**Understanding response mechanism through fieldwork strategies in ESS Round 4 contact files**

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**Abstract**

European Social Survey (ESS) has paid much attention to the development and implementation of targeted fieldwork specifications, such as minimum 4 visits on different days and time including evening and weekend visits, visits spread over at least 2 different weeks and use of refusal conversion activities. For the study of non-response bias, it is increasingly recognized that distinguishing between universal and country specific mechanisms is far more important than relying on response rate measures. This paper assesses the effect of contact procedure, observable and dwelling variables as well as interviewer’s assessment on refusal’s unit on survey cooperation, and highlights the importance of different phases - initial and tailoring phases - of these variables for survey co-operation. The data used come from ESS Round 4 contact files for selected countries (Belgium, Poland and one additional country is considered). Countries are selected on the basis of completeness of information in the contact file, same type of sample frame (individual based), preferably different levels of response rates and similar fieldwork time duration and period. A proportional hazard model - more specifically, a competing risk model defined as interview, non-contact and refusal with time-variant (contact procedure) and time-invariant (neighbourhood and dwelling) variables – is used. Three models are tested for different groups: (i) all sample units; (ii) sample units that achieve final contact status after the 2nd contact attempt; and (iii) sample units that underwent refusal conversion activities. Our analysis shows that achieving survey co-operation partially escapes the interviewer's control because neighbourhood variables produce significant effects. It also shows that a large number of contact procedure variables nevertheless remain of crucial importance for the achievement of survey cooperation. In addition, the critical decisive feature of the contact procedure differs by event. And finally, sample unit-specific and country-specific interviewer tailoring is the key even more for the success of refusal conversion activities pointing the limits of scope for further standardization of the fieldwork procedure.