

**Expert Group Meeting on
Setting the Scope of Social Statistics**
United Nations Statistics Division
in collaboration with the Siena Group on Social Statistics
New York, 6-9 May 2003

Elements of a social statistics program:
A Canadian perspective *

by

Statistics Canada

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I. Introduction

1. Over the last decade, there has been an increasing focus, at both the national and international levels, on issues related to social policy and development. For example, the 2000 Millennium Summit¹, the 1995 World Summit for Social Development² as well as other international conferences have considered the need to address pressing social issues.

At the same time there has been an increasing interest in what has been termed “evidence-based” decision-making as well as the rebirth of interest in indicators to monitor social trends and conditions.

2. In response, a considerable amount of work has been undertaken on the development of social statistics both within national statistical agencies as well as at the United Nations (UN) and other international organizations. Although much has been accomplished, it is generally agreed that more needs to be done at both the national and international levels. The challenge is to build on past work in order to develop a concrete strategy for a more systematic development of social statistics.

3. The changing demands for social statistics have a number of implications for statistical agencies. First and perhaps most importantly, there is a need to specify an adequate conceptual framework for defining a given social domain. Such a framework should identify relevant concepts, link the concepts to data sources and outputs and finally link the data outputs to uses of the data. It would then point to more specific issues and activities that include (a) the need for new, and perhaps different, types of data (b) issues related to measurement, standards, classification and data harmonization (c) analysis and dissemination approaches and (d) the mechanisms of involving stakeholders in the social statistics program.

4. This paper will consider some of the elements of a social statistics program drawing on Canada’s experience. An earlier paper “*Towards systems of social statistics – some principles and their application in Statistics Canada*” by Ivan Fellegi and Michael Wolfson³ considered many of the same topics in arguing “that the further development of social statistics should be based on a careful review of the fundamental needs of social policy”.

II. Scope of social statistics

5. At the most basic level, there is no international agreement as to the topics that make up social statistics. Although agreement might be reached on a set of core topic areas, there are likely to be additional areas that are more or less important in some countries than in others. In Canada, the core areas of the social statistics program each have an organizational unit that carries out an extensive statistical program. These core areas are:

- a) Demography (including a population estimates and projections program)
- b) Labour/ Work
- c) Income

- d) Health
 - e) Education
 - f) Justice
 - g) Culture
 - h) Tourism
6. In addition to the above, other areas of social statistics currently of interest at Statistics Canada include:
- a) Families and households
 - b) Housing
 - c) Immigration
 - d) Ethnicity
 - e) Language
 - f) Aboriginal Population

Aboriginal population, families and households, ethnicity, and language are essentially basic population characteristics. Historically, much of the work in these areas has been based around the population census. In recent years, however, new surveys or other data programs have been introduced or are actively being considered.

III. Conceptual Frameworks

7. The National Accounts has long had a well-defined and internationally-accepted framework for developing and reporting statistical information. During the 1960s and 1970s, Richard Stone did pioneering work on trying to develop a system of social and demographic statistics.⁴ The challenges of developing an overall framework for social statistics will not be discussed here, but such a framework, if at all possible, must remain a long term ideal. However, what is needed, and some might argue perhaps essential, for the development of social statistics, are conceptual frameworks for specific domain or topic areas.

8. A conceptual framework for a domain might be thought of as a schema for (a) defining the scope of the domain; (b) identifying standard concepts, definitions and terminology; (c) linking concepts to data sources; and (d) linking data sources to uses of the data. Until recently there have been few such frameworks. However, the growing interest in social statistics has generated much new activity in this area. A conceptual framework can be viewed as essentially a roadmap to a subject area that provides a useful overview of an area, and identifies data gaps or areas where more development or harmonization might be required. In most cases frameworks will evolve over time.

9. Although the National Accounts framework doesn't apply to all social statistics, there are some domains where the concept of satellite accounts may be appropriate and may provide a useful link between social and economic domains. For example, Statistics Canada has developed a satellite account for tourism statistics and work is underway on the development of a satellite account for the voluntary sector.

10. At Statistics Canada, frameworks exist, or are under active development, in the areas of health, education, justice, labour and culture. In most cases, this development work draws heavily on work done at the international level, for example, at the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization. One example of a framework under development for Statistics Canada's Labour Statistics program is summarized in Appendix A.

11. Recently, the Australian Bureau of Statistics specified a framework for Australian Social Statistics that underlies a new report on measuring well-being.⁵

IV. Data sources

12. For most countries, the main source of social statistics data is likely a census of population that is carried out every five or 10 years. The strength of the census is in its ability to provide consistent data at a small area level although the breadth of information is limited by costs and operational constraints.

13. Historically, a second major source of social data comes from the administrative data sets that are collected as part of a social program. In many countries, the oldest administrative data are the vital statistics information available on births, deaths and perhaps marriages. In Canada, administrative records collected by various social institutions, such as hospitals, schools, the police, courts and immigration authorities, are important sources of social data in the areas of health, education and justice. Such data have long provided a time series of information on the number and characteristics of various institutional or program populations as well as financial information about the institution. In the case of health, information is collected on numbers of hospital admissions and length of stays, spending on hospitals, numbers and characteristics of doctors, nurses and other health professionals. In the area of education, information is collected on the numbers of students, teachers, degrees granted, costs of education, and so on.

14. The strength of such administrative data is that they are collected as part of a particular program. They can provide data for detailed geographic areas with disaggregations for whatever population characteristics are available. Furthermore, the information is likely to be quite accurate. On the other hand, the limitations of administrative data are well known. In particular, the concepts and definitions are program-driven and these, as well as the coverage of the program, may change over time. Geographic disaggregations may also be problematic since the geographic information is likely based on administrative regions or the

mailing address of respondents. In addition, the range of data available from any one program is generally quite narrow.

15. In addition to the above sources, Statistics Canada, for the last 20 years or so, has made extensive use of individual tax records for producing annual income and migration data. The records from the government's unemployment insurance program are also a source of data on unemployment.

16. The third major source of social data is household surveys. In many countries, the main household survey is most likely a labour force survey. In Canada, the monthly Labour Force Survey, in existence since 1946, is the cornerstone of the household survey program. The survey provides timely monthly information on key employment and unemployment indicators. Its infrastructure is also used to conduct a wide range of other surveys, many done as supplements to the main survey.

17. In addition to the Labour Force Survey, many other household surveys are carried out in Canada. Information on the main surveys, as well as the other main sources of data for the various domains of the Canadian social statistics program, is available from the Statistics Canada Website.⁶

V. Evolution of the Canadian social statistics program

18. Historically, social statistics has been concerned with reporting inputs or program participation since these data were often readily available as an administrative data set. However, over the last decade or two, Canadian social statistics have evolved in several important ways. First, until recently, most datasets, whether surveys or administrative data, were cross-sectional and focused on a specific topic, with the primary objective to monitor trends over time at the national and primary sub-national levels, such as province or state. In Canada, until the mid-1980s, the main regular social surveys were concerned with measuring labour and income trends. In the mid-1980s, a new social survey was introduced to follow-up a sample of graduates from universities and colleges after one year, three years and five years.

19. In the mid-1980s, a new multi-purpose General Social Survey (GSS) was introduced to fill data gaps in areas such as health, education, justice, families and unpaid work. In the case of health, education and justice, the surveys were designed to complement existing administrative data. In the absence of regular social surveys, the idea was to carry out an annual survey with a modest sample size of 10,000 that would cover a different core topic each year. Each topic would be repeated every five years. While one objective of the survey was to monitor change over time, an equally important objective was to collect a broader set of social information that might be analytically linked to the core topic of interest. A second objective was to experiment with data collection in new areas. For example, over the years, the GSS has collected new data in the areas of unpaid work, care-giving, social capital and

the impact of technology on society. It has also collected data on perceptions and attitudes on the core topic being covered.

20. In recent years, many new major social surveys have been introduced to address issues in areas such as health, labour and income dynamics, children, youth, literacy and volunteer work. In all cases, such surveys were introduced to meet the federal government's policy research needs, and the surveys have been funded by various policy departments.

21. Another very important aspect of Statistics Canada's household survey program has been the capacity to conduct ad hoc special household surveys on a cost-recovery basis. This program, developed in the 1970s, used the Labour Force Survey's sampling frame and infrastructure. This permitted surveys to be carried out cost efficiently as supplements to the main monthly Labour Force Survey. Over the years, this capacity has been used extensively, mainly by federal policy departments, to conduct numerous surveys on a wide range of topics.

22. The expansion of the household surveys program not only saw more topics covered, it also saw a fundamental shift in the nature and complexity of surveys. In part, these shifts were facilitated by the evolution of computer technology

23. Fellegi and Wolfson⁷ capture the reasons for this shift in describing the link between social policy and the related systems of social statistics as follows:

"...the dual priority for systems of social statistics should be: (a) the development of measures aimed at monitoring key outcomes, and (b) illuminating their most important correlates, particularly those with causal significance."

24. One important shift in the nature of social data has been an increased interest in longitudinal data to better track social change at an individual level and better understand the determinants of social outcomes. In Canada, during the first half of the 1990s, this led to the development of new longitudinal surveys in the areas of health, children and labour and income dynamics. Subsequently, longitudinal surveys of youth in transition, recent immigrants and workplace and employees were introduced.

25. Another shift, also related to more analytically relevant information, saw the introduction of multi-level surveys that collect information at different levels. For example, in the case of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, data are collected at the level of the child, the family, the school classroom and the school itself. Another example is the Workplace and Employee Survey that collects information from a sample of firms, then for a sample of employees within those firms.

26. A third development has been an increasing demand for data at a regional level. Aside from the census, administrative data also offer an opportunity to produce small area data. In fact, in Canada individual income tax records have been used for this purpose since around 1980. More recently, a large Canadian Community Health Survey (sample size about 130,000) was introduced as a source of biennial data on health status and health-care utilization at a health region level.

27. Administrative data and household surveys each provide important slices of social statistics. However, the usefulness of such data can be greatly enhanced through record linkage of administrative data across time, the linkage of different administrative files or the linkage of administrative data to survey data. Clearly, in any linkage work, care must be taken to consider the balance between privacy and the public good. As a result, the evolution of a social statistics program along these lines must be accompanied by supporting policy and procedures in the areas of privacy and confidentiality.

28. In Canada, record linkage has taken several directions. These include a linkage across time; for example, a longitudinal tax file covering a 20% sample of tax filers currently covers the years 1980 to 2001. This linkage has allowed the creation of family units from the individual based tax records and the associated information on non-filing dependents. Immigration records have also been linked to tax records for analysis of the income profiles of immigrants over time. This linkage is particularly valuable in that it allows for analysis of important program criteria and policy levers, for example, class of immigration and selection criteria, that are difficult, if not impossible, to collect in the census or household surveys.

29. Record linkage also has a particularly big payoff in the areas of health, education and justice where there are many different separate parts of the system. Linking data across various parts of the system results in what might be termed a person-oriented data base. This allows for a much more holistic look at people and how they interact with programs. For example in the area of health, this allows one to look at a comprehensive picture of health utilization across physicians, hospitals and perhaps even medication use. Such linkage has allowed for interesting follow-up work on the impact of different surgical procedures for a given condition.⁸ Other possible linkages are education information from elementary, secondary and post-secondary institutions, and justice information on contacts with police, the courts and the prison system. This permits analysis of issues such as patterns of recidivism.

30. An example of linkage of survey data to administrative data is the linkage of health survey data to administrative health care, hospital and mortality records. Clearly, such a linkage greatly enhances the potential for analyzing the relationship between health status and utilization of the health care system. As indicated earlier, privacy and confidentiality must be paramount in considering such linkages. At Statistics Canada, with rare exception, linkages of administrative data to survey data are done only when people give their informed consent at the time the data are collected. In the case of the Canadian Community Health Survey, about 90 % of survey respondents agree to such linkage.

31. A final source of social data that should be mentioned is micro-simulation modeling. Fellegi and Wolfson provide a discussion of the role of such models in a system of social statistics. As they point out

“ Such models are good vehicles for the integration of our existing knowledge about the phenomena under study, including information on dynamics and causal factors represented in the form of transition probabilities (or better yet, transition probability densities, expressed as functions of relevant covariates). Subject to our level of knowledge, these kinds of models provide a foundation for coherent families of summary outcome indicators.”⁹

Such models have been used for some time, most often from the point of view of departments of finance for analyzing the potential impact of tax changes. At Statistics Canada, the Social Policy Simulation Database and Model has long been used for this purpose. More recently, work has been ongoing on the development of a “Lifepaths” model that would simulate population changes from the point of view of the lifecycle.¹⁰ The model is based on time-use data, and has been used to examine factors such as working time over the lifecycle.

32. Another major innovation in household surveys has been an attempt to collect data that is internationally comparable. One example is in the area of literacy where the International Adult Literacy survey was carried out in about 30 different countries. In addition to the focus on international comparability, these literacy surveys are noteworthy for making major advancements in the measurement of literacy. Another internationally comparable survey is the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) that, in Canada, is collected as part of the Youth in Transition survey. Other initiatives underway to develop internationally comparable data are the Family and Fertility Project and the Gender and Generations Project¹¹ that are led by the UNECE Population Activities Unit. In some cases, for example the Luxemburg Income Study and the International Time Use Project, international comparability was attempted by standardizing similar data sets from different countries.

VI. Methods, standards and classification issues

33. These topics are central to all statistical activity and are an ongoing focus at both the international and national levels. At the international level, the UN Expert Group on Economic and Social Classifications¹² is concerned with these issues, although much of their focus has been on the economic side. However, some work has been done in the areas of international migration and time use. A number of City Groups have also made very good progress on issues related to methods, standards and classification. For example, The Canberra Group produced an excellent report on household income statistics;¹³ the Rio Group is working on issues related to measuring poverty; and the Washington Group is concerned with similar issues related to disability. The UN decennial census preparatory work is another example of the attempt to harmonize concepts and definitions.

34. Although much of the work at the international level is concerned with issues of international harmonization, the need to ground the social statistics system in the national program and policy environment makes international harmonization particularly challenging. For example, in recent years, for some domains the focus of harmonization has been driven more by regional concerns. In North America, this had led to the development of the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS) and the current work on developing a North American product classification. More recently, work has started on the possible harmonization of North American immigration data. While in the short term the development of detailed classification systems might be driven by regional concerns, in the long term it is clearly desirable to have some comparability across various region systems. The approach to this might be viewed as a two-step process: first, development of relevant regional systems; and, second, the harmonization of such systems, likely at a higher level of aggregation.

35. Issues related to the harmonization of concepts, definitions and standards also arise at the national level, since surveys and other data collection instruments are often developed independently of one another. Here, the task of harmonization is complicated by the fact that the development of different data systems is frequently driven by different policy interests with perhaps different concepts and needs. However, in other cases, the lack of harmonization seems much more related to the independence of different organizational programs.

36. At Statistics Canada, a departmental Methods and Standards Committee is concerned with these issues, although at the international level most of the work has been done on the economic side. In addition, Statistics Canada has internal “subject matter” committees that try to deal with harmonization and related issues across programs. In the U.K., ONS has developed recommended harmonized concepts and questions for government household surveys that is an example of best practices in this area.¹⁴

VII. Dissemination and analysis

37. One issue crucial to the success of any social statistics program is a strong dissemination program that ensures the availability and accessibility of data to interested audiences. Traditionally, aside from a few general publications such as a yearbook, most statistical output from social statistics programs was oriented to producing detailed tabulations and databases of primary interest to statistical practitioners. However, the increasing interest in social data, coupled with the evolution of the Internet, has resulted in an opportunity to produce data in more accessible ways. This requires a re-thinking of the types of data available and, in particular, a shift to more summarized data that is organized by trends over time, or comparisons between areas.

38. The resurgence of interest in social indicators is another example of the demand for summary social data. In some cases, indicators are tied to program monitoring. For example, in Canada, key indicator work has been done in the areas of health, education and

justice. A major effort has recently been initiated to develop indicators in the area of sustainable development.¹⁵ At a more general level, in recent years the reporting of societal indicators has been included in an annual report “Canada’s Performance” submitted to Canada’s Parliament.¹⁶

39. Although social indicators are much in demand, the reporting on social trends and conditions must be grounded in a broader analytic program including the dissemination of analytic results. At Statistics Canada, one approach has been to develop a series of “flagship” analytical publications that report the results of analysis in an easy-to-understand way. These publications, for the most part, are based around a specific theme, such as education, labour and income, justice, health, tourism and so on. Their primary target audience is people working in the domain area. In addition to these theme-based publications, Statistics Canada has a more general quarterly publication titled *Canadian Social Trends*. Each issue consists of a series of short articles written for students and a more general audience.

40. The Internet also provides new opportunities for disseminating statistical data and information to broad audiences. Many statistical agencies are continuing to develop their websites as important points of access to statistical information. However, this work involves much more than simply transferring data from one media to another. Rather, the entire approach to dissemination must be rethought if the Web is to be used to its full advantage. At Statistics Canada, a new web-based approach was used very successfully to disseminate results of the 2001 Census. In addition to providing easy access to data, the census release strategy developed an active partnership with the media to ensure census results were widely distributed to the general public.¹⁷

41. Another class of key data users is the research community in both government and academia. While these users generally want access to detailed data bases, such access must be done only after taking into account the paramount issue of confidentiality, a major concern of any statistical organization. In Canada, access to household survey data has long been possible through the production of public use microdata files. Such files provide data that have been modified in various ways to ensure confidentiality is preserved. These modifications might include restrictions on the level of geographic detail, omission of selected variables, or collapsing of extreme values or detail. Until recently, it has been possible to produce public use files for virtually all household surveys. However, with the advent of more detailed surveys, such as longitudinal surveys or those done for specific target groups, it has become much more difficult to create public use files for more detailed surveys. In order to continue to provide researchers access to microdata, several years ago, Statistics Canada developed a Research Data Centre program. Under this program, qualified researchers have access to detailed data in a secure and controlled university environment. Currently, nine such centers are in operation, and four more are planned.¹⁸

VIII. Involvement of stakeholders

42. Social statistics are of broad interest to many different stakeholders, including governments at all levels, academics, non-profit organizations, the private sector, the media and the general public. In the case of the public, interest stems from the fact that the social topics often touch aspects of everyday life, and much of the population can see themselves in the data. This presents a real opportunity to demonstrate the relevance and importance of statistical activities, an increasingly important factor in maintaining the viability of the relevant statistical program and perhaps helping to sustain high response rates to statistical surveys.

43. As indicated earlier, any social statistics program must be relevant to the social policy and program environment. In fact, many of the topics likely correspond to the area of responsibility of specific national or sub-national government policy ministries. This has a number of implications for social statistics activities. In some countries where the national statistical system is not centralized, individual ministries may, in fact, have primary responsibility for their own statistics, although the central statistical agency may still be responsible for collecting census and some survey data. This presents coordination challenges.

44. In Canada, where there is a high degree of centralization of statistical work, individual policy departments still collect and hold a wide range of program administrative data. These are important parts on the social statistics program. In addition, most maintain a research and statistics function to support policy development and evaluation. The importance of policy departments for developing social statistics also stems from the fact that in many cases, large federal departments are sponsors and sources of funding for major social surveys and other statistical activities. This has certainly been true in the case of Statistics Canada, where over the last decade virtually all new major social statistics activity has been funded by various policy departments. The need for the involvement of policy departments is important, but not only from a funding point of view. Their input is necessary to ensure the social statistics program remains policy-relevant and responds to emerging policy needs.

45. In Canada, the involvement of national policy departments in the development of social statistics has evolved over the years. In the late 1990s, the federal government was concerned with capacity of its various departments for policy research. It was generally agreed that research capacity had eroded over time. In addition, it was felt there was a need to look at issues on a much more horizontal or cross-cutting basis, rather than through the lens of a single policy department. As a result, a federal “Policy Research Initiative” was launched.¹⁹ One dimension of this initiative was to look at emerging research needs and to determine where there might be data gaps. This led to formation of a Policy Research Data Group in which Statistics Canada and the policy departments worked to identify the need for new statistical surveys. Although on-going funding was allocated to the data initiative, the idea was that the funding would be seed money to begin priority projects. In the longer term, the hope was that if there was a need to maintain projects on an on-going basis, more permanent funding would be found by the lead policy department interested in the data. The

program, with funding of \$20 million Cdn per year, is in its fifth year. A major review and evaluation of the original funded projects is currently underway.

46. Co-ordination between Statistics Canada and major policy departments is handled through interdepartmental committees that serve as a focal point for mutual interests. Committees may meet several times a year to share information and discuss joint projects. They are often used to co-ordinate a variety of continuing activities within different parts of both agencies. In addition, for major surveys funded by policy departments, a steering committee with representation from the department is set up to ensure the department's needs are taken into account in the survey development.

47. In addition to the interests of policy departments, for some topics, responsibility for part of the social statistics program is shared with another national organization. For example, in the case of health, Statistics Canada is responsible for issues related to measuring the health of Canadians, while the Canadian Institute for Health Information is responsible for most of the issues related to use of the health care system. Along the same lines, a new Canadian Institute for Learning is being created to look at issues related to education and learning. Another example is the proposed First Nations Statistical Institute that would deal with statistical issues of interest to the largest part of Canada's Aboriginal population. While all of these national bodies present opportunities for strengthening the social statistics system, they also present substantial challenges related to the planning and co-ordination of activities.

48. In addition to important national agencies having responsibility for parts of the social statistics program, the situation is further complicated in Canada, as in other countries, because in many cases program and policy responsibility does not rest with the national government. For example, under the Canadian constitution, responsibility for health and education, and to some extent justice, rests with 13 provincial and territorial governments. In such cases, co-ordination is much more complicated, particularly since the jurisdictions vary widely in size and the nature of their programs. Hence, statistical capacity also varies widely. In Canada, this has led to formation of various federal/provincial/territorial bodies to share information, develop statistical priorities and ensure the policy relevance of social statistics.

49. The growing interest in social statistics has resulted in non-traditional stakeholders becoming much more interested in social data. For example, in Canada the Voluntary Sector Initiative is a joint project between the voluntary sector, representing 180,000 non-profit organizations, and the Government of Canada.²⁰ An important part of this initiative is a focus on new research, including new national surveys on issues such as individual giving and volunteering and on the voluntary sector's contribution to the economy.

50. There has also been a growing interest in social statistics by cities and other municipal governments across Canada. This has led to the development of a "Community Social Data Strategy" that is a partnership between Statistics Canada and the Canadian Council on Social

Development to develop increased statistical capacity and coordinate better access to statistical data.

51. On the more academic and research side, the evolution of the social statistics system to a much richer, but more complicated, system presents other challenges. In particular, there is a concern about the capacity to use new statistical data and transfer research findings to policy makers. Several years ago Statistics Canada introduced the Data Liberation Initiative to provide Canadian academic institutions with affordable access to data files and data bases for research and teaching.²¹ More recently, quantitative social science research was the subject of a joint task force of Statistics Canada and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the main national granting agency for social science research.²² The task force included representation from researchers as well as the two sponsoring agencies. The result was development of the Canadian Initiative on Social Statistics (CISS) that included four main dimensions: (a) improved access to microdata; (b) increased training and support of researchers, particularly young scholars; (c) increased support for quantitative social science research; and, (d) programs targeted to insuring the transfer of research findings to policy makers.

52. Although funding has not been available to implement the CISS in its entirety, much progress has been made, especially on the first three components of the strategy. As indicated earlier, Research Data Centres have been established. As well, a program of short-term training schools based at universities has been started and is gradually being expanded. Finally, funding for development of research infrastructure and actual social science research work has been increased, often in the form of large multi-center research teams, often including representation from Statistics Canada.

53. Academics and other researchers are also involved with the statistical program through representation on various sector advisory committees, such as social conditions, that advise the Chief Statistician on the statistical program. Researchers are also on various expert groups that are set up to offer advice on developing a specific survey or program.

IX. Organization issues

54. At Statistics Canada the size of the Social Statistics program is currently 1,100 person years with an annual non-census budget of approximately 75 Million (Cdn). This program is divided into 8 subject matter divisions. In addition there is a Special Surveys Division and a Census Operation Division.

55. In organizing a social statistics program, the statistical agency must balance two, in some cases competing, objectives. On the one hand, from an operational and production point of view, it is desirable to organize around various data sources. For example, work could be organized by individual survey. Given the need for survey management expertise, it makes sense to look at setting up survey-taking units that are responsible for all aspects of

a set of surveys. On the other hand, from the point of view of a specific domain, such as income or immigration, there are clear advantages to having a unit responsible for all data sources related to the domain. This is particularly valuable from the point of view of developing a comprehensive conceptual framework and harmonizing concepts, standards, processing approaches and outputs across various data sources. There are, of course, many intermediate organizational approaches between the two extremes.

56. Clearly, regardless of which approach is used, there is a need to keep in mind both the operational and subject matter needs. This might be done on a project basis by involving appropriate expertise in various aspects of the project. For example, subject matter staff might be heavily involved in the content development and analysis of a survey. Cross-cutting committees concerned with issues of harmonization or survey operations might also be used to co-ordinate activities across surveys.

57. At Statistics Canada, the social statistics program is organized for the most part along domain or subject matter lines, with each of the domain areas responsible for many of the major survey or data-collection activities affecting the domain. However, in addition there is a Special Social Surveys Unit that deals with ad hoc special surveys, as well as many of the new surveys, particularly those done on a cost-recovery basis. In some cases, new surveys may fit into an existing domain, but the expertise to conduct the survey does not exist in the subject matter unit. In this case, close co-operation is required to integrate the new survey into the broader existing subject matter program. In other cases, the topic of new surveys, for example, volunteer work or children, may not clearly fit into an existing unit. If such surveys are to be on-going, it may be desirable to reassess the need for new subject matter areas, perhaps as an extension of an existing area.

X. The future

58. As indicated above, in Canada, as in many other countries, the social statistics program has been undergoing major changes and growth in response to evolving data needs. The changes have included the introduction of many new surveys, often targeted at particular population groups that are the subject of social policy development, for example, children, youth, immigrants and persons with disabilities. For the future, Canada's aging population, and in particular the impact of the large baby boom cohort, will no doubt be a major policy focus. In fact, a possible new major longitudinal survey on aging is under consideration. The continuing shift to a knowledge-based economy will also see a new focus on skills development and lifelong learning. Finally, it has been suggested that in future there will be more of a social policy focus on the life course. This new focus may include the many transitions that occur throughout life, as well as associated changes in financial capital, human capital and social capital.

59. Regardless of the exact direction of the evolution of social statistics, it is clear that international collaboration can be a great asset to all statistical agencies in developing new

programs. From a Canadian perspective, some possible areas on which to focus would be the following:

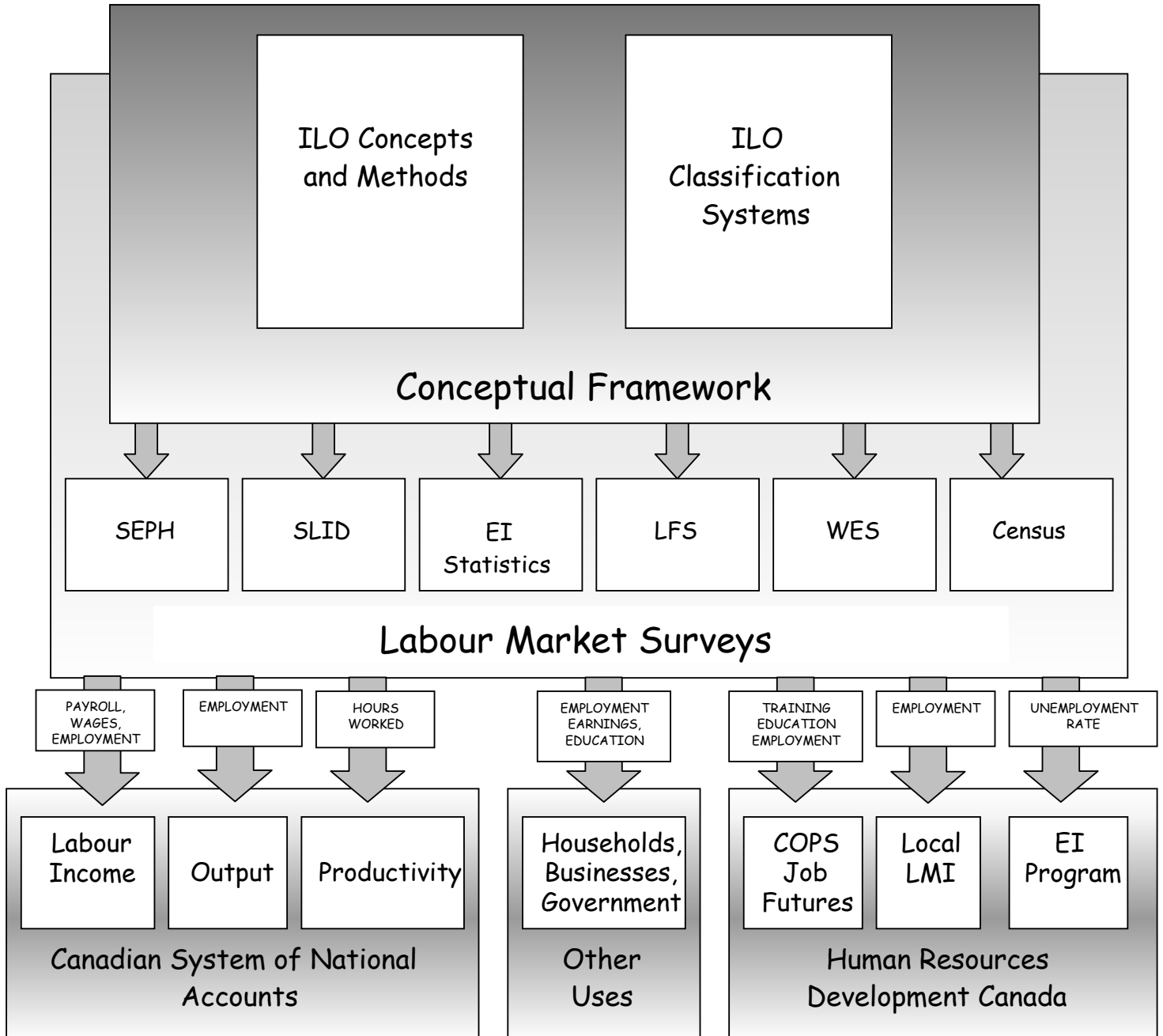
60. **Conceptual frameworks:** Although a conceptual framework for an area must be based on the availability of social policy and data in the country, many aspects related to the development of frameworks are generic, and a sharing of experience would be valuable. Closely related is work on the standardization of concepts and definitions. As mentioned earlier, the Canberra Group's work on income can serve as a best practice here. A key to the success of that work seems to have been a clear focused work program and schedule that resulted in a published report. The current work program of the Siena Group on Social Statistics, as well as work by the OECD and a number of national statistical agencies, is concerned with the measurement of social capital. This might be an area on which to focus in a more coordinated fashion.

61. **Multi-purpose surveys:** One aspect of a number of social statistics programs is the existence of some type of multipurpose or general social survey. Canada, the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom and Italy are among nations with such a program. It would be useful to examine these surveys and the role they play in a social statistics program. One challenge of social statistics is that many topics are interrelated. However, clearly it is not possible for any one survey to include all relevant topics. A carefully designed, multipurpose survey might be able to measure interrelationships in some way. In addition, such surveys might include core modules that are carried by various countries to produce internationally comparable data.

62. **Dissemination and analysis:** As noted earlier, social survey development has evolved towards longitudinal and more complex multi-level surveys. In addition, measurement is improving, and also becoming more complex. Sharing experiences related to new analytic methods, as well as training, would be beneficial. In addition, the evolution of the Internet, and the potential for innovative approaches to dissemination, provide scope for identifying and sharing best practices in this area.

Appendix A

A Conceptual Framework for Statistics Canada's Labour Statistics Program



Major Labour Market Information Uses

Notes

1. See <http://www.un.org/millennium/summit.htm>
2. See Jenny Church, “World Summit for Social Development: Implications for Statistics”, Statistical Journal of the United Nations ECE 13 (1996) 17-23
3. See I. Fellegi and M. Wolfson, “Towards Systems of Social Statistics- Some Principals and their Applications in Statistics Canada” Journal of Official Statistics, Vol. 15, No 3, 1999, pp.373-393
4. See “Towards a System of Social and Democratic Statistics” United Nations Studies in Methods Series F, No 18, ST/ESA/STAT/SER F/18 New York, 1975
5. See http://www.abs.gov.au_ (search Measuring Wellbeing)
6. For more details on Statistics Canada social statistics Program see <http://www.statcan.ca/English/concepts/index.htm>
7. See note 3, p. 379
8. See H. Johansen, C. Nair and G. Taylor “Variations in angioplasty and bypass surgery” Health Reports, Winter 1998, Vol. 10, No.3..
9. See note 3, p. 390
10. See M. Wolfson, “Lifepaths: A New Framework for Socioeconomic Accounts. 24th General Conference of the International Association for Income and Wealth. Lillehammer, August, 1996
11. See http://www.unece.org/ead/pau/ggp/ggp_h.htm
12. For an explanation of the work of the UN Expert Group on international and social classifications see <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/class/intercop/expertgroup/default.htm>
13. See Expert Group on Household Income Statistics, The Canberra Group, Final Report and Recommendations, Ottawa 2001 ISBN 0-9688524-0-8
14. See <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/harmony/document.asp>
15. See http://www.nrtee-trnee.ca/eng/programs/current_programs/SDIndicators/index.html
16. Link to Treasury Board page. http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/report/govrev/02/cp-rc_e.asp
17. See “2001 Canadian Census Experience: Shifting Gears” Paper prepared for 2003 Joint UNECE-EUROSTAT Work, Session on Population and Housing Censuses. Paper available at <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2003.05census.htm> (look for wp.3)
18. See G. Goldmann, “The Research Data Centre Program in Canada: A holistic approach to evidence-based research to inform public policy”. Paper presented at the International Conference on Social Science and Social Policy in the 21st Century, Vienna, Austria, December 9-11, 2002
19. See <http://policyresearch.gc.ca>
20. See www.vsi-isbc.ca
21. See www.statcan.ca/english/Dli/dli.htm

22. See “Final Report of the Joint Working Group of SSHRC and Statistics Canada on the Advancement of Research Using Social Statistics (December 1998)”. This PDF document is available at www.sshrc.ca/web/about/publications/publications_e.pdf