Analysis of non-response in the ESS
State of play, state of the art and some guidelines for improvement

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A perennial problem – what’s new?

Non-response study (HBS, EU-SILC, LFS, SBS) to conduct an:
1. Assessment of the state of play in the ESS
2. Inventory of the state of the art
... and
3. provide some guidance.

This provides the structure for today’s presentation – which focuses on the state of play (1).
1A. ESS state of play: Qualitative overview

**Basis:** questionnaire to ESS NSIs; methodology reports.

**Methods to reduce non-response (before data collection):**
- Introductory/remind letter
- Multiple contact attempts
- Interviewer training (interviewer handbook)
- Compulsory participation (e.g. LFS)
- Substitution (e.g. HBS)

*(Rarely used:)*
- Incentives
Non-response treatment (after data collection)

- **Unit non-response:**
  - Total: Weighting, calibration, imputation
  - Partial (more than one unit of analysis): Imputation, exclusion of entire case

- **Item non-response**
  - SBS: Imputation from administrative registers and other sources (mean imputation…)
  - Otherwise: Imputation (hot-deck, cold-deck …), heterogeneous situation across countries/surveys
Non-response reporting

Well-defined in regulations for EU-SILC, LFS and SBS
– but different for each survey...

• **EU-SILC**: three indicators based on combinations of
  (i) the address contact rate $R_a$
  (ii) the household response rate $R_a$
  (iii) the individual response rate $R_p$.

• **LFS**: one global response rate (normally at household level), decomposed by reason into:
  (i) refusals
  (ii) non-contacts
  (iii) other reasons

• **SBS**: weighted unit non-response information

• **HBS**: complicated situation (non-response for parts of the survey; issues with recording of substitution)
1B. ESS state of play – quantitative overview

Basis: Reported non-response for the four surveys

Findings:

• **Increase over time**
  - LFS: $\sim 0.45 \%$ units per year refusals rate, $\sim 0.42$ u.p.y. other causes rate
  - HBS: $\sim 1.23 \%$ u. p. y. non-response rate before substitution
  - No trend observed for EU-SILC or SBS

• **Mode effects:** hard to disentangle
Complex surveys have lower response rates

LFS (total non-response rate)

EU-SILC (total non-response rate in the new sample)

HBS (total non-response rate before substitution)

SBS (Overall non-response rate)
Compulsory participation reduces the refusal rate (LFS example)
EU-SILC: non-response for new units higher than for the whole sample
2. Overview of the state of the art

Literature inventory, covering:

- Basic issues
- Prevention
- Treatment
- Evaluation/reporting
3. Recommendations

**Non-response prevention**

- **Mixed mode**  
  *(Experimental evaluation needed. WPs 22, 23 and 24 laudable in this regard!)*

- **Use of administrative data**

- **Increased number of contact attempts**

- *(Rendering participation compulsory...)*
3. Recommendations (cont.)

Non-response treatment

- Strive for converging practice of **calibration**
  (Same set of variables meaningful
  – unnecessary conditioning on white noise?)

- **Use of administrative data** (again!)
  (Unique identifier)

- **Heterogeneous imputation practices**
  (No clear path; discussion a first step)
3. Recommendations (cont.)

**Evaluation of non-response**

- *Cross-country harmonisation needed.* (EU-SILC presented as a good example)

- *(Cross-survey harmonisation restricted by directives...)*
4. Conclusions

- Rich material (for four surveys):
  - Qualitative overview across the ESS
  - Quantitative side-to-side comparison across ESS

- Few actionable findings so far