International harmonisation and comparison of wealth data – Household Finance and Consumption Survey

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Outline

1. Household Finance and Consumption Survey – introduction
2. Harmonisation of survey methodologies
3. Harmonisation of output data
4. Interpretation of results
5. What you can do with the data - example
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5. What can you do with the data- examples?
What is the Household Finance and Consumption Survey (HFCS)?

• Cross-country comparable micro data on the wealth of European households

• Country coverage:

• First wave (around 2010): 15 countries

• Second wave (around 2014): 20 countries (80,000+ households)

• Third wave (around 2017, to be published in 2019):
  – All 19 euro area countries + Croatia, Hungary, Poland, (Denmark)
1. Introduction

Background

- Household-level data are informative on **distributional issues** and can be relevant for the transmission of monetary policy and for **financial stability**
- Macro data (e.g. financial accounts) do not reveal developments of **different population groups**
- Existing (pre-2010) household wealth surveys in Spain, Italy, France, the Netherlands and Finland, but no ex-ante harmonised data source that allows comparisons between various countries
1. Introduction

**Background**

- In 2007, the **Household Finance and Consumption Network** started working on a common set of variables and harmonised methodologies
  - No legal basis, gentlemen’s agreement
- Existing household wealth surveys to be gradually harmonised with the HFCS output
- Experiences from similar European wide surveys on **income** (EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions – EU-SILC) and **consumption** (Household Budget Survey – HBS)
  - Data structure and most demographic variables adapted from EU-SILC
- Consultant from the US Federal reserve board, having conducted a Survey of Consumer Finances since 1983
- First fieldwork (mainly) in 2010, first results released in April 2013.
Areas covered by the HFCS

- Real and financial assets
- Liabilities
- Pension wealth

- Income
- Consumption
- Inheritances and gifts

- Demographics
- Employment
1. Introduction

Output harmonisation

• The HFCS has a list of variables with harmonised definitions and coding (answer categories)
  – Core variables to be collected in every country
  – Non-core variables: collection voluntary, but if collected, a harmonised definition should be used

• In addition there is a blueprint questionnaire that countries can, but do not have to apply

• Comparison of output data will be discussed more in detail later
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How to achieve comparable data?

- The most important and most underrated feature:
- **How to produce** data that can be compared across countries?
2. Harmonisation - methodologies

Harmonised survey methodologies

• The HFCN provides very detailed instructions and requirements on how to conduct the survey

• Two main reasons:

1. The output data can only be comparable, if produced with methodologies comparable across countries

2. Countries with no previous experience in conducting surveys can adapt the HFCS methodological guidelines and do not invent everything themselves
Methodological guidelines include

1. Survey mode
2. Sampling, including oversampling of the wealthy
3. Weighting
4. Imputation
5. Variance estimation

• What follows is a brief overview of these topics
2.1 Survey mode

• The preferred survey mode is **Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI)**
• Interviewers enter the household residence for the interview
• Both *personal* and *household* level questions
• Personal questions asked preferably to each (adult) household member:
  – Demographics
  – Employment
  – Part of income (labour and pension income, unemployment benefits)
  – Pension wealth
• Household level questions
  – Wealth and liabilities
  – Private businesses
  – Part of income (other transfers, capital income)
  – Consumption
Survey mode in practice

- In the second HFCS wave 18 out of 20 countries applied CAPI
- Telephone interview (CATI) in Finland (merged to income survey) and Web interviews (CAWI) in the Netherlands
- Main problems with CATI: length of interview, ability to interview all household members
- Main problem with CAWI: potential bias of the sample, no interaction with interviewer
Other data sources

• Where available, interview data can be complemented with **administrative data** (output harmonisation)

• For example: income from government authorities, financial wealth from tax authorities or financial institutes, information on pensions

• Administrative data can be used:
  – to replace interview data as such
  – to estimate the value of a survey variable (e.g. ownership of real estate + information on prices)
  – in the editing phase.
2. Harmonisation - methodologies

2.2 Sampling

Survey producers use a **sampling frame** that should (as much as possible) cover the entire target population…

…to draw a (gross) **sample**, i.e. select households that are invited to participate in the survey
Sampling – theory and practice

• Examples of **sampling frames** from which the actual sample is drawn from
  – Population register
  – Register of dwellings / addresses
  – Population census
  – Customer register of electricity authority

• Most important common feature: **probability sampling**
  – each household in the sampling frame has a non-zero probability of being selected in the sample, and this probability is known beforehand

• **Stratification**: defining the structure of the sample by e.g. region and municipality size

• Samples should be representative at the country level
  – Sample sizes (2014) vary from 1,000 in Malta to 12,000 in France
Oversampling of wealthy

- **Oversampling** of the wealthy
  - Distribution of wealth skewed, to obtain reliable information for the entire distribution, the sample should include proportionally more wealthy households

- Not all euro area countries are able to oversample
  - **Lack of data sources** from which wealthy households can be ex-ante identified

- Examples of sources for oversampling
  - Wealth tax (personal)
  - Income tax data (personal)
  - Electricity consumption (personal)
  - Average personal income (regional)
  - List of wealthy street sections (regional)
2.3 Unit non-response and weighting

- Unit non-response means that all units invited to participate in the survey do not reply
  - Households cannot be contacted
  - Households refuse to participate in the survey
- The net sample (households that are interviewed) is smaller than the gross sample
  - Main problem: if refusal to participate connected with household characteristics (e.g. rich households tend to participate less frequently)
Relatively high unit non-response in HFCS

- Unit non-response a major problem in wealth surveys

HFCS response rates (2014)
Adjusting for non-response: survey weights

- No results from survey data should be calculated without using proper survey weights!
- Each household interviewed for the survey represents a certain number of households in the population being analysed
- **Four main steps in the production of survey weight:**
  1. Probability of selection
     - how many one person households from Umbria are selected?
  2. Coverage adjustment
     - has the person we sampled from Umbria moved abroad
  3. Non-response adjustment
     - if one person households from Umbria have relatively high non-response rates, their weights will be bigger
  4. Calibration
     - to match the known population structure of e.g. the census
2.4 Item non-response and imputation

- Every respondent does not know – or does not want to reveal – the answer to all questions (item non-response)
- However, they still provide valuable information to the survey
- Some variables, particularly balance sheet and income variables, have to be imputed, if there is no answer from the respondent – i.e. for every household there is a non-missing value for all such variables
Imputation

• With modelling, impute a value of a variable that should have been reported, but was not

• Using the **answers of other households** that have responded to the question

• May require several steps
  – E.g. first impute, whether the household has a mortgage, and if imputed as ‘yes’, impute the outstanding value

• HFCS feature: **multiple imputation**
  – Impute five values for each observation to reflect the uncertainty of imputations

• Several detailed methodological guidelines + common programs provided in the HFCS
Why is imputation important?

- Imputation requires a significant amount of time and resources
- What if we do not impute?
  - If we include partial balance sheets in the data (which we don’t):
    - Some balance sheets in the data will have lower values than in reality
  - If we exclude all households with partial balance sheets from the calculations (which we do):
    - Biased set of households in the data, households with complicated balance sheets tend to have more missing observations
2.5 Variance estimation

- Finally, to show the uncertainty of the data, we need standard errors.
- The method: bootstrapping using replicate weights.
- Draw 1000 replicate samples from the net sample with replacement.
- Meaning that every household can be included 0 – n times in each replicate sample.
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Harmonisation of output data and results

Three levels

- National variables
- HFCS output variables
- HFCS derived variables
National level variables

• May have a different question *wording* than in the HFCS blueprint questionnaire

• May have different *answer categories* than the HFCS
  – E.g. on labour status, legal form of family business

• One HFCS variable may be constructed from *several* national level variables
  – E.g. if considered useful to ask separately for various types of deposits

• However, in the end each HFCS country provides the information to the ECB in a *harmonised format*
3. Harmonised output data

HFCS output variables

HB0900 current price of household main residence

**Question wording:** [What is the value of this property, i.e. if you could sell it now how much do you think would be the price of it?]

**Filtering:** If \(((HB0300=1)\lor(HB0300=2))\)

**Unit:** Household

**Type:** single numerical question

**Coding:**
Numerical value in EUR, 9 digits

**Special codes:**
-1 - Don't know
-2 - No answer
3. Harmonised output data

**HFCS derived variables (indicators)**

- Consistent reporting of results, definitions of wealth and other important concepts
- For every indicator, we use the same set of output variables for every country
- **Example:**
  - **Non-financial wealth** = Value of household main residence + value of other real estate properties + value of vehicles + value of valuables + value of self-employment business
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From harmonised methodology to comparable results

• Simple, isn’t it?
• Now, all we have to do is

  Compare

  And

  Understand

  The results
Some results from the HFCS second wave

• Reference year for wealth and liabilities:
• 2014: Belgium, Germany, Greece, France, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia
• 2013: Estonia, Ireland, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Finland
• 2012: Spain
What we wanted to tell the world
Size and composition of household portfolios in euro area

Stylized Facts:

1. Household Main Residence (HMR) is the largest asset
2. Total assets are dominated by real assets
3. Portfolios are in general not very diversified, though less so for the rich
Wealth heterogeneity persists across life cycle

4. Interpretation of results

Distribution of Net Wealth by Age of Reference Person (age in years, EUR Thousands)

Hump-shaped profile of the median wealth and of the P25/P75 range
4. Interpretation of results

**Impact of the financial crisis**

Decline in household Net Wealth between 2010 – 2014 across the wealth distribution
What the press wanted to tell the world
4. Interpretation of results

**Median household net wealth by country, 1,000 €**
Most frequently asked questions

• Why are Germans so poor?
• Are the data reliable?
• Can we compare the data across countries?

Correct interpretation of data

• The HFCS is not the ‘wealth of nations’, it measures wealth of the household sector
  – But of course, we cannot avoid comparisons across countries
• Measures points of distribution (e.g. median) much better than aggregates (e.g. mean)
  – But points of distribution do not necessarily reveal aggregates
4. Interpretation of results

Harmonisation vs. interpretation of results

- Data are produced with sufficiently harmonised methods
- Variables are collected with identical definitions
- The concept of wealth is identical in all countries

But

- To interpret the results one needs to understand what is measured and some fundamental institutional and demographic differences between countries
4. Interpretation of results

Mean and median household wealth, 1000 €

[Bar chart showing the mean and median net wealth for various countries, with countries listed from LV to LU.]
Household

- Wealth is measured at the household level
- Usually not possible to divide most of household wealth among household members
- Equivalence scales (‘per consumption unit’) used in income, not in wealth statistics

- However: Average household size matters in cross-country comparisons of household wealth
4. Interpretation of results

Median net wealth by household size
4. Interpretation of results

**Share of one-person households**

![Bar chart showing the share of one-person households in various countries within the eurozone.](https://www.ecb.europa.eu)
Homeownership rate

- The Household Main Residence (HMR) is by far the most important asset of the household sector
  - Approximately 50% of household wealth in the euro area is in the value of the HMR

- Additional measurement issue: the value of HMR is relatively well captured in surveys, but the value of financial wealth and other real estate wealth is sometimes significantly underreported
  - Households know the value of the HMR, not of financial assets
  - Wealthiest households missing from the data own a small share of total HMRs, but a large share of total shares and businesses

- Homeownership rates explain a large share of cross-country variability in median net wealth
Wealth heterogeneity persists across homeownership status

Home-owners hold more net wealth than renters

Results stable across waves
4. Interpretation of results

**Homeownership rate by country**
Explaining differences in household size and homeownership

• In Central and Northern Europe children move out of their parents’ house earlier than in Southern and Eastern Europe

• Young people who have just moved out more probably live alone and are more probably renters

➢ Larger average household size and homeownership rate in Southern and Eastern Europe

• Example:
  – Spain: 17.5 million households, 5.1 million adults (>18) living with parents
  – Italy: 24.7 million households, 6.9 million adults living with parents
  – Germany: 39.7 million households, 3.8 million adults living with parents
  – Ratio of adults living with parents to number of households is lowest in Finland (5%) and highest in Slovakia (42%)
4. Interpretation of results

Homeowners, renters and adults living with parents, number of households = 100%
Where to find more information?


• HFCS web page that includes
  – Analytical reports of the results
  – Methodological reports
  – List of output variables
  – Other methodological and implementation documents

• Any questions can be addressed to
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What was the impact of the crisis on household debt burden?

Debt-to-income ratio of euro area households – macro data (Eurostat)
5. Use of data - debt burden

**Micro aspect: Share of indebted households (HFCS)**

- **Decline** in debt participation
- From 44% to 42%
  - Mainly due to participation in non-mortgage debt
- 4.2 Mio households less that are indebted

**Bar chart:**
- Has mortgage on HMR
- Has mortgage
- Has non-mortgage debt

Data from 2010 to 2014.
5. Use of data - debt burden

**Conditional medians of outstanding debt, EUR**

- For indebted households, the median debt has increased significantly between 2010 and 2014
  - HMR = Household Main Residence

![Bar chart showing changes in total debt, mortgage debt, and HMR mortgage debt from 2010 to 2014 with percentages and median values.](chart.png)
5. Use of data - debt burden

Debt-to-income ratio by income quintile (2014)

Share of indebted households

Indebted low-income households face high debt burden – 1/3 of indebted households in QI have DTI ratio > 300%
5. Use of data - debt burden

Share of households with DTI ratio over 300%

- 2010-2014: Increase of 0.3%-points (650,000 households) with DTI ratio>300%
- Low income households most affected
- For high income households decrease in debt burden
Thank you for your attention!
Reserve slides
Credit constraints – fewer HHs applied for credit

Share of HHs which Applied for Credit by Income Quintile (%)
Application 1: Effects of interest rate changes on debt service-income ratios

- For households with adjustable-rate mortgages, we can compute the impact of change in key ECB rates on mortgage payments.
- Young adults aged 35-44 would experience the biggest impact – hold bulk of mortgage debt.
Household wealth changed differently along the distribution

- **Belgium**
  - **Wealth** increased in the lower part of the distribution and decreased at the top
  - **Decrease in inequality** for most indicators

- **Germany**
  - **Wealth** decreased in the lower part of the distribution
  - **Increase in inequality** for indicators more sensitive to lower parts of the distribution (Gini, Atkinson(1))

- **Cyprus**
  - **Wealth** decreased in the entire the distribution
  - Mixed results on **inequality**
Comparison with National accounts for comparable financial wealth

• Coherence with macro sources on individual assets may be hard to achieve
• Adding up comparable items (deposits + quoted shares + mutual funds + bonds) gives a pretty reliable picture at least on changes between waves
Heterogeneity across households exceeds heterogeneity across countries

Much overlap in the middle ranges (P25-P75)

Distribution of Net Wealth per Household by Country (EUR Thousands)