European Social Survey academic impact monitoring
Annual report 2024

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1 INTRODUCTION: AIMS, METHODS AND CONTENT OF THE REPORT

To evaluate the academic impact of ESS both internally and externally, inform the design and redesign of its questionnaires, and guide its outreach and communication strategies, ESS continuously collects detailed feedback on its academic use. Bibliographic monitoring provides the following **information, outputs, and guidance**:

- Longitudinal empirical evidence on the **scope, geographical and disciplinary** patterns of ESS academic usage, as well as its contributions to theory development and policy references.

- Empirical support to guide **informed decision-making** by ESS bodies (CST, SAB, and QDTs) on questionnaire content (item and module selection and revision), targeted training, communication strategies, and related areas.

- Summary **bibliographic reports**, a comprehensive citation list with options to create customized sub-lists based on various criteria (see Appendix 1), and **item usage statistics** (see Appendix 2). These documents help demonstrate ESS's academic relevance to European and national funders, as well as users (NCs, GA).

- A **bibliographic repository** for other work packages, used for methodological testing, updating the ESS online bibliography, supporting ESS communication efforts, and creating relevant outreach materials.

- The source of annual updates for the **ESS online bibliography**, offering bibliographic variables accessible to the general public and allowing users to browse ESS publications by various criteria. For data users, understanding which analyses have already been conducted with the dataset is crucial, as bibliographic information provides essential contextual metadata for studies (Fear 2013; Kern 2015).

The 2024 annual bibliographic report (Deliverable 11.08) includes **publications from 2003 to 2023**. An ESS-based publication, as defined in this report, refers to any English-language academic work, including journal articles, books, book chapters, conference materials, research papers, reports, or theses. These publications, whether methodological or substantive, must incorporate at least one ESS item in their primary analysis.

It is important to note that the relevant universe excludes ESS-based publications in languages other than English, as well as substantive publications that use European Social Survey keywords without incorporating primary data (e.g., those replicating ESS items or citing ESS data secondarily). The limitation to English is necessary due to the extensive coding of variables derived from the texts. As English contributes to global academic visibility, the database aims to achieve the broadest possible coverage of ESS-based **international publications**.

As in previous years, ESS-based publications were identified using the **Google Scholar** indexing tool, widely regarded as the most comprehensive for covering various publication types (see Nederhof, 2006; Mayr and Walter, 2007; Ware and Mabe, 2012). The search

targeted the key phrase *'European Social Survey'* along with *'round(s)'* or *'wave(s)'* in texts or abstracts to locate relevant publications.

Publications containing these keywords were reviewed individually to confirm their primary use of ESS data. Approximately 60% of the initial Google Scholar results were discarded due to irrelevance or duplication. This process yielded 475 new publications, most of which were published in 2023. With this latest batch, the total number of ESS-based publications has reached **7060**. Full texts of 412 new substantive publications were obtained for comprehensive bibliographic coding and detailed item usage analysis.

The scheme below (Figure 1) outlines the main steps in the **workflow of the annual bibliographic exercise**. The blue boxes represent the primary processes, while the red boxes indicate the key outputs of the task, which include citations, publication texts, data files, and reports.
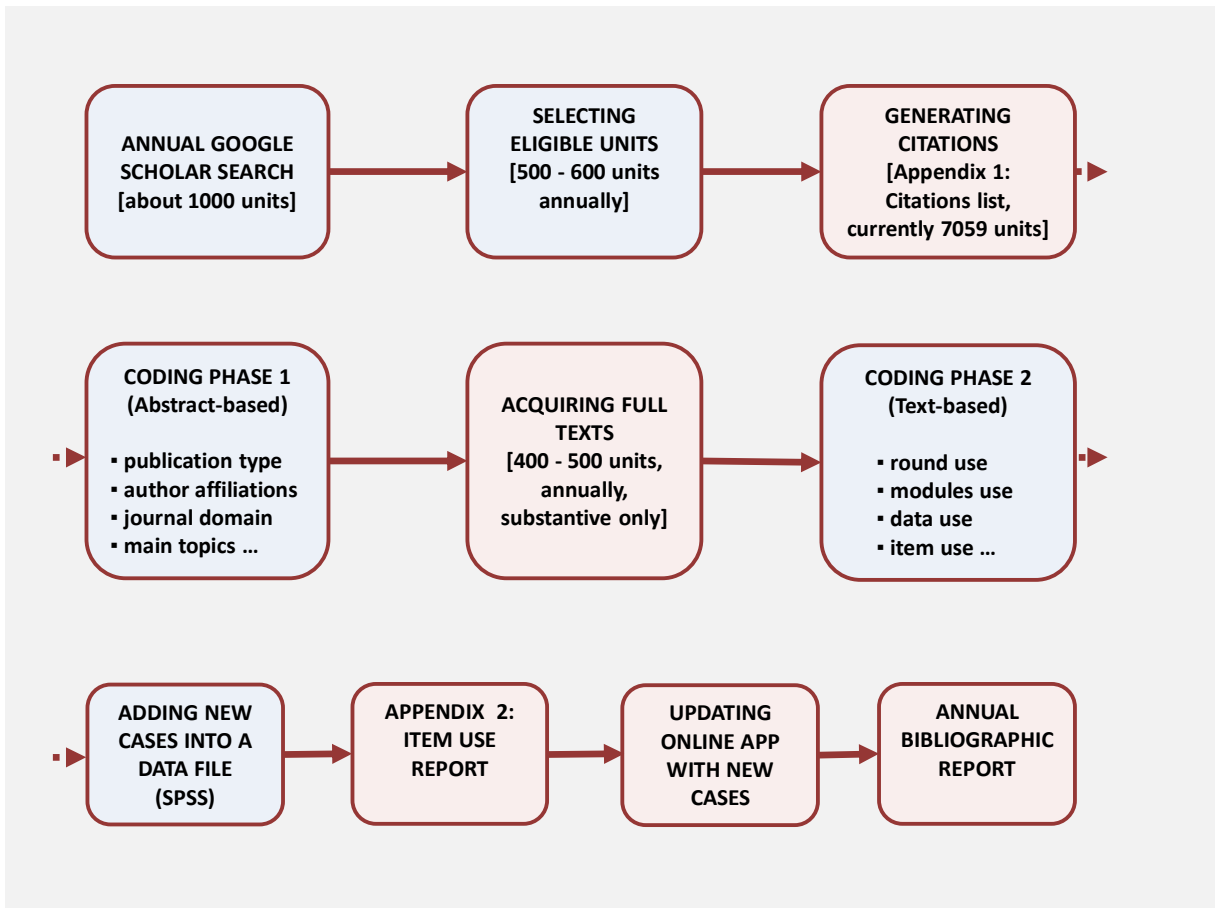

FIGURE 1: Overview of the annual lifecycle of the bibliographic exercise task

The 2024 ESS annual bibliographic report is organized into 12 sections, comprising both standard elements and special features.

Content of the report:

2 ESS USE ACROSS ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES

2.1 ESS BASED ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC PUBLISHING

The first section examines the volume of publications based on European Social Survey (ESS) data and the evolving trends in research studies and other materials utilizing ESS data. The ESS is a **multi-purpose**, comparative survey conducted at regular intervals to support the monitoring and modelling of societal changes and to facilitate the study of specific sub-groups.

The ESS was designed to provide high-quality, longitudinal comparative data to a range of academic communities, supporting empirical analyses of societal phenomena across multiple scientific fields. The success of any scientific infrastructure's academic mission is best reflected in the **volume and breadth** of academic publications it generates, making this a key performance indicator for European Research Infrastructures (ERICs).

Results:

- The **total number** of English-language ESS-based publications, termed "international publications," has reached 7,060, as identified through Google Scholar. This pool continues to expand, with approximately 500 new publications added each year.

- Figure 2 illustrates the **longitudinal trend** in ESS-based publications by year. It should be noted that data for the latest publication year (2023) is currently incomplete. Approximately 10% of journal articles from this year will be captured in searches conducted next year, due to the time lag between early online publication and final print release.

- There appears to be a **temporary decline** in publication numbers following the peak in 2021. Several factors may contribute to this trend, including a decrease after the surge of COVID-19-related publications, delays in publishing Round 10 (R10) data, the aging of key ESS sociological modules—such as Family, Wellbeing, and Immigration—and potential limitations in Google Scholar's detection.

- The predominance of **journal articles** is largely due to their status as the most prestigious form of academic output and their accessibility in publication searches. However, documenting books, chapters, and student theses also provides valuable insights for diverse user groups. Similarly, working papers, conference papers, and reports—often categorized as "grey literature," produced outside traditional academic channels—offer essential feedback. These types of publications may gain further importance, particularly in light of ongoing ESFRI evaluations of Landmarks, which emphasize the value of diverse publication forms (ESFRI 2018).
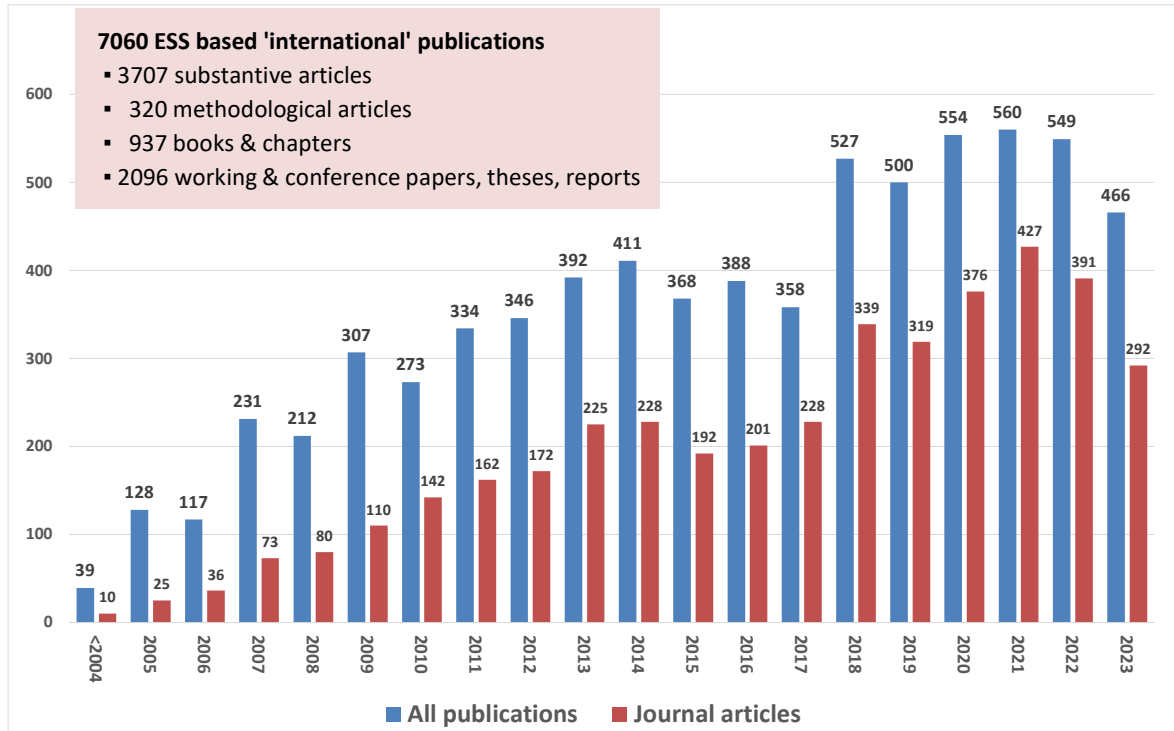
7060 ESS based 'international' publications
- 3707 substantive articles
- 320 methodological articles
- 937 books & chapters
- 2096 working & conference papers, theses, reports

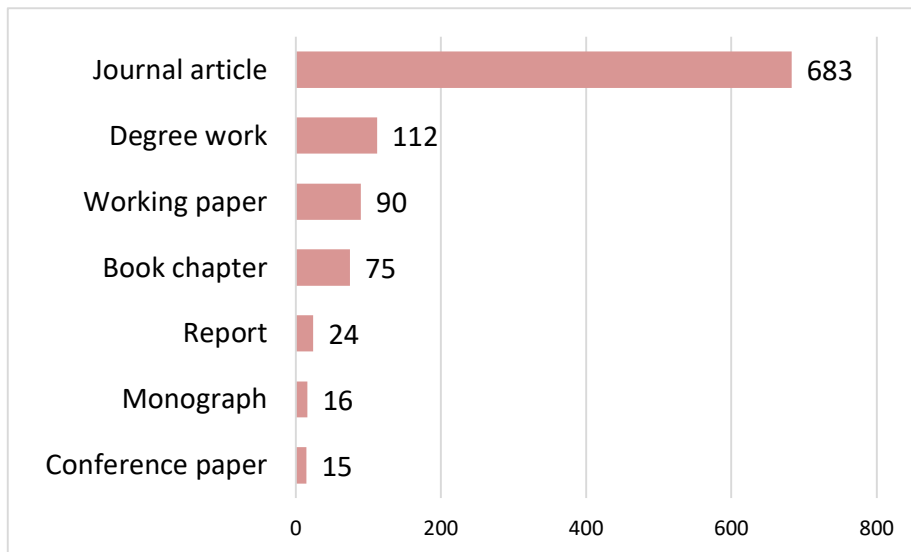**FIGURE 2:** Longitudinal trend of ESS English-language publications by publication year (N=7,060)

FIGURE 3: Distribution of ESS English-language publications by category, 2022-2023 (N=1,015)

- Figure 3 shows the distribution of ESS English-language publications for the latest **2022-2023 period.** It highlights both the strengths and limitations of the current bibliographic monitoring design in terms of accessibility. While coverage of journal articles is excellent through university library IP, the only other categories with satisfactory coverage are working papers and reports, as these are typically available as open-access publications. In contrast, very few books and book chapters are accessible, resulting in an **incomplete picture** of their actual number within ESS publications. Although more theses are becoming available, universities have varying policies regarding the (open) online publication of degree works, leading to underreporting in this category as well. The category of conference papers is likely

the most underestimated, as only those with full texts are included, which is the only reliable way to verify the use of ESS data.

• Given the **accessibility challenges** associated with most non-journal types of publications, it is reasonable to assume that the **actual number** of ESS-based English-language publications is considerably higher, particularly in the categories of books, chapters, and theses. Additionally, there exists a broader body of publications in **national languages** that are not included in this report. However, some of these are captured through the self-completion feature of the new ESS online bibliography, which includes approximately one-fifth of publications in non-English languages.

Key takeaways:

• **Growth and volume of ESS-based publications:** Despite a temporary post-2021 decline, publication numbers indicate a sustained interest in ESS data across disciplines.

• **Importance of publication type diversity:** While journal articles dominate ESS-based research outputs, tracking other forms of publications is essential for a comprehensive assessing of ESS research impact.

2.2   DISCIPLINARY PROFILE OF ESS ACADEMIC USERS

The ESS, as a pan-European survey infrastructure, provides data across a wide range of academic fields and serves as a **platform for international research teams** investigating specialized topics. The Blueprint outlines the ESS's goal to serve a diverse clientele within social science disciplines, including political science, sociology, social psychology, mass communication, economics, modern social history, and social anthropology (ESF 1998). This sub-section highlights the various ways in which ESS data is utilized across these disciplines and research communities, using journal disciplinary fields as a proxy measure.

Results:

• The overall structure of **user groups** (Figure 4) is influenced by various contextual factors, including the size of European and global academic communities, as well as the content of the ESS questionnaire and its relevance across diverse research fields. ESS-based analyses are most commonly found in **six academic disciplines**, with sociology (33.1%), political science (24.6%), and economics (13.7%) being the most prominent. These are followed by contributions in health & medicine (6.4%), psychology (5.6%), and methods (5.5%). These figures suggest that the primary academic audiences targeted by the ESS creators during the questionnaire design phase have been successfully engaged.

• The ESS's adaptable structure enables it to **continually expand** into new, specialized academic domains, enhancing its relevance and impact across diverse research communities. The series of rotating modules has allowed the ESS to extend its reach

into specialized fields such as criminology, medicine, environmental studies, and digital sociology.
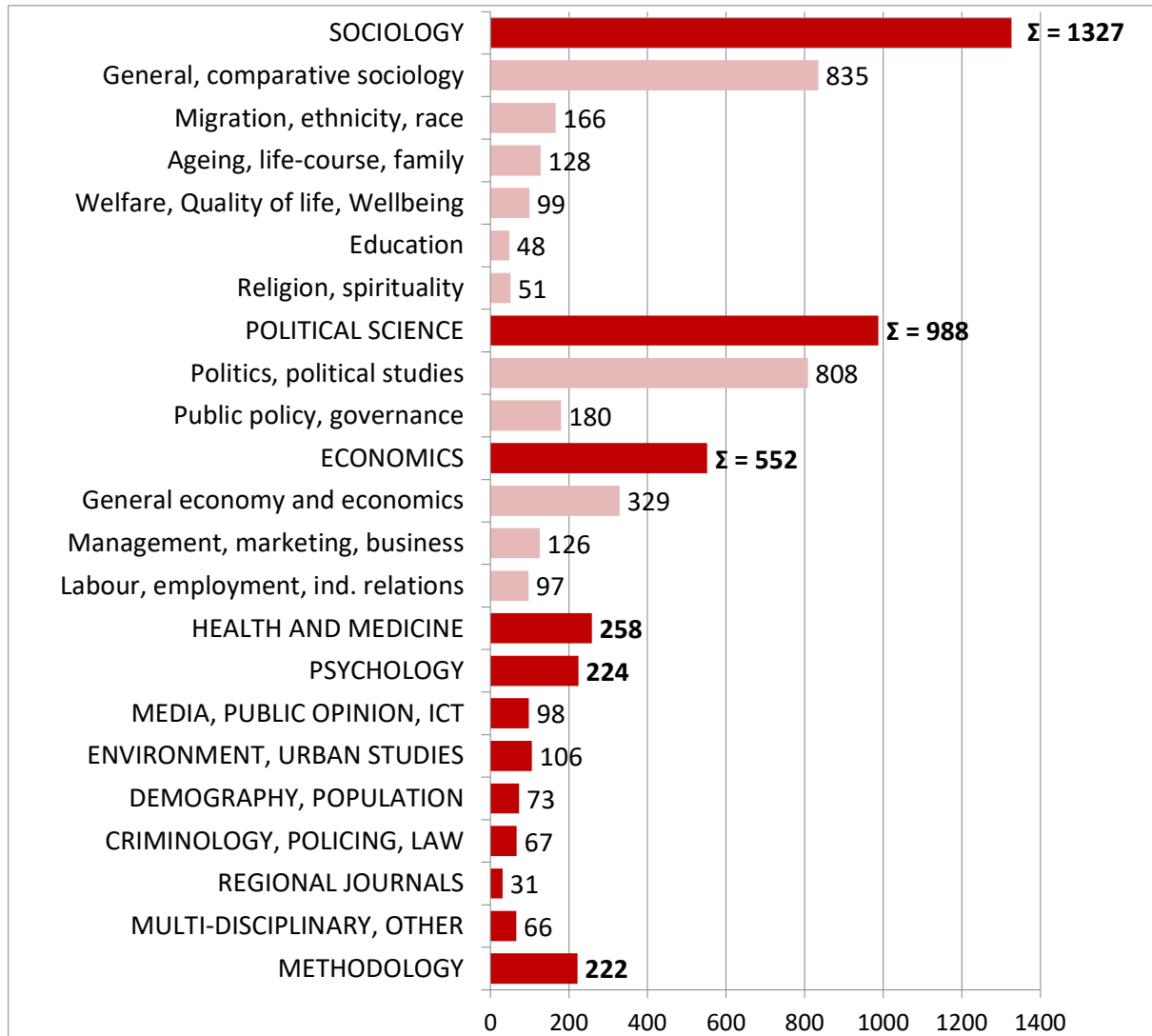

Field	Value
SOCIOLOGY	Σ = 1327
General, comparative sociology	835
Migration, ethnicity, race	166
Ageing, life-course, family	128
Welfare, Quality of life, Wellbeing	99
Education	48
Religion, spirituality	51
POLITICAL SCIENCE	Σ = 988
Politics, political studies	808
Public policy, governance	180
ECONOMICS	Σ = 552
General economy and economics	329
Management, marketing, business	126
Labour, employment, ind. relations	97
HEALTH AND MEDICINE	258
PSYCHOLOGY	224
MEDIA, PUBLIC OPINION, ICT	98
ENVIRONMENT, URBAN STUDIES	106
DEMOGRAPHY, POPULATION	73
CRIMINOLOGY, POLICING, LAW	67
REGIONAL JOURNALS	31
MULTI-DISCIPLINARY, OTHER	66
METHODOLOGY	222

FIGURE 4: ESS outreach across academic fields from 2003 to 2023, categorized by journal type (N=4,012)

- Figure 5 illustrates the **20-year trend in journal types** across selected fields, revealing notable shifts. The most significant change in the latter period is the increase in the share of political science journals, alongside a relative decrease in sociology journals. Economics journals have remained relatively stable. Additionally, there has been a decrease in publications in media and ICT journals, contrasted by an increase in environmental journals. These shifts can be at least partially attributed to the successive ESS modules, which often align more closely with specific fields.
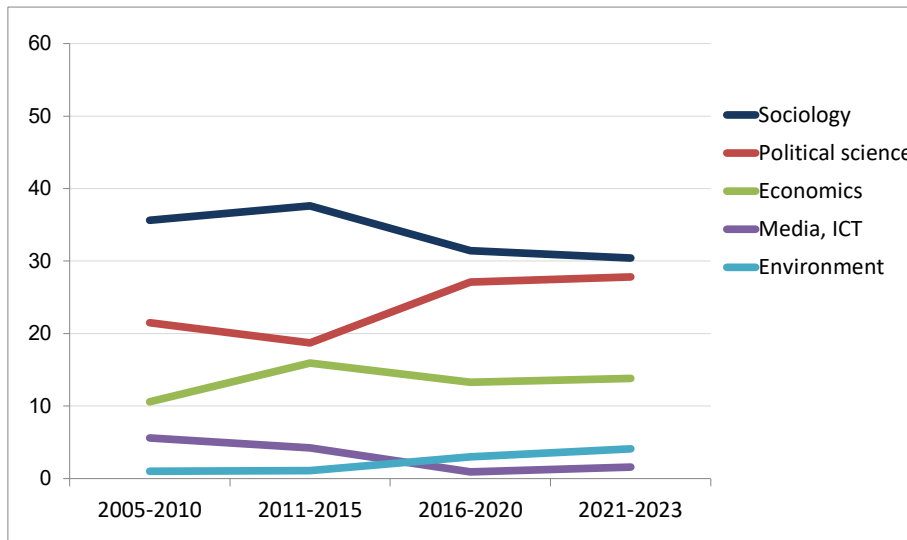
FIGURE 5: 20-year trend in the share of journal types across selected fields (N=4,012)

Key takeaways:

• **Broad disciplinary reach**: The ESS supports a wide range of academic fields, effectively engaging core social science disciplines which represent the majority of ESS-based analyses.

• **Adaptability and expansion into new domains**: The ESS's flexible questionnaire design allow it to continually adapt, reaching into specialized and emerging fields across a growing range of academic domains and research communities.

3   RESEARCH TOPICS AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES

As a multi-purpose comparative survey, the ESS does not serve a single primary application but rather encompasses a wide range of topics and theoretical approaches. Rather than advancing a specific model, multi-purpose studies like the ESS allow for the exploration of numerous essential social processes (Hakim, 1982). Designed to serve the **collective interests** of the academic community, surveys such as the ESS must be mindful of the diverse interests and developments within the field (Kim et al., 2006). The ESS core questionnaire was crafted to be relevant across various thematic domains, while rotating modules function as specialized tools to address research gaps in specific areas and to encourage ESS use in emerging fields of study.

This section outlines the range of topics, research areas, and theoretical frameworks adopted by scholars using the European Social Survey. It offers insights into the breadth and depth of research areas explored with ESS data, the **diverse theoretical perspectives** through which scholars analyze social phenomena, and the contributions of ESS data to advancing knowledge across academic communities. The structure of topics covered in ESS publications reflects the content of the ESS questionnaire, the size of ESS academic user groups, and areas where key societal challenges are emerging.

Results:

- Table 1 provides an overview of the most **frequently researched topics** by authors using ESS data. Of the 7,060 publications, 88.9% (6,278) are substantive studies, while 11.1% (792) are methodological. Given the inclusion of numerous popular political science concepts and indicators in the ESS core module, it is unsurprising that politics remains the most explored subject in ESS-based academic literature. **Political topics** appear in 24.0% (1,695) of ESS publications (with each publication coded for up to two topics). Within politics, the most frequently referenced subjects include political parties, political trust, political elites, political culture, political responsiveness, and political efficacy. Recent years have witnessed a significant rise in studies examining (right-wing) political populism and the factors driving its support. These topics are widely explored by authors across all European regions, as shown later in the report.

TABLE 1: Number of ESS publications by topic (up to two topics coded per publication, 2003-2023, N=7,060)

RESEARCH TOPIC	N	%
Politics, democratic system, political participation, political parties, populism, LR placement	1695	24.0
Immigration issues, ethnic diversity, ethnic discrimination	1012	14.3
Survey methods	842	11.9
Welfare stare, welfare attitudes, welfare chauvinism	750	10.6
Paid work, **labour market**, industrial relations, trade unions	665	9.4
Economy, financial crisis, economic values, consumerism	617	8.7
Social inequalities, social class, social mobility	574	8.1
Subjective well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, quality of life	573	8.1
Health, subjective health, health system	526	7.5
Social capital, **trust**, social networks	513	7.3
Culture, **values**	500	7.1
Age groups, ageism, the elderly, the young	386	5.5
Family, family roles, norms, work-life balance, family planning	378	5.4
Gender issues, gender roles	346	4.9
Education, skills, educational inequalities	290	4.1
Religion, religiosity, religious change	288	4.1
Crime, criminal justice, corruption	284	4.0
Environment, climate change	277	3.9
Media, internet, ICT	209	3.0
Citizenship, volunteering	204	2.9
Nation, **national identity**	192	2.7
Europe, European Union, Euroscepticism	190	2.7
Post-socialism, transition	124	1.8

- The second most explored subject is **immigration,** a pressing social issue for European countries and a prominent topic in comparative survey research using ESS datasets. This prominence can be attributed to factors such as larger sample sizes, frequent measurements, and an abundance of relevant indicators. Many researchers use ESS data to test and refine theories on **inter-group relations**, often drawing from

psychological research, including intergroup contact theory, social distance theory, and group threat theory. Numerous studies also examine immigrant integration into host societies, exploring theories such as (segmented) assimilation and acculturation. Additionally, multiculturalism—a non-assimilative approach to cultural diversity—is widely analyzed, particularly in relation to national identity. Overall, immigration-related topics are represented in 14.3% (1,012) of ESS publications.
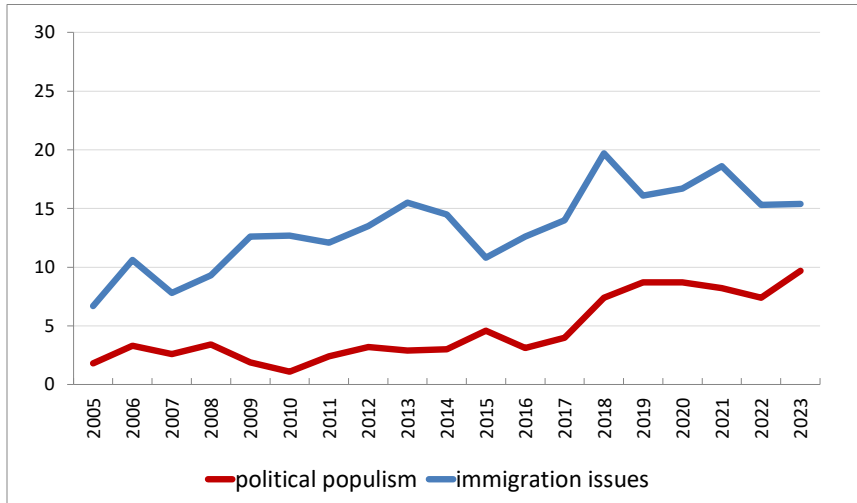

FIGURE 6: Trend in the share of publications on populism and immigration topics (N=7,060)

- Figure 6 illustrates the share of publications addressing **populism and immigration** topics over 18 years of publication. Both topics show a growing trend, driven by contextual factors such as the 2015 immigration crisis, as well as events like Brexit, the rise of Trump, and the surge of other populist movements around the same period. The ESS core questionnaire includes robust sets of indicators for both themes, with a rotating module specifically focused on immigration. Given the ongoing political and policy relevance of both issues, the high share of publications addressing these topics is likely to persist for the foreseeable future.
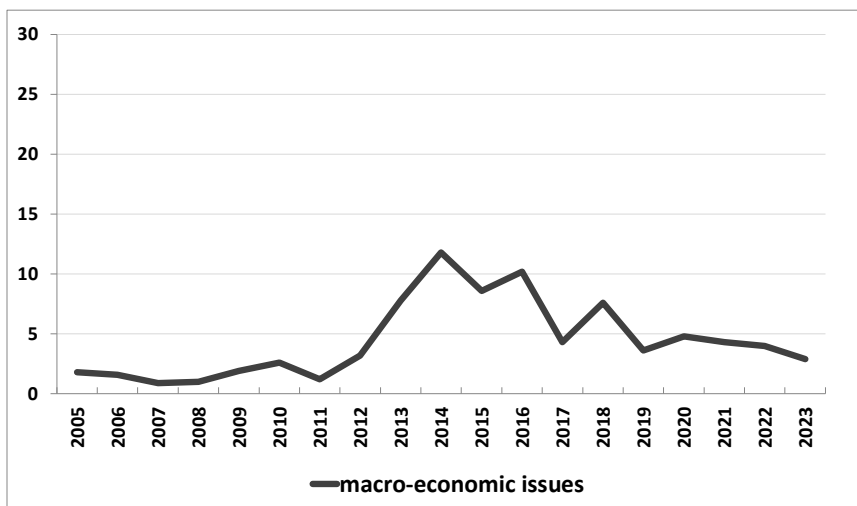

FIGURE 7: Trend in the share of publications addressing macro-economic issues (N=7,060)

- Another highly contextual topic is the **macro-economic situation**, particularly the effects of economic recession (Figure 7). Publications addressing this issue began to surge around 2012, with a 3- to 5-year delay following the onset of the 2008 economic

crisis. The presence of this topic grew significantly and remained strong for nearly a decade. Both the populism and economic crisis surges highlight how the ESS questionnaire incorporates relevant concepts that become prominent when needed. Notably, no specific items were added to the questionnaire for these topics.

- **Family research** is primarily associated with the Family & Work modules, with a strong focus on work-life balance. This research builds on a longstanding tradition of examining the challenges of managing paid work alongside family and other life responsibilities. In this context, closely related concepts such as gender roles, gender inequality, and gender discrimination are explored to investigate gender-based disparities, particularly in education, paid employment, and household duties. This area of research is likely to expand further with the introduction of the new module on gender inequalities in Round 10. **Demographic issues** also feature prominently, with particular attention to fertility and fertility decisions, often explored through the life course perspective. Additionally, the process of aging and its societal implications—such as its effects on demographic structure, the workforce, party membership, the aging electorate, and welfare sustainability—are examined within the framework of demographic transition. Together, these topics appear in about 15% of ESS publications.

- ESS-based studies on **well-being and health** often examine determinants such as age, illness, immigration status, peer comparisons, welfare regimes, social capital and networks, trust levels, economic resources, and other relevant factors. A key concept explored in the well-being domain is the socially produced inequalities in health. Together, well-being and health-related topics are addressed in approximately 15% of ESS publications. In particular, authors from *southern Europe* often explore the impact of macro-economic issues on well-being, as these countries were among the hardest hit by the 2008 economic downturn (Figure 8).
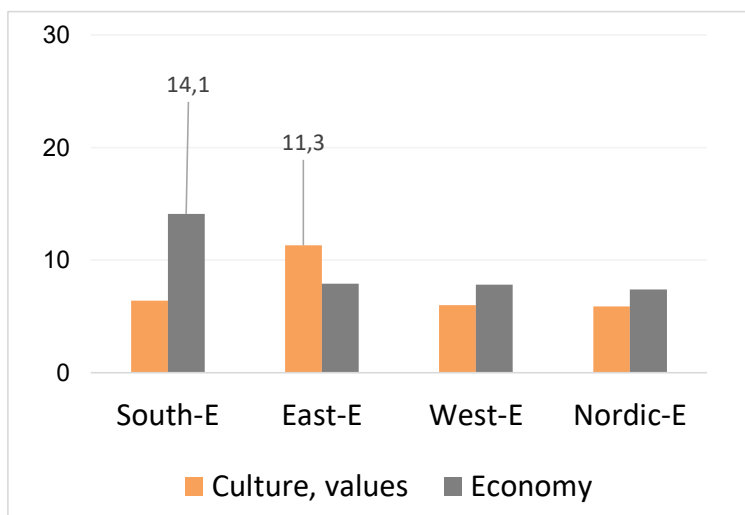

FIGURE 8: Regional popularity of *culture* and *economy* topics (N=7,060)

- **Culture and values** represent another significant area of exploration within ESS research. Analysts often investigate the mechanisms of social norms across various disciplines, including gender and family norms, fertility norms, volunteering norms, norms of political engagement, work and employment norms, tax morale, as well as

the transmission of norms, informal control, peer pressure, and other related aspects. Cultural change is a major focus within this domain, addressing topics such as individualization and post-materialism theory. Additionally, **religion**—often studied within the framework of cultural change—is predominantly explored through secularization theory. This theory suggests that as societies modernize, religious authority diminishes across all aspects of social life and governance. Together, culture and values-related topics are explored in approximately 11% of ESS publications and are particularly popular among *east European* authors (Figure 8).

- Another prominent topic in ESS publications is **welfare**, which appears in approximately 11% of them. Within the realm of public policies, the most explored concept is Esping-Andersen's theory of welfare regimes. This theory suggests that welfare regimes function as socializing forces that reproduce the demand for redistribution, thus legitimizing them. Another frequently discussed concept is **welfare chauvinism**, which refers to the belief that immigrants are "free-riders" who receive social benefits without contributing adequately through taxes. Publications addressing these topics are often grounded in the Welfare module of the ESS. This topic is particularly prevalent among authors affiliated with *northern European* countries, a region known for its robust welfare state policies (Figure 9).
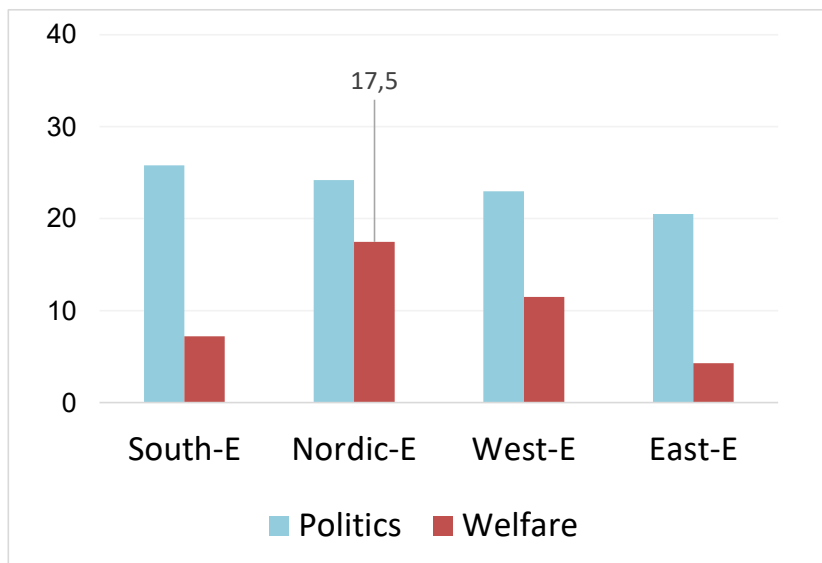

FIGURE 9: Regional popularity of politics and welfare topics (N=7,060)

- A further popular area of research within ESS is **citizenship and social capital**. Scholars in this field examine the relationship between generalized trust and various aspects of liberal democracy, such as the functioning of democratic institutions, increased citizen participation, improved performance in various policy areas, social cohesion, and overall societal well-being. These topics are addressed in about 10% of ESS publications, although, as shown in Figure 10, they are currently in decline.

- One topic on the rise is **environmental issues.** The cross-time dynamics of these two topics are less defined by sudden shifts in the societal context and more influenced by changes in scientific interest and the introduction of new content into the ESS questionnaire. Social trust was a heavily explored topic in the first decade, largely due to the citizenship module, which later became outdated. In contrast, environmental

issues were not adequately covered until the introduction of the 2016 climate change module.
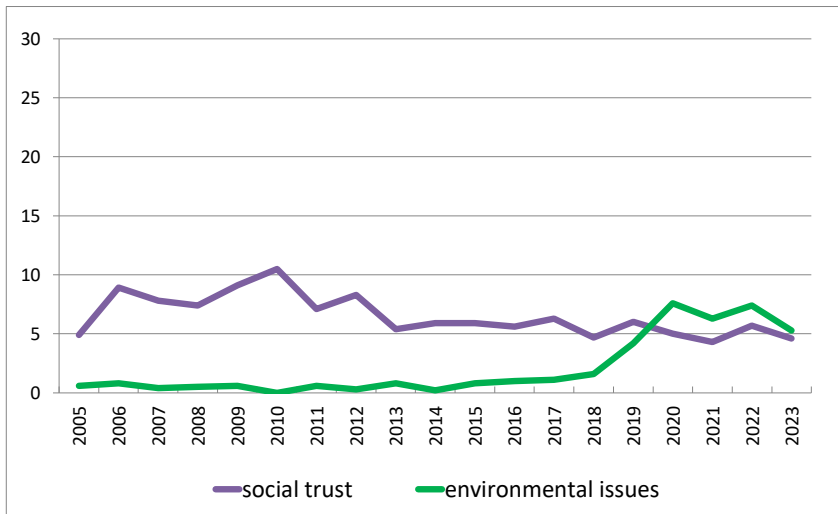

FIGURE 10: Trend in the share of publications addressing social trust and environmental topics (N=7060)

- The area of **paid work** is another topic featured in about 10% of ESS publications. The most significant concept is the theory of human capital, which conceptualizes the role of education at both the individual and societal levels. Another frequently explored concept within industrial relations is union membership, which serves as a collective bargaining mechanism that strengthens employees' bargaining power. Researchers investigate both the macro and micro determinants of union membership in their studies.

- **Social inequality** is also a frequently explored topic, focusing on the unequal distribution of income or wealth, often interpreted through either functionalist or conflict perspectives. The most widely studied concept in this area is social class, with other key theoretical perspectives including social exclusion, social marginalization, and social mobility. These themes are addressed in approximately 8.0% of ESS publications.

Key takeaways:

- **Politics and immigration as central topics:** Politics remains the most explored subject in ESS research, with a significant rise in studies on right-wing populism. This research is prominent across all European regions.

- **Impact of economic crisis:** Publications on macro-economic issues, particularly the effects of economic recession, surged after the 2008 financial crisis. This demonstrates how the ESS questionnaire incorporates relevant topics in response to societal challenges.

- **Rise of environmental issues**: Environmental topics have gained prominence in recent years, following the inclusion of climate change content in the ESS questionnaire.

- **Regional variations in research focus**: Topics such as political populism, immigration, welfare, well-being, and health-related issues are explored differently across European regions, reflecting the unique socio-political contexts of each area.

4   ESS POLICY IMPACT

As demonstrated by the trends in publications on topics such as the economic situation and immigration, researchers often **respond to societal events**, observing their effects, explaining them, and offering policy recommendations. Informing policy is not only a central goal of ESS but also an important function of large-scale social surveys in general. While these surveys remain under academic control, those funded by national research councils, like the ESS, are expected to serve dual purposes: addressing both the theoretical and disciplinary interests of academic researchers, and providing valuable insights for policy-making, offering broader societal benefits (Hakim, 1982). This section explores how ESS data has been utilized to **inform policy** decisions, as indicated by bibliographic trends and the growing number of publications aimed at policy-related issues.

Results:

- The first approach involves conducting a **keyword search** across 3,902 publications for which full texts were acquired and made searchable. By examining the frequency of the terms *policy* or *policies* in these publications, this method measures the "intensity" of authors' policy orientation. References to policies are found in 80.2% of ESS publications, with an average of 12 occurrences per publication.
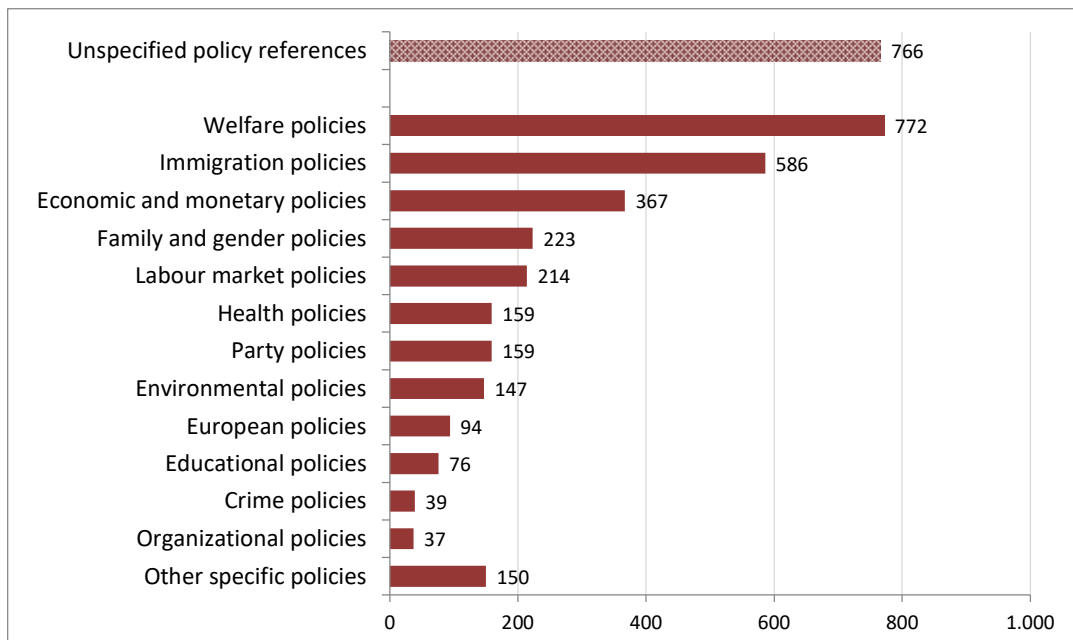

FIGURE 11: Domain structure of policy references in ESS-based publications, 2003–2023 (N=3,902, sum of two possible codes)

- In addition to counting the frequency of policy-related keywords, the specific **policy domains** addressed in the publications are also examined. The majority of policy references focus on specific policy domains (Figure 11). Policy areas with a consistently

strong presence in ESS publications include welfare and immigration, with environmental policy also gaining traction, particularly due to the policy-oriented Climate Change module. Other areas with substantial policy focus include macroeconomics and the labour market, especially during periods of global crisis—a trend that could intensify following the pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

- The use of keywords varies substantially across **topics.** As shown in Figure 12, authors addressing welfare, environmental issues, European relations, or immigration make 3-4 times more policy references compared to those discussing areas less directly linked to state intervention or regulation. The chart thus highlights areas where ESS-based, policy-relevant findings are most prevalent, potentially inviting meta-analytical studies to consolidate and assess these findings.
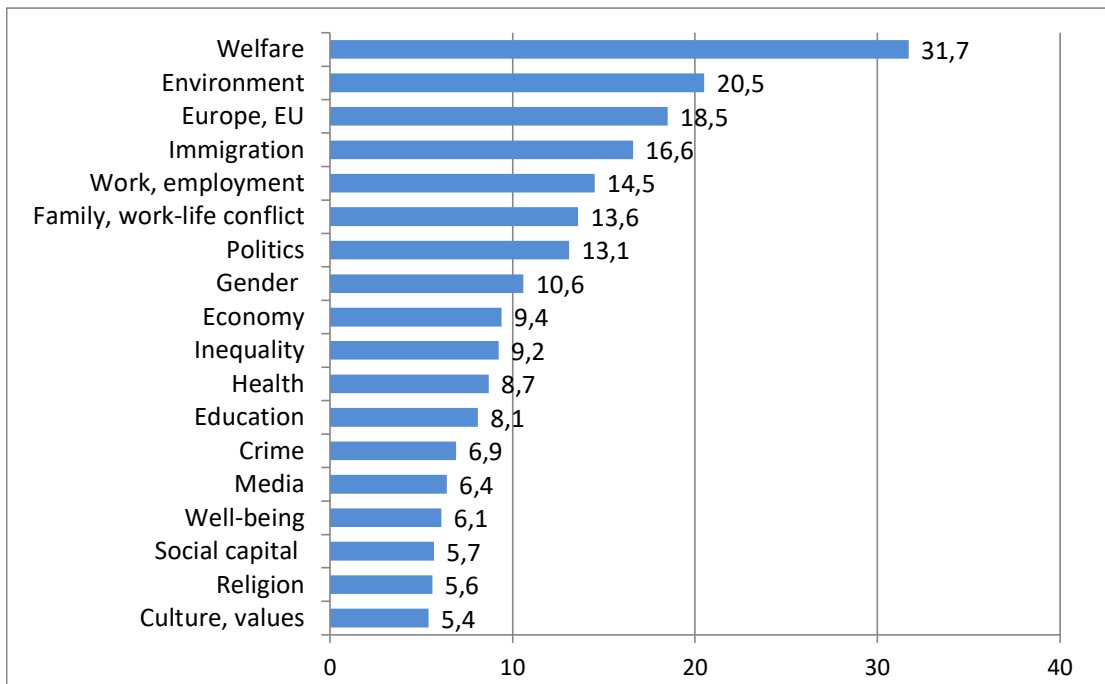

FIGURE 12: Average number of policy references in texts discussing different topics, 2003–2023 (N=3,902)

- Figure 13 shows the average number of policy references in publications using ESS data **over time**. Despite some fluctuations, there is a general trend toward an increasing number of policy references. This may reflect a growing tendency among academics to incorporate policy discussions in their research, a shift in the ESS questionnaire content toward more policy-oriented topics, or a combination of both. In any case, policy-relevant content in ESS-based research has been on the rise.
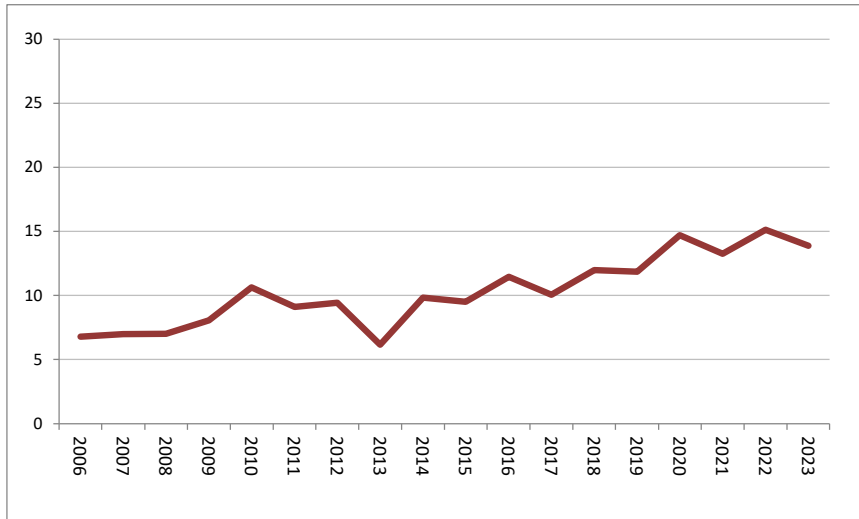
FIGURE 13: Average number of policy references in publications using ESS data, 2003–2023 (N=3,902)

Key takeaways:

• **Broad policy engagement across disciplines**: Welfare, immigration, labour market, family, and macroeconomic policies are the most frequently discussed policy areas, illustrating the survey's relevance to a wide array of public policy issues.

• **Growing policy relevance over time**: The number of policy references in ESS publications has gradually increased over the past two decades, likely reflecting both a shift in the ESS questionnaire to address more policy-relevant issues and a growing academic interest in contributing to policy discussions.

• **Emerging focus on new policy areas**: Recently, environmental policy has gained prominence within ESS-based research, largely due to the Climate Change module. This shift suggests that the ESS's adaptability to emerging societal issues

4.1. MAPPING THE USE OF ESS DATA IN POLICY AND RESEARCH REPORTS

In addition to the keyword analysis, this section employs a second method to triangulate the policy impact of the European Social Survey (ESS) through bibliographic data: the para-bibliographic analysis of reports as a specific publication category. Reports, often classified as "**grey literature**," play a crucial role in bridging academic insights and policy application. Unlike peer-reviewed journal articles, grey literature such as reports often circulates within government, non-governmental, and research organizations, where findings can directly inform decision-making processes.

Reports have gained increased recognition in the **evaluation frameworks** of European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC) infrastructures, reflecting their growing influence in policy and research contexts. In light of this trend, this year's report takes a closer look at report-based publications using ESS data, offering a more detailed perspective on the policy impact of the ESS.

Results:

- The ESS bibliography currently contains 171 English-language reports. Key aspects of interest to the ESS Core scientific team include institutional affiliation, academic or policy orientation, methodological or substantive focus, and related characteristics. A total of **144 reports** were analysed, with ESS's own publications (such as findings booklets and toplines) and borderline cases between reports and other publication types excluded from the analysis.

- Figure 14 shows the distribution of reports categorized by the type of **commissioning institution**. Of the 144 reports, 102 (70.8%) were commissioned by institutions whose primary focus is research and innovation**.** The remaining 42 reports (29.2%) were commissioned by organizations involved in a diverse range of activities, including the promotion and development of employment, welfare, public policies, education, training, tolerance, societal development, humanitarianism, social justice, civil society, equality, social cohesion, human rights, democracy, culture and media, political cooperation, and fair elections, among others.
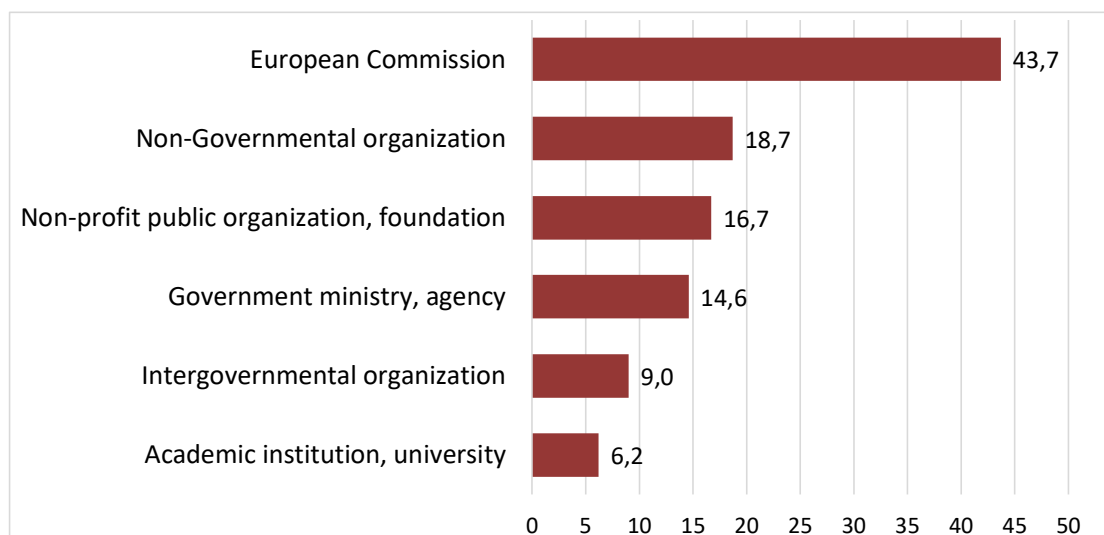

FIGURE 14: Distribution of reports by type of commissioning institution (N = 144)

- **European Commission (EC)**: The EC and its organizational network are key political entities informed by the research they commission. ESS data is utilized in numerous initiatives, departments, and projects across the EC. A bibliographic search of 'grey literature' identified **32 unique EC programs** and projects that have issued deliverables and reports containing ESS data (Box 1).

  This indicates that ESS is informing other scientific projects and fostering synergies. Multi-year funding programs are the primary mechanisms through which the European Commission supports research, technological development, and innovation across the European Union.

BOX 1: EC programmes and projects informed by ESS data

- XENOPHOB Cluster: Migrants, Ethnic Minorities and Social Exclusion/ Integration (FP5)
- CONNEX: Connecting Excellence in European Social Science (FP6)
- EPSARE: European Project on Safety Reps (FP6)
- EQUALSOC, Social Quality: A New Paradigm for Social Cohesion in Europe (FP6)
- ESSi: The European Social Survey Infrastructure (FP6)
- EUROSPHERE: Diversity and the European Public Sphere. Towards a Citizens' Europe (FP6)
- The IDEFICS/ I.Family study: Identification and prevention of Dietary and lifestyle-induced health EFfects In Children and infantS (FP6, FP7)
- CITISPYCE: Combating Inequalities through Innovative Social Practices of and for Young
  People in Cities across Europe (FP7)
- EUMARGINS: On the Margins of the European Community (FP7)
- FAMILY PLATFORM: The European Research Network on Family Policies and Family Support (FP7)
- GINI: Growing INequalities' Impacts (FP7)
- INSPIRES: Innovative Social Policies for Inclusive and Resilient Labour Markets in Europe (FP7)
- Irregular migration in times of global economic crisis - perceptions and realities in Europe, Africa, Latin-America and Asia (FP7)
- JUSTIS: Justice Indicators (FP7)
- REPRO: Reproductive decision-making in a macro-micro perspective (FP7)
- RISQ: Representativity Indicators for Survey Quality (FP7)
- STYLE: Strategic Transitions for Youth Labour in Europe (FP7)
- DARE: Data Access and Research Environment (H2020)
- DEMOS: Democracy in the Digital Age (H2020)
- DIALOGUES: Energy citizenship for a sustainable future (H2020)
- ENGAGE: Engaging Research in Social Sciences and Humanities (H2020)
- InGRID-2: Inclusive Growth Research Infrastructure Diffusion (H2020)
- OPPORTUNITIES: Opening up pathways to improve and enhance employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups in the EU (H2020)
  - QuantMig: Quantitative Approaches to Understanding Migration (H2020)
- REMINDER: Revisiting the European Migration and Refugee Crisis: A Critical Examination of Policy and Practice (H2020)
- SERISS: Structural Evolution of Research and Innovation Systems (H2020)
- SHARE ERIC: Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (ERIC RI)
- TAO: Third Age Online (AAL project)
- Parental Leave Policies and Social Sustainability (COST action)
- CARIM East: Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration (ENPI project)
- Employment and Social Innovation (EaSi programme)
- EU-US Immigration Systems study (EC-US research initiative)

- The review further identified the following unique **EC institutions** commissioning or issuing reports that contain ESS data (Box 2).

> **BOX 2: EC institutions informed by ESS data**
> - Directorate-General for Research and Innovation
> - European Commission's Joint Research Center (JRC)
> - Academic Network of European Disability Experts
> - The European Observatory on the Social Situation. Social Capital Network
> - Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union
> - Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (Socrates programme)
> - European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
> - European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia

- The next large group of ESS report-oriented data users consists of **non-governmental organizations** (NGOs). The search identified **18 unique** NGOs that issue reports containing ESS data, with some organizations publishing multiple reports (Box 3).

  The first six organizations are **think tanks** focusing on areas such as development, humanitarianism, social justice, economic and policy analysis, welfare, social issues, social innovation, and inclusion. The remaining twelve NGOs are dedicated to promoting civil society, human rights, democratic cooperation, innovation, social progress, understanding and awareness, and the voluntary sector, among other initiatives.

> **BOX 3: NON-governmental organizations informed by ESS data**
> - ODI, The Overseas Development Institute (global)
> - Bruegel think tank (Europe)
> - IPPR, Institute for Public Policy Research (UK)
> - Social Justice Ireland (Ireland)
> - NEF, The New Economics Foundation (UK)
> - Institute for public policy research (UK)
> - The Atlantic Social Lab (global)
> - CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation (global)
> - Fondation Roi Baudouin – Koning Boudewijnstichting (Belgium)
> - i-RED Institute for Rights, Equality & Diversity (Belgium)
> - The Estonian Cooperation Assembly (Estonia)
> - FES, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Germany)
> - Stiftung Mercator (Germany)
> - Open Society Foundations (Hungary)
> - fRDB, Fondazione Rodolfo DeBenedetti (Italy)
> - Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies (Slovenia)
> - The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research (USA)
> - WCVA, The Wales Council for Voluntary Action (Wales)

- The review identified several departments, agencies, and other bodies related to **national governments** that commissioned reports containing ESS data (Box 4).

BOX 4: Governmental organizations informed by ESS data

- Federal Science Policy Office (Belgium)
- BELSPO, The Belgian Science Policy Office
- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (Czech Republic)
- Estonian Research Council
- Statistics Norway
- Scottish Executive Social Research
- HSRC, Human Sciences Research Council (South Africa)
- SCP, The Netherlands Institute for Social Research
- ESRC, Economic and Social Research Council (UK)
- Department for Work and Pensions (UK)
- Ministry of Justice (UK)
- Department of Culture, Media and Sport (UK)
- Welsh Government, Social Research Division (Wales)
- NRC, The National Research Council (USA)

- The next category includes **intergovernmental organizations** commissioning research (partially) based on ESS data (Box 5).

BOX 5: Inter-governmental organizations informed by ESS data

- UNESCO, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (global)
- UNU, United Nations University (global)
- WHO Regional Office for Europe (global)
- OECD, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (global)
- IMF, The International Monetary Fund (global)
- The World Bank (global)
- Council of Europe (Europe)
- Nordic Council of Ministers (Nordic Europe)

- Finally, the search identified **non-profit and public** (research) organizations commissioning research (partially) based on ESS data (Box 6).

BOX 6: Non-profit and public (research) organizations informed by ESS data

- EFSQ, The European Foundation on Social Quality (Europe)
- European Centre for the Study of the Living Conditions and the Quality of Life (Austria)
- IZA Institute of Labor Economics (Germany)
- WZB, Berlin Social Science Center
- DIW, German Institute for Economic Research
- ESRI, Economic and Social Research Institute (Ireland)
- IHREC, The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
- The Equality Authority (Ireland)
- The Knesset Information Division (Israel)
- FFMS, Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos (Portugal)
- FORS, The Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (Switzerland)
- LSE, London School of Economics and Political Science (UK)
- The National Centre for Social Research (UK)
- IFS, Institute for Fiscal Studies (UK)
- UK electoral commission
- AHRC, Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK)

- **Academic institutions**, including universities, also play a significant role in publishing policy briefs and reports. ESS data has been found in publications from prominent institutions such as KU Leuven, Sciences Po, Utrecht University, Oxford University, St. Mary's University Twickenham, the University of Cambridge, and the European University Institute. It is likely that many more such publications exist in national languages, as policy content is often tailored to inform national policymakers across various countries.

- In total, **102 unique institutions** commissioning or funding reports containing ESS data were identified, indicating a significant presence of ESS data among policy-oriented users. While the picture is somewhat skewed towards the English-speaking world, it still provides valuable insights. It is also important to note that these reports often incorporate multiple data sources, with ESS being one component of the broader policy data ecosystem.
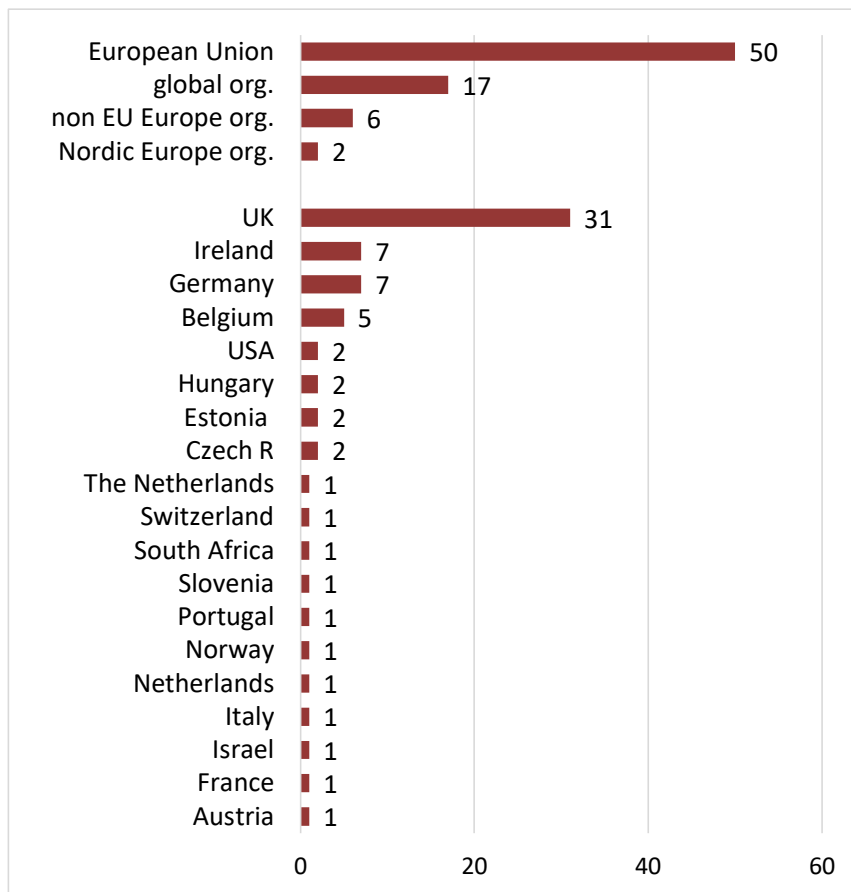
FIGURE 15: Geographic location of report commissioning institution (N = 144)

- Figure 15 shows the geographic distribution of report-commissioning institutions. **Supranational institutions** commissioned 75 reports, or 52% of the total, with the European Union being the most prominent, accounting for approximately 35% of all reports, primarily due to its research programs. An additional 25 reports, or 17%, were commissioned by non-EU European, global, or regional institutions.

  Institutions from **individual countries** commissioned the remaining 69 reports, with the United Kingdom leading at 31 reports, followed by Ireland, Germany, and Belgium.

While institutions from Eastern European countries commissioned only 5 reports and those from Southern Europe just 2, it is important to consider that many reports may exist in national languages.

- When examining the **topics and issues** addressed in the reports, it is important to note that mapping English-language reports may introduce a bias, particularly towards policy issues in supranational organizations and Western European countries. In terms of broad themes, the two most prevalent topics addressed in the reports are **migration and inequality,** which together represent about 37% of the total (Figure 16). These areas—migration and integration, as well as addressing inequalities across various social domains and groups—are clearly key policy concerns in Europe.

In response to the rise of **political radicalism**, another significant group of topics focuses on political participation, active citizenship, and populism, which make up about 20% of the reports. Other frequent topics include areas that are heavily influenced by policy intervention, such as well-being, the labour market, and population trends. Additionally, there is a separate category of reports related to the development of research methods, an area where ESS also contributes significantly.
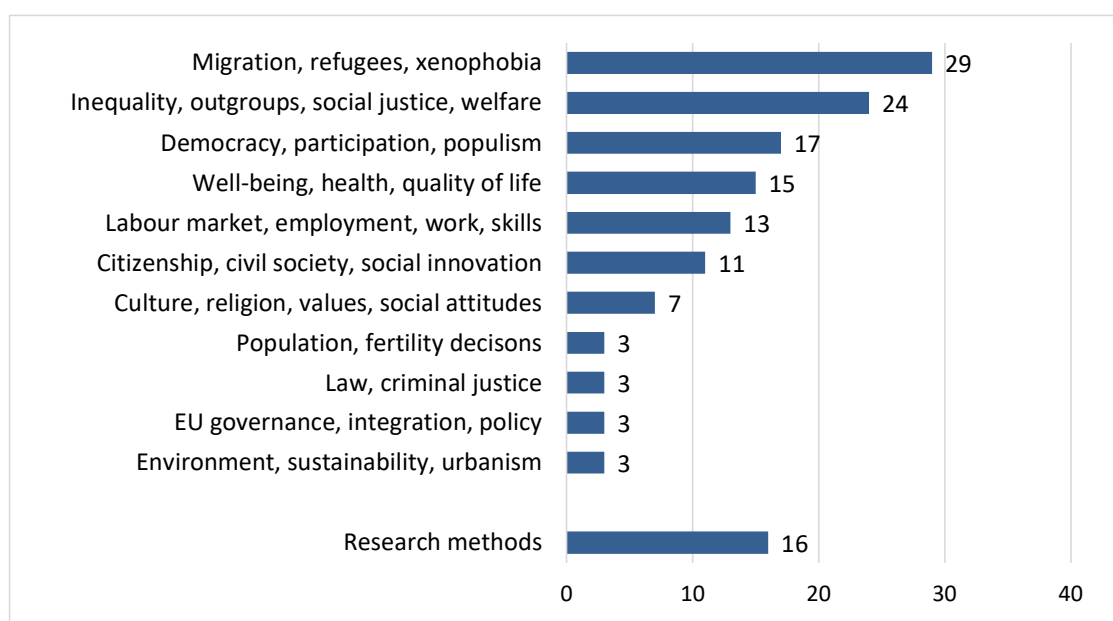

FIGURE 16: The distribution of topics across reports (N=144)

Key takeaways:

- **Broad use of ESS data across institutions**: The review highlights that ESS data is utilized by a wide range of institutions, signalling the broad impact ESS has across various sectors and its integration into a wide array of policy-related research.

- **Geographic and institutional distribution:** The majority of ESS-informed reports come from supranational institutions (52%), with the European Union being the leading source due to its research programs. National institutions from countries like the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, and Belgium dominate the country-level reports.

- **Key policy themes in ESS reports**: Migration and inequality are the two most prevalent themes across the reports, reflecting Europe's ongoing focus on immigration issues and social inequalities. In addition, political participation, active citizenship, and populism are significant topics, especially in light of political radicalization in recent years.

5   FINDINGS PRODUCTION ACROSS ESS COUNTRIES

This section explores the **geographical distribution of authors** contributing to research findings based on European Social Survey (ESS) data, providing insights into the global diversity and reach of ESS-based scholarship. By examining the regions and countries represented in ESS-related studies, this analysis highlights both the European foundation of ESS and its expanding role in global social science research.

The volume of findings produced across ESS countries is especially relevant for national funders (ESS General Assembly) and national teams (National Coordinators Forum). The primary indicator here is the count of academic publications co-authored within individual countries. While ESS bibliographic monitoring focuses exclusively on English-language publications—capturing only a segment of the full research output—this scope is nonetheless significant. English-language publications, especially journal articles, hold a premium status in academic evaluations and provide a valuable metric for assessing ESS's scholarly impact across borders. This approach, despite its limitations, thus offers a meaningful view into the influence and reach of ESS-based research within the international academic community.

Results:

- The data in Table 1 reveals that around 80% of ESS international publications are co-authored by researchers from 10 advanced **Western European** countries and the USA. This trend mirrors findings in the broader academic landscape, where scientific output is disproportionately generated by high-Human Development Index (HDI) nations. For example, Zanotto et al. (2016) found that just 24 high-HDI countries produce 83.9% of global research output, whereas 153 countries with lower HDI levels contribute a mere 1.9%, underscoring regional imbalance in research capacity.

- **Eastern European** scholars represent a notable share of ESS authorship, contributing 869 publications, or 13.1% of the total. Poland leads this group, with nearly 200 publications. A rise of authorships from Eastern Europe reflects both the growing number of Eastern European countries in the ESS ERIC and an increased focus among local analysts on regional issues.

- As ESS expands its **global connections**, the landscape of ESS authorships is likely to evolve over the next decade, with an anticipated rise in contributions from non-European regions. The potential integration of an EVS module would further support this diversification by fostering more international collaboration, particularly given the significant overlap with the World Values Survey (WVS). This alignment could attract a

broader range of researchers worldwide, enhancing both the diversity and cross-national relevance of ESS findings.

TABLE 2: Number of ESS international publications (co)authored by at least one author affiliated with a country, 2003-2023 (N=7,060)

Country of affiliation	N	Country of affiliation	N	Country of affiliation	N
UK	1036	France	168	Turkey	46
Germany	937	Ireland	152	Lithuania	46
USA	777	Israel	133	Bulgaria	47
Netherlands	672	Hungary	138	Slovakia	34
Spain	463	Austria	121	Ukraine	23
Italy	449	Estonia	100	Serbia	26
Belgium	416	Greece	103	Croatia	22
Sweden	407	Canada	98	Cyprus	19
Switzerland	274	Russia	87	Iceland	14
Norway	261	Czech republic	85	Latvia	10
Poland	217	Slovenia	60	Albania	4
Portugal	205	Australia	63	Kosovo	2
Denmark	197	Luxembourg	59	Montenegro	2
Finland	191	Romania	51		

- The unit of Table 2 is an ESS publication; for example, if five authors from a particular country co-authored a publication, it is counted as one publication unit for that country. By considering authors/authorships as units, we gain an additional perspective on ESS writers across regions. The more than 7,000 ESS publications were authored by over **12,500 authors** (including repeat authorships). This number was derived by coding the first five authors, meaning the total is somewhat underestimated.

- Figure 17 shows the distribution of **ESS authorships across world regions** in 7,060 ESS publications. Unsurprisingly, the largest shares come from European regions, where most ESS member countries are located. Western Europe, home to some of the largest social science research communities, is traditionally the strongest group. Among non-European regions, North America contributes a significant number of authors, followed by the Middle East, primarily due to the ESS member countries of Israel and Turkey. Asian authors are also relatively numerous.
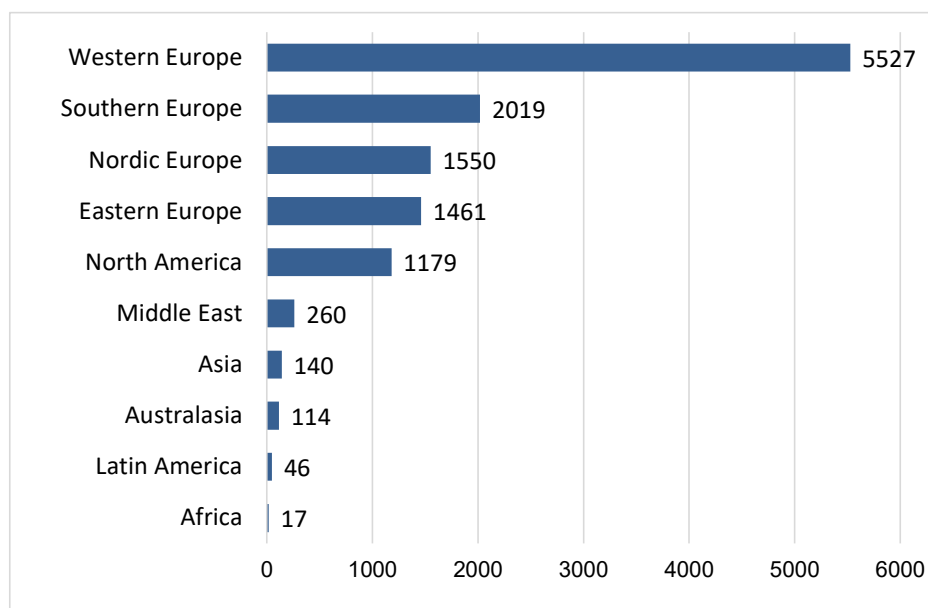
FIGURE 17: Regional origin of ESS authorships (N=7060 publications)

Key takeaways:

• **Leveraging strong western European authorships for broader impact:** The dominant presence of Western European authors in ESS publications underscores the strength of well-established research communities and their ability to drive high-quality, impactful ESS-based studies. Moreover, the expertise and resources in Western Europe can foster collaborations that enhance the capacity of researchers in other regions.

• **Eastern European growth and regional expertise**: The increasing involvement of Eastern European reflects the growing regional capacity and expertise and will contribute to promoting regional perspectives in the broader European and global academic discourse.

6 UTILIZATION OF COUNTRY DATA

This section explores the factors that influence the use of **data from individual countries** within research and analysis conducted using European Social Survey (ESS) data. It examines key aspects such as the availability and reliability of country-specific data, the relevance of this data to specific research objectives, and the methodological challenges associated with incorporating such data.

As some scholars have pointed out, **unequal representation** of countries in international surveys can limit the generalizability of research findings and introduce bias by omitting atypical cases, particularly those from less-developed (low-income) and non-Western countries (Kołczyńska, 2014). While some countries are extensively researched, others have limited survey data, which skews our understanding toward more prosperous regions with higher quality of life (Goerres et al., 2019).

Thus, using ESS data as the analytical foundation allows for an examination of how well each country is represented in research, highlighting disparities in data availability and the resulting potential gaps in our understanding of global trends. The analytical potential within national academic communities is often constrained by their size and overall analytical capacity. In contrast, the broader international academic community is better positioned to fully harness the value of these datasets once they are integrated into the ESS cumulative data file.

Results:

• Table 3 provides an overview of the **proportions of national data inclusion** for all countries that participated in at least one ESS round. The inclusion rates vary significantly, with Germany at 75% and North Macedonia at less than 1%. This substantial gap underscores the far greater extent to which countries like Germany are researched compared to countries like Kosovo or Romania.

TABLE 3: Proportions of ESS international publications including country data (N=4746)*

	%		%		%
Germany	75,2	Hungary	59,3	Luxembourg	22,3
UK	73,3	Switzerland	59,1	Israel	21,9
Sweden	72,6	Slovenia	58,5	Iceland	22,8
Netherlands	72,2	Czech R.	56,1	Ukraine	20,3
Belgium	70,9	Austria	52,6	Croatia	18,6
France	71,0	Estonia	50,8	Latvia	15,4
Spain	69,7	Greece	40,8	Romania	11,9
Finland	70,3	Italy	42,1	Turkey	10,3
Portugal	65,5	Slovakia	40,0	Albania	4,5
Denmark	64,0	Bulgaria	33,3	Kosovo	4,1
Ireland	64,0	Lithuania	30,8	Serbia	3,1
Norway	63,9	Cyprus	27,9	Montenegro	2,5
Poland	62,2	Russia	22,6	N. Macedonia	0,6

* The population of downloaded ESS publications with full texts where country-data inclusion can be established;

• The primary factor driving disparities in national data inclusion is the number of rounds each country has participated in, which directly impacts the volume of data available for analysis. The number of **available data files** is influenced by factors such as a country's accession point to the ESS and the consistency of its participation, both of which are often linked to the country's level of development and the associated funding challenges. Only 15 countries participated in all ESS waves, while 10 countries

took part in four or fewer waves. Generally, countries that participated in all or nearly all rounds exhibit the highest data and most stable inclusion rates, while those with fewer rounds of participation show lower rates due to the absence of data from certain ESS waves. This is illustrated in Figures 18a and 18b, which compare the data inclusion dynamics for countries with consistent versus inconsistent participation over the ESS lifespan. The inclusion rates for countries with inconsistent participation fluctuate significantly, leading to lower overall inclusion rates.
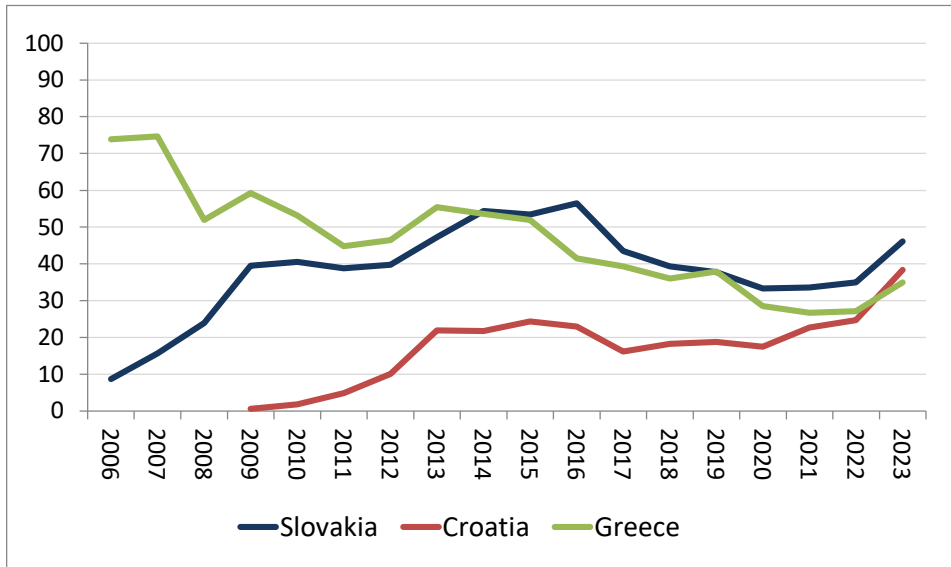
FIGURE 18a: Data inclusion trend for a selection of countries with inconsistent participation (N=4,745 publications)
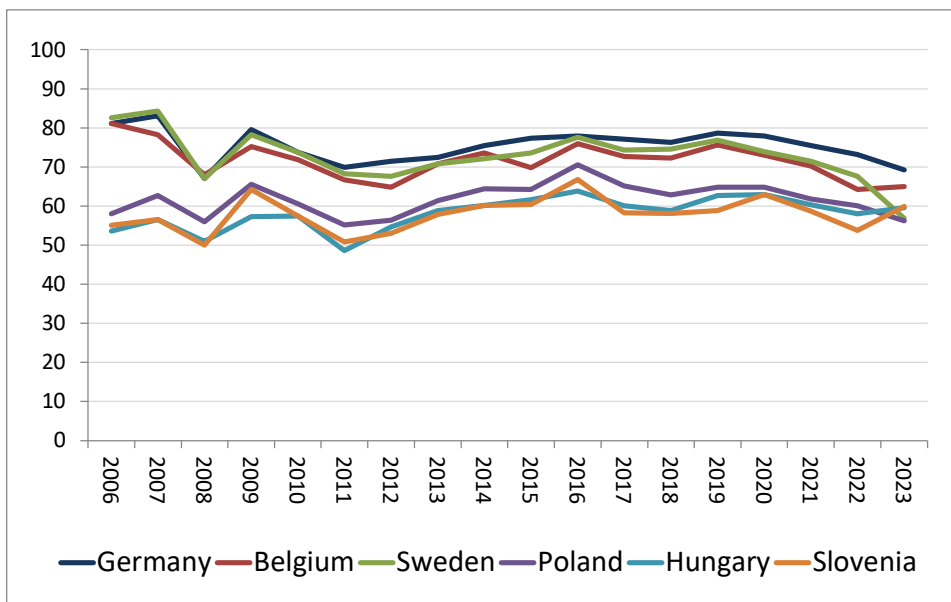
FIGURE 18b: Data inclusion trend for a selection of countries with consistent participation (N=4745 publications)

- Besides the smaller number of available datasets, lower inclusion rates for countries that joined the ESS later or have had inconsistent participation are further exacerbated by the widespread use of **multiple rounds**, either for pooling cases or conducting

29

cross-time analyses (as discussed later in the report). In these cases, analysts often exclude countries that are not present in all or a significant number of rounds, even if their data is available for some of the measurements.

- Figure 19 provides a summary picture of country data inclusion in ESS publications. Around 15% of publications focus on single-country analyses, while the majority are **comparative** in nature. In 60% of publications, more than 16 countries are included, and 42.3% of publications include data from over 20 countries, with the maximum reaching 39. This suggests that ESS data is primarily used for broad, comparative analyses.
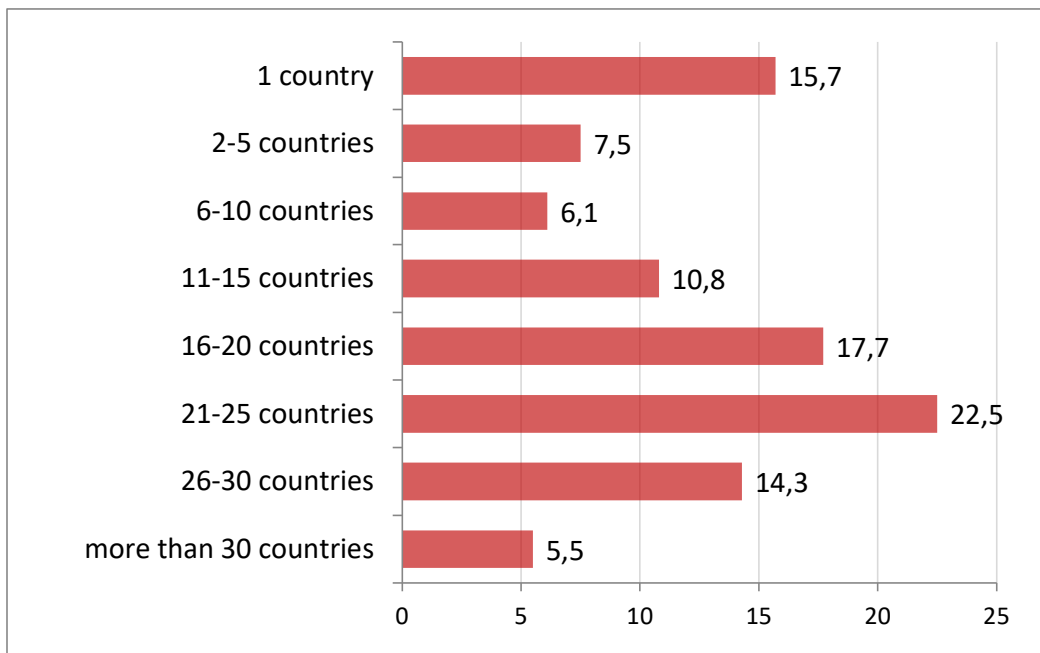
FIGURE 19: Number of countries included into analysis - grouped (N=4674 publications)

The **average number** of countries included is likely influenced by the prevalence of multilevel analysis, which typically requires a large number of country-level units. Publications using multilevel modelling include an average of 21.4 countries, significantly higher than the 14.4 countries included in those that do not use this approach.

- Figure 20 presents the average number of countries analysed over the years. The average remains fairly stable, fluctuating around 20 countries in publications that adopt a comparative perspective (i.e., those including more than one country) and around 15 when single-country publications are included. This trend persists despite the gradually growing number of participating countries. One explanation is the large share of publications that utilize multiple rounds of data (see Chapter 9), which tends to favour the inclusion of **14-20 'core' countries** with near-complete time series. Another key factor is the theoretical inclusion/exclusion of countries, which is discussed in the next section.
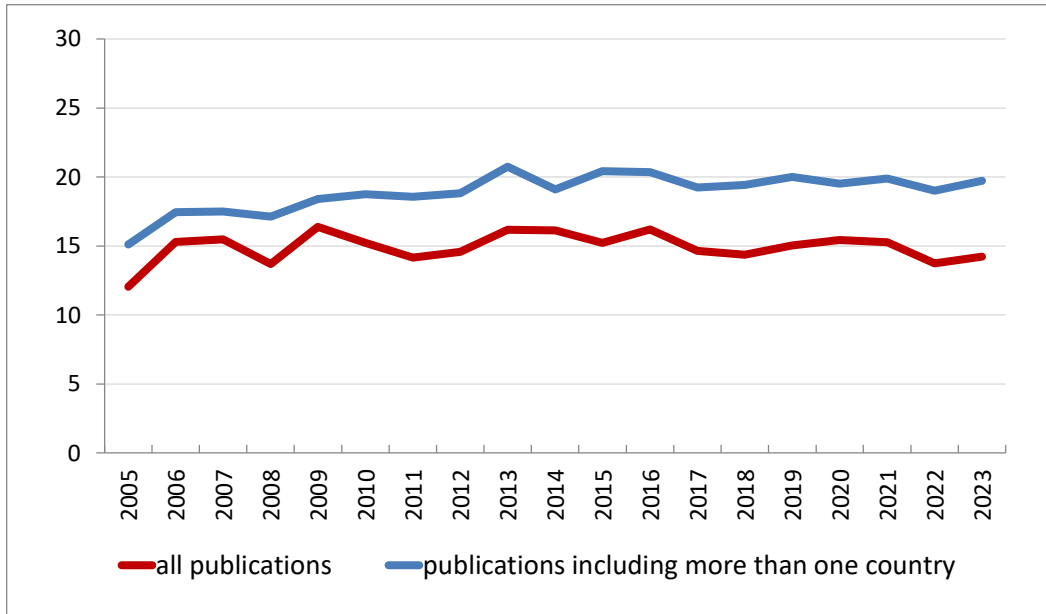
FIGURE 20: Average number of countries included into analysis, 2003-2023 (N=4674 publications)

6.1   COUNTRY DATA EXCLUSION

While inclusion rates provide essential information on country data usage in academic publications and highlight the importance of consistent participation, they do not fully explain the variations in inclusion between countries that participated in the same rounds or the same number of rounds. To better understand why analysts might exclude certain countries, even when their data is available in the ESS cumulative file, a keyword search was conducted across ESS publications to identify common explanations for these exclusions.

Results:

•   Among the 5,155 acquired (downloaded) and reviewed texts, 1,495 (29%) provided reasons for excluding countries for which data were available. Two primary reasons for exclusion were identified, if explicated, and the distribution of these reasons is illustrated in Figure 21.

•   The most prevalent reason for exclusion is **theoretical exclusion**, which is likely implicitly present in the majority of publications where only a subset of countries is included. This is a common practice in comparative research, where the selection of countries is driven by their theoretical relevance. As Jowell (1998) and Goerres et al. (2019) point out, the selection should ideally be limited to the smallest number of countries that align with the research objectives, rather than attempting to include as many nations as possible. Authors often focus on homogeneous groups of countries, such as EU members, Western European countries, or Nordic countries, to ensure consistency and relevance in their analysis.
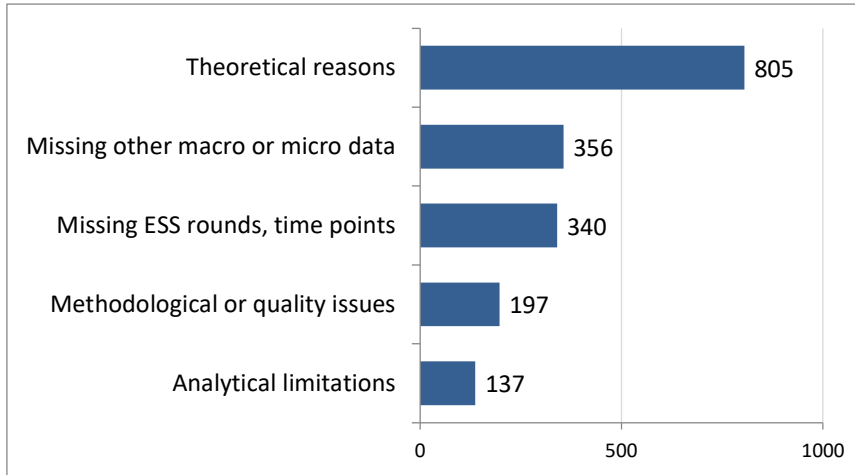
FIGURE 21: Explicitly stated reasons for excluding individual countries, 2003-2023, (N=1,495)

- Figure 22 illustrates the practice of theoretical exclusion across various **topics**, highlighting that countries are not equally excluded across all topics. The prevalence of theoretical exclusion varies, with certain topics showing a stronger bias towards select groups of countries. For instance, many authors from Western European countries tend to focus on other *Western European* nations when addressing shared issues such as immigration, political populism, or welfare chauvinism. Similarly, topics related to the European Union typically prioritize *EU member countries*, while studies on religion often focus on countries with significant populations of specific denominations. In contrast, topics like human values or subjective well-being are less influenced by regional or cultural context and are thus more inclusive, with fewer restrictions on country selection.
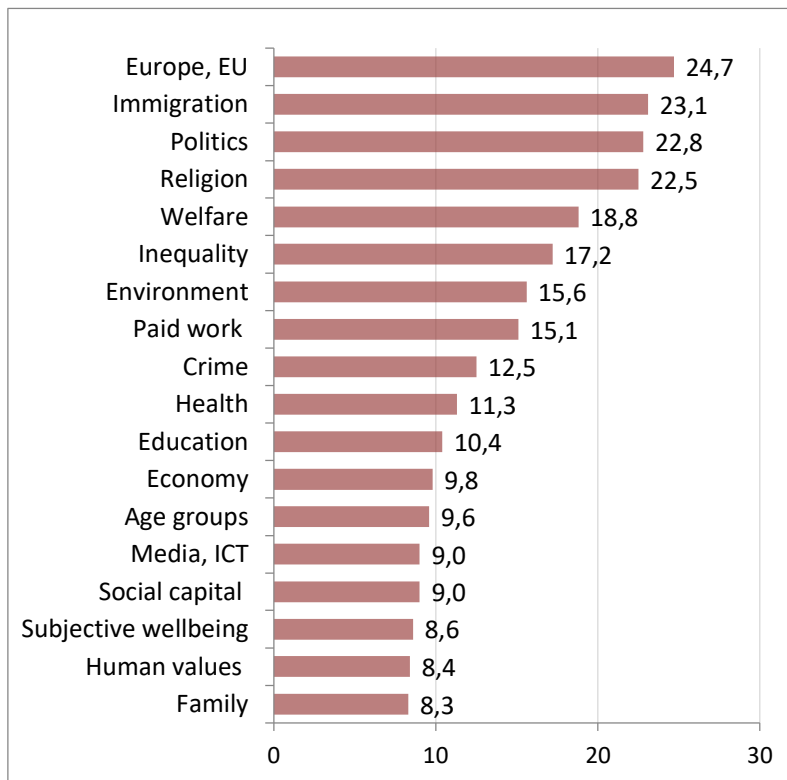

FIGURE 22: The practice of theoretically based country data inclusion/exclusion across topics, 2003-2023, (N=1,495)

- The second most frequent reason for country exclusion is the absence of **macro or other micro data**. At least a third of ESS publications incorporate macro and micro sources alongside ESS data, with a similar proportion using multilevel analysis (see section 10). In these cases, countries may be excluded due to the unavailability of essential indicators from non-ESS data sources, which are required to specify the model. This issue is particularly significant for countries that are not members of the EU or OECD, as they often lack the necessary contextual data from statistical offices or administrative sources. In an era where multilevel analysis is becoming increasingly prevalent, the absence of macro data poses a substantial barrier to utilizing country-specific survey data.

- Again, the exclusion due to missing macro or other micro data is not uniform across **topics** (Figure 23). While the shares of exclusion for this reason are generally lower than those for theoretical exclusion, they remain significant in certain areas. Topics related to welfare, paid work, and family issues are the most selective, as they frequently rely on combining ESS data with macro indicators or other micro data. In contrast, topics like religion or European issues are among the least selective in terms of exclusion. ESS has addressed the challenge of missing contextual indicators by offering its **multilevel data resource**, which helps mitigate some exclusions. However, this resource is still dependent on external macro-data providers, and analysts continue to face gaps in data availability.
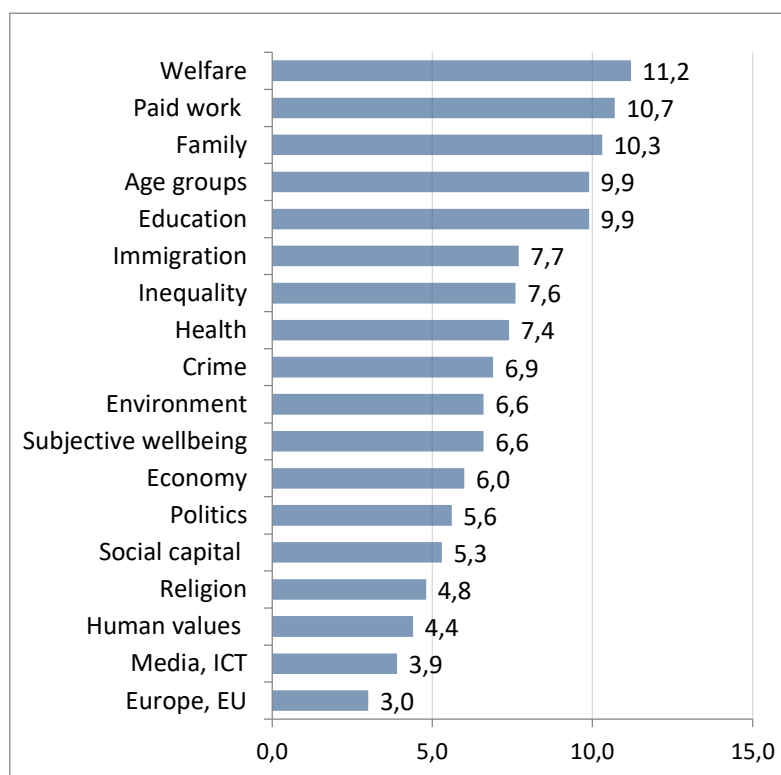

FIGURE 23: The practice of data inclusion/ exclusion across topics due to missing macro or other micro data, 2003-2023, (N=1495)

- The third most common reason for exclusion is the **skipping of ESS rounds**. Authors who pool data across multiple rounds or conduct cross-time analysis often exclude countries that have not participated in all or a significant number of rounds. This practice disproportionately impacts countries with intermittent participation, which

are often non-OECD members. Unlike other forms of exclusion, this reason is somewhat preventable, and ESS ERIC has made efforts to address it by engaging with individual countries to secure long-term funding commitments and encourage consistent participation in future rounds.

- The fourth reason for exclusion is related to **quality issues**, which is arguably the most preventable and directly linked to the actions of the CST (Central Survey Team) and National Coordinators (NC) teams. To better understand this, publications citing quality issues were reviewed, revealing four main clusters of problems: missing items in certain countries, high item nonresponse, issues related to the questionnaire itself, and other quality-compromising factors. The majority of these errors were identified by ESS authors through the comprehensive ESS documentation and alerts about deviations, underscoring the critical role of transparency in ensuring rigorous and reliable analysis.

- The final cluster of reasons for country exclusion relates to **analytical limitations**. These issues are typically outside the direct control of ESS, but they help shed light on why certain national data may be excluded from analysis. Common reasons include sample size limitations for a specific country or subgroup, other data-related challenges, societal characteristics that make a country incomparable, or situations where a country or subset of countries is deemed irrelevant for a particular analysis. This highlights the inherent limits to the relevancy of national data. It also underscores that while quality issues can be prevented, those that arise should continue to be documented to enable analysts to make well-informed decisions in their research.

- It should be noted that only the explicitly mentioned reasons for exclusion were coded and counted. Therefore, the actual share of exclusions for all reasons is likely much larger, although the distribution and order of importance are probably similar to what has been presented.

Key takeaways:

- **Inconsistent data inclusion:** The disparities in data inclusion based on a country's participation history underscore the importance of long-term participation for ensuring robust and comprehensive country-level analysis. Countries with sporadic involvement or late accession face greater challenges in being fully represented in comparative studies.

- **Data gaps:** Exclusion due to missing macro or micro data highlights the growing importance of integrating contextual data from external sources and the challenges faced by countries with less comprehensive data infrastructure.

- **Quality and analytical limitations:** Quality and analytical issues highlight ESS's role in maintaining data integrity, while also indicating that some exclusions are inherent to the nature of comparative research.

7   THE USE OF QUESTIONNAIRE SECTIONS

This section examines specific segments of the European Social Survey (ESS) questionnaire and how researchers utilize them in their studies. This assessment enables the Core Scientific Team to monitor trends in the utilization of specific questionnaire segments over time, allowing them to make informed decisions when **implementing revisions**. While usage is not the sole criterion for revising items or sections, it plays a significant role in the evaluation process. Unused items or sections fail to contribute to scientific findings and do not serve their intended purpose, underscoring the importance of evaluating their utilization in the context of research investments.

The ESS **core questionnaire**, developed collaboratively by the ESS central team and external thematic experts, covers enduring topics of interest for researchers across the social sciences and beyond, along with a wide range of socio-demographic variables. In contrast, the **rotating modules** introduce a bottom-up element to the ESS, allowing the scientific community to address research gaps across various academic domains. This structure strikes a balance between innovation and adaptability on one hand, and longitudinal stability on the other (Schnaudt et al., 2014; Lindstrøm, 2017). The questionnaire—comprising individual items, item blocks, and modules—defines the thematic possibilities for users, influencing the scope of topics, theoretical approaches, and interactions with different academic communities.

Results:

- The analysis is based on **4,982** downloaded **publications** in which relevant individual items were present and could be identified. The minimum criterion for documenting the use of a section was the presence of at least one item from it in a publication.
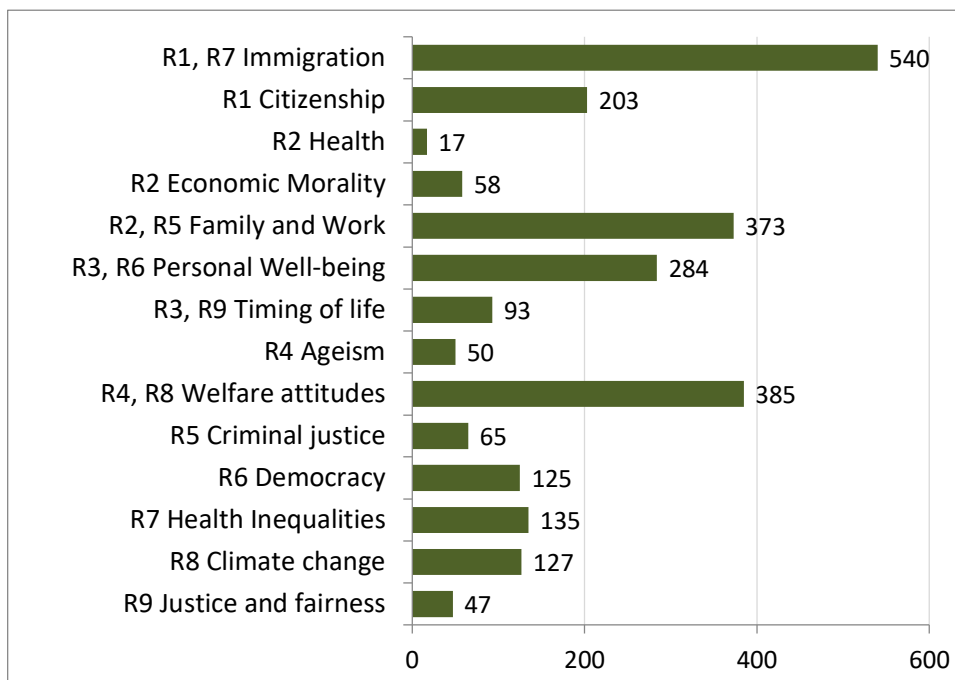

FIGURE 24: Overview of rotating modules usage (2003-2023, N=4,982)

- The **A, B, and C core sections**, not depicted in the chart above, have consistently been the most utilized attitudinal sections of the ESS questionnaire, appearing in 85.1% (4,242) of downloaded publications. The conceptual significance of this section for various scientific communities, combined with its biennial fielding frequency—which results in a continually refreshed time series and the potential for sample pooling—establishes the ABC core as the most pervasive component in ESS-based analyses. **The Portrait Values Questionnaire**, a part of the ESS core values battery, is used in 15.2% (757) of publications.

- Rotating modules, the "project" sections of ESS questionnaires, exhibit considerably uneven usage, as depicted in Figure 24. In terms of academic publishing, these modules can be categorized into more or less popular ones, and this pattern has remained relatively stable over the past decade. The three most frequently utilized ESS modules are **Immigration, Work & Family, Welfare, and Wellbeing**, each appearing in 370-540 publications. However, the Citizenship module, which once held similar popularity due to its battery of items measuring participation in voluntary organizations, has gradually faded from this group. Its absence since 2002 has rendered its data too dated for further analysis.

- The second group consists of relatively recent modules, which, compared to the earlier set, see more moderate usage, ranging between 125-135 publications. These include modules on **Democracy, Health Inequalities, and Climate Change**. The remaining modules target narrower academic audiences, resulting in usage numbers below 100. It is worth noting that the Justice and Fairness module from Round 9, being relatively new, has yet to achieve higher usage numbers at this point.
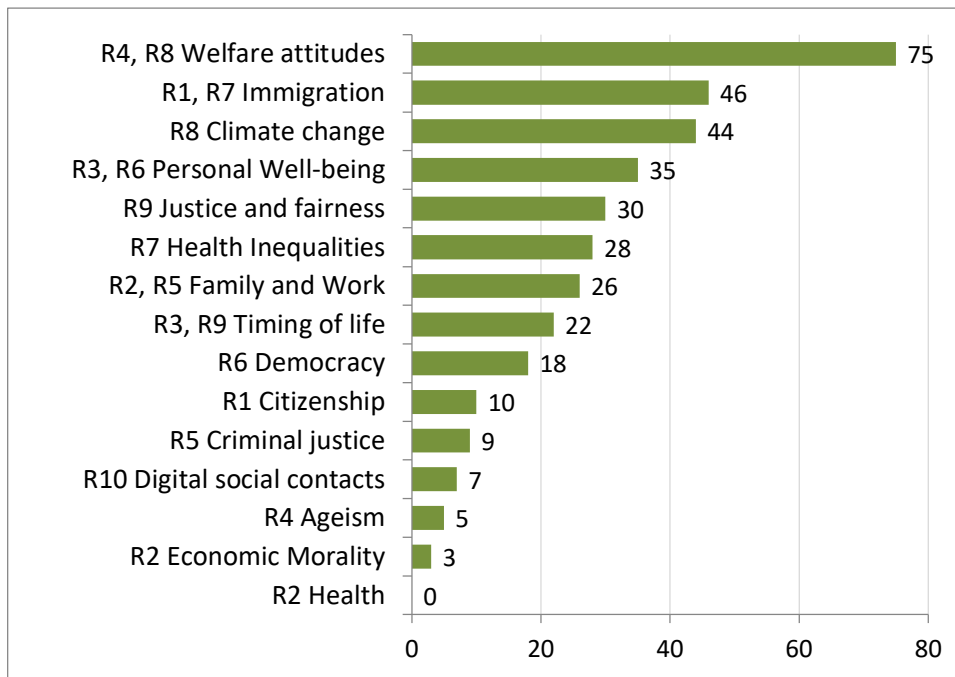

FIGURE 25: Overview of rotating modules usage in publication years 2022-23 (N=864)

- Figure 25 illustrates the use of modules in the **two most recent complete publishing years**. The two modules most frequently featured were Welfare and Immigration, both

of which benefitted from recent repetitions, receiving a 'boost' with fresh data that enabled cross-time comparisons. Close behind are the popular Climate Change and Well-being modules, while other modules trail behind in terms of usage. The consistent strong usage of certain modules highlights their enduring relevance for academic audiences, addressing thematic areas of broad academic and policy importance.

- Figure 26 presents the **relative use** of the ABC core and rotating modules in ESS publications. It shows that nearly 60% of analysts produce publications using only core items. This is likely due to the strong use of multiple rounds (see section 9), which encourages the inclusion of items from the longitudinal ESS core, both for case pooling and trend observation. However, more than 40% of analysts incorporate items from rotating modules to varying extents, with the majority focusing on items from a single rotating module, indicating alignment with its specific thematic focus
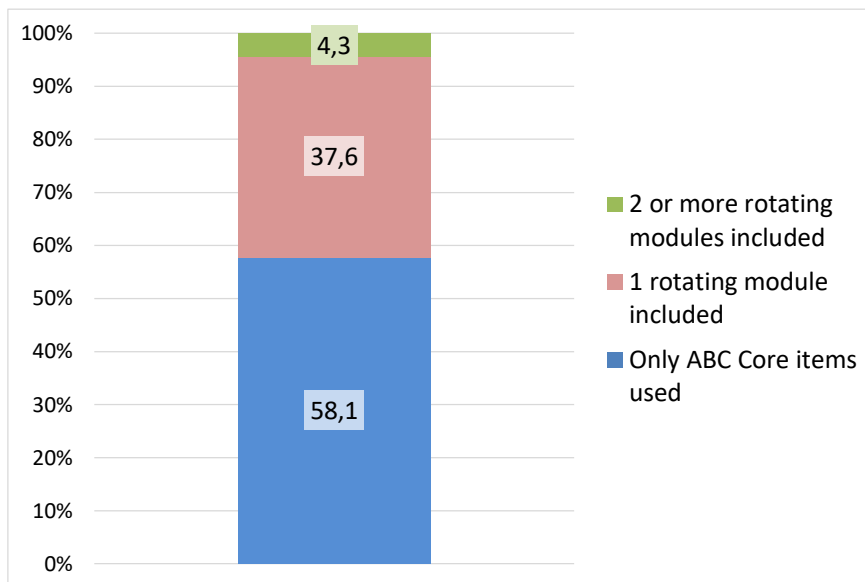
FIGURE 26: The relative use of ABC core and rotating modules in ESS publications, 2022-2023 (N=5155)

- Figures 27a and 27b present cross-time usage for two repeat modules, well-being and welfare, demonstrating the dynamics of repeat module use. The publishing life of repeat modules follows a **cyclical pattern**, with their usage peaking approximately five years after the fieldwork. As new waves are introduced, their use is revitalized to varying extents, while the use of one-time modules gradually declines due to data aging. Introducing a new time point is the primary method for rejuvenating and enhancing the analytical value of the original measurements.

- Accordingly, the ESS should consider repeating (at least) parts of successful one-time modules to revive them from their current unused state, where their relevance has diminished to primarily historical aspects. This is especially true for the Citizenship module and its volunteering battery. Reintroducing these topics could reinvigorate their analytical value and address evolving research needs. Other potential strategies to **promote rotating modules use** include enhancing awareness and promotion, targeted collaboration with research networks, expanding and updating module content, incentivizing publication with rotating module data and similar.
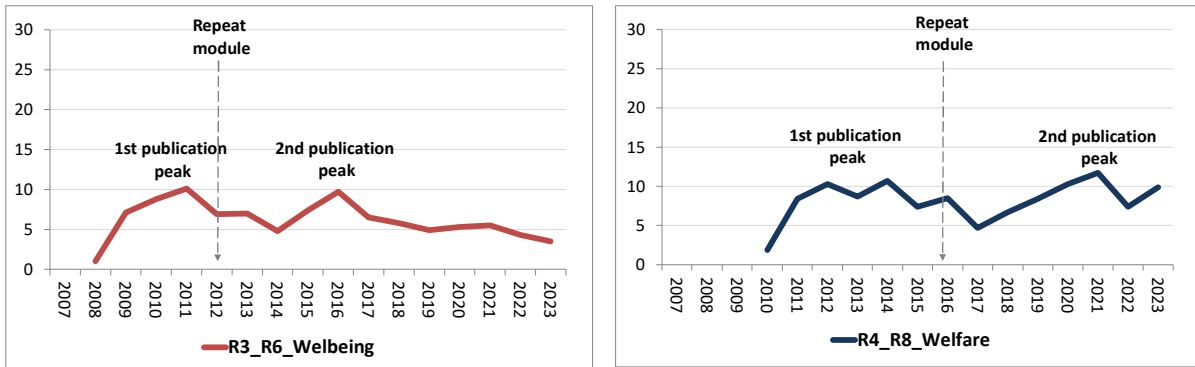
Figure 27a, b: Trends in academic utilization of ESS repeat modules, 2003-2023, (% shares, N=284 and 385 publications)

Key takeaways:

- **The centrality of core sections to ESS research**: The ABC core section, encompassing key attitudinal items, remains the most utilized part of the ESS questionnaire. Its consistent biennial updates and long-term time-series data make it a foundational resource for longitudinal and comparative research.

- **Balancing the repetition of existing modules with the development of new ones**: While repeating modules rejuvenates data and ensures their ongoing relevance, developing new modules is essential to address emerging research trends and evolving societal issues. ESS must strike a balance between the two.

8   TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN ITEM USAGE

Individual items are the smallest units of the questionnaire, and alongside item pre-testing and post-testing, monitoring item usage is a key source of information in the questionnaire refinement process (e.g., reviewing the ESS core and designing repeat modules). The item usage count presented here is based on **4,982** downloaded substantive publications from 2003 to 2023. Full item usage statistics, including rotating module items, can be found in Appendix 2.

Results:

- A **total** of 39,290 item usages were counted for the 2005-2023 publication period. This primarily refers to ABC core items, excluding the demographic section (except for the subjective income item and a few others). Additionally, the PVQ scale is counted as a single item. With Round 10 included, the overall number of items counted is 1,000, meaning the **average usage** per item is 39.3.

- Table 4 presents the **10 most used** ESS individual items from the ABC core, which were featured in more than 10% of all ESS publications. Based on recent trends, the most frequently used ESS attitudinal item is the *left-right scale*, followed by *generalized trust* and *trust in parliament*. These top 10 items are central to the most explored concepts

among ESS authors, including ideological attitudes, social and political trust, immigration, and subjective well-being.

TABLE 4: Ten most used ABC core items, 2003-2023

Rank	Variable	Label	N	
1	LRScale	Left-Right scale	940	18.9%
2	PplTrst	Trust in people	907	18.2%
3	TrstPrl	Trust in [country]'s parliament	724	14.5%
4	BrnCntr	Were you born in [country]?	712	14.3%
5	RlgDgr	How religious would you say you are?	654	13.1%
6	StfLife	Satisfaction with life	632	12.7%
7	TrstPlt	Trust in politicians	627	12.6%
	Health	How is your health in general?	627	12.6%
9	ImUEClt	Immigrants undermining culture	615	12.3%
10	ImBGEco	Immigrants good or bad for economy	570	11.4%

- The **multiple relevance** across key domains help explain why some items top the usage list. Figure 28 illustrates the use of the *left-right scale* item across various topics. It shows that the item appears in 26-34% of publications addressing prominent ESS topics such as politics, immigration, welfare, and the environment, which contributes to its leading position.
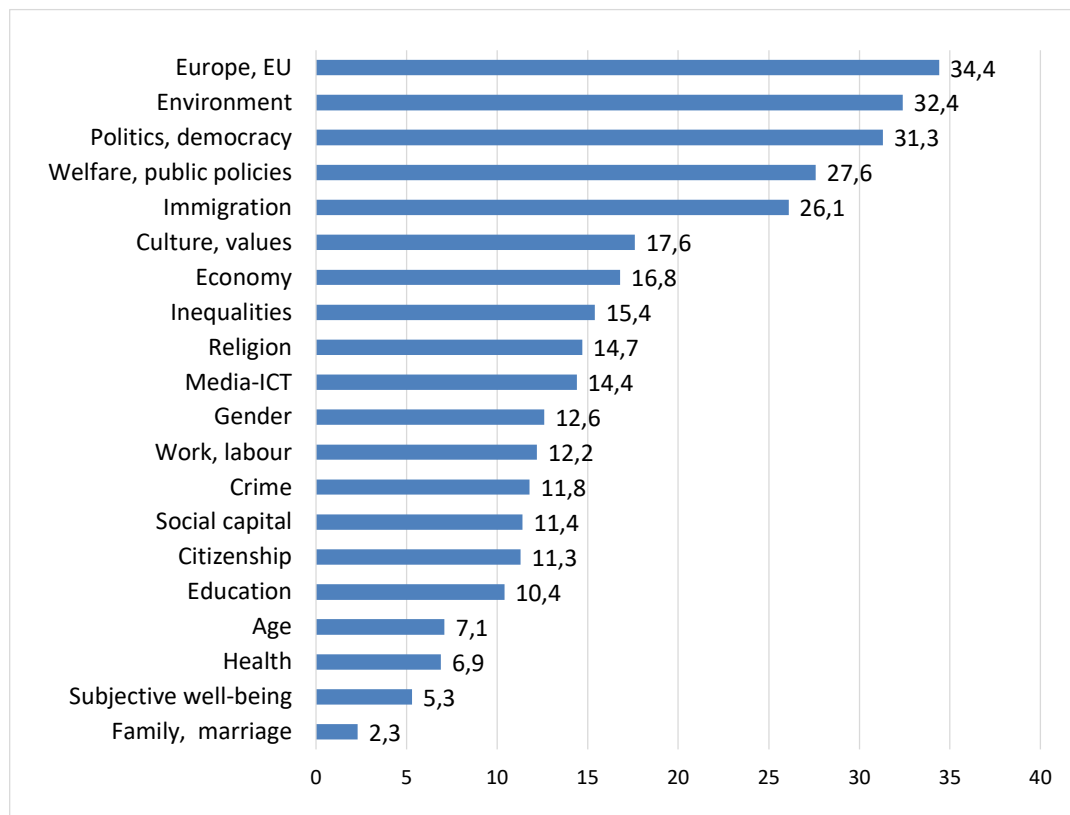

FIGURE 28: Usage of the *Left-right scale* item across topics in ESS publications, 2022-2023 (N=940)

- Figure 29 shows the corresponding distribution of the *Trust in People* item. While it is overwhelmingly used in publications focusing on social capital, it is also frequently employed by authors analysing economic issues, citizenship, subjective well-being, and other prominent topics
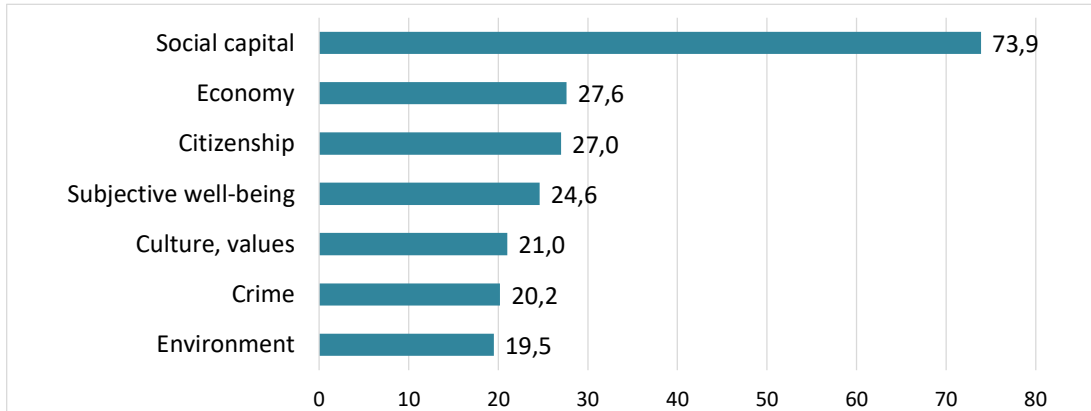

FIGURE 29: Usage of *Trust in people* item across topics in ESS publications, 2022-2023 (N=907)

Item usage variation within questionnaire sections

- The **ABC core**, being repeated in each round, has the highest average per-item use. The current set of 'active' 97 core items has been employed a total of 24,500 times, with an average of **250 uses per item**. Despite some variation, the consistent and robust utilization of items from the ESS attitudinal core underscores the fundamental importance of the included concepts for conducting a comparative quantitative analysis of key societal trends and issues.
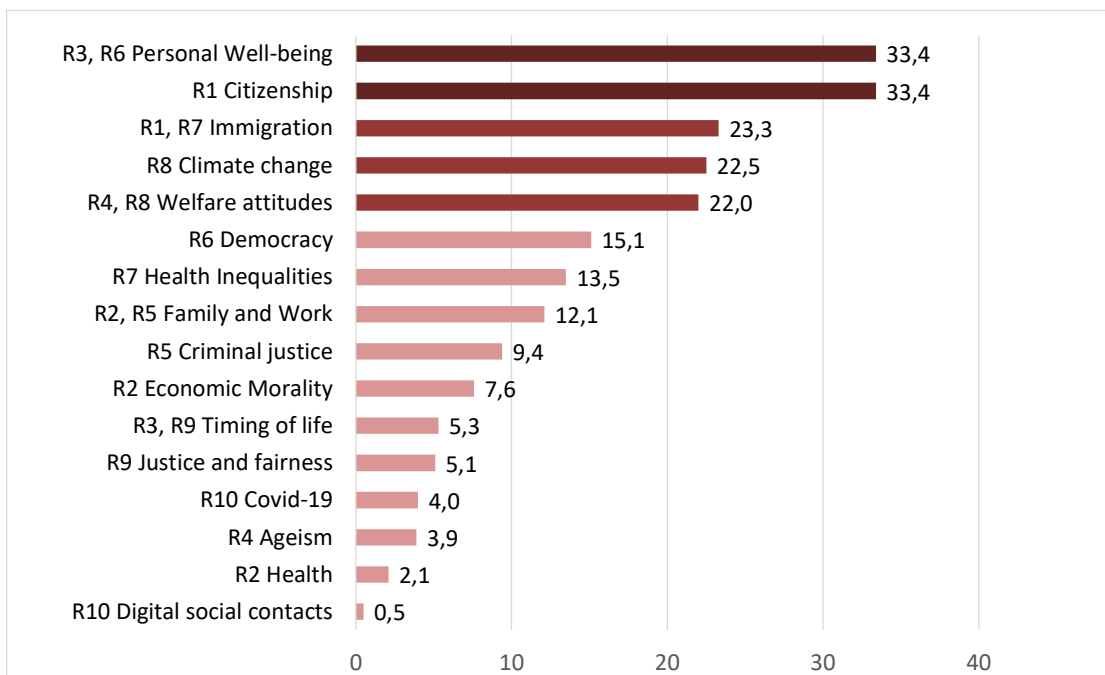

FIGURE 30: The average number of item uses across rotating modules, 2022-2023 (N=4,982)

- While **rotating modules** are used less frequently, it is particularly interesting to compare their usage among themselves (Figure 30). There are significant differences in the average number of item uses across modules. As expected, **repeat modules** show higher average usage, with three repeat modules ranking among the top five. Family & Work is the only repeat module with relatively low average usage, primarily due to the low utilization of large parts of the original, extensive module

- Additionally, modules can achieve high average usage in different ways. Both modules with the highest averages include **batteries of items** that are typically used together to form an index, which drives up the average. In the case of the R1 Citizenship module, this is the *voluntarism scale*, consisting of 12 items related to voluntary organizations (Figure 31).
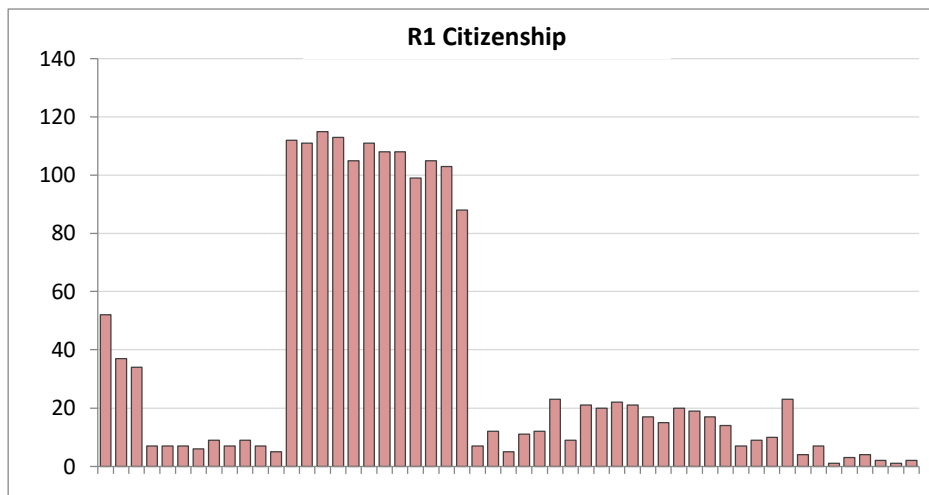

FIGURE 31: Frequency of items use in R1 Citizenship module

For the Wellbeing module, the *CES-D depression scale*, consisting of 8 items, contributes to its high average. The Health Inequalities module displays a similar pattern, with 13 items related to health issues, and the Democracy module includes 13 items related to the characteristics of democracy. Other items in these modules generally exhibit much lower usage percentages.

- Another way to achieve high average use is high **dispersed use**, which is typical of Welfare, Immigration and Climate change modules. In terms of covering a broad range of concepts, these three modules can be considered the most effective. At the same time, they all address pressing societal issues.

- Figure 32 presents the use of items from two **welfare modules**. The original module, in particular, contains a diverse set of items with strong usage, while the repeat module did not replicate this pattern and introduced only one new, highly used item. In contrast, the **immigration modules** show a different trend, where the repeat module introduced a series of well-used items (Figure 33).
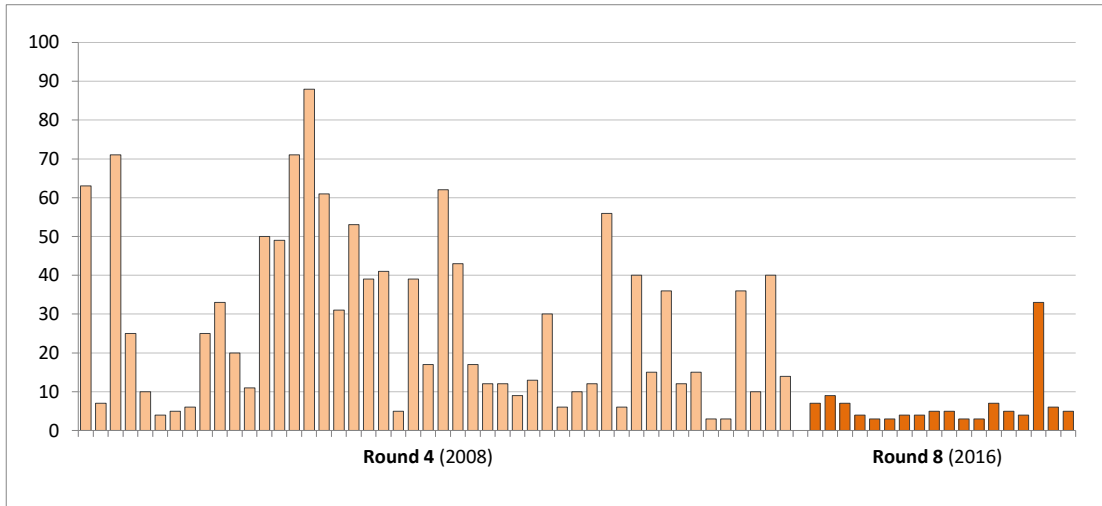
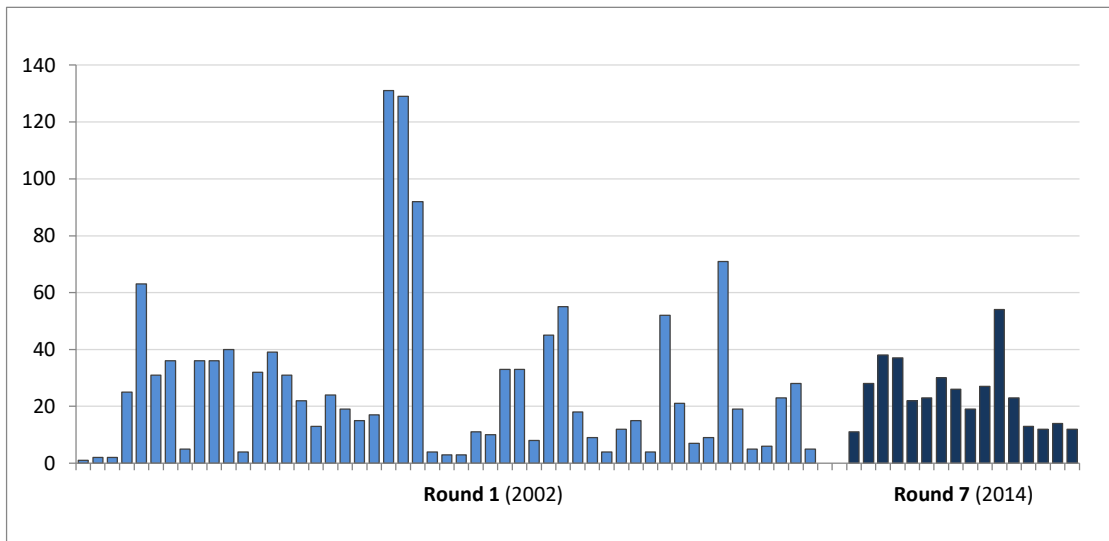**FIGURE 32**: Frequency of items use in R4, R8 Welfare modules

FIGURE 33: Frequency of items use in R1, R7 Immigration modules

- The third category includes modules with patchy use, with the two **Family & Work** modules from rounds 2 and 5 being the most typical examples (Figure 34). These modules contained a high number of items due to various routing scenarios, resulting in an uneven usage pattern. Some sections were heavily used, while others saw less utilization, such as those on unpaid help and family support or the experience of studying. The latter sections were largely omitted in the Round 5 repeat module. As a result, it is one of the modules with the largest number of items but also among the least efficient in terms of average item use.
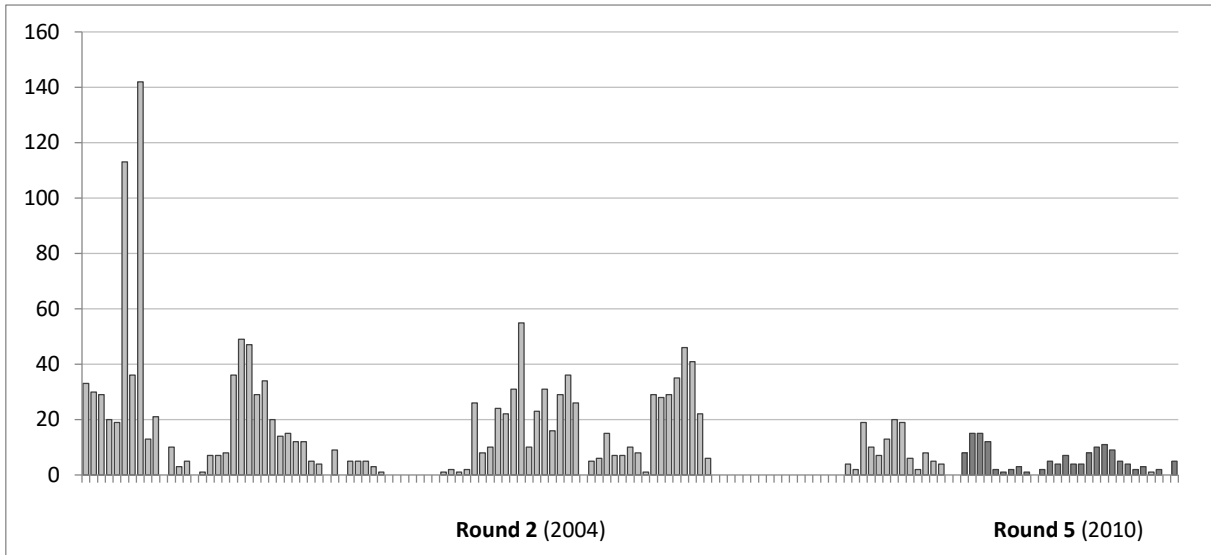
FIGURE 34: Usage frequencies for items in Round 2 and Round 5 Family, work, and wellbeing modules

- The fourth category consists of modules with generally very **low use** of all or almost all items. It includes R2 Health, Economic Morality, Ageism (Figure 35), and Timing of Life, and partially also Criminal Justice. This is not to say these modules did not fulfil their purpose of connecting ESS with smaller, niche academic communities. In fact, they often address themes for which there are no widely used pre-existing comparative measures, or themes of more general relevance that are less likely to generate widespread usage.
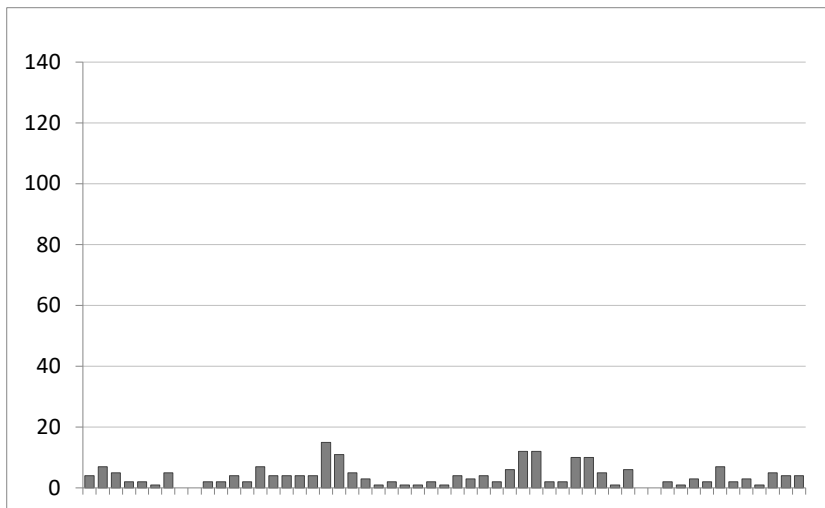

FIGURE 35: Usage frequencies for items in Ageism module

- **Societal context** and **questionnaire content** can influence and modify the analytical relevance of items. Figure 36 shows the use of the *Left-right* self-placement scale and '*which party voted for*' items across time.
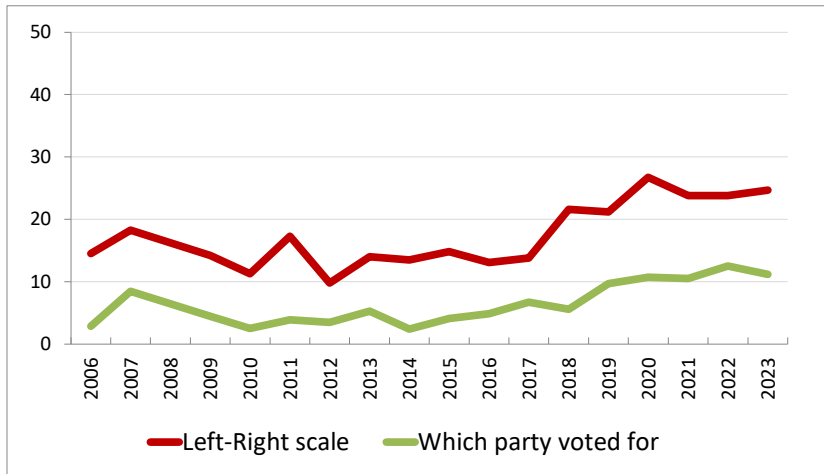
FIGURE 36: utilization of *Left-right scale* and *party voted for* items, 2003-2023, (% shares, N=929 and 368)
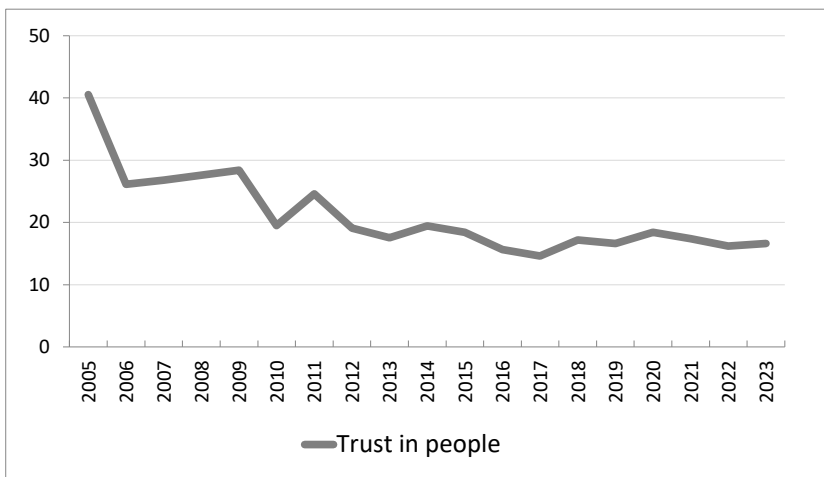

FIGURE 37: Utilization of *Trust in people* item, 2003-2023, (% shares, N=889)

Both items, especially left-right ideology, have always been widely used, but their use saw a significant increase with the rise of the populism topic. In contrast, the use of the *'trust in people'* item dropped and stabilized after an initial peak, largely due to the aging of the popular R1 Citizenship module and the absence of the theme in subsequent rounds (Figure 37). Such dynamic can affect nearly any item, complicating the process of questionnaire revisions.

Key takeaways:

- **High-impact items drive usage**: Some items that measure key social and political attitudes have broad applicability and are central in addressing a wide range of societal research questions, which leads to their high usage.

- **Dynamic nature of item relevance**: Some items lose their relevance over time, particularly when a module is no longer repeated, or when the societal context shifts. This dynamic nature presents challenges for questionnaire revisions, as it requires balancing the inclusion of longstanding items with emerging research priorities.

9   THE USE OF ESS ROUNDS

This section explores how researchers utilize data from different rounds or waves of the European Social Survey (ESS). It investigates whether or not researchers tend to focus on specific rounds, the dynamics of round usage in publications, the reasons behind these choices, and the implications for research findings. Understanding how ESS data rounds are used provides insights into the **dynamics of data ageing**, which can either increase or decrease its analytical value, depending on the specific research objectives, such as cross-sectional or cross-time analysis. This annual report draws on data from 5,068 downloaded publications where specific rounds were identified.

Results:

- Figure 38 illustrates the cycle and magnitude of the use of individual rounds, showing that each new dataset typically reaches its **peak usage** in academic publications approximately 4-5 years after its initial release. This pattern of round usage remained consistent until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused a delay in ESS Round 10 fieldwork. The first version of Round 10 was published at the end of June 2022 and quickly appeared in 20% of publications in 2023.
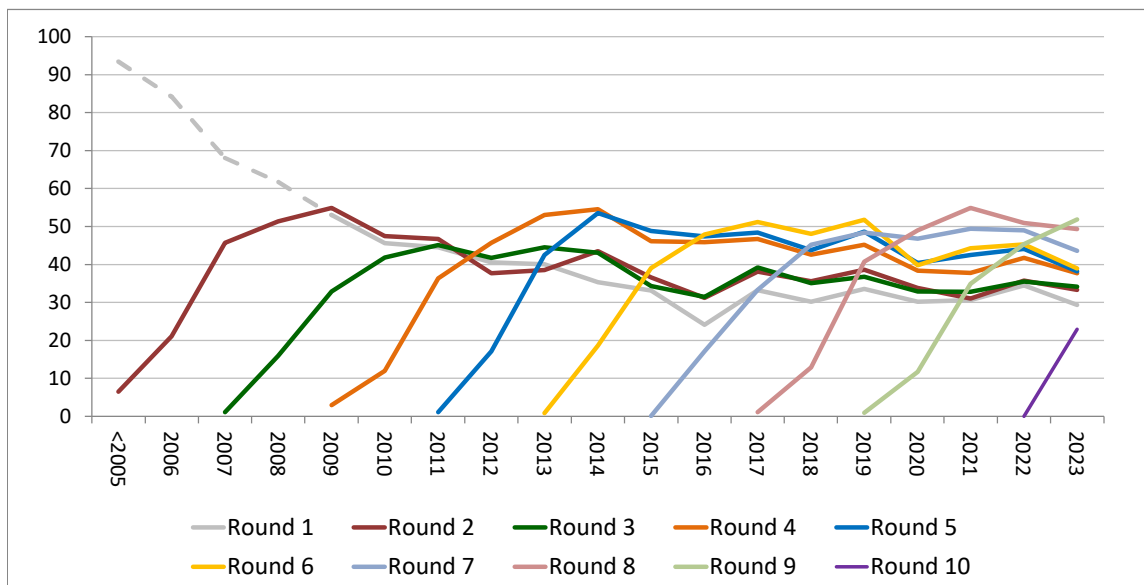

FIGURE 38: The cycle of rounds use in ESS publications, 2003-2023 (% shares, N=5068)

- Following the peak, the usage of each round stabilizes at around 30-50%, as earlier rounds continue to be utilized, largely due to the popularity of **cross-round analysis** (Figure 39). In the most recent publication year, 2023, 47.6% of publications combined data from multiple ESS rounds, with even higher figures in previous years. This trend is expected to persist in the future. While expanding sample sizes by utilizing multiple rounds benefits more recent datasets, which are more comparable in terms of social context and surveyed populations, the relevance of earlier rounds will remain significant, especially in cross-time analyses.
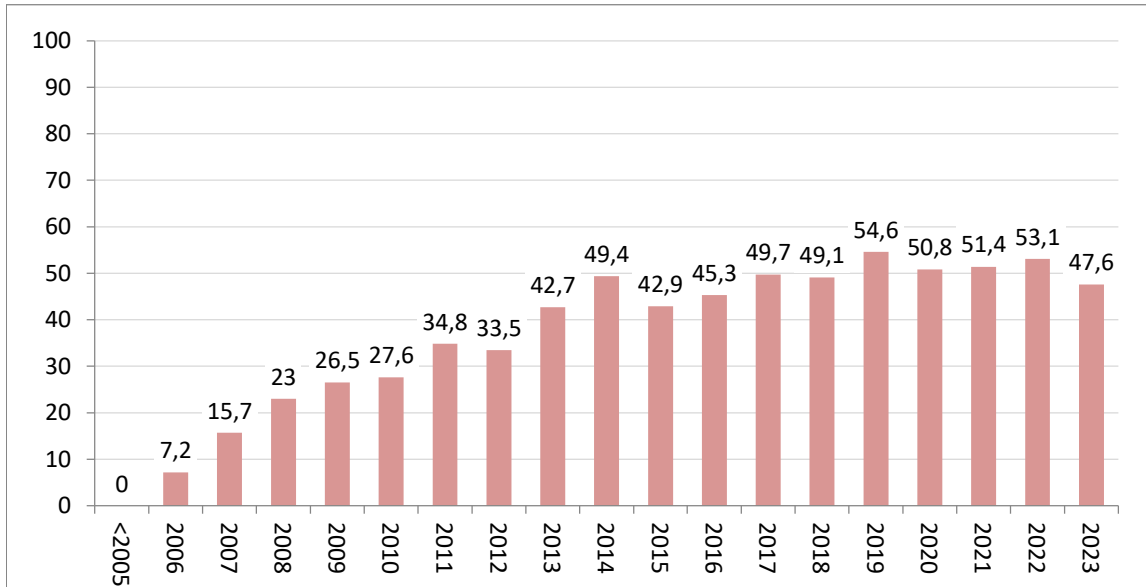
FIGURE 39: Multiple rounds usage in ESS Publications, 2003-2023 (N=5,068)

- Figure 40 illustrates the **analytical rationales** driving the use of multiple rounds. The motivations for merging rounds were coded in a total of 1,590 downloaded publications, as this code was introduced later than other bibliographic codes. Nevertheless, the sample size is substantial enough to provide a robust estimate. The most common rationale for using multiple rounds is **cross-sectional analysis**, which is primarily aimed at increasing sample sizes for general populations, and more frequently, for specific **sub-populations**. This approach is evident in 70% of the observed publications.
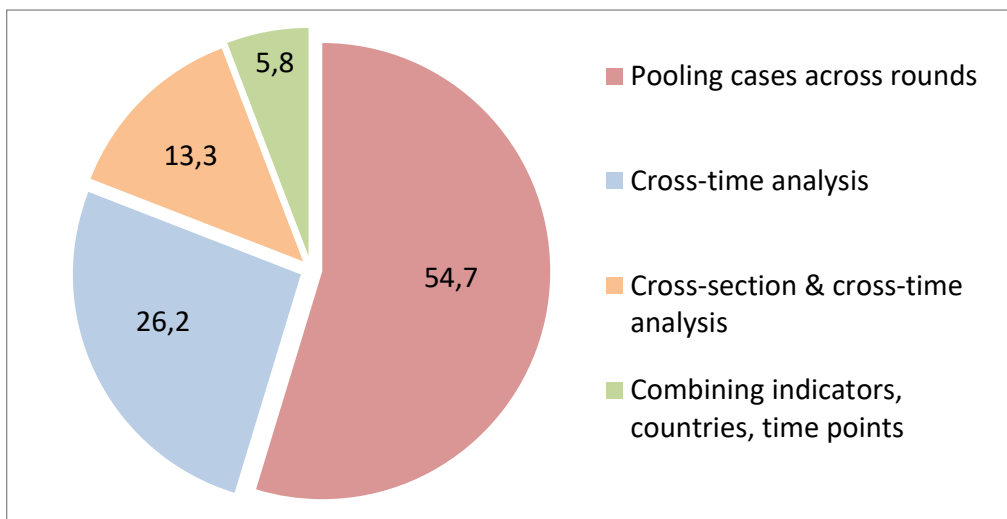

FIGURE 40: Reasons for the use of multiple rounds use in ESS publications 2003-2023 (N=1590 publications coded for reasons)

- The second most significant motivation is conducting **cross-time analysis**, which appears in 40% of the publications, with 15% of publications falling into both categories. This pattern aligns with the literature, which highlights that multi-purpose surveys are designed for regular repetition, enabling the monitoring and modelling of societal change and the study of sub-groups through case pooling (Kim et al., 2006).

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The common practice of merging data from multiple years is often used either to achieve a sufficiently large sample for studying minority groups or to enable the use of detailed classifications, such as occupation (Hakim, 1982). Approximately 6% of publications cite **other reasons**, with the most common being the combination of indicators or countries from different rounds.

- While recency and topic specificity are the primary drivers for using single or **selective rounds**, considerations such as country coverage, alignment with external data, focus on round-specific individual items and the impact of social events also play significant roles.

Key takeaways:

- **Cross-round usage**: There is a strong tendency towards using cross-round data for comprehensive analysis. Merging data from different rounds is commonly done to study minority groups or to analyse detailed classifications.

- **Data recency and specificity drive round selection**: Researchers often prioritize newer rounds for their recency and relevance to specific research topics, but factors such as country coverage, alignment with other data sources, and the relevance to ongoing social events are also important.

9.1   THE USE OF MIXED-MODE ROUND 10

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Round 10, a total of 9 countries switched to a self-completion (web and paper) approach (Austria, Cyprus, Germany, Israel, Latvia, Poland, Serbia, Spain, Sweden), while 22 countries continued to use ESS's usual face-to-face fieldwork approach. With the **mode switch** in Round 13, the previously 'unproblematic' practice of widespread cross-round use may become more precarious due to potential mode effects. To anticipate user reactions, we examined the use of the mixed-mode Round 10, first released in June 2022. Monitoring analysts' responses to this dataset offers some insight into their sensitivity to the upcoming mode change.

According to the literature on users behaviour, **users' reactions** to ESS switching modes should likely not be overestimated. The majority of analysts using European Social Survey data tend to rely on pre-established data quality and do not engage deeply in quality checks, assuming that the status of ESS ensures its reliability (see Friedrich, 2020; Faniel, 2015; Yoon, 2017). However, potential challenges may arise if the mode switch affects the ease of data use, leading to decreased user-friendliness, which could, in turn, impact data usage.

Results:

- All rounds from **1 to 9** show **strong combined use**, largely due to the extensive pooling and cross-time analysis of the core items (Figure 41). Variations in the share of multiple-round use are still considerable and may indicate greater utilization of rotating modules, as seen in rounds 1 and 2.
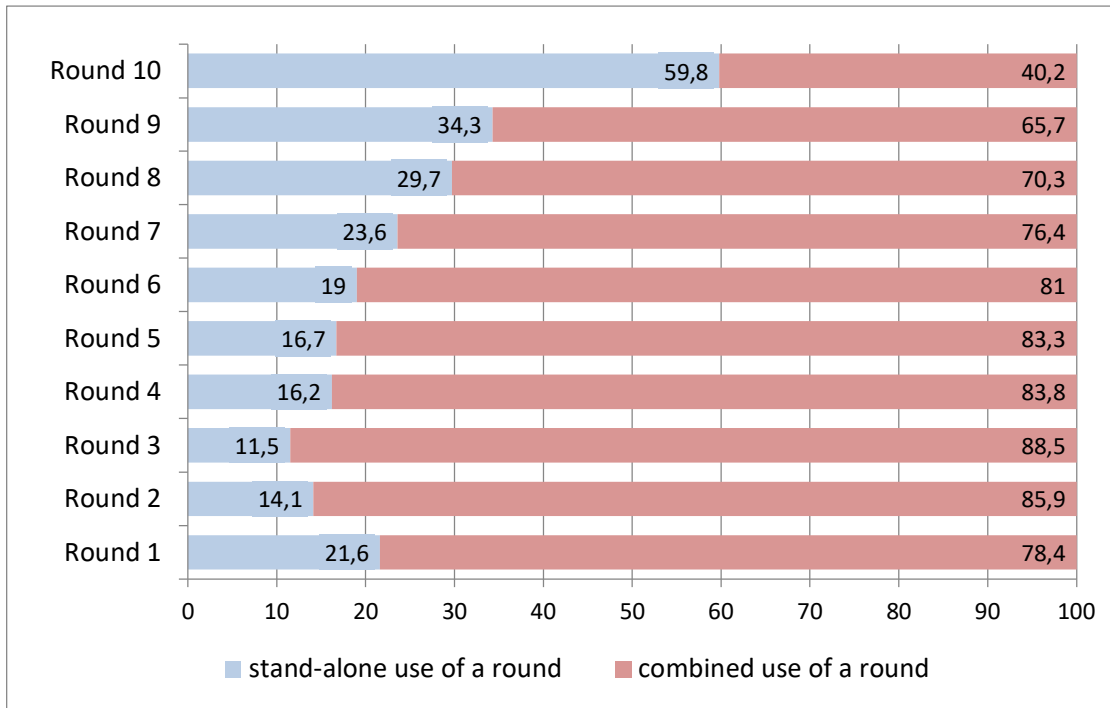
FIGURE 41: Shares of stand-alone and combined uses of individual rounds in ESS publications 2003-2023 (N=5,118)

- **Round 10** currently stands out as an **outlier**, characterized by a high proportion of **stand-alone use**. Among the 101 publications utilizing Round 10, 61 focus on it as a stand-alone round, while the other 40 combine it with data from additional rounds. This pattern may stem from a combination of factors, including interest in its specific modules, the impact of its mixed-mode design, and a recency effect, whereby newer rounds attract users primarily interested in accessing the latest data.

  It remains to be seen whether Round 10 will continue to have a high rate of single-round use or if this trend will normalize over time. Currently, it has been used in a relatively small number of publications (100) compared to earlier rounds (670 for Round 9, 1,183 for Round 8, 1,442 for Round 7, etc.), so this usage pattern may still shift significantly.

- A **small qualitative study** provides additional insight into user reactions—or lack thereof—to R10 and its mixed-mode design, analysing all available texts utilizing this round. The analysis reveals that 24 publications, or about a quarter of all R10 texts, include some form of mode-related comment (Table 5). Of these, the majority (16) is limited to explicitly noting that ESS R10 employed two different survey modes. Six publications focus on societal (contextual) effects of COVID-19 and fieldwork delays rather than addressing potential mixed-mode issues, while only four explicitly raise concerns about challenges arising from the use of mixed modes.

TABLE 5: User methodological comments in 101 ESS publications using Round 10.

Content type	N
Texts containing no R10 related comments	77
Texts containing R10 related comments (Total)*	24
- Authors explicating, but not questioning, the use of two survey modes	16
- Authors cautioning about longer fieldwork, different fieldwork timeframes or potential pandemic context effect on answers	6
- Authors explicitly cautioning about the use of mixed-mode	4

* More than one code possible

- The **low level of detected concern** suggests both trust in ESS as a data provider and a delegation of responsibility for data quality to ESS itself. It is reasonable to expect a similar reaction to the mode shift in R13—namely, a general absence of concern, with only the most methods-oriented users acknowledging the shift. As the number of R10 publications is anticipated to increase significantly next year, continued monitoring could yield more conclusive insights should the ESS Core Scientific Team decide to pursue this line of inquiry.

Key takeaways:

- **Low expressed concern:** The low level of expressed concern regarding Round 10's mixed-mode design reflects users' trust in ESS as a reliable data provider, with most analysts relying on pre-established data quality without engaging in extensive checks.

- **Mixed-mode impact still unclear**: Nonetheless, round 10 stands out as an outlier with a high proportion of stand-alone use. Continued monitoring will be necessary to assess the longer-term impacts of the Round 10's mixed-mode design and the mode shift in Round 13 on usage patterns.

10   METHODOLOGICAL PRACTICES IN ESS PUBLICATIONS

This section provides feedback on **para-bibliographic variables**, focusing on authors' levels of methodological awareness when using ESS data, their citation styles, and, to some extent, their engagement with ESS web resources. Given that the ESS was explicitly designed to address longstanding methodological challenges in comparative research, assessing the presence of methodological concerns among authors is a relevant aspect of this analysis.

Results:

- Figure 42 illustrates the presence of content indicating **methodological awareness** throughout the 2003-2023 period and specifically for the last publication year. In 2023, nearly 42% of publications reference the use or non-use of ESS **weights**, exceeding the average over the entire period. Around 30% of publications cite the ESS data **file edition** in the recommended citation format, and approximately 25% reference the

ESS website, either generally or in relation to specific documents like sampling or weighting guidelines.
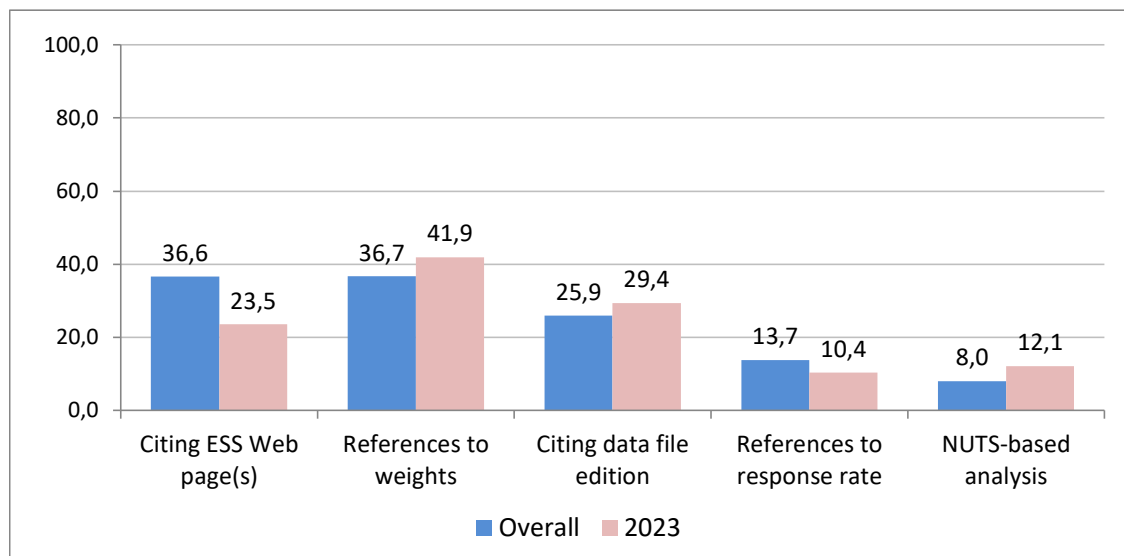

FIGURE 42: References to methodological elements and ESS analytical resources in publications (% shares, N=5,110)

- Approximately 12% of ESS publications in 2023 referenced the **response rate**, a figure that has remained relatively steady over the years. This pattern could suggest that analysts and journals may not view response rate as essential in data description, possibly reflecting a shift in the perceived relevance of response rate as a quality indicator. Alternatively, this relatively low percentage could represent the subset of authors with a heightened methodological focus, who may also be more attuned to issues like the anticipated ESS mode shift.

- Regarding **replication** possibilities, most ESS-based publications include details on the survey years used, though this is not universal. However, there is a significant amount of missing information, especially concerning the countries analysed and the specific items included. In several cases, only a subset of the items or countries used in the analysis could be identified, which limits full transparency and replicability.

- Figure 43 displays **trends** in referencing the use of **weights** and citing specific ESS **file editions**. References to weights have remained relatively stable, fluctuating between 30-40% throughout the observed period. This does not necessarily mean weights are absent from other analyses but suggests that readers are often not informed about their use, which limits replication transparency. Similarly, the practice of citing specific ESS file editions has plateaued at around 30% in recent years. This may reflect either a reliance on alternative identifiers, such as data file DOIs, or a gap in citation practices that could impact replicability.
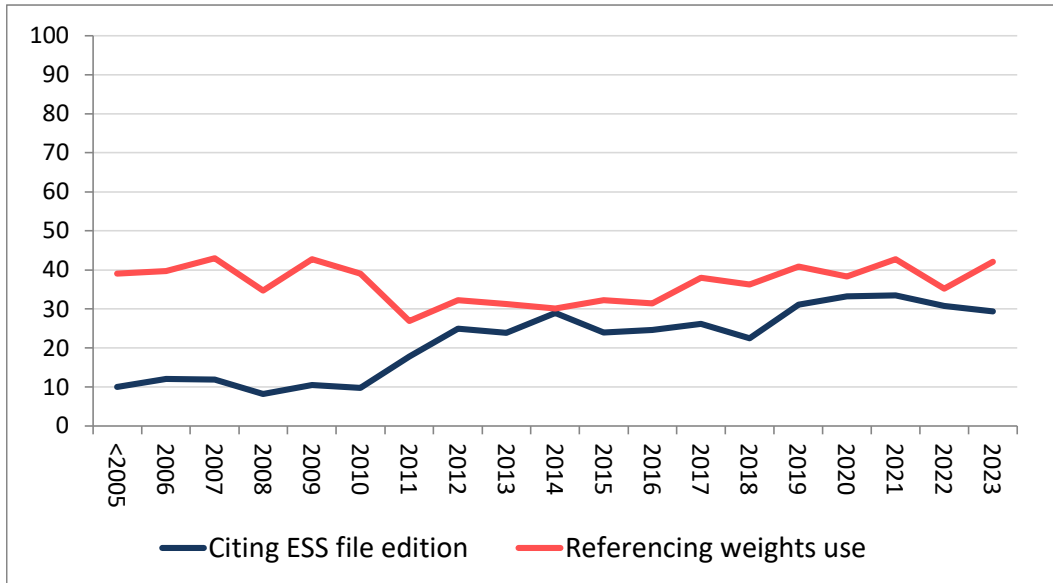
FIGURE 43: References to file edition and weights use in publications (% shares, N=5,110)

- Figure 44 presents the **trends** for referencing ESS **response rate and web pages**. Both seem to be declining, with web-page referencing showing larger fluctuations. Referencing ESS webpages for various reasons (data, sampling, weighting, or translation materials, etc.) is not necessarily an indicator of success or failure; it is simply a measure of user engagement.
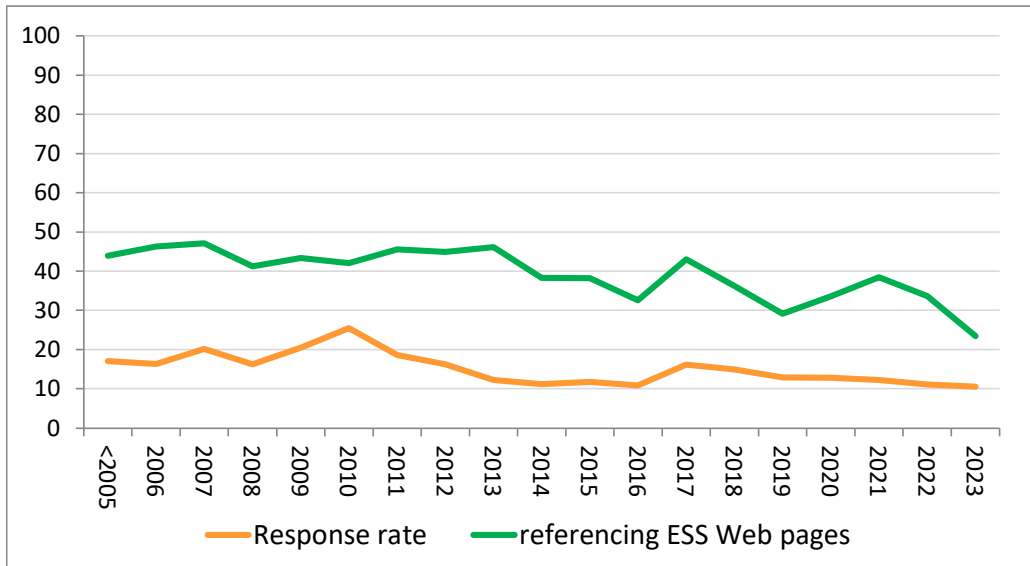

FIGURE 44: References to response rate and ESS web pages in publications (% shares, N=5,110)

- To gain insight into the extent of **regional-level analysis**, articles were coded for their use of the NUTS variable. Overall, 8% (or 406) of ESS publications use this variable to examine social phenomena. Regional analysis is more common for **certain topics** than others, as shown in Figure 45. Environment and social capital are particularly prominent topics where ESS authors apply regional-level analysis. Besides theoretical motivations, the availability of regional-level indicators may also influence the decision

to include this level of analysis. Broader use of regional analysis is often limited by the lack of macro data at this scale.
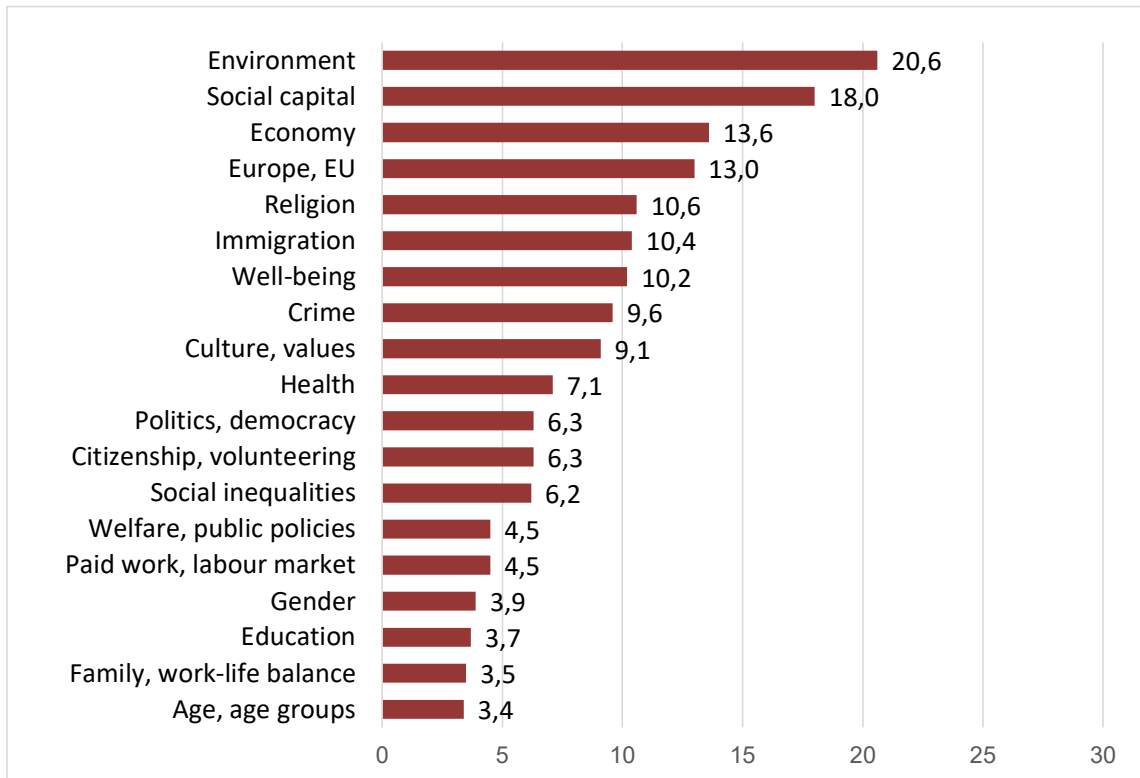

FIGURE 45: The presence of regional level (NUTS) analysis across topics (% shares, N=5,057)

- As shown in Figure 46, publications employing regional analysis tend to include a larger share of **multi-level** analysis, which is not surprising given that this approach helps address the relatively low number of larger units (countries) in the ESS. It is particularly common to combine ESS microdata with **regional GDP** data, but much less frequent to combine it with regional Gini data, possibly due to the latter's limited availability.
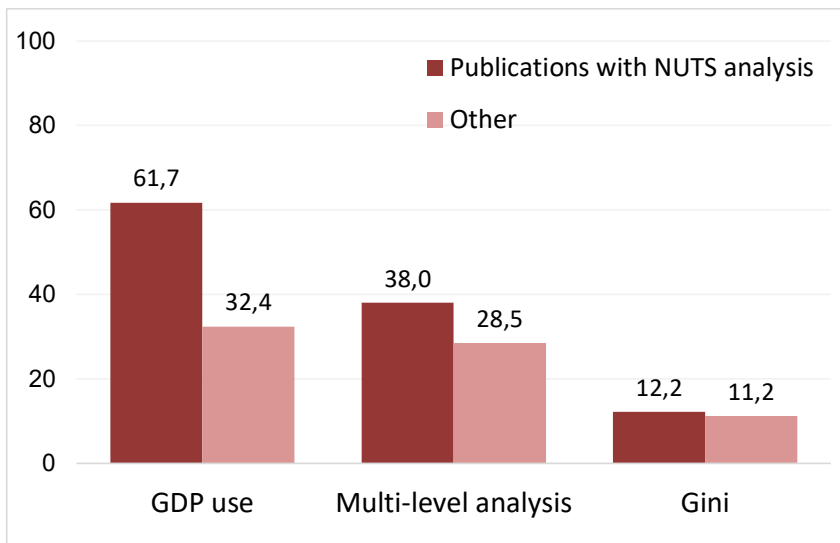

FIGURE 46: The use of contextual data and techniques in regional level (NUTS) publications (% shares, N=5057)

- Finally, regional-level analysis is particularly prevalent in a **subset of ESS countries**. Figure 47 presents the 15 countries with the largest share of regional (NUTS-based) analysis, based on the first author's country of affiliation. Four countries stand out: Greece, Estonia, France, and Italy, where authors engage in regional analysis significantly more than those from other countries. This trend may be attributed to a variety of factors, including the explanatory relevance of regional-level analysis, contextual data availability, and differing analytical preferences. In the future, it would be valuable to conduct a meta-analysis of these publications to gain a more detailed understanding of the findings and policy recommendations they produce.
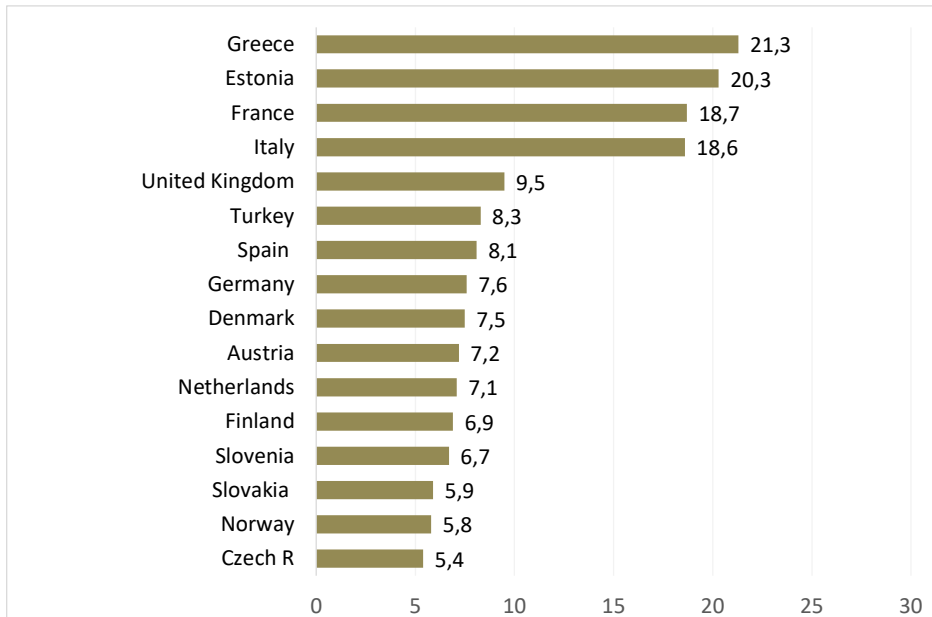

FIGURE 47: Regional level (NUTS) analysis according to 1st author's country (% shares, N=5,057)
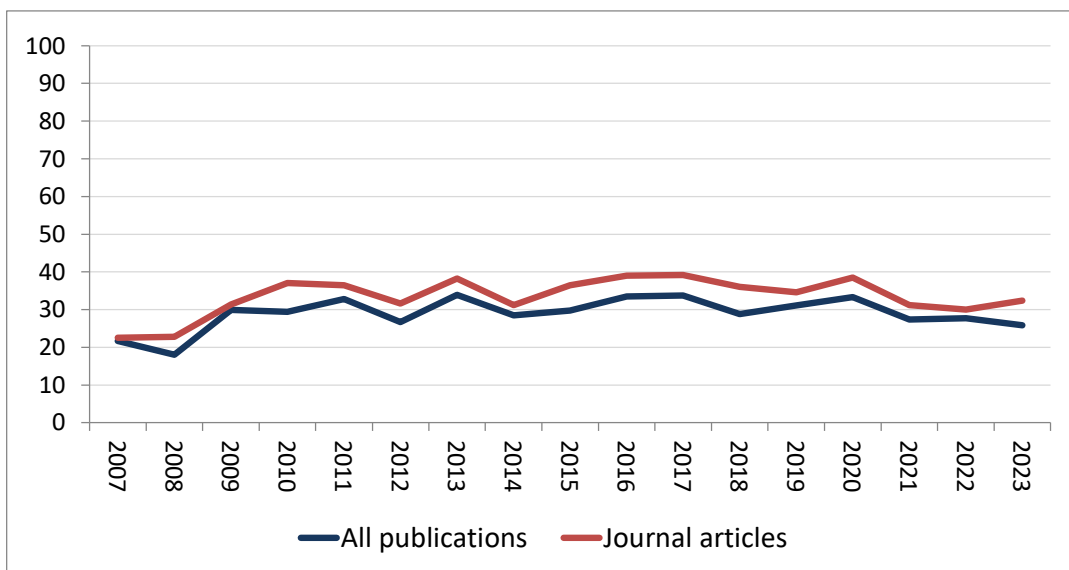

FIGURE 49: The use of the multi-level analysis among ESS authors, 2003-2023 (% shares, N=5,155)

- The use of **multi-level methods** among ESS authors is widespread, with 29% of publications utilizing this approach. Figure 49 illustrates the trend, which has remained fairly stable in the 30-40% range, with multi-level analysis being more prevalent in journal articles than in other types of publications. This method is particularly common in topics where a multi-level perspective provides significant explanatory insights, such as welfare, family-work, immigration, and health. In contrast, areas like culture, values, and subjective well-being are less commonly analysed using multi-level methods, likely due to the lesser role of public policy regulation in these domains.

- A final set of para-bibliographic variables highlights the extent to which **other data sources** are used alongside ESS microdata (Figure 48). As noted, ESS-based multi-level publications often rely on macro data at the country or regional level from external sources, particularly GDP and the Gini index, but also HDI and many others. The availability of Multilevel Data resources on the ESS website likely contributes to the prevalence of multi-level publications.
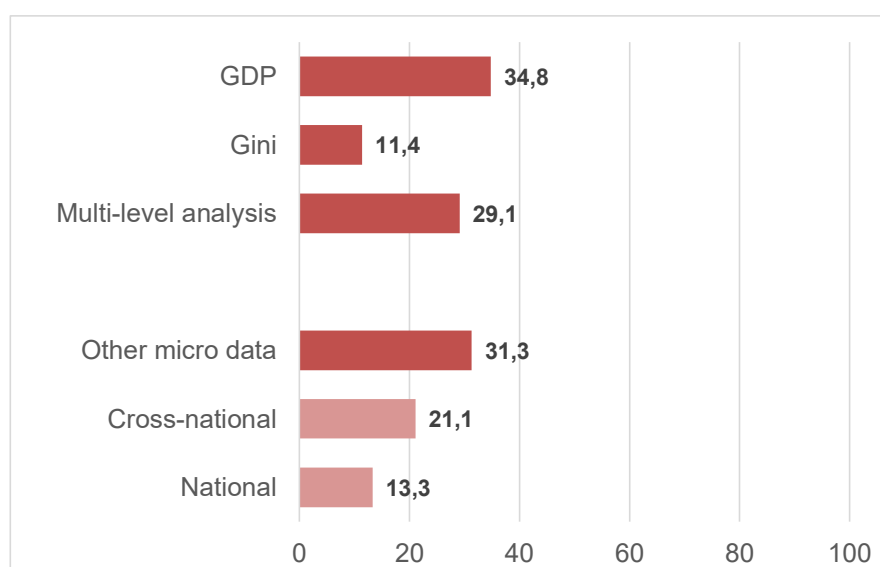

FIGURE 48: Co-use of ESS and other data sources in journal articles, 2003-2023 (% shares, N=5155)

- Along macro sources, ESS data is frequently combined with **other survey data**, either cross-national, national, or a mix of both. A notable practice involves combining ESS data with data from three other general-purpose comparative surveys: **WVS, EVS, and ISSP**. The ESS bibliographic dataset contains 312 joint publications with WVS data, 251 with EVS data, and 172 with ISSP data (some publications feature data from all three surveys).

The use of multiple micro-data sources enables a **wider range of analytical strategies**, such as combining concepts and indicators to enhance conceptual coverage, conducting validation and robustness checks to address potential biases in cross-national research (Lyberg et al., 2018; Smith, 2019), expanding geographic coverage by adding other European or non-European countries, incorporating additional time points, pooling samples across surveys, and more (for further details, see Malnar & Ryan, 2022).

Key takeaways:

- **Methodological awareness**: ESS publications show limited but notable awareness of key methodological practices, such as proper citation of sources, consideration of weights, and engagement with ESS web resources. However, this awareness is not consistent across publications, and gaps remain in ensuring the replicability and robustness of research findings.

- **Regional analysis**: The use of NUTS (regional) data is more common in certain countries, reflecting the varying emphasis placed on regional analysis, rather than a broader increase in the overall use of regional data.

11   THE USE OF ESS BIBLIOGRAPHIC APP[1]

This concluding section offers insights into the utilization of the ESS Online Bibliography and its associated **application**. The bibliographic application is continuously evolving, with ongoing improvements that include new functionalities and enhancements, such as the addition of advanced search criteria and the inclusion of previously missing DOI identifiers.

In 2024, the **publication submission process** underwent further updates and refinements, streamlining the user experience and ensuring more comprehensive bibliographic records. It can now process the latest *dx.doi.org* output format, which is used for autocompletion of latest bibliographic entries based on DOI identifier.

Refinements:

- When a user adds a new bibliographic entry, multiple processes occur in the background. The system first checks whether the proposed entry already exists in the database using various criteria. It then queries the dx.doi.org service for additional information, parses the received data, and autocompletes the bibliographic fields. These tasks typically take a few seconds but can occasionally fail if dx.doi.org cannot process the request in a timely manner. Since 2024, the bibliographic application has improved user communication during these steps. It now displays the current processing status (e.g., "Querying dx.doi.org...") and provides guidance in case of delays or errors, such as suggesting the user try again later when a timeout occurs (e.g., "Dx.doi.org communication timeout, please try again later").

- If the system finds the newly proposed article is already in the dataset, it tells so to the user and provides them a link to the bibliographic entry (*"This record is already in our database. Click here to view it"*)

- A more comprehensive bibliographic item view was introduced

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[1] This chapter was co-written by dr. May Doušak

These refinements, among others, mitigate the occurrence of duplicates arising from the merger of the Google Scholar database with the prior online bibliography.

Results:

- The combined ESS bibliographic repository currently contains **9,615** records from both platforms. Each year, approximately 500 new bibliographic entries are added through an annual Google Scholar-based search. Authors can also contribute their publications via a self-completion feature. In 2024, 19 user-submitted articles were added, underscoring the importance of National Coordinators in encouraging domestic users—particularly those publishing in national languages—to actively enhance the repository's comprehensiveness.

- The main target groups for the new online bibliography and app include analysts from various academic communities, National Coordinators (NCs), and other ESS bodies. The majority of the visitors (71.6%) **access the website** directly either typing the url address or using bookmarks and links provided in e-mail[2]. Under 0.5% of visitors arrive via social networks (Facebook, X), and 4.4% of visitors are referred from search engines, which is a less than in 2023. This further underscores the importance of enhancing the app's presence on these platforms, particularly through improved keywords and an increased number of links leading to the site, such as placing links on national ESS web pages.

- In the three years of the app's operation (2022-2024), visitors to the page conducted **28545 searches (14343 during Jan – Nov 2023)**. It is important to highlight that the bibliography search currently functions as a specialized search engine, limited to items within the ESS pool. Despite this, a noteworthy number of organic searches—comprising complete sentences —have been observed. To enhance user experience, an organic search engine could be integrated into the app in the future.
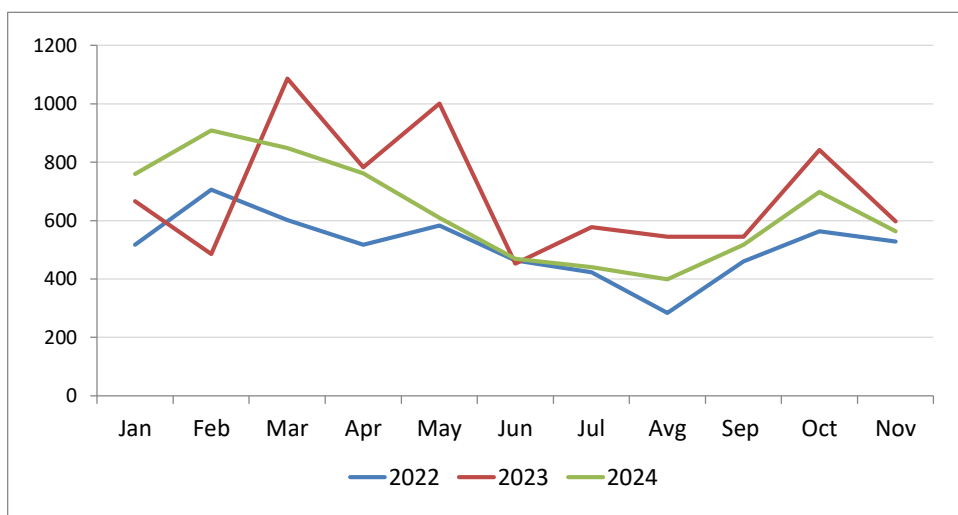

FIGURE 49: Monthly visits to the ESS Online bibliography in 2022, 2023 and 2024

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[2] The referring site can also be hidden (i.e. detected as a »direct link«) when the visitor is using privacy-focused Web browser settings.

- Another popular feature is **browsing across ESS bibliographic records**. Visitors primarily sought publications from specific countries, likely for reporting purposes to quantify the number of units per country. Moreover, there were instances of recurrent browsing patterns across different survey rounds, indicating a search for publications that facilitate longitudinal data comparison. While a significant portion of browsing queries lacked a specific topic selection, when users did specify, their primary areas of interest were *ICT*, *trust* and *media discrimination* – quite different from past top queries like "*Environment/Climate change*, *age groups*, and *social capital*".

- Additionally, there has been a significant rise in unsuccessful **hacking attempts** on the web app, with 7,275 requests recorded in 2024 compared to 4,607 in 2023. This highlights the critical need for continued efforts to improve the app's speed, security, and reliability. UL remains committed to regular server maintenance, implementing security updates, and making minor usability enhancements based on user feedback and analytics.

Key takeaway:

- **Enhanced functionality and user experience**: The ESS bibliographic application continues to evolve, with improvements like advanced search features, DOI-based autocomplete, and duplicate detection. In 2024, streamlined submission processes and better user communication during data processing enhanced usability and ensured comprehensive records.

13   FINAL INSIGHTS

Based on the findings from the past decade of bibliographic monitoring, the following suggestions for future enhancement of ESS academic impact and its monitoring are proposed:

- **Academic impact monitoring** of ESS data usage plays a critical role in assessing how effectively the survey data is being utilized. It can help highlight trends in research, such as underutilized modules, geographic imbalances, or potential biases in the areas being studied. In the future it would be beneficial to adopt a more targeted approach to assess the impact of ESS data on theory development, policy relevance, and interdisciplinary work.

- To enhance the comprehensiveness of ESS usage analysis, future bibliographic research should **include national language publications**. This would provide a more holistic view of how ESS data is utilized across diverse academic communities, particularly in countries where publications in local languages dominate. Incorporating these sources could reveal region-specific trends, disciplinary preferences, and methodological considerations that may be underrepresented in the current English-language-focused analysis.

- To improve efficiency, it would be beneficial to explore the **automation** of bibliographic tasks. Automation tools could help process large volumes of data, streamline the extraction of key information, and reduce the time spent on repetitive tasks. However, automated systems may struggle to capture nuanced details—such as those found in incomplete or vague author descriptions, interpretations of charts, or the contextual use of survey items.

- Establishing a mechanism to **encourage meta-analytical explorations** would be valuable for advancing ESS research. One potential approach could be the creation of an ESS-supported series of thematic monographs, focusing on core themes or rotating modules from the ESS questionnaire sections. These monographs could compile and synthesize findings from a wide range of publications based on ESS data, providing deeper insights into key areas of research.

- To better address the unique challenges faced by **non-Wester European** countries, it is essential to encourage the development of ESS questionnaire content (rotating modules) that focuses on issues more pertinent to these regions. For example, while the current modules on immigration to Western Europe are valuable, there is a critical gap in exploring emigration from Eastern and Southern Europe, which has profound social, economic, and demographic consequences for these countries.

- Providing accessible, **tailored resources** and workshops on data usage, statistical analysis, and advanced techniques for incorporating ESS data would empower researchers to make more nuanced, methodologically rigorous contributions, particularly in Eastern European countries. ESS could also consider offering guidelines on how to handle issues related to mixed-mode data and regional variations in data collection.

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