

This chapter provides short accounts of various methodological aspects of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe and its co-ordination by the Mannheim Research Institute for the Economics of Aging (MEA) at the University of Mannheim, Germany. It includes an overview of both the substantive and technical development of the common survey instrument and its translation into the different languages. Further, we briefly describe the sample design and weighting strategy in the participating countries, our train-the-trainer program that aimed at implementing common practices in each country, and the field work and survey management. The chapter further presents basic information about unit and item non-response rates. Finally, we include in this chapter short methodological notes on the comparability of subjective health data, the imputation of missing information on income and wealth, and the elicitation of subjective probabilities. Further details will be available in a separate technical reports volume, which will be published later in 2005.

### **7.1 History of the Development Process: Pilots, Pre-Tests, and Main Study**

*Axel Börsch-Supan*

The SHARE development process iterated in four stages between questionnaire development and data collection. In the first stage, starting in January 2002, the working groups produced an English-language draft questionnaire, departing from the HRS and ELSA instruments plus survey instruments in Germany, Italy and Sweden which addressed relevant questions. This draft questionnaire was piloted in the UK in September 2002 with help of the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen, London) which has also conducted the first wave of ELSA.

Based on the lessons from this pilot, the English-language questionnaire was thoroughly revised and, with the help of the language management utility (LMU), translated into all SHARE languages. These language elements were fed in a common CAPI programme. The second stage culminated in a first all-country pilot which applied this instrument simultaneously in all SHARE countries, using quota samples of some 75 individuals in each country (June 2003).

In the third stage, after further refinements of the instrument, the full questionnaire was pre-tested in January/February 2004 using genuine probability samples (some 100 primary respondents per country plus their spouses). This all-country pre-test also tested the country-specific logistics and the procedures to achieve probability samples.

During the fourth stage, an extensive statistical analysis of the pilot and pre-test results was conducted under the AMANDA project also financed by the European Commission. The improvements based on these analyses led to the final design of the instrument. The first prototype wave of about 1500 households per country began late April 2004 and was finished in most countries in October 2004. Supplementary data collection is still going on.

The articles in this book are based on an early and incomplete release of the SHARE data, created in November 2004 (“Release 0”). It includes 18,169 individuals in 12,512 households with completed interviews. The French data were only partial, and the November release did not contain Belgian data. While we have done a host of crosschecks, an extensive consistency and plausibility check of all data with a subsequent imputation process is work still to be done. All results in this book are therefore preliminary.

In April 2005, a more complete data set (“Release 1”) will be accessible to the entire

research community. It will contain about 4,000 additional individual interviews in about 2,500 households, plus added generated and imputed variables. We hope that many researchers will take the opportunity to work with these fascinating data.

A final release with the complete data set – about 27,000 individuals – with an extensive set of generated and imputed variables (“Release 2”) is planned for the first half of 2006.

## 7.2 Instruments: LMU, CAPI, DROP-OFF, and CMS

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Although the actual fieldwork in SHARE was carried out by a different agency for each country, the programming of the individual instruments was done centrally by CentERdata, a survey research institute affiliated with Tilburg University in the Netherlands. The data were collected using a computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) program, supplemented by a self-completion paper and pencil questionnaire. The set-up of this CAPI program allowed each country involved to use exactly the same underlying structure of meta-data and routing. The only difference across countries was the language. This mechanism, where question texts are separated from question routing, enforces the comparability of all country specific translations with a generic questionnaire.

The CAPI program was written in Blaise: a computer-assisted interviewing system and survey processing tool for the Windows operating system, developed by Statistics Netherlands and also used by the US Health and Retirement Survey. The generic CAPI instrument was directly implemented in Blaise, and the generic texts (in English) were stored in an external database. After several rounds of revisions of the generic instrument, the different countries translated their versions of the instrument using the Internet and the so-called Language Management Utility (LMU), developed by CentERdata. Another program was written converting the translated question texts, interviewer instructions, answer categories, fill texts and other instrument texts (like error messages) from the (LMU) database into a country specific survey instrument, based on the blueprint of the generic version. Yet another program was developed to process a paper version of the separate country specific CAPI instruments, as well as the generic English version.

There were only few exceptions to the generic blueprint of the questionnaire. Country-specific parts were introduced when institutions were fundamentally different, e.g. in the health care section. Second, country specifics could be introduced by skipping irrelevant answer categories and by adding new country specific answer categories in the LMU. These exceptions never led to a different sequence of questions for a specific country.

Next to the CAPI instrument, a Case Management System (CMS) was developed to manage the co-ordination of the fieldwork. Only three countries used their own system: France, Switzerland, and The Netherlands. The CMS basically consists of a list of all households in the gross sample that should be approached by the interviewer. Contact notes and registrations, appointments with respondents, and area and case information could be entered in the system, and the system enforced common procedures for re-contacting respondents and how to handle non-response.

Some additional tools that converted the CMS into a complete Sample Management System (SMS) were developed. One tool facilitated the merging of all CMS databases that came back from the field, the preparation for sending the interview data, and the actual sending (via FTP) to the central management team. Another tool generated a progress report on the basis of the CMS databases.

All data that came back from the field were processed, converted to SPSS and STATA