

The Austrian way towards a new LFS questionnaire

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1. Abstract

The development of the new Austrian LFS questionnaire for 2021 includes comprehensive tests as well as harmonisation work in order to guarantee a user-friendly, multi-mode questionnaire that fulfils the requirements of the Integrated European Statistical System (IESS) and the new LFS Implementing Act. The main objective of our contribution to the LFS workshop is to present the work that has already been done and to share our plans for the further development of the questionnaire.

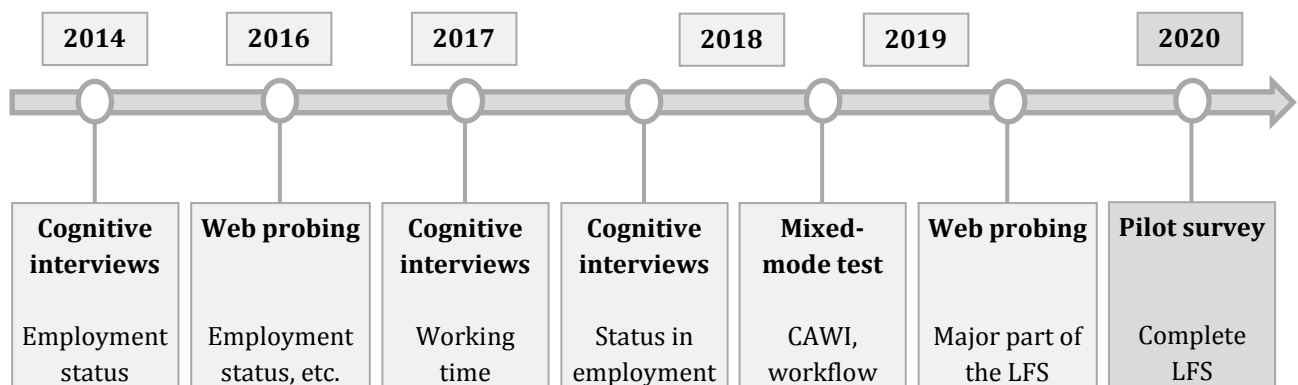
2. Overview: Steps taken towards the new LFS questionnaire

On the way towards the new LFS questionnaire we planned and conducted several tests. Figure 1 gives an overview of the milestones regarding the test process.

Between 2014 and 2019, we carried out some cognitive tests for the development of the questions (see section 3.1). Furthermore, in 2018/19 a mixed-mode test was conducted as it is planned to introduce CAWI (computer-assisted web interviewing) together with the new LFS questionnaire. The aim of this test was not to evaluate the questions and their adequacy for a mixed-mode survey, however, the aim was to identify subpopulations that should get the LFS in CAWI mode and how to efficiently remind non-respondents in CAWI mode.

The final task on our way towards the new LFS is a pilot survey for the complete questionnaire. The objective of the pilot survey is to get a profound basis for the estimation of the breaks in time series. The added benefit of the pilot survey is the testing of the complete future LFS survey and all associated processes (see section 4).

Figure 1: Tests for the new LFS questionnaire conducted since 2014 and planned for 2020.



3. Development of the new LFS questions

The guidelines of the LFS explanatory notes, the definitions and notes of the flowcharts annexed to the LFS implementation regulation, as well as our experiences with the current LFS questionnaire and the results of the cognitive tests constitute the basis for the development of the new LFS questions. Furthermore we use the metadata of our current LFS questionnaire in order to identify difficult questions and to evaluate help texts and plausibility checks implemented in the questionnaire. This comprehensive information helps to develop user-friendly questions, which are suitable for a mixed-mode survey, fulfilling the definitions of the IESS and follow the LFS explanatory notes.

In order to reduce the work load we split the questionnaire in modules. Each module consists of several variables related to the same topic (e.g. employment status, working time, job tenure). One of the LFS team members bears responsibility for each module and designs the questions including all components (filters, help text, etc.). For the development and administration of the modules and questions we use Excel templates as well as a repository.

3.1. Cognitive tests

For the development of the new questionnaire several cognitive tests were conducted during the last years. Starting in 2014, a first cognitive test on the LFS questions measuring the employment status was carried out as part of a EUROSTAT grant. We used the model questionnaire on the employment status which had been developed by the Task Force on the harmonisation of the measurement of employment and unemployment (TF HMEU) and conducted eleven personal interviews. The objective of this test was to check whether the questions were understood by the respondents as intended and according to the definitions as well as whether correct results can be obtained with the survey instrument (see FASCHING, PLATE 2014).

In 2016, the improved questions on the employment status based on those test results as well as some other LFS questions were tested in a web probing. The aim of this web probing was to identify problematic aspects of the questions when using CAWI mode in order to provide recommendations for the new mixed-mode questionnaire. It was the first time we used web probing as a tool for cognitive testing. Furthermore it was the first time that our LFS questions were conducted in a self-administered online survey. The sample of this web probing consisted of 341 respondents (see PAŠKVAN 2017).

In 2017, cognitive personal interviews dedicated to the model questionnaire on working time were carried out. 15 respondents were asked the new questions on working time (for more details see the presentation of our colleagues: BAUMGARTNER, WIEDENHOFER-GALIK: Cognitive Testing of Model Questionnaire on Working Time).

The next step towards the new LFS questionnaire was a cognitive test regarding the status in employment. Therefore twelve respondents were interviewed. Apart from the

main questions concerning the status in employment some other questions were tested (e.g. the variables SIZEFIRM, HOMEWORK, FINDMETH, see NOCKER, SIEGERT, BIRSEN 2018).

The next and last cognitive test for the new questionnaire is a comprehensive web probing conducted in April and May this year. The web probing questionnaire consists of 60 selected LFS questions tackling most of the modules of the questionnaire. For each LFS question the web probing questionnaire comprises one or two probing questions (see example in figure 2). The targeted sample size is 300 individuals. The respondents for the web probing are recruited among the respondents of the last wave of the regular Austrian LFS following a quota scheme in order to ensure a sufficient number of responses for certain groups (e.g. unemployed, persons on parental leave, self-employed).

Figure 2: Web probing 2019: example for a question and the related probes.

Haben Sie in der Woche von Montag, 6. Mai bis Sonntag, 12. Mai, mindestens eine Stunde gegen Bezahlung gearbeitet?

Ja
 Nein

English translation: "In the week from Monday, 6 May, to Sunday, 12 May, have you worked for pay for at least one hour? – Yes/No"

Die vorherige Frage war:
"Haben Sie in der Woche von Montag, 6. Mai bis Sonntag, 12. Mai, mindestens eine Stunde gegen Bezahlung gearbeitet?"
Ihre Antwort lautete: "Ja".

Wie leicht oder schwer ist es Ihnen gefallen, diese Frage zu beantworten?

sehr leicht
 eher leicht
 eher schwer
 sehr schwer

English translation: "The previous question was: 'In the week from Monday, 6 May, to Sunday, 12 May, have you worked for pay for at least one hour?' Your answer was 'Yes'. How easy or difficult was it for you to answer this question? – Very easy/rather easy/rather difficult/very difficult"

Sie haben geantwortet, dass es Ihnen **eher schwer** gefallen ist, die Frage "Haben Sie in der Woche von Montag, 6. Mai, bis Sonntag, 12. Mai, mindestens eine Stunde gegen Bezahlung gearbeitet?" zu beantworten.

Warum ist Ihnen das "eher schwer" gefallen?

[Empty text box for response]

English translation: "You have answered that it was 'rather difficult' for you to answer the question 'In the week from Monday, 6 May, to Sunday, 12 May, have you worked for pay for at least one hour?' Why was it 'rather difficult' for you?"

3.2. Order of the questions

A further step towards the new LFS questionnaire is the definition of the order of the questions to guarantee a smooth flow through the questionnaire. In order to determine and optimize the flow of the questionnaire, various versions were checked in simulated interviews. The challenge is to find a flow that is suitable for all subgroups (e.g. employed, self-employed, unemployed, inactive) and all variables of different periodicities (quarterly, yearly, biennial variables). For the variables on employment and unemployment the predefined flow of the flowcharts was implemented. Starting with the labour status module all the other questions were put into a reasonable order.

3.3. Harmonisation of the wording

In addition to the development of the questions several activities towards a harmonised wording were taken. Numerous frequently used terms were harmonised. The LFS team discussed several alternatives and finally fixed the terms that should be used consistently during the whole questionnaire. An example for this harmonisation exercise constitutes the wording for the reference week. We agreed on using “in the week from Monday, dd. Month, to Sunday, dd. Month” and rejected alternatives such as “in the time from dd. Month to dd. Month” or “from Monday, dd. Month to Sunday, dd. Month” (without indicating “the week”). Considering the difficulties with translating terms from English to German other examples for terms designated for harmonisation were “work”, “main job” or “enterprise”. Moreover, the type of questions and the answering categories of similar questions were harmonised in the national questionnaire. We ensured that the categories of the “reasons variables” (e.g. FTPTREAS, WANTREAS, SEEKREAS) are translated in the same way for the national questionnaire. Furthermore, at the end, all help texts are reworked by one person to guarantee homogeneity.

4. Next step: pilot survey in 2020

After implementing the results of the final comprehensive web probing, the new LFS questionnaire should be finalised in autumn 2019. In 2020 the pilot survey for measuring the breaks in time series, which is financed by a EUROSTAT grant, will be conducted.

The pilot survey is planned for all four quarters of 2020. It will be carried out under similar conditions as the regular LFS. As far as possible we are going to use the same methods for data collection, weighting, etc. For the pilot survey 6,000 household interviews will be conducted in total, thereof 3,000 first wave households and 3,000 second wave households. 6,000 households correspond to approximately 13,500 persons. For the first wave CAPI (computer-assisted personal interviewing) is used. For the following wave the interviews are mostly carried out in CATI (computer-assisted telephone interviewing) mode and probably CAWI. For the estimation of the breaks in time series we will use a combination of the results of the pilot survey and the statistical models. For more information see FORSTER, GUMPRECHT 2018.

5. References

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