

Monitoring and addressing non-response surveys bias during the pandemic

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Abstract

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, a lockdown was declared in the United Kingdom on the 17th of March 2020 and face-to-face data collection was ceased overnight. The Social Survey Operations (Office for National Statistics) implemented a range of measures to be able to continue to operate. This included a shift to telephone interviewing and the implementation of different approaches to obtain the telephone contact details of respondents. An online portal has been developed and telematching is being used. A “knock-to-nudge” approach has also been rolled out on several social surveys, where interviewers are visiting addresses to obtain phone contact details of respondents at the doorstep.

The impact of these new approaches on response rates and on the characteristics of respondents has been monitored since the start of the pandemic across several surveys. A change in the characteristics of waves 1 survey respondents compared to pre-pandemic times has been observed. The implementation of the “knock-to-nudge” approach has helped to improve response rates and to address some of the non-response biases observed. The biases observed have been further mitigated by the addition of new calibration variables in the weighting methodology. For example, the weights of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) have been adjusted for tenure and country of birth.