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## The TAKE Survey: Fieldwork Report

### REPORT

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LIÈGE université  
**ESPRist**  
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## Abstract

The fieldwork report is a description of the TAKE Survey fieldwork experience. The TAKE Survey is part of the TAKE project. It consisted of a representative survey conducted among the low-income Belgian population about their access to general and specific social benefits and services. The aim was to gain more insight into the size, characteristics and causes of non-take-up in Belgium. This report deals only with the specificities of the data collection in the field. It describes how the involved survey agencies managed the main aspects of the project. It successively presents the pre-established harmonized protocols, the characteristics, the size and the distribution of the sample by region, the interviewer teams, the fieldwork specifications and the results in terms of participation rates and the final evaluation of the fieldwork.

**Keywords:** TAKE Survey, non-take-up, fieldwork, interviewers, survey protocols, sample, response rate, ineligibility

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# 1. Introduction

The TAKE Survey fieldwork was managed by two experienced academic survey agencies: *Het Centrum voor Demografie, Familie en Gezondheid* from the University of Antwerp for the Flemish Region, and *ESPRist – Études et évaluations* from the University of Liège for the Brussels and Walloon regions. The fieldwork was executed between 2019 and 2020 after a long phase of preparation and testing of the questionnaire. This report is a description of the TAKE Survey fieldwork experience. It comprises five main sections, i.e. “Protocols”, “Fieldwork sample”, “Interviewers”, “Fieldwork specifications and results”, and “Evaluation of the fieldwork”.

The report starts with the presentation of the fieldwork framework of the survey and how it was implemented. The first part details the harmonized protocols for interviewers dealing with the procedure to contact the preselected households and how to schedule appointments with participants. Subsequently, the interview specifications present the eligibility criteria for reference respondents within households (i.e. the respondents eligible to complete the main household questionnaire) and for the other household members (eligible for the individual questionnaire). In this report we call “other household member interviews” each interview apart from the reference person. In addition, the role of a proxy respondent is explained, together with its eligibility criteria. Given the linguistic diversity in the sample, the procedures to overcome language barriers are discussed as well. The final part of the first section briefly presents the incentives to encourage survey participation.

The next section comprises a sample description. Two dimensions (age and social benefits) divide the sample in four subgroups: i) households with all members younger than 65 years old or, on the contrary, ii) with at least one member older than 65; and iii) receiving or iv) not receiving the social assistance or the income guarantee for elderly people.

In the section “Interviewers” we present the distribution of the sample between the regional interviewers teams (respectively Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia), the degree of activity among interviewers at different stages of the fieldwork period and the household re-assignments due to COVID-19 interruptions and other fieldwork difficulties. In this section we also present the content of the interviewer training sessions and the fieldwork materials, including the Qualtrics survey software.

The section “Specifications and results” reveals the fieldwork time schedule as well as an overview of the progress in contacting households and response rates. Furthermore, final disposition codes and the reasons for non-participation are presented. Figures concerning the household members interviews are also discussed.

The last section of the report includes a summary of the feedback given by the TAKE interviewers on the one hand and reflections on the fieldwork provided by the survey agencies on the other. The section draws on information from a variety of sources: direct communication between survey agencies and interviewers during the fieldwork, interviewer observations recorded at the end of the interviews, an interviewer fieldwork feedback survey, notes from feedback group sessions at the end of the survey project and individual experiences of the fieldwork coordinators. The section provides elements of strengths and weaknesses in the TAKE Survey fieldwork and spotlights important issues to deal with for similar future survey projects.

This paper is part of the basic methodological documentation of the TAKE Survey, alongside the following documents<sup>1</sup>:

- A report on the development of the TAKE questionnaire (Janssens et al., 2022).
- The TAKE questionnaires.
- A report on the TAKE sample design and its implementation (Goedemé, 2022).

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<sup>1</sup> All these documents are available on the TAKE website: <https://takeproject.wordpress.com/>.

- A report on the microsimulation models available for the TAKE data (Janssens and Derboven, 2022).
- A report on data matching and imputations (Bolland, 2022).

Key findings of the TAKE project are available in the final report of the TAKE project (Goedemé et al., 2022).

## 2. Protocols

After deliberation between the research team and survey agencies, protocols for the TAKE Survey were formalized with respect to contact attempts as well as for conducting interviews. Those rules aimed to optimize the households' participation rate and to guarantee the quality of collected data. It also included interview specifications regarding the type of respondents, proxies, language and incentives. The protocols were inspired by existing and well-proven procedures from long-standing survey projects and tailored to the specific characteristics of the target population.

### 2.1 Contacting the Households

#### 2.1.1 Introduction letter

The first contact letter was sent on a single occasion by the Crossroads Bank for Social Security (CBSS) in August 2019. This letter mentioned the goals of the study, the partners involved, the expected duration of the interviews, the incentive for participation, the specific purpose to link survey data with administrative information, the voluntary basis of participation, the anonymization of the collected information and the non-impact of participation or non-participation with respect to respondents' social rights. Also, this letter mentioned the possibility to refuse participation within four weeks by sending an accompanying response card (for free). After this period, the CBSS provided the survey agencies with the list of households that had not refused to be contacted. Subsequently, the survey agency assigned the list of households randomly to fieldwork batches. The fieldwork started in September 2019. From this moment, interviewers began to contact respondents face-to-face or by phone.

The information provided to the interviewers included the selected households' addresses, names of the reference persons (head of household) and names of any other member living officially in the same household. As phone numbers were not available from the administrative data source, interviewers had to collect it during their face-to-face contacts in the field or with the help of secondary sources (e.g. phone books).

#### 2.1.2 Expected number of contact attempts

In case that a phone number could not be registered, the instruction was to make a minimum of four face-to-face contact attempts as long as there was no final result before the household was considered as non-participating. A result was final when a contact resulted in a reference person interview, ineligibility or refusal. If a phone number was available, interviewers were asked to make the two first contact attempts face-to-face followed by a minimum of four contact attempts by phone. Of course more contact attempts were very welcome but not necessary. From previous survey experiences, we decided to set a minimum number of attempts beyond which the probability to have a direct contact with a target household strongly decreases, given the profile of the studied population. Interviewers were allowed to make more contact efforts, notwithstanding that the minimum number was required to receive a financial compensation for the efforts.

#### 2.1.3 Interview appointment scenarios

According to the privileged scenario, the interviewer tried to contact the household and if possible conducted the interview with the reference person and with as many other household members

available as possible. To complete individual questionnaires with the other household members, in case they were not present at the time of the reference person interview, two scenarios were proposed. A proxy interview was allowed, or a second appointment had to be scheduled, either immediately or later by phone. A new interview date could be set for a face-to-face interview or an interview by phone.

## 2.2 Interview specifications

The survey was addressed to all household members in order to capture heterogeneity inside the household and to estimate the household's financial situation accurately. This information is required to conduct the means-tested measurements.

### 2.2.1 Type of respondent

The main interview should be carried out with the reference person. To be a reference person three conditions needed to be met:

- being de facto a member of the household;
- being the main responsible for the household's finances and, if applicable, being the applicant for social benefits;
- being at least 18 years old.

The reference person interview could be conducted face-to-face only, not by phone.

To be eligible for the other household member interview, respondents required an age of 18 or older, irrespective of the fact whether they were living officially in the same accommodation or not. The interview could be completed either in person or by phone.

### 2.2.2 Proxy respondent

The support of a proxy respondent during the interview with the reference person was allowed only in case of language or financial knowledge issues. The proxy could be either an official or unofficial household member, or even someone not living in the same household (e.g. a friend, relative or social worker). The *sine qua non* condition was the presence of the reference person during the interview. This means that a proxy was not allowed to participate to resolve the unavailability or refusal from the reference person.

For the other household member interview proxies were allowed because of language barriers or unavailability at the second appointment. A proxy could be the reference person or other household members.

### 2.2.3 Language barriers

To deal with language barriers during the interviews, multiple workarounds were prepared. First of all, the questionnaire was available in three languages (French, Dutch and English), allowing for different options if both respondents and interviewers spoke one of these languages. Table 1 shows that in Brussels and Wallonia, except for a few interviews in Dutch, all interviews took place in French. In Flanders there was a higher number of French interviews, while more interviewers and respondents also opted to complete the interview based on the English questionnaire.

Questionnaire language	Brussels and Wallonia		Flanders	
	Reference person	Other household member	Reference person	Other household member
French	964	521	80	16
Dutch	5	1	830	330
English	0	0	30	11

**Table 1. Distribution of language questionnaires by region and interview type**

Furthermore, in big cities the survey agencies tried to hire interviewers who spoke a second language that is common among migrant populations, such as Arabic, Italian, Turkish, etc. In case of language difficulties those polyglot interviewers were asked to translate (parts of) the questions. In addition, the survey agency in Flanders provided a glossary with key concepts of the questionnaire in Polish, Arabic and Turkish as a workaround. Another possibility was to conduct the interview with a proxy respondent doing the translation work. As can be observed from Table 2a, we distinguish between different situations of language use during the reference person interviews to uncover how interviewers dealt with language barriers. The numbers are derived from the interviewer observations module at the end of each interview. The majority of interviews in all regions took place in the language of the questionnaire without the use of proxy translations or mixtures of different languages by the interviewer and respondent. A higher share of proxy use was found in Brussels and Wallonia (18.2%), whereas during the English interviews in Flanders often a proxy respondent was present as well (23.3%). The percentages of non-proxy interviews where interviewers and respondents used on-the-spot translations to complete the interview were limited in all regions. In Brussels and Wallonia only during 1% of the French interviews on-the-spot translations were required as a workaround, while this varied between 1.2% and 3.5% in Flanders, depending on the questionnaire language. In section 6 we provide further details on how interviewers experienced and managed language barriers during the fieldwork.

Q language	Brussels and Wallonia			Flanders		
	Non-proxy interview in questionnaire language	Proxy interview language barrier	Non-proxy interview using different languages	Non-proxy interview in questionnaire language	Proxy interview language barrier	Non-proxy interview using different languages
French	80.8% (779)	18.2% (175)	1.0% (10)	88.8% (71)	10.0% (8)	1.2% (1)
Dutch	100.0% (5)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	83.4% (692)	13.1% (109)	3.5% (29)
English	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	73.3% (22)	23.3% (7)	3.3% (1)

**Table 2a. Distribution of language use during the reference person interviews by region in % and N**

Table 2b shows the language use during the other household member interviews in a similar fashion. Due to questionnaire routings a lot of missing information was recorded to construct the category of non-proxy interviews using different languages, especially for the French version of the questionnaire. Therefore, we focus more on the presence of a proxy respondent to translate. We find similar percentages for the French interviews in Brussels and Wallonia (16.3%) and Dutch interviews in Flanders (18.8%), suggesting that the use of proxy respondents for translating the questionnaire is quite similar between reference person interviews and other household member interviews.

Q language	Brussels and Wallonia			Flanders		
	Non-proxy interview in questionnaire language	Proxy interview language barrier	Non-proxy interview using different languages	Non-proxy interview in questionnaire language	Proxy interview language barrier	Non-proxy interview using different languages
French	82.9% (423)	16.3% (83)	0.8% (4)	56.2% (9)	43.8% (7)	0.0% (0)
Dutch	100% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	79.0% (260)	18.8% (62)	2.1% (7)
English	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	54.5% (6)	0.0% (0)	45.5% (5)

**Table 2b. Distribution of language use during the other household member interviews by region % and N**

#### 2.2.4 Incentives

Both survey agencies used monetary incentives to convince respondents to participate. This incentive was a gift voucher. The University of Liège distributed a €10 voucher for the reference person interview and a €5 one for each extra household member interview. The University of Antwerp rewarded households with a voucher of €10 for a reference person interview only.

In addition, after the interview, participating households received a leaflet with an overview of benefits that were mentioned during the interview. Doing so, the survey agencies aimed to tackle any questions about social assistance the respondents came across during the interview. Social benefits were classified by topic: school, housing, family, transports, social assistance and health. The leaflet specified what each service or benefit comprises, for whom it exists, and how to access additional eligibility information. It also provided reference organizations to help respondents if they were looking for more information: *Espace Social Télé Service* in the Brussels region, *Le Réseau wallon de lutte contre la pauvreté* in Wallonia and *De Vlaamse Infolijn* for Flanders. This initiative was really appreciated by participating households and helped interviewers to inform respondents when they were left with questions after the interview.

### 3. Fieldwork sample

The fieldwork sample included four target groups: households with all members younger than 65 in 2018 of whom either i) at least one person receives social assistance (YOUNG-SA) or ii) no one receives social assistance (YOUNG-NOSA) and households including at least one member older than 65 in 2018 either iii) receiving (OLD-IGE) or iv) not receiving the income guarantee for elderly people (OLD-NOIGE). The distribution of the four targeted subpopulations in the fieldwork sample is presented in Table 3a. The sample excludes people living in institutions and collective households, households living in the German-speaking part of Belgium, households who migrated to Belgium during 2017 (year of the sample drawing), households with incomes equal to zero according to the Data Warehouse and IPCAL database, households receiving income from abroad or from international organizations.

Target subpopulation	Brussels	Wallonia	Flanders
YOUNG-SA	990	413	825
YOUNG-NOSA	571	758	1317
OLD-IGE	190	204	315
OLD-NOIGE	275	289	400

**Table 3a. Distribution of target subpopulations by region (all batches included)**

Batch	Brussels	Wallonia	Total ULiège	Flanders
1	1.476	1.163	2.639	2005
2	315	289	604	521
3	152	191	343	280
4	83	21	104	51

**Table 3b. Distribution of batches by region.**

Table 3b shows the division of the sample in four fieldwork batches, irrespective of the four target groups. The sample was divided in batches that could be activated according to the needs of the fieldwork in terms of response rates. Batch 1 was opened at the start of the fieldwork in Brussels and Wallonia. Flanders opted to open batches 1 and 2 from the start. Given the observation of low responses rates during the fieldwork, batches 2 and 3 were opened during fieldwork in Brussels and Wallonia. Moreover, thanks to an extra funding from the *Observatoire de la Santé et du Social de Bruxelles-Capitale/Observatorium voor Gezondheid en Welzijn van Brussel-Hoofdstad*, the region of Brussels was oversampled to carry out more region-specific analysis.

For the University of Liège, we first distributed 2661 households. This number corresponds to the first batch of Brussels and of Wallonia together (2639 households), increased by 22 households that were transferred from Antwerp. Those 22 additional addresses were localized close to Wallonia and an area where a both French and Dutch speaking interviewer from Liège was active. Opening batches 2 and 3 led to an increase of 947 distributed households for Wallonia and Brussels. Also, 139 late refusal cards arrived after the distribution of the addresses among interviewers, meaning that those households

were considered as refusing an interview since “drop out” response card were received after the initial refusal list from CBSS. The final total number of in-the-field households was 3469<sup>2</sup>.

For the University of Antwerp, the distribution of addresses at the start of the fieldwork summed to 2526 (batch 1 and 2) in Flanders. As 22 households were transferred to the University of Liège and 89 late refusal cards were received, the total number of in-the-field households was 2415.

In all regions batch 4 remained closed throughout the fieldwork.

## 4. Interviewers

The TAKE Survey fieldwork was completed by the work of about 80 interviewers. Half of them were trained in Dutch by the survey agency of the University of Antwerp and worked in Flanders. The other part was trained in French by the survey agency of University of Liège and was active in Brussels and Wallonia. The fieldwork began in September 2019. It was interrupted because of the COVID-19 lockdown starting from March 2020. Part of the interviewers, mainly working in Brussels and Wallonia, went back to the field for about one month during August and September 2020 (cfr. infra). In addition to this interruption, survey agencies had to deal with demotivated interviewers dropping out during the fieldwork, of less-experienced interviewers in particular, in what was a challenging survey project. This is discussed in section 6 of the report. Other reasons for interviewer drop-outs are generally related to personal, family or professional reasons.

### 4.1 Distribution of the sample

The regional distribution of interviewers is presented in Table 4. During the first period, 41 interviewers were trained in Liège in four sessions. 19 worked in Brussel and 22 in Wallonia. 7 dropped out between the training and the period of lockdown, some without completing any interviews, while others finished only part of their addresses. Note that one interviewer was active both in Brussels and Wallonia. In Antwerp, 44 active interviewers were trained during three sessions.

Brussels	Wallonia	Flanders
<b>First period pre-COVID-19, batch 1 only in BXL and WAL, batch 1 and 2 in FLA)</b>		
15 active iwers <sup>3</sup>	20 active iwers	44 active iwers
95 HH <sup>4</sup> per iwer	55 HH per iwer	57 HH per iwer
<b>Second period (post-COVID-19, batches 1, 2 and 3 in BXL and WAL, batch 1 and 2 in FLA)</b>		
9 active iwers	13 active iwers	1 active iwer
129 HH per iwer	82 HH per iwer	29 HH per iwer
953 HH re-assigned	564 HH re-assigned	29 HH re-assigned

**Table 4. Regional dispatch of households.**

In the region of Brussels 15 interviewers were active before the COVID-19 interruption. The average sample size per interviewer was 95 households. Several re-assignments of addresses had to be done for a variety of reasons. The recruitment of interviewers in Brussels was, in line with other survey projects, difficult, leading to a high workload for the active interviewers there. In February 2020, only weeks before the COVID-19 break, batches 2 and 3 of the sample were opened to mediate low

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<sup>2</sup> Batches 1 for Brussel and Wallonia (2661 households) minus late refusals (139 hhs) plus batches 2 and 3 for Brussel and Wallonia (947 hhs).

<sup>3</sup> Interviewers

<sup>4</sup> Household

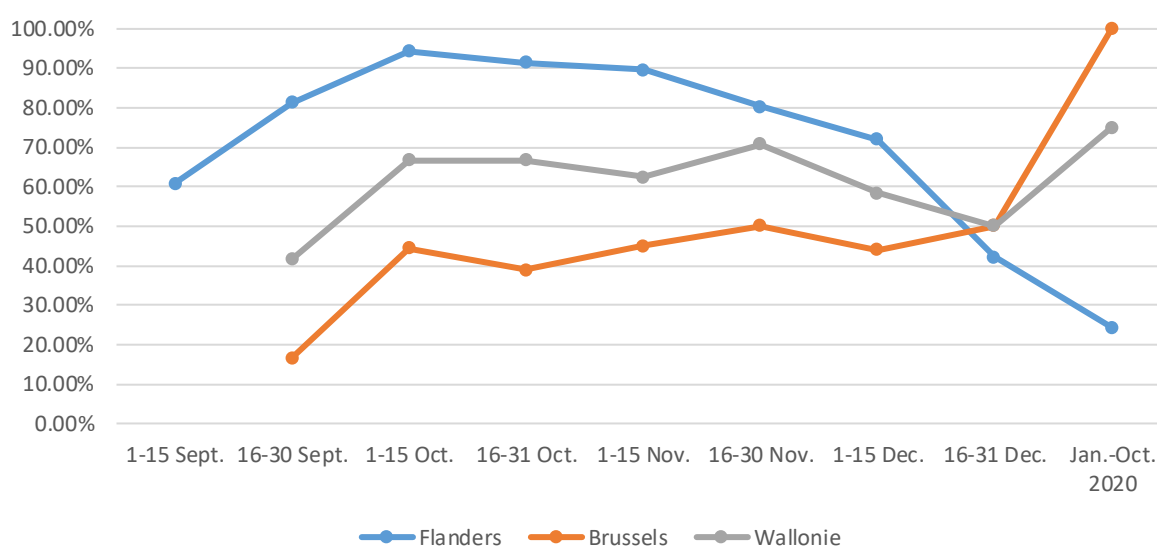


response rates in Brussels. After the break, multiple re-assignments of households were required as some interviewers stopped working for the project. As a result, the average number of households per interviewer increased to 129 with only 9 interviewers carrying on. Given that a large share of households was ineligible and response rates were low in Brussels, the workload was still reasonable for the remaining period. Nevertheless, this implied a slower progress of the fieldwork in the region.

In Wallonia the survey project could count on 20 active interviewers. Two other interviewers had also been trained but eventually never interviewed. Before the COVID-19 break, the average size of the sample per interviewer was smaller than in Brussels, i.e. 55 households. Some re-assignments were necessary during the field, due to two interviewers dropping out and to resolve low response rates. After the interruption, 13 interviewers remained active with on average 82 addresses.

In Flanders 44 interviewers were active, including two interviewers terminating their involvement with only limited fieldwork activity. Re-assignments of addresses were due to health problems on the side of interviewers and a difficult timing of the project (delays). The average number of addresses per interviewer was 57. Only one interviewer was active in the second period to finish the households of an interviewer who dropped out.

## 4.2 Active interviewers during fieldwork



**Figure 1. Percentage of active interviewers by period and region**

Figure 1 shows the share of active interviewers by period and region. "Active interviewers" are defined as those who registered at least one contact attempt or interview in a certain period. In Flanders, interviewers were mainly active from September 2019 to December 2019, with high activity rates (+90%) in October and November. Turning to Brussels and Wallonia, the majority of interviewers had to postpone their fieldwork start because of other projects they prioritized and incompatibilities due to multiple delays of the TAKE Survey. All the interviewers in Brussels were active during the first months of the year 2020. In Wallonia, while some interviewers had already finished their work in 2019, others still had to do a lot of efforts after the COVID-19 break, explaining that the percentage of active interviewers never approached 100%.

## 4.3 Trainings

In both Antwerp and Liège, the interviewer training for the TAKE Survey implied a one day session for experienced interviewers. Unexperienced interviewers received a one and a half day of training in Liège and two days in Antwerp. The extra (half) day mainly focused on basic interviewer skills and deontology (door-to-door selling strategies, interview conducting, survey methodology in asking

questions, interviewer bias and data quality, administrative matters, GDPR, etc.) and was facultative for experienced interviewers. In total, the survey agency of Liège organized five full day sessions and three half days sessions. Most of them took place somewhat before the start of the fieldwork, meaning between July and October 2019. A last session for later recruited interviewers occurred in February 2020. In Antwerp the trainings took place in three sessions during the second half of May 2019. Unexperienced interviewers had a basic interviewer training in early May 2019.

The full day of TAKE Survey training included a presentation on the context of the TAKE project, detailed explanations about the specific fieldwork protocols and questionnaires, hands-on exercises on the survey software and a presentation of the required fieldwork materials (i.e. the introductory letter, incentives, etc.). The project context introduced how non-take up is defined, what the goals of the survey are, who the involved partners are and the different parts of the entire TAKE project. The protocols module presented the sample profile, eligibility criteria and the proxy rules (who is a valid respondent for the different types of questionnaires), as well as the contact procedures and the monitoring of the fieldwork progress. Subsequently, the questionnaires were presented, together with the specific interviewer instructions for difficult questions (e.g. the consent for administrative data matches). Further, interviewers were familiarized with the Qualtrics survey software, including the module to register contact attempts. A presentation of the fieldwork materials learned the interviewers the purpose of all tools the survey agencies provided for the fieldwork. For example, flyers to convince people to participate, a question and answers (Q&A) guide to assist interviewers during the fieldwork, the showcards book, etc. Another part of the training spent attention to the deontology of interviewers and how they needed to comply with the existing privacy rules (GDPR). Finally, a mock interview version was practiced, i.e. a full reference person interview was conducted with the entire group interviewers during the day of training. Furthermore, interviewers were expected to practice at least one reference person interview at home before going into the field.

#### 4.4 Fieldwork material

Besides an interviewer laptop and its related equipment, interviewers received from the survey agencies:

- A copy of the first contact letter sent by the BCSS, in order to refer to it during contact procedures.
- Flyers to be distributed during face-to-face contact attempts, for if nobody was at the door or for if people asked for more information.
- A Q&A guide presenting summarized information: e.g. the TAKE Survey and TAKE team, a summary of the procedures, strategies to convince respondents, Qualtrics software guidelines, etc.
- Address lists and official household compositions.
- An interviewer badge.
- A showcards book.
- A leaflet with an overview of the benefits to leave at the respondent's house after participation.
- Gift vouchers to be distributed to each participant.
- Contact registration forms (optional).
- A glossary for foreign language including translated key terminology of the questionnaire (Flanders).

#### 4.5 Qualtrics software

The fieldwork leant on the Qualtrics survey software, for which the University of Antwerp provides an XM platform license. With respect to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) it is important to note that the servers hosting the survey data should be located on the European continent. Although primarily developed for touch screens and mobile phones, an offline survey app for the interviewer

laptops comes with the purchase of a Qualtrics license. This tool allows equipping interviewers with survey registration software tailored for offline usage when interviewing respondents at their place of living. The offline app synchronizes with the Qualtrics online platform that includes the required instruments to build questionnaires with complex routings and different methods of survey questioning. At the same time, the online platform backups all completed interviews when synchronizing with the interviewer laptop. Hence, the fieldwork progress could be monitored by means of the Qualtrics platform. Besides the different types of questionnaires (household and individual) in varying language versions (English, Dutch and French), a short questionnaire for registering contact attempts was downloaded to the interviewer laptops. This module allowed survey agencies to keep track of the status of all sampled households during the fieldwork. Each registered contact attempt required the time and date of the event and eventual outcome (e.g. respondent was not at home or refusal by the respondent). All this information (completed interviews and contact attempts) could be downloaded from the platform and processed by the survey agencies to monitor the fieldwork in detail and to provide the interviewers with their work progress.

Given the reliance on laptops, the navigation within the Qualtrics offline app by means of a touchpad or mouse was sometimes cumbersome. Also, the offline app is inflexible in the interruption and re-opening of interviews. In addition, the app offers little overview on the synchronization between computer and online platform. The app is also incompatible with survey projects like TAKE using fixed lists of respondents as no accessible information (except questionnaires) for the interviewers can be preloaded to the offline software. In line with this, it is impossible to make use of pre-coded questionnaires (e.g. a questionnaire with a preloaded respondent identification number), leading to difficulties in assigning interviews to the correct respondent (typically interviewers tend to make mistakes in filling out identification numbers). This, in turn, causes difficult and time-consuming data cleaning work. Also, the lack of real-time access to previously registered contact attempts hindered the work of the interviewers.

## 5. Fieldwork specifications and results

This section presents how the TAKE Survey fieldwork unfolded in 2019 and 2020. First, we briefly summarize the timing of the fieldwork, with its schedule of (re-)start(s) and stop(s). Subsequently, we provide an overview of the progress in contacting households and response rates during the fieldwork period. Finally, the final response rates are discussed, together with the reasons for refusal or ineligibility. We also pay some attention to response rates broken down by target population.

### 5.1 Fieldwork time schedule

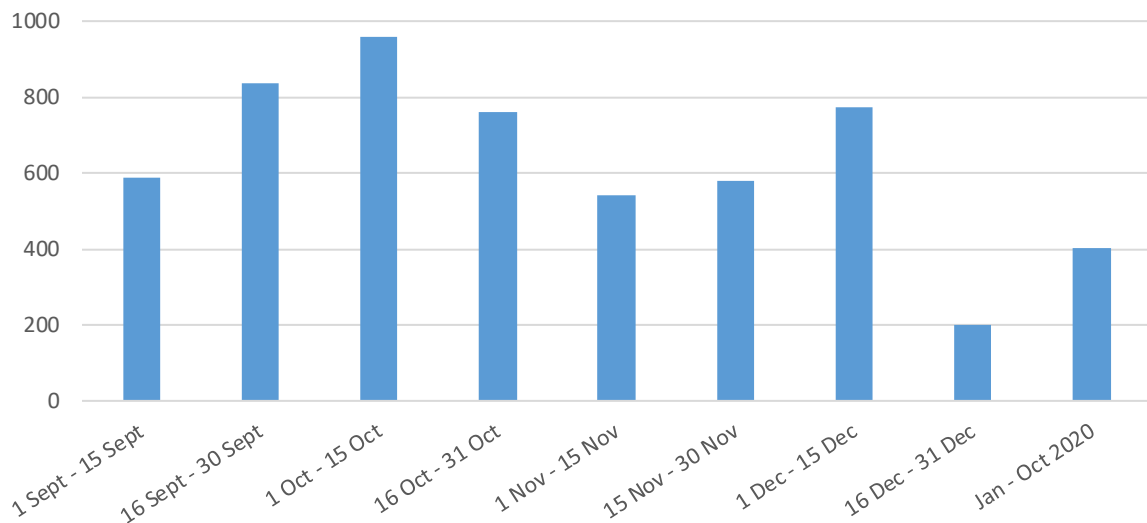
In both Dutch and French-speaking Belgium the fieldwork started in September 2019 (the 2<sup>nd</sup> in Flanders and the 17<sup>th</sup> in Wallonia-Brussels resp.). The initial objective was to reach a target number of 840 household interviews in Flanders and 990 in Wallonia-Brussels within 4 months of fieldwork. In Flanders this target was attained in mid-December, whereas difficulties to reach and convince respondents forced the fieldwork in Wallonia and Brussels to be extended. Eventually, the fieldwork was also prolonged in Flanders to finish all addresses of the activated fieldwork batches. On March 17 2020 all fieldwork activity had to be stopped due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The restart in Wallonia and Brussels took place on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2020, while Flanders continued to conclude the fieldwork in the last sampled municipality during the month of September. Ultimately the last fieldwork activity was registered on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October in Flanders, September 30 in Wallonia and October the 4<sup>th</sup> in Brussels. The fieldwork time schedule could be summarized as follows:

- Start of fieldwork September 2019 (batches 1-2 for Flanders, batch 1 for Wallonia and Brussels).
- Target number of interviews reached for Flanders in mid-December 2019.

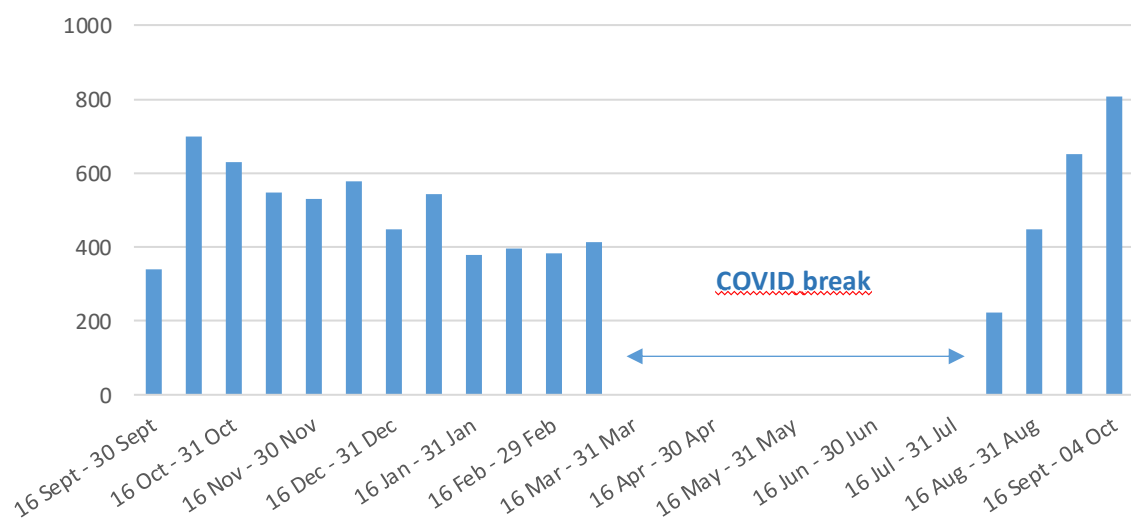
- Fieldwork batches 2 and 3 opened and distributed mid-February 2020 for Wallonia and Brussels.
- All fieldwork activity interrupted from March 17 2020 onwards.
- Restart of fieldwork in August 2020 after spring-summer lockdown.
- Ending of all fieldwork activity late September and early October 2020 for all regions.

## 5.2 Overview of contact attempts

Figure 2 demonstrates how the number of contact attempts varied over the fieldwork for Flanders. Figure 3 shows the same for the Brussels-Wallonia sample. Notice that the period of the COVID-19 fieldwork break is displayed in Figure 3, while it is omitted in Figure 2. In Flanders, the majority of contact attempts was done early in fieldwork, particularly in September and October 2019. After a 2019 end-of-year period with less contact attempts, the 2020 attempts are clustered all together for finishing the last addresses before and after the COVID-19 fieldwork break. In Brussels and Wallonia the contact attempts are stretched over a long period.



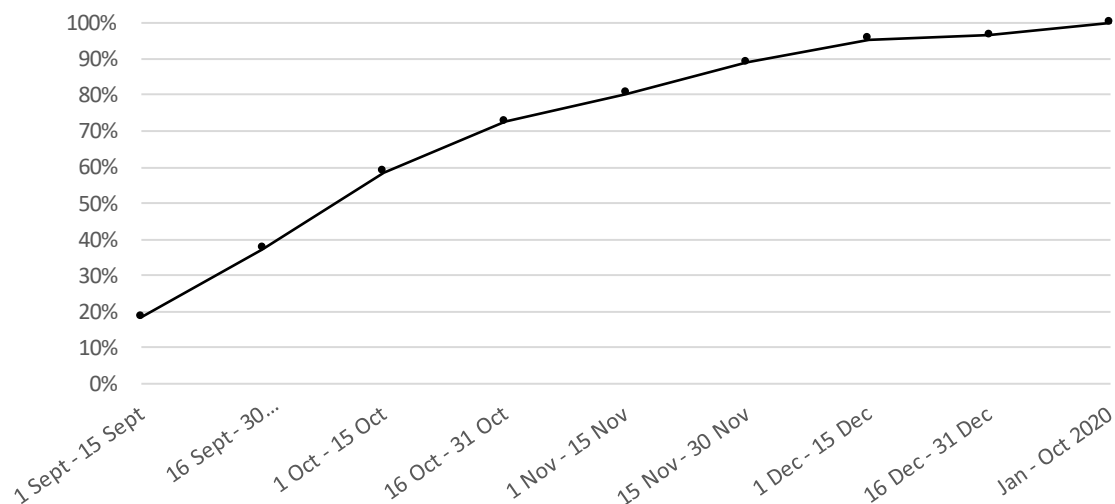
**Figure 2. Number of contact attempts by period TAKE fieldwork (Flanders)**



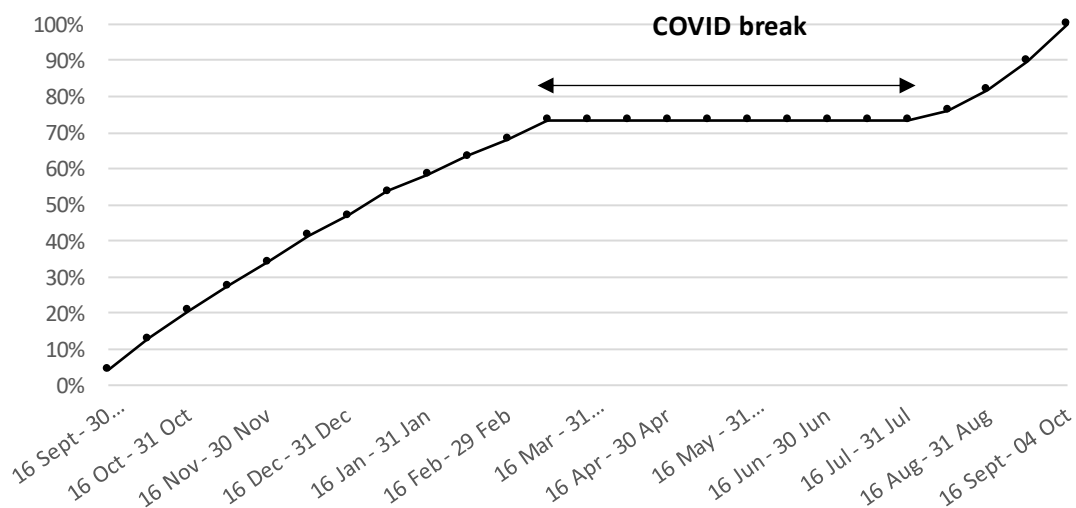
**Figure 3. Number of contact attempts by period TAKE fieldwork (Brussels and Wallonia)**

The patterns of contact attempts are reflected in Figures 4 and 5, presenting the cumulative percentages of households contacted for the first time over the fieldwork period. It reflects the share

of contacted households for each period relative to all households that were tried to be contacted at least once. 100% of the 2437 (including 22 transferred households, excluding 89 late refusal response cards) households were contacted in Flanders by the end of the fieldwork. Nearly all households were visited by the end of 2019 (95%). The pace of contacting households was the highest in the first weeks of the fieldwork, with almost 60% of the sample contacted for the first time by the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2019. From the sample size of 3447 (excluding 22 transferred households and including 139 late refusal response cards) households, for Brussels and Wallonia together, 3306 were contacted at least once by the end of fieldwork period. This translates into a total contact rate of nearly 96%. The contact rate appears particularly lower in Brussels with 93.6% households contacted, compared to Wallonia with 98.6% contacted. Figure 5 shows a steady increase in contacted households between September 2019 and mid-March 2020 in Brussels and Wallonia. Before the COVID-19 break more than 70% of the households were contacted at least once. It should be noted that batches 1 and 2 were immediately opened in Flanders, whereas in Wallonia and Brussels, they were opened according to the evolution of the response rate in the field (which means batch 1 in September 2019, batches 2 and 3 in February 2020). As a consequence, the contact rates based on the final sample does not reflect the contact rates as experienced during the fieldwork in Wallonia and Brussels.



**Figure 4. Cumulative proportion of households contacted at least once (Flanders). N = 2437 contacted households**



**Figure 5. Cumulative proportion of households contacted at least once (Brussels and Wallonia). N = 3304 contacted households**

## 5.3 Household participation

### 5.3.1 Household response rates

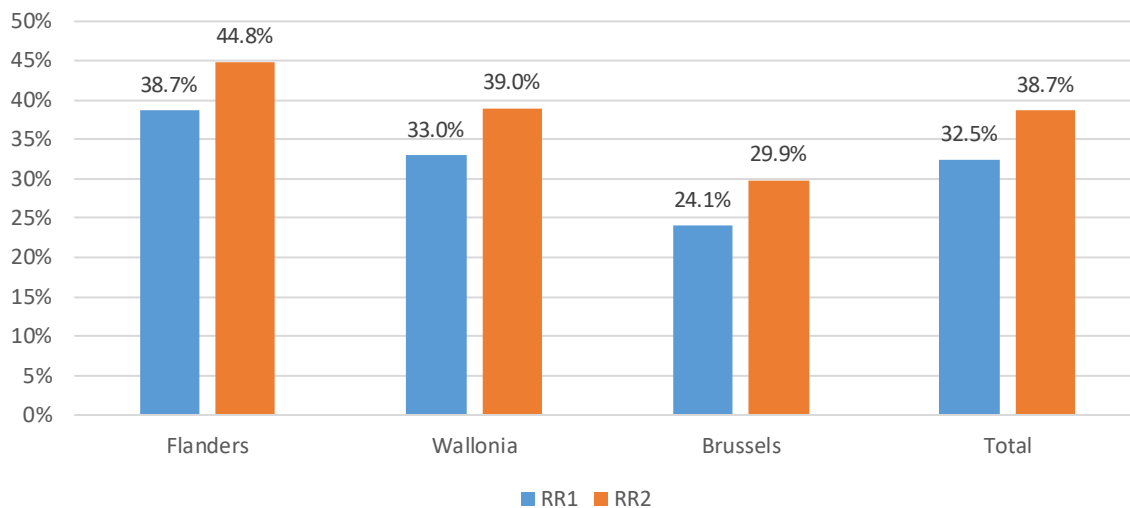
The participation in the TAKE Survey first focuses on the reference person interview, which is the prerequisite for considering a household as participating. The fieldwork yielded 1909 reference person interviews, i.e. the number of participating households. 940 of the interviews took place in Flanders, whereas Brussels and Wallonia totalized 450 and 519 interviews respectively. There are several ways in which the household participation rates can be calculated, depending on how cases of unknown eligibility and ineligibility are handled. According to the AAPOR (2016) calculation procedures of response rates, this could lead to different outcomes. To evaluate the TAKE fieldwork we considered two types of response rates: a minimum (RR1; including all households in the sample) and a maximum response rate (RR2; correcting for households with a wrong address or that could not be interviewed due to language barriers). The calculation of the two rates is as follows:

$$RR1 = \frac{I}{I + (R + NC + O) + NE}$$

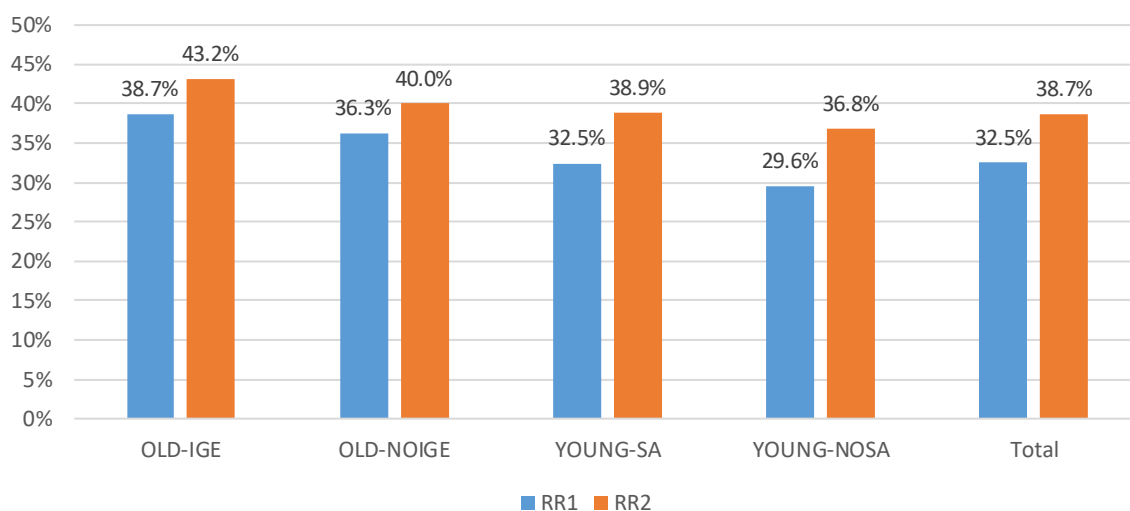
$$RR2 = \frac{I}{I + (R + NC + O)}$$

where  $I$  denotes the number of interviews.  $R$ ,  $NC$  and  $O$  represent the numbers of refused, non-contacted and households with other types of non-response as final disposition codes respectively.  $NE$  counts the number of non-eligible households from the interviewers' point of view. Those households are not able to participate as i) the sampled address does not (longer) correspond with the respondent's place of living (e.g. in case of an empty dwelling or different residents) and there is no new address available, or ii) the household lacks a reference person with the required language skills to be interviewed and there is no proxy respondent or other interviewer available to remediate. Figure 6 shows the two types of response rates broken down by region and for the total sample. The household participation appears the highest in Flanders (RR1 is 38.7%), whereas in Wallonia (RR1 is 33.0%) we were able to interview one out of three households and in Brussels (RR1 is 24.0%) somewhat less than one out of four. Overall, the observed RR1 is 32.5%. Correcting for the households that were not eligible for a reference person interview (RR2), the response rates reach higher levels: 44.8% in Flanders, 39.0% in Wallonia and 29.9% in Brussels. The overall RR2 is 38.7%. Differences between the two response rates are comparable for all regions. This is shown in Figure 6.

As discussed previously, the sample can be subdivided in four target groups: households with all members younger than 65 in 2018 of whom either i) at least one person receives social assistance (YOUNG-SA) or ii) no one receives social assistance (YOUNG-NOSA) and households including at least one member older than 65 in 2018 either iii) receiving (OLD-IGE) or iv) not receiving the income guarantee for elderly people (OLD-NOIGE). Figure 7 presents the response rates for each of these targeted groups. In general the response is higher among the older age groups, irrespective of receiving social benefits or not. Also, the groups relying on social benefits show higher response rates in both age categories. Hence, among the OLD-IGE the response was the highest (RR1 is 38.7% and RR2 43.2%), followed by OLD-NOIGE (36.3 and 40.0% resp.). While the response rates with respect to RR1 are significantly lower in YOUNG-SA (32.5%) and YOUNG-NOSA (29.6%), it is remarkable that the RR2 (38.9 and 36.8%) tends to catch up with the older groups. The distribution of the households' final disposition codes (not shown) suggests that this results from a relatively large group of younger households that could not be found at the sampled address by the interviewers. As such, a lot of the younger households were not contactable, leading to ineligibility.

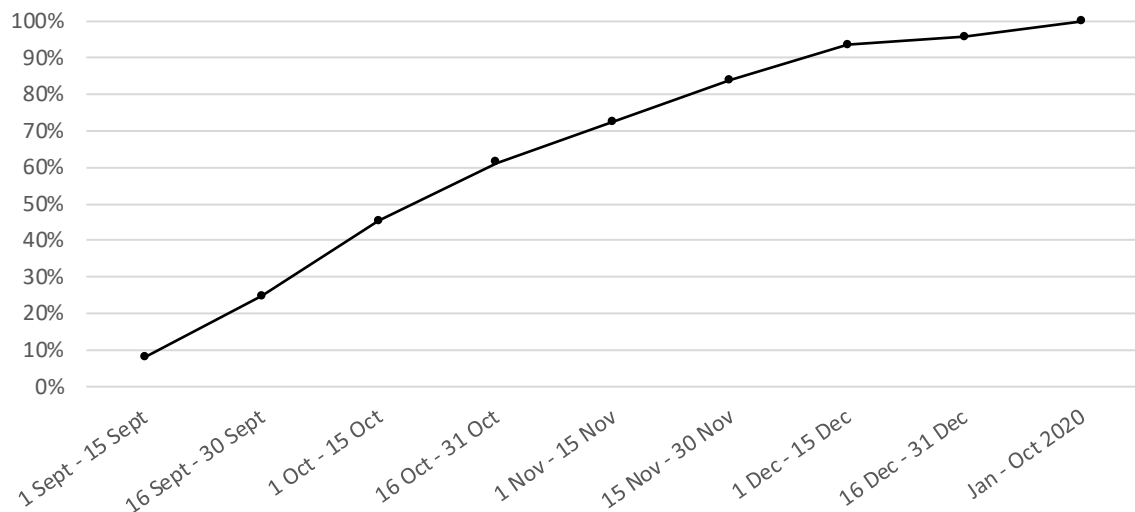


**Figure 6. Household response rates (RR1 and RR2) by region**

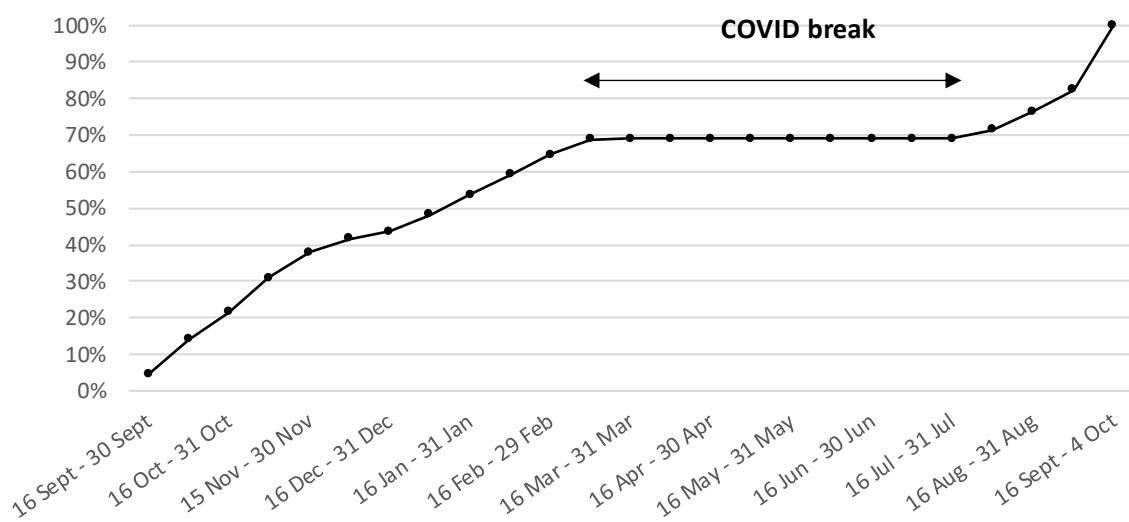


**Figure 7. Household response rates (RR1 and RR2) by target subpopulation**

To evaluate the progress of the fieldwork in terms of household participation, Figures 8 and 9 present the cumulative percentage of households that were interviewed by fieldwork period. It reflects the share of households with a reference person interview for each period relative to all participating households. In the first month of fieldwork (September 2019) nearly one out of four of all participating households were interviewed in Flanders. The most productive month turns out to be October 2019, with 345 reference person interviews (36.7%) that were conducted. During November and December the fieldwork slowed down. However, Figure 4 indicates that still a lot of contact attempts were registered in the first part of December, suggesting that many interviewers were trying to reach and convince households that were not eager to participate before finishing their list of addresses at the end of 2019. In 2020 the Flemish fieldwork activity was limited. Less than 5% of all completed interviews took place until October. In Brussels and Wallonia the fieldwork started at a slower pace, with 14% of all reference person interviews completed in the first month. By the end of 2019, 43.7% of the interviews had taken place. This shows that the bulk of the fieldwork was concentrated in 2020, with an additional 25% of the interviews completed before the COVID-19 interruption in March 2020. After the restart in August 2020, a substantial surge of 173 household interviews was observed in the last two weeks of the fieldwork, representing almost 18% of all participating households in Brussels and Wallonia. This suggests a large final effort to increase response rates in those regions.



**Figure 8. Cumulative proportion of households with reference person interview (Flanders). N = 942 interviewed households.**



**Figure 9. Cumulative proportion of households with reference person interview (Brussels and Wallonia). N = 970 interviewed households.**

Given the procedure of opt-out response cards for respondents not willing to participate, it is worthwhile to look at the response rates based on the gross sample<sup>5</sup> as well. Overall, in 23% of all households in the gross sample a successful reference person interview was recorded, with an achieved response rate of 19% for Brussels, 22% for Wallonia and 26% for Flanders. A more detailed analysis shows that the response rates in the gross sample are particularly much lower for the older age groups (22% for OLD-IGE and 18% for OLD-NOIGE), implying that this age group sent the response cards more frequently to avoid survey participation. The YOUNG-SA and YOUNG-NOSA groups achieved response rates of 26% and 23% respectively (Goedemé, 2022).

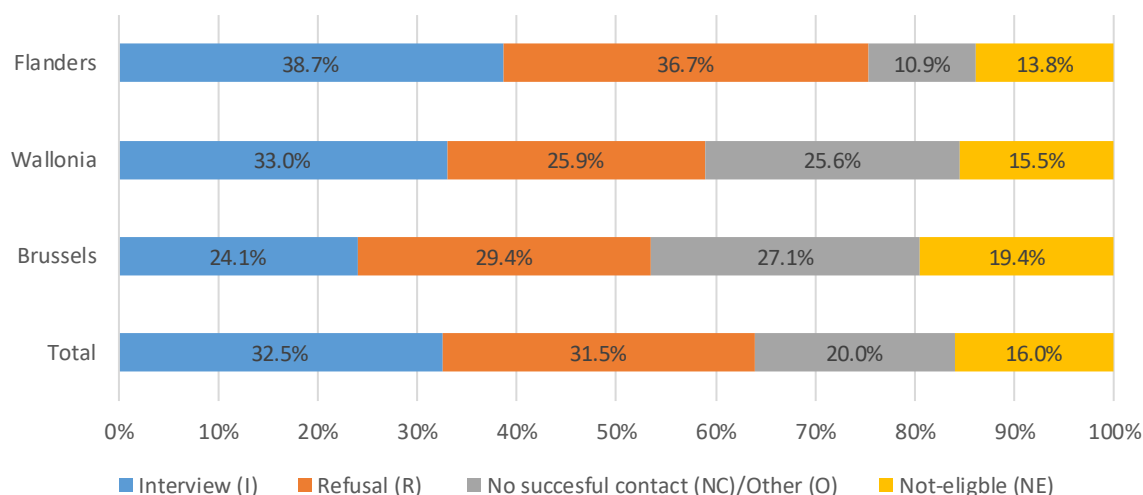
### 5.3.2 Household final disposition codes and refusals

Figure 10 presents the distribution of the final disposition codes for all fieldwork-activated households at the end of the fieldwork by region. The largest group of ineligible households was found in the region of Brussels (19.4% of the total sample), while in Wallonia 15.5% and in Flanders 13.8% was not eligible for a reference person interview. According to Table 5, demonstrating the reason for non-participation

<sup>5</sup> Received an invitation letter with response card (excluding non-activated batches during the fieldwork).



by region, the principal cause of ineligibility was incorrect address information. For 18.0% of the non-participating households the targeted respondents could not be found at the official address. 5.7% of the households could not participate because of language incompatibilities between the respondent and the interviewer and/or the questionnaire language. Both shares were relatively high in Brussels. Figure 10 suggests that the proportion of refusing households was the highest in Flanders (36.7%). In Wallonia and Brussels interviewers struggled more to successfully contact respondents (25.6 and 27.1% respectively) and to label households as refusing or to convince respondents for an interview (e.g. respondents could not be reached, did not show up for appointments, did not refuse nor gave consent for interview, etc.).



**Figure 10. Distribution of final disposition codes all households by region. N = 5884**

	Refusal (R)	No successful contact (NC)	Other (O)	Not-eligible (NE)		Total
				Address unknown	Language barrier	
Flanders	59.80	17.73	0.00	15.25	7.22	100.00
Wallonia	38.69	36.23	1.99	20.53	2.55	100.00
Brussels	38.78	33.36	2.32	19.07	6.47	100.00
Total	46.66	28.24	1.36	18.02	5.71	100.00

**Table 5. Reason for not participating among all non-participating households by region (%). N = 3972 not-participating households**

Table 6 presents the distribution of the reasons for refusal among all refusing households separated by region. Please note that these figures need to be interpreted cautiously as respondents not always motivate their refusal straightforwardly. In many instances, the coding of a refusal depends heavily on the personal evaluation of the interviewer. In Flanders respondents often indicate that they are not interested to participate in the TAKE Survey or tend to be against surveys in general (29.6%), while this reason was less frequently present in Wallonia and Brussels (12.2% and 10.5% respectively). Around 20% of the refusals express a lack of time to participate to an interview in all regions. A result that stands out is that nearly half of all the refusals in Brussels are motivated by bad health or being too old to participate. This proportion is also high in Wallonia, with a share of more than 40%. The little-saying category of other reasons is used most frequently in Flanders, representing almost 40% of all refusals. Refusals to take part because of data linkage are very marginal (1.4% overall). Finally, refusals due to fear of COVID-19 infection were predominantly present in Wallonia as a substantial part of the fieldwork was continued in this region after the introduction of COVID-19 in Belgium.

	No interest, against surveys	Too busy, no time	Too old, bad health	Other reasons	Data linkage	COVID-19	Total
Flanders	29.64	20.47	10.40	39.15	0.34	0.00	100.00
Wallonia	12.22	21.76	40.59	16.14	2.20	7.09	100.00
Brussels	10.53	20.87	49.73	16.15	2.54	0.18	100.00
Total	20.12	20.87	28.75	27.24	1.40	1.62	100.00

**Table 6. Reason of refusals among all refusing households by region (%). N = 1854 refusing households**

#### 5.4 Other household member interviews

Among participating households with more members than just the reference person, adults were eligible for a household member interview, with the purpose of collecting more complete information about the entire household. Table 7 presents the other household member response rates and related characteristics. The highest number of other household member interviews was observed for Flanders (357). However, if we compare this with the number of participating households (cfr. reference person interview), Wallonia shows the highest proportion of participating households with at least one other household member interview (38.5%), followed by Brussels (32.9%) and Flanders (30.0%). In Brussels the mean number of interviews per household with at least one household member interview is substantially higher (1.80) than in the other regions (1.30 and 1.26 for Wallonia and Flanders resp.). In 60.8% of these Brussels' households one additional interview was registered, while in Wallonia (78.5%) and Flanders (83.0%) the large majority of households yielded only one other household member interview. Whereas Wallonia shows the highest response rate at the household level, in Brussels multiple other household member interviews took place within the participating households more often. Please note that these outcomes strongly depend on the household compositions within the regions. According to the official list of household compositions between 36 and 37% (not shown) of the households with a reference person interview are not eligible for other household member interviews in each region as it concerns single-living people (i.e. only reference persons). This confirms the higher individual response rate for Wallonia, with only 24.6% of the multiple member households not participating to the other household member interviews (33.1% and 30.2% for Flanders and Brussels resp.). The household composition list also learns that, on average, the participating households include more members in Brussels (2.72) compared to Flanders (2.56) and Wallonia (2.33). Finally, the fieldwork results show that almost 94% of the other household member interviews are with respondents identified from the official household list. In Wallonia a higher percentage (11.2%) of the other household member interviews was with persons living in the participating households without being an officially registered member (or became it only recently before the interview).

	Number of other household member interviews	Number of participating households	% of participating households	Mean number of interviews per household	% of households with one other household member interview	% on official household member list
Flanders	357	283	30.0%	1.26	83.0%	97.5%
Wallonia	259	200	38.5%	1.30	78.5%	88.8%
Brussels	267	148	32.9%	1.80	60.8%	94.0%
Total	883	631	33.0%	1.40	76.4%	93.9%

**Table 7. Response rates and other characteristics other household member interviews by region (percentages based on households with a reference person interview).**

## 6. Evaluation of the fieldwork

Completing the fieldwork of the TAKE project was a challenging endeavour. Fortunately the survey agencies could count on a motivated group of interviewers. We are convinced that the strengths of the fieldwork approach should be highlighted. Nevertheless, we think there are also some important lessons to take away from the TAKE Survey project. In this section we document the feedback of the fieldwork procedures and the experiences with the target population as reported by the interviewers during debriefing sessions organized by the universities of Antwerp and Liège. This qualitative and anecdotal feedback is complemented with the results of an interviewer feedback survey after the fieldwork. In addition, we discuss the organization and coordination of the fieldwork through the experiences of the survey agencies.

### 6.1 Feedback by the interviewers

The obstacles interviewers had to face during the TAKE fieldwork generally occurred during two phases of their work: i) the process of making the first contact with the respondent and ii) the execution of the interview after scheduling an appointment. Besides a summarization of the debriefing sessions with the interviewers at the end of the fieldwork, we consider the results of the interviewer feedback survey to discuss them. In Flanders 42 interviewers participated to the feedback survey, 8 in Brussels and 15 in Wallonia. The interviewer survey results are mostly presented separately for Flanders on the one hand and Brussels and Wallonia on the other.

#### 6.1.1 Contacting respondents

The first step to convince a household reference person to participate to an interview is reaching the correct household. According to the interviewers active in Brussels the problem of not finding the correct respondents at the sampled address or encountering vacant dwellings was more common compared to other survey projects (6 out of 8 interviewers agreed). In Wallonia only less than 25% of the interviewers reported this, while a majority of 64% in Flanders agreed. Some interviewers were not always comfortable during their work for TAKE as they felt more insecure than they used to when visiting the neighbourhoods of their respondents. Also, interviewers notified that often there was no clear indication who lived at the address or there was no doorbell, interviewers experienced more no shows or people that were present not opening the door. Two thirds of the interviewers in both Brussels and Wallonia indicated that it was more difficult to have a successful contact attempt with their respondents as compared to their previous interviewer experience. In Flanders about 50% had more difficulties with this. One factor that plays a prominent role is that a great deal of the target population lives in apartments, where it is more difficult to make contact at the door (due to intercoms, unclear doorbells, no direct face-to-face contact, etc.). Also, interviewers experienced cases where they had the feeling that respondents did not belong to the target population at all. This even concerns people living in big villas with swimming pools but for a certain reason had low official incomes. Often those respondents were very reluctant to participate.

If people were able to be contacted face-to-face, language barriers often existed. In those cases, it was difficult to express the purpose of the study and to explain how an interview would take place. In contrast to workarounds that were available during the interview, language issues were more difficult to solve during face-to-face contact at the door. Respondents only speaking foreign languages were frequently reluctant to participate as they feared to lose their social rights (or, in reverse, felt obliged to participate because of the same consideration). Explaining the importance and the goal of TAKE was even to a great deal of the Dutch- or French speaking respondents a big challenge. Although the university teams spent considerable efforts to keep the introduction letter straightforward and clear, it remained difficult for a substantial share of the respondents to have a good understanding of the letter, explaining the study and announcing the visit of an interviewer. Many interviewers had also the impression that respondents often did not read the introduction letter in advance. A striking difference

with other survey projects was the number of respondents having difficulties to express whether they agreed to participate or not. As some of the addresses were geographically quite dispersed, it demotivated interviewers to make the effort to do extra face-to-face visits. Those undecided participations also translated into a lot of no shows during interview appointments. Nearly all of the interviewers confirmed this in all three regions. In Flanders interviewers reported an average of 6 appointment no shows throughout the fieldwork. In many instances, interviewers had the feeling that respondents did not dare to refuse and therefore wanted to please interviewers to make an interview appointment or were not good at scheduling it. Furthermore, interviewers admitted that facing low-income respondent was sometimes a shocking event as sometimes people's stories were very hard to face or living conditions were precarious in some instances.

On a side note, the use of the Qualtrics software impeded interviewers' swift and correct contact registration. A large majority of the interviewers in Brussels and Wallonia agreed that registering contact attempts was tedious work due to the interface and procedures of the software, while this was about the half of them in Flanders.

### 6.1.2 The interview

Once interviews could start, interviewers came across a variety of other difficulties and particularities. In the first place, the interview language frequently formed an obstacle. According to 80% of the interviewers in Flanders this was a greater difficulty in comparison with other survey projects. The last module after the reference person interview comprises of questions on the interviewer observations during the interview, including questions on language issues that occurred. In more than 25% of the interviews the interviewer experienced to a certain extent (from a little to a lot) that respondents had problems speaking Dutch or French. In more than 15% of all interviews a proxy assisted to overcome language barriers. Nearly all translators were children (about 40% of all proxies) of the reference person or other non-relatives (about 43%) and to a lesser extent partners (10%) or other relatives (10%). In case a proxy was not available, Flemish interviewers reported that the lists of translated keywords to guide the interview among respondents with limited language skills were not very helpful. Some respondents suggested that the quality of those translations was not sufficient. Hence, the use of proxies, working with language-specific interviews and interviewers able to speak multiple languages seems the preferred way to deal with language barriers. The number of interviewers speaking the appropriate foreign language appeared quite limited given the variety of languages and often it was difficult to deploy them adequately as language barriers emerged scattered over the sampled cities and regions of the fieldwork.

Nevertheless, even respondents speaking the interview language often had difficulties with understanding the questions. Notably, 71% per cent of the interviewers experienced in TAKE a bit or much more problems in Wallonia. In Flanders this was 55%, while in Brussels only 33%. If we look at the interviewer observations during the interview, in barely 52% of the reference person interviews the interviewer had the impression that the respondent always understood the questions. This increases to more than 87% if also "often" is considered. A large 9% only understood the questions sometimes, while more than 3% were categorized as "rarely" or "never". A suggestion by the interviewers is to use software enabling to switch between languages during the interview. This would provide a welcome flexibility. To get an idea of how much difficulties native respondents had with understanding the questionnaire, we consider the share of reference persons with no problems speaking Dutch or French during the interview. In this group 64% always understood the questions, 29% often and 7% sometimes, rarely or never. In more than 25% of those interviews the respondent asked to clarify questions sometimes, often or always. This suggests that a substantial number of native respondents still struggled with wordings, concepts or the design of questions. From the feedback sessions, we know that especially detailed questions on the financial situation were often difficult to deal with. Also, questions on hypothetical situations were deemed challenging or confusing in particular. Further, modules with repetitive questions frequently caused difficulties to recognize

differences between questions. Several interviewers also had the impression that respondents tended to give more general or socially desirable answers when they did not understand the questions very well. Apart from that, embarrassment among respondents could have influenced answers to questions. Some interviewers indicated that respondents were ashamed to tell about their situation and living conditions. Altogether, 40% of the Flemish interviewers think that getting reliable answers was more difficult than in other survey projects (47% consider it similar) and 50% evaluate that the questionnaire was less tailored to respondents' situation compared to other survey projects (35% consider it similar). Despite all this, the willingness of the respondent to answer the questionnaire was rated good or very good for more than 96% of the reference person interviewers.

For interviewers it was often impossible to keep the interview a private event. Besides the fact that proxies were often required, in some families reference persons preferred that other people were present. Sometimes households considered the reference person interview more as a "group event" according to some interviewers. Also, in many instances the interviews took place in small dwellings where it was difficult to guarantee privacy. In only a small 57% of the reference person interviews the interviewer and respondent were alone during the interview. Other persons present were partners (14%), children (12%), parents (1%), other relatives (3%) or other non-relatives (4%). During about 10% of the interviews even more than one of those categories were present together. Among the group of interviews where no proxy respondent was attending (since no additional people are expected to attend non-proxy interviews), during about two thirds of the interviews nobody else was present than the interviewer and respondent. Here partners are still most often present as spectator (15%), followed by children (9%). If someone was present in 58% of the interviews this person intervened during the interview. This proportion drops to 41% if there was no proxy helping to translate the interview. This suggests that in 14% of the non-proxy reference person interviews third persons intervened. Interviewers also had the impression that the presence of a partner often demotivated them to participate in the extra household member interview.

### 6.1.3 General reflections on the fieldwork

Notwithstanding the challenges interviewers had to deal with, nearly all of them reported they enjoyed working for the survey project (85% in Flanders and 91% in Wallonia and Brussels).<sup>6</sup> Sometimes the work was perceived as tiring and the interviewers not always felt as if they received a fair return to their efforts, especially in Brussels. The main motivation of the interviewers seemed to stem from the importance and goals of the TAKE project. Taking together all regions, 90% of the interviewers indicated that they consider the objectives of the TAKE Survey meaningful. Also, a lot of interviewers enjoyed meeting their respondents. Talking to respondents often gave them a warm feeling or they learned from hearing different life stories. Some of the respondents were embarrassed about their situation, but for others the interview worked therapeutic according to interviewers. Having someone showing interest and listening to their story meant a lot for some. In turn, this gave the interviewers a feeling of satisfaction as they were a help in some way. On the other hand, this could also provoke frustration as it was impossible for interviewers to have a significant influence on the situation of the respondent. In this context, it was important that interviewers could hand over a leaflet with an informative overview of the social benefits that were mentioned during the interview. More than 90% of the interviewers in all regions evaluated this brochure as useful or very useful for the respondents. The monetary incentives for interviewed households were welcome, but the large majority of respondents did not consider it as an important motivation for participation.

## 6.2 Feedback by the survey agencies

As for the survey agencies the TAKE Survey project included some challenging aspects as well. Some strengths need to be spotlighted first. The two teams of the survey agencies of the university of

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<sup>6</sup> This is likely an overestimation as the most motivated interviewers probably participated to the non-mandatory feedback survey.

Antwerp and Liège have a longstanding collaboration in organizing the fieldwork of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE). This streamlined the cooperation and facilitated outlining and implementing the fieldwork procedures of TAKE. In addition, both survey agencies can rely on an elaborated network of experienced interviewers in different regions, given their involvement in other projects. This pays off in a survey project with a particular target population like TAKE.

One of the main challenges the survey agencies had to deal with were several delays before the start of the fieldwork. Because of a variety of reasons the project was postponed for different months, which complicated matters as its eventual timing coincided with other survey projects. Unexpected delays also increased the period between the trainings of the interviewers and the onset of the fieldwork. This tends to decrease the quality of the fieldwork as periods of inactivity often deteriorate interviewers' knowledge of the project and questionnaires on the one hand and hands-on experience with the interviewer software on the other. In addition, the schedules and workload of interviewers were also complicated by changing project timings.

A major limitation of the survey procedure was the mandatory opt-out system of response cards. This procedure implied that sampled households received a letter announcing the TAKE project, together with a response card. In case households did not want to participate, the response cards had to be sent back (for free) to a third party (SMALS, affiliated with the Crossroads Banks for Social Security). Of the initial sample of 8 964 contacted households, 2 613 sent back the response card. Obviously, this procedure has its merits compared to an opt-in system for the response of the fieldwork. Nevertheless, it meant an additional delay before starting the fieldwork. Also, based on anecdotal evidence, respondents did not always understand the purpose of the response cards. For many, the accompanied letter was too difficult to grasp properly, which is likely to introduce selectivity in the remaining sample. Some interpreted that sending back the response card was necessary for participation instead of refusal. About 10 households that sent the card back were even interviewed (the late-resent response cards were only received by the survey agencies after the first face-to-face contacts with respondents). In total, 228 households were tagged as "refused via response card" after the fieldwork had already started, as respondents not always reacted to the letter in time. This hampered the work of interviewers when they were already contacting households and address lists had to be adjusted multiple times. Although interviewers were equipped with an additional introductory letter per household, the fact that the letters were sent out centrally at once was also a disadvantage for their workflow. The most appropriate procedure is that interviewers decide when introductory letters need to be sent as they can timely follow up the letter by a face-to-face visit. In Flanders only 33% of the interviewers felt as if the introductory letter and response card were an advantage for their work. Two thirds considered it confusing for respondents, experienced language barriers, thought the time in between receiving the letter and face-to-face contact was too long or had the impression that respondents did not read the letter. Finally, SMALS did not communicate about letters that were returned due to incorrect addresses, which could have saved a lot of time and kilometres visiting households.

The manual processing of the Qualtrics software posed difficulties to the survey agencies as well. It complicated monitoring the fieldwork and induced a lot of labour-intensive and manual data-cleaning. Mostly because recording mistakes in household and respondent identification numbers were numerous. A survey software package with more flexibility and allowing for preloaded respondent – and address information could have avoided a lot of errors and manual work. Given that a great deal of addresses had to be re-assigned during the fieldwork (due to language barriers, interviewers pulling out of the project, etc.), more integration in the software would have been helpful. It was very difficult to control whether interviewers invalidated their list of respondents and addresses at the end of the project since those were not coupled to the interviewer software.

In Brussels there was a particular problem of finding a sufficient number of interviewers. Especially because of a low response in this region, interviewers tended to drop out early in the project as well. By consequence, a high address load per interviewer did not help to achieve a smooth completion of the fieldwork in Brussels. Keeping the interviewers motivated was a more general problem for the survey agencies since some interviewers encountered a low degree of return on investment in the TAKE Survey project. This had also the effect that interviewers often prioritized other survey projects that yielded higher response rates. For some interviewers, the survey agencies had the feeling that they were underpaid, given budget constraints.

Another recruiting problem was finding skilled multi-language interviewers. It was not feasible to cover the entire regions with multi-language interviewers, as they were mostly concentrated in urban areas. Also, language barriers were quite variable, which makes it extremely difficult to mediate all different types of language issues.

A final difficulty was that a substantial part of the fieldwork was interrupted by the COVID-19 lockdown during 2020, especially in Brussels and Wallonia. After the restart in the summer, preventive measures (face masks, social distancing, disinfection, etc.) were implemented to guarantee the safety of both respondents and interviewers.

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## The TAKE project

Reducing poverty through improving the take-up of social policies (TAKE) is a Belgian research project financed by Federal Science Policy (Belspo). It aims to significantly improve the measurement and understanding of non-take-up of social policies in Belgium and to contribute to practical solutions. It is carried out by a research consortium consisting of the University of Antwerp (Coordinator), the University of Liège, the Federal Planning Bureau and the Federal Public Service for Social Security. The project makes use of a mixture of research approaches, including in-depth interviews with administrations, large-scale field experiments, microsimulations as well as a survey which brings together a unique blend of information collected through register data and face-to-face interviews. More information can be found on <http://takeproject.wordpress.com>.

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