

## **4 Fieldwork Monitoring in SHARELIFE**

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### **4.1 Introduction**

SHARELIFE is designed to be a genuine cross-national survey. One important task in order to ensure high data quality and cross-national comparability is monitoring the fieldwork as close as possible. Keeping track of the fieldwork in a timely manner helps minimizing the occurrence of errors such as nonsampling errors and errors due to attrition.

In order to standardize the monitoring efforts, a unique fieldwork monitoring tool, the sample management system (or short: SMS), was developed by MEA and CentERdata with support by the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor (see also Chapter 3). The SMS was not only used by each of the 14 professional survey agencies, which carried out SHARE in the participating countries. The SMS was also used by central project coordination at MEA in order to monitor the fieldwork progress in all countries.

### **4.2 Survey Agencies**

Thirteen European countries participated in SHARELIFE. In each country, a professional survey agency carried out the fieldwork for SHARELIFE. Belgium was the only country with two survey agencies working on SHARELIFE: one agency was responsible for the French-speaking part of Belgium, the other agency for the Flemish-speaking part. Most of the survey agencies conduct the SHARE survey since the very first wave in 2004. This continuity is one pillar of the success of SHARE since survey agencies and interviewers become more familiar with the protocols of SHARE over time. Furthermore, being contacted by the same interviewer each wave increases the willingness of respondents to participate and therefore lowers the attrition rates (see, for example, Lepkowski and Couper, 2002). Only in two countries, namely Switzerland (in wave 2 in 2006) and Austria (in wave 3 in 2008) new survey agencies joined the SHARE family. For the complete list of survey agencies participating in SHARELIFE, see Table 4.1.

### **4.3 The fieldwork period**

The main fieldwork period of SHARELIFE lasted about twelve months, from October 2008 until September 2009. Whereas the largest part of the fieldwork was done before summer 2009, the fieldwork was prolonged in most countries into early autumn in order to work on difficult cases, such as people living in old-age institutions, people who moved house, and to identify proxy respondents in order to conduct end-of-life interviews.

**Table 4.1:** Survey Agencies in SHARELIFE

<b>Country</b>	<b>Survey Agency</b>
Austria	IFES
Belgium (French-speaking part)	PSBH Research Centre for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies (CELLO) - Antwerp
Belgium (Flemish-speaking part)	University LINK Institut für Markt- und Sozialforschung
Switzerland	
Czech Republic	SC&C s.r.o.
Germany	infas GmbH
Denmark	SFI-SURVEY
Spain	TNS Demoscopia
France	INSEE
Greece	Kapa Research
Italy	DOXA S.p.A.
The Netherlands	TNS NIPO
Poland	TNS OBOP
Sweden	Intervjubolaget IMRI AB

Almost all countries started their fieldwork before the end of 2008. The only exception was France which started the fieldwork in May 2009 and conducted the whole fieldwork within 3 months. Of all cases that were finally interviewed, only about one percent has been interviewed after the deadline of June 30th, 2009 (see Table 4.3). Of these remaining cases, 53 percent were in France, where all of them were interviewed in July.

At the start of the fieldwork SHARE mailed an *advance letter* to each household in the gross sample before any other contact attempt was made. The main purpose of this advance letter was to inform respondents about upcoming calls or visits by interviewers and explaining the importance of participating in SHARELIFE. In some cases the advance letter also helped identifying respondents who moved prior to the start of the fieldwork. Respondents who showed a general reluctance after receiving the advance letter were sent a follow-up letter. Since in most cases the reason for reluctance was the question why to participate again after having participated in one or two waves prior to SHARELIFE, the follow-up letter was designed to reiterate the importance of cooperating in a panel survey.

**Table 4.2:** SHARELIFE fieldwork periods

<b>Country</b>	<b>Fieldwork duration</b>
Austria	January 2009 – May 2009
Belgium (French-speaking part)	October 2008 – September 2009
Belgium (Flemish-speaking part)	October 2008 – September 2009
Switzerland	November 2008 – May 2009
Czech Republic	November 2008 – August 2009
Germany	November 2008 – September 2009
Denmark	October 2008 – September 2009
Spain	October 2008 – July 2009
France	May 2009 – July 2009
Greece	December 2008 – September 2009
Italy	October 2008 – June 2009
The Netherlands	December 2008 – August 2009
Poland	November 2008 – August 2009
Sweden	December 2008 – August 2009

Shortly after the interview, the respondents received a thank-you letter from the survey agency. This thank-you letter was designed to increase the propensity to participate in future waves of SHARE. Some countries additionally sent season greetings cards to the respondents. In cases where the death of a respondent from previous waves was detected, the survey agencies also mailed a condolence letter to the family of the late respondent.

For respondents who moved into old-age institutions a special advance letter was designed. Interviewing respondents living in such institutions is often very difficult as not only the respondent, but also in most cases the respondent's family and staff of the old-age institution need to be informed about the study. Thus, this special advance letter contained not only information about SHARELIFE but also on the respondent's participation in previous waves of SHARE.

For respondents, who participated in previous waves of SHARE but who deceased in the meanwhile, SHARE has designed an end-of-life interview, which covers health, social and economic well-being in the last year of life. This end-of-life interview is answered by a proxy respondent, mainly someone next of kin to the late respondent. Only in cases where the respondent died very recently, interviewers were instructed to postpone the end-of-life interview until at least three months after the initial respondent's death.

**Table 4.3:** Distribution of Delayed Deliveries of Survey Data

<b>Country</b>	<b>Percentage of data delivered on time (June 2009)</b>	<b>Percentage of data delivered after deadline</b>
Austria	100.00	0.00
Belgium	99.48	0.52
Czech Republic	98.60	1.40
Switzerland	100.00	0.00
Germany	97.99	2.01
Denmark	99.95	0.05
Spain	100.00	0.00
France	92.87	7.13
Greece	100.00	0.00
Italy	99.92	0.08
Netherlands	99.43	0.57
Poland	97.79	2.21
Sweden	98.88	1.12
Total	98.76	1.24

Identifying a knowledgeable person who could provide information on the deceased respondent was a difficult task in those cases where the deceased respondent was living alone. In cases where this knowledgeable person was living far away from the late respondent's home, end-of-life interviews could also be conducted via telephone.

In some cases an end-of-life interview could not be conducted since no person next-of-kin could be identified. Especially for those cases the survey agencies were required to ascertain the death of a person from official sources (e.g. death registers) if possible.

#### **4.4 Fieldwork Monitoring using the Sample Management System (SMS)**

Monitoring the fieldwork in a timely manner is very important for the success of a survey. Problems can be identified very early, which gives the possibility to interfere and go against sources of errors. In order to facilitate the management and the coordination of the fieldwork, survey agencies were required to use an electronic sample management system (SMS). MEA and CentERdata designed this SMS with the support by the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University

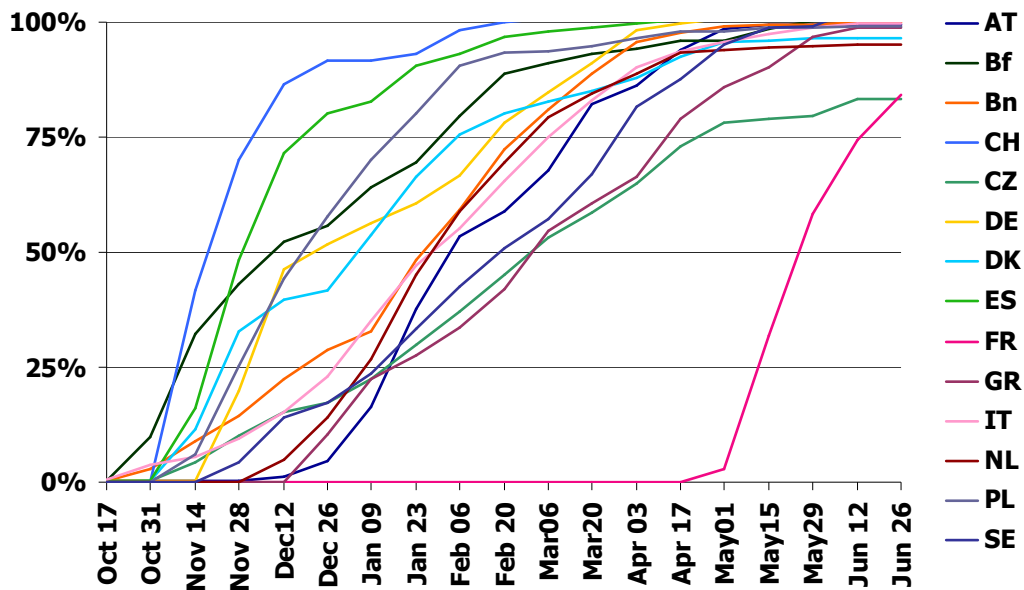
of Michigan in Ann Arbor (see also Chapter 3). Unlike in previous waves, where some of the agencies used their own sample management systems, all fourteen survey agencies applied the SHARELIFE SMS in the field. The SHARELIFE SMS contains all households to be approached by interviewers, together with the sampling frame information that is used to locate each household (e.g. address, telephone number). The interviewers were trained to record all contacts and contact attempts with the households into the SMS, such as the result of the contact attempt as well as date and time the contact attempt took place. Additionally interviewers could add information in case the contact was done with a proxy. A special remarks field enabled them to write down anything else which they thought could be helpful for further contact attempts. The collection of this data helped interviewers to tailor contact strategies for household that were difficult to contact which in turns helped to minimize the non-contact rates in SHARELIFE. Call record data were also used to manage refusal conversion strategies, especially when addresses were transferred from one interviewer to another. The SHARELIFE SMS also contains an agenda function, which offers the possibility to enter appointments for interviews. The CAPI interview can only be started from within the SHARELIFE SMS. Thus, the exact date and time of the interviews are automatically stored in the SMS. The SMS also contains the information whether an interview has been completed or interrupted.

Interviewers were supposed to submit the data collected in the SMS back to their survey agency at least once every two weeks. Survey agencies in turn submitted the collected data to CentERdata every two weeks at pre-defined dates. CentERdata then made the data available for analysis for the coordination team at MEA.

Since the data has been submitted on a biweekly basis, the fieldwork monitoring did not only focus on the fieldwork development so far but especially on the progress made within the last monitoring period (which is within the last two weeks). The central coordination team at MEA produced short reports which were sent to the country team leaders for discussion with their survey agencies. Such reports usually included information on:

- a) the number of households contacted so far and within the last monitoring period
- b) the number of completed interviews so far and within the last monitoring period
- c) the number of interviewers actively working on SHARELIFE within the last monitoring period
- d) current progress and retention rates
- e) refusal rates

Figure 4.1 gives an example of one of the items presented in the biweekly reports. The figure shows the fraction of households which have already been contacted. It becomes apparent, that countries applied very different contact strategies. While some countries contact as many households as possible within the first part of the fieldwork phase, others contact households in tranches steadily throughout the fieldwork phase.



**Figure 4.1:** Percentages of households already contacted

In the beginning of the fieldwork the SMS also enabled the coordination team to control how long it took until all trained interviewers actually became active. Figure 4.2 shows that in most countries it only took a few days or weeks until all trained interviewers had started to work on SHARELIFE. (Given the late fieldwork start, this also holds for France.) Only a few countries showed a slow but steady increase in the first third of the fieldwork phase. Figure 4.3 displays the number of interviewers which actively worked on SHARELIFE within each monitoring period. There was a steady fluctuation. Towards the end of the fieldwork period there is a natural decline in the number of active interviewers, since more and more interviewers finished their sample points and stopped working.

Towards the end of the fieldwork period the focus was on eligible households where no interview had been conducted so far. The SMS helped to identify those households with only one or two contact attempts. Since the minimum requirement of SHARELIFE was to have at least eight face-to-face contact attempts before a household could be classified as not reachable, this helped focussing attention of interviewers on those households.

The fieldwork monitoring report also kept track on the number of completed interviews per interviewer within a monitoring period. In cases where interviewers did many interviews within a very short period of time compared to other interviewers the coordination team checked the interview length and quality of those interviews. This provides the opportunity to replace interviewers or re-train them in case odd results are found.

An electronic sample management tool with so many features capable of dealing with several tens of thousands of cases does not come without a price. CentERdata and MEA invested a great amount of time into the design and

implementation of the SMS. It was not easy to come up with a sample management system that accounted for the needs and specifications of fourteen different survey agencies. Additionally, many hours of training are necessary to make the interviewers comfortable with the SMS. All in all, setting up the SHARELIFE SMS was a time consuming task *prior* to the fieldwork phase.

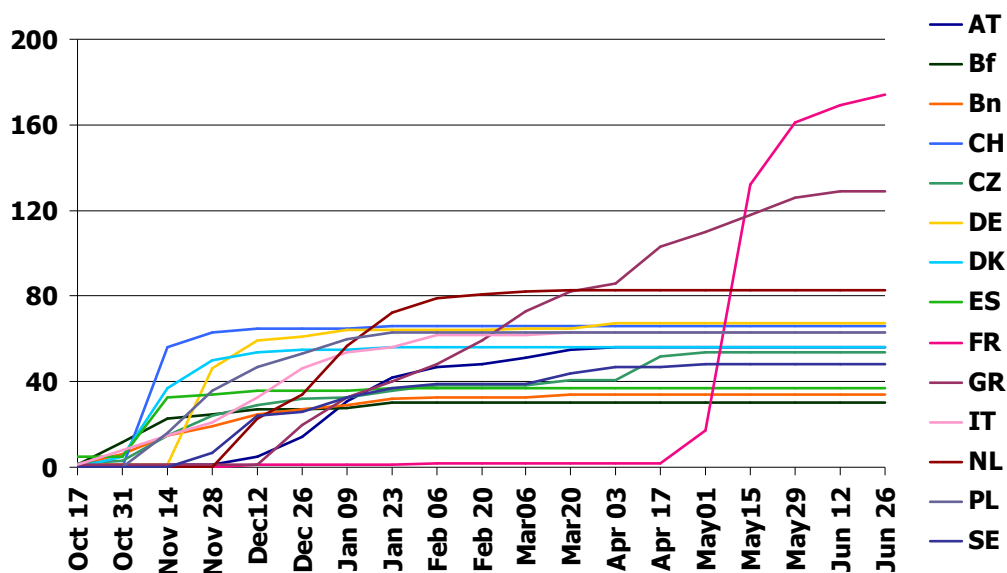


Figure 4.2: Number of interviewers in the field (total)

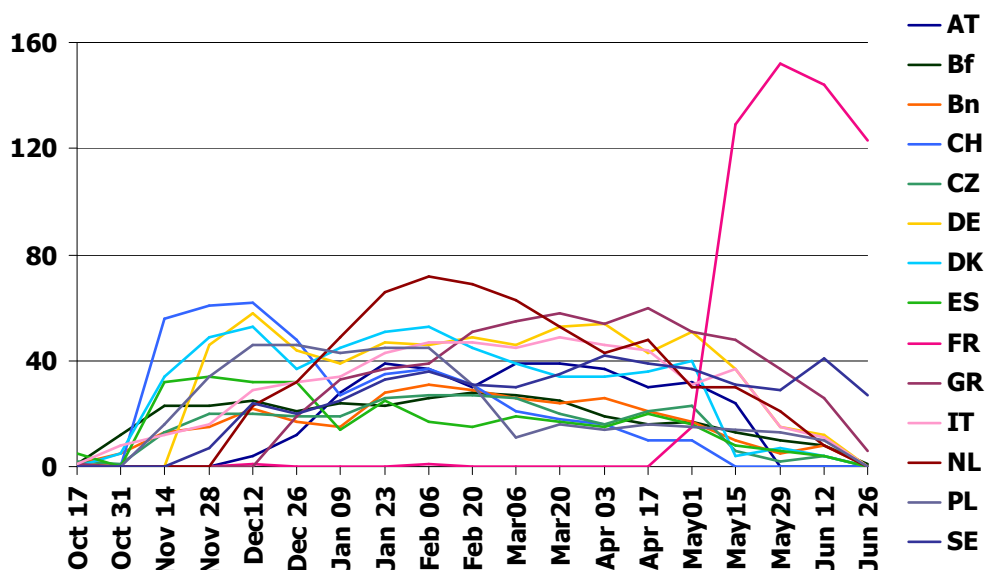


Figure 4.3: Number of active interviewers during each monitoring period

But all those efforts pay off. The great advantage of an electronic sample management system is that it enables real-time monitoring. A huge variety of paradata is collected and available for analyses without delay and without huge additional effort *during* the fieldwork phase. Identifying possible problems in the field and their possible reasons early in the process was the main purpose of collecting this paradata. The coordination team and the country team leaders discussed strategies to cope with these problems, with the country teams then contacting the survey agencies. Remedies to these problems could be implemented without unnecessary delay.

#### **4.5 Conclusions**

The third wave of SHARE provided again new challenges to the fieldwork process, while old issues have been overcome. It was very useful to have all countries using the same Sample Management System, as this provided the coordinating team at MEA in Mannheim a constant *comparable* flow of information from the field, which could be used to jump in whenever necessary to improve matters directly in the field. On the other hand, the common system forced agencies to use the SMS provided, which meant additional learning time and costs on their side. However, as the scheme of “one SMS for all” will be continued in the future, the long-term benefits will clearly outweigh the short-term costs experienced in SHARELIFE.

#### **References**

Lepkowski, James and Mick Couper, 2002. “Nonresponse in the Second Wave of Longitudinal Household Surveys.” In (Editors): Robert Groves, Don Dillman, John Eltinge, and Roderick Little. “Survey Nonresponse”. John Wiley & Sons, New York.