

## CHALLENGES OF WEB SURVEYS AND WEB PANELS

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Traditionally, national statistical institutes collect data by means of face-to-face or telephone surveys. This is an expensive way of survey data collection, but experience has shown that it is necessary in order to produce high quality statistics. Nowadays, national statistical institutes in many countries are faced with budget constraints. This causes them to look for less expensive ways of data collection, while maintaining their quality. Web surveys seem a promising alternative. They have become increasingly popular, particularly in the world of market research. This is not surprising as a web survey is a simple, fast and inexpensive means to collect a lot of data.

At first sight, a web is just another mode of data collection. Questions are not asked face-to-face or by telephone, but over the internet. However, web surveys also suffer from methodological problems, such as under-coverage, self-selection, non-response and measurement errors. So, the question is if and how web surveys can be used for making official statistics.

One step further is a web panel. Once such a panel is in place and operational, a web survey can be conducted easy and fast. The sample can be selected from the list of panel members. Alternatively, all members can be approached. Only a questionnaire has to be designed and put on the internet. Then an e-mail is sent to all selected panel members. There are no costs involved. Response will be high, since all panel members agreed to participate in surveys regularly.

However, there is a caveat. Setting up a good, representative panel is no so easy. How to select a random sample (with equal probabilities) of people from the general population who want to become a member of the panel? And how to keep the web panel representative over time, as some panel members may lose interest in the course of time?