



# **Start of the LISS panel: Sample and recruitment of a probability-based Internet panel**

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# 1 Sample

The reference population for the LISS panel is the Dutch speaking population permanently residing in the Netherlands. The sampling and survey units of the LISS panel are the independent, private households, thereby excluding institutions and other forms of collective households. Households in which no adult is capable of understanding the Dutch language are not included in the reference population. The sample frame is the nationwide address frame of Statistics Netherlands. This address frame, consisting of records including an address and a municipality code, is constructed by Statistics Netherlands using a random 10% sample from the population registers GBA (Gemeentelijke Basisadministratie) each year. The address frame can include situations in which there are multiple households living at a single address, as in student housing, for example. Information about mail delivery is used to identify these multiple household situations. One address can thus have multiple sampling frame units.

In co-operation with Statistics Netherlands a simple random sample of 10,150 addresses was drawn from the aforementioned address frame.

The sample unit was defined as the address because the intention is to build a household panel including all members of a household living at a given address. The sample file contains the address, community code, number of persons living at the address, and those persons names and dates of birth.

Since letters addressed to "the inhabitants of this address" are likely to be thrown away unopened, at each address a name was selected from the register to be put on the mailed letter and envelope. Whenever the register contained more than one name at a given address, if possible, the name of a random person of 38 years or older was selected. If all persons at a given address were younger than 38 years old, the name of a random person of 18 years or older was selected. If all persons at a given address were younger than 18, the name of a random person was chosen. This selection sequence increased the likelihood that in households with adult children, the letter with the request to participate in a household panel was addressed to a parent. Note that the selection of a person within a household was for the purpose of addressing the announcement letter only: The sample unit of the panel is the address, and all members of the households at the addresses in the sample are asked to participate.

To maximize the response rates, the gross sample was delivered to the field work office in two stages: First, a random selection of 8,000 addresses from the total of



10,150 addresses was delivered, and only after this sample was fully exhausted the remaining 2,150 addresses were put in the field.

For each address in the sample, a telephone number was searched by Cendris, a contact centre company which is part of TNT Post. The contact database contains landline information only. Complementing the Cendris search with a manual search, landline numbers for about 70% of addresses were found, as was expected. It is known that about 30% of addresses in the population registers has no or unregistered landline telephone numbers.

## 2 Coverage of the non-internet population

The sample from the population registers naturally includes individuals and households who do not have Internet access. These participants are loaned equipment to provide access to the Internet via a broadband connection. Sample members with previous Internet access, but not broadband are provided with broadband. The broadband connection facilitates the use of visual displays and video. CentERdata's partner for the delivery and installation of equipment is SIM B.V. This company is small, flexible and innovative and focuses on the part of the Dutch population that has no experience with computers. This group is getting smaller each year, but at the same time more difficult to recruit. The computer developed by SIM B.V., called the "simPC", is a small and simple device using centralised support and maintenance (see [www.simpc.nl](http://www.simpc.nl)). It is operated by large "buttons" for the most frequently used functions, and has screens that are designed to be readable for elderly people. The computer and the broadband Internet connection are installed for the panel participants. If necessary, they can also get help at home to show them how to fill in the questionnaires on screen.

In July 2008, about 400 households using a simPC were registered in the panel.

## 3 Recruiting method

Recruitment of the sampled households was done from May until December 2007 by the field work institute TNS NIPO. Households were contacted in a traditional way: first, an announcement letter was sent in combination with a brochure explaining the nature of the panel study. A 10 euro note was included with the letter, because a pilot study had shown that a prepaid, 10 euro incentive effectively increased the willingness to participate in the panel (see paragraph 7). Next, respondents were contacted by an interviewer in a mixed mode design. Those households for which a telephone number



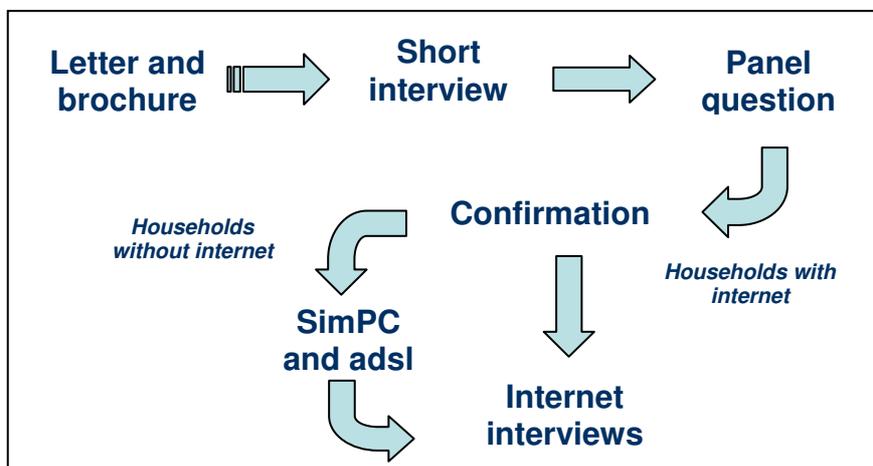
was known were contacted by telephone (CATI). The remaining households were visited by an interviewer and thus contacted face-to-face (CAPI).

The interviewers were instructed to first try to speak with the person to whom the announcement letter was addressed. However, whenever the addressee was not present or not able or willing to be contacted, they could speak to any other adult person living in the same household. As described above, the sample unit was at the level of the household or address, not the specific person.

Once contacted, the interviewer asked the respondents to participate in a 10-minute interview, after which the request to participate in the panel was made. The interview consisted of a few questions about demographics, the presence of a computer and Internet connection in the household, and a series of survey questions about social integration, political interest, leisure activities, survey attitudes, loneliness, and personality. Within one to two weeks after the interview, the respondents with Internet access who agreed to participate in the panel received a confirmation e-mail, and a letter with login code, an information booklet and a reply card. With the login code provided in the letter they could confirm their willingness to participate and immediately start the first interview. Respondents without Internet or computer could confirm their willingness to participate by returning the signed reply card, after which CentERdata provided them the equipment and/or broadband connection necessary to participate. The confirmation procedure ensured the double consent of each respondent.

In the confirmation e-mail and letter, respondents were promised an additional 10 euro incentive for logging in or sending back the reply card, to minimise the loss of respondents resulting from the double consent procedure. Figure 1 summarizes the recruitment process.

**Figure 1. Overview of the recruitment process for the LISS panel**





## 4 Maximizing the response rates

The interviewers were instructed to focus on obtaining the co-operation of the selected households, and not on maximizing the response/interview time ratio as they would do for commercial surveys.

In the telephone recruiting the maximum number of contact attempts was 15, at regular intervals, spread over several weeks. When a household was not reached after 15 calls, the address was transferred to face-to-face recruiting.

In the face-to-face recruiting, a first series of 8 contact attempts was made by the interviewer. A second series of 7 attempts was made after a few weeks pause.

The interviewer proposed to ask only one to three central questions if respondents refused the complete interview. If this was successful, the questions were followed by the request to participate in the panel. This method was extensively used in the nonresponse follow-up stage.

A refusal conversion procedure was designed in co-operation with the field work institute who carried out the recruitment. The procedure was tailored to the type of refusal recorded.

*First stage refusal:* When a contacted person was not willing to do the short recruitment interview, a sequence of different steps was followed:

1. The interviewer proposed to make an appointment for another time;
2. The interviewer asked whether another adult in the household could participate;
3. The interviewer asked for the refusal reason and read out tailored arguments. Based on the pre-test study, some conversion arguments for the most common refusal reasons were programmed in the interview;
4. The interviewer proposed to do the interview in a different mode: online; face-to-face instead of telephone; or telephone instead of face-to-face;
5. The interviewer proposed to ask only three central questions. If this was successful, the three questions were followed by the request to participate in the panel
6. The interviewer proposed to ask only one central question. If this was successful, the questions was followed by the request to participate in the panel
7. The field work institute sent a second letter, tailored to the refusal reason, with an offer to do the interview in another way. For example, if the reason for refusal was "no time" the letter referred to the lack of time and included a very short, two question paper-and-pencil form; if the refusal reason was "too old" the letter



explained the importance of including elderly people in a survey and proposed a personal visit by a special interviewer.

For brutal refusals, closing the door in the interviewer's face or hanging up the telephone, the six interviewer steps could not be followed. Such addresses were re-approached at different moments and, after two brutal reactions, transferred to stage 7.

*Second stage refusal or hesitation:* When a contacted person had answered the short recruitment interview, but refused or hesitated to participate in the panel, the following steps were carried out:

1. The interviewer asked whether another person in the household would be willing to participate in the panel;
2. The interviewer asked for the refusal reason and read out tailored arguments;
3. The interviewer offered hesitators the possibility to get extra information from CentERdata, by telephone, on the website, by mail, and made an appointment to call again;
4. If the refusal or hesitation had to do with old age, the interviewer could propose to telephone a person close to the respondent, to give more information. If the respondent agreed, the number of this person was asked and an appointment to call again was made;
5. Second stage soft refusals and hesitations in the telephone recruitment were finally followed up by a visit. If the reason for refusal or hesitation was old age or inexperience with computer and internet, a special interviewer was sent to the address to give a video demonstration.

*Third stage non-response:* When a contacted person had agreed to participate in the panel but did not login or sent back the reply card within two weeks, a series of reminders was started:

1. After two weeks non-response, a reminder e-mail was sent to households which had given their e-mail address to the interviewer in the recruitment stage; a reminder card was sent to households with no or an unknown e-mail address;
2. After four weeks non-response, the field work institute called the household again;
3. After six weeks non-response, CentERdata sent a reminder letter to the household.



4. After eight weeks non-response, the field work institute re-contacted the household again by means of an interviewer visit.

## 5 Recruitment response rates

The intensive efforts to re-contact and motivate respondents to participate resulted in satisfactory response rates. Table 1 shows that the response to the short CATI or CAPI interview or to the "central questions" (the first stage response) is 75% in total (51% completed interviews, 24% completed central questions). The willingness to participate in the panel among respondents who answered the recruitment interview or the central questions is quite high: 84% of those participating in the recruitment interview (or 63% of the total gross sample) told the interviewer they were willing to participate in the panel. The pilot study had shown a rather large loss of respondents between the expressed willingness to participate and the actual start in the panel. As a result, we extended the follow up procedure in the main recruitment and promised an extra 10 euro incentive after registration. These measures appeared quite successful, as the final panel membership rate is 48% of the total sample (Table 1).

Table 1. Household response in successive stages of recruitment. Percentage of the total gross sample minus not usable addresses.\*

	<i>% of total gross sample</i>
Contact person completed CATI or CAPI recruitment interview or answered central questions	75
Contact person expressed willingness to participate in panel	63
Household registered as panel member	48
<b>Total gross sample</b>	9,844

\* Not usable includes, among other things, non-existing or non-inhabited addresses, companies, long term infirm or disabled respondents, language problems. In total, 306 (3%) addresses in the total gross sample were coded as 'Not usable'.



## 6 Panel participation rates

When a new household enters the panel, the contact person of that household fills in a household questionnaire, specifying the composition of the household and some demographic information about each member of the household. The table below shows the number of households registered as panel members and the number of households with a completed household questionnaire in February 2008, when the recruitment was finished and the panel was at full strength. All individual members aged 16 and older in a household were asked to participate, but they were of course not obliged to. All households in which at least one person participates were included in the panel. The contact person of each household could, in the household questionnaire, indicate which members are not capable or not willing to participate. The third row of the table shows the total number of persons eligible for individual questionnaires, where eligible is defined as aged 16 or older and capable of filling in the questionnaires. Persons who are capable of answering questionnaires but do not want to participate are counted as eligible. The next line of the table shows the actively participating panel members, defined as eligible persons who are willing to participate, according to the contact person, and who have actually started to answer questionnaires. The actively participating panel members make up 82% of the eligible persons in the panel. The last row of the table shows the monthly response of the eligible, active persons to the individual questionnaires, averaged over 12 months.

### **Participating panel members**

<i>Situation February 2008</i>	<b>Number</b>
Household registered as panel member	5176
Contact person completed household questionnaire	5005
Eligible persons in households	9831
Actively participating persons in households	8026
	<b>Percentage</b>
Actively participating / Eligible persons,	82 %
<i>Average October 2007 - October 2008</i>	
<b>Monthly response of eligible, active persons</b>	73 %



## 7 The pilot experiment: effects of contact mode, incentives and information

A pilot experiment was carried out from January to April 2007 to determine the optimal recruitment strategy for the LISS panel. The recruitment variables considered were: contact mode, incentive amount, timing of the incentive, content of the information letter and timing of the panel participation request. The experimental design took into account the “naturally” varying factor of whether or not the households involved had a known fixed landline. The study focused on the effects of these experimental factors on the primary response rates and the willingness of respondents to become a panel member.

The highest response rate was found with an incentive of 10 euro; 20 euro and 50 euro incentives did not substantially increase response rates beyond those seen at the 10 euro level. All incentives were found to have much stronger effects on response rates when they were included with the announcement letter than when they were paid later. The second most important factor was found to be the contact mode used. Contact was made either by telephone (CATI) or face-to-face (CAPI). While the contact rate was somewhat higher with CATI, the CAPI interviewers were more successful in obtaining panel participation. The contact rate was substantially lower in the subpopulation of households without a known fixed landline, even when controlling for the effect of contact mode. The response rates were not affected by the content of the information letter. Response rates were also independent of whether the nature of the panel study was explained before or after the recruitment interview was completed.