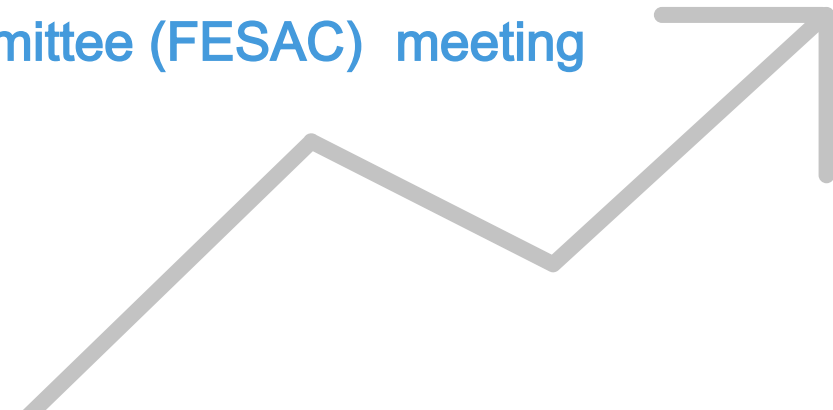# The German Microcensus and LFS
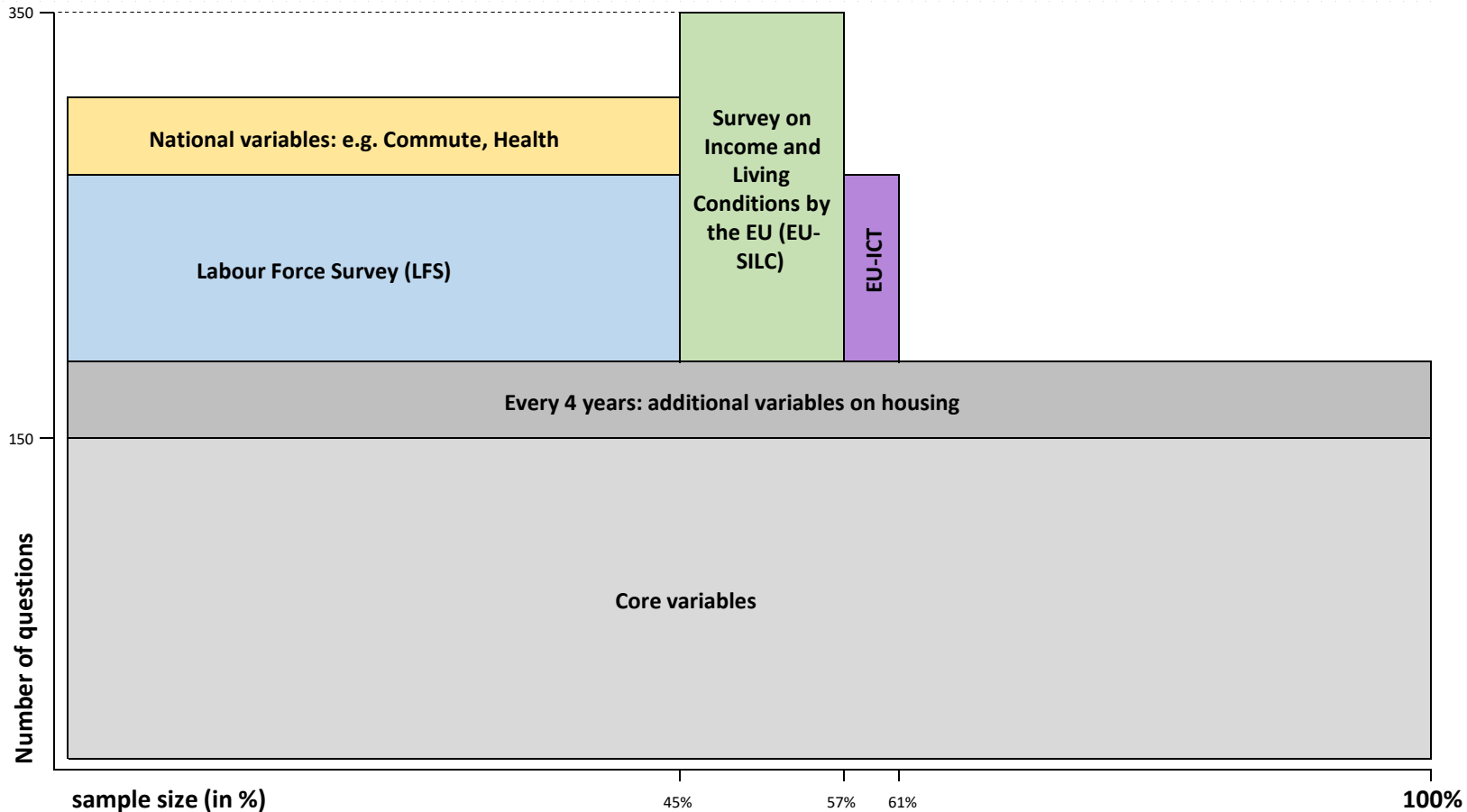
Recent improvements and future challenges

December 13, 2024

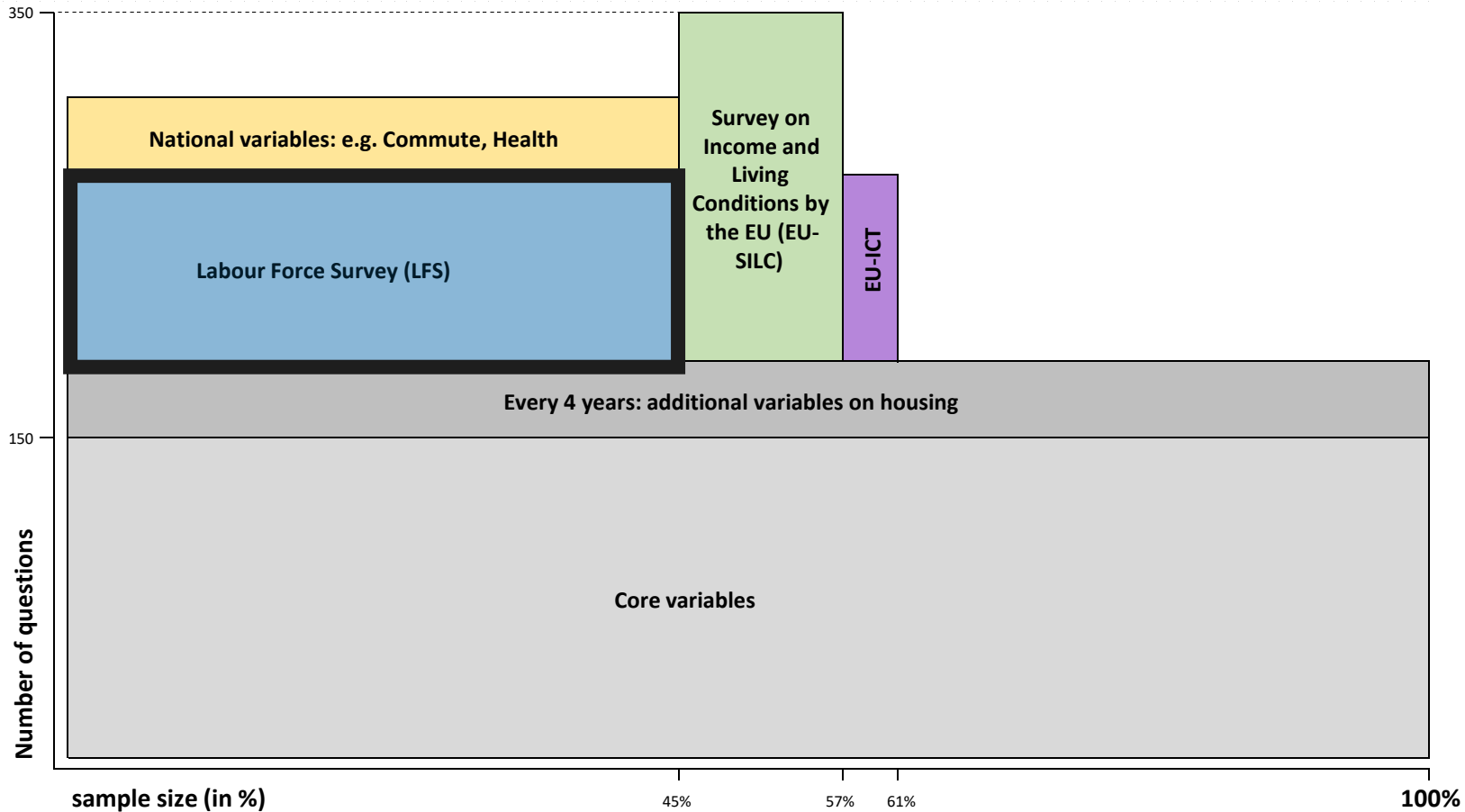Federal Economic Statistics Advisory Committee (FESAC) meeting

MZ2020 – Basic concept

- » 1 %-Cluster sample based on addresses
  - » Even distribution over the year
  - » Fixed reference week
  - » Rotation design with four interviews
- » Full questionnaire in private household, short questionnaire in collective households
- » Obligation to answer for most questions
- » Common social core programm (incl. ILO labor status)
- » Common survey management
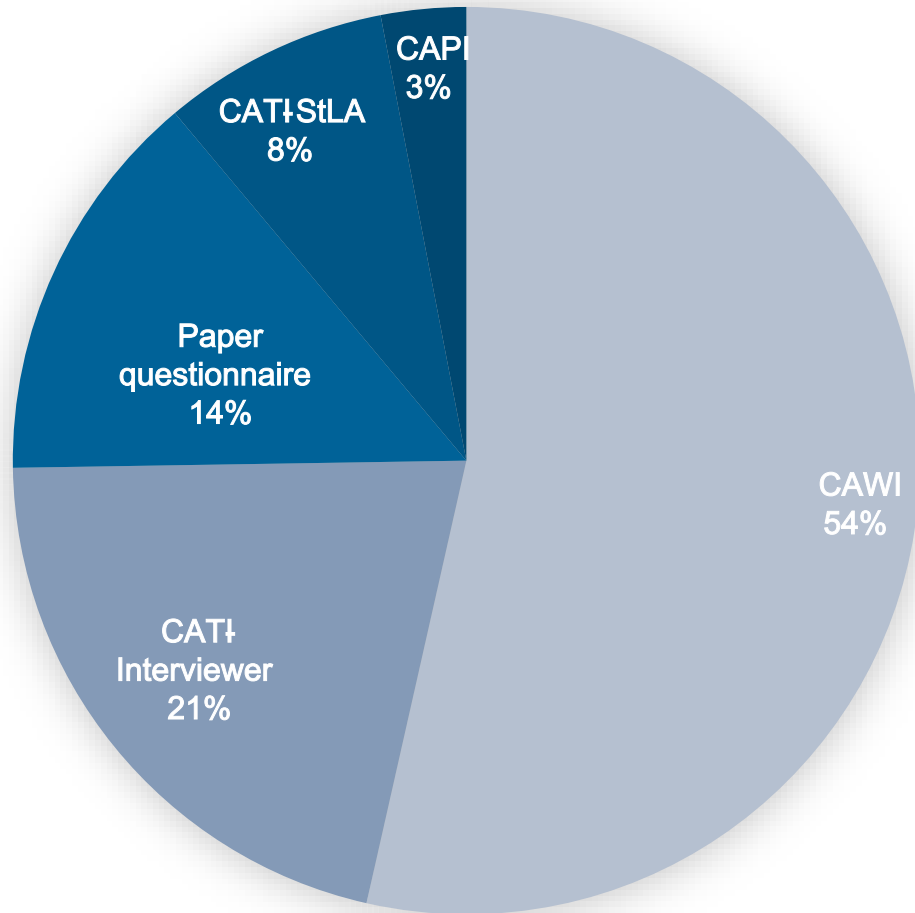
MZ2020 – Labor force survey (LFS)

Number of questions (y-axis)

350

National variables: e.g. Commute, Health

Survey on Income and Living Conditions by the EU (EU-SILC)

Labour Force Survey (LFS)

EU-ICT

Every 4 years: additional variables on housing

150

Core variables

sample size (in %)   45%   57% 61%   100%

» Up to 45% of total sample

» 2-(2)-2 rotation pattern

» Wave approach

  » Every wave

     Core-Variables

     + Quarterly LFS-variables

  » Every second wave

     + annual LFS-variables

     + Module-variables
       (multi -annual)

     + additional national
       variables

Mode strategy for 2020 relaunch

» Mixed-Mode-Strategy

  » Face-to-Face (CAPI) first, telephone (CATI) second for the first wave, subsequent waves as CATI first, CAPI second

  » Supplemented by webinterviews (CAWI) and paper questionnaires in all waves

  » First-time introduction of CAWI

» However…

  » Technical restrictions in introductory phase due to complex interviewer client

  » CAPI immediatly suspended due to Covid-19

  » Uniform use of mode sequence in the federal states (decentralised organisation) eased to secure data collection

  » CAWI became the alternative during the crisis …and beyond ? Back or towards a new strategy?

Current mode distribution and response rates

Microcensus 2023 initial results

Unit response rates
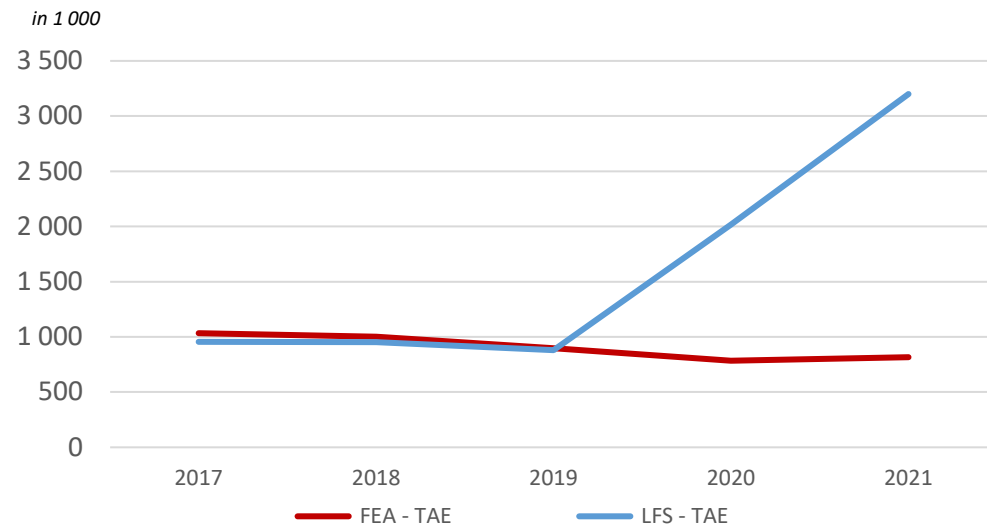
» Monthly: ca. 55% (t+19 for data collection)

» Quarterly: ca. 79% (t+ 45 for data collection)

» Yearly:

  » Initial ca. 91 % (t+ 45 for data collection)

  » Final ca. 94 % (ca. t+300 for data collection)
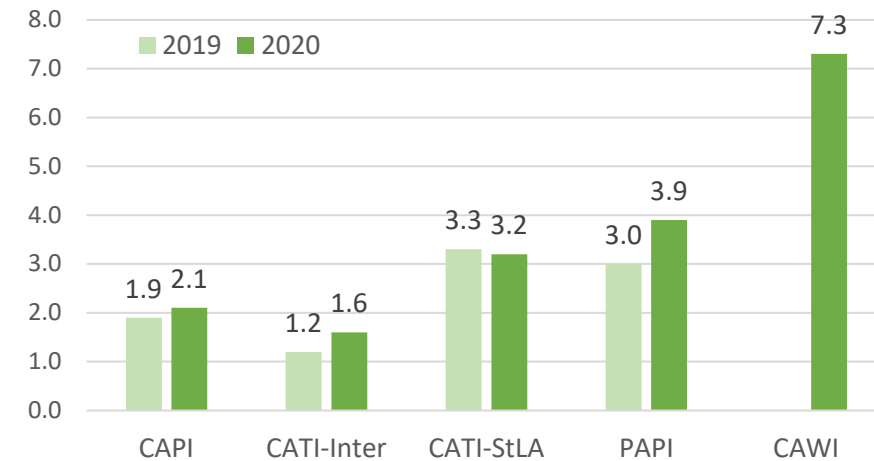
Mode analyses from the ongoing survey

» Interviewers help to achive high response rates in a very short time

» Mode-preferences between population groups differ and offering different modes is still important

» Interviewer modes have a positive impact on response rates of voluntary questions

» Measurement effects: Differences in results of mandatory questions between modes exists, but no evidence to suggest wider influence on the results in general

  » "Other"-categories were selected more often in CAWI

  » Longer lists tend to be biased (less differentiated) by interviewers

  » For a few questions: More serious mode effects were identified

» Comparability suffers if modes aren't carried out uniformly in the federal states

Example: Temporary agency employment (TAE)

» TAE by statistical source (FEA, LFS)

» LFS by interview mode (%)

in 1 000

Chart legend: FEA - TAE, LFS - TAE; years 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021; axis values 0 to 3 500.

Bar chart: 2019, 2020

Mode	2019	2020
CAPI	1.9	2.1
CATI-Inter	1.2	1.6
CATI-StLA	3.3	3.2
PAPI	3.0	3.9
CAWI		7.3

Role of question wording

up to 2022

> *For your job, have you concluded an employment contract with a company that has placed you in temporary agency employment?* [translation from German]

» Tricky question wording with main stimulus at the end and asked after an already lengthy interview

» For some respondents more difficult to directly grasp intention of question:

  (1) tend to approve yes/no-question, or

  (2) refer only to first part of question on the existence of an employment contract

» Experienced interviewers can compensate this and ask more directly. Question works best with CAPI or CATI by interviewers and worst in self-administered online questionnaire (CAWI)
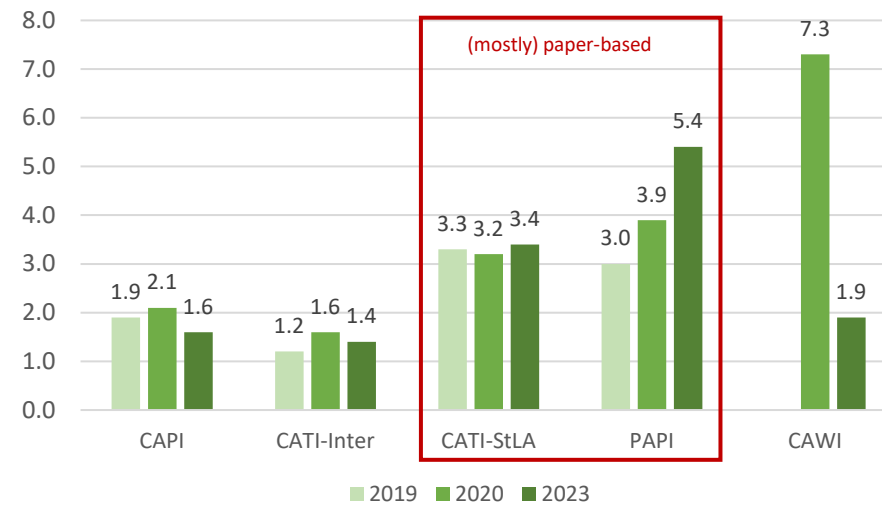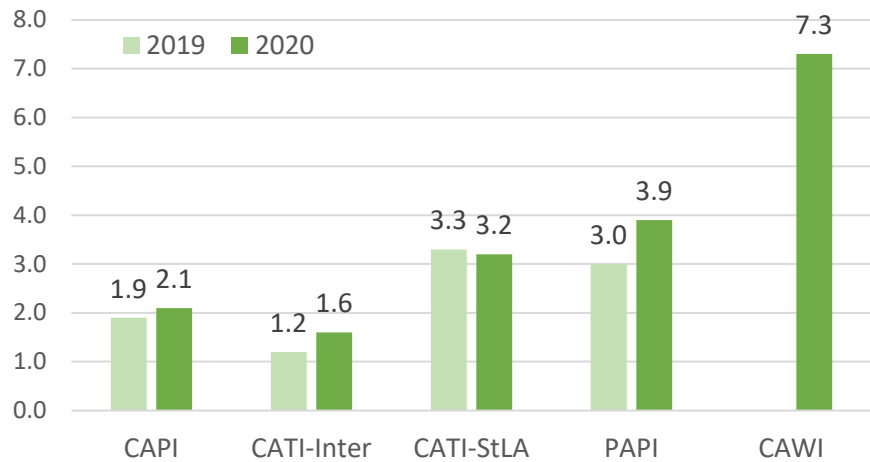
2023 (CAWI)

> *Does your job involve temporary agency work ?* [translation from German]

» Modified question: short and directly asks for employment in TAE using common terms that are used for it

» Use of question wording from a well-established German panel survey (SOEP)

» Introduced 2023 in all electronically based interview modes, in 2024 in paper-based modes

Impact on results 2023

» LFS-TAE by interview mode (%)

» TAE rate for CAWI in 2023 is close to CAPI rate

» Original results on TAE from LFS decrease close to level of the FEA statistic

Lessons learned

» For each question usability for an interview mode has to be assessed

» Interviewer based modes can mask questions where problems are not obvious

» Cognitive pre-testing is always advisable before introducing new interview modes to a survey

» For topics that apply only to small sub-groups, cognitive tests might leave problems undetected

» Ideally, a combination of qualitative and quantitative pre-tests should be conducted

Future mode-strategy

» Strategic goals

    » Modernization and digitalization

    » Ensuring data quality

    » Reduce complexity of IT-processes and secure data production

    » Consolidation of costs

» Strategic decision: CAWI first, CATI second

    » Includes consultation via telephone

    » Paper questionnaire as the last option, if other modes won't be accepted

    » No more CAPI

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