Appendix Minimizing non response errors

A range of measures are taken to keep non-response to a minimum.

Contacts with households w1

Since 2014 and with the SRPH survey framework, the names, first names and ages of all household members of the sampled household are known and enable post to be addressed individually. As a result of tests carried out to assess cost-effectiveness and the perception of respondents with regard to the different ways in which the initial letter was addressed, it was decided to send one letter per married couple that could be identified as such in the household, as well as one letter per unmarried adult (aged 18 and over). For households comprising two people who were not identified as a couple, one letter was sent, addressed to both names.

Although the SRPH survey framework contains a great deal of socio-demographic information on the household composition, it does not include a telephone number. This survey base, therefore, has to be combined with the base CASTEM to allow the household to be contacted following the initial letter. Households without a land-line telephone number or registered mobile number (ALTEL households, approx. 35.2% of gross sample) can only be contacted by post. Members of such households aged 18 and over are sent a letter containing an unconditional compensation of CHF 5, asking them to inform us of their telephone number. They have several ways of doing this: by text, email or fax, by internet on the site of DemoSCOPE using the user name and password sent with the initial letter, or by telephoning the DemoSCOPE hotline. If the households do not reply, a first reminder is sent by post, followed by a second one.

Contacts with households w2-4

The method of contacting households in wave 2 to wave 4 has not changed from previous years. Each household receives one letter informing it that it will be contacted again soon to take part once more.
The whole sample is contacted in four distinct batches, for a more even distribution of work for those carrying out the survey and to avoid too long a gap between the initial letter and the first contact by telephone. Initial telephone contact is made as soon as possible after the letter is sent out. Depending on people’s availability, some or all of the questionnaires can be answered. In the event that some questionnaires remain to be completed, telephone appointments are scheduled to encourage the utmost participation from all persons aged 16 or over. Depending on circumstances, interviewers may suggest participation in the face-to-face survey (CAPI). Except in the event of outright refusal (hostile refusal with threats or refusal in writing), the households or individuals (individual questionnaire) who in the first instance refuse to take part in the survey are contacted again by post and then by telephone (follow-up after refusal) by specialist interviewers.

Screening

When initial letters are returned to the FSO because the addressee cannot be found, the most recent addresses are looked for in the SRPH then sent to the survey institute who tries to contact them. A manual search based on Directories data enabled several telephone number to be found before letters were sent. Mobile telephone numbers and email addresses, requested at the end of questionnaires issued in wave 1, can often be used to get back in touch with people who have moved.

Monitoring the fieldwork

On a daily basis, the research institute delivers each day's statistics to SILC staff, who then conduct supplementary analysis. The purpose of fieldwork monitoring is to gain a daily overview of how the survey is progressing, determining the right time for activating address batches and defining optimum survey duration. Monitoring should also be used to identify quickly any performance shortfalls between call centres or between address batches and to immediately take remedial action by alerting the research institute's call centres. Not only can this be used to visualise problems fully but monitoring also substantiates actions in relation to the survey institute, for example if we request an increase in the number of interviews assigned to a call centre. Having a view of key fieldwork stages provides an important repository of information for improving fieldwork year after year.

Listening in at call centres

Due to the COVID-19 health crisis, no call centre visits were possible in 2022. An online interview listening solution was developed that year by the survey institute. It was possible to listen in every week from an FSO work computer via a secure connection or using two secure laptops provided by the survey institute.

Interviewer selection

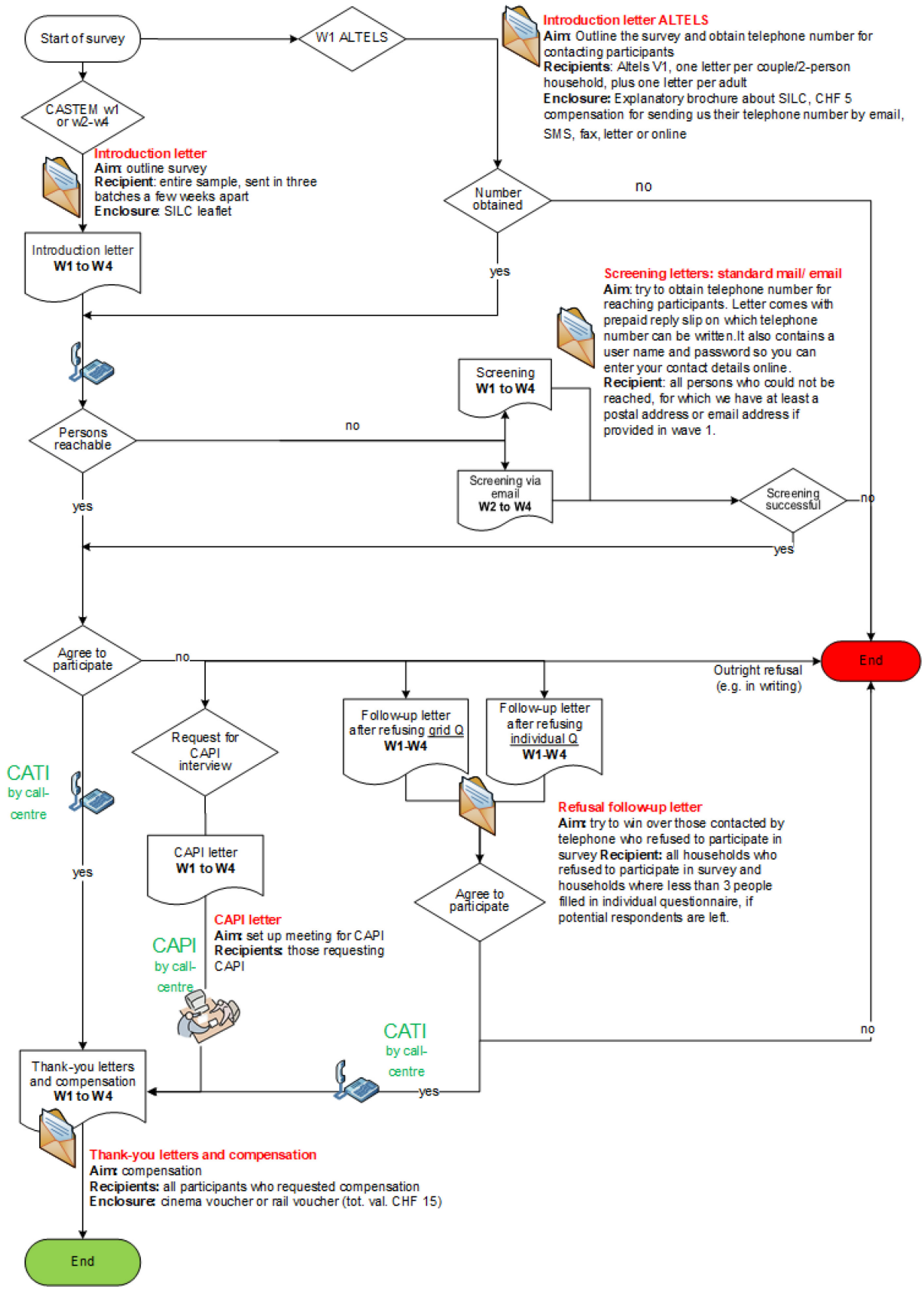
A whole range of measures are taken to ensure that interviewers provide good-quality work. Interviewers working on the SILC survey are picked from amongst the most experienced staff at the research institute. A large portion of interviewers assigned to the SILC survey are the same year after year. The research institute pledges to identify rapidly those interviewers who accumulate more refusals or item non-response than usual, or who do not perform satisfactorily in the processing of interviews.

Compensation

To keep non-response to a minimum, a selection of compensatory products is offered to each individual aged 16 or over who answers the individual questionnaire. Research conducted by the Swiss Household Panel showed that response rates were higher amongst respondents who had the choice between several types of reward as opposed to those offered a set item of compensation. Assuming a similar type of behaviour from respondents to the SILC survey, each respondent to the individual questionnaire had the choice between two types of gift with a value of CHF 15 (€15):

1. A public-transport voucher
2. Voucher to see one film free at the cinema

This choice of condition-dependent compensation is offered in the survey introductory letter to minimize the unit non-response rate. Compensation is sent out quickly, in a separate dispatch, to all those who have answered the individual questionnaire to encourage other household members (aged 16 or over) who have not yet answered the individual questionnaire to do so.

Figure 2. Household contact procedure during survey

Q = questionnaire