

Innovative tools for EU-Survey data collection during COVID-2019 restrictions

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the most countries, the lockdown¹ related to COVID-19 was announced in the middle of March 2020. Eurostat carried out an EU-survey [1] during March on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on EU-SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions) data collection across the Member States and EFTA countries. The mode of data collection was impacted the most². The survey on the impact of COVID-19 on the EU-SILC data collection will be repeated and updated in October 2020 [2].

During the first round of the EU-Survey (March), it was reported that the lockdown was affecting ongoing EU-SILC fieldwork in most of the countries, except for Romania, Spain, Greece, Malta and Italy where the fieldwork was planned to take place later. The main issue for EU-SILC data collection, related to COVID-19, was that statistical offices were not able to conduct face-to-face interviews (PAPI, CAPI) with households. However, in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Lithuania, Iceland and Switzerland, the main data collection modes are CATI and CAWI that does not involve face-to-face contact in the data collection process. Consequently, almost none of the latter six countries experienced major problems in the data collections. Nevertheless, other issues mentioned in some other countries were problems with CATI interviews and in particular with CATI interviews for the first year sample (SILC is a longitudinal survey where households are interviewed during four – more in some countries - consecutive years).

Since Statistics Denmark has conducted Computer Assisted Web Interviews (CAWI) for EU-SILC since 2012, Denmark was one of the counties that successfully conducted the EU-SILC data collection during COVID-19 crises. The experience of Denmark is reflected in the paper.

For countries that faced difficulties, in order to overcome obstacles related to COVID-19 crises, they have adopted ad hoc measures, including innovative approaches. The experience of the countries is included in the paper.

2. METHODS

2.1. Measures taken by countries to reduce the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on the data collection in 2020

The majority of the countries (24) have adopted ad hoc measures for the 2020 EU-SILC data collection. During the first EU-survey (March), the change of fieldwork was noted

¹ A lockdown is considered as an emergency protocol characterised by isolation or restricted access as a safety measure. It can be implemented by the authorities that prevents people from leaving home, city, country or a given area. In some cases, the lockdown may prevent people to enter a specific building, area or even state. So during the lockdown have a restriction in the movements or activities while limited but still allow the activities related with supplying basic needs. The lockdown can be differ for each region, city or state. For the purpose of EU-SILC the lockdown will be considered the period from the date applied the restriction for that household/individual (due restriction applied in the area) till the end of the restrictions.

² Paper-Assisted Personal Interview (PAPI); Computer-Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI); Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI); Computer Assisted Web Interviews (CAWI)

in 13 countries (and 10 more were considering it). Countries were considering to extend the duration of fieldwork and in few cases move it to autumn. In particular, countries which only collect data via direct interview (PAPI or CAPI) stopped the fieldwork and planned to restart at a later point. Twenty countries changed the mode of data collection, stopped face-to-face interviews and instead moved to CATI and/or CAWI interviews. Five countries introduced changes in the questionnaire, some other countries mentioned that if the crisis would continue after summer they would use CATI and in order to do it, they will need to reduce the number of variables in the questionnaire. In March, no country had introduced changes in the survey sampling, however some considered oversampling the sample for the 1st wave panel of the survey (due to the difficulty to have a contact).

In April, Eurostat has issued recommendations [3] in order to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the EU-SILC data collection, including moving to more innovative tools of the data collection (CATI or CAWI). In addition, Eurostat (the European Commission) has already for several years provided financial help to the EU and EFTA countries to enhance the use of innovative approaches in EU-SILC data collection in order to increase efficiency and precision of the data collection (like administrative registers, or use of computer/mobile devices based data collection tools). As well point 10 and 16 of the “IESS” Framework Regulation [4], consider using multiple data sources and innovative data collection methods using the latest technological changes.

The second EU-survey (to be conducted in October) will review the outcomes of the changes in the 2020 EU-SILC data collection (effectiveness).

2.2. EU-SILC data collection by Statistics Denmark using web interviews

Statistics Denmark has conducted Computer Assisted Web Interviews (CAWI) for SILC since 2012. SILC is a complex survey that collects detailed data on several subject matters – in some cases for all household members. The extensive use of administrative data limits the amount of information Statistics Denmark need to collect. The Selected Respondent model allows Statistics Denmark to only interview one member pr. household. The result is a relatively simple questionnaire setup in relation to the complex nature of SILC. The questionnaire has been designed to function on smartphones and tablets as well. Four out of five SILC respondents participated on web. Of these almost a third filled the questionnaire on smartphones or tablets in 2020.

3. RESULTS

The results regarding the effectiveness of the ad hoc measures due to COVID-19 crisis in EU-SILC data collection will be collected in October (2020) and included in the paper.

Based on EU-SILC 2018 data, countries still use mainly CAPI method for data collection. In 2020, there has been an increase of using CATI or CAWI and, for the latter, mainly for selected respondent countries.

In Denmark, the 2020 data collection started on the 27th of February. The use of CAWI interviews allowed the data collection to continue as planned in Denmark even as it faced a country-wide lockdown from the 11th of March due to covid-19. Following the lockdown, Statistics Denmark even experienced a slight increase in response rates – leading to higher response rates overall compared to previous years.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In all European countries, the collection of EU-SILC data were affected by Covid-19 lockdown. The majority of the countries have adopted ad hoc measures for the 2020 EU-SILC data collection, mostly the changes of the mode of the data collection. Countries have moved from PAPI, CAPI to more modern mode of data collection. In the experience by Statistics Denmark, the web based interviews (CAWI) for EU-SILC data collection were successful and showed even a slight increase in the response rates during the COVID-19 crises. Still it should be considered that Denmark uses a shorter questionnaire as is one of the countries using administrative sources.

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