'Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress', 2009, particularly recommendation 4: "Give more prominence to the distribution of income, consumption and wealth". The direction being taken by the micro Expert Group is consistent with much international and national research over many years, including, the *Final Report and Recommendations of the Expert Group on Household Income Statistics* (2001), commonly referred to as the *Canberra Group Handbook*, and the *Canberra Group Handbook on Household Income Statistics, Second Edition* (2011).

Comprehensive publications for the new wealth guidelines, and for the household income, consumption and wealth framework, are to be developed by the end of 2012. This paper provides the policy and research context for the further development of micro statistics on household income, consumption and wealth, and reports on the key features of the micro Expert Group's work on both publications.

Introduction

The June 2010 meeting of the OECD Committee on Statistics (CSTAT) discussed a proposal prepared by Statistics Canada for a new activity on the development of an integrated framework for household income, consumption and wealth statistics at the micro-level. This proposal was supported by a large number of countries, and was included in the OECD Programme of Work for 2011 and 2012. An OECD Expert Group was subsequently established and charged with:

- i) providing guidance on the collection, dissemination and analysis of household wealth statistics at the micro-level; and
- ii) developing an integrated framework for the joint measurement and analysis of statistics on household income, consumption and wealth at the micro level.

This new stream of work is consistent with recommendations (or statements) made in a number of reports that underscore the need for a better understanding of household economic well-being. These recommendations include:

- The Canberra Group Handbook (2001), which argued that "*Further research is required into the "relationships between income, expenditure and wealth"*" (Chapter 9, p. 107). The Second Edition of the Canberra Group Handbook (2011) also emphasised the importance of this work and proposed an international research agenda that would

support further advances in the field of household micro-economic statistics (Chapter 9, pp. 119-122).

- The 17th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, whose Final Report (2003) noted that: “*Assistance should be provided to countries in establishing their programmes for collecting, compiling, and disseminating the statistics covered in the resolution on household income and expenditure statistics. To do this effectively and as a training tool, a technical guide could be prepared in collaboration with other interested institutions to give detailed guidance on the implementation of the guidelines in the resolution*”.¹
- The CES (2008) “In-depth review of income, living conditions and poverty statistics”, which concluded: “*A wider initiative is needed to work towards an integrated framework of income, expenditures and wealth ... by setting up a possible city group*”.
- The 2009 report of the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission, which recommended “*Give more prominence to the distribution of income, consumption and wealth.*” (Recommendation 4).²
- The report to the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (“*The Financial Crisis and Information Gaps, 2009*”), whose Recommendation 16 notes: “*As the recommended improvements to data sources and categories are implemented, statistical experts to seek to compile distributional information (such as ranges and quartile information) alongside aggregate figures, wherever this is relevant. The Interagency Group on Economic and Financial Statistics (IAG) is encouraged to promote production and dissemination of these data in a frequent and timely manner. The OECD is encouraged to continue its efforts to link national accounts data with distributional information*”.

The national accounts provide essential information about the overall economic performance of each country, as well as aggregate measures of the various dimensions (disposable income, in-kind public transfers, consumption expenditure and investment, assets and liabilities) that shape household economic well-being. However, the national accounts do not provide information on the *distribution*, at the micro level, of these economic resources nor do they present *coincident* measurement (i.e. reporting on households which are simultaneously experiencing differing levels of income, wealth and consumption, etc.).³

¹ The report also noted: “*There is, however, a need for targeted research in some important areas relating to the resolution which could best be carried out under the auspices of a city group on household expenditure statistics*”. (Further Work”, p. 75).

² This recommendation stemmed from the argument that: “*Average income, consumption and wealth are meaningful statistics, but they do not tell the whole story about living standards. For example, a rise in average income could be unequally shared across groups, leaving some households relatively worse-off than others. Thus, average measures of income, consumption and wealth should be accompanied by indicators that reflect their distribution. Median consumption (income, wealth) provides a better measure of what is happening to the .typical. individual or household than average consumption (income or wealth). But for many purposes, it is also important to know what is happening at the bottom of the income/wealth distribution (captured in poverty statistics), or at the top. Ideally, such information should not come in isolation but be linked, i.e. one would like information about how well-off households are with regard to different dimensions of material living standards: income, consumption and wealth. After all, a low income household with above-average wealth is not necessarily worse-off than a medium income household with no wealth.*”

³ A distinctly separate, but complementary, Expert Group responsible for compiling distributional information alongside aggregate figures within a national accounting framework has also been established by the OECD Committee on Statistics (Expert Group to measure disparities in a national account framework).

Motivation for the work

Measures of the distribution of income, patterns of consumption, redistribution through the tax and transfer systems, levels of consumer debt and net worth provide critical information for the design of economic and social policies. Measures based on each of these distributions provide insight into the barriers that affect labour force participation, and about those inefficiencies (in markets, policies and regulations) that act as a drag on aggregate economic performance.

Measuring the coincidence of household level measures provides additional insight into both behaviour and outcomes, e.g. to identify poverty and economic distress. Some households with low income, for example, may report adequate levels of consumption expenditure or wealth, or vice versa. Policies and programmes could be better targeted to households in need based on information on the joint distribution of all types of economic resources.

However, integrated analysis at the household level has significant data requirements that go beyond the measurement currently undertaken in most countries. Internationally recognised statistical frameworks and standards are required to underpin the measurement and analysis of micro household economic resource statistics to support the design of better government policies to avoid unintended consequences, in distributional terms, and better targeting of programs to assist households in need. Better informed policies hold the promise of delivering improved economic wellbeing to individuals, higher economy-wide performance, and better individual and societal outcomes across a range of dimensions of social concern.

The new guidelines and framework will provide improved support for all practitioners working in these subject areas.

Organisation of the work

The OECD Committee on Statistics established an *OECD Expert Group on micro statistics on household income, consumption and wealth* in early 2011. The key deliverables for the Expert Group will take the form of two publications aiming to:

- provide guidance on the compilation and analysis of micro statistics on household wealth; and
- develop a framework for the compilation and analysis of the joint distribution of household income, consumption and wealth at the micro level.

These activities are carried out thanks to the cooperation of experts from 18 countries who are actively participating in the Expert Group (Australia, Canada, Denmark, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States). This work is also supported by Australia (in the form of a secondment to the Secretariat), Switzerland (through a voluntary contribution) and Italy (through a secondment from the Bank of Italy). The EG ICW is chaired by Mr Bob McColl (Australia). It also includes representatives from Eurostat, UNECE, the European Central Bank and the Luxembourg Income Study, as well as analysts invited by the Secretariat based on their expertise in the field. Annex I provides the list of all members participating in the Expert Group.

The Expert Group is operating mainly via electronic communication, supported by three face-to-face meetings. The first face-to-face meeting, held on 23-25 March 2011 in Paris, agreed on the scope of the work and informed the detailed work plan, including the allocation of tasks and broad timelines. For each task on the work plan, a lead-person and

two to three co-contributors have been assigned. The lead person works with the co-contributors and is responsible for managing all the outputs related to that task, usually the production of a draft chapter.

The second meeting, held from 30 November to 2 December 2011 in Paris, considered first drafts of a number of the chapters and annexes, and took key decisions concerning the proposed definitions for household wealth statistics and the conceptual framework underpinning the compilation and analysis of household income, consumption and wealth statistics.

The third and final meeting is scheduled to take place on 1 – 3 August 2012 in Boston, United States, back-to-back with the 32nd General Conference of the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth (5-10 August 2012). The meeting will also be held in parallel to the OECD-Eurostat Expert Group on Disparities in a National Accounts Framework. The final Boston meeting of the EG is expected to address all remaining issues before the substantive editorial work is undertaken by the Secretariat.

Developing wealth guidelines

Purpose of the guidelines

The development of household wealth guidelines reflects the increasing interest over the last few decades in the different dimensions of people's economic wellbeing and in the inter-relationships between these dimensions. This interest has come from policymakers, researchers and other analysts and is highlighted in a range of international reports that have specifically called for statistical action to better understand these dimensions, including household wealth.

As interest in household wealth data has grown, more countries have developed new collections or expanded existing collections to provide micro statistics in this area. Statistical collection initiatives have also emerged at the international level, such as the *Luxembourg Wealth Study* and the *Eurosystem Household Finance and Consumption Survey*.

An internationally agreed set of definitions and guidelines are needed to address the common conceptual, definitional and practical problems that countries face in producing such statistics as well as to improve the comparability of the currently available country data. They are also needed to facilitate the integration of micro statistics on household wealth with those relating to other dimensions of economic well-being, such as income and consumption, and to those compiled at the macro level, so harmonisation with other international standards is an important objective of the work e.g. the 2008 System of National Accounts, the 2011 Canberra Group Handbook on Household Income Statistics, and the recommendations of the 17th International Conference of Labour Statisticians on household income and expenditure statistics.

The OECD Expert Group has focussed on identifying best practice in collecting, disseminating and analysing micro statistics on household wealth. The adoption of these practices by countries should contribute to more accurate, more complete and more internationally comparable data and lead to more informed use of the data. These best practice guidelines are intended to help countries to improve the quality and usefulness of their existing statistics in this field and to assist those planning to develop such data in the future by providing a sound conceptual and practical base for their work. They are designed to be widely applicable, with relevance to countries in different stages of statistical development, having different statistical infrastructure, and operating in different economic and social environments.

Key features

The draft wealth guidelines aim to be relevant to both those who produce wealth statistics and those who use them, whether in national or international statistical agencies, other government bodies, research organisations or in the wider community. In the case of producers, the guidelines are intended to assist them throughout the statistical process: from data development, collection and compilation to data analysis, dissemination and quality assurance. For users, the guidelines are intended to improve understanding and interpretation of the data, including the basis on which the data have been compiled and the relevance and appropriateness of different measures for particular types of analysis.

The following table provides a brief outline of the key features of each of the chapters and appendices in the draft wealth publication.

Table 1 Key features of Wealth guidelines publication

Chapter 1	Introduction
	Describes the purpose of the guidelines, how they were developed, and their relationship with other international standards.
Chapter 2	Overview of household wealth statistics
	Discusses the need for and importance of information on household wealth, including the types of analyses it can inform. It reviews the current availability of statistics in this field and discusses international data collection initiatives. Issues affecting the integration of micro statistics on household wealth with other statistics are also considered.
Chapter 3	Concepts, definitions and classifications
	Presents the basic concepts and key definitions (i.e. 'household', 'wealth', 'asset', 'liability') and the general principles of recording (i.e. 'valuation', 'time of recording', 'consolidation and netting', 'coverage', 'unit of measurement'). The components of wealth and recommended household groups are also specified and defined. Alignment with other international standards is discussed.
Chapter 4	Measurement guidelines
	Focuses on how the components of wealth specified in Chapter 3 are best measured. For each component, the main measurement issues are considered and practical guidance is provided in light of data collection experience by those countries that produce statistics in this field.
Chapter 5	Data sources and methods
	Describes the different types of sources and methods that are used to collect and compile household wealth statistics and indicates the main strengths and weaknesses of different approaches. The aim is to assist statistical offices to determine the best approach in their particular circumstances.
Chapter 6	Measurement of household wealth using surveys
	Considers in some detail how household wealth can be measured using one of the more common approaches: household surveys. The primary aim is to provide practical guidance concerning the measurement issues that need to be considered at various stages of the survey process and to highlight those practices that should produce good quality statistics that conform with the standards and guidelines provided in earlier Chapters. It is not intended as an operational guide for conducting such surveys but rather an assembly of useful information based on country practices.

Chapter 7 Analytic measures

Considers the ways in which the usefulness of the basic micro level data on household wealth, produced using the sources and methods discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, can be maximised through statistical analysis and presentation. A range of analytic measures that can be derived from the basic data are discussed and guidelines are provided for analysis of the data.

Chapter 8 Dissemination

Discusses the different formats and vehicles that can be used to disseminate micro level household wealth data to different types of users. It considers how presentation and dissemination choices can affect the usefulness of the data and it provides guidelines on best practice.

Chapter 9 Quality assurance

Focuses on quality assurance of micro statistics on household wealth to ensure their fitness for purpose. It provides guidelines on best practice methods of assessing quality. The guidelines complement those in the previous Chapters and are intended for use by both data producers and data users.

Appendix 1 Eurosystem Household Finance and Consumption Survey

Provides a summary description of the Eurosystem Survey, which is referred to in various places in the main body of the document. It describes the purpose and content of the Survey which is being conducted in all 17 euro area countries to obtain information on income, consumption and wealth using an ex-ante agreed common methodology. It outlines key methodological features, including country-specific features for each of the participating countries.

Appendix 2 Luxembourg Wealth Study

Provides a summary description of the Study, which is mentioned in several Chapters. It outlines the main features and experiences of the Study, which involves the ex-post harmonisation of household wealth data based on datasets obtained from individual countries. It discusses the wealth and non-wealth variables that are included in the Study and the comparability issues that have been encountered in using the datasets from 12 participating countries.

Appendix 3 Differences between micro and macro measures of household wealth

Provides a comprehensive list of the differences between the standards for micro statistics on household wealth and those for macro statistics in the 2008 SNA. While the differences are identified and discussed throughout relevant Chapters in the document, they are shown here, in one place, for the convenience of readers.

Appendix 4 Comparison of country methodologies for producing micro statistics on household wealth

Presents the results of a questionnaire designed by the Expert Group to obtain information on country methodologies for producing micro level wealth statistics and to investigate the availability of such data. The questionnaire was despatched in mid 2011 to members and observers of the OECD Statistics Committee as well as to other non-OECD countries; responses were received from 26 countries and from the European Central Bank.

Survey of country practices

A significant input into the work has been provided by the results from a meta survey, conducted in mid-2011, of country practices on household wealth statistics. The survey was sent to all OECD countries, as well as being sent by Eurostat to European non-OECD countries. Information on country-practices in collecting and compiling micro data on household wealth was received for 26 countries (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, the United-Kingdom and the United States).

The results from the meta survey have allowed the Expert Group to obtain a comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of practices in individual countries with the purpose of identifying the data collection and compilation processes upon which harmonization could take place. For example, where a large number of countries reported that they had data available for a particular component, this was taken as an indication of the importance of the component and of the practicality of collection, thus informing the selection of the recommended components identified by the Expert Group to improve the international comparability of micro wealth data sets. Highlights from country practices in this field include:

- Most of the 26 countries that completed the meta-survey reported that they rely on household surveys, although in the case of Canada, Finland, France, Malta and the Netherlands data are partially based on administrative records.
- A majority of national surveys are cross sectional, but those for Belgium, Estonia, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Spain include a panel component, while those for the Netherlands and the United States are panel-only.
- In all countries, the collected wealth information refers to the non-institutional population, although in the Netherlands it also includes people living in institutions.
- Oversampling of the wealthiest households is applied in most countries with the exception of Australia, Germany, Israel, Japan, Malta, Norway and Turkey.
- Country-practices differ in how values of household assets are recorded, with some countries recording these values 'net' of the outstanding liabilities pertaining to them (either for specific types of assets such as business equity, or for the total) and others recording them on a 'gross' basis (i.e. with separate recording of the value of assets and liabilities).
- The time reference for valuation is usually the time of interview, although some countries refer to the end of the calendar year prior to interview.
- When surveys are used, the valuation method is usually an estimate provided by the respondent, sometimes by referring to respondents' administrative records, with

values recorded using currency amounts or pre-defined ranges, or a combination of both.

- There are differences across countries in terms of the categories of assets and liabilities covered. The financial assets categories most often covered are accounts (transactions and savings), bonds and stocks. Among non-financial assets the most common categories are principal residence and other residential property, while mortgages on the principal residence is the most common liability.

Developing an integrated framework for statistics on the distribution of household income, consumption and wealth

Purpose of the framework

Understanding the relationships between the concepts of income, consumption and wealth at the individual household level is essential when measures of each of them are brought together for joint analysis. Consistency across each dimension is needed to produce statistical measures that support such analysis and this has been an underlying principle in the development of the new framework.

There are many policy and research questions concerning the economic wellbeing and behaviour of households where joint analysis of income, consumption and wealth can add considerable value.

There has been a long tradition in many countries of jointly collecting income and expenditure data together since the level and pattern of expenditure of households strongly reflects household income characteristics. However, the most extensive studies of material living standards and economic wellbeing can be conducted when comprehensive data on all dimensions of economic resources (income, consumption and wealth) are available. For example, a low income household with above average wealth is not necessarily worse off than a medium income household with no wealth, or vice versa. On the other hand, low income households that also have low levels of wealth may be of particular interest to governments seeking to target policies and programs more directly towards households in need. Joint analysis of the distribution of these resources can lead to more effective policies and better outcomes.

Some examples of specific needs for the joint analysis of micro level data on household economic resources are outlined in the following paragraphs.

(a) Relationship between household wealth and consumption

Wealth can affect personal consumption through various channels. For example, households whose wealth increases due to higher asset prices may spend more because they have more resources available and their liquidity or collateral constraints are relaxed. Households may also use credit to insulate their spending from financial shocks, although for some of them the higher debt service costs may leave fewer funds available to smooth their consumption and put them at risk of financial hardship. As household heterogeneity can play an important role in how average consumption responds to wealth changes, household level data are crucial in assessing the structural relationships between average wealth and average consumption.

(b) Access to credit and borrowing constraints

Liquidity, cost of debt and other constraints can substantially affect the borrowing of some households. Analysis of the wealth and other financial circumstances of

households at the individual level can provide useful insights into the nature and effect of such constraints, and into their association with financial hardship and the inability to smooth income shocks.

(c) Retirement funding and pension policies

In order to assess the adequacy of retirement savings and the possible risk to these savings from asset meltdowns or other financial shocks, it is important to know the level and composition of assets of households whose main income earner is at or close to retirement. This may be of particular interest in countries where there are government incentives to take up certain types of assets, e.g. tax incentives for employees to make their own contributions to pension funds, as part of a strategy to encourage saving for retirement. For assessing the effectiveness of these policies, it is important to know whether such incentives are leading to higher saving or to a shift away from other products in asset portfolios.

(d) Micro simulations of household behaviour

Micro simulations, based on models of individual household behaviour, can be used to simulate the behaviour of all households and therefore explore different scenarios. Incorporating income, consumption and wealth variables in such models can provide important insights into the possible effects of a range of financial shocks and policy changes.

(e) Assessing economic performance

Assessments of the joint distributions of income, consumption and wealth can inform on economy wide developments observed in sector wide estimates in the national accounts. Unexpected, unwanted or unintended changes in distribution can be pointers to inefficient processes in taxes and transfers, or in the operation of labour and other markets, leading not only to less equitable outcomes for people, but less optimal growth at an economy wide level.

It is also important to understand the relationships between income, consumption and wealth when only partial data is available. For example, if no wealth data are available or only stocks of wealth at one particular point in time, it will not be clear to what extent wealth is being used to support consumption in a given period. The observed relationships between income, consumption and derived saving may suggest significant use of wealth for consumption by some households but timing issues, gaps in coverage, lumpiness in transactions and errors in measurement for both income and consumption will limit the conclusions that can be drawn. If users do not understand the broader framework they may draw wrong conclusions from the available data. For example, they may conclude that some households are in much worse, or much better, economic circumstances than they actually are.

Key features

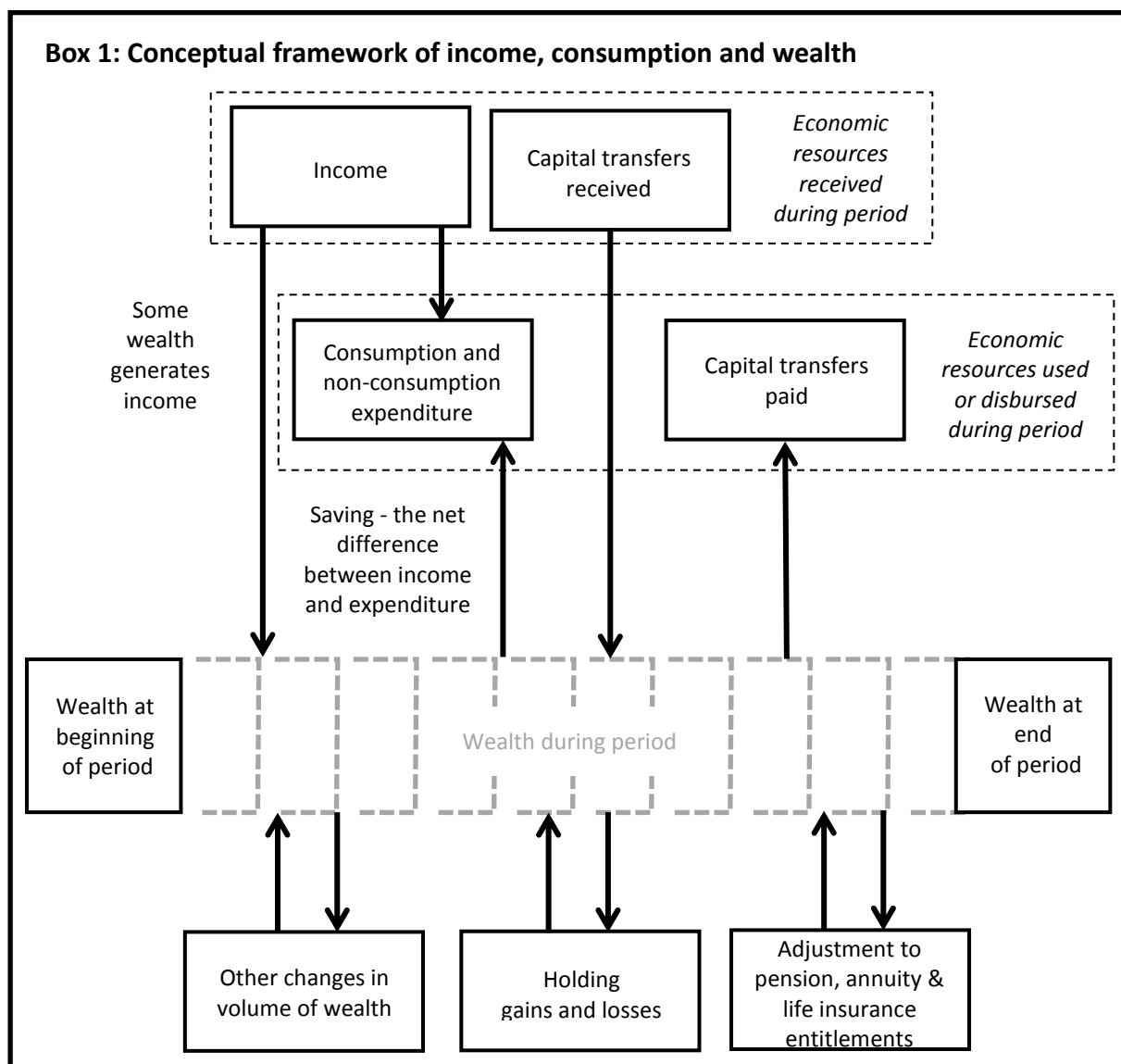
The draft publication provides a framework for the compilation and analysis of the joint distribution of household income, consumption and wealth at the micro level. Such a framework is essential to the production of harmonised and coherent information on the economic situation of individual households.

The following table provides a brief outline of the key features of each of the chapters and appendices in the draft income, consumption and wealth framework publication.

Table 2 Key features of the Integrated income, consumption and wealth framework publication

Chapter 1	Introduction
	Describes the purpose of the framework, how it was developed, and its relationship with other international standards.
Chapter 2	Economic wellbeing
	Provides a relatively short, high level overview of approaches for analysing human wellbeing, and then discusses economic or material wellbeing in particular.
Chapter 3	Conceptual framework
	Provides the complete conceptual framework for household income, consumption and wealth statistics. It discusses the concepts that are required to give the context in which data on income, consumption and wealth can be analysed. These include the statistical units and reference period to which the data relate, the use of equivalence scales to obtain comparable data for different sized units, valuation issues, and managing price differences over time and across geography.
Chapter 4	Household income
	Describes the main uses of household income data and the agreed international standards, concepts, definitions and classifications for micro level household income statistics, as well as the key measurement, data collection, dissemination and analysis issues.
Chapter 5	Household consumption
	Describes the main uses of household consumption data and the agreed international standards, concepts, definitions and classifications for micro level household expenditure statistics, as well as the key measurement, data collection, dissemination and analysis issues.
Chapter 6	Household wealth
	Describes the main uses of household wealth data and sets out the concepts, definitions and classifications for micro level household wealth statistics separately developed for the <i>Wealth guidelines</i> , as well as the key measurement, data collection, dissemination and analysis issues.
Chapter 7	Statistical framework
	Provides a structured presentation of the component elements in all dimensions and how they relate to each other (particularly for cross cutting issues), including how they relate to the elements in the SNA.
Chapter 8	Integrated statistics
	Supports implementation of the overall framework to achieve integrated statistics, through data collection in household surveys, or by data matching techniques.
Chapter 9	Analytical framework
	Outlines the different analytical perspectives and measures that can be used to examine the joint distribution of income, consumption and wealth.
Chapter 10	Conclusion and future directions
	Considers further work that might be undertaken in the future to progress work in respect of micro level household economic resource statistics.

The model underpinning the Framework developed by the OECD Expert Group is illustrated in Box 1 below. Essentially, income, consumption and wealth are considered as three different dimensions of economic well-being; the framework also describes the direct relationships between them, i.e.: i) income and wealth can be utilised to enable consumption; ii) when income is greater than consumption, saving adds to wealth; iii) when income is less than consumption, dissaving subtracts from wealth; iv) some forms of wealth generate income; and iv) asset price changes can lead to changes in some forms of wealth that can be used to finance future consumption.



Conclusion

The OECD Expert Group will conclude its work at the end of 2012, when complete drafts of its two publications will be available. It is anticipated that these drafts will be brought to the attention of CSTAT Delegates through a written procedure by end-2012. Following receipt of CSTAT Delegates comments, new drafts addressing Delegates issues will be circulated to CSTAT for endorsement and "sign-off" in early-2013, and subsequent publication.

The OECD Expert Group publications are expected to stand as a critical reference point for data compilers and users of household income, consumption and wealth data for some time. However, in due course and following 'road testing' by an increasing number of countries, consideration will need to be given to whether the outputs of the Expert Group should be refreshed, brought up to date with evolving practice, and then brought to the attention of other statistical bodies, such as the United Nations Statistical Commission, for possible endorsement as statistical standards. A similar process was followed in the case of the *2001 Canberra Group Handbook on Household Income Statistics*, which evolved into a standard, adopted with little modification, by the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in December 2003 (ILO, 2004).

Further information can be provided by contacting the OECD Secretariat:

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ANNEX I
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