

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS TO MAINTAINING SURVEY RESPONSE RATES IN SOCIAL STATISTICS

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Abstract

In Latvia, since 2017, when data collection was also introduced via the Internet, the social statistics provide respondents with the possibility to reply in person, by phone, by internet and by completing a paper questionnaire (only HBS).

By 2020, the most significant part of the responses were collected in face-to-face interviews and slightly less than 10% in online interviews. Latvia, like other countries of the European Union, faced the challenge of keeping response rate of the surveys for several decades (Särndal 2005, Tourangeau 2013), while the measures to limit the covid-19 pandemic provided for the complete cessation of face-to-face interviews for nearly two years.

In order not to stop collecting social statistical data and to ensure the volume and structure of data that meets the quality requirements, the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (hereinafter - CSB) took a number of measures to organise surveys and maintain the response rates.

The measures included a complex approach and sustainable solutions. Primarily, in cooperation with several Latvian administrative data holders (Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, Road Traffic Safety Directorate and State Revenue Service), an agreement was reached on obtaining the contact information of respondents – phone numbers and e-mails. Secondly, the CSB refocused the interviewers service by providing operationally a load redistribution between face-to-face interviewers and telephone interviewers. A training and adapted working tools were performed.

As a result, around 80% of phone numbers and emails were reached to contact respondents. None of the social surveys delayed the deadlines due to field works. However, some respondents did not respond to an invitation to reply via the Internet and some of the contact information failed to obtain. In the surveys where this was possible (the person samples), the CSB redesigned sample from two stage to a one stage sample design and recalculate sample volumes, as a lower number of respondents is sufficient for one stage than for two stage sample. The CSB carried out the Adaptive data Collection approach. The “adaptive” meaning is flexible and active control of collection results, ensuring that the answers in certain groups are well balanced and representative to the population. Thus, it was ensured that respondents to the unrepresented age/sex/groups were surveyed.

The third group refers to communication with respondents, particularly groups that are more difficult to reach – rural residents, young people and men (Woronkovicz 2020). Through the funding available in the grants granted by Eurstat, EU-SILC, LFS, EU-GBV, AES surveys have developed and implemented measures: development of a branding for each survey; communication with the respondent: letters, reminders, booklets; content for home page, social networks, newspapers, TV and radio – infographics, radio news, cartoons; participation in Instagram discussions, broadcasts and podcasts and test for the main news home page delfi.lv.

The pandemic crisis has shed light on that it is possible to find sustainable and cost-effective solutions to maintain response rates in social surveys. The complex approach and operational action have not

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only allowed all social surveys to be conducted within the planned deadlines, but even increased the survey response rates.

Keywords: response level, social surveys

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