

European Data Watch

This section will offer descriptions as well as discussions of data sources that may be of interest to social scientists engaged in empirical research or teaching courses that include empirical investigations performed by students. The purpose is to describe the information in the data source, to give examples of questions tackled with the data and to tell how to access the data for research and teaching. We will start with data from German speaking countries that allow international comparative research. While most of the data will be at the micro level (individuals, households, or firms), more aggregate data and meta data (for regions, industries, or nations) will be included, too. Suggestions for data sources to be described in future columns (or comments on past columns) should be send to: Joachim Wagner, University of Lueneburg, Institute of Economics, Campus 4.210, 21332 Lueneburg, Germany, or e-mailed to wagner@uni-lueneburg.de.

“Living in Switzerland”

Swiss Household Panel 1999 – 2003 (SHP)

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Abstract

The *Swiss Household Panel* (SHP) provides a unique database in Switzerland set up to observe (gross) social change at the individual and the household level and the validation of causal hypotheses (using the temporal succession of events). In 1999 the SHP recruited 5,074 households and interviewed 7,799 people – from a stratified random sample of the permanent resident population of Switzerland – about their living conditions. All members of these households aged 14 years and older are to be interviewed annually for 10 to 15 years. The *Living in Switzerland survey* is conducted using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) and applies various encouragement techniques so as to establish and maintain the loyalty of the households in the survey. To date, the first two waves have been carried out successfully. The survey was designed and structured on the basis of experience gathered over the past three decades in Switzerland and abroad. Unlike panels such as the SOEP in Germany and

the BHPS in Britain, which concentrate on socio-economic conditions (labour market and income levels), the SHP covers a broad range of topics and approaches in the social sciences (e.g. composition of and changes to the family, health, social networks, leisure and lifestyles, political behaviour, and satisfaction). In addition to this, factual information is complemented by subjective assessments. The SHP's longitudinal data is being collected as part of the structural measures undertaken by the *Swiss Priority Programme (SPP), Switzerland Towards the Future* to supplement the basic information on social change in Switzerland. The Swiss Household Panel is a joint project run by Switzerland: *SPP Towards the Future*, the *Swiss Federal Statistical Office* and the *University of Neuchâtel*.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to publicise a unique Swiss database that was set up recently called the Swiss Household Panel (SHP). Its main characteristics are as follows: 1) it is a comprehensive survey covering a broad range of social fields and a variety of topics; 2) all members of the households in the panel aged 14 years and over are interviewed; 3) the SHP offers opportunities for analysing gross social change and 4) it allows for research on trajectories of the individuals and groups comprising the resident population of Switzerland.

The SHP represents one element of the structural measures undertaken by the Swiss Priority Programme (SPP) Switzerland Towards the Future for collecting basic data. Its purpose is to contribute to improving the situation for social sciences in terms of quantitative data, to act as a reliable barometer of social change and provide an in-depth analysis of social dynamics in Switzerland. To date, it represents the largest financial investment ever made in a single social sciences project in Switzerland.

The Swiss Household Panel survey is a joint project run by the SPP Switzerland Towards the Future, the University of Neuchâtel and the Swiss Federal Statistical Office. These three partners are represented on the SHP steering committee and make strategic decisions as regards the content and running of the Living in Switzerland panel survey. The SHP team, based at the University of Neuchâtel, has operational responsibility for designing and managing the survey, and for appropriately distributing the data to interested researchers.

2. Structure and contents of the SHP

2.1 Structure of the SHP

The construction of the SHP is drawn from international knowledge of the social sciences and the experiences of various panel surveys in Europe

and North America (Budowski et al. 1998a; Joye and Scherpenzeel 1997). The structure of the Living in Switzerland survey must satisfy its primary objective, which is to measure the multiple dimensions of social change as they occur over the next 10 to 15 years in Switzerland. The SHP is designed to enable analyses in different disciplines using different conceptual approaches. Consequently, the design of the SHP is based, on the one hand, on theoretical work related to the structure and development of contemporary (Beck 1986; Bourdieu 1983; Eisenstadt 1990; Haferkamp 1990; Konietzka 1995; Leisering and Walker 1998; Mayer 1991; Müller and Schmid 1995) and on the other, on recent analyses of Swiss society and the way it functions (Höpflinger, Charles, and Debrunner 1991; Leu, Burri, and Priester 1997; Levy et al. 1997).

Contemporary societies are currently undergoing profound structural changes which are the consequence of globalisation of the economy, uneven regional developments around the world, and world-wide demographic changes. Despite the new opportunities this evolution offers for households and their members, these changes are affecting current living conditions and lifestyles as well as those aspired to in the future. The way individuals and households adapt to the new realities is only partially the result of their own preferences and abilities; it is also to a major extent dependent on the social structures, standards and values present in the immediate social environment and society at large. Individual behaviour patterns therefore result from a dynamic relationship between the structural and the cultural dimensions. These influence the preferences and behavioural tendencies of individuals. The impact of these two dimensions is mediated by collective lifestyles and perceptions. Collective behaviour patterns, in turn, may lead to transformations in the structural and cultural dimensions. In one way the panel-survey is designed to distinguish between structural, cultural and behavioural dimensions, in another, since it essentially collects data on individuals, it distinguishes between macrosocial and microsocial levels. The contents of the survey, i.e. the actual questions used when collecting the data, reflect, the three dimensions mentioned at the microsocial level. Macrosocial information (from other sources) can be added to the panel's database.

2.2 Contents

The Living in Switzerland survey is a comprehensive survey. The questionnaires (household and individual) cover a broad range of social fields and topics. They are also designed to collect both “objective” data (resources, social position, participation, etc.) and “subjective” data (satisfaction, values, evaluation, etc.). The whole constitutes an operationalisation

of the different elements of the microsocial level of the panel structure: living conditions, events of life, attitudes and perceptions, and lifestyles / ways of life (Budowski et al. 1998b).

2.2.1 Areas covered by the survey

By definition, a household panel collects data at two levels: the household and the individual (all individuals in the household aged 14 and over). In the case of the SHP-survey, the interview at *the household level* covers the following areas:

1. *composition of the household*: containing basic information about all the members of the household, such as the age, sex, relations between the members of the household, nationality, level of education and occupational status;
2. *accommodation*: containing “objective” elements, such as the type and size of the accommodation, homeownership or tenancy, the cost of and / or the subsidies received for housing , as well as “subjective” elements, such as satisfaction with the accommodation, evaluation of the state of the accommodation and assessment of perceived nuisances;
3. *standard of living*: referring to a list of goods owned by the household or activities that its members can carry out, together with the reason (financial or otherwise) why goods are not owned or activities not carried out;
4. *the household’s financial situation*: containing “objective” information such as the existence of financial difficulties (and the household’s reactions to different situations), indebtedness and the reasons for it, the total household income, the amount of tax paid, and the social and private transfers, as well as “subjective” elements, such as satisfaction, an estimate of the minimum income the household considers necessary or an evaluation of how the household’s financial situation has evolved;
5. *the household and the family*: with information on any external help available to the household for housework or child-care, the sharing of tasks, and decision-making within the household.

Individual interviews cover the following topics:

1. *the household and the family*: comprising “objective” elements, such as the existence of children living outside the household, the sharing of housework and child-care, as well as “subjective” elements, such as satisfaction with private life and with the sharing of the housework;
2. *health and “victimisation”*: covering “objective” elements, such as general illness and health problems, visits to the doctor and hospitalisation,

long-term handicaps, threats or attacks endured, together with “subjective” elements such as the self-perceived state of health, the estimated evolution of the state of health, or satisfaction with one’s own health;

3. *social origins*: referring to information related to profession, professional position, educational level, and the nationality of both parents together with possible financial difficulties in the family of origin;
4. *education*: covering the various levels of achieved education, education currently being pursued, fluency in foreign languages, and participation in on-the-job training;
5. *employment*: considering four different aspects: firstly, the collection of information necessary to determine the status of the interviewee in the labour market, secondly, information covering the current main employment, thirdly, information on second jobs, and finally details about the last main job held; these modules also comprise “objective” elements, such as profession, status of the profession, the number of hours worked, work schedule, atypical work, as well as “subjective” elements such as satisfaction with various aspects of the job, the evaluation of promotion prospects or of personal qualifications;
6. *income*: including “objective” elements such as total personal income, total professional income, received social transfers, received private transfers, and other income, and “subjective” elements, such as satisfaction with the financial situation and an evaluation of changes concerning the personal financial situation;
7. *participation, integration, networks*: taking into account “objective” elements, such as frequency of social contacts, non-remunerated work outside home, participation in associations, membership of and participation in religious groups, and “subjective” elements such as the evaluation of potential practical help and emotional support (from the partner, family, friends, etc.);
8. *politics and values*: referring to “objective” elements such as political participation, membership, party identification, political positioning; and “subjective” elements such as satisfaction with the political system, the evaluation of issues or even political values; and finally
9. *leisure and media*: comprising “objective” elements, such as leisure activities and the use of the media as well as “subjective” elements, such as satisfaction with leisure and free time.

From the second wave on, the questionnaire also includes a “life events” module and an “occupational calendar” module (covering the 12 months prior to the interview).

2.2.2 Nomenclatures, standard variables, and comparability with other surveys

From the outset, the SHP was designed and built up in such a way as to make international comparative analyses possible. Furthermore, it was always situated in relation to the work of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO). On the subject of the nomenclatures and classifications, for example, the *professions* of the interviewees (and their parents) are classified using a uniform nomenclature drawn up by the SFSO. This means it is possible to apply the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), which enables comparisons with the results of various surveys of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office and with various other surveys carried out in Europe. Furthermore, the interviewees give the name of the company in which they work (or used to work). The attribution of the company to one of the economic sectors of the EUROSTAT general nomenclature of economic activities is carried out by means of the Register of Enterprises drawn up by the SFSO.

The data from the Living in Switzerland survey also allows for the construction of most of the *recommended variables* on working life (status in the labour market, status of activity, level of occupation, atypical working conditions, duration of the activity, etc.), education, state of health as well as income. By means of these standardised objective variables the comparison with various surveys and analyses carried out either in Switzerland or abroad is made possible. In particular, the results of the Living in Switzerland survey can be compared or combined with results from different data sets held by the SFSO, such as the *General Census*, the *Swiss Labour Force survey*, the *Swiss Health survey* or the *Household Budget survey*. Finally, the data set contains or will contain in near future a certain number of indicators aimed at making their use easier: various household typologies, (Budowski and Wanner 2001) various indices of social position (such as ISCO, CAMSIS, Wright), the yearly household income equalised, the typology of communes, the economic sector of companies, etc.

3. Methodology of the Living in Switzerland survey

3.1 The reference population: the permanent resident population of Switzerland

The reference population for the Living in Switzerland survey is the population permanently resident in Switzerland. The sample chosen must therefore be representative of the whole of Switzerland, without regional

imbalances. It includes households of various nationalities provided that their members live on Swiss territory throughout the year. Seasonal workers, cross-border workers, and foreign tourists are not part of the permanent resident population and are therefore not taken into account in the sample. Switzerland is divided into seven large statistical regions. The methodology section of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office drew a random sample in each of these on the basis of the SWISSCOM's electronic telephone directory which covers over 95% of all private households. The households selected in this way are a representative sample of the various social groups in all regions of Switzerland. However, as the interviews are carried out in the three official national languages (German, French, and Italian) only, there might be a certain bias concerning how population groups who have recently migrated to Switzerland are represented.

3.2 The survey unit: private households

The concept of household refers not only to households comprising individuals or groups of individuals but also collective households (e.g. homes or prisons) and non-profit organisations (NPO) such as charitable organisations, political parties, trade unions, religious communities. Only private households are included in the Living in Switzerland survey, collective households and NPOs are excluded. The Living in Switzerland survey has adopted a fairly broad definition of a “household” so that it does not automatically misjudge new types of cohabitation (in particular collective non-institutionalised ways of living) as compared with the classic concept of the “household / family”. Therefore the definition of a household is based on five fundamental criteria, which must all be fulfilled: 1) sharing *at least one common dwelling room*; 2) *sharing certain expenses*; 3) taking *at least one meal together per week*; 4) *stability* (the household is considered a long-term arrangement); and 5) the individuals consider it to be their *main dwelling* (rather than a second home, work-related accommodation, etc.). If blood ties, marriage (in the broad sense, including the spouse's family), adoption or stable partnerships are included in the traditional definition of household / family, the SHP definition also allows non-institutionalised forms of living to be included, provided they fulfil the above-mentioned criteria. In each household a “reference person” needs to be defined. In the Living in Switzerland survey the reference person is designated freely by the household itself. However, it is specified that this person should *know the household very well*. The reference person should also, as far as possible, be 1) an adult (age 18 or older), 2) a *longitudinal respondent* of the panel – an original sample member (OSM), and 3) the *same person* from one wave to the next. In the first wave, it is the reference person who answers the questions

of the grid and the household questionnaire (in addition to the individual questionnaire).

3.3 Data collection tools

In a household panel, the information is collected at various levels (household / individual), so several questionnaires are used. Most household panels use *three types of questionnaires, i.e. the household grid, the household questionnaire and the individual questionnaire*. This is also the case for the SHP survey.

3.3.1 The household grid

The data in the *household grid* is not usually intended for analysis. However, as it is an operational control tool, it is absolutely crucial to keep it up to date to ensure the smooth operation of the data collection process. Every year the new grid, which is based on the previous one is updated taking into account address changes in between waves. This makes it possible to contact households and check whether their composition has changed, how many people they comprise, who must be interviewed and how (by personal interview or by proxy, etc.). The grid's *main functions* are: 1) to check and trace changes within the sample (for both households and individuals) over time; 2) to collect information on the non-respondents; 3) to provide information necessary to link households and individuals over time; 4) and to collect basic data on the households and individuals. The grid therefore provides information on the composition of the households and any changes concerning the structure of the households' "resources" (education, work, nationality, etc.). Given that much of this information is subject to data protection laws, researchers receive access to it in the form of aggregate variables (such as the relationship of the interviewee with the reference person, household typologies).

3.3.2 The household questionnaire

In the first wave, the household questionnaire was answered by the household's reference person. As far as possible, this questionnaire follows the household grid, to reduce the number of contacts and increase the response rate. From the second wave on, it can, if necessary, be completed by any adult member of the household. The household questionnaire contains questions about accommodation, living standards, the household's financial situation, the household's organisation, and the family. The Living in Switzerland survey has opted for a single version of the household questionnaire

but adapts the wording and the questions depending on the type of household (i.e. households comprising a single adult or households with more than one adult).

3.3.3 *The individual questionnaire*

The Living in Switzerland survey utilises two questionnaires for the individual; the “*standard*” *questionnaire*, containing all the questions in various sections: family, health, social origins, education, employment, income, networks, religion, leisure, media, politics, and values and the “*proxy*” *questionnaire*, which comprises a limited number of questions and is intended for ineligible candidates (children under 14 years), those unable to respond (handicapped, too old, etc.) or temporarily absent. The household’s reference person answers the latter questionnaire in the first wave. In the following waves it can be answered by the same adult in the household who responds to the household questionnaire. Unlike the “*standard*” questionnaire, it only contains factual questions about health, education, professional activity and income. The proxy questionnaire is not applied for those who are eligible but refuse to be interviewed individually, for ethical reasons. From the second wave on, the various questionnaires use a filter system to take account of the status of interviewees: those who are already members of the panel and the newcomers (the cohabitants and children born to first wave members).

3.4 Periodicity of the survey

Like other household panels, the SHP chose to interview the households and individuals annually. This was not an arbitrary choice since there are several arguments in favour of choosing a periodicity, such as 12 rather than of 24 months. One such argument is the risk that longer periods will be significantly biased due to memory lapses. In addition, a prolonged reference period has been shown to pose major problems of *telescoping and omissions*. The periodicity of the panel surveys also has repercussions on the *response rate*, because of the greater probability of respondents moving and the difficulties encountered in finding them again for the following wave. Problems can also arise with regard to the *motivation of respondents* to continue in the panel when the periodicity is extended to 24 months between waves.

3.5 Follow-up rules

Follow-up rules make it possible to determine which people must be interviewed in the first wave and which people must be interviewed again in subsequent waves. The following rules were chosen for the Living in Switzerland survey. At the *household level*, in the first wave, all the households from the sample drawn are to be interviewed. A household becomes an *original sample member (OSM)* if the household questionnaire is completed together with at least one individual questionnaire. From the second wave on, the households are screened according to whether they satisfied the conditions for becoming original panel members. Among the original panel members the households which do not meet the following criteria are dropped: 1) those which do not respond to two subsequent waves; 2) those which have given a “refusal” considered as final; 3) those which move out of national territory; 4) those whose members are totally and “definitively” institutionalised. At the individual level, a distinction is made between the *longitudinal members* and *cohabitants*. Those persons stemming from the first wave households are defined as longitudinal members or original sample members. Children born to original sample members after the first wave of the study also become such. The *longitudinal members* defined in this way are followed constantly.¹ Individuals joining or living in a household of at least one ordinary sample member in the second or any consecutive wave of the survey are defined as cohabitants. *Cohabitants are, however, only followed while they continue to live with a longitudinal member.*

4. Development and phases of the project

4.1 Launching the SHP

In January 1998 the Swiss National Science Foundation took the final decision to fund the SHP. When the panel survey was being designed, roughly 80 researchers stated their interest in certain topics and methodologies, and they became the core of the Living in Switzerland research network. In tandem with establishing the scientific basis, defining the relevant indicators and drawing up the questionnaires, two important decisions were made. The first was *that telephone interviewing would be used*, CATI (computer-assisted telephone interviewing) rather than face-to-face using CAPI (computer-assisted personal interviewing) due to considerations of quality and cost (Scherpenzeel 2000c; Scherpenzeel, Wernli, and Eichenberger 1999). The second decision was *that a survey institute would be mandated* to carry

¹ In theory therefore until they die or are definitively institutionalized.

out the interviews. A call for tenders was launched in early September 1998 among institutes which are members of the nationwide survey research association called SWISS-Interview. After a detailed examination of the tenders from interested parties and discussions and negotiations with the various institutes, M.I.S. Trend in Lausanne was chosen mid-December 1998. In January 1999, the household and individual questionnaires were submitted to the Living in Switzerland research network for consultation, then passed to the Steering Committee for approval. Over 50 researchers provided comments and suggestions which were systematically evaluated according to various criteria: compatibility with the panel structure, necessity of a longitudinal perspective, and implications for the questionnaire in the long term. In the light of these criteria, it was not possible to take all the remarks into account. A series of *qualitative and quantitative pre-tests* were conducted from February to the end of June 1999. These were used to fine-tune the questionnaires and the survey procedure and helped to improve communication with the households and the interviewees.

4.2 The first two waves of the survey

The first wave was carried out from September 1999 to February 2000. Out of the 14,174 addresses receiving an invitation to participate in the survey, telephone contact was possible with 12,084 households (85%). At the household level, the net response rate was 61%. To obtain reliable extrapolations for the whole resident population of Switzerland and a panel of about 4,000 households and 6,600 individuals for the second wave, it was necessary to request the participation of at least 5,000 households in the first wave. This goal was achieved, as the first wave yielded valid data for 5,074 households and 7,799 individuals. The household interviews lasted an average of 12 minutes and individual interviews an average of 55 minutes. In total, slightly fewer than 8,500 hours of telephone interviews were carried out. The finalised set, with transversal weighting and constructed variables, was available in spring 2001. The second wave started in September 2000 and ended in February 2001. Valid data was collected for approximately 4,300 households and 7,000 individuals. The longitudinal sample (individuals interviewed in the first and second waves) comprises approximately 6,000 individuals. The data was made available to researchers in the autumn 2001. In 2002 a survey with a self-administered, written “biographical” questionnaire was completed by the panel interviewees after the third wave, to reconstitute their life trajectory since childhood (fundamentally of the living arrangements/family and professional life).

5. Diffusion of the data

By and large, there are no restrictions on the use of SHP data. However, interested parties must sign a contract with the SHP undertaking to 1) use the data only for predefined research purposes; 2) inform the SHP of their experiences and their publications; 3) refrain from transmitting the data to third parties; and 4) play an active role in the Living in Switzerland research network. The topics being analysed and the identity of members of the network are listed on the SHP website <http://www.unine.ch/PSM>. On signature of the contract, the data is supplied in a labelled SPSS format and the documentation is provided on a CD-ROM for PC or Mac.

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