

7 Fieldwork and Survey Management in SHARE

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7.1 Introduction

SHARE is designed to be a genuine cross-national survey. The common interview mode, questionnaire design, effort devoted to the translation of the questionnaire, and finally the standardisation of the fieldwork procedures across countries – including, wherever possible, a common electronic case management system – were the most important design tools used in SHARE in order to ensure a strict cross-national comparability and high quality of the data.

This chapter describes the main fieldwork procedures and survey design characteristics adopted by SHARE. They have been designed and implemented in close cooperation between the Mannheim Research Institute for the Economics of Ageing (MEA) and CentERdata at the University of Tilburg, with help of the Centre for Survey Research and Methodology (ZUMA) in Mannheim and the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

In order to achieve high data quality, professional survey agencies have been selected in all participating countries. Agencies were subject to a common set of requirements designed by the SHARE co-ordinating team in order to minimise the occurrence of nonsampling errors (like unit and item nonresponse). Examples of the common protocols are the length of the fieldwork period, the use of advance and follow-up letters, and the set-up of general rules for the management of the fieldwork. Basic fieldwork procedures were then administrated by the survey agencies according to their own established protocols.

7.2 The fieldwork period

During its first wave, SHARE was conducted in eleven European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland). In several countries, the sample consists of two parts: the “core sample” and the “vignette sample”. In the vignette samples, a part of the self-completion questionnaire was replaced by a section with anchoring vignettes.

Table 7.1: SHARE field periods

Country	Core Sample	Vignette Sample	Supplementary Sample
Austria	May-Oct 2004		
Belgium	Jan-Jul 2005	Jan-Jul 2005	
Denmark	May-Oct 2004		
France	Oct-Nov 2004	Jun-Jul 2005	
Germany	May-Oct 2004	May-Oct 2004	
Greece	May-Oct 2004	Jan-Mar 2005	
Italy	May-Oct 2004	Aug-Dec 2004	
Netherlands	May-Oct 2004	Aug-Dec 2004	
Spain	May-Oct 2004	Nov-Dec 2004	
Sweden	May-Dec 2004	Nov-Dec 2004	Nov-Dec 2004
Switzerland	May-Oct 2004		

The fieldwork period of the *core sample*, which represents the original part of the SHARE sample, lasted about 6 months (between May and October 2004) in most of the SHARE countries (see Table 7.1 for an overview). The exceptions are Belgium, France, and Sweden. In Sweden, the fieldwork period lasted 2 additional months

(between May and December 2004) because of a larger number of projected interviews than in the other countries. In Belgium, financial reasons did not permit starting the fieldwork period before November 2004. It is expected to end in July 2005.

A *vignette sample* was added in eight countries (all SHARE countries except Austria, Denmark and Switzerland). For this part of the sample, the data collection period varied considerably across countries. In Germany, for example, the vignette sample was fielded during the main survey period together with the core sample. In Italy and Netherlands, it was fielded between August and December 2004. In Greece, Spain and Sweden, it was fielded after the end of the main field period. In France and Belgium, the vignette sample was still in the field in June 2005.

7.3 Advance, follow-up and thank-you letters

Before any other contact attempt, SHARE mailed an *advance letter* to each household in the gross sample. The main purpose of the advance letter was to inform the respondents of upcoming calls or visits by an interviewer, to communicate the nature of, and the motivation for, the study, to explain the importance of participating, and to address the respondent's potential concerns about data confidentiality. Together with the advance letter the respondents received a coloured brochure that explained the aims and objectives of SHARE and stressed the importance of participation of each selected household.

After the initial contact with the household, respondents who showed a general reluctance to participate received a *follow-up letter*. Follow-up letters were mainly designed to reiterate the importance of cooperating with the survey request and the adherence to the data protection laws. In Sweden, the follow-up letter had the outside text "Support Swedish research and get a free Bingo ticket" and included another lottery ticket (worth €4), which proved to be a successful approach.

After the interview, a *thank-you letter* was mailed out to each respondent in order to increase the propensity to participate in future waves of the survey. Standardised versions of the advance, follow-up and thank-you letters were provided by the SHARE co-ordinating team to be used in all participating countries, then translated and, in some cases, adapted to local customs.

7.4 Incentive schemes

Two types of incentive schemes were adopted in SHARE. In most of the SHARE countries, *incentives for respondents* were distributed in order to gain their cooperation. Because of different cultures and experiences of the survey agencies, different types of incentives were used in each country. In several countries, individuals received a small gift before completing the interview (e.g. a lottery ticket in Sweden, a box with a set of ball-pens in Germany, a sweet in Austria, a voucher for a department store in Spain). In other countries, incentives were given at the end of the interview (15 Euro per completed household in the Netherlands). Denmark was the only country in which incentives were considered inappropriate.

In addition, most countries implemented incentive schemes for interviewers in order to increase interviewers' motivation. In households with more than one eligible person, interviewers received more money for the first respondent. Such a payment system accounts for the higher effort which is normally needed to make the first interview. In Austria, Italy and Switzerland, special premiums were also paid on the basis of the interviewer level response rate. Each survey agency fixed its own threshold response rate. Once the target response rate was reached, interviewers

received higher payments for additional interviews. In Sweden, gifts (records, books, etc.) were also used as encouragement to hard working interviewers.

Finally, an extension to the contract with the survey agencies contained *incentives for the survey agency* to reach the target response rate. Interviews in excess of the target response rates were paid better, while not reaching the target response rate precipitated a contractual penalty.

7.5 Other fieldwork requirements

A set of additional fieldwork requirements was designed in order to increase the response rates. First, a *minimum number of contact attempts* (five) was set, of which at least two had to be in person at the respondent's address, before a household was allowed to be considered non-respondent. In person and telephone contact attempts were required to be done at varying times of the day and days of the week. Such fieldwork rules were mainly designed to obtain high contact rates. Second, participation enhancing strategies were required to be attempted for all respondents who showed reluctance to participate to the survey. *Refusal conversion strategies* were: additional follow-up letters, switching to more experienced interviewers and switching to other contact modes. Third, survey agencies were required to make sure that an appropriate *number of interviewers* were available in a sufficient regional spread. Furthermore, interviewers working for SHARE were required to have extensive face-to-face experience.

7.6 Interview mode

The mode of the data collection is one of the main survey design characteristics which may affect the quality of the data collected in a survey. Among other things, interview mode may impact survey participation, item nonresponse and reporting errors. The interview mode adopted in SHARE was Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI), supplemented by a self-administered paper and pencil questionnaire ("drop off").

The CAPI interview, which is known to be one of the most effective interview modes, represents the largest part of the SHARE interview. On average, it took about 80 minutes for a one-person household and about 120 minutes for a two-person household, see Chapter 8.

The self-administrated paper and pencil questionnaire was used to ask more sensitive questions, like questions on social and psychological well-being, health-care, religiosity and political affiliation. As a common rule, the self-administrated questionnaire was handed to each eligible respondent only after the CAPI interview was completed. The interviewee could then choose whether to return the questionnaire to the interviewer right away, or send it back to the survey agency by mail using a pre-stamped envelope. The first collection model was strongly preferred and also mostly used. In the case of two or more interviews in the same household, the earlier respondents filled out the self-administrated paper and pencil questionnaire while the later respondents were interviewed by CAPI.

All respondents in the core sample received the same version of the questionnaire. Respondents in the vignette sample received one of two different versions of the vignette questionnaire, which were randomised by interviewer.

7.7 Proxy interviews

Proxy interviewing means that, under particular circumstances, a sample respondent is allowed to be assisted by a proxy respondent to complete the interview. Typically, a proxy respondent is a person who is knowledgeable about the

sample respondent's situation regarding the area covered in the questionnaire, such as a spouse, an adult child, or any other family member.

In SHARE, proxy interviews were allowed when problems of physical or mental health limitation of a selected respondent affected the propensity to participate to the survey or the reliability of the data collected during the interview. Examples of the conditions under which proxy interviewing was allowed were: hearing loss, speaking problems, Alzheimer's disease and difficulty in concentrating for the interview time period needed for SHARE.¹

SHARE allowed two types of proxy reporting. If a respondent was merely helped by a proxy, the interview is referred to as a "partly proxy" interview. If the proxy answers the entire questionnaire in lieu of the respondent, the interview is referred to as a "fully proxy" interview. Proxy interviews skipped six modules of the CAPI interview: Cognitive Function, Mental Health, Grip Strength, Walking Speed, Activities and Expectations since the information required in these modules is based on personal abilities, cognitive and physical measures, or personal judgment. For all other modules of the questionnaire, interviewers recorded at the end of each module whether it was completed by a respondent only, by a partly proxy or by a fully proxy.

On average, 94 percent of the SHARE interviews have been conducted with the selected respondent, 4 percent were conducted as a "partly proxy" interview, and 2 percent were "fully proxy" interviews. As expected, the percentage of interviews with some extent of proxy reporting was considerably higher for the oldest-old age group (17 percent) and the respondents with a poor self-reported health (22 percent).

7.8 Case management

All survey agencies were required to use an electronic sample management system (SMS) in order to facilitate the management and the coordination of the fieldwork procedures. An SMS is an electronic tool designed to automatically store and link different sources of information that are useful for the organisation and the documentation of the fieldwork. Since in many countries survey agencies still relied on paper records, a common "Case Management System" (CMS) was developed by CentERdata. Most other survey agencies with their own proprietary sample management system decided on a hybrid solution: employing the SHARE CMS for case management in addition to their own systems for interviewer management. France, the Netherlands and Switzerland were the only countries in which survey agencies used exclusively their own electronic systems.

The SHARE CMS started with a list of households to be approached by each interviewer, together with sampling frame information that could be used to locate each unit (like address and/or telephone number). The SHARE CMS interacted with the main SHARE CAPI instrument and determined automatically those household members that were interview-eligible, and whether or not eligible household members had already been interviewed. This greatly facilitated the screening of the respondents' eligibility and the management of appointments and interrupted interviews. The CMS also allowed interviewers to record the history of all contact attempts made to a household. Given the large number of sample units assigned to each interviewer (42 on average), call records data allowed the interviewers to tailor how to approach each household. The CMS also enforced appropriate calling and follow-up strategies to maximise response rates. Call records data were also used to manage refusal conversion strategies, especially when addresses were transferred from one interviewer to another.

¹ See the SHARE Interviewer project manual for more details.

7.9 Fieldwork monitoring

The SHARE CMS provided valuable information to monitor the progress of the survey in real-time. Specifically, the CMS delivered information on the mode, the date, the time and the result code of each contact attempt. Such information allowed the SHARE co-ordinating team to conduct a very effective fieldwork monitoring during the entire fieldwork period of the pre-test and the main survey. Every two weeks, at pre-specified dates, the survey agencies sent their updated CAPI and CMS data electronically to CentERdata, where the data were processed and made available to the country team leaders and the SHARE co-ordinating team.

These data were used to produce bi-weekly reports which depicted the discrepancies between actual and projected status of some key indicators such as the number of households already contacted, the number of interviewers actively working on SHARE, the number of achieved interviews, response rates and the main reasons for non-contact and non-interview. The main purpose of collecting this information was to identify possible problems in the field and their possible reasons early in the process. Strategies to cope with these problems were then discussed between the coordinating team and the country team leaders, who then contacted the survey agencies. The fieldwork monitoring system permitted the implementation of remedies without unnecessary delay.

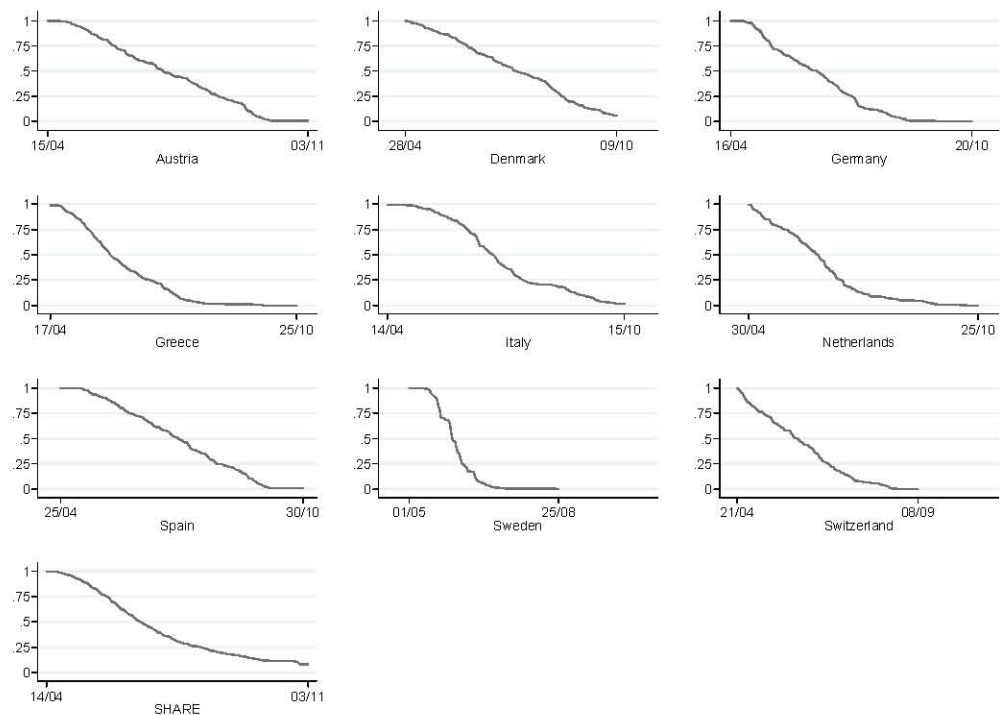


Figure 7.1: Fraction of the gross sample still to be contacted

Figures 7.1 through 7.3 show – by way of example – three indicators of fieldwork progress plotted against the field time: the fraction of the gross sample that still needs to be contacted, the cumulative number of interviewers employed in the interviewing process, and finally the number of completed interviews.²

² This analysis is based on Release 0 data without a completed coverage of Belgium, France and the vignette samples. These samples were therefore excluded from the figures.

First contacts were made in mid April 2004. In some countries, addresses were contacted very steadily throughout the field period (e.g. Denmark) while other countries contacted the households in a single big effort (e.g. Sweden). Delays in contacting are evident from these figures; they sparked inquiries by the coordination team and the country team leaders.

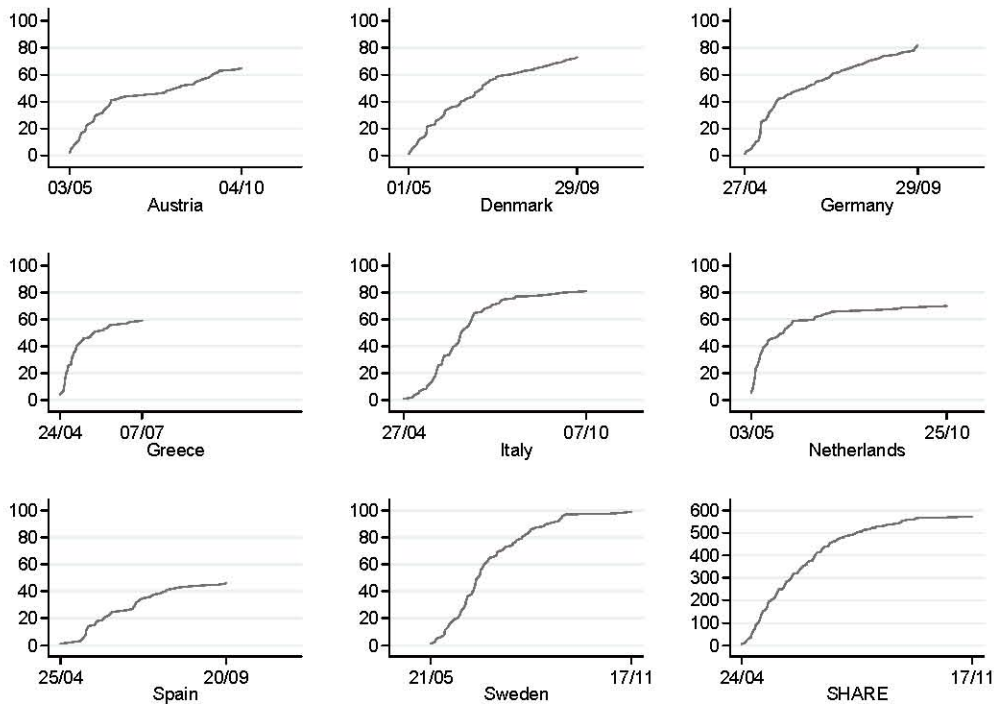


Figure 7.2: Cumulative number of interviewers working for SHARE

Figure 7.2 shows the cumulative number of interviewers involved in SHARE. At the end of the field work, almost 600 interviewers had been involved. The Spanish agency hired much fewer interviewers than the Swedish agency. Partially this was due to the larger sample in Sweden, see below; it also resulted in a higher work load for the Spanish interviewers. In Greece, almost all field work had to be finished before the beginning of the Olympic Games in July 2004. In some countries, the coordination team and the country team leaders insisted in hiring extra interviewers because of sluggish progress, this action is visible e.g. in Austria and Sweden.

Figure 7.3 finally depicts the core outcome of the survey, the number of completed interviews. SHARE aimed to reach a target of 1500 completed household interviews in each country, except for Switzerland, Denmark and Sweden, where the target numbers of household interviews were equal to 1000, 1200 and 2260, respectively. Based on these targets and the start and duration of the fieldwork, a projected number of completed household interviews was computed, assuming a linear development process. Figure 7.3 depicts the evolution of the projected and the actually achieved number of completed household interviews over the fieldwork period.

Taken all countries together and excluding the vignette samples and the core samples of Belgium and France, SHARE succeeded in interviewing slightly more than 90 percent of the overall target. Since the relatively short fieldwork period could not be extended for various logistic and financial reasons, SHARE therefore ended

up with slightly fewer interviews than originally planned. As a consequence, SHARE will have a substantially longer field period in the second wave planned for 2006.

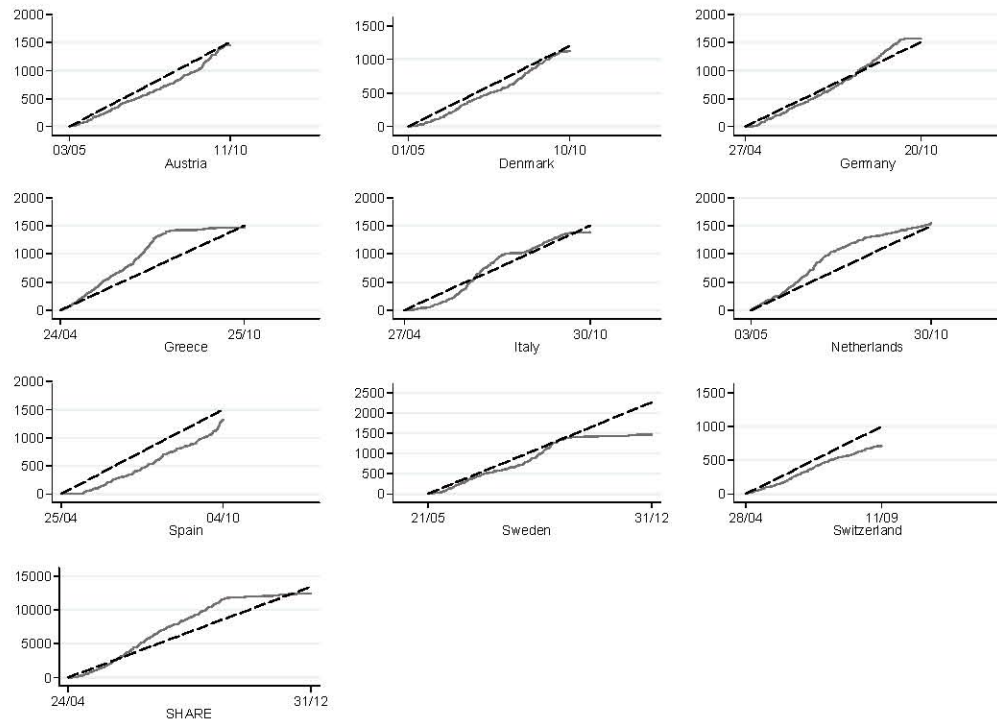


Figure 7.3: Achieved and projected number of completed household interviews

Figure 7.3 also shows the wide variation by country. The Greek team succeeded nicely in finishing their survey before the Olympic Games. The additional hiring of interviewers in Austria was a successful intervention. In Sweden, a similar intervention failed since refusal rates increased at the end of the fieldwork period. Germany and the Netherlands were able to exceed the targeted number of interviews, while Spain, Sweden and Switzerland ended substantially below their targets. For those countries, the number of completed household interviews has been constantly lower than the corresponding projection. This was a clear signal of difficulties in getting contact and/or gaining respondents' cooperation. Since November 2004, a supplementary sample of 950 households was fielded in Sweden in order to increase the low number of interviews. Overall, this fieldwork strategy was quite successful. With the supplementary sample, it was possible to reach a final interview-to-target ratio of 82 percent.