ESS Round 9 Guidelines on Fieldwork Monitoring

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1. Scope of guidelines

Face-to-face fieldwork in the ESS is a multistage process with many stakeholders involved including interviewers, the fieldwork agency, National Coordinators (NCs) and the ESS Core Scientific Team's Fieldwork Team. Monitoring fieldwork is a joint effort. Ultimate responsibility for delivering national fieldwork rests with the NCs and the fieldwork agency. The CST, through the ESS Fieldwork Team is responsible for ensuring comparability of data collected across the different countries and that there is consistency in the quality of data by means of setting and improving standards. The NC has a key role to play, working with the survey agency to plan and manage fieldwork in their country and raising and addressing any concerns with the ESS Fieldwork Team.

To ensure effective fieldwork monitoring it is important that all stakeholders involved have access to timely, shared and consistent information about fieldwork progress. In ESS Round 9 this will be achieved through the Fieldwork Management System (FMS).

- For countries using the FMS app, the ESS Fieldwork Team will automatically receive information on fieldwork progress transmitted from SAMPLE CTRL to the central server (SURVEY CTRL). This will be same information accessible to NCs.
- Countries using the FMS upload portal will need to provide progress updates on a weekly basis, independent of the length of fieldwork. This information will need to be provided at a case level rather than at an aggregate level and using a pre-defined standard template. See *ESS 9 Fieldwork Management System (FMS) data upload portal user guide* available via the ESS9 intranet (http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/intranet/nc/).

The present document provides an overview on fieldwork monitoring strategies and intends to help NCs when accessing information in the FMS and monitoring progress of fieldwork in their countries. The document contains information on what it is essential to monitor – using the FMS – as well as other information it could be useful to request from the survey organisation to have a closer look at the potential issues during fieldwork.

Please note that the progress monitoring activities do not affect the information NCs and survey agencies have to collect on the contact forms – actually, the contact forms data are the basis for the FMS and the monitoring activities described here.

[1] The CST requests that the following citation for this document should be used: Salima Douhou, Sarah Butt, Achim Koch & Roberto Briceno-Rosas[1] (2018). *ESS Round 9 Guidelines on Fieldwork Monitoring).* London: ESS ERIC Headquarters.
The document builds on previous monitoring recommendations and work by Annelies Blom, Natalie Aye Myung, Rory Fitzgerald, Verena Halbherr and Ana Villar.

2. Fieldwork projections

NCs are requested to discuss projections regarding the target number of complete interviews to be achieved for each week of fieldwork with the survey agency. The fieldwork projections need to be sent to the ESS Fieldwork Team for sign-off **at least 14 days before the start of fieldwork**. The CST also provides information on the number of interviews achieved on each week of fieldwork in an earlier ESS round (if applicable) to help NCs set or assess targets for this round—please see the document *ESS R8 Fieldwork Figures and R9 Projections*, which is accessible from the ESS9 intranet.

Projections should be realistic. When agreeing the projections it may be helpful to look at the actual progress of fieldwork in R8 (assuming figures are available) and base the projections for the current round on previous performance. However, particularly if there were problems encountered with fieldwork in the previous round or if the parameters of fieldwork in the present round differ, past performance may not be the best benchmark for performance in the current round. Factors to consider when formulating projections are:

- The size of the interviewer workforce
- Workload per interviewer and the time available to interviewers (including whether they will be working full time on ESS and/or able to start work immediately after the briefings)
- Release of sample in waves/batches
- Any re-issue phase planned
- Any known difficulties in contacting/motivating target persons
- Any national holydays occurring during the fieldwork period

3. Essential information on fieldwork outcomes and interviewer performance

During the fieldwork period, NCs and the ESS Fieldwork Team should use the summary reporting indicators in the FMS as a first step to discussing fieldwork progress in their country. These figures reported in FMS are based on the latest file uploaded to the portal by the NC <u>or</u> synchronised from Case CTRL (if using the FMS app).

For countries using the upload portal, it is essential to upload a case level file on the same day each week. For example, if fieldwork starts on a Monday a first case level file should be uploaded by the following Monday. The data uploaded should be as up-to-date as possible. In the present example, the data should ideally mirror the state of all sample units on Sunday, i.e. the day before the upload took place. If problems occur, the NC and ESS Fieldwork Team might need more detailed information than the FMS summary reporting indicators to identify the best ways to intervene. The NC should be prepared to ask the survey agency to provide more/detailed information to allow for better monitoring of fieldwork activities. This will include providing background information that might help to explain the fieldwork figures uploaded to the FMS and any delays in progress.

3.1. Summary reporting indicators in FMS

Weekly summary reports will be available in FMS to provide an aggregate level summary of the state of fieldwork in a specific week based on the current status of the case as defined by the outcome of the <u>last</u> contact attempt recorded by the interviewer. The following summary reporting indicators – and their definition – are available in FMS:

Indicator	Definition
Gross sample	N= Number of cases in gross sample As agreed with sampling expert and signed off in Sample design summary and Fieldwork Questionnaire (FWQ)
Cases uploaded to Sample CTRL	N= Number of unique sample records currently uploaded to FMS upload portal % = (Cases uploaded/gross sample)*100
Contact attempted	N= Number of cases with at least 1 contact attempt (in any mode) since the start of fieldwork % = (N cases with at least 1 contact attempt/ Gross sample) * 100
Ineligible	N = Number of cases coded as ineligible at last contact attempt i.e. case coded as: 7 = Invalid at Q5 on ESS Contact Form OR 8, 9, 10 at Q6 on ESS Contact Form % = (N ineligible cases/gross sample) * 100
Response rate	N = Number of completed interviews achieved i.e. case coded as: 1 = complete interview at Q5 on ESS Contact Form %= (N interviews achieved/(gross sample-ineligible)) * 100
Non-contact rate	N= Number of cases where no contact achieved i.e. case coded as: 6 = No contact at all at Q5 on ESS Contact Form % = (N of cases with no contact/(Gross sample-ineligible))*100
Cooperation rate	N = Number of interviews achieved i.e. case coded as: 1, 2 = complete or partial interview at Q5 on ESS Contact Form % = (N of interviews achieved/(N interviews achieved + refusals))*100
N of interviewers active in selected week	N= Number of different interviewers making at least one contact attempt in seven day period % = (N of active interviewers/All interviewers assigned to ESS Round 9)*100
N of interviewers achieving an interview in selected week	N = Number of different interviewers achieving a complete or partial interview in seven day period % = (N of interviewers achieving an interview/All interviewers assigned to ESS Round 9)*100

The weekly targets set in the signed off ESS Round 9 Projections template with respect to number of completed interviews should be used to assess progress on a weekly basis. An easy way to monitor progress against projections is to use the “Charts” available in FMS summary reporting. Monitoring other summary indicators is also important as they give a general insight into adherence to ESS Specifications (e.g. non-contact rate) and can point to possible issues in productivity of interviewers, progress being made with contacting cases, etc. If problems are encountered during fieldwork, the more information is available, the easier it is to diagnose and attempt to solve them. If more information is needed, NCs are encouraged to discuss this with the survey agency and/or to have a closer look at the uploaded case level datasets. The NC should review and evaluate fieldwork progress at least once a week and communicate any issues and possible strategies to address these as soon as possible to the ESS Fieldwork Team.

See table 3.1 for suggestions on how to interpret the information on general outcomes provided in the FMS summary reports.

Table 3.1 Points to monitor in summary reports

Measure	**How to use/possible further enquiries**	**Possible actions (not exhaustive)**
Contact attempted	• If low, why is this? • Have all the addresses been allocated to interviewers? • Are there any interviewers unable to start work?	(i) Allocate remaining addresses (discuss challenges); (ii) Encourage interviewers to start work promptly; (iii) Recruit more interviewers, arrange additional briefings.
Ineligibles	*If sampling frame has not changed this measure should be stable across ESS Rounds* • Is this higher than expected? • Were the initial assumptions correct? • Are interviewers assessing eligibility correctly?	(i) Request definition of ineligibles used and check if outcome codes included are correct; (ii) If definition is correct, discuss with survey agency possible reasons for high level of ineligibles.
Number of completed interviews (response rate)	• Is the number of completed inter-views in line with projections? • Can (a) the required sample size be achieved and (b) can fieldwork be completed on time?	Discuss early with survey agency: (i) Number of interviewers currently working or starting work; (ii) Scheduling of interviews; (iii) Recruitment of more interviewers (arrange additional briefings); (iv) response maximisation strategies; (vi) number and timing of calls to reduce non-contact rate; (ix) are cases coded as ‘non-contact’ after 4 contact attempts? (viii) at what stage refusals mostly seem to occur (see detailed outcome codes); (v) refusal conversion strategies; (vii) refer also to ESS9 Guidelines for Enhancing Response Rates and Minimising Nonresponse Bias;
Cooperation rate	• Is this in line with expectations?	
Non-contact rate	• Is the non-contact rate in line with projections?	

Measure	How to use/possible further enquiries	Possible actions (not exhaustive)
N of interviewers active	• Is the number of active interviewers in line with expectations?	(i) If consistently low, discuss causes with agency.
N of interviewers achieving an interview	• Are there only few interviewers with a high (or low) success rate?	(i) Discuss with agency whether there are interviewers consistently underperforming; (ii) Find out what the reason is: e.g. does this happen in a specific geographical area?

3.2. Full list of outcome codes and detailed breakdowns

A detailed breakdown of sample units into the outcome codes specified in the contact forms will allow NCs to pinpoint where problems might be occurring. The full list of outcome codes is made available to NCs in the *ESS9 Interviewer Training Manual* which is accessible from the ESS9 Intranet.

A table with detailed outcome codes is also available and gives the current status of the case as defined by the outcome of the last contact attempt recorded by the interviewer. Outcome codes are the same as those given in the ESS Round 9 Contact Form at Q6. See Appendix 2 of *ESS Round 9 Fieldwork Management System (FMS) Data upload portal* available via the ESS9 intranet for an illustration.

The summary report in the FMS will also allow NCs and ESS Fieldwork Team to monitor a breakdown of outcome codes by batch, region, interviewer ID, case status and demographic variables (gender and age group) if these are available and uploaded with the case level file.

See table 3.2 for suggestions on how to interpret the information on detailed outcome codes.

For further information see the document *ESS Round 9 Guidelines for Enhancing Response Rates and Minimising Nonresponse Bias* available via the ESS9 intranet.

Table 3.2 Points to monitor in detailed breakdowns

Measure	How to use/possible further enquiries	Possible actions (not exhaustive)
Breakdowns by batch	This can be used to highlight progress per batch to see whether an earlier batch is receiving enough attention by interviewers.	Liaise with survey agency about: (i) specific measures to address a batch with poorer performance; (ii) encouraging interviewers to exhaust cases on earlier batches first; (iii) possible re-allocation of interviewers to batches.
Breakdowns by region	This can be used to highlight those regions where allocation	Liaise with survey agency about:

	or response is poor, where interviewers are getting off to a slow start.	(i) specific measures to address areas with poorer response; (ii) scheduling of interviews; (iii) possible re-allocation of interviewers to different areas.
Breakdowns by interviewer ID	This information can highlight problems with individual interviewers.	Liaise with survey agency about: (i) supervision and support strategies for interviewers with poor response; (ii) re-issue strategies for interviewers with poor response.
Breakdowns by case status	This information can be used to check whether cases are being pursued by interviewers.	Liaise with survey agency about: (i) when cases will be issued into the field (if there are cases not issued yet); (ii) progress made with closing 'active' cases (assigning final outcome code).
Breakdowns by gender and age groups	This can be used to check whether there are subgroups with particular response rate difficulties.	Attempts to enhance response rates should try to bring response rates to a more consistent level across subgroups, if possible. This can mean targeting efforts to groups who are disproportionally underrepresented. Liaise with the survey agency about targeted letters or incentives for these groups and/or changes to the interviewer payment schemes.

3.3. Timeliness of monitoring data

If progress seems very slow, it can be useful to check with the survey agency how up to date their monitoring information is and whether interviewers are sending back completed interviews and/or contact data in a timely manner. If interviewers do not send back this information to the organisation in a timely manner, it can be difficult to ascertain how response rates are progressing.

The FMS upload data contains a field for "dateresult" showing the date on which the last contact attempt for each case was recorded. It is useful to check this field and confirm how recent the information the upload file contains is. If there is a significant gap between the dates of last activity and the date of upload this should be flagged with the survey agency who should be encouraged to obtain more regular updates from their interviewers.

4. Additional information on fieldwork progress

4.1. Interviewer performance

During fieldwork, NCs should also monitor interview length and contact patterns for all interviewers as this can provide useful information on interviewer compliance with standardised interviewing and the agreed contact strategy. Loosveldt and Beullens (2013)[2] found large variation in interview length

[2] Loosveldt, G., & Beullens, K. (2013) 'How long will it take?' An analysis of interview length in the fifth round of the European Social Survey. *Survey Research Methods,* 7(2), 79-78.

in the ESS resulting in measurement error related to the interviewer. Where outliers in interview length are found during fieldwork, reasons for particularly short or long interviews should be discussed with the interviewers. It may then be necessary to remind interviewers of correct interviewing techniques, or even to discard an interview as invalid on the basis of implausible length. Please refer to the *ESS Round 9 Interviewer Briefing Materials* for more information about standardised interviewing.

Table 3.3 Points to monitor in interviewer performance

Measure	How to use	Possible actions (not exhaustive)
Data on fieldwork processes (e.g., time/day of calls)	Is there any evidence that certain times or days are better for obtaining interviews? Are there any unusual patterns of calling? Is there any evidence of non-compliance with calling strategy requirements?	(i) feedback to interviewers any evidence about best times to call; (ii) investigate reasons for unusual call patterns; (iii) emphasise minimum calling requirements to interviewers.
Calling patterns by individual interviewers	Can be used to identify unusual or unproductive interviewers, as well as particularly "productive" interviewers who are using good strategies.	Liaise with survey agency about unusual calling patterns, or interviewers working well (could be used for training of others).
Data on interview duration	Can be used to identify interviewers conducting particularly short or long interviews and enables outliers to be investigated. Also interview length per item may be monitored or specific blocks of questions.	(i) Investigate reasons for unexpected interview lengths; (ii) remind interviewers of correct interviewing procedures; (iii) discard invalid interviews.

5. Information on re-issues and back-checks

The following information might not be available on a regular basis, but the NC may find it useful to obtain it on a weekly basis during fieldwork.

5.1. Information about re-issues

NCs should have, during fieldwork, early discussions with the survey agency about whether re-issues will be needed. A re-issue occurs when an interviewer returns a non-productive sample unit to the survey agency after having finished working on it. The survey agency may then decide to re-issue this sample unit, usually to another interviewer, in an attempt to still turn a non-contact or a refusal into a productive interview. The survey agency should provide NCs with information about the number of addresses that can be re-issued and how these addresses are to be selected. Ideally this would be broken down into:

- number of 'soft' refusals to be re-issued (and how these are defined);
- number of 'hard' refusals to be re-issued (and how these are defined);
- number of non-contacts to be re-issued (and how these are defined).[3]

[3] Some survey agencies may not define an address as a non-contact until the end of the fieldwork period, so that only refusals can be re-issued during early stages of fieldwork.

The most productive groups—in terms of increasing the response rate *per se*—are typically 'soft' refusals and non-contacts. However, reducing the number of 'hard' refusals may be more important in terms of reducing non-response bias, given that one might expect such respondents to be less similar to initially co-operative respondents than 'soft' refusals. Nevertheless, in some countries re-approaching 'hard' refusals will not be possible due to data protection laws.

It will be useful for NCs to monitor the re-issuing process and try to have the survey agency re-issue some of the more reluctant persons, as this may be more effective in reducing non-response bias than re-issuing 'soft' refusals only.

Please refer to the document *ESS Round 9 Guidelines on Enhancing Response Rates and Minimising Nonresponse Bias* for further details.

5.2. Information about back-checks

It may also be useful to monitor that back-checking procedures are in place and working according to specification. If possible, NCs should try to do some back-checks themselves. Basic information to monitor includes:

- the number of back-checks conducted and their outcome;
- the type of back-checks (on productive interviews, ineligibles, etc.).

Note that the back-check procedure (removing the requirement to back-check noncontacts and refusals) was updated in the latest version of the Specification issued in July 2018.

Further guidelines on back-check procedures have been provided in a separate document available on the NC intranet under Project Specification and Timetable.

6. Interim dataset of achieved interviews during fieldwork period

If it is possible to obtain one (or several) interim datasets of achieved interviews during the fieldwork period, this can be extremely valuable. This can help to detect problems, such as CAPI programming errors that went unnoticed during pre-testing stages, problems with the data template, or syntax problems with recoding of variables (such as country-specific variables that need to be harmonised).

Table 6.1 Points to monitor in interim dataset of achieved interviews

Measure	How to use	Possible actions (not exhaustive)
The structure of the data can be checked	Are all the bases to questions—i.e., the number of people responding to a question—correct, taking into account the relevant filtering? Are there any low bases (not explained by filtering)?	Incorrect bases often indicate routing errors or problems with the setup of the data file.
Demographic composition of the achieved sample compared to official statistics or other benchmarks	Are the survey findings generally in line with other sources? If not, how and why?	Discuss strategies on how to target particular groups where response is low, such as incentives for respondents.

Measure	How to use	Possible actions (not exhaustive)
Levels of missing answers, refusals or don't know responses	Do any questions have unexpectedly high levels of missing answers, refusal or don't know?	This could indicate problematic questions where it may be worth providing interviewers with extra guidance.
Data on fieldwork processes (e.g., time/day of interview)	When are most interviews being conducted (time/day of week)?	Feed back to interviewers any evidence about best times to call.
Interview length	Is the interview length in line with assumptions? Are there are unusually short or long interviews occurring? Check "outlier" interview lengths – is this related to particular groups of respondents or particular interviewers?	If longer, check impact on schedule of fieldwork completion. If some interviewers are particularly slow or fast, have the supervisor talk to them and identify causes.
Days and time elapsed between interviews of the same interviewer	Are there any unusually short time intervals between interviews?	(i) Feedback to survey agency on individual interviewers; (ii) request back checks.