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Surveying Migrants in the Context of the Low-income Panel PASS

Birgit Jesske

Abstract

The panel study “Labor Market and Social Security” (PASS), established by the Institute for Employment Research, is a central data source for research on unemployment, poverty, and the welfare state in Germany. Since 2007, approximately 12,000 persons in more than 8,000 households have been interviewed annually. The study’s design particularly allows for evaluating the situation of recipients of basic income support, called unemployment benefits II (UB II) in Germany. With the influx of refugees to Germany, the structure of UB II recipients changed and as a consequence Arabic-speaking persons needed to be integrated into PASS. In 2016, that is, in PASS wave 10, we were faced with several challenges to meet the needs of this new population. This paper focuses on fieldwork issues: How did we access the special population of Arabic-speaking respondents and which contact strategies were necessary to reach refugees? And how did we manage to conduct the interviews given the respondents’ different cultural backgrounds and their special living conditions as refugees in Germany? The sampling structure of PASS allows for comparing the refugee sample and the general UB II recipients. A great willingness to participate and high motivation was apparent among the refugees. It was possible to obtain access to the refugee households both by telephone and face-to-face. Whereas non-response occurred to a larger extent in the general refresher sample due to refusals, in the refugee sample it was caused by lower reachability.

1 PASS as a Household Survey in the Low Income Sector

The Labor Market and Social Security Panel (PASS) is a central data set for labor market and poverty research in Germany. It is also used for the evaluation of social policy measures adopted in the framework of volume II of the Social Security Code (SGB II).³⁶ The panel was established in 2006 at the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) and the annual survey waves that have been taking place since 2007 make a detailed description and analysis of the living conditions of unemployment benefit (UB II) recipients and low-income households possible. Given the fact that basic income benefits are tied to persons

36 Social Security Code (SGB), volume II, Basic Benefits for Job-Seekers.

living together and building a needs-based community, the conceptual design of PASS is a household survey (Trappmann, Beste, Bethmann, & Müller, 2013).

In light of the research interests mentioned above, two subsamples are formed in PASS so that the UB II recipients can be compared to a control group consisting of a sample of the general population. The benefit recipients (needs-based communities) sample is drawn from the process data of the Federal Employment Agency (BA). This subsample is refreshed annually based on new additions to the benefit recipients (general refresher sample). The general population sample is drawn from the population registry of selected municipalities. Up to now, the latter subsample was only refreshed in wave 5. The PASS survey started in 2007 with 12,794 households surveyed and, including the addition of yearly refresher samples of the UB II population (approximately 1,000 households each), has now a size of, on average, 10,000 households per survey wave or per year. The persons interviewed in PASS are all persons living in a household and being of at least 15 years of age. The Institute for Applied Social Sciences (infas) has been conducting the surveys since 2009 (wave 4) on behalf of the IAB and has also been responsible for the data processing.

1.1 Migrants in PASS

The population investigated in PASS includes a high proportion of migrants. Here, the disproportionately more frequent precarious living conditions to be found among the migrant group play a role, as do lacking linguistic abilities or vocational qualifications, which make it more difficult for migrants to integrate into the German labor market. To prevent the risk of systematic unit non-response particularly in this target group, the PASS survey has taken on a multilingual format since its beginning. However, given budget constraints, the PASS questionnaires were only translated into Turkish and Russian until wave 9. Initially, these two groups represented the numerically most important migrant groups among benefit recipients in Germany. The influx of refugees that began in 2013 has changed the composition of UB II recipients. Since then, Syrians and Iraqis have become the largest group among the migrants receiving UB II. In light of this fact, Arabic was chosen to be an additional survey language in survey wave 10 (2016)³⁷, and Syrians and Iraqis had to be included as a refugee sample in PASS. The inclusion of this new migrant group with its cultural particularities did not remain without consequences for the entire survey process and the field strategies in PASS. First experiences with interviewing refugees (Brücker, Rother, & Schupp, 2016; Johannson, Schiefer, & Andres, 2016; Gonser, Jesske, & Pfeiffer, 2017) have shown that for this target group it is not sufficient to simply provide a questionnaire that has been translated into their native language. The cultural particularities and the particular life situation as refugees in Germany require additional measures to be taken to facilitate contacting and interviewing refugees. How did we deal with these challenges in PASS and what experiences did we make during the first contact with this target group in survey wave 10? Answers to these questions will be provided in the following. By comparing this special sample with the general refresher sample, we can identify whether

37 Since survey wave 10, Turkish is no longer offered as a survey language. The proportion of Turkish-speaking persons in PASS has undergone a sharp decline in recent years.

special contacting strategies are necessary in dealing with this new migrant group and, if so, which.

1.2 Refugee Sample with Syrians and Iraqis in Wave 10

Syrian and Iraqi households were oversampled in the refresher sample within the UB II population, as we needed to reach a sufficient number of cases to allow for independent substantive analyses for Syrians and Iraqis. The oversampling was also advantageous for a detailed analysis of the contacting strategies in PASS survey wave 10. With the goal of reaching 500 completed interviews in Syrian/Iraqi households, a gross sample of 1,564 households was drawn. As already mentioned above, the general refresher sample, consisting of a population of UB II households of predominantly German nationality, serves as a basis for comparison with the refugee sample. The general refresher sample in PASS survey wave 10 was based on a gross sample of 2,870 households, and we aimed to eventually complete approximately 800 household interviews. The survey for wave 10 took place between the end of February 2016 and the beginning of September 2016. Households for the refugee sample were contacted from May to December 2016. The later start of fieldwork for this target group was due to the time which had to be spent on translating and preparing the Arabic version of the questionnaire. By the end of fieldwork, 521 Syrian/Iraqi households had been interviewed in PASS and 664 households in the general refresher sample. The distributions of the final disposition codes show a high degree of motivation and a great willingness to participate among the Syrian/Iraqi households in the refugee sample. This group achieved a response rate of 33.3% as compared to 23.1% in the case of the households in the general refresher sample (RR1, AAPOR response rate: The American Association for Public Opinion Research [AAPOR], 2016). Whereas in the general refresher sample the majority of non-responses were due to refusals, the non-responses in the case of Syrian/Iraqi households were the result of an inability to reach the households in question (non-contacts). The proportion of non-responses due to refusal amounted to 9.8% in the refugee sample as compared to 37.7% in the general refresher sample. Households that could not be contacted, either because they were not reached despite several contact attempts or because their address information was incorrect, comprised 43.6% in the refugee sample and 11.2% in the general refresher sample (Jesske, Knerr, & Kraft, 2017).

2 Study Design and Response-Enhancing Measures in PASS and the Particularities Involved in Interviewing Migrants

The sources and causes for (measurement) errors and distortions have been thoroughly investigated in survey research (Biemer, 2010; Groves & Couper, 1998; Dutwin et al., 2014). The result has been a large spectrum of measures and strategies that can be used to prevent selective non-responses, in particular with respect to special target groups within the total population. Measures and strategies are a component of study design, when, for instance, the survey methods to be used are selected. Furthermore, measures and strategies play a

role while working on a sample during fieldwork, for instance, when contacting target groups that are difficult to reach or when making a standardized interview possible with a person that has difficulties to follow a questionnaire.

2.1 Mixed-mode Study Design in PASS

The PASS study design involves a mix of methods in which both telephone interviews (CATI) and face-to-face interviews (CAPI) are possible. PASS interviewees can freely choose the interview method. Even different methods within a single household are possible. All the households in the refresher sample always start in CAPI. Households that cannot be reached despite several attempts to make contact in person or whose address is incorrect can be switched to CATI in the course of the survey. The flexibility of switching between survey methods ensures that efforts to make contact are maximally exploited in order to reach as many households in the sample as possible. The PASS survey period of more than six months (February to September) provides the opportunity to repeat and alternate different efforts at making contact. Moreover, tracking measures are employed in PASS, amongst others, to locate households that have moved. In addition, address searches and updates using the available registries (population registry bureaus, BA process data, Addressfactory (company within the Deutsche Post AG)) take place. Following Couper and Ofstedal (2009), tracking is understood as a comprehensive package of measures including the use of advance letters (incentives form part of this package), inquiries regarding the willingness to participate, and comprehensive contact information for the purpose of making contact in the current wave as well as in subsequent survey waves. In PASS, all households in the refresher sample receive advance information in written form on the purpose of the study, along with a detailed data protection statement. In addition, the letter announces an incentive of EUR 10, which the persons surveyed receive, along with a thank-you note, following their participation. In PASS, all letters and other written documents are also available in each of the survey languages.³⁸

2.2 Tailored Contact Strategies for the Refugee Sample

The usual PASS strategies were partially modified in wave 10 for the purpose of contacting the Syrian/Iraqi households. Both CATI and CAPI surveys were allowed as initial methods for Syrian or Iraqi households so that the Syrian/Iraqi households could be addressed in their mother tongue in Arabic (Standard Arabic): In CATI, contact was facilitated by bilingual interviewers. At its Bonn location, infas has a multilingual interviewing team, specifically trained and experienced for interviewing non-German respondents. Depend-

38 The study design and strategies employed in PASS are described in detail in the technical report published by the Research Data Center (FDZ) of the IAB following each survey wave (http://fdz.iab.de/de/FDZ_Individual_Data/PASS.aspx).

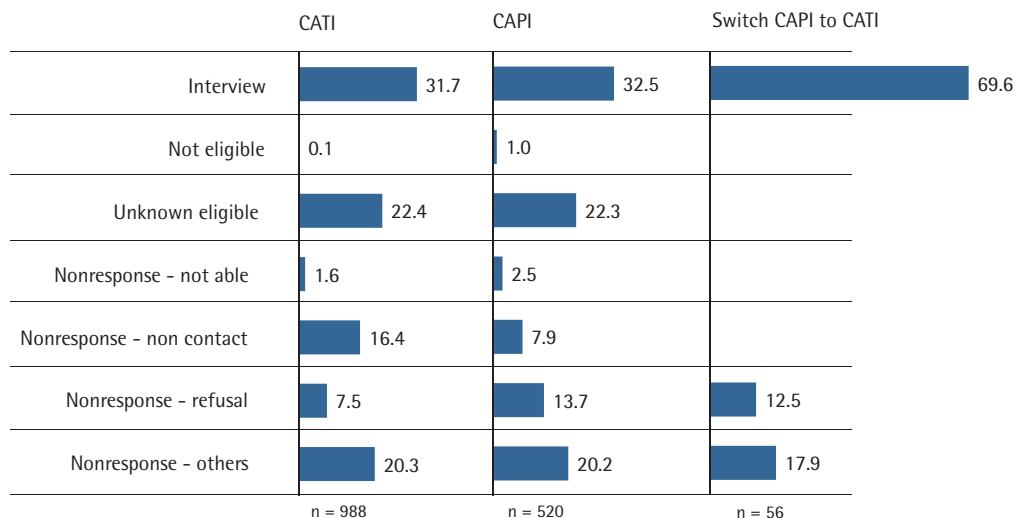
ing on the study design, this team can also be deployed as CAPI interviewers.³⁹ However, a specifically trained Arabic-speaking interviewing staff for CAPI surveys is not available in Germany at present. All households with a telephone number available started in CATI. For all other households, the CAPI interviewers attempted, even without having knowledge of Arabic, to establish contact with Syrian/Iraqi households in person. When doing so, they were allowed to draw on the support of other German-speaking persons living in the household or in the neighborhood. Furthermore, they had greater flexibility in conducting the interviews. The latter issue will be dealt with in greater detail in the next section. The assumption was that interviewers in CAPI can establish contact even if they do not have any knowledge of Arabic. Specific measures and strategies were adopted in order to assist the interviewers in their work and in dealing with the particular target group of refugees. Thus, in addition to the advance letter and the data protection statement in Arabic, a contact flyer was prepared for the Syrian/Iraqi households explaining the purpose of the survey and the function of the interview. The contact flyer was available to CAPI interviewers in both English and Arabic and it could be presented upon entering the household. Also CATI interviewers used sections from the flyer in order to better steer the conversation during the interview. If, despite the strategies mentioned above, the CAPI interviewers were unable to communicate with the Syrian/Iraqi households in person, they were asked to try to obtain a telephone number. This number could then be provided to the CATI interviewers for the purpose of making further contact.

Of the 1,564 addresses in the refugee sample of Syrian/Iraqi households, 576 households started in CAPI and 988 in CATI. 56 household were eventually transferred from CAPI to CATI for further treatment. Among the households that had initially been contacted with CATI, it was possible to conduct telephone interviews in two-thirds of the cases. For all other households, in both CAPI and CATI, it was possible to successfully interview nearly one-third of the households. Figure 1 shows the distributions of the final disposition code⁴⁰ for the respective survey methods. Whereas the proportion of refusals was almost twice as high in CAPI than in CATI (13.7% vs. 7.5%), the non-responses in CATI tended to be caused by a lower ability to reach the households. 16.4% of the households in CATI could not be reached until the end of fieldwork. In CAPI, this was the case for only 7.9% of the households. Syrian/Iraqi households showed a great willingness to participate, in particular when one compared their success rate to the one applying to the UB II households in the general refresher sample (as described above). The higher level of motivation of the refugee

39 infas has employed interviewers from the CATI field in collective housing, including in the case of refugee surveys: *Reallabor-Befragungen von Geflüchteten in der Rhein-Neckar-Region* on behalf of ZEW and Heidelberg University (2016), *Religion Monitor* on behalf of the Bertelsmann Foundation (2016).

40 Classification of groups according to AAPOR: Not eligible (NE) to participate in PASS are, in principle, deceased persons, persons who have moved to another country, and young persons under 15 years of age, as well as those who have already been interviewed. Unknown eligible (UE) are households that have moved, incorrect addresses, and wrong telephone numbers. The non-response (NR) group comprises all non-responses. These non-responses are differentiated into non-contact (NC), not able (NA), refusal (R), and others (O). The “others” group includes all households with whom the interview, for various reasons, could not be conducted in the course of the fieldwork period, but who were, in principle, willing to participate.

households became apparent in a great willingness to participate again in the next wave (97.7% panel consent). Willingness to participate again is the main challenge in longitudinal studies. The high panel consent of Syrian/Iraqi households gives hope that refugees can be integrated in the PASS panel study.



AAPOR final disposition code, RR1, household level; figures in percent

Source: Panel Study Labour Market and Social Security (PASS), 2016 Wave 10, contact data (infas)

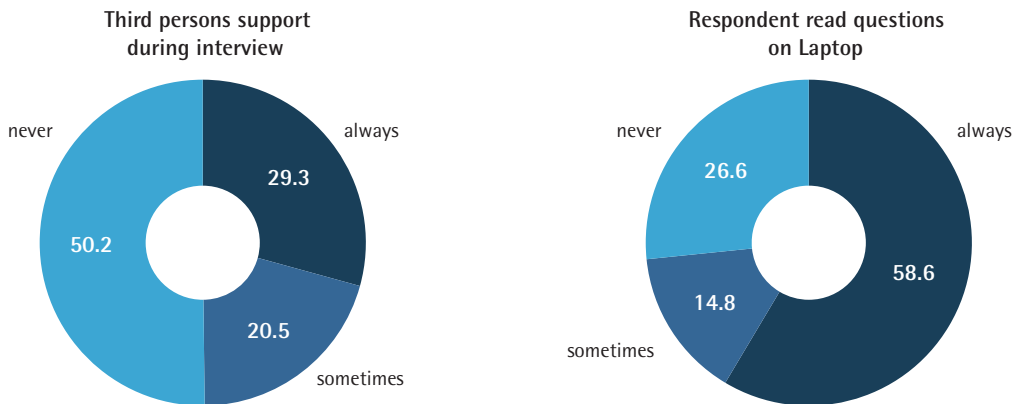
Figure 1 Final disposition code for sample Syrians/Iraqis via mode

2.3 Tailored Interviewing Strategies for the Refugee Sample

In general, there is a standardized questionnaire available in PASS. The survey instruments are identical for both telephone and face-to-face interviews. When conducting the interviews, interviewers follow the rules of standardized interviewing (Fowler & Mangione, 1990). 1:1 translations of the PASS questions were undertaken to produce the foreign-language versions of the questionnaire, which means that the whole German questionnaire was translated without any adaptation to Arabic-specific contents or specific conditions for respondents from Syria/Iraq. Interviews in the foreign languages should, in principle, follow the questionnaire and be conducted in a standardized fashion. Assistance and translations by third parties have not been allowed in the foreign-language interviews in Turkish and Russian during the last waves in PASS. However, in order to facilitate interviewing the Arabic-speaking households, deviations from the standard rules for conducting interviews were introduced in CAPI in wave 10. The main reason for this was to enable interviewers with no knowledge of Arabic to conduct interviews with persons who were not able to follow a long interview in German. The interviews in PASS have an average length of 45 minutes with the head of household and 30 minutes with each additional person of at least

15 years of age. A key deviation from the standard interview was a situation in which the interviewer and the respondent were not, as usual, sitting opposite but next to each other, thereby making it possible to jointly follow the questionnaire on the screen. The technical possibility of changing the language displayed on the screen was advantageous for this procedure. Thus, for each question, the interviewer and the respondent could decide whether the German or the Arabic version should be displayed. For Arabic, the change in the direction of the writing was, of course, heeded. Therefore, the interviewers could guide respondents through the questionnaire, even if they did not understand the texts displayed in Arabic. They just started with the German question on the screen and then switched to the Arabic version so that the respondents could read the question themselves. A further deviation from the standard interview involved support from third parties. In the case of Arabic-language interviews, assistance from third parties was allowed. Besides helping interviewers to steer the communication and explain tasks to the respondents, third parties also could help reading out questions and sometimes explaining their meaning. This was necessary due to the fact that not all respondents from the refugee sample were capable of reading and sometimes they needed help to understand questions with higher complexity.

The option to read together on the screen was chosen in almost 60% of the interviews conducted, whereas steady support from third parties occurred in almost one third of the interviews (see Figure 2). Support included help in reading out and explanations as described above. The consequences of this procedure for the quality of the data cannot be shown yet, since they are the object of further analyses. The feedback of the interviewers on the individual interviews provided some first indications of possible problems and further needs to revise the PASS questionnaire. Selected questions from the interviewer feedback will be described below.



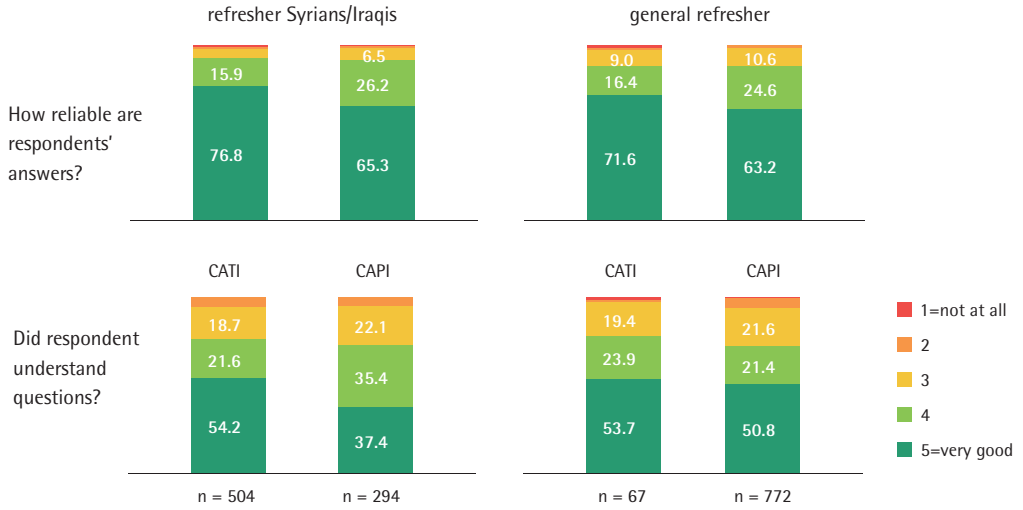
Refresher Syrians/Iraqis with CAPI mode, interviewers' rating on individuals level n=263; figures in percent

Source: Panel Study Labour Market and Social Security (PASS), 2016 Wave 10, paradata (infas)

Figure 2 Interview setting during CAPI

2.4 Interviewers' Assessment of Interview Situation with Refugees

At the end of each interview, the interviewers were asked to provide an assessment of the interview situation and of the respondents' behavior. These assessments took place at the end of both the CATI and the CAPI interview. Comparing the interviewer assessments from the two survey modes allowed us to identify possible effects of the deviations from standardized interviewing. Thus, for instance, the interviewers were supposed to estimate how often respondents had asked for explanations during the interview. In the refugee sample, respondents requested explanations more rarely in the CATI interview than in the CAPI interview (Resp never/almost never ask for explanation: CATI 57.9%, CAPI 42.5%). But this difference between the survey modes could also be observed for the general refresher sample (Resp never/almost never ask for explanation: CATI 73.1%, CAPI 58.9%). The greater need for explanation may depend less on the de-standardization in the CAPI interview though. It seems that explanations in the CATI interviews in general were less needed than in the CAPI interviews. However, the extent of the need for explanation was greater in the refugee sample than in the general refresher sample. This finding confirms reports from interviewers saying that questions in PASS were difficult for the migrants to understand. Further assessments of the interviewers – for instance about the reliability of the respondents' answers – also revealed a difference between the survey modes, but not between the samples, as is shown in Figure 3. It is only in the case of the assessment of the questions' understandability that an effect emerged among the Syrian/Iraqi households that were interviewed in CAPI. While a very good understanding of the questions was observed for half of the respondents in the general refresher sample and half of the refugees surveyed in CATI, it seems to have been considerably worse for the refugees surveyed in CAPI. It is possible that the respondents' reading the questions on the screen was not, after all, sufficient enough to enable them to answer the questions. Moreover, in light of this finding, one can assume that the CATI interviewers may have provided additional assistance to the Syrian/Iraqi households during the interviews. The PASS questionnaire includes some questions with particularities on the topic of unemployment benefits, which are difficult to understand for refugees unfamiliar with the German welfare system. Furthermore, the translation into Standard Arabic requires a higher level of education since Standard Arabic is the written form of Arabic and not used in everyday language.



Refresher sample, individual level, mode of interview; figures in percent

Source: Panel Study Labour Market and Social Security (PASS), 2016 Wave 10, paradata (infas)

Figure 3 Interviewers' rating on respondents' comprehension

3 Discussion

A great willingness to participate in PASS and high motivation were apparent among refugees from Syria and Iraq. It was possible to achieve a considerably higher response rate in the refugee sample than in the general refresher sample. This experience gives reason to be optimistic, also with regard to the next survey wave and the involvement of more migrants in PASS. It was possible to gain access to the refugee households both by telephone and face-to-face. It was also helpful to adapt contacting and survey strategies for this target group. In CAPI, deviations from the standardized interview were allowed to enable CAPI interviewers without foreign-language abilities to interview persons in the refugee households. The interviewer assessments, which were provided at the end of each interview with refugee households in both modes, indicate difficulties in understanding as well as further need for clarification but do not necessarily refer to differences in the collected data. The consequences on the data collected still have to be analyzed more closely. However, feedback from the interviewers on difficulties dealing with particularities of the German welfare system or other complex questions suggest that optimizing the translation of individual questions surely makes sense.

Non-responses occurred to a larger extent in the refresher sample due to refusals, whereas they were caused in the refugee sample by lower reachability. The difficulty of reaching respondents in CATI was particularly disadvantageous due to the fact that refugees very frequently provide cell phone numbers. Cell phone numbers bear the risk of

changing more frequently and being invalid. In order to remain in contact with refugees, it will be necessary to develop additional tracking strategies in PASS. The reachability of respondents in the follow-up surveys will be of major significance in order to avoid panel attrition. The integration of refugees in the panel can only succeed if longitudinal data about them can be collected over the course of several survey waves.

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